This is an extract from the article referred to by Agnès Guillemot in our conversation where Godard says ‘If direction is a look, montage is a heartbeat’. Considering that when he wrote this piece he had yet to make a full-length film, it is a surprisingly elegant insight.

... montage is above all an integral part of mise-en-scène. Only at peril can one be separated from the other. One might as well try to separate the rhythm from the melody. ‘Eléna et les hommes’ and ‘Mr Arkadin’ are both models of montage because each is a model of mise-en-scène. ‘We’ll save it in the cutting room’: a typical producer’s axiom, therefore. The most that efficient editing will give a film, otherwise without interest, is precisely the initial impression of having been directed. Editing can restore to actuality that ephemeral grace neglected by both snob and film-lover or can transform chance into destiny. Can there be any higher praise of what the general public confuses with script construction?

If direction is a look, montage is a heartbeat. To foresee is the characteristic of both: but what one seeks to foresee in space, the other seeks in time. Suppose you notice a young girl in the street who attracts you. You hesitate to follow her. A quarter of a second. How to convey this hesitation? Mise-en-scène will answer the question ‘How shall I approach her?’ But in order to render explicit the other question, ‘Am I going to love her?’ you are forced to bestow importance on the quarter of a second during which the two questions are born. It may be, therefore, that it will be for the montage rather than the mise-en-scène to express both exactly and clearly the life of an
idea or its sudden emergence in the course of a story. When? Without playing on words, each time the situation requires it, each time within a shot when a shock effect demands to take the place of an arabesque, each time between one scene and another when the inner continuity of the film enjoins with a change of shot the superimposition of the description of a character on that of the plot. This example shows that talking of mise-en-scène automatically implies montage. When montage effects surpass those of mise-en-scène in efficacity, the beauty of the latter is doubled, the unforeseen unveiling secrets by its charm is an operation analogous to using unknown quantities in mathematics.

Anyone who yields to the temptation of montage yields also to the temptation of the brief shot. How? By making the look a key piece in his game. Cutting on a look is almost the definition of montage, its supreme ambition as well as its submission to mise-en-scène. It is, in effect, to bring out the soul under the spirit, the passion behind the intrigue, to make the heart prevail over the intelligence by destroying the notion of space in favour of that of time. The famous sequence of the cymbals in the remake of ‘The Man Who Knew Too Much’ is the best proof. Knowing just how long one can make a scene last is already montage, just as thinking about transitions is part of the problem of shooting. Certainly a brilliantly directed film gives the impression of having simply been placed end to end, but a film brilliantly edited gives the impression of having suppressed all direction. Cinematographically speaking, granted the different subjects, the battle in ‘Alexander Nevsky’ is in no way inferior to ‘The Navigator’. In other words to give the impression of duration through movement, of a close shot through a long shot, is one of the aims of mise-en-scène and the opposite of one of those of montage. Invention and improvisation take place in front of the Moviola just as much as it does on the set. Cutting a camera movement in four may prove more effective than keeping it as one shot. An exchange of glances, to revert to our previous example, can only be expressed with sufficient force – when necessary – by editing. . . .

. . . . The montage, consequently, both denies and prepares the way for the mise-en-scène: the two are interdependent. To direct means to scheme, and one says of a scheme that it is well or badly mounted.
Films to View

Certainly Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky* and his other major films will yield value at every viewing, but Godard is right: *The Navigator* and Buster Keaton’s other classics have just as much to teach us albeit in a vastly different idiom.
Agnès Guillemot

The only editor to work with both Godard and Truffaut, Agnès Guillemot’s career spans from the beginning of La Nouvelle vague in the 1960s to the sexual radicalism of Catherine Breillat at the turn of the century. I talked to Agnès in her home in Paris, where she was then living with her husband Claude, a film-maker in his own right. My friend, Sarah Hickson, joined me to lubricate the conversation for which I am immensely grateful. I started, as usual, by asking Agnès about her background.
I am a war child from a modest background in the north of France, Roubaix. During the war there was not much cinema. Our studies were done in the cellars with air raids in the background. I did not feed on films when I was young. I went on studying. I read a lot and went on to study philosophy. But the arts were revealed to me, not by the dialecticals or intellectuals, but by the poets and their world and philosophy.

The art that appealed most to me was music. Unfortunately I had been unable to learn it. I would have liked to become a conductor and I discovered that cinema is music and that editing is like being a conductor. I would not be able to invent themes, to be a composer, but I can produce orchestrations – I can adapt things therefore I can edit.

In fact I did not have any manual dexterity. I could not draw – editing gave me all that. It did not come from the head – it came through the rhythm, the music, the poetry, which brought me to the meaning of things. One had to listen, feel, receive and then transmit. This is how I came to it – not through my family.

We lived in the north during the textile crisis, during the war. My mother was a maths teacher. I had an unhappy childhood. It does not prepare one for the cinema. I was a student in Poitiers. Then I discovered music (discovering something late has many good points), what music meant. A discovery in depth – music in its entirety, its vastness – as well as an analytical approach – it engulfed me from all directions.

I had not been brought up with the radio on all the time – I never had a gramophone (record player). I was addicted neither to films nor to music. You can count on your fingers the number of films I saw as a child. One day the school took us to the cinema. It makes me laugh because of ‘Les Carabiniers’. It was a film on animals: a bear was disappearing at the bottom of the screen – I got up to see it go! It always reminds me of the shot in Carabiniers where the young actor, Michel Ange, goes to the cinema and wants to touch the woman at the bottom of the screen and tears it. It was the same naivety. His discovery was like mine, but I was young.

Nothing prepared me for it but then I discovered the role of the conductor. When I saw a film on Roberto Benzi, who was a child prodigy conductor in the 1950s, I said to myself this is what I want to do. Not with music – with what I did not know – but I would find out.
I had finished my degree, in philosophy, and I thought about the cinema – its role, its meaning, its ethos – all that, and I wanted to write a thesis on this. But I went to IDHEC and editing seduced me. It was not out of an inability to do anything else – it was a deliberate choice. It was meant for me.

I could not have been a director – I cannot invent stories. Editing has one marvellous thing – you are alone with the material and you listen. I use many metaphors, metaphors you use when talking about painters and sculptors. They look at a landscape, a stone; the stone inspires them to do this or that. Editing is the same. The material is given by somebody else, but I listen to it afresh. I do not try to make it mine, I try to make it produce what it can do. The object is inside – it must be made to come out. It is exactly this – I listen, I look a long time with all my being and I extract what the director wants.

I do not rush and produce some mechanical cuts – all this is not what is real. Everybody can do this but it does not make a film. To give birth to the true film is my passion. I am very lucky, I am very modest and I do not mind doing this for somebody else. On the contrary, I can ‘be’ the other person – enter his skin, feel what he wants to say, empathise completely, be one with the other. I can go very far in that direction – it can become like an addiction, but it is instrumental in the formation of a good editor.

When I edited my first Truffaut after having edited for Godard, some friends of Truffaut said, but she is going to do a ‘Godard’. Completely idiotic – it was too much praise and at the same time not being understood at all. I deliver a Truffaut from Truffaut, a Godard from Godard. I do not mix things up. Film buffs recognise a film edited by me not because of some special seal but through sheer research and attention – I reach a certain truth, a strength. You could think of such and such a piece of music conducted by such and such a conductor and you recognise the conductor’s hand. I have not written the music, but I conduct it.

I have been very lucky. Of all the films I have edited, I only regretted doing one (I will not tell you which one) and it is not the worst of all the films I edited. Some were very good, others more indifferent, but in all of them I thought it was worth giving something of myself. Some films I refused to take because the directors do them so as to be ‘somebody’ in social circles. They do not care a damn about their
films. I am not at the service of the director – I am at the service of the film. Otherwise I quit. People who want to shine in society alongside a director are legion: I can’t.

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When I arrived in Paris, my degree in philosophy in my pocket, I thought I would do some work in depth on the cinema, its aims and responsibilities, its meaning, its ethics. To be right in it I did IDHEC. My parents were all for it, my mother being herself in teaching. It was a good place to learn, to be in the middle of things. I preferred the way IDHEC was run in those days. Some said it did not let students’ genius develop. This is wrong. Genius is not given by any school – either you have it or you don’t.

At IDHEC we knew that the cinema is a team effort. At La FEMIS I saw the director on his own in the cutting room, editing his own film. It is not right. The director is not the best person to deliver his film. He delivers what he thinks is best, but he does not know it all. The greatest directors have always worked with editors.

It is true, later on, Godard with his sense of humour said ‘I edited my films myself when I saw how easy it was’, but this was after having edited a dozen films with me. I was his only editor, although there had been some substitutes when I was pregnant or editing another film. But even in his first political films he had an assistant – an assistant not a partner in editing. After he did it on his own when he discovered video and he meditated at length on virtual editing thinking one could mix film and video. For years he pondered about this and I could not follow him on those tracks. In the end he again separated one from the other. In Telerama he said: ‘He who makes films like they were video is a dunce; he who makes video as if it were film is also a dunce’. From then on he separated the two.

He did try to make films where he mixed both. ‘Passion’ despite being a success is not completely a film. The first he did really with his own money and which meant a lot to him was ‘Je vous salue, Marie’ on film. This year of reflection led him to see that different methods give different results. I am not saying that you must not do any videos but you must not think that if you make video instead of
a film, on film you will have the same thing. The thinking time (during editing) does not take place in the same way. It is a solitary work that has no transmission of knowledge. It is terrible; the constant work at night – abnormal working conditions. On top of that the producer thinks it’s easy.

On my last film, ‘Selon Matthieu’, I fell ill. When I was getting better they sent me a cassette of the film. The director and the producer had done a version to ask me what I thought. Abominable! There is no distance. You must take the audience on a voyage of discovery, whereas in their version they knew everything before the end, and I do not think that films can be edited like this. In France the Cinema is being invaded by the power of TV. If TV does not want such an actor you do not shoot the film. It is frightening.

I am glad that the end of my career coincided with the compulsory use of video. In 1966 I cut ‘Mémoires d’un jeune con’ on Avid and they then printed it on 35mm. The director, Patrick Aurignac, spent seven years in prison and wrote a script based on his experiences. I found this worthy of interest. The producer, to save money, made him direct his film and it went to his head. He was not up to it – it would have been a worthy film but he was badly advised. He committed suicide. It was worth breaking my beliefs for, but I wish it had a better ending.

Since I retired I have been working as an adviser on films shot on video. I always use the same technique. I will not say straight away after looking at it, it’s fine or no, something is wrong. I will say – we watch the film together and then you go and have lunch. I think and then two hours later I will tell you the result.

When I watched a film I would treat it as I would a music manuscript – I would divide it into movements. I can tell you that timing the pieces made it obvious, allowed a dialogue with the director, showed why it did not work – a question of rhythm. If you try to explain to them, make speeches, they do not understand. If you tell them you have two sequences lasting exactly the same and which say more or less the same thing they understand. Even working in Avid I did some scenes like this to be able to discuss them.

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Agnès Guillemot
Agnès then decided to show me the way she prepared her dubbing sheets – using music manuscript paper horizontally instead of the industry norm of vertical.

Example of dubbing chart designed by Agnès Guillemot (Courtesy of Agnès Guillemot)
My first ‘score’ was with Godard on ‘Le Petit Soldat’ and he called them ‘my little trains’. In France we used to prepare mixing sheets vertically. Why vertical – they used to answer me – because the film unthreads vertically. I do not see the relevance. On my ‘score’ I would indicate the main shots (i.e. the image), direct sound, dubbing and all similar effects – played on the same ‘instrument’. It allowed us to divide it up in a more musical way.

My husband who did some editing – he is not an editor he is a director – used to say, you are not going to do like everybody else, with vertical sheets, it is ridiculous. Together we realised it was much more ‘crafty’ to do them horizontally. In the vertical sheets we had big long columns and to know what was happening in parallel made very difficult reading. Moreover one would not prepare the charts in advance. I prepare in advance where my assistants must put the sound. Before they put it where there is an empty column. There was no planning. In ‘Virtual’ they found out what I used to do, the horizontal way (timeline), it is obvious.

Godard said I should give them to the Cinémathèque. This one is ‘Le Mépris’ (shows me example). Everybody speaks of the shot in this film – so beautiful; ‘Do you like my feet, etc.’ In fact it is not the original version; before we went straight from the cameraman, Raoul Coutard, who arrived with his camera, to Jack Palance, who was coming out of the studio. The Americans said there is not enough sex. Godard added the scenes of Bardot naked. The scenes are peppered here and there. He added that travelling shot on the bed – everybody thinks it is superb. I get cross – it was superb to go directly from the credit to the film in one shot. Now one speaks about the splitting up of time but it was not like this – it was a much more linear, simple film. When he had to put things for the Americans he did his best (superb shot where they are sitting on the settee and he strokes her legs, interspersed with shots of her on a carpet, red, white and blue). It was a long shot (continuous) but it was cut to put in these censored shots. It was painful – I have the proof in these documents.

Agnès shows me the various versions.

With ‘Vivre sa Vie’: when he shot he knew exactly what he was going to do – no discussion. He was the only one (and even his
friends of the Nouvelle Vague were astounded by this) who knew. He ‘saw’ his film before actually shooting it. There were very few things he did not know. We hesitated a few little times but for most things it was a logical continuation of what preceded it. It was in his head.

We spoke very little. We were two shy guys. We understood each other’s body language. I was on the editing machine – he was next to me. I run the film – when he thinks we should stop, I stop. We look again – we stop at the same point. We spoke very little. When there were doubts – it happened once or twice on some travelling shots in relation to the music – he would say ‘underline the strong beats in white – I will sit down and mark them’ – he used a yellow marker. When we looked at the film the yellow and white coincided. He said ‘it won’t be possible to say we did not get on’. Sometimes things would surprise me, but I would listen.

In the book ‘Godard by Godard’ in the piece ‘Montage mon beau souci’ (Montage my beautiful concern) he said ‘To direct is a look to edit is a beat of the heart’. Our hearts beat at the same rhythm – we did not need to speak. Take ‘Les Carabiniers’. There is a scene in the woods; the partisans are ambushed by the so-called soldiers. One of them removes a partisan’s cap and fair hair falls to her shoulders. The gesture is done twice – in closeup and again in a wider shot. We tried to do a classical link, but it did not have the same import as it did when we used both shots.

I put them both together again and Godard said ‘How are we going to justify this?’ and I said ‘we can say, he did it and when he did it he asked himself why he did it – he does it again to know how he did it’. It is the only thing I said to Godard. It was a bit twisted – not an explanation, only a word here and there. For the sake of equilibrium we needed other ‘double raccord’ (repeat actions) in the film, but they were less moving than this first one.

Godard’s films are impeccably constructed. The only time that censorship came into his films was in ‘Le Mépris’. He was furious because he knew that if you take off a beat the whole thing may fall. I learnt this with him: equilibrium. What I learnt with him is that genius is caring passionately. I told this to Nicole Garcia who did not understand at first, but saw the truth of it later on. One reacts differently as an actress than as a director. Her films are good. She
was good. I ended my career as an editor with ‘Romance’. Good film – great dignity of female sexual pleasure – not pornographic.

‘Vivre sa Vie’ is a masterpiece. There are different categories of film in Godard – for instance contemplative films, of which ‘Vivre sa Vie’ is the prototype. ‘Bande à part’ is something else. I worked with Godard in the first ten years of his career. He then stopped to make his political films and then his research. When he started again he did not want an editor. He was not sure of himself but he was sure he had ‘perfect pitch’ as far as films were concerned.

He could not stand people talking on the set. They prevented him from listening. He looked at everything with an open eye. His films were not expensive – he shot very quickly – he knew exactly what he was going to do. He extracted from things all that could be extracted. I see him walking in the location of ‘Masculin, Feminin’, a bistro. He sent all the team to the next bistro to be in peace, and he ‘felt’ the set. When he asked people to come back he knew exactly where to put them. It was not as things were done then – we are going to do a shot here and there – he would do long tracks. He did not change things without a reason. He found things in the workplace – no known recipes.

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Jean Douchet in his book on the New Wave said we were not aware of what we were inventing or discovering – we lived it intensely but without saying to ourselves we are inventing new things. On the whole people do not like it when I say this. Anna Karina in an interview describes Godard as an intellectual, but I do not think this is the right term. He is marvellously intelligent but not an intellectual. The other day I was asked why did he want to do a science fiction film with ‘Alphaville’. I answered, he did not decide to do a science fiction film. He went looking for locations for ‘Une Femme Mariée’ – he was looking for locations in Orly airport, which was being built. He saw the basements, the odd buildings – at the time the atomic bomb was in the headlines. He saw the swimming pool in the airport – a new thing at the time. The film was to be called, ‘A new adventure of Lemmy Caution’. When he saw all these settings it all crystallised and became the elements of what became a science fiction film,
linking the swimming pool and the interrogations, as in certain countries at the time. At the time and even now people do not realise that it is a ‘true’ science fiction – there are no special effects. Here it is the daily routine, which creates the science fiction.

Godard looked at everything with passion. He found things in everyday life when he walked, listened, found things for his scripts. He listens. It is while walking in the street, seeing the girls in the street, that ‘Vivre sa Vie’ started. There is an expression of a novelist – ‘Sculpture came up from his feet’. Inspiration came from his feet to the heart. It is tactile, physical. Intellectuals would talk at conferences on Godard, but when Godard came they did not ask him any questions. Vampires, they live off Godard’s films but the person does not interest them.

I divide people between the earthly and the pure spirit. Godard told me he was visual/audio and I was audio/visual. I was an audio tactile. This is why I could not work in virtual. I have to touch the film. In the last film of Godard, a reflection on the cinema, he edits a film with a female assistant who is blind. He gives her a piece of film and asks her to put the sound on it.

A producer once said, he hasn’t done any splicing for three days. He spends his time looking at the film backwards, looking at the same scene. I am sure this is how one should edit one’s film – not by rushing to do the first splice. I had to fight with the producer at first. They wanted me to edit the first sequence to find the results, but it does not mean that the final editing will be the same. You have to see the whole film – I have to explain this to directors.

Once Catherine Breillat called me to come to her aid. She had told her editor to edit the first sequence between two characters. She said the editor had sabotaged the sequence. When I came I saw why it did not work. We saw the characters later on – we discover their tempo – their dialogue. She had edited this tac/tac/tac quickly. Whereas it was two characters that took their time to speak; the editor must see the whole of the film.

In French films music is used as an illustration – not a good use of music and sounds. Godard always uses direct sound except in ‘Le Petit Soldat’ because of Anna Karina’s accent. He wanted to show the sound level. We are not conscious of the sound level we hear.
(He was in the editing room for the image but not for the sound – he was in the bistro downstairs.) In 'Le Petit Soldat', at the beginning, a car arrives silently, one does not hear the brakes, sound of a match, car goes, one hears nothing – then music.

By the way, I did not know Godard before I worked with him. He had asked one of my former pupils in IDHEC if she knew somebody who was not deformed by traditional films who could edit his film.

In 'Une Femme est une femme' Anna Karina gets up, goes to the bistro. She is inside, asks for a ‘green’ crème – goes out in the street, lots of noise, the shot after – no more noise. It was to make us hear the sound level that you normally do not hear, like abstract music. With the Italians we sent them an International copy (sound mix without dialogue) with the cut. They thought there was a mistake and they reintroduced the sound everywhere – put sound in the ‘hole’.

He sees it as his rhythm that he adds to the music. He always said that he is not a musician himself and discovered music later on. He had a tremendous ear – he did not want to use music to illustrate things, to accompany. He wanted music that would talk with the other sounds in the film – a dialogue – not music to make things smoother, easier to understand, to create false emotions. Sometimes I hear people say here it is not too good, let us put some music.

‘Le Mépris’ was the only time when he used a score – Delerue – good collaboration. He did not cut it. In the scene in the music hall, normally you would lower the music when people talk – here he cuts it: no half-measures.

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I worked with Truffaut from ‘Baisers Volés’, because Claudine Bouché was not available. We got on well with ‘Baisers Volés’, the way one got on with Truffaut. Truffaut was not bothered by how one makes a film, how one puts things together. He is the spectator – he wants to see the result, not the know-how. I was completely puzzled. Godard never shot a scene from different angles saying we will choose, but Truffaut did it. Naively I thought he was going to say I want this or that in closeup on such characters. He said nothing, do what you like, disconcerting but exciting.
'Baisers Volés' was edited in quite a new way. For instance the scene where Lonsdale comes to see the private detective and says nobody loves me, when you sell shoes you are a shoe-nick twenty-four hours a day. In principle one puts a wide shot then one gets nearer, then closeup. Looking at the film I thought this is ridiculous – why do this? Lonsdale was fantastic in medium closeup and closeup. I went from one to the other to take the best.

Truffaut asked why did you do this? I said I do not want the best things to stay in the rushes, discarded. He accepted the principle of the thing after we projected it. When it was alright he would not say much but when it did not work he would say so. He was jealous of Godard. I suffered from having worked with Godard but I was proud of it. Truffaut did not use me without letting me know – it was his way. During ‘Domicile Conjugal’ one scene with Claude Jade was causing problems. He said we should not edit it this way. I said I had tried everything – can you come to the editing room. Then he was mad. He did not know what to say – he hated it.

‘Baisers Volés’, ‘L’Enfant sauvage’ and ‘La Sirène du Mississipi’ are his three best films. ‘Domicile Conjugal’ I like least. Truffaut was very susceptible. Jealousy and his unfaithfulness were his worst defects. He needed to love and be loved. His films went by fours. Of his editors only Martine Barraqué did more.

When I was on the dole I went to see a director – a lover of film – Pierre Tchernia. He was making a film that I do not like – ‘Le Viager’. He told me ‘I do not do Godard’. Later on when somebody said that to me I would reply ‘it is a shame you don’t’. There is a very poignant article by Godard in Telerama. After his accident he tried to start again. ‘I have to start from scratch, as if I had not done anything before’.

Truffaut shot in a more traditional way. His trademark is his sensitivity. There is a charm that is Truffaut – it comes from the way he learnt about the cinema when he was very young – he likes cliché. With Godard it was the opposite so for me it was sometimes difficult. The cliché which may cost me my work with him was in ‘Domicile Conjugal’. Claude Jade has a child. Léaud comes home late – meets his in-laws at the bottom of the stairs. Truffaut shot two versions: one where the in-laws said, ‘Be nice to her, she had a lot of
pain, she went through a lot’ the other ‘You have a lovely little boy, be happy and nice with her’. Earlier in the film we had been told that she was listening to a record about childbirth without pain – automatically I chose the second version. Truffaut said to me ‘why did you choose this one?’ I said ‘If you shoot her listening to the record, you are not going to traumatise generations of young women’. It was bad faith. In the scene where Claude Jade and Leaud meet again she says ‘now you are proud of your son, but before, you dropped me’. He betrayed her with the Japanese girl – it was bad faith.

Godard says ‘the cinema is a question of morality’. It was contrary to my belief to put the first version. For Truffaut it was better to put the more hackneyed idea. Women suffer and to hide the fact she was putting on a face because her partner had betrayed her. He took my version but he was not a moralist. I was nearer to Godard.

With Truffaut there was no joy in the cutting room. Once I had a big bouquet and a telegram for ‘Baisers Volés’: ‘make the film how you like, I shot it thinking of other things (it was 1968) I trust you completely, do as if I were dead’ I found this note after Truffaut’s death. In June 1968 all the technicians were on strike. He had asked me if we could go and do one projection without saying anything to anybody. I said no. I did not like it, it was contrary to my principles. I do not see why I should have given in.

I am very severe on ‘La Nuit américaine’. It presents the cinema to the public in the same way that Cinémonde would show it to the reader. This is why I share Godard’s view who wrote to him: ‘From a cineaste who is such a film buff you should have been more faithful’. One could have done better on a film about film. When I saw it, it annoyed me.

I did not like this line in ‘Baisers Volés’: ‘politeness is better than being sincere’ – I do not think so. In the scene when Delphine Seyrig comes in the room it was not easy. The frame when he is clowning in his bed – it was not very well directed – and hard to find some reactions. She is superb – I love the scene when he is on top of the ladder in the shoe shop and sings.

In ‘Le Sirène du Mississipi’ there were lots of aphorisms: ‘I love you because you are loveable’! One could not discuss with him.
Not even Suzanne Schiffman – she was wonderful – she just died. She understood Truffaut. She had worked with Godard too. When they split it was very painful. I do not like to speak too much of my work with Truffaut. It is good to admire and I do not admire him that much. At first it was possible when he was in love with Catherine Deneuve. He went to Brittany and left the film with me, in full confidence. Then when he broke with Deneuve – I knew he would not take me again. He had an extraordinary wife, Madeleine Morgenstern.

Yann Dedet and Martine Barraqué went on the set. I never did – or I went out of politeness. Truffaut liked people to go. When I see a film being shot it has not the same mystery for me as when I discover it in the projection room. It is fantastic, the editor seeing it for the first time. This does not happen in video – everybody has seen everything as it happens. One’s eyes are polluted by so many shots.

Anna Karina says in an article ‘to make films one has to take everything seriously’ – I add to this ‘except oneself’. One has to be modest:

Shall we drink a coffee now?
Films to View

It is difficult to imagine the impact Jean-Luc Godard’s films might have on a new generation since jump cuts and other ways in which he broke the conventional syntax have been absorbed into cinema long since. However I would still encourage new explorers to watch *Breathless* and all the films Agnes worked on through to *Weekend* but not forgetting *Pierrot le fou*, which was edited by Francoise Collin who went on to edit for Godard a number of times and had earlier cut *Chronique d’un ete* for Jean Rouch, which might well have brought her to Godard’s attention. *Chronique d’un ete* or *Chronicle of a Summer*, which starts with a series of random interviews on the streets of Paris from which the leading characters are chosen was particularly organic in its evolution as Rouch and his co-filmmaker sociologist Edgar Morin used an unusual approach deciding at each turning point what next to focus on, sometimes discussing their options on camera. Though fictional, *Pierrot le fou* also contrives a complicity with the audience and both films depend on the craft of editing for their seductive effect.

Agnès is hard on Truffaut because she disapproved of his character but she was also unfortunate in editing for him in mid-career. Whilst Godard was more radical both politically and aesthetically Truffaut had a natural flair with the medium and his first three films are as good a start to a director’s career as any in the history of cinema. *Les Quatre cents coups*, *Tirez sur le pianiste* and *Jules et Jim* are not only superb in every aspect including the editing but they are surprisingly different from each other. The first is based on Truffaut’s own childhood, the second is an adaptation from an American pulp novel by David Goodis and the third from an early twentieth century memoir/diary by Henri-Pierre Roche. In each case the style including the montage cleverly reflects the subject material. Truffaut also revived late on with for instance *La Chambre Verte* in 1978 a reflection on mourning the dead only six years before his own early demise.
I talked with Sabine in her Paris apartment, the morning after a preview of ‘Ma Vrai vie à Rouen’, the delightful film which was the third she edited for Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau, who both joined us for lunch. Sabine’s career began when she knocked on the door of the cutting room of Abel Gance and that was the first of many wonderful experiences. Sabine’s death at the end of last year made me realise how privileged I felt to have met her. I hope this interview will stand as witness to her commitment and passion.

I was born in Tunisia in 1948 and my mother died at my birth. My father had a garage, which pleased me very much because I could share something with Jacques Demy: we both had a father who owned a garage. Movies and reading were the two things I liked most. I have to remind you that TV did not exist at that time. I remember a movie I saw which was called something like ‘Geneviève de Brabant’, and it was the story of a catholic saint who got burnt. My step-sister was Geneviève, and it was something wonderful to imagine that she could be burned too. I must have been very young – three or four – because it’s one of my first memories: being at the movies and thinking it was true.

Going to the movies was a joy, a reward, a passion; movies would magnify life, with actors being bigger than us. There was Asmahane, Farid al Atrache’s sister, even more beautiful than ‘Gilda’, there were Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas, and Jerry Lewis, who have remained my favourites. There were Victor Mature, the Indian musicals, and a very strange film called ‘Goha le simple’ by Jacques Baratier, the first film where they spoke Tunisian, starring Omar Sharrif. Goha, called Ch’rah in the Maghreb and Edd in Hodja in Persia, is a character loved both by Jews and Arabs when they used
to laugh together. Jacques Baratier filmed Goha joining his lover at night, crossing a street from a village and entering the street of another village. In the eyes of a little girl so curious about love, it was a secret unveiled.

Life passed by, I wanted to be a movie star, have my name and my image big on the walls. It happened once, as I have been the star of Agnès Varda’s ‘Documenteur’. First in Los Angeles (LA), then in Paris, and I was ashamed when I warned my father that I was naked on the poster. I was then living in LA, full time in love and didn’t come to Paris.

As a teenager I discovered the Italian neo-realists, and the ‘angry young men’ whom I loved so much. A movie newspaper printed an article I wrote on ‘The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner’ when I was fifteen, I became a woman with ‘Family Life’, ‘I pugni in tasca’, Godard, Demy, Varda, Satiajit Ray, Woody Allen, Nanni Moretti, Chantal Akerman. I was a very lonely person, and their works were the only ones speaking to me.

Going to movies is still a feast. Living in Paris is lucky. Although a lot of cinemas have disappeared I guess it has remained the capital of
movies. I remember the Styx where we used to see horror movies seated in a coffin; the Luxuor where we’d see Indian films like ‘Mandala Fille des Indes’ or ‘Mother India’; the Delta which was showing kung-fu films and the Japanese ‘Baby cart’.

There are directors, and the list would be long, that fill me with admiration. I’d adore to be Soderberg’s cutter, to participate in the discovery of the sense created by two shots. Being able to see how a film is done, in terms of movement of camera, cuts, voice on or off, multiplies my pleasure and my admiration in looking at films. It’s a pity not to be allowed anymore to stay in the cinema for the next performance. I remember having booked a whole afternoon for Alan Rudolph’s ‘Remember My Name’.

It is also important for me to go to movies when I am editing a film. When the film director with whom I am working is a friend, we go together with other friends. The first Kitano I saw was with Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau and we solved a problem we had in ‘Jeanne et le Garçon Formidable’ thanks to that film. Funnily enough, it again happened with another Kitano when we edited ‘Drôle de Félix’.

Going to movies helps me stay alert. ‘King of Marvin Gardens’, ‘Safe’, Douglas Sirk, Jean-Claude Guiguet’s ‘Les Passagers’, Alain Guiraudie, ‘Bloody Sunday’, any Kaurismaaki, they all wake me up, ask me to pay attention.

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Now back to chronology. I passed my baccalaureate when I was sixteen and a half, entered university, graduated one year and decided not to carry on. Though I had developed other passions than going to movies, as literature theatre and concerts, I wanted to work in the movies and I had to earn my living as I had left home and had no place of my own. The sister of my parents’ best friends was a famous editor for trailers and that’s how I started. I entered a cutting room and really loved it: the smell, the noise of the 35mm perforations on the Moviola, the white gloves, the taste of the film. You remember, Roger, the feeling of the film in your mouth, there was the shiny side and the matt side, and the matt side is the one that sticks to the lips. In winter, if you had dry lips, it would take off a little of your skin. It was enough to forget to check once and be called
to the screening room because all the emulsion was scratched on ‘la tete de lecture’ (playback head), and shame on you!

When I look back on those times we would work ten hours a day, six days a week. As an apprentice I was not being paid as I was supposed to be learning. I earned money working in dubbing theatres. I remember a long summer when I subtitled ‘zarzuelas’, Spanish musicals. I also worked in laboratories which did opticals.

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In one of these laboratories Abel Gance was working on a new version of ‘Napoléon’, I was a fan of Abel Gance and so I knocked on his door and told him. ‘Admiration bien placée’ he answered (admiration well placed), and he accepted me in his cutting room. I worked there for six months, in great admiration. I loved him and would imitate him in every gesture, trims around my neck sweeping the floor and smoking two packs of Gauloises a day. You may shudder as we were working on inflammable film that could ignite instantly.

When Gance shot ‘Napoléon’ in 1926, sound in movies had not yet been invented, but he insisted that the actors should say their lines. So when sound was invented he could dub the film. This is part of his genius. So he re-cut the film and dubbed it. Now, in 1970, he wanted some of the mute sequences that had not been inserted in the ‘version parlante’ to be part of the new version. For example the little boy on the battlefield beating his drum and when he is killed the sound of hail pouring on the drums replacing him. He also inserted some of Napoleon’s speech and I was able to see Albert Dieudonné in the theatre, dubbing himself over forty years after the shooting.

There was no money for me but it seemed fair as there was no money at all: Abel Gance had to stop till a few years later Claude Lelouch came by and helped him out. By that time, I was engaged on, God knows what and couldn’t work on the last version of ‘Napoléon’.

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Then, one day, I was hired as an apprentice on a 35mm fiction film. Spares and trims and trims and spares; after three of those six months apprenticeships, you’d earn a card from the National Centre of Cinema that said that you were an assistant. By that
time, I was fed up with the editor working behind a black curtain and the films I was working on (films I would never go and see in the cinema). So I quit editing for good and started travelling in a small truck with my lover, his basset, my Newfoundland dog and a library. Gone my dream of working with Agnès Varda, Mai Zetterling and Jean Schmidt. It was even more than a dream, it was what I had sworn to myself. The first two names were the only female film directors – apart from Paula Delsol – of those times and Jean Schmidt was a director of documentaries I admired.

I travelled for almost a year, reading Beckett, Joyce, Proust, Bashevis Singer, Flaubert, Manes Sperber, Cervantes, Forster, Koestler, Tanizaki, Nemirovskis. Time didn’t count. The future didn’t count.

I came back on the day a friend was looking for me to edit a short film by Mai Zetterling, who was looking for an editor who spoke English. We met, I was an admirer, having seen the films she had performed in, when she was Bergman’s actor, and the film she had directed. I guess my enthusiasm made up for my total lack of experience, she trusted me and I edited her film ‘La Dame Aux Oiseaux’.

Then another friend offered to introduce me to Agnès Varda, to finish ‘One Sings, the Other Doesn’t’. Imagine, it was on the phone that she told me she’d meet me in the cutting room on Monday, 10:00 a.m. I asked her, ‘Don’t you want to see me before?’ She replied that she was going away for the weekend and that there was no problem. I spent more than ten years working with her. Till now, I have problems with directors who cast editors. I have problems with ‘frileux’ which translates into English as ‘sensitive to the cold’ and ‘unadventurous’. In French it is one word. The problem with ‘frileux’ is that you tend to be ‘frileux’ as well. All I know, I have learned from her and the other film directors I have worked with.

Just like Claude Accursi in 1973 – I was twenty-four years then – who chose me to edit his 35mm film. He asked me: ‘Tell me, mademoiselle, why you want so much to edit my film?’ I answered: ‘Sir, because you took the greatest actor in the world, Roger Blin’.

[Roger Blin was above all the director of Beckett and Genet, and an incredible theatre actor. Imagine I didn’t even know his film was about Dadaism! – Sabine]
So when Claude Accursi told me that, I rejoiced and when he told me the difficulties he had finding the poem, ‘Dada au coeur’ I said ‘Its simple, it’s in the book published by Seghers’.

Comforted by the fact that I had worked with those two, I wrote to Jean Schmidt, it was good timing – he had just finished shooting ‘Comme les Anges Déchus de la Planète Saint-Michel’, and he hired me as the editor. So now that I look backwards I see a twenty-nine-year-old woman having coffee with Jean Schmidt who had responded to her love letter. My knowledge of his work and my admiration for it – documentaries were not so fashionable then – made him decide to choose me. It was my first work on documentaries and I realised we had to invent the structure, how you start, how you associate, how you finished the film. Nothing was taken for granted.

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In 1980, Agnès Varda phoned me from LA and asked me to come and assist her on the preparation and the shooting of ‘Murs Murs’ and then edit it. My love for her is inextinguishable. Does such a word exist? Though I was overwhelmed with joy, I still made one phone call as I had heard that a man had recorded hundreds of hours with survivors of the Shoah. I didn’t know then that it was Claude Lanzmann, author of ‘Why Israel?’ the first day of the screening of which was the first day of the Iom Kippour War. I phoned the cutting room and learned that Claude Lanzmann already had two editors, so I flew to LA and Agnès.

‘Murs Murs’ took us nine months, from preparation to the end of the mix. We finished at Christmas. For Christmas I offered Agnès a copy-book where I had written down all her day-dreams about a film being the shadow of ‘Murs Murs’. She later on said in ‘France Culture’ that it was what made her decide to shoot the film, which was called ‘Documenteur’. She said to me ‘I saw you play with my son Matthieu yesterday and thought you could act in the film’. I was very aware of the risk she was taking as I was not an actress, but I trusted her. She wanted to do a home movie: the characters of the film were her son, and friends of hers or mine. We would shoot and edit and shoot. What I lived through this film was being very close to the process of creating. Seeing Agnès shooting a feature film without any scenario.
The editing machine, a 16mm Atlas, was at her place. I was living very close; my lover was an actor in the film and the assistant of the Director of Photography (DP). The DP was one of my best friends, Nurith Aviv. Those times were among the happiest in my life; filled with wit and joy, laughter, energy, tenderness and passion.

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Jacques Demy was something else – Jacques Demy was the impossible dream – he was very English – to me what is English. Like he would say ‘Oh, I am late’ and not move faster and say goodbye and be very polite. I remember him when there was a big discussion in LA, everyone was talking and he was translating very, very peacefully and very slowly to someone who couldn’t get the whole thing and he was translating everything. This for me was incredible. I was always hanging around at Agnès production and she was looking for an assistant speaking English for ‘Lady Oscar’ by Jacques Demy. So I asked Jacques if I could be the assistant and he said: ‘Sabine you can’t because now you are a young editor and you can’t now just go down and be an assistant’. I said: ‘Oh but Jacques I’d rather be an assistant with you than an editor with anyone else’. So he started smiling – he was a little perverse really, and I got the job – the editor was Paul Davies, because he wanted an English person to edit the film. I liked very much the sound editor, Alan Bell.

I was living in LA and I was starting to edit some small documentaries, some small shorts out of the Union. In 1982 I was thirty-four years old, Agnès Varda was back in Paris and I was still living in LA and full time in love. Jacques Demy called me and asked me if I could edit his film, ‘Une Chambre en Ville’. He had always been one of my favourite film directors. So I said ‘Yes, right away’. He said ‘Is there nothing to restrain you?’ He amused me as he was offering me the castle and at the same time he was giving me the price to pay: a separation from my love.

Jacques Demy wanted me to begin before the shooting. We had to figure out the preparation for playback. I remember being jet-lagged and understanding nothing. So I said ‘I have never edited a musical in my life and I am lost’. You could feel all the stress, which filled the mixing room, flying away, as in fact it was what everyone was thinking.
'Une Chambre en Ville' was pure happiness – what can I say. For example I remember that 'Lady Oscar' was in the era of John Travolta. It was the time of the Palace, a nightclub, which was a kind of paradise on earth. Fortunately it would only start opening on Thursday – so from Thursday – we were three girls in the cutting room – we would arrive at work at 10:00 a.m. already dressed for the Palace. It was disco time, all glitter, and at 7:00 p.m. we would leave Jacques Demy and his editor, and we could see in the eyes of Jacques Demy that he would have just loved to come with us. He would say, ‘Thursday Night Fever!’ But we would also go out with him a lot at night. It was very nice to spend the whole day with people and then call your lovers and all go out together.

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Just after that, a friend of mine named Claude Weisz, with whom I was a political militant, arranged a meeting for me with Yilmaz Guney, who was looking for an editor. Instead of asking Costa-Gavras, whom he knew very well, he asked this old friend from old times when he was not yet a prize winner at Cannes. Yilmaz Guney was hiding – the Turkish police were looking for him. So it was like during the occupation moving from one appointment to another one – I entered the room and I saw a very beautiful man looking at me. It was Yilmaz Guney. I went to the kitchen with him and his translator, and we started talking and the translator started laughing. Yilmaz Guney asked the translator why he was laughing and the translator said because we were supposed to get acquainted and he saw that Yilmaz Guney and I were talking as if we had known each other for a long time.

‘Le Mur’ was extraordinary – to work with someone with whom you have no common language. What a pity that sometimes nowadays, like in a fairy tale, you have to show ‘white hands’ to prove I don’t know what. You had to prove nothing before. People are free or not – you feel you’re accepted and then it’s extraordinary – you feel you could die for them! You trust them, you admire them and then you want to go beyond yourself.

I met a girl – a very strange girl in LA. She asked me if I could see her short film. The film was very good. I said why is this shot upside down? She said because Jim Morrison says ‘Head upside down’.
I told her: ‘The film is perfect, I have nothing to tell you, but you have twisted the leader for the sound and it’s difficult to adjust because the sound is cut diagonally. So I am going home, phone me and I’ll come and fetch you, you’ll sleep at home or I’ll drive you downtown’. I never heard from her again that night.

When for ‘Une Chambre en Ville’ I needed an apprentice, I remembered that girl. I was anxious, never having edited a musical in my life. I was phoning her everyday telling her I needed an apprentice who had already worked on a musical, and then I made up my mind and asked her to be my apprentice. This girl is Patricia Mazuy. After being my apprentice on ‘Une Chambre en Ville’ she was my assistant on ‘Le Mur’. She was very original. Later she directed ‘Peau de Vaches’, which was a very good film with Jean-François Stévenin.

We edited ‘Le Mur’ in Pont Sainte Maxence which is about one hour drive from Paris, where Yilmaz Guney turned a convent into a prison. I have loved Yilmaz Guney immediately: he was an oriental prince to me. He had problems with the French crew. I loved the dinners, with the Turkish crew, the workers, the painters, all the kids and the women. We had Greek food. I just loved it. I was with Patricia while the crew would eat outside.

At one point there was a strike of the French crew. They couldn’t cope with waiting for Yilmaz Guney to start shooting. They couldn’t cope either with his attitude to the kids. I remember him slapping a boy because he was late for the shooting. So the boy cried and said he went to the village because it was his birthday. Yilmaz Guney did not reply, but that night there was a super birthday party for the boy. I didn’t go on strike with the French crew. I remember they were not happy with the script in Turkish, on which Yilmaz Guney was still working.

We finished the editing in Paris. We immediately fired the translator who was too slow and what he’d say would make no sense. We went on working, Yilmaz Guney not speaking French and I not speaking Turkish, but we understood each other.

Patricia was an incredible first assistant on ‘Le Mur’. I remember at a point there was no reel one. I said to her: ‘How come there is no reel one? So just call the reel two reel one’. So she said: ‘No, reel two is reel two’. ‘Well where’s reel one?’ ‘Reel one is not yet made – it’s...
made of all the shots that are in reel three, four, five, six –’ She was incredible: I had total confidence, but for weeks we had no reel one!

Somehow I just communicated with Yilmaz Guney. He had a court around him – men around him – a lot of men. You would hear them speaking Turkish and then pronounce Marx or Engels or Lenin and then go back to Turkish. I didn’t know which International they were preparing. Every night Yilmaz Guney would give dinner – every night we would go to a restaurant. I was invited with whoever I wanted and could bring as many friends as I wanted. He was very gentle and very generous.

Maybe I’m talking about love instead of talking about editing, I hope it’s okay with you. After that film he got sick, and I remember he had learnt French a little. He told me he would bring me to Istanbul at the crossing of the three seas after the Revolution. We would be there and drink and eat grilled fish. I still have this dream of something I will never do.

There were thousands of people at the burial of Yilmaz Guney – the burial of Victor Hugo must probably have been the same. They had come by bus – Turks from Germany as well as from Turkey itself. A lot, a lot, a lot, of people. Sometimes I still meet one of the Turkish crew. I still have a few friends. I made very, very nice friends there.

Once a crew from TV came to film him in the editing room. Yilmaz Guney asked me: ‘What do I do?’ I replied: ‘As usual, you press my shoulder when you want the shot to finish.’

For his birthday we decided that we were all going to learn a piece of the script of ‘Le Mur’. We knew it was insult. All the editing crew dressed in white and red, the colours of Turkey, and we played the part. He was crying with laughter. When we got the answer print with subtitles, we realised that what we had said was even worse than we had thought. Things like: ‘I fuck the garage of your mother for generations’!

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I was from time to time asking about Claude Lanzmann’s film ‘Shoah’ until one day Catherine Zins, a friend of mine, told me that she was offered to edit part of the sound of his film and couldn’t do it as she was directing her own first film ‘Matura 31’. So I went
to Claude Lanzmann’s cutting room and was hired right away. This incredible and daring trust that creators give you allows you to surpass yourself. ‘Shoah’ was the film I was expecting. It signified the end of my nightmares.

RC: Tell me why you hated Resnais’ film ‘Night and Fog’.

SM: ‘Night and Fog’ is obscene. I don’t think you should be allowed to show a corpse unless you get the permission of the corpse. No one wants to be shown dead or even in such a state of degradation. All the more because we found out afterwards that Alain Resnais accepted the cutting of photos in two to hide the participation of the French police. The legend of the French only being resistant had to be created. France had to sit around the table of victims!

I felt offended and humiliated by the silence that was made around the Shoah. I did all my classes for fifteen years and the Shoah was never taught. I remember saying once that Second World War had been a war against the Jews and being thrown out of the class for saying such absurdities.

‘Shoah’ for me is a masterpiece of structure and of form. Claude Lanzmann said something which I like very much: ‘Without form you don’t inform’. Form creates sense, it imposes a way of seeing.

While I was editing the sound for ‘Shoah’, TV showed ‘Documenteur’, where I play a love scene and a nude scene. Lanzmann came in the cutting room and said, ‘So you are an editor too’. This man who has made the masterpiece of the movies doesn’t freak out to see that an actress is cutting the sound of his film. Such confidence! Of course he doubts. He’s the man who works with doubts, but doubting has nothing to do with trust.

When Claude Lanzmann asked me to edit ‘Tsahal’, you can imagine what a gift it was. Even if sometimes afterwards I would quote Thérèse d’Avila: ‘Que de larmes versees pour des voeux escuaces’ (‘how many tears you shed for wishes that are granted’), because the editing lasted three years and the film is five hours long! He was shooting in Israel – I was getting the rushes in Paris. I had to tell him things and at one point he said: ‘Why are you telling me that?’ I said: ‘I just thought this would be really great to start with’. He said: ‘Oh it’s strange I thought the same’. With Lanzmann, who is probably the man I admire the most, I am not afraid to sound silly. This is his freedom.
After ‘Tsahal’ we edited ‘The Living from the Dead’. There was something written in Czech on a wall and he said he wanted the translation. I immediately phoned a Czech friend. When he returned my call I was busy, so I asked my daughter, Rachel, who was seven to write the French translation down. I brought it to Claude – with no time to check it and realised there was at least one fault in each word! Claude read it and said, very gently: ‘But, Sabine, how are you writing French?’ I sometimes feel this is how love can last forever, with a man accepting you write like a seven-year-old kid.

Of course it was hard and of course it lasted a long time, but it’s so interesting to edit a documentary with several characters. How and when does one appear? When are you going to find him again? Will you see him again? And when you are ready to treat a new theme, who will talk about it?

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RC: When you talk about finding freedom from people, how does that relate to your development as an editor?

SM: I’m not afraid to make mistakes: I invent an association – I invent a structure – I invent a form – I am free even with sync – I hate sync! Its something I have worked on a lot with Agnès Varda. How a voice over can come in and be out and be in again. You cheat with the sync. You can invent a silence when there is none. This is absence of fear of making mistakes. They have to allow you that. When a director is petty or mean or when he is waiting for you to make a mistake, it’s impossible to work. I have to work with directors with whom I’m not afraid to sound silly, to have no solution, to say I don’t know.

RC: Is it harder in fiction film, because of the conventions?

SM: No, there are no real conventions in French films. In fiction the more I respect the director, the more I feel free to take a sequence and throw it in another place and see what sense comes out of this change of structure. The director changes your changes and at the end you don’t even know who thought what. Claude Lanzmann said a very beautiful thing. When I decided to take a weeks holiday after three years the producer said ‘Well, as long as the film can continue’, and Claude Lanzmann replied: ‘She can’t edit without me and I can’t edit without her’. I thought it was so beautiful to say that. It relates to what is born in the
unique relation between the film-maker and his editor. The miracle can happen from film to film.

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Now I can talk about Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau. Olivier Ducastel was a student at IDHEC (Institute des Hautes Etudes Cinematographiques); being a fan of Jacques Demy he asked me to be his teacher. He had directed a short musical, a very beautiful one called ‘Le Gout de Plaire’. He finished School and I chose him to be my assistant on ‘Trois Places Pour le Vingt-Six’, by Jacques Demy in 1988. He was a wonderful assistant – I adored him. When we finished the film he asked me: ‘Who is going to trust me like you did?’ I replied: ‘If there is someone for whom I don’t worry it is you’. I decided that I would not keep him as an assistant. So I gave him all the jobs I wouldn’t do. He became an editor very quickly and then a sound editor.

Then Olivier Ducastel met Jacques Martineau who had written a musical: ‘Jeanne and the Perfect Guy’, he introduced me as the editor of Jacques Demy. I saw in Jacques eyes that I was like a goddess. Olivier asked me to edit the film and I accepted gladly. They came in the cutting room on a Sunday. I didn’t even know how to make the machine work. So Olivier Ducastel turned to Jacques Martineau and said: ‘I told you she would have stage fright but you didn’t believe me!’ That was set! It was just like he had always known me, sick, physically sick on the first day. Whether Olivier had been my pupil or my assistant had not changed anything.

It’s extraordinary to work with both of them – ‘Ma Vrai vie à Rouen’ is already the third film. I cut with Olivier Ducastel then we turn to Jacques Martineau and Jacques is le ‘garant’, he guaranties.

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RC: Then you worked with Catherine Corsini.
SM: Yes. I first edited ‘La Nouvelle Eve’. Catherine Corsini is a very beautiful woman – a sort of savage cat in black leather and hair upside down – very beautiful. The first day she told me: ‘I don’t understand why we leave a shot to go to another one’ I replied: ‘You are right’ – it came from my heart. She looked at me and asked: ‘What makes you cut here and not
there?’ I said: ‘I don’t know – it’s something deep inside, which I cannot name’. It was then that I thought I will be able to work with this woman. It was laughter for three months with tears running down. The film was very good, very funny, great actress, Karin Viard, first commercial success in my life. We had no idea it was going to be a success. A little film produced by Paulo Branco, a daring man.

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RC: So the fear when you start a film . . .
SM: It’s just a fright that I have to overcome.
RC: And does it happen every time you start a film?
SM: Oh yes, and sick for a week.

I haven’t read many books on cinema. The book which taught me a lot was Jerry Lewis’s book. First I adore him, always adored him. He says things like: ‘When I am very bad tempered and I come to the stage I tell people, “Look, it has nothing to do with you, I am very bad tempered because the plumber fucked the toilet”. Then every one on the stage is working peacefully and smiling’. This kind of thing he tells you is true because when you are bad-tempered your assistant and your apprentice start to wonder: ‘What have I done?’ You just have to say: ‘It has nothing to do with you it’s just this sequence – I don’t know how to edit it’, and you see how they keep on working calmly.

RC: When you moved from cutting on film to the Avid – do you have any feelings about that, and the effect it has on you as an editor?
SM: Working on film we would go to the screening room and discover the film on 35mm on the screen, and then we would cut on the machine. Now, in France you discover the film on a video monitor, so you don’t recognise what you have seen on the big screen. The first thing I edited on Avid was the pilot for ‘Jeanne and the Perfect Guy’. I didn’t edit the long shots, the master shots, because I couldn’t see anything. We went to the screening and I said I was sorry. I went back to the cutting room and we edited the master shots. How can you choose which is the best master shot, when you discover it on your Avid screen? This is stupid. We have to have more money to be able to print the rushes and then you recognise it on Avid. We need more money – the rest is no problem.

There are no more apprentices and you have no chance to meet your assistant except if he or she overslept when digitising! It’s a pity. I think that you don’t learn editing, you
practice it. An apprentice, an assistant learns by watching you deal with the most difficult thing in editing: the relation with the film director.

The only really excellent thing is the sound. Whereas you had to choose between cheese or desert (as they say in French restaurants), with Avid, or whatever, you can have both; words, music and even effects. Also you can raise or lower a sound or the entry of a sound. How many times did we have to redo a cut, just because the entry of the sound wouldn’t match! And remember when we had to fill a piece of a sound shot. It would start by a phone call to the sound department! And now, copy, insert, it’s done. Numerique (digital) was born last century, so what’s new?

How much I loved to enter the film cutting room and smell fresh coffee, fresh smoke from English tobacco, the ink of the numbering machine and Guerlain. I had forbidden the use of toluène long before doctors did and changed it to some Eau de Cologne by Guerlain; it wipes false numbers just as good.

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A donkey can edit. However long it will take, it will be good in the end, if the rushes are good. Maybe it will take him ten years but the donkey will manage. But how do you deal with the director, with his anguish? I’m not even talking about how you deal with yours, but how do you deal with theirs. How can you be in sympathy with him, not suffer too much from his anguish. Make silence so he can say what he thinks of what you did. Who knows if the cut is good – who knows? It’s fashion, and it’s not only the director. It’s the producer. Even if the producer is right, how do you behave? You can listen but you don’t start speaking with the producers saying: ‘How right you are!’ I’ve seen editors doing this. That’s stupid. And now it’s not only the producers, it’s the distributor who come along. So you have to deal with all of that. To keep calm – this is the difficult part of editing – the rest is pure joy.

**RC:** You can say this now after thirty years but you still had to learn and to find the freedom as you put it. To feel as an editor that you can have the trust and have the freedom to work with the material and find the form.

**SM:** Maybe because I was a very young editor with film directors who had already done several films and were at ease with
themselves. I can’t take this out of my experience. I would rely on them – they taught me everything.

**RC:** Something Agnès Varda said when she came to the Tate Modern. She talked about the fact that she didn’t know cinema before she became a film-maker. But she knew painting, she knew literature and she said she knew that the form did not have to be conventional storytelling, especially in the linear sense – that there are other ways of representing life than just telling a plot. Therefore the form could be free from what happens next in a story. So her mind was free of that convention of telling stories the way Hollywood does most of the time. Do you know what I mean? That freedom is so important for there to be a cinema which is not just about plot.

**SM:** I listen to you and I think maybe something that helped me a lot is having been born in different cultures and different languages. In Tunisia we would have Maltese, Italian, Jewish, Arab – you had five or six languages in the playground. There were differences between the plot of an Indian film or an Egyptian film or a French film. I remember seeing ‘*Les Quatre-Cents Coups*’ and turning around at night in my room and understanding suddenly that this was what people call ‘having the blues’, and then going to bed because I could put a name to what happened to me.

**RC:** But what gives you the freedom to explore beyond conventional cinema?

**SM:** For me it’s the relation with people. For example, there’s a man I like very much, called François Barat who has always made underground films. I have edited maybe ten of his films. When I edit he comes. He speaks about editing. I swear I have never understood what he said and my apprentices look at me – they feel silly because they haven’t understood. I tell them I haven’t understood either, but his words put me to work again. Since it’s underground we are very free to explore. No distributor is here to give us recipes.

Agnès Varda made some conventional and some unconventional films. ‘*Sept Pieces, Cuisine, Salle de Bains à Saisir*’ I like very much. I don’t know what it is – I like things that look like nothing.

**RC:** Yann Dedet said to me that he likes a film ‘for nothing’ which is why he said he likes working with Jean-François Stévenin. ‘*Passe-montagne*’ is not like anything.

**SM:** Yes, ‘*Passe-montagne*’ or ‘*Le Bonheur*’!
The reason for doing this book is because I feel that – not just European cinema – but other kinds of cinema are so important to preserve and develop because otherwise we are totally swamped by the deluge of the conventional cinema. It scares me because working in a film school where it’s sometimes very difficult to get young film-makers to have the courage to do something different. Many of them are just imitating what they think is cinema that works for them and they are often ignorant of other kinds of film-making.

I would like once to see an African film with an African that would tell me if this is the normal way to tell a story. In a film there’s a woman who goes to market, comes home, enters her home and you never see her again in the film. I don’t know in Africa if this is the normal way to tell a story or is it just this person who decided that he would tell the story that way.

Conventions are normal with young people. You have to work to go beyond convention. There are very few innovators. You think of Abel Gance. He invented the travelling, he invented the subjective, he invented the ‘montage-parallele’, he invented almost all techniques – flashbacks; in 1910, he had already done it all. Students have to go beyond admiration and start to be themselves, start to express and explore.

Is it good for you to go from documentary to fiction?

Yes, it’s perfect. One nourishes the other. There is no such thing as documentary – they are both mise-en-scène. Shooting a documentary, a director decides to shoot this person in this place doing this and that, in that specific light. Remember Claude Lanzmann shooting Bomba as a hairdresser though Bomba had retired? The difference from fiction is that in documentaries the structure has to be invented. Even then in fiction when the script is not strong enough you may have to re-organise the structure by changing the order of sequences.

‘Documentaries’ were the very boring films we had to see before the film in the cinema fifty years ago, but you may see films like ‘Sabotier du Val de Loire’ by Jacques Demy which is pure poetry.

Do you like poetry itself?

Yes I do. For the concision for the raccord, for the form, and especially for the construction.

When you are not editing, what do you do if it’s not cinema?

In my daily life? I’m a great reader. I am a translator too. I translated into Spanish a book on Talmud, by Marc Alain Ouaknin,
with my best friend, Julio Maruri. Now there’s a book they’ve published in Madrid, both in Spanish and in French, called ‘Promenades Avec Julio Maruri’. It was originally a script abandoned because I never found a producer. The manuscript was lying on the floor of my brother in Madrid. A young man got crazy about it and decided to publish it as a book. So he asked us to translate it into Spanish, which we did. I have spent for ten years about three or four evenings learning Talmud with Marc Alain Ouaknin, the book of whom we decided to translate after as an homage of admiration. I write short stories which have been published in ‘Le Temps Modernes’. I have directed a few documentaries on my best friends.

I take Kung-fu lessons for my love of Kung-fu films. My teacher is a beautiful woman named Xiao Yan, which means ‘Little Nightingale’. I practice three days a week. So does my daughter who is fifteen years old and Champion of France.

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RC: Can you recognise who has cut a film by the style?
SM: There are films you don’t even have to read the credit – you know who has edited the film. This is what I hate most. This idea that they have a style and whatever they cut they cut exactly the same way – I can’t stand it. Can you imagine a hairdresser who would give exactly the same cut to everyone because it’s his style!

French movies have an old tradition of being talkative, (I’m not being pejorative). Think of Louis Jouvet or Jean Eustache. Words are important and loving words helps. Sami Frey directed ‘Je me Souviens’ by Georges Perec. It was his first experience as a director. He asked Agnès Varda to give him the name of an editor who loved reading. You’d think: what’s the importance, it’s a play, we won’t take a word out of it? Yet, that was – to my luck, as he’s my favourite French actor – his demand. Not an editor with a sense of rhythm, an editor who loves reading.

As for your question if life changes radically when I’m not working, well, no. When I’m working, I need to be kept awake; I need to go to movies, to concerts, to read. Even more, filled with the energy of work, I have often been able to create short things, a short story published here, a short film shown there. While I can be really lazy when I don’t work and stay at home and read without any make up on and let my daughter come home with the smell of English cigarettes...
welcoming her, whereas I’d be more careful that she gets a good dinner when I work.

**RC:** How do you choose to do a film?

**SM:** At the worst, ‘l’occasion fait le larron’ (literally ‘opportunity makes the thief’). At the best, I was there the moment of the birth of the first sprinkle of the scenario.

**RC:** How does the script relate to the editing?

**SM:** I just read the script, sometimes I have been given all the versions of the script. Then I edit. The first duty is to edit the film as the script goes. Then I often go back to it after the first cut, after having worked on new structures . . .

**RC:** What is important for you in the cutting room?

**SM:** Fortunately, my favourite landscapes do not change. I’m thinking of the faces of my favourite film directors, Claude Lanzmann or Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau.

**RC:** Do you start by doing an assembly?

**SM:** The first cut is the final cut till I change it or till I’m asked to change it. Even if I know that there is little chance that it lasts till the answer print! And yet some have.

**RC:** How important is sound?

**SM:** It’s the sound that makes me cut the picture, with questions like how much silence should I give her before she replies or how many frames before the sound of the spoon against the cup? I edit everything that concerns speech. The sound editor adds the additional effects.

**RC:** And music?

**SM:** You know that in France, the film editor cuts the music, we are the music editors as well. You choose with the film director the spots where you desire music. In the dubbing theatre, you’re the one to discuss with the film director to mix it or not. Yet I think that how music is used and the type of music used remains the most boring and conventional aspect of movies.

**RC:** Do you value your assistant?

**SM:** Have you ever noticed how important it is to be three in order to understand one another, two talk and one listens and strangely enough, the two that talk understand each other. Being a very unorganised person, having almost never been an assistant, I have always let my assistant organise the things for me. Till now, my favourite assistants are still working with me logging and digitising and putting in order and I rely on them. Technology bores me: four Avid ways to make a cut bore me, what excites me is where to make the cut.
RC: Does your personality affect the way you cut?

SM: I wouldn’t speak of personality, as I don’t think you are the same person whoever you deal with. Unless you’re hysterical! I have no cutting style, let’s take three of the films I’m most proud to have edited: *Une Chambre en Ville*, *Tsahal*, *Ma Vrai vie a Rouen*. I have edited more than one film of those film-makers. An editor needs just one quality: the ability to listen.

**Films to View**

Firstly the films that spoke to Sabine when she was a lonely teenager: *The Loneliness of the Long Distant Runner*, by Tony Richardson, edited by Anthony Gibbs, *Family Life* by Ken Loach, edited by Roy Watts and *Fists in the Pocket (I pugni in Tasca)*, Marco Bellochio’s first film edited by Silvano Agosti. Films about youngsters struggling in dysfunctional circumstances, but in different styles that demonstrate the contribution of editing when focused on the portrayal of an individual both observed and from their point-of-view.

Then a wonderfully eclectic group of directors that she says ‘spoke’ to her amongst whom we should mention Satyajit Ray, Woody Allen and Nanni Moretti as perhaps sharing frequent preoccupation with family and personal identity, but again in very different styles. Watch the *Apu Trilogy* by Ray for a lesson in quiet observation, perhaps inspired by Ray’s early encounter with Renoir when he was shooting *The River in India*. View Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall* and other early work of his to enjoy the interplay between self-absorption and the mockery of human frailty. I would like to think Sabine was inspired by Nanni Moretti’s first feature *io sono un autarchico* (*I am Self-sufficient*, 1976), in her early struggle to be just that.

Choosing Steven Soderbergh as the filmmaker to be the editor for might well have been based on watching his first feature *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989), which won the Palme d’Or at Cannes and has a freedom with the form especially editing that we can all admire, but there is good reason to view *Kafka* (1991) an underrated second feature - on the face of it far more conventional but fascinating in its structure and which Soderbergh has been re-editing ever since its unsuccessful release. Jeremy Irons plays Kafka reminding me of Buster Keaton but now slightly less innocent in a confusing world of hidden motives and rebellion against corrupt authority. Soderbergh has remained his own editor acutely aware of the value of the craft.

The same is true of Takeshi Kitano and I would encourage you to watch his films even if screen violence is anathema to you since his control of the medium does not depend on pyrotechnics but on careful use of minimal material often culled from rehearsal ‘takes’. I am not surprised that Sabine found answers to problems in editing entirely other kinds of films from watching Kitano’s work. *Hana-Bi* (1997) is a good place to start, exploring far beyond the limits of easy violence.
So different on the surface from the world of Sabine’s all time hero, Jacques Demy, but look carefully and you might notice similarities. In any case there is a passion for the craft in both directors evident in Demy from his early short Le Sabotier du Val-de-Loire (1956) about a clog maker to his most famous pair of films, Les parapluies de Cherbourg (1964) and Les demoiselles de Rochefort (1967) and perhaps most obsessively evident in Une chambre en ville (1982), which is a culmination of his series of dramatic films that are sung rather than spoken and a project he had nursed since writing the novel many years earlier. The rhythms of sung dialogue represent an interesting challenge for the editor who must dance in time whilst giving the usual attention to dramatic emphasis and character interaction. We can perhaps understand how working on such a film bleeds inevitably into behavior beyond the cutting room as described by Sabine.

Yilmaz Guney is a neglected and largely unknown filmmaker. If you can see Yol (1982) and Duvar (The Wall, 1983) you will appreciate his passionate commitment to the cause of the Kurdish people for which he was frequently imprisoned and his films suppressed by the Turkish authorities. Sabine’s editing of the latter is remarkable considering that she and Guney could only communicate through an interpreter or by signs or physical gestures. You can observe Guney at work, though unfortunately not editing with Sabine, in the documentary made whilst he was shooting The Wall that is a bonus with the MK2 DVD.

It is difficult to comprehend the eleven years Claude Lanzmann spent making Shoah (1985) but the nine and a half hours that resulted will never be equaled in the intensity of remembering the greatest horror of the 20th century – The Holocaust.

The discipline of avoiding both archive film and reconstruction - depending totally on the recall of survivors to tell the awful detail of the attempt to wipe a race off the earth is a miracle of editing letting the material speak for itself and avoiding the use of seductive or manipulated montage is a lesson for all time and all filmmakers.

Lanzmann kept to his principles in the form of the other films which Sabine worked on.

Despite Sabine’s description of Night and Fog (Nuit et Brouillard, 1956) as obscene I feel it is important to watch Resnais’ film and to ponder the difference from Lanzmann’s work. Not only in what is shown but how. It is crucial to try and understand how no image (or sound) is a neutral representation of human existence and that editing contributes profoundly to the way what is shown is perceived.
The films Sabine edited with Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau are well worth seeking out. The last of their collaborations *Ma vrai vie a Rouen* (2002) is particularly interesting because the young protagonist is obsessed with filming his daily life and thus the editing embraces his point of view and our view of him, which is handled with grace and sensitivity by Sabine.
Agnès Varda and Alain Resnais

In 2001, after the release of her film ‘Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse’ (The Gleaners and I) Agnès Varda was invited to the Tate Modern in London to talk about her career.

In describing her entry into cinema she emphasised that she had no training or background in the medium and drew on other forms for her inspiration and approach: She emphasised that: ‘Literature – Joyce, Faulkner, Dos Passos – showed that linear narrative was not the only way’ and therefore her films from the beginning have not embraced linear narrative. ‘Not A to B to C even if “the guilty one” is identified at the end’.

She said that ‘A film should offer something to everyone – images, sounds, emotions, maybe a story, but above all the chance to feel something’ and that she wishes ‘to project real things but not to make realistic films’.

Even the making of films should be non-linear: ‘Write–shoot–edit–shoot–edit–write: an integral process’. To begin a film neither script nor even idea is necessary. You can ‘start with an image’ which itself can be surreal for instance ‘If my aunt had wheels she would be a beautiful bus’.

She believes in ‘the accidents or chances of cinema’ and ‘narrative by association – both instantaneously and predetermined’.

By returning to film the people who are her subjects in ‘The Gleaners and I’, two years after the original shoot, Varda added another dimension to this non-linear and reflexive cinema. The subjects are part of the dialogue with the filmmaker and her audience. In all this
her editing is informed by a different consciousness of the why of filmmaking. To her 'The audiences are witnesses'.

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In 1954 Agnès Varda made her debut film, ‘La Pointe Courte’. She knew virtually nothing about cinema or filmmakers. Literature and painting were her passions. Her ignorance of filmmaking included the editing process. This is how she describes what happened after the film was shot.

RESNAIS MONTEUR

Back in Paris, I needed to find an editor who was willing to work without wages, as part of the co-operative, like the other technicians. People mentioned Resnais of whom I knew nothing. I write to him. He replies requesting my scenario. I send it to him. His next letter was discouraging: ‘Your research is too similar to mine . . . I am sorry’. I ring and insist. He agrees to look at the rushes. We meet at the Éclair Laboratory in Epinay.

There are ten hours of silent images. We are planning to show him only four. He sits in the middle of the room towards the front and
me four rows behind him. We don’t exchange a word whilst the film passes in silence, although I could have spoken the dialogue to him out loud. After two hours he stands up and says: ‘I have seen enough, I don’t believe I could work on that film’.

He is smiling but distant. I am demoralised and ask him what I should do. He says: ‘In any case to edit a film you need to number the material, one number each foot. If you wish I will lend you a rewind with a crank, a rewind without, a piece of film marked up for the length of a foot, and a small synchro’. I had the distinct impression he had spoken Javanese!

He brings everything to the rue Daguerre. I screw the rewinds on a table and start numbering the film outside of the perforations with white ink and a tiny nib. I turn once, tick, then write down the numbers: one for the shot, one for the take (1st time, 2nd time, etc.). I was on a treadmill.

After ten days of working with almost no break, I ring Resnais: ‘I have finished what you asked me to do’. ‘You have numbered 10,000 metres in ten days! You are mad! Okay, I will come and do your editing but on my conditions. I agree to the co-operative salary, but I want my lunch paid for each day. Also I stop at 6 p.m.’

In short, working for nothing but no overtime!

I hired a CTM editing machine and fixed up the rest of the installation. Resnais was living in the 14th arrondissement like me. He came on his bike with clips on his trousers. He was punctual.

I will never forget his generosity, the way he worked for months on this editing without any wages, nor the lesson I retained from it. Noticing that ‘La Pointe Courte’ was shot at a slow pace without safety shots (no cutaways, no alternative angles, no safety close-ups), he was saying that we needed to keep the rigidity of the film, its slowness and its bias without concession.

But he also made remarks like:

This shot reminds me of Visconti’s ‘La TerraTrema’.

‘Who is Visconti?’ I would ask.

‘There is in Antonioni’s “Il Grido” the same taste for walls’
‘Who is Antonioni?’

Resnais did not try to use his talent as an editor to transform the film, re-arrange or adapt it to a simpler form, more lively or rapid. He was looking only for the right rhythm of this film.

I also remember the dazzling laugh of Anne Sarrault, Resnais’ trainee assistant, the wrinkling of her eyes and her cascading giggles.

The ‘Estro Armonico’ records which I had listened to when writing the film also influenced the rhythm of the editing. When Resnais was riding home on his bike, I listened to Brassens, Piaf, Washboard Sam and Greco when she was singing Queneau:

‘If you think little girl, little girl, that it will, that it will, that it
Will last forever
You got it wrong little girl’.

FROM INNOCENCE TO RULES OF THE GAME

Resnais talked to me about Renoir, Murnau, Mankiewicz, all strangers to me. He led me to discover that a Cinémathèque existed in Paris, Avenue Messine, advising me to start with ‘Vampyr’ of Dreyer. He came as well on his own. We talked on the pavement afterwards. He led me to know the names of the great filmmakers, if not their films. Apart from my evolution from rough cineaste to debutante, it was through him that I discovered an exotic Paris, its Chinese restaurants, its Jewish district, the green path where the circular train used to run, and the mound of the Buttes Chaumont.

He astonished me one day that he knew the number of spectators for a film. He told me how one could read every morning – as for the stock exchange – the number of entries in the cinemas, by film, by day, by week, etc. There I was thinking that a film was like a painting, viewed by a few and going from gallery to gallery, and I discovered the commercial controls of the industry, certificates, the committee of censorship, the agreement files. How funny life was, to be taught all this by Renais, the cineaste of ‘L’ Année Dernière à Marienbad’ and of ‘La Chante du Styrène’, always searching for an inventive cinema, sincere and structured. Nowadays beginners,
both talented and untalented only know Cine-Chiffres, the CNC, the Box Office and Audimat!


**Films to View**

Regarding Agnès Varda herself, *La Pointe Courte* (1954) her first feature is an object lesson on how to construct a film from very basic elements and primitive shooting without sync sound. *Cleo de cinq a sept* (1962) was the next feature but there were a number of exploratory shorts in between. Cleo is a mine of fascinating uses of image and sound (and music) and the relationship between them. She continued to work across fiction and non-fiction projects – whatever form suited a subject or idea - in France, California and elsewhere. Watch *Le Bonheur* (1965), *Vagabond* (1985), *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000) and everything in between, and if you acquire the appetite, she will always be stimulating and surprising. I especially like *Daguerrotypes* (1976), a portrait of people living and working on her street, done with affection and playing with the form, which breathes life into the process of capturing images of humanity begun by Daguerre with *Niepce* in the 1820’s.

In pursuing Alain Resnais, Varda was aware both that he was an unusual filmmaker but also that he started as an editor. His first credit as an editor was on *Paris 1900* (1947) directed by Nicole Vedres, which was a compilation of predominantly archive material. Although he shares the editing credit with two others (Yannick Bellon and Myriam Borsoutsky) this must have been an interesting exercise in filmic construction. By the time he edited for Varda he had cut many documentary films, mainly on art and artists often directing them too and soon tackled the most difficult of subjects - the concentration camps in *Nuit et Brouillard* (1956), which makes hard watching, but the careful editing, the sensitive narration by Jean Cayrol and the music by Hans Eisler contribute to the feeling of respect for the victims.
With his first features: *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), *L’année derniere a Marienbad* (1961) and *Muriel, ou le temps d’un retour* (1963), Resnais created a real impact and all are worth studying in detail for their inventive editing. Resnais continued until 2014, never settling for a conventional approach, perhaps exemplified by his adaptation of Alan Ayckbourn’s fascinating theatrical experiment *Smoking/No Smoking* (1993), a simplification of the playwright’s idea that even the most banal of acts can change the course of people’s lives and thus demand different editing.

All of the other filmmakers Varda mentions being introduced to by Resnais: Visconti, Antonioni, Renoir, Murnau, Mankiewicz and Dreyer are worthy of study. We have mentioned Renoir earlier.

Visconti became more interested in mise-en-scene than editing – often the scenes follow each other without smooth transitions, but there are truly magnificent sequences that defy real time and space as in the long ball scene in *Il Gattopardo* (1963). The early neo-realist films: *Ossessione* (1943), *La terra trema* (1948) and even *Rocco and his Brothers* (1960) have a greater energy in the shooting supported by edgy editing.

F W Murnau, after a distinguished career in Germany, notably *Nosferatu* (1922) reached his zenith in Hollywood with *Sunrise* (1927), in which editing contributes beautifully to the story that combines settings – both countryside and the city with troubled characters to create perhaps the most moving of silent films.

Carl Theodor Dreyer perfected an ascetic style during the silent period in Denmark the peak of which for me is his *Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), which stars Maria Falconetti as the Maid. The film centres on her trial with an intensity unequalled at the time to which the discipline of the editing makes an extraordinary contribution. Watch his signal works from *Vampyr* (1932) through *Day of Wrath* (1943) and *Ordet* (1955), which culminated in *Gertrud* (1964), his final film still uncompromisingly wedded to an almost unbearably slow pace but always conveying the tension that at any time might fracture the icy surface. Wonder that such a film could inhabit screens in the ‘swinging sixties.’

Michelangelo Antonioni cannot be summarised in a few sentences: neither his writing, nor directing or even his editing. From his first short *Gente del Po* (People of the Po Valley, 1947) he is preoccupied not with ‘realism’ in the sense that what we see contains everything we need to know but with reality in the sense of the continuous uncertainty and unknowable truth beneath the surface of human existence.
We are presented in this first film with life on a barge for a man, a woman and a young girl who is shown as being ill in her bunk and tended by the woman in between sharing the work of life on the river. In eleven minutes we are made aware of the unforgiving struggle with nature going with the inevitable flow of life on the river. Whilst, after several such short films depicting the privations of the poor, Antonioni switches immediately and forever to the world of the bourgeoisie when he makes his first feature Cronaca di un amore (1950), he retained this resistance to the easy convention of surface plotting. The result of this choice is that editing has to function entirely differently with a patience and sensitivity decoupled from action/reaction or question/answer. Editing has to allow the space and time for the audience to sense rather than be told everything.

Watch all the features but especially the trilogy of L’Avventura (1960), La Notte (1961) and L’Eclisse (1962) and the films made abroad: Blow-Up (1966), Zabriskie Point (1970) and The Passenger (1975) and work out for yourself how editing is different from the conventional plot driven film.
A Conversation with Nino Baragli

(This interview was conducted a few years ago by Stefano Masi and was published in the book 'Nel Buio Della Moviola'. It is printed here with his kind permission and that of Gabriele Lucci, to whom I am most grateful. The translation is by Emiliano Battista.)

At the time of this interview Nino Baragli was the President of the Italian Association of Film Editors (AMC). He has, in the course of his career, cut thousands of miles of films: he is one of the undisputed old masters of this craft. His contribution to Pasolini’s filmography was enormous: Accattone, Mamma Roma, Uccellacci e uccellini/Hawks and Sparrows, Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo/The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Teorema/Theorem, Porcile/Pigsty, Medea, Decameron, I racconti di Canterbury/The Canterbury Tales, Il Fiore delle Mille e una Notte/The Arabian Nights, Salo’ or the 120 days of Sodom.

He had recently worked for Sergio Leone on Once upon a time in America: a truly monumental task with more than six months of work in the cutting room. For Leone he has also edited Il buon, il brutto ed il cattivo/The Good the Bad and the Ugly, Once upon a time in the West and many other films. He had worked for a host of other directors from Mauro Bolognini to Bernardo Bertolucci. More than 200 films cut in thirty-five years.

Baragli is a man with a big deep voice, he couldn’t be from anywhere else than Rome. He wears a shirt open at the neck and sports a thick golden necklace. His skin is dark: he looks tanned. But how is it possible for an editor, always stuck in a cutting room, to get a suntan?
I meet him at the CDS Studio on a hot mid-May afternoon. Roberto Perpignani was there with me. His support has been crucial in my investigation about editors in Italian film history. I am slightly late and I find them in the middle of a discussion with another editor, Raimondo Crociani. The three of them are all governors of the AMC. They are talking about producers and how editors are paid. It is rather an interesting issue as there are two different positions within the Association. Young editors like Cruciani insist that the Association should fix what is the minimum fee editors can claim for a film. On the other side Baragli argues that this wouldn’t really solve anything as producers always find a way to avoid regulations and do things in their way. But young editors with little contractual power feel that they are not being protected when facing producers and they are forced to accept very low fees.

**Stefano Masi:** Mr Baragli, I would like you to help me solve a little mystery about the origins of this craft. An old Italian DOP, Otello Martelli, told me that in his early days the camera operator and the editor would sometimes be the same person. Does that make sense to you?

**Nino Baragli:** It does actually sound a bit strange. But it is not impossible.
Let’s put it like this: on the one side you had the intellectual. He would have the idea, write the script and direct the movie. On the other side you had the technician who would be in charge of photography and editing. So that the technician, editor and camera operator, was the manual worker, the one who would physically handle the film.

Now that I think about it, it is not so strange after all. My uncle Eraldo worked for a while as a camera assistant before turning to editing. I don’t really know why and how he went into editing . . .

Your uncle Eraldo, Eraldo da Roma, is the greatest Italian editor of all times . . . .

His real name was Eraldo Judiconi. He started in the 1930s. I remember that when he was working on *Addio Kira* and *Noi Vivi* I was already there, as close as possible to his moviola, to see how the film is spliced together and how the image moves . . . .

Why did he decide to be called Eraldo da Roma?

He used to be a tenor and Eraldo da Roma was his stage name as a singer. He was really great. He used to perform a lot, mainly operas. I remember him in *La Tosca*. I still have a picture of Eraldo playing as Cavaradossi. But his real surname was Judiconi: he was my mother’s brother.

So he moved into cinema and he kept his stage name. Why did he stop singing?

He never had the big break in that world. Once he had an audition at the *Teatro dell’Opera*. Rita Gigli, the daughter of the great Beniamino Gigli, heard him singing and thought that he was her father. Eraldo had a great voice, but it was really difficult to make it as one of the top singers. That’s why he decided to quit and started working as a camera assistant.

And what about you, did you start working as your uncle’s assistant?

No. I actually started in cinematography, even if just for a short while. So what you were saying at the beginning about the connections between editor and cinematographer is probably right. I started in the camera department myself.

When, and how?

In 1944 my sister moved up north to join her husband Carlo Bellero. He was the camera operator in films like *Alfa Tau* and *La Nave Bianca*. During the times of the Salò Republic they were still in the north, in Venice. I hadn’t seen my sister for a
long while and decided to join her in Venice. It was a rather adventurous journey . . .

SM: And what about your uncle Eraldo? Had he moved to Venice as well to join the Salo’ film industry?

NB: No. He stayed in Rome. The production company Scalera had resettled in Venice. They were trying to complete a new film directed by De Robertis. It was called Marinai senza stelle.

SM: How old were you at that time?

NB: No more than sixteen or seventeen years old.

SM: And what was a seventeen years old kid doing on the stage of Scalera-film in Venice?

NB: I was the apprentice with my sister’s husband. He was the camera operator. I started as his assistant and camera loader. Arriflexes weren’t too difficult to load. Then, since De Robertis would cut his own films, I joined in to help out in the cutting room as well.

SM: So De Robertis was a director without an editor but with an assistant editor?

NB: I have to say that in the 1940s there was still not a great awareness of how crucial the editor’s role is. Then we had some great editors, like Serandrei and Eraldo, who showed how important this profession is.

SM: Straight after the war the editor’s role was really obscure.

NB: Sure, the layman wouldn’t know anything about the existence of editors and editing. But people in the industry knew how important editors were. De Sica knew my uncle was an extraordinary man. And Visconti knew he owed a lot to Serandrei, that his editor had really given him a lot.

SM: Do you know if De Robertis would always cut his films on his own?

NB: I don’t really know. But from what I saw he would do everything by himself. He would sit at the moviola and do the whole thing: he would cut and splice just like an editor. He had a girl assisting him. I can remember that cutting room being a real mess: they didn’t use rubber numbers, they could never find trims and so on . . .

SM: After that film you went back to Rome and started working with your uncle. Is that right?

NB: Yes. He was cutting a film called Eugenia Grandet, directed by Mario Soldati. I only did a couple of films with uncle Eraldo. And I wasn’t even his main assistant, I was the second assistant. Then after that I started to cut myself.
On which of the films edited by Eraldo did you work?

The first was Eugenia Grandet. Then there was something called Premio di Roma: a very strange experience. It was one of the first times the Americans came to work in Italy. The whole thing was a joke: these people claimed to have great actors, they were pretending to be really big names, but none of it was true. They had this Montgomery guy, but he wasn't the famous one. These kind of things would happen at the end of the war.

So we are talking about the period between 1946 and 1948.

That's right. And straight after that I cut the first film that was just 'mine'. It was in 1950. It was an American production and the whole crew spoke only English. I couldn't understand a single word. The film was called Dark Road and the producer was Mike Frankovic. We would all call him 'Big Cigar' because of this long thing constantly hanging from his mouth. A couple of years later he became the President of Columbia Productions. Dark Road was also Tonino Delli Colli's debut as a DOP.

How would an editor get to cut his first film feature in the late 1940s?

As far as I can tell things haven't changed at all. You had schools before and they are still here. Take the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia for instance: it is still working. And just like today you would have nepotism which you see everywhere in the industry: I have a friend, you have a friend, he has a nephew.

Nepotism is part of our cinema as much as it is part of the rest of our culture. I don't think anything has changed. From the way I see things, Film Schools don't really produce editors. I guess there is something wrong in the way things are structured. For instance I have two nephews who work as assistant editors. Roberto Perpignani has a daughter who does the same. Montanari got his son into the industry. You see, that is how it works.

And you are saying that forty years ago it was exactly the same?

Maybe things are just a bit different. Forty years ago there was a rather small number of editors around. They formed a closed circle probably even more than now. Sometimes it was very difficult to make it even if you had somebody in your family who was an editor.

I remember that when I started my uncle Eraldo told Camillo Mastrocinque not to hire me as an editor. Eraldo was
Mastrocinque’s editor and instead of supporting me, he told me I was still too young and inexperienced and that he would have to cut the new film as well. It was a very tight ‘clan’ you see . . . .

**SM:** Why do you think that is?

**NB:** Take Eraldo and Serandrei. I remember that, if they met in Cinecittà, they would avoid eye contact and literally look away. They never said hi to each other. Things are very different now and there is a strong bond between all of the editors in the Association. Those who accuse us of not allowing enough space for newcomers are very much mistaken. They should rather realize that it was much tougher for us who made our debut thirty or forty years ago.

**SM:** How many of you came from the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia?

**NB:** As far as I know nobody did, and it is still the same today.

**SM:** Silvano Agosti is the only exception then?

**NB:** Well, he studied editing but now he is a director . . .

**SM:** So why do you think there is such a bad connection between School and Industry?

**NB:** Schools are a good thing but they have their limits. Learning how to cut a film is not the same as learning that 2 plus 2 equals 4. Sometimes, in film editing, 2 plus 2 equals 3. Do you know what I mean? It has to do with your ability to be inventive. Being able to cut a film . . . it is something you either have or not. There are certain things that cannot be taught at school.

**SM:** Yes but don’t forget that you need the right chances and connections if you want to make it. Otherwise you can’t be as talented as you want . . . .

**NB:** As Eduardo De Filippo said ‘exams never end’. It is like that whenever you work with a director you are being examined by him. Same thing with the producers . . . so all the time we constantly are trying to pass exam.

**SM:** Would you say that about a low-budget film?

**NB:** As far as I am concerned, there is no difference between one film and the other. There is no such a thing as class A-movies and B-movies. They all matter in the same way. Think of the director of a low-budget film: that little film is nonetheless going to be his ‘Ben Hur’.

**SM:** Do you still work with young and first-time directors?

**NB:** Of course I do. A couple of days ago I met Cinzia Torrini about a project she has that I might cut for her. Actors like
Robert Duvall and John Savage are expected to be on board. She wrote the script and asked me to have a look at it. So we sat together and started revising it. I had never done it before. This is her second film. It has been a wonderful experience. I didn’t ask for money, I didn’t want anything. She said: ‘Let’s wait and put everything on the final bill!’

SM: Is it normal for an editor to start collaborating with the director at the script stage?

NB: It almost never happens. But it would actually be a very good thing to do. Editing means reinterpreting the script after it has been filtered by the director. Sometimes you really do change the film in the editing. See that film on the shelf: L’Attentazione by Giovanni Soldati. Well . . . you should read the original script and then look at the film. Things have changed so much.

SM: To have the editor cooperating on the script is actually a sort of Utopia, in strong contrast with the attitude most directors have. Perpignani told me that Orson Welles used to tell him: ‘You are not supposed to think!’

NB: It is true that at the moment there are very few directors who are up for a real and full collaboration.

SM: Looking at the editor’s work, what are the main differences between contemporary cinema and yesterday’s cinema?

NB: From what I can see, one of the main differences is in the amount of footage that is shot for a single film. Forty years ago, editors would not sit at the moviola struggling with the incredible amount of footage we are faced with nowadays. For Leone’s Once Upon a time in America I had something like three hundred kilometres* of film from which to chose. Forty years ago, you would never have more than ten kilometres of film in the cutting room.

SM: You can’t really make a comparison with Once upon a time in America . . .

NB: It is true that Leone’s is a rather special case . . . but even for other films you are always have around 70,000 metres of film. You should also bear in mind that in the past things were normally shot more in continuity. People tended to do a certain amount of editing work at the shooting stage, editing ‘in camera’. Take Germi, for instance, he would always know beforehand where he was going to cut. Now they have second and third cameras . . . what a waste of film stock.

*A 100-minute film is approximately three kilometres in length.
SM: Can you think of any directors who is not following this new trend?

NB: Recently I had a chance to look at the rushes of Ferreri’s new film. He doesn’t shoot that much. He still makes cinema the way people used to many years ago.

SM: Let’s go back to 1950, the year of your debut as a feature editor. If I were to walk into a cutting room from 1950 would I see anything different compared with the cutting rooms you work in today? Different kind of tools maybe?

NB: No doubt about that!

SM: Can you describe me these different tools?

NB: As far as I can remember at the time moviolas were built on a wooden base and we only had four plates. No hand controls, we would use pedals to run the film backwards and forwards. Right pedal to go forwards, left backwards. And you had to lift your feet from both pedals to ‘brake’ and stop the film.

SM: And did you have the Catozzo splicer (Tape joiner)?

NB: No, and that was the real problem! In the 1950s you really had to be good to make a cut. Now it is much easier: you can actually see the joins and you can try things over and over; if it isn’t working you can actually try and add two more frames. Nothing terrible is going to happen. There is no way you could have worked like this in the olden days. With the cement splicer you would lose a frame for each joint.

SM: Did that imply a different way of working?

NB: Before making a cut you would examine the frame very carefully with a magnifying lens.

SM: Did your uncle Eraldo have one?

NB: Oh yes, he had a magnifying lens in a golden frame, he got it as a present from Vittorio De Sica, or maybe it was from Rossellini. I can’t remember now. Anyway, I inherited from him when he died. With this lens Eraldo would carefully analyze the movement in the frame, check the position of the head or the arm of the character. He also used a lamp, he would look, check, make his marks. Then he would go back, look at the frame again and change the marks. So you can see that it really took a long time to make a single cut.

SM: Did you also work like this in your early days?

NB: Not really . . . honestly I wasn’t really worried about making mistakes because I would use a little bit of black spacing on every cut. But then of course you had a black flash on each joint of the film.
A Conversation with Nino Baragli

SM: What was the black spacing for?
NB: To fill the gaps created when you had to remove little slices of the frame in order to make the joint.

SM: I can imagine it must have been quite a lengthy procedure.
NB: It would take ages.

SM: Practically, who was in charge of doctoring the film like this? Was that the assistant’s job?
NB: No. Editors would do that by themselves. The assistant was in charge of the sound tracks. And that was a very delicate task, since at the time we would cut what used to be called ‘the standard’ (master). The sound was already printed next to the picture but with a 19-frame offset. So you had to cut in a very particular way.

SM: It must have been like cutting a positive married print!
NB: More or less. This is how we did it: we had to cut the picture first and then pulled the handles of each shot for the dialogue to be dubbed. We basically had to cut the film twice: it was an endless process. And I’ll tell you something more: straight after the war the dub was done on a half-band optical negative (and I am almost sure that FONO-ROMA kept working this way till very recently). It is actually 35mm stock cut in half, they would use both sides in order to save money. Once I had to sync up a film with the negative of the sound track.

SM: What does that actually mean?
NB: Well, say that you break the film as you are working on it, then you have to call the actor and have him rerecord his lines form scratch.

SM: So was the syncing up part of the editor’s duties?
NB: At the time there was a lot of sync sound. You would have departments in charge of this, but sometimes the assistants would do the syncing up for the editors. Editors would never do it themselves. I did it sometimes as an extra job when I was working as an assistant, just to earn a little bit more money. I did syncing up for Cinquini when he was cutting Il diavolo bianco.

SM: So you were working as an assistant and doing night shifts syncing up?
NB: Exactly. After a day of work in the cutting room I would sit at another machine and do syncing up till midnight. You do these kind of things only if there is a great passion!

SM: So you didn’t have much time left for other things or other people?
NB: You have to love this job to the point that you become completely obsessed by it. I don’t trust those people who go around bragging about being able to cut a film in ten days. Let’s say: it might even be possible . . . but then you have to spend another ten days watching it over and over because there is always something that is not quite working. I don’t like rushing things. You have to be committed to what you do.

SM: And do you believe in this regardless of what the shooting ratio is?

NB: It doesn’t really matter that much, you know. Sometimes, when people are trying to convince me that they are talking about a rather easy project, they will say: ‘He’s the kind of director who doesn’t shoot that much!’ But not having a lot of rushes doesn’t necessarily simplify the editing. When there is a lot of material it might take a lot to find the right stuff, but at least I know I’ll find it eventually. When the shooting ratio is really low, you might not have what you need at all.

SM: Could you talk about a project you worked on which you think is particularly interesting from an editing point of view?

NB: I think Accattone did something to slightly change the way we approach editing, the system behind it. The film was initially produced by Federiz (Fellini and Rizzoli). Pasolini went out shooting for two weeks. Then Catozzo, the editor, told the producers that, from his point of view, it was impossible to put together the things Pasolini was shooting! The production came to a halt. Everybody who has been involved with Pasolini knows very well how emotional and passionate he could be. He felt shattered at the time (He seriously wanted to kill himself after Mamma Roma, because he didn’t like the film.) Then a new producer, Alfredo Bini, stepped in and we went through the rushes together.

SM: And what did you think of Pasolini’s rushes?

NB: I was shocked! Pasolini would film a man running out of frame, then all of a sudden you would find him standing perfectly still. We, the editors, were used to people leaving and entering frame, while Pasolini would film a shot in Frascati (Suburb of Rome) and the reverse angle in Venice. But I manage to understand exactly what he wanted. Pasolini was a silent type and it was very difficult to understand his way of working.

SM: His background was mainly in literature. Maybe he didn’t have a good relationship with technology.

NB: I would always ask him the same question: What is the point of this sequence?’ Since you wouldn’t understand anything
by the way his scripts were written. His scripts were rather short but with a lot of things in them. I would ask him: ‘What are you trying to say?’ At that point he would take his glasses off, put them on his lap and then start to explain.

SM: But how would he explain himself: on the intention, the narrative content or the metaphorical one?

NB: He would explain a sequence as if it he was talking about a book. Even shooting for him was like writing a book. He didn’t have any kind of fixed rules: he always had to be interpreted.

SM: And how did your colleagues react to such an unconventional way of editing?

NB: Serandrei came to congratulate me after he watched Accattone. He told: ‘What I just saw was something truly wonderful!’

SM: When you were younger, did you ever work in the sound department?

NB: Yes I did because getting into editing was really difficult and so all the youngsters would work doing syncing up and mainly wait for the right chance to come up.

SM: Why was it so difficult to get into the big time?

NB: Since there were a few big names in the industry that were doing all the available films preventing anybody else from working on anything serious. They would cut four or five film at the same time. Serandrei was even able to work on eight projects at the same time: he was the number one at Titanus.

SM: How could they possibly cut four, five or even eight films at the same time?

NB: They did manage. I have done it myself. In the golden days I would really cut four films at the same time.

SM: But how could you work in four different cutting rooms, dealing with four different directors?

NB: Obviously it wasn’t easy! I remember that once I was working on four different films, all of them in the studios of the old Istituto Luce.

One morning I got there and I saw all four directors, Montaldo, Vancini, Caprioli and Gregoretti standing in the courtyard, all four waiting for me. As soon as I spotted them I just said ‘I am going to the bar!’. And so I ran away. Then I rang each one of them to arrange different appointments.

SM: But don’t you think there is something wrong in working on four films at the same time?

NB: I try not to overlap projects. I try at least. But editors have many clients and we have to make them all happy. At times I
have to say no to somebody. I remember that Scola wanted me to cut *Riusciranno i nostri eroi*. I was approached by the producer first and then Scola himself rang me at home. I wasn’t in so he spoke with my wife: ‘Tell Nino I’ll be delighted to work with him. I am about to go away to shoot now. I’ll let him know something later on’. At the same time Pasolini was about to start *Porcile* (*Pigsty*) which was not a big production but struck me as being quite an important film. So I had to make a choice. And I went for *Porcile*. Of course, I never worked with Scola again after that! You see, that is why sometimes we are forced to say yes.

**SM:** So you spend most of your time in the cutting room?

**NB:** Do you know how I cut Bolognini’s *La notte brava*? He’d been working with Cinquini up to that point. That was my first film with him. We were running out of money during the editing. So I spent four days and four nights working without a break on a version of the film to be shown to people who were interested in investing in it. I had a little nap on a couch from time to time. I barely washed my face and never left the cutting room for those four days.

**SM:** When things are so difficult what can an editor rely on?

**NB:** Your instinct mainly. Some editors have it, others don’t. Instinct tells you what to take out of the film and what to put in. You can spend your entire life on a sequence that maybe is never going to work. Other times you immediately know what you have to do.

**SM:** But what about working on more projects at the same time. How can your instinct keep shifting between different narrative situations? How can you cut a war drama in the morning and a romantic comedy in the afternoon?

**NB:** You have to think you have different airtight rooms in your head, you know what I mean? Think of a submarine ready to go on a mission. If you don’t make sure all the rooms are airtight it is going to sink. The brain works in just the same way. In one place you have one film, in a different place you store another one. At any point you can lock one room and go into another one.

**SM:** Has it happened to you to try and find a shot that actually belonged to a different film? Don’t you ever get confused?

**NB:** That would be a sign that I am losing the plot.

**SM:** So you really need an extraordinary memory for this job!

**NB:** What really matters is that you have to respect your film and your craft. If you get into a film there is no way you are going
to be confused. It can only happen if you are not focused on what you are doing.

SM: Editors have their own professional association. What are its aims?

NB: I would like to stress the importance of promoting a new image of who the editor is. We created the Associations of Italian Editors because we want people to know and understand who editors are and what they do. Sometimes even in the industry people don’t know that much about editing. My uncle Eraldo, the great Serandrei and all the other wonderful editors have passed away before somebody realized the importance of collecting and treasuring their experiences. When people talk about editing they never go beyond Eisenstein and Griffith.

SM: Have you already achieved something with the Association?

NB: Yes. We managed to finally have awards for editors, so now there is a Donatello (Italian equivalent of the Oscar) for the best film editor of the year. And we are hoping to have more awards next year.

SM: How did the producers react to your Association?

NB: Some of them might believe that we are joining forces against producers. But they are wrong. We only work towards the best for the film.

SM: Do you ever as an editor have to negotiate between director and producer?

NB: Sometimes you are caught between two fires: the director wants something and the producer wants the opposite of it. But you have to understand the producer’s reasons and point of view. Sometimes the producer comes and says: ‘We are going to be in trouble with the board of censorship unless we cut that scene out!’

SM: And what if the director really wants the scene in?

NB: I have to find a way to make them both happy, mainly for the film’s sake. Things like this happens all the times. I remember cutting Comencini’s Tutti a casa produced by Dino De Laurentis. De Laurentis almost convinced Comencini to cut out a very beautiful scene which was not in the script and had been invented during the shoot. I was the only one that still wanted that scene in. We had a test screening in Florence and I persuaded the producer to leave the scene in at least for that occasion. The audience’s reaction was very strong, there was loud applause and so that the scene never went out again.

SM: Ruggero Mastroianni told me about a very curious technique used by Serandrei before the tape joiner was introduced and
editors were still using cement splicers. He would make a cut but then, instead of scratching the film and joining it with cement, he would spit on it and overlap the two frames on each side of the cut. The saliva would hold for a while and then his assistant would do the proper joint later. Do you know of anybody else who used to work like this?

**NB:** I would never spit on the film because that is where what I eat comes from . . . I’ve never seen anybody doing it. I can say for sure that my uncle Eraldo didn’t do it.

**SM:** Serandrei was the top editor in Italian pre war cinema. Still his colleagues didn’t know anything about his way of working. I assume there is not a real flow of information amongst you editors!

**NB:** Every editor has a different way of working. I work a lot at the editing machine. Some editors only mark the film at the machine. Then the assistant makes the cuts and they check the final result in the projection room. My approach is different. I sit at the machine till the whole sequence has gone from the left to the right plate and I can say that I am satisfied with the result. On top of that, I start from the assumption that cinema was originally silent so everything should make sense even without sound and dialogue.

**SM:** Are you saying that you edit without sound?

**NB:** No. I cut picture and sound at the same time. But when I finish cutting a sequence I rewind the film and check it without sound: it has to work even silent. Otherwise it means that it isn’t perfect.

**SM:** Do you ever cut without sound?

**NB:** Only in special circumstances. You can’t really do it all the time: if you don’t really master the language, for instance, you have to cut the sound. The first film I ever cut, *Dark Road*, was in English. In cases like this you have to cut the sound by yourself.

**SM:** Was it difficult to cut *Dark Road*?

**NB:** Very complicated. Everything was done in the American way: the director would shoot and then leave. The producer had the last word on the final cut. I didn’t even know it at that time.

**SM:** Are you saying that the director was not in the cutting room?

**NB:** Never! That is a typical American thing. They have three different stages in the editing. The editor does the first cut. The second is the result of the discussion between editor and director. But they don’t work together in the cutting room: they watch it in a theatre, taking notes and using a projector that can play the film.
backwards as well. Then for the final cut, it is the producer’s call. He can always impose his will. Of course things are different if the director is called Coppola or Scorsese or Spielberg.

SM: In Italy we don’t really have this idea of the Final Cut, do we?
NB: No: it is an American thing. I’ve met many American editors, like Peter Zinner who cut *The Godfather*. They have a completely different system. Sometimes they even have a little editing machine on the stage. For *Lady Hawk*, for instance, I’ve seen that they had a Moviola in Cinecitta’ Studio 5, where they were shooting. They would use it to check some effects and camera angles.

SM: In America the editor’s work is much more respected.
NB: In the American film culture the editor is a central figure: he is the most important man. He starts working on the film when the shooting begins. He is alone in the cutting room and he is completely autonomous. The Americans know well how the film comes to life in the dark of the cutting room.

[RC: Baraglì’s description of the autonomy of the American editor speaks more to his own dream than any reality though it is undeniable that European editors have traditionally had less status]