

Dylan Tichenor and "Magnolia" — How He Edits His Scenes

"Magnolia" is the third collaboration between director Paul Thomas Anderson and editor Dylan Tichenor, who cut the critically acclaimed "Boogie Nights" and served as post-production supervisor on Anderson's first feature, "Hard Eight." Tichenor has worked in a variety of positions, ranging from apprentice to associate editor, on such Robert Altman films as "The Player," "Short Cuts," "Ready To Wear" and "Kansas City." Nominated for an Emmy Award for his work on Altman's "Jazz '34," Tichenor most recently edited "The Royal Tenenbaums"

"I had to start cutting as soon as they started shooting because there was so much material. When the first couple days of dailies were in, I began working on the Julianne Moore scenes first. Generally at the beginning of the schedule, I try to do loose assemblies and not lock myself into a certain pacing. I just pick takes and put the scene together loosely without doing any fine-cutting. The schedule was tough. It was a five-month shoot that wrapped in June and the film was released just before Christmas. With such a long movie and complicated effects, it was tight. We locked picture sometime in the middle of September.

"Paul always talked about this film as nine stories that functioned as one story; though they involve different characters and different story lines, they are all one story. We did 'Boogie Nights' together and I worked with him on 'Hard Eight,' so I understand what he's trying to get at. He writes his scripts very clearly so you understand the vibe of the scene. There are different sections of the film that call for different approaches, so we talked about that. Paul has an idea of how to pace the movie when he writes the script and he tries to specifically indicate what kind of feel a scene should have, by how the dialogue is written and how he describes the camera moves.

"When the film shifts from one character to another, most of that is specifically scripted. We changed a few things around and many scenes became shorter. Some scenes were dropped entirely. There were sections where things moved around a bit and sections where things didn't change at all from the script. The section in reel six where everything starts to fall apart -- the game-show host has a stroke, the kid pees his pants and Tom finds out his dad is dying -- we played around with that. But the order in which the scenes appear is the same.

"There were certain sections where Paul made specific shot choices. Other than that, I watch all the dailies three times and I generally take my cues from the actors about how to approach the pacing of the scene. If the actors are methodical and deliberate, it's hard to cut the scene as fast-paced comedy. There are opportunities to fudge things and tighten things up -- to add or remove -- but as a general approach, I try to let the actors determine the pacing. When I watch the dailies, I look for things I like, moments that explain the characters we're seeing. I don't like to make a lot of gratuitous cuts; I like to cut when I have to. I think audiences feel more connected to a film, and identify with the characters better, when they're allowed to spend time with them.