

Dear SAGE members,

SAGE Newsletter 2019, Volume 2

Spring is in the air!

Just a few more days and it's officially Spring Day, the first of September. We would like to use this opportunity to inform you of developments since our last newsletter in April and make a few announcements.

The 21th Encounters International Documentary Festival

SAGE held a panel discussion about the creation of trailers during the Encounters Festival. Sandra Vieira presented the workshop in Johannesburg, while Richard Starkey S.A.G.E. presented the one in Cape Town. Both events took place on 8 June.



SAGE also collaborated with [Encounters](#) and [The Refinery](#) to present the second Rough

Cut Lab in May. The SAGE mentors were Ronelle Loots, Megan Gill and Khalid Shamis. If you have missed our special Rough Cut Lab newsletter edition, please drop us a [mail](#) and we'll send you a copy. Below one of the editor participants, Stephen Abbott S.A.G.E., shares his experience.

Rollaball – Directed by Eddie Edwards, edited by Stephen Abbott, mentored by Khalid Shamis



Stephen Abbott, second from left, sitting next to director Eddie Edwards.

Stephen is a filmmaker and editor based in Cape Town. A versatile storyteller, Stephen has fifteen years professional experience in bringing engaging content to life in post-production, with plenty of cross-genre experience in nearly every editorial position including assistant editing, offline/story editing, colouring, online/finishing work, and post-production supervision, bringing engaging stories to broadcast television, web, cinema, and most recently VR goggles. In 2019, Stephen was honoured by the Editors Guild with the accolade of the SAGE acronym.

Stephen is known for his uncompromising devotion to quality, and is firmly committed to the progression of a loyal film culture in Southern Africa. He's also been known to make a mighty fine café latte.

How would you describe the role of a documentary editor?

As with all kinds of editing, it's about removing everything that doesn't need to be there. But with documentary the question of what needs to be there is perhaps harder than any other kind of film... for most other types this question gets addressed in the writing - hopefully! I strive to be a lot more than just "the director's editing hands", so I find I spend a lot of time talking through the idea of the film with the director, trying to grasp at this ethereal question. It often ends up changing a lot in the edit, not just because of the footage we have available, but also because of our shared reaction to the footage.

What were the challenges you encountered when editing the documentary?

Rollaball is a sprawling story shot over 10 years. Storylines that looked promising at the beginning fizzled out, and new ones appeared halfway through. It's tough to find the balance of who to include (and how), and to work a structure into an inherently unstructured (but wonderful) shoot.

I'm also not the first editor to come onto this project... in fact I think I'm the fourth! So it's tough to respect but also question earlier decisions, and inevitably you have to leave a few stones unturned. This isn't easy for an editor to do!

When do you think it is important to have a mentor involved?

Mentors are invaluable throughout any creative process. Really, there's no one time to include them! This isn't always possible, so then I'd say as early as possible.

What value did the Rough Cut Lab process add to your project?

The Rough Cut Lab was a great breath of fresh air. Three days focussed on the bigger picture with Khalid Shamis was fantastic - no distractions, just working through film as it currently stands. I have hope that this breath will turn into a steady breeze that will help us sail to completion.

Jumping from the edit suite to the director's chair - Q&A session

Two award-winning films currently doing the film festival circuit, *Dying for Gold* and *STROOP - Journey into the Rhino Horn War*, were produced and directed by SAGE members Catherine Meyburgh and Susan Scott. They talk about their experiences below.

Catherine Meyburgh S.A.G.E., *Dying for Gold*

South Africa's wealth and white privilege has been funded by large scale maiming and killing of people by the gold mining industry. Today gold miner communities across Southern Africa have nothing to show for the wealth they produced except extreme rural underdevelopment and the world's worst epidemic of TB and silicosis. Through testimonies from communities in mining families throughout Southern Africa and extensive use of contrasting archive materials *Dying For Gold* tells how we have arrived at this extraordinary situation.



Since editors usually join a project halfway through, how was it to be part of the process from the beginning?

Developing a film from the beginning, doing the research, finding the narrative ideas, characters all the way through to post, I find exhilarating. This is something I've always wanted to do. I directed a few films at the beginning of my career, but then concentrated more on editing, which also fitted into being a parent. I loved seeing the first rushes coming in and being in the privileged position to watch all the takes, in the case of drama, and all the footage, in the case of documentary, slowly finding the narrative in the footage. Making my own films now has benefited from years of editing with different filmmakers and assisted in finding my own visual and narrative style.

What do you think an editing background brings to the process of directing and producing a documentary?

Editing a film is really at the coalface of filmmaking. Once all is said and done we now need to translate all the great material filmed and compromises made into a special, moving work - the best it can be. Having this in mind I am able to circumvent many mistakes that many directors and producers make. In a digital world we are able to shoot everything to death (literally). To the point where a vision can be lost in too many angles, too many choices and exhaustion of ideas.

Growing up in a film world where it was expensive to expose film, there was a much more tempered approach on set. Not to say that we have not benefited from the digital excess, but we could benefit from a more tempered approach before filming. This I've learnt from reading scripts before filming and then seeing the final rushes. Scripts are often not given the time needed for that extra draft before shooting, which would not only save production money to use elsewhere but would also focus the crew and director better. In documentary, many vérité films tend to follow their characters endlessly. I've learnt to be more clear about the narrative and visual style from the beginning. I've learnt not to exhaust characters with endless questions but rather spend more time getting to know them before filming, rather than filming every moment with them. I've learnt when to stop filming, especially in documentary. But I've also learnt not to compromise with time to get the right shot and not every shot. This means when I'm directing, I'm already editing, I see

the scene and pursue what is important to the narrative rather than filming every nice image. If there is still time and energy then I'd pick up extra shots that I may or may not use. It may seem obvious, but knowing that the viewer will only see your footage, you need to be able to find and film that which best captures the scene.

All these aspects also impact on producing. One observation is in translation. In my last film, *Dying for Gold*, we had eight languages and different dialects. We had a substantial budget just for translations and transcribing, this is the heart of the film. Often when editing films I've found this part of the budget grossly under budgeted. And as a storyteller I am left with basic simple translations, which are impossible to use if one wants to find the nuanced, powerful and moving parts in interviews. It just does not work when you have to select from a summarised translation.

Was it difficult to direct as well as edit the documentary? Would you advise people to take on two roles?

Yes and no. I love editing and carving the narrative. So this is fundamental to the filmmaking. The sadness of being an editor is that I have not worked with other editors in such an intimate way. This has made it difficult. I would very much like to work with an editor who is able to push the narrative and film further than I could as both director and editor. In documentary this is not always possible as, if you are an editor, you can substantially reduce your post-production costs because you can abuse yourself as much as you want... But my advice and wish would be to rather collaborate than do both.

What new insights did you receive from being in the director's chair?

In *Dying for Gold* I collaborated/co-directed with Richard Pakleppa. I think collaborations are what filmmaking is about. Working with people who you trust, who will push you, open your ideas, share ideas and also be challenged, it is in my experience very enriching for filmmaking. I don't believe in singular geniuses making films; almost every film that I admire has had many collaborators and I'm uncomfortable with the hierarchy that the film world imposes on creatives. I don't know if this is a new insight, but every time I direct it is reinforced.

Are you able to retain objectivity once you get into the edit? How do you judge whether the cut is working as well as it can?

I have all kinds of ways of dealing with this issue. As filmmakers I don't believe we can be objective. Filmmaking in itself is subjective no matter what anyone says. Creatively I make many notes during interviews as well as watching them afterwards. This, mainly to capture my first response to the interviews. It's very important how interviews move you emotionally and often not necessarily what they say. So, my notes will remind me later when the narrative demands information, I can draw on these notes to ensure the emotional content is not sacrificed. I take breaks from each rough cut, final cut etc. Just viewing your cut after a week or two doing something else can maintain distance and perspective.

Also, viewing the edits with different people who you trust to be critical but open to your ideas, is important for the final crafting of the film. You need viewings that will help clarify the narrative, viewings that help you ensure there aren't any misreadings of the narrative

and viewings, which allow the viewer just to watch the film without needing to comment but you can ask them questions. Each one of these viewings may be with different people for the different needs.

In cases where you may not have managed to get all the coverage you wanted, did you have to fabricate any scenes in order to recreate the truth?

Is not all editing a kind of fabrication of what has past? It's our compilation, choices and attempt to carve a story out of what has been filmed. So I would question the word 'fabrication' - this could mean re-enactment of an event, it could mean making something that did not exist before or making something new out of something else. All of this happens in filmmaking.

In regards to truth, in my view all films are subjective. Maybe at best the filmmaker's truth. I hope that my films ask more questions of the audience than try and pose a truth. I hope they will take something from the film into their lives, which could be enriching, changing and/or humbling.

Is the finishing and screening of the finished film a cathartic moment or does it bring back all the anxieties of why you made the film in the first place?

Showing the final film is something I can't get enough of. I know of filmmakers who say after it's done they don't watch their films anymore. I am hugely grateful for every opportunity to screen my films. I will always love sitting in a dark room feeling the energy of the audience as they watch the film. Yes, I get anxious every time but this is not negative, it's humbling.

Susan Scott S.A.G.E., STROOP - Journey into the Rhino Horn War

Winning 18 awards and officially selected for nearly 30 international film festivals this acclaimed film takes the viewer on a roller coaster ride between Africa and Asia. First-time filmmakers Susan Scott and Bonné de Bod embed themselves on the front lines of the rhino poaching crisis where they are given exclusive access to the war unfolding. Carving out six months for the project, the two women quickly find themselves immersed in a world far larger and more dangerous than they had imagined, only emerging from their odyssey four years later.



Since editors usually join a project halfway through, how was it to be part of the process from the beginning?

Funny enough, when I was working on the production I hardly thought about the edit! I guess subconsciously as a first-time director, I was mildly panicking about production issues and I think the weight of being an editor added to that stress during the shoot. I was so focused on getting the right interviews, finding characters and building relationships to get us access in such a secrecy driven storyline that I really didn't think about edit. I do remember a few of our grantors and backers asking about edit style and I told them not to worry as it was covered, coz you know... I am an editor, but actually I hadn't given it much thought. I do believe mightily in the magic of the edit suite and that we don't actually know what the film is until you are in there battling with putting squares into round holes and then you come out with beautiful shapes that don't conform to either... the pushing and prodding and wrangling over story arc can only happen in the cutting room, so be as prepared as possible from the beginning so that you have all the threads to a quilt.

What do you think an editing background brings to the process of directing and producing a documentary?

Well, I can see what we're not going to shoot very clearly. And I think a few times Bonné would ask on shoot: "Are you sure about that? Do you not want to cover it?" That saved a lot of time obviously, but also allowed us to focus on other aspects of the filmmaking process that needed more work. I knew also that the film is made in the edit and luckily my producing partner, Bonné de Bod, agreed with me and she allowed me far more time in the edit suite and didn't try to scrimp that process. Look, we were lucky in that we did this truly independently by crowdfunding and raising grants so we could essentially take as long as we wanted... but Bonné did draw a line in the sand in terms of our festival run as she wanted us to start it in the Sept/Oct run in the states and Europe, so when the San Francisco Green Film Festival accepted our rough cut and said we were in provided we finished in time for the festival... there was no dilly-dallying around. We had to finish the cut for the screening and it was nail-biting stuff as I wanted to finesse the last stages and I think if Bonné hadn't have drawn that line, I would still be sitting there trimming! For real!

Was it difficult to direct as well as edit the documentary? Would you advise people to take on two roles?

Gosh, it's tough, I'm not gonna lie about that. I have a lot of really good friends who are editors and I kept wanting to get them in to edit so that there was separation from the story for me. You get really deeply involved with these incredible people on the ground, and it's not just because it's rhino poaching, it's like that on every documentary. We have the privilege of capturing real, meaningful moments that human beings have in doing something great and you get such a close bond with them that I found that unexpected in my new role as a director. When I used to edit, I would watch footage so closely I would pick up nuances and little ticks and cute expressions or sayings that I felt so close to those characters and I would try to cut in a way to bring out those unique characteristics. And sometimes it was really weird because a character in the film would show up at the rough cut screening and I would almost hug them because I had been watching them all day every day for six weeks, and of course they had never met me before! So that separation of the character in real life and only knowing them on celluloid (I know we're on digital, but that place where the footage exists) is a vital function that the editor has. The editor is always on the side of the audience and pulls only what exists, so it doesn't matter what the director or producer says happened, if it's not on your drive, it might as well never happen. So that was hard for me. Sitting in the cutting room and trying to make myself neutral to that person and the experiences I had with them so that only the footage talked.

I only took on the two roles because we didn't have money. I would've loved to have hired one of my friends (all really great editors) but that kind of pressure wouldn't have been fair to them or me. And in the end, I've realised that it's really hard work, but I so enjoyed the directing in the field and the editing in the dark room that it seems now to me that it is one role. And that's basically what an editor does isn't it? Direct the storyline through their skill of pacing, tension and revealing. So I would like to edit again on my next film. Maybe have several assistants though!

What new insights did you receive from being in the director's chair?

Well, I also shot the footage, more out of necessity than funding for this... because the subject was a dangerous one. We didn't know what time we would come back from filming with the rangers, or when we filmed undercover or on police busts, we couldn't put crew through that unknown factor where quite literally your life would be on the line. Plus a lot of people we interviewed and spent time with were nervous for security reasons or had wild orphaned rhinos and couldn't have huge crews flitting in and out, which would've stressed the rhino calves.

So with that in mind (trying to find excuses here already!), a lot of the footage would've been unacceptable for me as an editor. Truly! I would've called the director in and shown them the shit-show that I had been given and would've moaned at how much longer it would take me to "save the scene"! After filming these shit-show scenes myself, I've realised that I was really hard on cameramen. Seriously, some of the situations out there are not conducive to filming beautifully and you have to take what you can get and that's why you hire a good editor to sort it out for you!

Do you think you could have let someone else do the editing, or would it have been too tempting to interfere?

Many times I wondered how I would get an edit to work and would've appreciated another

set of experienced editor or director eyes sitting next to me as Bonné was a first time producer and me of course a director. So I can imagine working with an editor through something like this would be very rewarding.

Are you able to retain objectivity once you get into the edit? How do you judge whether the cut is working as well as it can?

I think I've always been lucky in that I can see straight away when something will work really well and be a great moment in the film and the same goes for flat scenes that aren't working... but remaining objective and also not knowing what a shot's worth is, is really important. I knew how difficult certain locations were to get to, or a difficult character who finally agreed to be interviewed... that was hard, knowing when to chuck those scenes on to the floor and move along. That was hard.

In cases where you may not have managed to get all the coverage you wanted, did you have to fabricate any scenes in order to "recreate the truth"?

Luckily no and I did that a couple of times for filmmakers I worked for when I was cutting and I hated it. In fact, I hated it so much that I wouldn't work with them again. I really do believe in Rabinger's overarching theme that the documentary form is pure and that ordinary people can create a work that looks at an important issue and hold the mirror to society... so with that in mind, we can't fabricate. There's a certain ethical code that we as filmmakers have to subscribe to. When we had a scene that we didn't have footage for, we would use graphics overlaying the character's retelling of the event. That was really powerful and so much better than doing a recreation. I would've rather lost the scene than recreate it!

Is the finishing and screening of the finished film a cathartic moment or does it bring back all the anxieties of why you made the film in the first place?

It's an amazing moment! In fact the screening of STROOP at the San Francisco Green Film Festival on 9 September last year was the best feeling in the whole five years of the film (4 years making it and one year rolling it out)! It was the first time we watched it with all the little fixes and fiddles done and so I was nervous that I would see stuff that would make me wince, but thankfully I didn't... and I watched the audience in this big stadium theatre like a hawk and was so tapped in to their every reaction. It was very powerful and also so incredible seeing the film on this massive screen for the first time. Since then we've screened the film in cinema chains, under the stars in Kruger, in run down town halls, rural classrooms, overflowing university auditoriums, off of phones and laptops as well as in open arenas and inside conference rooms... proof that your story will be seen, maybe off of a phone screen isn't what you intended, but it's being seen and most important of all... reacted to.

First Thursdays Cape Town

As part of Cape Town's popular First Thursdays initiative, [WESGRO](#) is hosting an industry event on 5 September at The Concourse, 7 Wale Street, and SAGE will be represented. These events are a great opportunity for industry networking. So if you're in Cape Town and free, please drop by!

Short Surveys

In May we conducted the first of our short monthly surveys. Our [latest survey](#) is about editing schedules and how long it takes you to edit certain genres. The survey is valid until the first week of September.

The SAGE Acronym

The SAGE acronym, S.A.G.E., indicates peer recognition of excellence in a field. There is sometimes confusion between the correct use of our abbreviation and our acronym.

The correct abbreviation, or short version, for the South African Guild of Editors is SAGE. If you are a paid-up member of the Guild, then you are a SAGE member.

The SAGE acronym is awarded only to eligible applicants who have been approved by the acronym committee. Recipients are allowed to write S.A.G.E. (in a slightly smaller font if possible) after their names, like Edited by Ed ITERS Rock S.A.G.E.

Being a SAGE member does not automatically entitle someone to use the acronym, or write it behind their name.

The SAGE Acronym is the highest honour the Guild can bestow on an editor and is available to any full member whose body of work is considered to exhibit a consistently high standard of editing as judged by the Acronym Sub Committee. In 2012 the Acronym application process was revised to align itself with the international standards set by the American Cinema Editors (ACE) and Australian Screen Editors (ASE) associations, making it a rigorous process for both the applicant and committee. It is important to note that the acronym should not be thought of as a right of passage for an editor, but rather a special accolade to celebrate excellence within the craft. The application process is rigorous and does not guarantee a positive result.

According to our constitution, applications for acronym accreditation require that the editor:

- Be a current member of SAGE, with a minimum of five years paid-up membership.
- Have been a Full member for at least one year before applying.
- Have at least five years industry experience as an editor.
- Have demonstrated their ability to advocate the role of editors in the industry.
- Submit a body of work that is considered to exhibit a consistently high standard of editing.

An acronym sub-committee, consisting of three members who hold the acronym, will make recommendations to the executive.

Acronym accredited members will be presented with a certificate bearing their name and the date of their accreditation. Unsuccessful applications are welcome to re-apply in following years.

We'd like to invite our members who meet the criteria and who would like to apply to write to acronym@editorsguildsa.org for more information, or alternatively click [here](#) for more information about what the application process entails. The deadline for this year's submissions is 30 September 2019.

Annual General Meeting

Our AGM will be in October. This is an opportunity for you to get involved in the running of SAGE, meet other editors and discuss any ideas or issues you may need to resolve. Many of our members have great ideas on how to improve SAGE, but unless you're willing to volunteer or take initiative, these ideas will not materialise. SAGE is run by editors who work full time as well, so the more hands, the better SAGE can serve all. So if you want to contribute to the Guild or provide active input, please send us your name. You can also send nominations for other executive committee members. Nominations can be made by [email](#), or in person at the AGM.

Volunteering for the executive involves managing a portfolio, like social media or events, in your spare time and reporting its progress to the exec at monthly meetings, which can either be attended in person or via Skype. During these meetings broader strategy and policy are debated and resolved. SAGE is actively involved, either directly or through SASFED, with engaging with the Department of Communications, the NFVF and the Department of Trade and Industry.

We will have a pre-AGM in Johannesburg, followed by the AGM in Cape Town. The meeting will be followed by a social. More details will follow soon.

Keeping in touch

We'd also like to remind members that if you have interesting news to share about projects you work on or which has done well, you are more than welcome to share it with us. You can also post on our [Facebook](#) page, as well as tweet on [Twitter](#), or follow us on [Instagram](#).

Please remember to update your details regularly and to ensure that we have your newest contact details. You can do so by logging into your profile on our [website](#). If you have news to share, or any queries, please don't hesitate to contact us.

We hope that you have enjoyed reading our announcements and that the last few months of the year will go fast!

- The SAGE Exec Team -

Kind regards,

Marina du Toit
SAGE Chairperson
+27 (0)82 255 8077
info@editorsguildsa.org



Facebook



Twitter



Website

[View this email in your browser](#)

Copyright © 2019 the **South African Guild of Editors**
South African Guild of Editors
6 Sylvia Pass Street
Johannesburg, GP 2187
South Africa

[Add us to your address book](#)

You're reading the SAGE members' list, automatically generated from the SAGE website.

Your membership status

<< Test Phone Number >> — << Test Address >>

Opted to receive: *IOPTOUTI*

Want to unsubscribe? We strongly recommend that you rather edit your profile on the [SAGE website](#). Choose 'Essential members' mail only' to receive the bare minimum communication from SAGE—just a few emails a year.

[unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)

