# CHAPTER 10
# DOCUMENTARY

Most of the techniques used by documentary editors are identical to the methodologies used by other editors, but documentary editors are a unique breed: crafting stories without scripts in many cases. Because their craft is similar but different, I have created a chapter dedicated to the art and craft of editing documentaries. As you may notice, many of the headings in this chapter reflect the topics in the previous chapters of the book. Like the interviewees in this chapter, I too spent a lot of time editing documentaries and working in various post-production roles in the genre, so this chapter is a bit of a homecoming for me. This chapter relies on five diverse documentary editors: Steve Audette, Paul Crowder, Andy Grieve, Paula Heredia and Craig Mellish. It should be noted that most of the "feature film" and "episodic TV" editors in this book also have solid résumés in documentary film editing.

## SCHEDULE

**Hullfish:** Andy, documentary films have very different schedules from one to another. What are some of the editing timelines you worked on?

**Andy Grieve,** *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief*: The range is probably 6 months to 18 months. *We Steal Secrets* took about 18 months. The Scientology documentary took a little more than a year. And that's just me as the editor. On both of those, the assistant started a good three or four months before me, and before *them* were researchers who were trying to pull together the archival. It could easily be two years from the first interview till someone gets to see it at a festival or whatever. At film festivals, people always ask, "What was the budget?" I heard a guy who had the greatest line: "This cost me five years of my life." Which I think is the perfect answer. It's a labor of love, by definition.

**Image 10.1** Steve Audette looking over circled scenes in script to determine which are too long.

**Hullfish:** What was the schedule of shooting this and editing on your latest film, Paula?

**Paula Heredia,** *Toucan Nation*: My main photography happened through six months. Then the last eight months I probably did five more shoots. But the balance between shooting and editing shifted. The first six months was mostly shooting and some editing. Then the last months I switched to mostly editing, and as I discovered things that I needed or new developments were happening, I would go back to shoot.

**Steve Audette,** *Frontline*: Our goal is to cut 10 polished minutes a week. Most weeks we do better than that. So a 52-minute show can be cut in 5 weeks. But I've banged out a great 2-hour film in 6 weeks. Early in week 6, we show the rough cut to the executive team. Then there is a week to 10 days to address those notes. Then we show it again as a fine cut. After that the sequence gets locked with a final writing session.

**Hullfish:** Paul, tell me about the process of cutting *Eight Days* and the schedule and how you organized it. I'm assuming you were cutting on Avid?

**Image 10.2** Paul Crowder's edit suite.

**Paul Crowder,** *The Beatles: Eight Days a Week—The Touring Years*: We were cutting in Avid. I have a system in an office at home. That was the best part of the process. Just to sit and have to sift through Beatles footage is great fun. There are some great moments, but it's quite a daunting prospect when you get your first batch of stuff, and then you get your second batch, which has more than the first batch you've just watched, then the third batch is about as big again and it just keeps coming. How do we pick? What do we do? My assistant, Jamie Bolton, who was absolutely brilliant, was constantly on the machine looking for stuff. I don't know if he has the luck or whether he's just better at it—probably the latter—but he kept finding the gold on his machine. He would just make lots of bins of stuff to use, good sound-bites, good moments, so we knew what we had as far as our support for any of the stories we want to tell and sometimes write our stories to those moments. So it was just a long process of about four or five months of just going through everything that had been given to us and selecting the best stuff, trying to figure out with some of it, "Will we ever find a master?" There're a couple of moments in the film actually where we couldn't find masters, and all we had was a VHS copy, but I thought the moments were so important that we should keep them, and we presented them in the manner that they are.

## APPROACHING THE MATERIAL

**Hullfish:** Steve, on a *Frontline* documentary project, where does the editing process begin?

**Steve Audette:** While the interviews are getting shot, an associate producer and production assistant are looking for documents, footage and photographs that might pertain to the story.

They're building a giant file database on a **RAID** that is divided into photographs, documents and video clips. We use Adobe Bridge to view and search for photographs and documents and the clips are automatically imported into the Media Composer when the edit room opens. When I come in on the first day, my assistant editor, Elliott Choi, has transcoded all of the media. He links to the media via AMA and then transcodes to the Avid ISIS. Our shooting ratio is something like 200:1. Most of the documentary content is edited from those ScriptSynced bins, not regular bins. My assistant breaks the project down into folders for interviews, stock footage, audio, graphics and some utility folders. Every project starts out looking the same. Inside the folder for interviews, there's a folder for every interview. Non-interview footage for scenes is segregated to bins. For example, all shots of the White House are sub-clipped into one bin. Audio headlines of news reports are gathered into bins for important moments in the narrative based on the subject. On the first day of the edit, the director will deliver the first 5 pages. (For a 2-hour show, the final script is about 82 pages.)

**RAID (Redundant Array of Independent Disks):** A high volume storage device that provides fast throughput and some degree of safety against drive failure.

**Hullfish:** Andy, let's discuss your organizational approach. What keeps you from going crazy with options?

**Andy Grieve:** I'll watch the interview, and I'll literally just cut out the questions and the dead air and end up with a sequence that's just the best parts of the interview, and from there I'll do further cuts where I'll organize this person or that person talking about this subject or that subject so that you end up with organized clips of different characters and their own telling of the stories and then from there I'll start to weave those together. Only when I'm much further down the line will I go into the archival stuff. Because so much of the documentary process is writing the script in the edit, there's not much point for me to flesh out the story with imagery and everything until you know how a story will be used in the whole film. From there, you can start putting in music and worry about pacing and decide whether this is going to be at the beginning of the film or the end of the film. It isn't really obvious that a specific story would start the film, but it actually ends up a lot later, so then it needs to be paced differently and have different archival stuff in it because it has a different function in the larger story.

**Hullfish:** That's exactly my approach as well. Creating selects reels of tightened, cleaned-up interviews that are organized by thoughts/storylines and then using those selects reels as the source material.

> ***Make a bunch of little 'modules,' the biggest trick is to compartmentalize.***

**Andy Grieve:** I'll make a bunch of little "modules" or scenes that I start to piece together into the overall story. It's like a bunch of little short films that have their own beginnings and ends—or don't. The trick is then how to trace a thread through all your little pieces, but for me, the biggest trick is to compartmentalize so I don't lose my mind. I can't think of it like "There're 300 hours of footage" because I'd just quit.

**Hullfish:** How are you organizing these selects reels you've got?

**Andy Grieve:** I keep a master interview selects reel for each interview. The interviews are organized in the timeline by subject with locators separating them. Some editors, I've seen, end up with a ton of sequences, but that would overwhelm me. I'd rather have a few longer sequences than more shorter ones.

**Hullfish:** And how are you going into those longer sequences to find the specific items you are looking for?

**Andy Grieve:** After I pull my selects, I'll have my assistant go in and put a locator at the head of each clip and sometimes even in the middle of the clip and put in the first few words of the sentence or the key words so we can search through locators within the sequences. And the last film I worked on was a little different. There were only 8 key interviews. Then on *We Steal Secrets*, about WikiLeaks, there were 35 interviews and a lot more footage, so that was a little trickier organizationally. Then I did a film about the OJ Simpson car chase that was entirely archival footage, so that had no interviews at all, so that was a completely different process. You have to approach each film separately. The OJ Simpson thing was about one day in sports with the car chase and all of these sports things that took place on that day that kind of wove through that. On that we ended up mapping out a 24-hour timeline of all the best footage we had from that day, so it ended up being a time-of-day timeline on different layers so that we could see when things were overlapping. So that was a little different . . . almost like detective work. Each project has its own little challenges and idiosyncrasies so you have to adapt to that.

**Hullfish:** Craig, you're cutting for Ken Burns; what's the post-process like at Florentine Films?

**Craig Mellish,** *National Parks: America's Best Idea*: Before post we've had a team searching still photographs and any archival film. That process is a year or more. In the case of *National Parks*, we had almost three years, mostly so we could film at all the parks without killing ourselves with travel, but also to be able to film in all different seasons. After we've collected the footage, we'll log it and then load it into Avid. The stills we organize into a FileMaker database that we can search. Then we take the still and animate it in a third-party program called Moving Picture, then import the Quicktime it spits out into Avid.

**Hullfish:** How much of the archive material is in your head, or are you relying much more on FileMaker?

**Craig Mellish:** Obviously the people who collected the material are going to know it the most intimately. On *Vietnam*, we had around 12,000 images to deal with, and *Parks* was probably similar. A search might come up with 900 choices. I page through it and find the shot I'm

**Image 10.3** Craig Mellish, screening with Ken Burns and some of the team at Florentine Films.

looking for. Sometimes I'll narrow the search, but usually I don't mind going through a bunch. I'm actually a frustrated photographer so I like looking through these great old photos anyway.

**Hullfish:** And how is the Avid project organized?

**Craig Mellish:** We copy over the folder structure from the previous film and then tailor it to fit the project we're working on. Usually, at the top, it's "Rough Cuts." Then bins for my cuts—past and present—stills, sound effects, motion effects, lifts, music I might be playing with that's not part of the main library. Then interviews. We probably interviewed a hundred people for this project. In the case of *Vietnam*, they were broken down into English interviews and Vietnamese interviews. Then we have a narration folder with bins for both Ken Burns' temp narration and then our final narration tracks. Then we'll have a voice-over bin for our voices, then subfolders for selects and for all takes. Then we have a bin of ScriptSync scripts.

> *Organization is key to being able to find things fast.*

**Hullfish:** Paula, what are you doing to organize the material that is helping you find what you need to tell a story?

**Paula Heredia:** I ended up with at least 500 hours of material. That's very common in the kind of films that I make or edit, and so organization is key to organize my own thoughts and being able to find things fast. Usually, I am shooting a story with scenes shot on different days. So for example the scene of Grecia (the toucan) eating. We might have shot this at different times. So all of that material that comes from different days goes to a folder that's called "Grecia eating," and I make sequences for each scene, so my first step with all of the material is to go through a process of first selects, which are sequences that are just the best of the material in a clean way, and then I do my second selects, which is a sequence that is a little more formed: I treat that material as if the whole film was that scene—so you can play it, you can feel it. Those sequences become my basket when I begin editing. By the time I start editing, I know the potential of each of the scenes and the topics that have emerged and that can best be conveyed with that particular scene. So when I start building a story, I begin grabbing from those sequences.

**Hullfish:** What is your process when dealing with interviews?

**Paula Heredia:** When you are doing a documentary with more formal interviews, the director and I take those interviews, and we mark selects on paper or digital. Those selects are subclipped, and those subclips go into a bin that has columns, which will get codes. We begin codifying the selects. So when I am searching for a code, I can sift and bring to my timeline everybody that talks about anything I need. I can immediately see everything that I have in terms of content, besides vérité. So when I'm building my next stage of that scene, I can begin weaving both elements.

**Hullfish:** Tell us about the codification of the subclips you talked about.

**Image 10.4** Paula Heredia at her Avid.

**Paula Heredia:** For example, in *Toucan Nation* we have an interview with someone, and we would codify the sound-bites as "popular movement, the law, the beak, technology, philosophy." Those are kind of general topics, codes, but in a paragraph that's talking about technology, they might also talk about 3D printing, so I make another code. Eventually, you begin merging and simplifying the codification. Usually, it starts a little loose, and then it gets a little tighter, and that's where the assistant editor plays a great role in cleaning up the codification. But in terms of the director and the editor codifying, we try to be disciplined and as clear as possible, and then as the process continues, you keep cleaning the codes. But if you have a subclip and you have four or five columns—code 1, 2, 3, 4, 5—and I make the selects and I have put two or three codes, I can just add them in those columns. Then, on the side, I have a list of all of the codes that we have assigned.

**Hullfish:** I use an almost identical methodology. But it's somewhat tricky when you are first trying to identify those codes, because unless you shot the footage, you don't know necessarily what all of the topics or subjects or ideas are going to be. Paul, how were you organizing that stuff? By scene or topic or story?

**Paul Crowder:** We put everything into events. There was a company that actually started compiling all of this media called OVOW ONE VOICE. Stuart Samuels and Matthew White at that company had done an extensive project of compiling media and footage, so that was the first stuff that we got. They had organized it into events, from October 1963 onwards. So each day was an event because they were filmed every day. So we then whittled those events down to the shows, so that every time there was a show, what we had from that day—any footage, photographs, sound from that day—was in an event folder. Everything was piled into folders, 63, 64, 65 and 66, and then organized by month and then by each day. So every time we went to an event, "We want to be here and talk about this," we were able to take a look at the authentic footage from the day as much as we can. We had to take some artistic license here and there, especially in the studio with what we actually had and when it was actually taken. There are some "Rubber Soul" and "Revolver" photographs where they're intertwined. But they tell the story. They visually connect. They visually make sense, so it's a little artistic license, but you're within a few months. Then we've got that to go to for everything.

> *Narration is your friend, but it's very easy to over-write when using narration.*

**Hullfish:** Steve, after organizing, where do you go?

**Steve Audette:** At that point, I start building a sequence. It includes narration, because, at *Frontline*, we are big believers that narration is your friend. However, it's very easy to over-

write when using narration, so we do "haiku narration." Narration is used to deliver a context or a connection for the audience and then get out of the way so the story can unfold.

We'll record scratch and start cutting sync bites and narration. We do that really quickly, just to get a sense of "Does any of this really work?" You really have to watch them say it, to get a real sense of how good that sound-bite is. Also, interviews are shot with two cameras: wide and tight. The wide shot is really pretty wide. It's handy when someone uses his or her hands to talk. Also, cutting between these two shots helps to truncate and tighten interviews.

We quickly assemble the day's script and watch it . . . figure out when it's boring and trim it down a little bit. "What's this going to look like? How does it start?" So in *League of Denial*, we know we're starting in Pittsburgh. How can we bring people to Pittsburgh? We think that's an important thing. As soon as you possibly can, help people know exactly where you are, what time it is and what kind of place it is. So we created a juxtaposition of imagery between the steel mill with the audio from the commentators talking about players on the field and the great Pittsburgh teams. It's very clear that you're looking at steel-working footage, but you're hearing this audio of a football game and that creates a dichotomy of interest. It pulls the viewer into the story. They discover their own connection and that creates an engaged audience.

**Hullfish:** There are editors that like to rip through an edit as quickly as possible and then go back and fine cut later and others that fine cut from the start. Which camp are you in?

**Steve Audette:** I'm always fine cutting. Editors understand the story no matter what state it's in, but almost everybody else needs to see a fine cut.

**Hullfish:** With docs, I tend to build what I call "the bones" of the film first.

> ***I want to know a film's rhythms, and you can only really find that out by cutting scenes.***

**Steve Audette:** I'm not a big fan of stringing out a whole film. I want to know its rhythms, and you can only really find that out by cutting scenes. I also really like to cut from the start. The hardest scenes to cut are the beginning and the end of a documentary. Like with books, the first 15 pages have to capture your interest. The same holds true for docs.

**Hullfish:** Since you start with the scene, what's your approach?

**Audette:** Generally speaking, a *Frontline* scene starts with narration. Very short: 20 words, 12 or 13 is probably perfect. Even if I assemble an edit that's just narration and sound-bites, I don't much watch it: I listen to it so I don't have to think about how ugly it is. The next thing

we do is say "What are we going to show and what are the atmospheric sounds?" We start building the interest level visually and aurally. I try to clean up sound-bites as much as I can without sounding false.

**Hullfish:** Andy, what's your approach to the vast sea of material that you have to draw from?

**Andy Grieve:** The approach depends on whether it's a "talking heads and archival film" or is it an archival film or is it a vérité film? I've edited all of those styles, so it's kind of different for each film, but my general process is that I like to watch everything before I start cutting. I can't really cut and screen at the same time. I like to watch and absorb things and not really make choices at the beginning. It's all a process of compartmentalizing information, so as not to get completely overwhelmed.

**Hullfish:** How much do you depend on being able to *memorize* a huge volume of sound-bites and visuals as you edit?

**Andy Grieve:** I do not try to memorize. I take notes either on notecards that go on the wall or in locators in the Avid.

**Hullfish:** If you build a cut primarily with the interviews, when do you go back and add b-roll and archival? Do you add that in a layer or layers on tracks above the interviews, or do you try to keep everything on a single track when possible?

**Andy Grieve:** I always work in multiple tracks for organizational reasons and also because sometimes I have multiple options stacked on different tracks, like if I am debating about using one image over another, this shot versus that shot, I will leave them all in the timeline on different tracks.

**Hullfish:** What's the process for most of these Ken Burns documentaries that you've worked on, Craig?

> ***"We start Day One with the music, so it grows organically with the cut and becomes integral."***

**Craig Mellish:** When we begin a project, we'll have a general understanding of what stories we're going to be covering in terms of the subject. So we just go out and begin gathering material: archival photographs and footage, a bunch of period-appropriate music and, in the case of *National Parks*, live footage. Usually, this process is done before we have a script. I started working on the *Parks* series in April of 2003 as a producer out on the road: scouting the parks. I'd also poke around the park's archives to get a sense of what they had. I might "pre-screen" some of the people we'd interview on camera. We didn't start editing on that

project till 2006. So there was a three-year lead-up to editing, and we shot the majority of our footage during that time with the exception of aerials which we laid in late because of their cost. We typically don't shoot to the script. But there were exceptions for recreations. We also start Day One with the music that's going to be in the film. So it sort of grows organically with the cut and becomes integral.

**Hullfish:** How are you breaking down these episodes into more workable chunks?

**Craig Mellish:** Well, usually we have a script that we follow just like any dramatic film. It's made up of "chapters," which relate to the interstitial titles that Ken's films are known for. And then each chapter will have multiple scenes within it.

**Craig Mellish:** For our next series, *Country Music*, we just did what we call our blind assembly. Dayton Duncan has written eight episodes for this project, and some, not all, are four to four and a half hours long. We cut those down to about two hours.

**Hullfish:** Is the blind assembly just a radio cut with no supporting visuals?

**Craig Mellish:** Yes. We screen with just the talking heads and the narration and any voices that there might be.

**Hullfish:** So, a four hour radio cut has to get down to two hours. What are some of the decision-making processes in that cutdown?

**Craig Mellish:** The scripts come in very heavily detailed. We call it "getting into the weeds." So we trim the "weeds." The bulk of that trimming is that we'll have 15 people telling the same story, and we're ultimately choosing the person or persons who tell that story best and removing the others.

**Hullfish:** For me, the choice of whom to use is: "Who tells it the most succinctly or who tells with the most passion?" Getting in and out of scenes is a difficulty for many editors. How do you approach that, Craig?

**Craig Mellish:** Sometimes you see a shot and you think, "This is the perfect starting shot. It really sets the table." Even when using still photographs for a scene I still want to have an establishing shot. And then same with an ending shot. Chances are it might be on screen a little longer because you're resolving the music or fading out, and you want that image to have maximum impact. The search for the perfect photograph is one of the most enjoyable parts of the process for me. But unlike the music, which I can sometimes leave out until I'm happy with a tune, the images need to go in. So sometimes you have to live with shots that you may not love. Maybe it's too illustrative or too on-the-nose. It's not conveying the mood that you're looking for, but it's all you have at the moment so accept it. But I'll always be looking. I think, "If I get the chance, I'm going to get rid of this shot. It doesn't do what I want it to do. It's just lying there, not doing anything for me."

**Hullfish:** Paul, let's talk about visuals. At the beginning of *Eight Days*, the still photos are not treated at all. There's no movement. They're presented in whatever aspect ratio they were

shot. Transitions were all simple cuts, fairly rapid. Then later in the film, there are some treatments of stills that are much more involved. From simple pushes—or I call them floats . . . very slow creep in's—but there was also real cigarette smoke rising from the still photo of a Beatle smoking, and there were some of those 3D faked moves on stills.

**Paul Crowder:** It's really difficult to figure out what to do with photographs that hasn't already been done. The 3D thing's been done to death now and so I shied away from it. I just wanted to see the image and let every part of the image tell us what it needs to tell us.

**Hullfish:** Uninflected by movement.

**Paul Crowder:** And if I'm going to do a move, I'm just going to push in really slightly. It's going to be very subtle. Just a little push in to give us a tiny bit of movement. So that was for the early part of the film. Then when we got to the studio, we felt like we needed to create a little more life in the studio section, so we started to treat some of the photographs in that manner. And we didn't do all of them, but just certain sections where we did the 3D thing, and it was just to bring the studio to life a little bit more. There's a tiny, tiny bit in the opening. There's a little cigarette smoke on a couple of things and a tiny bit of 3D going on in those as well, but the rest of it was held off.

**Hullfish:** Did you use selects reels? How did you keep from getting overwhelmed with material, or did you just stay in a scene and limit your vision to that scene?

**Paul Crowder:** That's the thing: to avoid getting overwhelmed. I learned this a long, long time ago because you end up feeling like you're at the bottom of Mount Everest every day looking up, thinking, "How am I going to get to the top of this thing?" You have to focus on, "Where am I? What scene am I in and what do I have to support it?" Let's just stay here. Then when you're building that scene and you find, "I don't have very much that I can use here. So what do I have around it? Let's look at a couple of days around it. What have we got? . . . Still struggling . . . I need them getting off a plane. I need them in a room. I need Ringo looking pissed off. I need something." So then you go delve the next bit further, and you look at what else you have in your resources. So the idea is just to keep yourself focused on the job at hand and stay focused in that moment. "We're going from here to here, and that's all I have to worry about. I just have to worry about the footage that supports this." And then there's, "Oh! I found this! Where can we put this?" And I'd send it to Mark, I'd send it to Ron, and say, "Let's find a place for it. We can't put it there, and we can't put it there." Then someone has the epiphany, "We could put it there!" I have this bin called "Hip Pocket," and I just put all these things in the "Hip Pocket" bin.

**Hullfish:** (Laughs) I am *so* stealing that! I'm creating a "Hip Pocket" bin on my next project! I've got a friend that has a bin called "Junk in the Trunk," but that's kind of the opposite of the "Hip Pocket" bin.

**Paul Crowder:** I constantly go through it to remind myself, "Oh Crikey, I've got to find a place for this!" I depressingly went through it the other day, and it was like, "Oh man, I never found a place for that or that or that."

# SCRIPTSYNC

**Hullfish:** Steve, you've been one of the major proponents of ScriptSync in documentaries. Lots of people have seen your tutorials, and I've seen you give several talks on your use of ScriptSync.

**Steve Audette:** Every interview, important speech or event that is part of the narrative is transcribed and the media is ScriptSynced. Most of the documentary content is edited from those ScriptSynced bins. Not footage bins.

**Paul Crowder:** I could not have done *Eight Days a Week* without ScriptSync.

There's no substitute for Avid. It's the Porsche of editing. We could not have done this on any other system. I know the other systems can handle it, but not in this manner. I don't have to worry about anything. I'm just working and we're cutting it together and it's all fine.

**Hullfish:** You used ScriptSync for the interviews?

**Paul Crowder:** No, for everything. Everything. Any dialogue at all we had transcribed and ScriptSynced. So I could go search words. I could search for whatever I needed. We had a whole bin of just ScriptSync scripts. We would get archive interviews and transcribe them and

**Image 10.5** Steve Audette working on a *Frontline* about the NFL concussion issue.

ScriptSync them. That's why I stayed in MC7. I never went up to 8 because they dropped the license in 8 (ScriptSync returned in Spring 2017). There's no way I could have done this without it.

**Hullfish:** I just finished cutting a documentary two weeks ago myself, and I was cutting in the latest version of Media Composer, but I was on Nexis shared storage and I had an old version 6 Symphony system hanging off of it that we used for nothing except ScriptSync and PhraseFind. When we wanted a word or phrase, you'd hop on the Symphony, do the search and locate the exact moment you wanted, then you'd have to go back to your current editing system to cut it in. So it was a bit of a pain, but it allowed us to stay current and still have the amazing PhraseFind and ScriptSync functionality. I'm so happy ScriptSync is back.

**Paul Crowder:** So having access to it on your editing systems saves you a step of course, since it will call that up directly into your source window ready to go. It's genius. I don't know how people make it without. I mean I did. It used to drive me nuts. You'd get a timecode where a sound-bite was supposed to be, and it wasn't there, and you'd have to literally watch an hour interview to find one bite and it would always be at the end. Or somehow you miss it and have to watch it again. It really helps because I could remember things that existed, but I couldn't remember where I put it or which year it was. So instead of having to go through it all, you put it in ScriptSync and boom! It's there.

**Craig Mellish:** We just mixed one of my episodes for Vietnam, and for a particular interview we were wondering, "Did he say the word 'fire' anywhere else?" Because, in this instance, the talking head is running the word together with the next word but we're looking for a way to cleanly end the sentence.

**Hullfish:** So you do a search for "fire" with a period at the end.

**Craig Mellish:** Exactly. As a dialogue editor on some of our films, ScriptSync is unbelievably helpful. Then we have a music bin, which has all our soundtrack stuff from the various sources of music we're using. Sometimes broken down by artist or year. Next, come folders and bins for stock footage. In this case, broken down into many individual subject bins. Like with the stills, I spend most of my time searching the wider, All Footage bins so I get a bigger picture of what we have. Then, we have a live footage folder and bins. On *Vietnam*, it's down near the bottom because we didn't have a whole lot, but on *National Parks*, it's more up towards the top. Then sound effects and some bins of technical stuff.

## SHOT SELECTION

**Hullfish:** On *Oprah*—which I cut for a decade—there was always care taken in only showing the "talking head" for a reason, not just because you didn't have anything better to cut to. The purpose of cutting to a talking head was to show a moment of personal revelation or emotion. Also, a real close-up was usually saved for an emotional or revelatory moment. Eddie Hamilton's opinion is that the audience will forget critical dialogue if it isn't played on the speaker.

> ***The purpose of cutting to a talking head is to show a moment of personal revelation or emotion.***

**Steve Audette:** I think that's very true. I tend to use the on-camera shot at the end of a sound-bite and use the cut to the next image as the "period" in their statement, whether that includes a pause before I cut away or whether I cut immediately.

**Hullfish:** I agree. Almost always the most critical thing is to see them at the end. What about the idea that close-ups are saved for important moments?

**Steve Audette:** I want to be close to see facial expressions. I like to think like you're in a salon of really smart people. How big is the frame of a person if you're sitting in their salon, listening to their discussion or to someone tell a story?

**Hullfish:** I feel like the super-tight close-up is too much emotionally for the basic information you get in most headshots. Unless it's really an emotional moment, the big, big close-up feels false to me. It's too intimate. That's similar to your salon example. If you're sitting a comfortable social distance from even a close friend, you're just not that intimately close.

**Steve Audette:** I agree with that. But I'm so interested in the facial expressions of my characters that I'm more inclined to go to the close-up than the wide.

**Hullfish:** But in the two docs I watched, you use that wide quite a bit.

**Steve Audette:** I use it for body language. For TV I think it's important to give people an opportunity to see the emotional content that is in the face. If it's in the rest of the body, I go wide.

**Hullfish:** One of those things that I think documentary editors struggle with is visualizing parts of the script. How do you know you have the right photo or piece of footage when you've got a thousand?

**Craig Mellish:** Your job is to decide that you have the right one. Sometimes I see people, editors that have several images stacked on top of each other, and I'll ask why. They say, "Well, it's because I have all these alternatives." And I'll think, "There is no alternative; there's just the one shot." That's how I feel. You are an editor. You have to make that choice. I feel confident that this is the best shot. I'm not going to stack three or four shots on top of each other because this is the shot, and it's my job to decide that this is the shot. Ken can't look through the 15,000 shots so he has to trust that his editors are providing him with the perfect shot for that moment.

**Hullfish:** What is the issue when you get that choice wrong?

**Craig Mellish:** It's usually that I'm reading things one way, and Ken's reading it another way.

**Hullfish:** What about being too "on the nose" and giving an audience a chance to read their own thoughts into an image?

**Craig Mellish:** In our film on the Dust Bowl, I had a scene where one of our talking heads, who was a child during those times, was telling the story of a time her father and some men had to put down their cattle herd because they had no way to feed them. I had a shot of a man who appeared to be shooting a cow that I could have used, but instead we used a shot of a small child hanging on to a barbed wire fence and looking sad, as if it were our interviewee. And I think it made the scene much more powerful to see it, in a sense through the eyes of a child.

**Hullfish:** How do you allow the viewer to "inhabit a photograph"?

**Craig Mellish:** God is in the details. You can show details of a bigger shot and then boom, you deliver the wide. Reveal what you want. I don't want to make the same film each time. Editing-wise I don't want to fall into: "Here's a new scene. I start with this, then music starts, then I bring in the voice . . ." I'm trying to find a different way. Hopefully, I'm not repeating myself. One thing that I did differently in *Vietnam* and I'm probably not going to do it so much on *Country Music* is that I left the talking heads on screen, not saying anything for long periods of time. When they were thinking about their answers. For some reason, it really works. You're really drawn in during their pauses. I think it was because they weren't being didactic or searching for the "right" answer. They were experiencing the story again after 50 years, and you could see that in their eyes. In those moments, the pauses were really effective, whereas in other instances, it's more like "Maybe they're spinning their wheels. Tighten it up. Let's help them get to the point. Let's move this along."

# PACING AND RHYTHM

**Hullfish:** What dictates the speed or rhythm of your cuts, Steve?

**Steve Audette:** They're based on the rhythms of the voices. The cuts are based on the pacing of the delivery, though you can stay on a beautiful shot longer. Frequently, to extend my ability to stay on a shot, I will do what I call an Avid push, zooming in anywhere between 10 and 30%. I'll do that on interviews if I think a guy's talking too long on camera.

**Hullfish:** Craig, sometimes in a documentary, you just need a break from facts and information for a moment.

**Craig Mellish:** In *Vietnam* we have a character who is sort of the All-American kid who goes to Vietnam and wants to fight for his country. We follow him for two episodes and, like many other young guys, he is killed in battle. When that happens in our story, it's in the middle of the episode, so we have to figure out the proper amount of time to let people catch their

**Image 10.6** Ken Burns mixing a documentary. Photo by Craig Mellish.

breath because it is very emotional. You obviously just can't roll on to the next story, but you also can't make it so long that you lose the thread of the film. So you have to find the balancing point of "Where have we mourned enough and when are we ready to move to the next story?"

**Hullfish:** I just rewatched *Dogtown and Z-Boys*, Paul, and one of the things I loved was the pacing and the musicality of the editing. There are moments of pure punk madness and then you've got this dreamy, slow sequence with Pink Floyd's "Us and Them" under it. Everything slows down, and it gives you this chance to breathe. Talk to me about how your music background may have played a part in that. You came to the US and L.A. as a drummer in a band.

**Paul Crowder:** Stacy (director, Stacy Peralta) came with a selection of songs and basically said, "This is the soundtrack we were listening to. We listened to all these records. This was the stuff that was important to us and inspired us to skate in the way that we did." And then Glen Friedman, who was one of the photographers, a younger photographer at the time, and a brilliant and prolific photographer today, he was also very musical and helped us go through all of the selections and songs we should use and the stuff that was really the pinnacle ones. So now we have this nice canvas of music that we get to pick from. We had no budget. We were a $400,000 film so we were really just going to pop them in and realize we wouldn't be able to get any of these (license them legally), but we figured, "Let's make the film we want to make." Really

it was just three of us in the room, Stacy (producer), Agi Orsi and myself, just making all of the decisions with no money guys, and I think the film kind of has that freedom because of that. They were a punkish movement. They came in that era. So the brashness of it, the Super 8mm film that was all shot in pieces and was old and destroyed and repaired and looked messy and scratched up . . . lots of flash-frames and things like that.

The photographs that were very raw and the way Stacy chose to shoot them gave us all this manic information visually, naturally. It was already manic naturally before I even laid my hands on it. It had this vibe already. And then, when you start picking the music and start pounding and moving very fast, and you've got to give yourself time to breathe. So it was very much structured like that to be able to power down the hill and fly through the swimming pools, then just for a moment admire the beauty of it all because that's the other side. It's very balletic; it's very graceful amongst all this, what they're really doing. And at times, the body movements and the swishes, you want to be able to enjoy them as opposed to having them thrown at you, which was also enjoyable. It was all thought out to give the viewer that chance, "Let's give them a chance to breathe. Let's give them a chance to change pace and let's juxtaposition the music we're using." Not only were we slamming our head to Aerosmith and punk rock and hard rock, we're also listening to Pink Floyd. We're also listening to Neil Young and other music that's more mellow. So it was all about creating their world and at the same time creating a pace for the film that allowed the viewer to enjoy the next really hard, powerful, rock 'n' roll, in-your-face moment, because they've had a chance to breathe and take a step back. The film made itself. We watched the film when we had a structure and said, "OK, these three things move," and we were literally done. I've never made a film quite like it since.

## STRUCTURE

**Hullfish:** Paula, you have told me that you first build scenes, then build the documentary from scenes. How do you determine the structure of putting together the scenes?

**Paula Heredia:** Sometimes you want to do it chronologically, sometimes you want to start from the middle and move backward. You have to apply it to the specific concept and idea you have for telling that particular story.

**Hullfish:** There're all kinds of structures for telling a story. How did you settle on the structure for *Toucan Nation*?

**Paula Heredia:** There are aspects of the toucan story that needed to be told in a chronological way because the story of the toucan is that he has a beak, then he doesn't have a beak and then he has a beak again. So there is an aspect of the story that there's no other way to tell other than chronologically. But when you build a structure for an audience that is having a complex experience, not just a one-stream story, then you bring in other elements. I start the

film with the impact that this bird had in the country by mobilizing the citizens to ask for laws to protect animals. So the opening scene of the film is a large demonstration in Costa Rica asking for that. After that, I cut back to what's going on with the bird. I develop the stories of the scientists. I develop the story of all the challenges that they had to go through to figure out what to do, and I'm going back and forth and taking a look at what's going on with the bird.

**Hullfish:** A lot of the success of this working is how different information is revealed and parceled out to the audience.

**Paula Heredia:** . . . and when.

> **_When it's time to go to another arc is defined by some elements that are rational and other elements that are irrational._**

**Hullfish:** And when. So let's talk about "when" a little bit. What decisions were made in determining the exact moment to branch away from the central story to tell a sub-story?

**Paula Heredia:** I go back to my own experience. I am my own audience. I react to my edit based on when I feel that it's time to go to another arc. That feeling is defined by some elements that are rational and other elements that are irrational. Rational reasons are related to "Oh, I haven't seen the bird for a while. It's time to know what's going on there." But there are also irrational and emotional needs, for example, "I am in a low moment and I need to bring this up." Or I need to make the audience feel something else. *When* that moment needs to happen is something that I, as a director and editor, feel in my stomach.

**Hullfish:** The idea of ebbing and flowing and low moments and trying to go brighter—that's a very musical sense, I think.

**Paula Heredia:** You're right because it's all about pacing. How long do you leave a scene playing or a storyline playing? It's all about rhythm. You find, sometimes, films that are good films, but they are fat because there was a moment in which you made your point and you gave me everything and you were too in love with something that you put in that doesn't respond to the pacing that was needed. So there's this arc and you're breathing and you say, "I need to inhale now because I've already exhaled."

**Hullfish:** With many of the films you do, you don't need to worry about hitting an exact show time, but on *Toucan Nation*, this is broadcast in the US, so you need to hit a specific time, right? Do you just tell the story you want to tell and now you have something that is an

hour and 15 minutes or 2 and a half hours? Then comes the painful process of trimming it down.

**Paula Heredia:** It's an interesting challenge: how do you squeeze it to just get the essence? And sometimes, hopefully, if you do a good job, it makes it better because it obliges you to think harder about how not to lose the essence of the story as you have to trim it down. Sometimes it's not good for the film, but sometimes you can make it good.

**Hullfish:** Were there any specific decisions about getting *Toucan Nation* down to time?

> *You keep shaping and shaping and shaping.*

**Paula Heredia:** I can't remember. Maybe because I hate to remember the things I don't like. It is like fine surgery. Sometimes it's as easy as pulling a whole scene, but most of the time it's not like that. You go to a scene and take one line here, 10 frames there. It's just about trimming just a little so you don't lose anything important. You just take fat, and the fat might be very, very thin, but you keep shaping and shaping and shaping.

**Hullfish:** Do you remember how long the first assembly of *Toucan Nation* was?

**Paula Heredia:** It probably was an hour and a half and needed to get down to 42 minutes. I have a special relationship with my executive producer. I trust his creative instincts, and I share my process with him. So when I do the first cut, I do it long intentionally because there are things that I want to show to him, and I want it to become a conversation. There will be many things that will not be playing like they should or are longer than they should be. But my intention is that he is aware of the material that I have so that later I can go back to him and say, "Maybe I should bring back 'x' or 'y' material that he has seen in the first cut." So the first hour and a half version is not necessarily the version that I want to have.

**Hullfish:** Paul, what about you? How was the film's structure developed?

**Paul Crowder:** It evolved constantly, but it starts on paper. Mark Monroe, who's been my business partner since 2006 and who I've been working with since 1998 doing *VH-1 Behind the Music*. He's written all of the films I've done, apart from the two I did with Stacy. So it starts with him. We gather our interviews: all the talking heads that we want to include that we have in our resources. Obviously, the tricky thing is that you want to balance the four Beatles. You want to hear from the four of them and obviously, having two still with us and two who have passed, you are limited in how many interviews there are with George Harrison and John Lennon, and you're certainly limited in how much of that has never been heard. There are a lot of people that have heard it all. I think we found a couple of interviews that are much rarer and that people may not have seen. That will help those who are very well versed in The

Beatles' story and archives. Mark Monroe would just lay out a structure of bites. We all talked about it.

We had plenty of meetings where the producer, Nigel Sinclair, Ron Howard, Mark Monroe and myself would sit around and discuss what was possible. The idea was, "Well if we're doing the touring years, how about if we structure things around performances," and having gone through the footage, we knew which were the strongest performances where we could do complete songs, and we decided we'd make those our "tent-poles." So then we're always striving to get to our tent-poles to move us forward. There was an extensive treatment written for what the story arcs would be and what the story would focus on, then Mark takes those ideas and we start structuring sound-bites together. From there we start laying in the supporting footage, the historic footage, the archives. I'll restructure from there, maybe take some stuff out that we don't need . . . back and forth in that manner. Then Ron has a look, gives us notes, and we'd circle back again to move forward. So it starts in a paper structure with sound-bites of talking heads, and we structure the rest of it around that.

**Hullfish:** A lot of structuring a documentary is killing your babies.

**Paul Crowder:** Crikey, the amount we couldn't use . . . it was painful the stuff we cut. Everybody has their analogy: Killing your children . . . *Sophie's Choice* . . . removing an arm. Whatever. It's *that* painful making some of these choices. It really is.

**Hullfish:** Tell me about some of those choices. I definitely wanted to explore that exact topic. I was certain that a bunch of great stuff had to be left on the cutting room floor.

**Paul Crowder:** There were so many moments. The Hamburg sequence was a wonderful sequence where we spent about 10 minutes talking about what it was like to play Hamburg. A few snippets exist in the film now, but using audio of a Star Club show on a bootleg that exists, we interweaved, we set the tone for Hamburg, we set the tone for who they were and how hard they had to work: 8 hours a day with an hour on and an hour off, so they were actually working 16 hours each day, playing constantly. A band today could never get away with learning their craft on stage today. There're very few clubs and everybody wants to be entertained, so you better do it or you're not getting another gig. But there, they were able to hone their craft and get better and better at it.

We interviewed Malcolm Gladwell, who talked about the fact that they were playing in a place that had strippers and drinking, so you'd better be able to entertain the drunks and be able to handle a rowdy audience, and you'd better have a plethora of songs because you can't just play the same eight songs, so they're pulling from the songs they grew up with, so they're doing "Taste of Honey," and they're doing all these old classic hits of that era. And all of that stuff ends up subconsciously within them. Not only have they honed their craft so that when they are playing Shea Stadium and they can't hear themselves, they know each other so well and they've played with each other for so many hours that that's easy. They trusted each other, and they all had that confidence to be able to play under those conditions.

So we told that story, and that's a massive part of who they are, and that was a killer—not only for the great photographs and the great sound, but just because it's an important part of who they are, but it was slightly outside of our timeline. It's pre-1962. So that was part of the decision-making. We tried to place it at a point in the film where we couldn't stop down for that long. We had to be rolling forward. The film couldn't take it where we wanted to put it, and we certainly couldn't start the film with a massive historical moment because that would just slow the pace in getting into the film and we'd lose the audience, so suddenly we had no place for it. So we tried to save a couple of moments and sprinkle them in a couple of places, but essentially that was a really bad one because it's so interesting.

# SOUND DESIGN

> ***Audio allows the universe of the film to lift off the 2D world of the screen.***

**Hullfish:** You and I have talked in the past about the importance of audio and sound design.

**Steve Audette:** For me, the audio is the story. The sound effects and sound design work that I do is an attempt to create a 3D world in which that story can live. It's the only element that allows the universe to lift off the 2D world of the screen. So that narrative is being held up by a bed of beautiful stereoscopic sound and then on top of that are images that are compelling and cut well so that the mind's eye can be drawn into the story. It's all about details.

**Paula Heredia:** Oh! Yeah! Sound is very important. I actually do a lot of design in my off-line process. I know that eventually a sound designer will come in and apply their art, but I want to make sure that I am building a good map of what I want and how I want things in terms of the kinds of sounds that I want and where those sounds should go. I build the concept, but I don't do the work of cleaning or EQing the sound or finding additional layers of ambience or sound effects. I build the layers related to dialogue and production sound, obviously music, and sometimes I might add a few effects that might be critical for the viewing experience so when I deliver the off-line project to my sound editor, they know exactly what I meant. This whole thing is about communication, and it's about the next person in this collective construction of a film knowing what the editor wants. That's the same relationship that you as an editor have with the director. You are trying to construct something based on the communication and understanding that you have from the person who brought the idea and the footage to you.

**Image 10.7** Documentary director and editor Paula Heredia.

**Hullfish:** Paul, one thing I noticed on *Dogtown* and also on *Eight Days* is that there were environmental and maybe even **Foleyed** sound effects that just couldn't have been in the archival footage. The sounds of the grinding skateboards on the pool edge couldn't have been part of that Super 8mm footage, right?

**Foley:** The re-creation of sound effects in a recording studio. Footsteps are a common example.

**Paul Crowder:** No. Absolutely, we worked over at DaneTracks on the sound on *Dogtown* and with *Riding Giants* and we spent a lot of time designing that sound. Stacy would ride around the parking lot, and they'd follow him around, and he'd do grinds, and we'd try to find concrete to grind on and asphalt so we had those sounds to embellish and really give that sense because all of the Super 8mm was **MOS**.

**MOS:** Stands for footage that was captured without sound. There are numerous urban myths about why the acronym MOS means "without sound." My favorite is that a German sound engineer pronounced it "Mitt out sound."

**Hullfish:** Talk to me a little bit about sound design. I loved the sound design in *Eight Days a Week*. There are great little audio montages and ambiences and atmospheres. Did you actually do Foley on this movie?

**Paul Crowder:** A little. The guys we work with, Christopher Jenkins and Cameron Frankley and their team of people, did a bunch of Foley to accentuate and pick up what we had. I edit a lot on the beats. Because I'm a drummer, I really lean on the drums a lot for my editing and chord changes and things, possibly making me a little predictable, but I feel like it's natural to me, it feels comfortable. I would give them the lead in my temp soundtracks . . . during the photo sessions, I'm always putting in camera clicks to try to drive it, and they would do the same things on snare rolls and fast hits and girls' voices, embellishing the screams, trying to put actual sounds in places where they should happen, to really put you in the moment so you really feel like you're in the audience when the camera is standing in front of the girls, you get the audio that that camera would have gotten. It just helped bring it to life. It was a mixture between what I had done as a basic thing because I always temp in sound mix. I can't stand to listen to it quiet. I'm always rhythmical in some manner, so they embellished and took it to a great place. I have to give them the credit for how great the film sounds.

**Hullfish:** There were little audio montages that I really liked that were bridges between sections.

**Paul Crowder:** That was my way of just wanting to get more intimate with them. We want to get in the bubble with them, in their world for a minute. Let's just be with them. We're going into the studio, so let's be in the studio for a minute and let them murmur and talk. We had access to that audio, Apple very graciously shared that audio with us, and we were able to listen to these moments. And if you close your eyes, you're there with them. You add a couple of photographs to it, and you're right there.

It's all just finding the natural sound, finding the tape loop or the tape start up or the voice when we come out of the Butcher Babies cover, and they've got this controversy about the cover and then the first word you hear after they put the new, boring album cover over the "Butcher cover" is "Sorry." Somebody making a mistake in the studio, but it connects as a perfect little link, and then you've got George and John and George Martin and Paul all having a tiny little conversation about what they're doing next, and it just drifts through the next couple of pictures. There's a lull, and you hear some messing about, and it's all loose and feeling a bit like you've walked through a door, and that's kind of the idea, and they're at it, and you've walked in to the middle of something. That was how I designed the studio moment. We literally go through the doorway. We see a contemporary Abbey Road, and we dissolve into an empty Studio 2, and the music and the sound does the same. It was all about opening doors. We did it in the opening scene. That's how we start. I found an audio section of them backstage, and I thought, "What if we started this like we were backstage with them before a show?" It was very difficult audio to hear, but there were some great moments in there. We started that with a door opening and somebody says, "RINGO!" and it's like you've walked into their dressing room. We sound design it as if you're walking past a door, and you hear something and it's intriguing, and you stop and listen. That's the feeling and idea behind it.

# MUSIC

**Hullfish:** To me, Ken Burns' documentaries have such distinctive and powerful music. How do you temp that stuff?

**Craig Mellish:** We don't have temp music. A lot of people comment on our music, and I think that's probably the reason why: it's there from the beginning, and the scenes are shaped with it. In many cases, it's a pre-recorded piece. Films like *Vietnam*, *The Tenth Inning* or *The Address* all have contemporary music in them to help set the time frame of a scene for the viewer. And then sometimes we'll take a recorded track and expand upon it. I think the main theme of the *National Parks* series is a song called "Sligo Creek" that we found from a guy named Al Petteway. And we might want to use that song throughout the 6 episodes of the show. So instead of simply repeating it, we get 10, 15, 20 versions of it with different instrumentations and different tempos and moods, and then we'll use them as themes throughout the project, across all the episodes.

**Hullfish:** You mention the idea of a theme. Do you try to theme a specific story or character with a specific piece of music?

**Craig Mellish:** Sometimes. Most likely a character. On a film like our series, *The Roosevelts*, the three Roosevelts, Franklin, Eleanor and Theodore, would each have a song, in various forms that would have become their theme. We wouldn't create "Franklin's Theme," but a song might develop into something like that.

For me, finding the "perfect" piece of music is always a challenge. That's one of my main focuses, and if I don't have the right piece, I'll just cut the scene without it and come back. It could take me weeks to find the right song.

**Hullfish:** Paula, do you use music while you're cutting, or add it later?

**Paula Heredia:** I think of editing as if I was preparing a meal. I don't believe you make a potato and tomato soup and put the potato at the end because it never mixes the way those two things should mix. So I work with music as I go. The way I work with composers is to build a bin of samples of the composer's work.

**Hullfish:** Obviously in a documentary about music, there are a lot of great musical moments, but one of my favorites is the great contrast between the song "Good Day Sunshine" and the negative images and negative vibe that's happening in the movie on top of it.

**Paul Crowder:** I'm always trying to look at the songs of the right era. It was literally to do just what you said: juxtapose . . . Paul, just before this, says, "Oh no! It's going to be fine. You'll see." He thinks the controversy about the "bigger than Jesus" statement will blow over, and you come off of that to this "dadadadadadadadadada" (drum beats of "Good Day Sunshine"), so there's tension and the images move fast to that, and then they're singing, "Good Day Sunshine," but really it's not. You're walking into hell. So trying to play one off the other. The reality is that it's not going to be great, and the imagery tells you that.

**Hullfish:** Talk to me about score and temp. Most people would probably not expect this movie to be scored. I was thinking specifically about the section where George says he doesn't want to tour any more, but I know there were several other places as well.

**Paul Crowder:** There're two places . . . at the very end where we're at Candlestick. Originally we were going to have them perform at Candlestick, the last performance, but the sound is so poor, and the sound we wanted to use—which is the last song they performed, "Long Tall Sally"—only the first 36 or 40 seconds of audio exist, and we would have had to cheat the rest of the music from another performance, and we didn't want to do that. The footage is very sporadic and Super 8mm and not very clear. There're some great Jim Marshall photographs. But we felt like "we don't need to hear them play now." We've already made the point that they're not playing well. We already made the point that they can't hear themselves. So we re-approached it thinking "What if it was score?" It was the same with the opening and doing the backstory. There's not a Beatles song that really fits here, and we don't want to be wall-to-wall Beatles music because that will get tiresome, and we don't want to bore our audience. Originally we had this opening that featured an analogy with Mozart that Malcolm Gladwell said that Mozart wasn't brilliant from the start. He had to work at it. His first symphony was rubbish, but by the time he gets to Symphony 30, he's a genius. So for that reason, we were considering using all classical music to score the rest of the film, but that didn't work. We did go down that path, though. Then we decided to find a nice piece of empty score that feels classy and just sits behind. The people we used to score the movie are called Matter. I've been working with them since Ri*ding Giants*. I've used them whenever I can on everything since. They're fantastic people. Dan Pinella, Chris Wagner and Ric Markman. They came up with these beautiful moments. I put some temp music in there to give them a little bit of a lead and then they did it, but that whole end section you're talking about, that was all scored by them. It's a beautiful section. It's so emotional at that moment. We wanted a respite from the Beatles music.

# COLLABORATION

**Hullfish:** Andy, do you get an opportunity to ask the director for additional footage or a re-shoot on an interview if you don't feel you have enough to tell a story?

**Andy Grieve:** That's the way Alex Gibney actually works. He shoots the interviews, and we wait till we're pretty much picture-locked before we do any of the re-enactments or b-roll or graphics or anything like that.

> ***"It's important to edit while you shoot so you discover the things that would be great to have."***

**Paula Heredia:** It's very important that you edit while you shoot so that you discover the things that would be great to have. You also have to leave some time and budget at the end for pick-ups. Because as you begin sculpting this—it's kind of sculpture with elements coming in from different places. The footage is the clay, and as you begin building this sculpture, you will know that the structure needs something to support an arm that you already have, but you don't know how you're going to link it to the body.

**Hullfish:** Describe your collaboration with your directors, especially with Alex, whom you've worked with multiple times. When do you stand up for what you think is right, and how do you know that you should cede to the director?

> *It is important that the edit room be a place where people can express opinions and share ideas.*

**Andy Grieve:** It is really important to me that the edit room be a place where people can express opinions and share ideas and not feel like they are going to offend anyone or step on anyone's toes, and Alex feels the same. He gives me the space to work and be creative, and I give him the space to bring his ideas to the process. It has been a great collaboration.

**Paula Heredia:** When you're an editor working for a director, you need to have a certain synchronicity because it's two people breathing, it's two people thinking, it's two people applying their brains and talents to one thing.

**Hullfish:** Let's talk about that synchronization. That's the heart of collaboration. How do you find yourself negotiating with the director between agreeing or disagreeing and coming to a compromise and feeling strong about your own personal decisions while also trying to serve the vision of the director?

> *You are directing the editorial process, but you are not directing the film.*

**Paula Heredia:** When you are an editor working for a director, you are there to use your talent for someone else's vision. It's not your vision. You're putting your talent in use to make that vision happen. So that's a very clear role as an editor. You might feel very strong about telling the story this way or telling this part of the story and the other person might be wrong about not doing it, but at the end of the day, it's not your film. It's the film of this person you're

working for. So you need to feel very comfortable about sharing your talent and putting it in function to someone else's vision. You are there to give the director your best advice and your best direction because you are directing the editorial process, but you are not directing the film. You are helping the director go through a process that's going to help him or her make a film.

**Hullfish:** I agree with that, and that was beautifully spoken. But how do you negotiate when you have a strong feeling and you think the director should listen to you, but you also know that it's their movie?

**Paula Heredia:** It depends on the relationship that you have with the director. A lot of what editors do is psychology. How you communicate and how you handle your relationships depends on the person you are dealing with. That's the art of being a communicator sitting in the editor's chair.

**Hullfish:** Paul, how did you and Ron Howard collaborate?

**Paul Crowder:** We would talk a lot about what we were trying to achieve and where we were going. There was a lot of communication before we got in the edit bay. When we start a structure, we've already got our treatment. We've already got our outline. We know how we're going to structure the story from here to here to here to here. So then, through Mark Monroe and myself, we go through the first pass structure. Mark and I would hone that structure and make sure it was in good shape and then send it to Ron, and then Ron would give us his thoughts and his notes, and we'd go back through the same kind of process again, just me, Mark and Nigel and then back to Ron. So very collaborative all the way. We already knew how we wanted to tell the story. We knew the moments we wanted to feature, and then there were these wonderful surprises. That was one of my favorite things was sending Ron and Nigel these little sections, like when I found Larry Kane's audio of him having this epiphany 13 shows in that he realizes that he's watching something that's unlike anything that's come before and is probably unlike anything that will ever happen again. He said that in 1964, and he's correct. Living in that world for 13 days, he's noticing that. Or when I found that gold studio moment, and I'd send them off to Ron, and it would get everyone so excited about what we could do. It was very collaborative. It was always going around the circle. Ron was making a few other films so he was traveling a lot. I'd sometimes sit in the edit bay with Skype and just point the laptop at the screen, and he'd watch it over the phone on the screen, and we'd discuss what we were doing that way.

# NOTES AND REVISIONS

**Hullfish:** What kind of notes are you taking when you screen your first cut?

**Steve Audette:** In an hour long show on the first pass, I make about 50 or 60 notes. They are, generally speaking, more technical than story structure at that point. The rest of the team

watches and will say, "I got bored here. The film sat down at 40 minutes in, and I don't know why." We then spend about two or three days fixing that stuff from the first screening. Frequently, it's too much narration. Sometimes it's "rabbit holes," which means we get too detailed about a certain particular *part* of the story that we get away from our *overall* story. Just being in the room with other people changes things like you can't even imagine. I love that experience of watching it through their eyes because it makes it extremely fresh for me. And it's in *that* pass that I'm doing all of the narrative story stuff: pacing, rhythms, story arcs and transitions.

**Hullfish:** How long is that first pass and where does it go from there?

> ***No scene in an hour-long show should be longer than the length of hand and a half of the script.***

**Steve Audette:** Early in week six, we screen with the executive team. After that screening, we make their changes, which, generally speaking, are really good ideas. Then we have a fine cut screening with them, and it's at *that* point where we tell the executive producer how long or short we are. The reason we wait that long is because we really don't know what they're going to want to add or subtract from the doc. I would say that the rough cut is usually eight minutes too long, the fine cuts might be four minutes long. The film I'm working on now is a two-hour film, and it was nine minutes long after the rough cut. The danger with most films at this point is that if you start pulling at a thread, you might wreck it. We have an unusual and effective technique to determine what to cut: we measure the length of scenes. We do that not by how long they are in terms of minutes, but how much *space* they take up on a script. We print the script and cut it into a long paper chain, then we circle each scene. We immediately see which scene is too long. No scene in an hour-long show should be longer than the length of hand and a half. Story is a linear process. If the scene is taking up a hand and a half of space, you can still truncate it without wrecking the story.

**Hullfish:** How much of the script structure—the way it is first written—remains in the final doc as it is aired?

**Craig Mellish:** Structurally speaking, the script stays pretty much as it was originally written. But the narration is constantly tweaked. During editing, we'll drop things like talking heads in favor of narration because we can make the point clearer that way. Recently on *Vietnam*, in one of my episodes, we had two Vietnamese stories separated by 30 minutes, and we decided, near the end of editing, to put them back to back because they were subtly connected to each other. And they would have been fine where they were, but now they really work together as a piece. I guess we try and do the majority of the big changes before we get to the editing.

**Hullfish:** How do you deal with receiving notes on a cut of a film?

**Craig Mellish:** Everybody's opinion is listened to, and Ken will write all of them down. After we take comments from everyone, we then retire to another room where we sit around the table and go page by page through the script, what we call "going into the trenches." A lot of the time the changes are writing changes, which I have no control over. But other times it's "Let's get a new photo here, or let's change this piece of music. Open up space here, close it down there." I'll write those notes in my script in red. I don't have a giant two-hour cut, I work in reels.

**Hullfish:** True 20-minute film reels?

**Craig Mellish:** When I first started at Florentine Films, we were still cutting on film so I try and keep them between 20 and 25 minutes. It helps me mentally too: knowing that I don't have to go for 2 hours straight.

> ***Sometimes you fall in love with the material too much. It's easy to lose sight of what really needs to be done.***

When we get notes, we push back when we get really passionate about it. We live with these things constantly, and they're our babies. Sometimes you fall in love with the material too much. It has to be this shot or this piece of music. And that's it. It's easy to lose sight of what really needs to be done sometimes. Obviously, Ken and the senior producers are the deciding voices. But you can convince them to change their minds if you sell it well enough.

**Hullfish:** You made a choice for a reason, and I think that the producer values the passion that you bring to defending that.

**Craig Mellish:** In the end, it's a collaboration. That's what makes it a better film.

**Hullfish:** Do you do screenings for test audiences? And what do you discover in those screenings?

> ***When you see a film with other people, you see it in a very different way.***

**Paula Heredia:** Screenings are actually quite interesting because sometimes you do a screening just to see the film yourself. When you see it with other people, you see it in a very different way. When it's a formal screening, you cannot touch the computer and stop and say,

"Let me change this." So sometimes screenings are just for that. You oblige yourself to have an experience looking at the film from beginning to end, and you always learn something about it. That moment when you cringe or you are bored or where there are moments where you don't want the scene to end tells you a lot. There are very few people I've encountered who are right when they describe a problem in a scene or in a film, and they can tell you actually what the problem is. Usually, someone who comes and screens a film will be sophisticated enough to know that there is an issue and they will try to describe it. My experience is that it's not exactly what they are saying that is correct, but they are pointing out something that they *think* the problem is and they might be right, but often it's not what they describe that's wrong—it's something else. Most of the time they can't articulate exactly what's wrong, but it's good to know that something *is* wrong. That's useful.

# MISCELLANEOUS DOCUMENTARY WISDOM

**Hullfish:** One of the things you use a lot is visual metaphors.

**Steve Audette:** One of the signs we have in our edit room is "Speak to peers." I'm always trying to make sure that I am making a visual environment that is as compelling as the bed of the story. Editors are the masters of maximizing the Kuleshov Effect. Kuleshov is a filmmaker in Russia who came to realize that every image has two values. It has the value of the image itself *and* the value of the image it's juxtaposed against. It's that combination of two values that excites the imagination of the viewer.

We try to create a universe that a film lives in. Every *Frontline* documentary has a certain sound design. Even when I go to a still photograph, I try to get the production assistant to find me walla-walla (indistinct background speaking and noise), so that the photograph itself has life. Is there something we can do to enhance the emotional experience of the narrative with color correction? For the visual part, we really try to make the pictures make sense in terms of a visual thumbprint. If you go on-line, you can see the visual thumbprint of *Star Wars* or *Black Hawk Down*, you can see the color palette of the movie.

**Hullfish:** How do you keep from getting overwhelmed? How much footage do you think you went through on the Scientology film? 120 hours? 130?

**Andy Grieve:** I've never really done the math. Probably 25 hours of interviews and easily 100 hours of archival. Easily 75 to 100 hours. I start by watching the interviews, if that's possible, because it clues you in to the kind of archival footage you should be looking for and because you kind of start to see threads through stories and can see that, for example, these two characters shared an experience and can be intercut, or they talk about the same thing. So if the driving thing for the film is going to be the interviews, for me that guides the rest of it.

**Hullfish:** What are some of the amounts of raw footage that you're coping with on other projects?

**Andy Grieve:** The talking heads and archival stories are all in the 100–300 hour range. The one that was the most out-of-control was this movie, *The Carter*, about Li'l Wayne and that was entirely vérité, and they spent a month with the guy, and they just rolled the camera non-stop and there were two cameras a lot of the time, so that was easily 500 hours plus. There'd be hours of footage of them hanging out in the recording studio and then suddenly, out of nowhere he decides to tell the story of losing his virginity. Suddenly you have 7 minutes of this incredible footage, and his friends are all laughing at this amazing moment. It's sort of like a treasure hunt. If I didn't have the patience, I could have easily just fast-forwarded past that.

**Hullfish:** How do you build or create emotional impact in your documentaries? Do you have to worry about being too manipulative with emotion?

> **"** ***I never want to create a false sense of cause and effect.*** **"**

**Andy Grieve:** I am always concerned with cause and effect. I am OK with manipulating things for emotional impact or story arc, but I never want to create a false sense of cause and effect. In the end, documentaries are about finding truths, and you have to be honest in that pursuit.

**Craig Mellish:** Ken refers to what we do as Emotional Archaeology. One of the things I like about our stuff is that it's not just a recitation of facts. You're getting the individual stories that tell the bigger story.

**Hullfish:** What sells a performance for you?

**Craig Mellish:** I think the key to our stuff is the direction that Ken will give. He says: "Let the words do the work."

**Hullfish:** David Mamet wrote a book called, *On Directing*, and he says that all the best stuff is uninflected. You don't need to *add* the emotion, the emotion is there.

**Craig Mellish:** You know when a voice actor understands what they're reading and gets it.

**Hullfish:** What's your personal philosophy about editing or producing documentaries?

**Paula Heredia:** When I take up the challenge of a picture, it is because I am convinced I can communicate something that I feel. And if I can translate that with the footage that I have,

with the way I edit it and share it with you, that's the only goal that I put to myself. If I can convey that passion and emotion in my films, everything else just happens by itself.

> *You must remain true to the footage.*

**Hullfish:** The name of my company is Verascope Pictures because the idea of truth is important to me in telling a story. How do you stay true in telling a documentary story?

**Paula Heredia:** You must remain true to the footage. In *Unzipped*, when I had the interview with the director, a few of my colleagues had already interviewed for it, and they told me "There's nothing in there . . . the footage is all over the place . . . the camera moves around like crazy . . . everything is out of focus . . . what can anybody do with that?" But when I interviewed with the director, I understood him, and I realized that the craziness of the way that the film was shot was very unintentional, but I could see how that footage could represent the craziness in the brain and the way the director saw life—saw the story itself. The director, Douglas Keeve, and the designer, Isaac Mizrahi, were breaking up from a long relationship, and all of that was part of that emotional state of the footage. If you look at the footage rationally, it doesn't make any sense. There's nothing there. But if you look at the footage and say, "I believe that the director has an intention, and I understand that intention," then I can take that footage and organize it and bring out of that footage the best that is; the vision of what that film is. As an editor, you have to start by believing that there is something in the footage and that you can bring it out. That's a process of cleaning the weeds out of something. And when it's clean and you play it, you can see it better.

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Before we move on to the final chapter of the book, I would like to point out again the wealth of additional resources on the companion website for the book: www.routledge.com/cw/Hullfish.

This site includes several additional chapters that were not possible to fit into the printed version of the book. These chapters include topics like NLEs, schedules, multi-editor collaboration, editing with VFX, and a chapter dedicated to editors discussing the editing secrets of specific movie scenes. The companion website also includes numerous screengrabs from various projects that help illustrate points in all of the chapters. The website has full color, full resolution images that are not available in the book.

The site also includes the complete interviews on which this book was based. This book is approximately 130,000 words. The interviews contain over 250,000 words. If an editor on these pages has piqued your interest in learning more about him (or her) and his (or her) techniques, I urge you to spend time reading their complete interview, which undoubtedly goes into more depth than the sections of the interview that I used for the book. These

transcriptions may not be as thoroughly edited as the pages of this book, but they are full of additional insights into the editorial craft. I take full responsibility for any typos, spelling or grammatical errors. I will also occasionally attempt to update the website with additional interviews and chapter supplements using interviews conducted after this book was delivered to the publisher.

The final chapter in the printed version of the book is Miscellaneous Wisdom. This is a catch-all chapter of great information that didn't find a home in previous chapters.