5
Editing for Advocacy

Katerina Cizek

This chapter is a guide to editing advocacy videos aimed at a variety of audiences, including local communities, international audiences, courts and tribunals, as well as an online viewership. Intended as a companion to more technically oriented video editing manuals, this chapter focuses on the unique concerns of editing video for advocacy in human rights, social justice, and humanitarian contexts. It uses case studies drawn from WITNESS partnerships and beyond to demonstrate varying approaches to creating videos designed to effect broader social change.

INTRODUCTION TO EDITING FOR ADVOCACY

What is editing?

> A film is born three times. First in the writing of the script, once again in the shooting, and finally in the editing. (French filmmaker Robert Bresson[1])

Editing, or postproduction, is the process in which a film or video's component parts—visuals, sound, word, music, and text—are woven together through storytelling and juxtaposition to create meaning. It is considered the most labor-intensive stage of the process of making a video or film. One of Hollywood's famous editors, Walter Murch, points out that editing is "something like sewing: You knit the pieces of film together."[2]

An editor's skill and creativity can make or break the quality of a video—turning amateur footage into compelling videos, or reducing quality footage into an incoherent string of imagery and sound. As there are a thousand different ways to edit any one video, no two editors will put the pieces together in the same way. Each editor strives to create a unique "'whole" that makes sense.

Editing is also about manipulation. In the "Kuleshov Experiment," an early Russian filmmaker proved that juxtaposing two unrelated

images could convey separate meanings. In his experiment, Kuleshov filmed a famous Russian actor, as well as shots of a bowl of soup, a girl, a teddy bear, and a child's coffin. He then edited the shot of the actor into the other shots; each time it was the same shot of the actor. But when audiences watched, they felt that the shots of the actor conveyed different emotions, though each time it was in fact the same shot. Intended or not, editing creates new levels of meaning.

Whether it's fiction or documentary, on average there is about 25 to 50 times more material shot than will end up in the final video, and this ratio can go up to 80:1 or higher in documentaries with a lot of verité footage. You may have filmed a given event in real time over the course of many hours, but, through good editing, you can convey the same event within seconds. Sometimes you may have far less material, and then the challenge is to tell your story with limited material. This is possible too. In every case editing is a process of ellipsis. As Peter Wintonick, a media critic and one of Canada's leading documentary-makers, says: "At the basic level, editing is about time-compression, whether you are compressing an afternoon into 3 minutes, a year into 20 minutes or a lifetime of a person into 60 minutes."

It is important to know your goals, audience, and intentions going into the process of making and editing a film. Defining your vision is key, even as you recognize, as Bresson says, that a film is recreated at each stage of the process. Therefore, when making a video, it's a good idea to begin planning for the edit even before you shoot. Prepare a script and use it as a blueprint to go through the various stages of making the video. A video benefits from this early vision and clarity (for more information on this early planning, see Chapters 1 and 3). Some edits stick close to the shooting script and are highly structured, while others are more organic, drawing on what has been filmed. However, it is equally important in the edit room to follow the script and simultaneously to respond to the material you have in front of you, to let the material speak to you. This is the challenge of the edit—to balance the script and the vision with the reality of the material that exists.

Editing for advocacy: The importance of audience

How may editing strategies differ if you are editing for advocacy?

In conventional editing, the story is king. Often, conventional editors have little or no direct relationship to the people they film or to the issue. In editing for advocacy, the focus shifts to:

- Speaking to your audience
- Communicating your message
- Navigating ethical concerns
- Respecting the people about/with whom you're making the film

Certainly, developing a good story plays a crucial role in fulfilling these responsibilities, but the triangle between the subject, the editor, and the audiences becomes a delicate balance in editing for advocacy.

There are a thousand ways to edit, and another thousand ways to edit for advocacy. An audience of teenagers will respond differently than a judge sitting on a tribunal. As you explore ways to encourage your audience to "do something," you may believe your greatest strength lies in the power of art, of empathy, or the power of overt persuasion, or all three. Across the board, video images and stories have the unparalleled capacity—beyond the written word—to put a human face on any issue, on any human rights story. It is the challenge of the editor to make that story come to life (for a more thorough discussion on defining your audience, see Chapter 3).

During editing for advocacy, special attention to ethics and unique concerns is also of paramount importance. Some of the major ethical issues involved in editing for advocacy are discussed later in this chapter.

Along with a clear message and ethical guidelines, advocacy video editing requires resources: time, equipment, labor, and some money. While it is true that much can be accomplished with creative solutions (bartering, volunteers, low-budget/low-tech options), the harsh reality of filmmaking is that there are always some hard costs involved. Good budgeting and planning before going into the edit room can save you or your organization headaches and surprises (see Chapter 3 for details on how to budget).

In the following pages we will explore only some of the "editing for advocacy" strategies, by learning from the successes and failures of editors and advocates from around the world. Mostly, we hope to inspire new ways of telling stories that matter—that will bring audiences, whomever you decide they may be, to their feet to take action.

Who is the editor?

In many human rights advocacy contexts (and low-budget contexts) often the very same person who has done the filming will also be

editing—alone. There are certain advantages to having a single person act as the videographer and the editor, especially when you are pressed for time. Firstly, the videographer/editor will already know the material, the issues, and the story. Secondly, editing is the best way to learn what to shoot next time. For example, many first-time videographers forget to shoot sufficient visual representations of a story beyond interviews or sufficient cutaway shots. When they reach the editing room, however, they realize how critical such footage is to the process of visual storytelling. They quickly learn from their mistakes and are better prepared for their next shoot. Another advantage is that the videographer/editor is likely to have the most direct contact with and exposure to the people and communities represented, so that he/she may bring a sensitivity to the ethical dimensions of the edit that someone more distant might not.

Howard Weinberg, a producer and documentary script adviser for political and cultural films for America's TV networks for over 30 years, recommends that organizations train several members in creating media for distribution. They can then work collectively and "mentor each other. When someone else is doing the editing, it's better than trying to do everything yourself. It's good to trade-off roles; it's less solitary. You can pick up new ideas from doing other things." In his experience, when there are two people working together, the editor is generally the one who has not been in the field, and looks at the material matter-of-factly. But, he says, "an editor can create something that wasn't there, so the producer who was on the scene keeps it honest. The relationship and dialogue between the editor and the producer/director tame the unlimited editing possibilities."

Sandrine Isambert worked as the in-house editor at WITNESS for two and a half years. While in the edit studio, she worked in various scenarios—editing material alone, as well as working closely with partners visiting from the field. She says, "It's so great to work with someone else, to laugh and to share the experience." When you are editing, "It's a constant battle to be with the individuals in your video, and to be with the viewers at the same time—to understand what they will respond to." As most audiences will only watch once, "It's ultimately about the first viewing for them, and that's a hard thing to keep in mind when you've seen the material so many times, and are deep inside the storyline, empathizing with the individuals featured."

A good editor has a lot of patience. An editor must be willing to spend long periods of time in a dark space, watching footage over and over again. Weinberg identifies a good editor as a person who can "track information, organize, and will have a sense of rhythm and flow, [who] will build story emotionally." No matter what the structure or content of the video, this ability to understand what emotional responses the video evokes at every stage is critical to the success of the project. For advocacy videos, it may also be critical to the success of the campaign or legal case at hand.

An editor has to be willing to throw weeks of work away, in the service of the video, says Franny Armstrong, a political filmmaker in the UK: "Sometimes a scene you love will have to go because it doesn't work in the larger picture. An editor can't have a big ego. They have to be willing to let go of their own creations."

An editor's work involves endless decision-making: how long to make a shot, to use music or not, what sequence to put shots in, etc. Ironically, in the end, a seamless editing job will probably go unnoticed by general audiences. Sandrine Isambert reminds us: "Ultimately, when people haven't said anything about the edit of a video, then it's probably a good edit."

Exercise 5.1: Learn to identify edits
This exercise is about getting a feel for the underlying editing. It is best done in a group.

Pick a recent film that you have enjoyed. If you have access to WITNESS films you might want to view an excerpt from the film *Books Not Bars*, and then contrast it with the film *Operation Fine Girl* to see two very different editing styles. Short versions of both these films can be seen online at <www.witness.org>.

Start by familiarizing yourself with the feel of the editing. Sit and watch the video, and tap your finger whenever there is a cut in the images. Now try doing the same thing with the audio edits. Now split the group in two, and half clap when audio changes and half clap when visual. Quickly you'll notice that they don't always happen at the same time. Challenge yourself to really listen and watch for changes, including audio cuts that may be hidden by cutaways or B-roll.

Quickly you will develop a feel for the way edits happen, their pacing, and how audio and visual edits play off of each other. Often,

if you have not thought about it before you will be surprised at the number of edits within even the simplest of films.

A variation on this exercise is to have group members shout out when a different source of audio or visual material (as discussed in Chapter 3) is used.

Conceptualizing a film for a better edit

It is never too early to think of editing in the filmmaking process. Peter Wintonick, a director who began his 30-year long filmmaking career as an editor, says: "In every stage of making a film, think like an editor." This means think of your story, and how you want to tell it before you start shooting, so you are better prepared for the edit room.

Joey Lozano stresses the importance of a shooting plan and script to good editing:

> The story concept usually comes in before I do the actual shoot and it guides me in my actual shooting work. After shooting, I do the shotlisting to determine which visuals are good ones and which are not that good. Then, after that, I go back to my original concept of the story and start the script.

By thinking of your edit before you shoot, you are troubleshooting for the edit process, and refining your story. Consider the early stages as a blueprint—things can and should change, but having a vision won't hurt if you remain flexible.

Notes Sam Gregory of WITNESS:

> A common problem is that during shooting, many points of view are filmed within the community, and you may need to focus on only a few,' notes Sam Gregory of WITNESS. 'Editing decisions may need to be explained before shooting because everyone who is filmed may be expecting to be in the film. They may not realize that 25 hours have been filmed and that the final video will only be 10 minutes! So you have to explain that in the edit you will use only a fraction of the footage, and you cannot be rigidly guided by the politics of representation. Not everyone can be included, and the key figures in the film should be determined as much by their perceived impact on the intended audience as by their stature within a community or simply because they were filmed.

ETHICS OF EDITING

Moving into the postproduction phase often means removing yourself from the tangible context of filming, of being "on the ground." It may mean you need to work in a studio far away from the community, or you may begin working with an editor who has little or no relation to the subjects you've been filming. It also means devoting your time to your footage rather than the situation on the ground. For all these reasons, it means that at some level you are distancing yourself from the concrete reality of a situation, in exchange for being able to "represent" it on video.

You are also alone with the material, often for a very long time. This separates you from your audience, from the people to whom you are communicating your message.

This very process of editing presents a complex web of ethical dilemmas that may not have been present while filming. As an editor and as an advocate, one needs to address the potentially dangerous consequences of how material is handled in the edit room.

Respect the subject

Says Ronit Avni:

> It is critical to honor every commitment that has been made during the filming of a scene or an interview. It can become very tempting in the edit room to use footage that is off-limits. You need to be very clear about the parameters of the material. During editing, we have the tools to manipulate, to change words, to reconfigure viewpoints without the context. It might further the goals of the video—but it might also hurt or endanger subjects.

In an advocacy context, whether it is yours or someone else's footage, you need to understand the context in which consent was obtained. If the interview was granted under the condition that the identity not be revealed, you need to take precautions that will ensure this anonymity. For example, the technique you use to obscure their identity needs to be appropriate. Sometimes, using the digitizing effect to obscure details of a face may seem enough in the edit room, but is not enough in the community—for example, clothes and voice could reveal a person's identity as well (see Chapter 2).

Guilt by association

Necessarily, the act of editing—placing one image/sound next to or layered over another—is the act of juxtaposition. Juxtaposition

can create ethical problems, back in the field or at home, of which you may not be aware in the edit room. Ronit Avni remembers one instance in which the producers of a video didn't realize the danger of juxtaposition:

> Once we edited a piece in a war-torn situation. We decided to include various parties from the political spectrum in the video. When we sent out the tape to the subjects for final approval, we suddenly got a terrified phone call. One subject, working within the bounds of the law, was terrified to be in the video with another subject considered *persona non grata* by the government. The subject insisted that WITNESS take out either one or the other interview, but keeping both in could be very dangerous. In the end we shelved the entire film.

Editing presents whole new situations of danger. Even if full consent has been given for an interview, a subject may feel threatened by the way the material is edited. "When editing for advocacy," Ronit Avni advises, "there's a great need to be committed to the safety of everyone in the film above everything else." This often differs from traditional news and documentary filmmaking, in which interviewees do not have a say regarding the other viewpoints represented in the film or in the eventual structure of the film.

Sam Gregory echoes:

> There can be a conflict between dramatic editing and ethical representation when making human rights video. How does the visual language work with (or against) what is being spoken? For example, when putting images over someone's interview, what do those images convey beyond the words spoken? You need to think about the images over-dramatizing the actual words. The juxtaposition between sound and image is crucial. Are you exaggerating what the interviewee is saying? Are you misrepresenting what they are saying—i.e. they are conveying a message of reconciliation while you are placing violent imagery over it? You have been given the person's trust not to misuse their words, and you must have that in your mind all the time.

Emotional manipulation and over-dramatization

In the editing process, an issue or subject can easily be either trivialized or over-dramatized. Both can cause ethical problems for the subjects as well as the audience. Producers can also feel the pressure to make situations look "as bad as possible" and to focus on the graphic images rather than explaining the reasons for the situation.

The tendency in the editing process may be to boost the emotion around the footage, in an effort to make it more dramatic. For example, using heavy music with slow-motion visuals and loaded, biased narration to ensure the message is clear—that a grave injustice is being represented.

While music, emotion, and drama are part of the language of filmmaking, you may need a reality check on how you use them. Are you leaning on stereotypes to manipulate your subjects and your audience? For example, many charitable organizations use images of starving children pumped up with sappy music, in efforts to tap into pity and raise donations for their missions. But what does this type of representation say about the nameless, anonymous children portrayed? What does it say about the audience?

As Sam Gregory says:

> There is the question of what message you are sending out: are you representing agency or plight, optimism or pessimism, victims or survivors? Are you making the subjects of the film look like hapless victims who need to be saved? Or are you giving voice to people… giving agency to a community as being capable of being part of the solution? It's difficult when you are looking for donors at the same time, not tapping into pity and charity. But it's a vicious cycle that perpetuates misperceptions if you start to do that. Audiences eventually feel tired and manipulated by this imagery, and if you frame the people in your video as victims you are disempowering precisely the people whose voices you want to be heard.

As the editor, you are mediating the relationship between the subject and the audience. You have the capacity to perpetuate stereotypes or to advocate for a new relationship between audiences and subjects as partners. As the socially conscious photographer Lewis Hines said of his own career: "I want to show the things that should be changed. I want to show the things that should be admired." Allow the people in your films as well as your filmmaking to speak to both.

Joey Lozano says that his approach to video-activism has changed over the years:

> If you go to a community where they only have problems, and they have no solutions, you can only come out with that kind of video, concentrating very much on the problems and maybe ending up with a grim situation. Failing to present any hope for the community can be very detrimental… In the past, in my early years, when trying to produce videos, I always fell into that pitfall

of presenting grim situations. This is more like a propaganda video, which may be useful at a certain stage, for example during the time of martial law [in the Philippines]. It was good, during that time. But it has come to a point when I think it's time to present the positive aspects, the positive struggles of people who are affected by this kind of bad situation. I think the effect, for viewers seeing this kind of video, is to inspire them to try this kind of solution that is being proposed in the video. Not to get paralyzed by situations that have been portrayed as hopeless. So it would also be good if a video can also provide a brighter side to the people's struggle.

Objectivity vs propaganda

Whether to present the other side of the argument is a key question in advocacy video. Journalistic tradition, especially in the USA, favors always showing the other side of the argument, and providing an ostensibly balanced viewpoint in which the different positions are given equal time.

Yet in many cases, video activists feel as though the "other side" (e.g. the government, figures of authority) has had enough exposure, with frequent presentation on TV, newspapers and other media. They feel the video they are making is their opportunity to give their point of view, often for the first time. Why give more time to the other side, one may think, when they have already had their time everywhere else?

Yet for some audiences, it may be very important to present "objective journalism" and let the other side speak. Gillian Caldwell says:

Doing this says "We offered the other side a chance to speak." It also says that we have gone through the procedures and mechanisms at the local level and they didn't work, for example, by going to the police and asking them why they did not act, we prove to the audiences that there is inaction at the local level, and that's why we must go higher, to national and even international levels.

In some human rights contexts this may also be relevant in proving that international action is necessary given that all domestic remedies have been exhausted.

Presenting the other side can also make your own argument stronger. Peter Wintonick points out that people often "put their own foot in their mouth." In a classic scene in *Manufacturing Consent:*

Noam Chomsky and the Media Wintonick and his co-director Mark Achbar intercut Chomsky's points with those of an opponent at the *New York Times*. Wintonick says this is one of the most powerful scenes in the video, because presenting the opposition only helped reinforce the power of Chomsky's point of view.

Audiences recognize propaganda when they see it. "If you use a sledgehammer instead of a button, this will usually be detrimental," warns Peter Wintonick. Martin Atkin, a producer at Greenpeace, agrees:

> Even though you are pushing a message, you need to be subtle. At Greenpeace, I have been trying to cut down the Greenpeace branding. Recently, we sent a team to Iraq, to investigate radiation contamination from radioactive material throughout the country. We sent a videographer and a still photographer. They had the Greenpeace logo on all equipment, on their T-shirts, on the caps. They had logos everywhere. Every shot that we edited had this in. When I tried to get this to the TV stations. They wouldn't use it. They told me "If that was a Shell, Ford or any other corporate brand logo, we wouldn't use it. So why should we use yours! Why should we give you guys a free advert?"

Gillian Caldwell counters:

> Pure propaganda is sometimes exactly what you are looking for! For example, in public service announcements (PSAs), you only have a few seconds to convey a powerful message to a broad audience. You need to make your point, and you need to make it right away. But if it doesn't resonate, if there is no human being to relate to, it will fall flat. We produced a powerful PSA calling for the ratification of the International Criminal Court statute that had a very strong impact on audiences—and it certainly wasn't a light touch.

Don Edkins, of the STEPS project in South Africa, warns:

> Now, the messaging around HIV/AIDS in South Africa tends to put people off. The billboards, the overt public service announcements, are preachy. People are tired of it, there's a fatigue. So, as filmmakers, we thought to use stories in order to not be preachy. We thought, "Let's create stories around different characters." We found that people related more to real stories. The other thing we learned was the people like their own stories from their own communities and their own filmmakers. People want to see videos from their own locations.

Old school and new school: The conventional and the cutting edge

A debate in advocacy filmmaking communities involves the issue of aesthetics, and how much to use a conventional grammar of editing. Within activist communities, there is a debate about the balance between breaking new ground and relying upon traditional aesthetics, filmmaking, storytelling techniques, and styles of production. Liz Miller asks: "How do we respectfully mainstream issues? Should we use the aesthetics of familiarity to get our message across? Does the message get lost in the process?"

Whichever way you choose to address the questions of aesthetics, innovation, and rule-breaking, the key is to understand your audience, and how you think they will respond. During the editing stage, you should plan to put together groups of individuals who resemble your target audience to "test" the material in rough cut screenings before your video is finalized. Do they understand what you are trying to achieve? Are they responsive?

For example, Stephen Marshal of GNN notes:

> Many people in the "left" feel our style (editing to music, in the style of music videos with heavy montages and special effects) is giving precedence to style over content, that we are delegitimizing the issues. I think that's an excuse on their part for not learning how this media works. Our target audience is the 20–35 year olds. I have no hope for my dad's generation. It's a desktop digital revolution. Yet it's amazing how few groups actually employ the very revolutionary techniques offered up by the technology to inspire a whole new generation. The advantage of our form is that we know our audiences, on average, watch our stuff two or even three times. It's a whole different viewing experience than, let's say, the documentary form, that has one chance to get their message across –- because their audiences are only watching one time. The corporations out there are all using this vibe to get the attention of the new generation, and they are working hard to get them. So we need to be as smart, we need to go after them the same way.

Gillian Caldwell observes:

> GNN speaks to a very specific, but important audience. Their videos aren't going to convince the powerbrokers—but they may mobilize people who can make other kinds of impact. I think all these genres have their place and time, and that they can be mutually reinforcing even though the presentations and impacts may be very distinct.

Dealing with violent and difficult material

Invariably, when working with video in a human rights context, editors will at some point be faced with images of violence, torture, pain, and even death. What responsibilities do editors have in dealing and using this material?

Ronit Avni suggests the following guidelines:

> If the graphic imagery sheds light on the situation that a certain target audience wasn't aware of, and it doesn't exploit the people shot in the images, if there is a context then, yes, use the image. But if it's used, for example, in a music video (with no light shed on the context) just to shock and titillate then its problematic. These are hard questions, because the very aim of art is, at times, to shock and titillate. But in an advocacy context, the context needs to be provided. Will the audience learn more? How might they weigh in? Will it prompt them to do more than just watch the video?

A very graphic image, when used in the right context, can reinforce the point that the situation is grave, real, and has true consequences. "They realize that this is not Hollywood," says Sandrine Isambert. For example, in the final scenes of the video *Rule of the Gun in Sugarland,* Joey Lozano edited footage of Ananias Tahuyan, a member of the NAKAMATA indigenous peoples' coalition, dying in front of the camera. The entire video until that scene builds the context surrounding Tahuyan's murder. For years, members of NAKAMATA, a coalition of indigenous tribes in the Philippines, have been harassed, intimidated, and even murdered in efforts to suppress their legal and peaceful pursuit of ancestral land claims. The video also points out what an international audience can do to bring justice to the NAKAMATA.

Case study: Using hip-hop music and montage for advocacy

The short music video *Diamond Life* was the Guerrilla News Network's (<www.gnn.org>) first video. Edited to hip-hop music, *Diamond Life* examines the violent impact of the diamond trade on lives in Africa. The video contains extremely graphic material, in montage sequence, and has been criticized for its deliberate attempts to shock.

Stephen Marshall of GNN explains:

> *Diamond Life* was the first video we did. We wanted to create an R-rated documentary; we wanted to speak to the hip-hop culture that we are closely

connected to. In hip-hop culture, people are covered with diamonds. We wanted to convey the traumatic experiences of people in Africa who suffer because of the diamond trade. The video contains very graphic scenes of murder and torture, at the hands of child soldiers. But we were speaking to audiences that we believe are already desensitized, and we were also speaking to girls dreaming of their first diamond.

We launched our organization with that video, and we had many people come back to us and say that they will never buy a diamond because of our video. But we also heard from some teachers that kids were passing around the video just for shock effect. We are in the midst of information warfare, so it's hit or miss. No strategy is going to work 100% of the time. But our point was that despite all this violence so prevalent in our media, war itself tends to be so sanitized in the media, and we wanted to challenge that.

When you do decide to use the material, Sandrine asks: "Will the audience take it? Someone is being killed on camera. You can't soften it; you can't make it more dramatic. It's just very, very difficult." The key question is: Have you done justice to the representation of that person's life—and death?

You should also make sure to test the resulting video with individuals who are not working on the issue– people who have been documenting abuses may have lost track of how a less experienced public will react to images of extreme violence or of death. As Sandrine points out:

It's very hard, because when you work in human rights, it's not like you get used to [graphic, violent situations], but as an editor, even if you have a hard time watching these images, you have to do it. Sometimes you have to remind yourself that people are not accustomed to that kind of story—to seeing those kinds of images. You always have to try and put yourself in someone else's shoes.

Research has been done that shows that people react to violent imagery by not remembering the material that precedes a violent sequence or the audio content of the sequence itself—consider how the use of this kind of imagery in your film may affect your audience's ability to follow the story.[3]

If you decide to edit a video to include graphic material, you should also include information in accompanying screening materials that can prepare audiences for the viewing. You may also consider

placing a title card warning of graphic or violent content before the film begins.

But, fundamentally, you need to ask yourself to what end is your use of violent material contributing? What message are you sending out? The term "The Trauma Vortex." has been coined by psychologist Peter Levine to describe the spiralling process of reliving trauma outside a person's normal life experience. The media can play a damaging role by sustaining the vortex, when reproducing images of violence.

Ronit Avni says:

One of the reasons I founded Just Vision was because I wanted to show constructive models of people trying to *do something* about the violence plaguing Israel/Palestine, and not just see more images of violence, violations and victimization. Video advocacy need not simply focus on violence, on sensational imagery, on reinforcing a paradigm of victimized and victimizer. It ultimately robs everyone of their agency and dehumanizes. The world needs more live, contemporary models of civic engagement, leadership, and activism. Sensational images leave audiences fixated, addicted to violence, but further disempowered.

Exercise 5.2: Dealing with violence
The Guerrilla News Network production, *The Diamond Life* had a very specific audience in mind. If possible, go to the WITNESS website at <www.witness.org> and watch the video in the Rights Alert section. What was your reaction to how it was made? Analyze how the video is constructed, and how it deals with specific images of violence. Using this same material, imagine different ways of editing this material for a different audience. What would you personally take out? What might you like to see put in? In your view, is the use of violent material justified in this video? Discuss your feelings and reactions to the material in a group.

Psychological effects of violent material

Watching violent images repeatedly as you log, transcribe, and edit has emotional and psychological effects. Editors and others involved in the production may experience guilt, anxiety, sleeplessness, and suffer from nightmares. Sometimes these symptoms are actually components of a well-documented psychological condition known

as secondary trauma, which is discussed more in Chapter 2. One common reaction is feeling that you are a witness to abuse, yet are completely powerless to stop it.

Sandrine Isambert says that editors, in any context, begin to feel as though they know the subjects intimately through the editing process. "I especially feel emotional when editing footage of refugees," she says, "because I always wonder what's happened to them."

Sandrine suggests:

> You need to take a lot of breaks. It's not always easy to be in the right mindset. With footage of war, people dying on camera, you just concentrate; you just hold your breath the whole time. You watch it over and over, and you need to stay detached, yet you are trying to build an emotional sequence. It's terribly difficult to keep the balance.

Respecting the audience, the field, the facts

A good editor respects the audience. There is often a fine line between condescension, and generosity of information. It's a fine balance to explain thoroughly, while at the same time not treating audiences as though they are inferior or lack knowledge.

Being responsible also means respecting the facts of the case. Manipulating the facts can be detrimental to your message, the subject, and the audience. Sandrine insists:

> You have to make sure your information is very accurate. You can't be wrong. Your credibility could be endangered. It's such an important issue and you want people to believe that what you are saying is true. You should double-check your sources.

As an editor, you also have responsibility to the emerging field of "human rights video" and to the broader human rights and social justice field. You are accountable to your colleagues. One bad film can affect everyone using media for advocacy—it can discredit other video-activists, by making audiences less open, more cynical.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO EDITING FOR ADVOCACY

Preparing the edit

Focus

You must begin with a clear idea, and an understanding of your message and audience. Peter Wintonick says:

Editing begins with an idea.What is the video, what are the subjects, the location? Where are you pointing your camera? What will you and won't you pay attention to? Then you can begin to make the argument, the message, and logistically, begin to think what is the arc, and the structure of the edited video.

Sam Gregory explains:

The common problem when people begin to make an advocacy film is that often people try and squeeze too many things into one video. The logical thing seems to be the desire to address all the issues, especially if this is the first time you are using video and you're not sure when you will next have the opportunity. But a video really needs to retain a focus. You and the eventual audience need to know what the issue is that matters to you, and what you are trying to communicate about this issue.

Before you begin any editing process, as we discussed in Chapter 2, spend time developing and outlining the central idea. It will make the rest of the process flow better, leading to a more focused and compelling message.

At each stage of the filmmaking process, keep the editing process in mind, so each piece of the puzzle is created and easily put together in the editing suite.

During the editing process, decisions will focus on the structure of the piece, i.e. how your pieces of puzzle will fit together in order to create the desired film.

The postproduction process

In Chapters 3 and 4 we talked about conceptualization and research, preproduction and production. Now we are in the postproduction phase. This stage includes:

- Viewing, logging and transcribing your footage.
- Preparing a paper edit and script.
- Producing an assembly cut of the video.
- Checking the assembly cut against script, and asking yourself if you have stayed true to the original concepts and audience/ advocacy goals.
- Creating a first rough cut, by refining the assembly.
- Testing the film with a select audience for feedback, comments, and suggestions.

- Creating subsequent rough cuts as necessary.
- Creating a fine cut of the video, incorporating constructive feedback from your select audience and script revisions, and possibly adding sound elements including music. This milestone is only halfway through the postproduction stage.
- Creating a final cut.
- Doing the "online," i.e. finishing the video, involves adding graphics, doing a final sound edit, digitizing the film in high resolution, and creating outputted versions. A sample timeline for the editing process is given in Figure 5.1.

A general and ideal guideline for editing in terms of the final length is shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1   How long will postproduction take?

Final length of the video	*How long to edit it?*
5–12 minutes	2–3 weeks
12–18 minutes	3–4 weeks
18–30 minutes	4–6 weeks
30–60 minutes	6–12 weeks

During a real editing process, a film can move back and forth and even in circles throughout the stages described above. One person's assembly edit may be another's rough cut; it's all very subjective. Each film has its own unique journey, and each editor has an individual way of traveling throughout these stages. Furthermore, the time estimates are only guidelines.

In reality, an advocacy video may be under serious time and budget constraints. Perhaps community members may only take limited days away from their families and their work—especially if postproduction facilities are far away in urban centers. Or perhaps, you may need to get your film out fast, in order to respond to political needs in a timely fashion. There are ways to keep postproduction short:

- Make a short final product—keeping your film under 10 minutes may help reduce postproduction time and for many audiences is an effective format.
- Shoot limited, efficient footage in the first place.
- View and log material with your camera in the field.
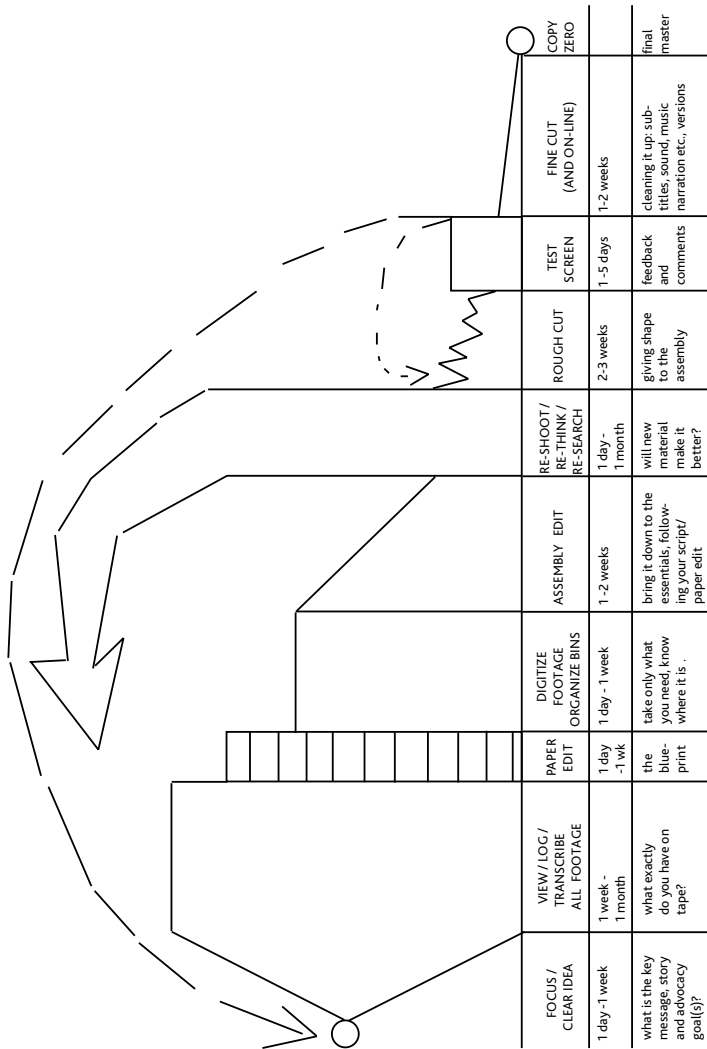- Structure a solid paper edit before entering the studio.

FOCUS / CLEAR IDEA	VIEW / LOG / TRANSCRIBE ALL FOOTAGE	PAPER EDIT	DIGITIZE FOOTAGE ORGANIZE BINS	ASSEMBLY EDIT	RE-SHOOT / RE-THINK / RE-SEARCH	ROUGH CUT	TEST SCREEN	FINE CUT (AND ON-LINE)	COPY ZERO
1 day –1 week	1 week – 1 month	1 day – 1 wk	1 day – 1 week	1–2 weeks	1 day – 1 month	2–3 weeks	1–5 days	1–2 weeks	
what is the key message, story and advocacy goal(s)?	what exactly do you have on tape?	the blue-print	take only what you need, know where it is .	bring it down to the essentials, follow-ing your script/ paper edit	will new material make it better?	giving shape to the assembly	feedback and comments	cleaning it up: sub-titles, sound, music narration etc., versions	final master

Figure 5.1 Editing and production timeline

186

- Book only one or two days in the facility for a rough cut, make a copy of the film, and go back to the community. Do screenings, and make changes on paper. Return to the studio for another day a few weeks later, once you know exactly what changes you wish to make.
- Consider new technologies that allow in-the-field editing (laptop computers with inexpensive editing software). Bring the editor to the community, if resources allow.

Linear vs non-linear

There are two distinct ways of conducting an edit: linear and non-linear.

Linear editing is the old video editing process, in which the images must be assembled in order, from beginning to end. The advantage of linear editing is that it requires the filmmaker or editor to be incredibly organized and detail-oriented throughout the editing process, in order for all the pieces to fall into place. The disadvantages of linear editing are that changes in order or length of segments cannot be made easily. Inserted sequences must exactly match a removed sequence. There is no easy way to make retroactive changes.

Non-linear editing is an editing process performed on a computer, in which the images can be assembled and reassembled in any order. Often non-linear editing is done on a timeline. The benefit of digital, computer-assisted editing is that it allows the editor to make changes anywhere, at any time. You can easily save multiple cuts of one film, and can remember and undo unsatisfactory edits.

Peter Wintonick traces the long history of editing, concluding that:

> From tape to virtual cut all editing is done in the mind and not on the machine. Certainly technology can influence the kinds of editing, the aesthetics as well, but I would posit that there is no editing style currently or potentially invented that could not have been used in the 1920s or could not be seen in a film like Vertov's classic of that time, *Man With a Movie camera*. […] It's not about the technology. Great editing is the absence of editing. Making it invisible, that is. Letting the material speak through you to the audience. Without the necessity of adding too much ego or editing pyrotechnics to distract people from the truth of a scene, a character, a film.

Regardless of what system you use, Franny Armstrong, political filmmaker, notes that "using the software is not editing. It's like touching the keys of a piano: that doesn't make you a musician. Editing is in the mind."

Low-tech and in-the-field editing options

It's important to know that simpler methods of (linear) editing are easy and can create acceptable results. You need only two machines—one player, one recorder, some cables and some time. You can edit a video using camera-to-camera, VCR-to-VCR, or camera-to-VCR, VCR-to-camera.

One filmmaker in Canada proved that you could make a video with just *one* camera, and he called the film *$19.49*, as that was the cost of the tape he used. He literally edited his video as he shot it, filming one shot directly after the other in sequences of how he wanted his video to look. This is called in-camera editing.

Organizing your material

Before you edit, you need to organize and prepare your material. Preparation can save you a lot of time later on.

First, you need to make sure your tapes are labeled properly. If they haven't been named or labeled during the shoot, do it now! Or if you are using material from various sources, create a system for numbering or naming types of material. For example, if you have three sources of material: original footage shot by Juan, original footage shot by Gabriela, and archive footage from the news, then perhaps you could label all tapes from Juan in the 100 series (100, 101, 102 etc.) and all tapes from Gabriela in the 200 series (200, 201, 202). All archive tapes could be 300s.

Now you should sit down and watch all the footage, taking notes (not logs, but notes) of your opinions, ideas, and emotions while watching the footage. You may have to watch the footage several times, which can make this a long and painful process.

If you have 50 hours of original material, it will take more than 50 hours to watch it! The process of screening is to absorb the material into your own brain's "database" so that you can draw from it as you build your video. "Know your footage well. Do not be afraid of your problematic parts," says Liz Miller, filmmaker and teacher. You will also begin noticing the problem areas—what shots don't work (including those you thought would), what sound is bad, what material is just plain missing.

Then, start logging the material, which means transcribing all dialogue spoken, and noting all visuals and sound material available. Using a logging form (see Appendix V), the aim here is to identify and write down all relevant information into logs or databases for future reference. Also, it is important to cite a time code if possible (for more information on timecode, see Chapter 4). Then if you can, print out these logs, and file them in easy-to-access binders or folders. Label the binders properly.

Liz Miller explains:

> During screening through your digital edit suite, you can log and capture tape without digitizing it, meaning you look at your tape, you mark "ins" and "outs" of the shots. You save that imaginary record, and then later on you go through it and you decide which footage you want to capture.

At this point you also need to evaluate the quality of picture and sound. Sandrine Isambert says:

> If you have poor audio, there's basically not much you can do about it. If you have an interview and you can't hear it, even if you subtitle it, the audience won't trust you, because they might have doubts that that is what the person is really saying. Basically, if you have bad audio it's garbage—you can't use the interview because your credibility is in danger. However, if the footage is intended as B-roll, audio may be less important. If you shoot an interview that looks horrible, but the audio is good—the audience will forgive you much more. And once you've established who's talking you can cover it with B-roll. Even if the background is noisy, you can get by with that. But you have to make sure that the [sound] bite is very strong, and very important and essential to your movie.

Structuring the paper edit

A paper edit is your first stab at mapping out the film by using all the elements at your disposal—picture, sound, and perhaps, narration. It is called a paper edit because you write out your sequence on paper or cards, incorporating all the elements and based on your knowledge from logging and screening the footage. You don't need to write the precise details, but here you are creating the links between all the elements. You can shift the cards and scenes around at will.

Comments Howard Weinberg:

> You shouldn't slavishly hold to your paper edit, but it helps to structure the video. Don't try and finish your video too fast. You are building a house. You build the foundation, then framework, and only then do you plaster.

While building the "house," some people work with little cue cards to help visualize and organize the material. Gabriela Zamorano, of UCIZONI in Mexico, liked using cards. She mapped out all the picture and sound shots onto different cards and played around with them to construct her videos. "We were overwhelmed by all the material, so playing with the cards helped. It was great to do that before we got to the editing machine."

You may also consider how many different versions of your film you plan to make. Will there be a longer version for committed community members and a much shorter version for lobbying efforts? Keep in mind that two radically different versions may need two distinct edit periods, and will probably even require different kinds of material to be filmed. It is possible to tweak slightly different versions (change narration, for example) and it can be fairly simple to make a basic, shorter version.

In an advocacy context, the beginning of your edit is a good time to check in with advocacy partners involved with the video, and perhaps even find new ones. Sam Gregory suggests:

> It can also be really good to seek out new partnerships at this stage. You can get NGOs and other partners to buy-in during the script phase. That way, you are making sure their issues and input are addressed in the final product, and that they are solid allies in distribution.

For more information, see Chapter 7, and <www.mediarights.org>, a useful website with articles on outreach and planning for outreach during the production phase.

Digitizing, organizing bins

If you are editing on a computer, the next step is to load—redigitize—the shots you think you will need onto the hard drive of your computer or another external hard drive. This creates a digital copy of your material so that you can then work with it in a non-linear editing program.

When you are digitizing, you store your shots in folders called "bins." You can first organize them according to the numbers of

your tapes, but you can also create new bins and organize material according to themes, chronology, sections, people, or places.

Liz Miller tells the students in her editing workshops:

> Think of bins as a room you're organizing where to put all your things. When I'm in the field, every tape that I have has a number from 1 to infinity. Your bins are like suitcases where you keep all of your shots. They are file cabinets. You can actually create a lot of file cabinets so that you can organize all of your files in very different ways.

In the edit room

The assembly edit

An assembly edit is a very preliminary edited sequence, which, in broad strokes, shows all the material you think you want to use. Basically, you line up your interesting material from beginning to end, in the approximate order of your paper edit. As you put this assembly together don't second-guess yourself as you go along— create a full assembly then review it. An assembly edit could be two hours long, for a half-hour final video. Watching this edit gives you new ideas of what works, what doesn't. It gives you ideas for the relationships between elements, for the larger structure.

The opening

The opening of your video is important. It will help determine whether audiences want to continue watching your video. A good opening hooks them into the video.

> Use a fact that becomes compelling, something that makes your audience curious to know more, think about what the audience might think, and address the other questions [says Howard Weinberg]. Make your argument not only a strong one, but address the additional reasons and questions. Give context. People need to feel like they've been there. Put people in the middle of the excitement.

Wintonick suggests:

> Never work at the opening at the beginning of the process. Openings change; so don't waste time on the opening. Cut off your first 10 minutes. Many videos take too long to get moving.

There are many options for video openings. Some may open with information that contextualizes the issue, others may provide a summary of facts that gives the viewer a historical perspective, others may consist of a high-impact sequence creating suspense and arousing curiosity. Often programs made for TV will have an opening that summarizes the main soundbites of the whole documentary and gives the viewer a sense of what to expect. Decisions on opening will often depend on the target audience of the piece.

The storytelling tools added in the edit room

Now you have all your elements in one place in the assembly edit. If you are on a computer, don't forget to save versions as you go along! You may want to return to earlier versions later. This is the time to start working more closely with every cut, every edit, and the juxtapositions, to help refine your story, and make it seamless.

"Exercise lateral thinking, work against your own intuition," recommends Peter Wintonick. "Attempt to remove the normal. Flip things around. Break yourself out of formulas."

You will already be working with the interviews, cutaways, B-roll, and verité footage that you shot during the production process (for more information on these elements, see Chapter 4). The following are some of the tools you can now use or think about:

Scratch narration   If you are going to use narration, it's a good idea to begin recording and using a "scratch" (temporary) narration in your video early on, so that you can begin testing and experimenting. You may decide you don't like the voice, or the writing or the narration, and may need to make changes.

Developing narration is a practical exercise in achieving clarity. In Exercise 3.4 (p. 92) we show how narration—depending who speaks it, and how—can influence the reception of your video.

Exercise 5.3: Practice your narration skills
Try this in a group. You are trying to see how to keep your narration clear and explanatory.

Have a colleague carry out a simple series of activities in front of the group. One person in the group is nominated as the narrator, and has to provide a simultaneous narration for the activities where they feel it's appropriate. The rest of the group listens and takes notes on whether the person is using narration at the right times, and if they

Tips on writing narration

- Think before you start writing. If you know what you want to say and what the goal for change and audience for the video is, then the narration, as with the rest of the script, will be much clearer.
- *Don't* describe what is in the picture.
- *Do* ensure that the narration fits the pictures—think of the B-roll you have and how it is going to be used.
- *Don't* overuse narration. Interview dialogue is preferable to narration. Remember that narration has to be covered with B-roll pictures. Often we do not have a lot of appropriate B-roll, and viewers quickly become bored if pictures are dull or relatively unrelated to the narration.
- Make your writing as clear as your talking. Describe succinctly what you are trying to say to someone else—you will probably be clearer, and use language more appropriate to narration.
- Revise as necessary and take advice from others—*but* remember not to lose the freshness.
- Make every word count and also ensure the meaning is clear.
- Avoid too many acronyms.
- Use short words and sentences and cut out the unnecessary—adjectives that describe what is in the picture, phrases that state the obvious or have no inherent meaning ("let's face it"), words that weaken their neighbors ("perhaps, about, maybe") and jargon or clichés.
- Replace *which* and *that* with a dash where appropriate, e.g. *Ocaranza hospital, which was the scene of the worst abuses, was where the first action was taken* could be understood equally well as *Ocaranza hospital—scene of the worst abuses—was where the first action was taken.*
- Make your sentences active. Consider this alternative: *The first action was taken at the scene of the worst abuses: Ocaranza Hospital.*
- Remember you have the option of titles—instead of saying the name of a location on the narration, why not use a subtitle, e.g. a title, *Ocaranza Psychiatric Facility, Mexico*.
- *Read* your narration out loud. Is it clear? Do you trip over words? Is there intrusive alliteration? Is a word repeated too many times? Think about who will be reading the narration—how will it sound with their accent?
- Look through your narration before you give it to the person who will read it. Are there difficult pronunciations of names and places, or technical terms that you should sound out for them before they begin? If they are not a professional voiceover artist or used to recording narration, are there passages that require a special emphasis or pacing?

are keeping it simple and free of unnecessary information. Afterwards, they review their comments with the narrator.

To make this exercise more complex, you can also insist that the narrator speak the narration from a different point of view than their own, or describe the activities with a particular audience in mind.

For examples of possible narrator voices, and of particular audiences, see Exercise 3.2, p. 87.

Music   Music can give emotion, pacing and rhythm to your video, but you should be careful that it doesn't take over the piece. The drama in your video should come from the story, not the music. Some audiences will also respond poorly to what they may perceive as emotional manipulation in overly intrusive or inappropriate musical tracks (note: this is often an issue in cross-cultural transmission of videos). However, as Sandrine Isambert says: "sometimes you need music to energize the piece. Sometimes when people are protecting themselves [from their experience of trauma], they don't seem sad. An audience might not understand this and ask: "Why is this person smiling?" She notes that this may be a good example of where music can help, and that many viewers have an expectation of some music in a video. A traditional documentary without music can become very dry, especially if you have narration.

Stephen Marshall of Guerrilla News network says: "Music targets the heart, it triggers the emotional and the marriage of music and the visual can be a very powerful thing. We use the music both to drive the cuts and build the visual montage." If you want to see how music adds to the impact of a scene, a good classic film to watch is *Psycho*.

If you do want to use recorded music, bear in mind that you must consider copyright issues: licenses for music can be expensive, time-consuming, and slow to get (see "Note on copyright" below). Another option is to follow the example of Joey Lozano, who prefers to use "local home-grown" music that he himself records with local musicians in the field. In these cases, always ask for permission from the musicians to use the music in your video.

Additional media assets—archival footage, stills, animation, and maps   Beyond your original footage there are other resources you can turn to: still photography, images from the Internet, computer or hand-drawn animation, maps, and archival video footage.

Archives can add color, history, and background to your video. Start researching at your own organization or community: are there photographs, even video images around that may be available for your use? What about partner organizations, or even international partners that may have media libraries? Then, of course, there are the

established media sources: local, national newspapers, and television stations. They may provide material for free, or very low cost.

During this process of researching additional material, you may learn something completely new about your issue. Howard Weinberg explains:

> When you start editing, you don't necessarily have the argument fully laid out. As you get additional footage, you condense, and you make it sharper. You may start thinking one way, but through continued research, history, and archives you may learn another story. Therefore, the very process of researching footage that you need, you may change your argument and learn something new about the subject itself.

Note on copyright and fair use

If you use or borrow images or sounds that are "owned" by someone else, you may need to consider copyright issues. Before using archives or found material (including music and any material taken from the Internet), check who owns the material. Then ask yourself—how likely is it that you could be sued for using these images or sounds or music? Who will be watching your video? Are you planning to screen only in your community? To judicial bodies? On the Internet?

If your video is for limited, private screenings you may be able to get away without securing all permissions. However, if you intend any kind of public distribution you place yourself at risk of being sued if you do not secure necessary permissions. If you have any desire to get your video on television, the station will require releases from you, proving that you have cleared the copyrights, or otherwise, a lawyer's confirmation that you are in "fair use" of the material.

Copyright can get very complicated and very expensive. For example, television conglomerates such as BBC or ABC charge up to US$400 per second for use of the material they own.

Technically, if you plan on television broadcasts, it's important to know that even logos or brand names have been copyrighted, and are covered by these laws. For example, during the editing of a comic music video, criticizing a proposed hydro-dam project, the filmmaker's lawyer removed all shots that featured the lead singer singing in the foreground, with a Kentucky Fried Chicken sign in the background. The sign had nothing to do with the content of the video; it was simply in the street where the video had been filmed. To go on TV, however, the music video had to do without these shots.

With regard to music, there are many copyrights involved, including writing, publishing, recording, etc. Keep in mind even the

song "Happy Birthday" is owned by someone, and if a character in your video sings the song, you may be subject to copyright laws. As attorney Tom Guida says:

> "Fair use," however, is a defense that can be raised against a copyright infringement claim; scholarly commentary, criticism, and news reporting can incorporate copyrighted material, used without permission, if the minimum amount of material necessary is used, the work is not particularly unique, and the proposed use will not deprive the author of a market for their work. Fair use is evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and there is no hard and fast rule for when a particular use will be considered "fair."

In the television world, you'll need a lawyer to back your case, though, and that can get expensive too.

Some images, sounds or work are "copyleft," as there is a growing global movement to stem the dominance of Intellectual Property laws. Some authors, artists, software developers (open source), and creators are labeling their work as in the "public domain," which means their work is free of copyright laws, and is available for free reproduction and use by all.

Transitions, motion effects, and special effects

Most cuts in films are simple "straight-cuts" directly from one image/ sound to another image/sound with no overlap. However, there are other transitions you can use. Often these will have a relatively established "meaning" in filmic grammar. Typical uses to be aware of include the use of a fade in or out from black or white to indicate a change in location or time, the use of the dissolve between two scenes to indicate the time passing or an ellipsis, and the use of jump cuts to indicate time passing or deliberate discontinuity. Cross-cutting between two parallel scenes is often used to indicate simultaneous actions. In addition there are special and graphic transitions such as page-turns, wipes, and spins.

You can play with the speed of a shot. Sandrine Isambert says:

> Sometimes you can get an amazing shot out of something you don't think is long enough, just by slowing it down. For example, in *The Price of Youth*, a film about the trafficking of young women from Nepal to India, they used a hidden camera, which was very shaky. It was a color camera, so the colors were great. By slowing the footage down, it became quite beautiful, mysterious. It brought a sadness to the material. Even though we did it for technical reasons, the slow-mo helped audiences to slow down and contemplate too.

Figure 5.2   Undercover footage filmed for *The Price of Youth* (Andrew Levine/WITNESS)

Special effects have a language of their own. At the Guerrilla News Network, Stephan Marshal says:

> we use the "video scratch technique" which comes from the hip-hop style of moving the record back and forth. Kids love this, because it signifies that the material is being handled by someone. Contemporary culture—music, TV culture, DVD culture—is about being handled. It moves at different speeds; it is in the hands of someone. We try and reflect this in our editing style. We also use a lot of compositing effects, we shrink footage (often footage that may be poorly shot, or looks worn out) and we frame it with an animated template around it.

However, beware that the use of certain graphics can easily date a video. In general, unless you are experienced with effects and know that your audience will respond well to them, Sam Gregory suggests not relying too much on these techniques unless you have a very developed style that incorporates them, such as is used by Guerrilla News Network. "The flashy effects," he laughs, "like whirling wipes, page turns, the low end graphics that you can now get on even the cheapest editing program, may seem fun in the edit room or on the computer, but they can date very quickly."

Figure 5.3 Guerrilla News Network uses new interview formats and graphics to communicate with its audience (Guerrilla News Network/Aroun Rashid Deen)

Case study: The editor as fixer

The reality of editing is that much of the time you are troubleshooting, and searching for creative approaches to problems. How do you "fix" the film? How do you create material out of thin air?

Sandrine Isambert identifies some of the common problems she encountered while editing, and goes on to suggest "fixes":

Common editing problems

1. Not enough visual material, and too little B-roll. No sequences filmed, just individual shots that do not "cut" together to form a full sequence.
2. Overwritten scripts that involve a story for which there is no material. Often, a script will feature long historical and political context for which there is no material (archives can be expensive).
3. Too many interviews.

Suggested fix ideas

1. Rewrite the script. Instead of struggling with a script for which you have no material, rewrite the script, sticking closely to your actual footage.
2. Titlecards at the beginning to set the context.
3. If you have some money, you can purchase some relevant news clips from television as archives. The advantage of news items is that they can help set context quickly and efficiently. Cheaper yet is radio, or you can also shoot newspaper headlines to create a historical context section in your video.
4. Make the video shorter! Remember, less can be more.
5. If it's not a pressing issue, or an emergency turnaround on the video, seriously consider reshooting.

The ending

Just as there are multiple ways to open a video, so too there are many ways to end one. For advocacy your priority for the ending will be encouraging people to act, and giving them a concrete sense of what they can do. As we discussed in Chapter 3, this will often mean leaving the audience with a sense that there is room for change, and that the people in the film, they themselves, or people they can influence or persuade can be part of this. This "space for action" usually requires that the video be somewhat open-ended, and that it doesn't leave the audience deflated and disempowered.

Advocacy video endings often include:

- A recap of the situation or survey of the people featured in the video, or testimony from the most articulate or representative.
- A final scene that crystallizes the dilemmas and issues illustrated in the video.
- A call to action or direct request from a person within the video.
- An analysis of the situation, and possible ways to create change, by someone in the video or another person whom the audience will respect.
- Information on other ways that a viewer can get involved after watching the video—often presented in a neutral format via a narrator or end titlecard.

Finishing an edit

The rough cut

Now your video has begun to take shape, you have reached the rough cut stage. Your video is in its first draft form, probably still a bit too long. Perhaps the narration is still scratch, perhaps some additional media are missing, maybe some edits are still rough. At this stage, you are ready to sit back and take a bigger look at the video. During this review process, you need to focus on the structure. Is it working or do you need to restructure?

You might want to show the video to a few trusted colleagues or partners and ask them to analyze the rough cut with these questions:

- Do you get the "message" of the video?
- What are the video's themes?
- Which characters do you feel the strongest connection to? Why?
- Did the video feel the right length or did it drag?
- Which parts were unclear or puzzling?
- Which parts felt slow?
- Which parts were moving or not?
- Do you think this will work for the audience we have in mind? Why or why not?
- If appropriate: Do you understand what action we are encouraging the viewer to take?

Sandrine Isambert suggests that you watch others as they watch your video. "You can learn a lot from their reactions and their faces," she says. Watch how people shift in their seats, and when their attention wanders. Be aware that sometimes the part that people complain about isn't the problem. Sometimes the problem is actually much earlier in the video, and you will have to probe into their reactions to ensure that they are not in fact referring to a structural problem that only becomes apparent at a particular point.

Rough-cut screening groups can quickly identify problems, but don't be too quick to act on their solutions. Think it through and, as Wintonick suggests, "Once you think you're done, go back and watch all your material again. It's refreshing." However, the truth is that the parts you are most attached to, your "pearls," are often the ones that you have to let go.

Fact and translation checking

By this stage, you will need to review your video to check the facts. Ideally, you or someone on your team will verify every fact, statement, and assertion made in the film including quotes, dates, names, agencies, figures, statistics, citations, and other represented facts. This process will help verify the authenticity, and legitimacy of every point made in the film. Fact-checking ensures you don't encounter legal and reputational challenges when you release your video.

But this process is also crucial to make your film legitimate in the eyes of the audiences, whether they are community members or judges on a tribunal. A simple factual mistake may not only detract from the screening of the film, but may also put the whole film's accuracy into question.

Don't count on your interviewees' stories to be accurate in every detail.

Fact-checking can become extremely political. Michael Moore fell under heavy attack for his presentation of the facts in his academy-award winning film *Bowling for Columbine*. For his next film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, his critical look at US President George Bush, Moore hired an entire team of fact-checkers (who had formerly worked at the *New Yorker*) and lawyers to review every single detail in the film. He even posts all the sources and fact-checking research on his website as further evidence (see <www.michaelmoore.com>).

Fact-checking involves:

- Collecting all facts mentioned in the film.
- Finding an original source for each fact mentioned.
- Double-checking with another, preferably independent and trustworthy source. Some fact-checkers will gather two independent sources. If you are using the Internet, be sure to check the *original* sources.

Note that very few newspapers fact-check the material they print, and are not reliable. Magazines, encyclopedias, academic, and scientific sources are more trustworthy. Sometimes, though, you'll need to conduct further personal interviews.

And if a fact is contentious, or controversial, it may be worth attributing it to your source directly in your video. That means, stating clearly the person or agency from whom you got it.

Fact-checking is also a good process to prepare you and your team to show your film to audiences, who will inevitably have questions for you: "How do you know that?", "Where does that figure come from?", "What is the name of that organization?" etc. Fact-checking is the time to reconfirm your "who, what, when, where, and how" of every point you made, so that both you and the video are solidly set up for the next stage of "going public."

An absolutely critical corollary of fact-checking for content is to ensure that any translation you've used has been checked and double-checked. It is a good idea to go over material several times with native speakers (to ensure that one does not err towards sensationalism—for instance, translating strip-search as sexual assault or rape), and ask them to sit with you as you put in the subtitles so you can ensure that the timing is correct, and that the accuracy is spot-on. There is nothing more damaging for your credibility than a viewer identifying, and then telling others, that you have misrepresented what someone is saying.

Test screenings

Beyond the few screenings you expect to show friends and colleagues, many filmmakers and advocates have done larger "testing" to examine their rough cut, either with advocacy and distribution partners—asking them to critique the representation of the issue, double-check on security issues if they were the documenters on a particular case, etc.—or with target audiences.

Make sure you prepare properly for this—in Chapter 7 you will find more on coordinating screenings. But consider issues like:

- Taking into consideration the subject matter of the piece and the social and cultural customs or political structure of the test audience, who would be best to introduce the test screening? It may not necessarily be the filmmakers.
- How should that person set it up so that the audience knows what to expect or what is expected of them (i.e. encourage them to have a discussion afterwards or to critique the film in particular ways)?
- Will breaking up your audience into small screening groups arranged by some characteristic such as gender or age encourage uninhibited dialogue among peer groups? Or is it more useful to invite questions and discussion across a more varied audience?

Case study: Test screenings

Peter Wintonick has thought extensively about how to use test screening in his work. Here he talks about his process:

> Over the last twenty years of my own documentary practice I have always tried to ask people what they thought. For the film that Mark Achbar and I made about Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, we tested the unfinished film in various stages, for 600 people, in groups ranging from a half dozen to a couple of hundred people. I think it made for a better film and made it into success it has become internationally.
>
> You should construct a one-page questionnaire, trying not to make leading questions. Make it simple to fill out but make sure it can measure objectively people's objections. Leave room for written-in critique, and provide ways that people can follow up with email or telephone contacts.
>
> On a practical level there are questions you want to ask the audience so that you can see if you are getting things right. On the most basic level, is the story or thesis clear? Is it clearly articulated from beginning to end? Do people like the film, and why? Are there language issues they do not comprehend? Can they see ways the film can be improved?
>
> At a rough cut stage we even went so far as to insert inter-titles to ask test audience questions like: "Do you think a case study example would be good to put here in our structure?"
>
> It is also important to point out that not all feedback is negative: Testing can be very affirmative, reinforcing, and good for the soul.

Go back and shoot

You've reviewed the rough cut. You've collected the answers to your questionnaires. You've processed people's comments. Some of the ideas are new; some ideas you discard; some confirm what you already knew. Perhaps it's time to go back and shoot.

During the editing of the project, *Following Antigone: Forensic Anthropology and Human Rights Investigations*, Sandrine Isambert worked closely with the Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense/ Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF). EAAF uses forensic sciences, including anthropology, to uncover the truth of massacres, disappearances, and other gross violations of human rights so that it can then help the families of victims recover the remains of their

Figure 5.4   The forensic anthropologists of EAAF at work (EAAF/WITNESS)

loved ones and provide evidence to courts. It was a one-year editing project, working with 50 to 60 hours of footage shot between 1992 and 2003 in multiple countries. The film set out to map out the different stages of EAAF's work and explain to audiences in places where such gross violations have occurred and where they are considering using forensic anthropology what the process is and how it could help them.

> It was extremely challenging to make a film that captured all the different facets of their work and the methodology behind forensic anthropology, as often the films at WITNESS are about a specific issue [Sandrine comments]. This is a group that works "digging up skeletons" of the disappeared and murdered, but really the emotional heart of their work is bringing those lost people back to their families.

"We realized that crucial footage was missing," Sandrine recalls. In all the years of using video to document their work, Sandrine found—through the editing process—that the group had been meticulously recording every detail of the exhumations they conducted, but not the emotions of why they were doing the work in the first place, and of how the family members responded to the return of the remains

of their loved one. In order to tell a compelling story and engage the viewer—and explain why the members of the team continued to do this work, year on year, at site after site—this human center to the video was crucial.

This is why Sandrine and EAAF decided that the group should go back and film more: this time with the forensic anthropologists turning the camera on themselves, asking more emotional and human questions about their motivations, experiences, and thoughts. "So in the process of editing," says Sandrine, "they learned something too about what needs to be filmed in order to make a compelling video."

The fine cut

The fine cut is another version of your video after you've made all the changes stemming from the rough cut stage. Now it is time to review the finer details and to polish the film: the "ins" and "outs" of specific shots, perhaps the wording in the narration, or losing one or two scenes or shots here and there. At this point it is also appropriate to review the images and material you are using in your film, and ensure that they are appropriate and accurate. Be aware of when it is OK to use generic shots which are non-location-specific or situation-specific, and when it is critical, as an ethical filmmaker, that you do not use footage of one village, one incident, one person to illustrate another different situation.

It's worth showing the video again to some of the people who watched the rough cut. It's also a good idea to show it now to someone who has never seen it before, and compare assessments. You are now very, very close to the final version of the video.

On-line picture and sound

"A video is never finished until you decide to walk away," says Liz Miller.

You've done the best you can and now it's time to create the best looking and best-sounding quality master of the video. This is called the "on-line." This might mean simply redigitizing your material at a higher picture resolution, and mixing your sound so that it is balanced, and the volume levels stay the same throughout the piece.

Or, "on-line" might mean turning to a professional edit studio for color correction (making all the colors "match" each other, and fit into the broadcast standards), and to clean up your sound etc.

Professional edits include several days of sound editing, in which additional sound effects are added and the existing sound is cleaned up by processing it through filters. Resources permitting, you may even decide to record the narration in a professional sound booth. Now is also the time to mix the music with the voices and the sound track.

"Broadcast quality" is a term used in the TV industry to reflect technical requirements for broadcast on mainstream television. While it's great if you can meet these standards, it's important to remember they can (and will!) be dropped if the content is compelling and important, so do not be intimidated by the quality standards. You can only do what is in your means, and that can be sufficient. A video can have a lot of impact even if it's not "broadcast quality."

At this point you may need to make several different language or region versions of your video. In this case, be sure to accommodate for all possibilities. Later, you may not have access to the computer you have been editing on. It's a good idea to make master tapes that allow you to create new versions of the video.

Consider making several different master tapes:

1. Your final original language master.
2. A master that has the sound split between the tracks so that dialogue is on one track, and music and sound effects are on the other. (That way, if you decide to make another language version, you can mix the sound again.)
3. A textless version, with no text appearing on any image—so if you decide to subtitle, or use another language in the text, you have an empty canvas to work on.
4. A master that is both textless, and with voiceover narration and music/natural sound on separate tracks (i.e. a combination of suggestions 2 and 3 above). This master will serve as a generic copy for possible international versions. If it's possible for you to have three audio tracks, it may also be useful to keep the music on a separate track to the natural sound. If you are able to produce this master, the textless version need not be a separate copy.

Your video is complete: Fitting it into a broader strategy

Gillian Caldwell puts the finished video into context:

When a piece is finished, filmmakers feel like they've given birth, but the true work begins when a film is done. What kind of life will it lead? What kind of parent or advocate will you be? Are there stakeholders in the project that will help give the film a life worth living?

Rarely does a video stand alone. Your video will need to be part of a larger strategy of advocacy including meetings, written materials, protests, and other forms of campaigning. As you have been editing the video you should be considering what additional materials—including print and audio—you will need to complement the video. WITNESS projects are accompanied by background material, screening guides, and online information sources with e-action opportunities to send emails to key authority figures. When Shabnam Hashmi toured the USA showing the film *Evil Stalks Our Land* about the atrocities in Gujarat, India she also brought printed documentation—examples of hate-literature, and follow-up material—to the screenings. Ronit Avni, the founder of Just Vision, a project documenting peace initiatives in the Middle East, attended Shabnam's press conference in NYC and said "the sum total of that experience—the film, Shabnam speaking and the printed material—had a huge impact."

For more information, see Chapters 1 and 7.

Exercise 5.4: Watch like an editor and an advocate

This exercise is best done in a group as it is primarily focused on discussing a film you have viewed. For this exercise, you will need to pick a video produced on your advocacy issue: you are trying to analyze your chosen video in terms of story, advocacy intent, and editing.

Now, as you watch your chosen video, try to answer the following questions.

1. Is this an advocacy film? Why? Why not? How could it become an advocacy film?
   If so, what is the film trying to say? What is its goal for change?
2. Who do you think the primary audience is? Can you identify how the film is framed for them?
3. What is the message of the film?
4. How would you describe the editing of the film (i.e. fast cuts, music, transitions, slow, etc.)?

5. What is the structure of the film? Is there a beginning, middle, and an end?
6. From whose point of view is the story told?
7. Is there narration? Was it factual, personal, dry, or emotional?
8. What is the drama, or conflict of the film?
9. How does the film open and get you interested?
10. How does it end? Are you moved to action?
11. At any point do you feel the editing is manipulative or unethical?

Now, the next time you see a film, ask yourself about these considerations—it's a whole new way to watch movies, TV, news, anything on a screen. Peter Wintonick recommends that you begin watching films from far away—for example, the back row of the movie theater. There, you are at a distance from the screen, less drawn into the story. Then you can begin to see and analyze the construction and the editing. Or else watch a film once for the content, and then watch it again immediately to see how it is constructed and edited.

Kat Cizek thanks:

Franny Armstrong	Ronit Avni	Martin Atkin
Amy Bank	Gillian Burnett	Arturo Carrillo
J. and L. Cizek	Sean Dixon	Don Edkins
Sam Gregory	Shabnam Hashmi	Sandrine Isambert
Joey Lozano	Stephen Marshall	Liz Miller
Avi Mograbi	Catherine Olsen	Erica Pomerance
Paul Shore	Atossa Soltani	Amadou Thior
Anna Van der Wee	Howard Weinberg	Peter Wintonick
Gabriella Zamorano		

NOTES

1. Michael Ondaatje, *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film* (New York: Knopf, 2002).
2. Ibid.
3. B. Reeves and S.L. Smith, "The Evening's Bad News: Effects of compelling negative television news images on memory," *Journal of Communication* 42, 2 (1992), pp. 25–42.