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Video as Architecture of Reality

*Between Technical Professionalism and Genuine Creativity*

In these times that we live in, surrounded by software and so many systems to produce content, where open access and unlimited resources cause media content to "go viral" instantly, it is appropriate to take one step further and talk about the importance of video as a communication tool: its ability to tell stories, express ideas and convey cultural values.

We must understand video and television as powerful means through which one can offer objective, constructive and critical messages in the hope of inspiring viewers to be better people.

To understand more of the communicative power of video, it is necessary to explain the process of creating the overall audiovisual content and how, within that process, the work of editing represents a key step for building and recreating reality with images and sounds.

Video and television, with their current innovations included, have their expressive origins in the early part of the last century and the films that were made back then.

Vsevolod Pudovkin and Sergei Eisenstein in Russia and David Bordwell and Noël Burch in the United States constructed theories based on their experience as filmmakers and coined the term "film language" to refer to the audiovisual codes for creating films.

**Editing as a selection process**

For those not very familiar with the issues of audiovisual creation, it should be explained that behind every story there is a collaborative work of many professionals who perform very specific functions in different stages.

The first phase, planning, starts with a sketch, where a story or topic and its feasibility to be recorded are explained. For example, one of my current projects as a producer of videos is a documentary that explains a conflict over land ownership in Brazil. A script is written detailing the plot development. The audiovisual design begins with the technical script, where an outline of each of the images that will be shown in the film is constructed. Detailed correctly, we see the size and internal composition of each of the shots, the angle and perhaps the movements that will make the camera depict situations optimally. Natural or artificial, the lighting effect is also studied.

Finally, the organization of technical equipment and filming on location is defined.
Such detailed planning is essential so that later editing can build a clear, understandable message, to produce effective communication.

Everything ready, we come to the second phase where visual images and sound are recorded. The filming sequence is determined by locations or by availability of actors and other participants. Almost never does the filming follow the order of the script. Many separate shots for each scene are taken.

Then comes the third phase: editing or montage, the key phase of construction of the messages. This phase involves several steps. First, a display of all the material is made to choose the best shots. Here, the editor detects and removes those where there are acting errors or other kinds of technical or unexpected problems. Some flawed shots are kept to see if they can redeemed later. The selection can be complex, as the editor should apply both aesthetic and technical evaluation criteria for selection of content: beauty, impact, authenticity or the force of dramatic events. He or she must evaluate, for example, what image best conveys the effect we want to produce: close-ups of faces or big long shots for landscapes. We choose to give greater value to the voices of the characters, but images and a general sense of the environment are important. Our choice always ends up giving preference to some elements over others.

Second, we have to form several sequences. The videos are organized into blocks, sections, following the order of the script. But while editing the script structure, it can be improved from viewing and exploring other ways of combining the material.

The range of creative possibilities is vast, and many programs are then improved by a good job of editing. This is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks for the editor, because the significance of the sequence depends on where each shot was taken. The order imposes on us as viewers a way to see, understand and assign a meaning. This aspect is key to understanding how editing builds a vision of the reality of who and what we want to explain. It can be represented better or worse, and this depends on the precision of the work to make clear what matters.

We must also choose how to make the transitions between the shots. We pass either from one image to another either through direct cut or by dissolve, the latter signifying a step in time. The aesthetic result of the chosen method is based the internal content of the images, their luminosity, speed of movement of the camera and the characters we see in action. There can be endless combinations: slow-fast, clear-dark, big-small, and so on.

Finally, the editor decides the exact exposure time of each take, based on what we want or do not want to show: a close-up, one big long shot or, better still, a combination of both. A shot is short because it serves only to show a part, and then we’ll see another shot. It is necessary to be very careful when connecting one shot to the next, to know well where the previous shot comes from and where the following shot is going, making physical movements, the movements of the characters in the scene, look completely natural.

The construction of the soundtrack is also a key task for running any story and is also a specialized form of editing work. We must exploit the use of different sounds and adjust the intensity of voices, music and effects. The choice and location of music is key to the viewer’s introduction to the space, how the viewer imagines the place, how it evokes the feelings and thoughts of the character. Sound effects and pauses allow building spaces, distances and different relationships between characters we see in the images. Finally, the work concludes by assembling all these elements in a soundtrack.

The final structure with its parts is organized as a visual tempo we call "rhythm" which is nothing more than our perception of how fast or slowly events happen.

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Objectives of editing treatments
As we can see, the work of the editor includes executing a wide range of decisions applicable regardless of gender or format.

One spot shows the wonderful effects of a beauty product in various areas (different shot sizes) of a model's lush body. A fictional scene shows a melee "shot by shot" from different camera positions. The news of a European secessionist conflict shows two completely opposite realities, with one side fully in favor and the other against the process completely. The news comes from the official channels of the disputed territories.

Examples, styles, employees and players can be totally different, but the communication objectives can be grouped into two levels: basic, to inform, entertain and persuade; and more elaborate: to educate, change attitudes, motivate behaviour or influence the forming of complex opinions.

False creativity
Above I have explained the effortful work that is key to the synthetic creative audiovisual editing process and its possible uses in the architecture of meanings. The possibility of erecting an ideal reality, almost perfect in the eyes of the viewer, can also turn into "perverse art" that distorts reality and manipulates you into believing ideas and even false assertions.

It is also true that, depending on the work environment, the editor may have a margin of either much freedom or very limited access to the operating performance, and thus the editor's level of contribution may vary. If working under the orders of a director, the editor simply executes what is indicated. A script can be set with absolute details of the order of sequences and transitions with no openness even to suggestions. In news, the routine adheres to the guidelines to be met from recording shots with no performance spaces.

Unfortunately, immediacy and control of information, broadly defined, connect us with the stark reality of the audiovisual market. For this reason, companies prefer to have editors with technical or technological profiles rather than creative content.

Someone who has more expertise in editing software, special effects, retouching formal and cosmetic manipulation of images and sounds (under the false concept of creativity) is more likely to be desired, perhaps because producers believe that allowing creative freedom can lead to the risk that the editor will go against superior orders.

I think this is a mistake. For me, the editor must be a professional with extensive knowledge of the world, endowed with aesthetic and narrative resources that can improve the expressive and communicative capacity of any audiovisual narrative. A good editor knows decisively how to implement methods of selection, ordering and balancing the facts, based on ethical principles.

In short, such an editor can not only represent the reality of any fact clearly and understandably, but also help viewers to form a full opinion and criticism of what is happening around them.