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LE TECHNICIEN DU FILM

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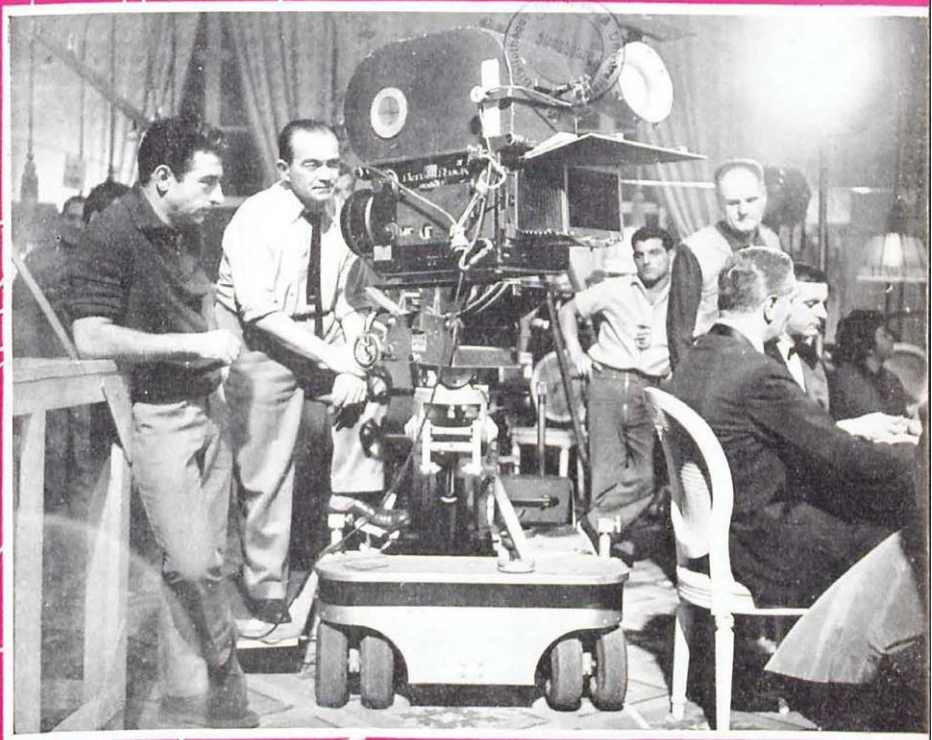


PHOTO SARTONY

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A new report: News from the Editing World
Today: Three head editors, Marguerite Renoir, Suzanne de Troye and
Marinette Cadix, talk to us about their jobs.

To start the series of reports on the profession of the editor in French film, the *Technicien du Film* has scored a trifecta. At the restaurant of the Billancourt studios, our journalist Jean Fléchet has met three of the most representative head editors of French cinema: Marguerite Renoir, Suzanne de Troye ¹ and Marinette Cadix.

Suzanne de Troye: We've been friends for a long time, we've known each other since we started working.

Jean Fléchet: How did the three of you come to work in film?

Marguerite Renoir: By chance, as far as I'm concerned, or rather, due to my bad disposition². I worked at Pathé as a colorist trainee. At the time, we were doing color films by applying garishly colored dyes³ straight onto the negatives. In fact, one day I was coloring a *Passion of Christ* when a storm broke out, and the resulting humidity made my dyes bleed on my film-strip. My department head came along and gave me a nasty talking-to. "Ma'am," I answered, "instead of yelling at me, you'd better explain why the storm made the colors run." This act of impertinence was not well received, and I was fired on the spot. I went to speak with the director. He agreed that I was innocent but did not want to contradict my department head, so I was transferred to editing. That was in 1921.

Jean Fléchet: And you subsequently had a great career. You've edited, among many others, all the films of Jean Renoir up to the war, then all of those of Jacques Becker. And you, Suzanne de Troye, how did you come to editing?

Suzanne de Troye: Through Marguerite Renoir, in fact. I started as a photographer: I was doing prints and touch-ups for a company employed by the studios. I met Marguerite, who took me on as an assistant on one of Jacques de Baroncelli's first talkies⁴, *L'Ombre (The Shadow)*. I was also a set assistant,⁵ then Jean Renoir's second assistant director. Then I worked on Marcel Pagnol's films as an assistant director, then as the editor, then on the films of Marc Allégret and Louis Daquin.

¹ N.b. Her last name is also sometimes spelled Troeye

² "*mauvais caractère*"—a way to describe being a grumpy or irascible person

³ "*Couleurs de gravure d'Epinal*" —a reference to kitsch images made for schoolbooks and other purposes in the mid-19th to early 20th centuries.

⁴ Sound films

⁵ "*assistante de plateau*" — could be production assistant in English

Marinette Cadix: I also got into editing through Marguerite. First I was Jean Renoir's secretary. I became an assistant editor in 1933. Before that, I was a mother ⁶...

Jean Fléchet: Actually, isn't the role of the chief editor in the making of a film a bit like that of a mother?

The Editor is the Mother of the Film

Marguerite Renoir: Yes, I am convinced that out of all the technicians that work on a film, the editor has the greatest attachment to the film – indeed, a physical, an emotional attachment.

Suzanne de Troye: Pagnol used to always say to me on the day of the film's premiere, "So Suzanne, we're giving birth..." It was just as painful, in fact.

Marguerite Renoir: We spend such a long time on the film – four or five months, sometimes more – that we get really attached to it, and then when everything is done and you have to put away all the bits of film that, as we say "ended up on the cutting room floor," one by one, it's often emotionally painful.

Suzanne de Troye: The editor is the one who stays the longest with the film – that's very important.

Marguerite Renoir: We have the most intense contact with the film - not that we get anything out of it.

Jean Fléchet: Isn't that precisely the manifestation of your femininity? As chief editors, aren't you in fact the mothers, the birth-givers of the film? Isn't it different when the editor is a man? This is a point we'll come back to during the rest of our series. Anyway, you're all the more defenseless because you're alone in the editing room in front of the director and the producer, while there are between fifteen and twenty crew members⁷ on the set.

Marinette Cadix: You have to defend yourself against the fatigue at the end of a film which makes you follow anyone's advice.

Jean Fléchet: You're fiercely protecting the integrity of the film up to and including its final touches. But do you have a say at the beginning of the film? Are you consulted, for instance, when the story-board is drawn up?

⁶ "*mère de famille*" – could be "homemaker" but also "mother"

⁷ "*techniciens*"

Without us, they would shoot 4,000-meters of film

Suzanne de Troye: I was the first one to raise this question to the Commission Supérieure Technique (Higher Technical Committee), the committee in charge of the editing.⁸ We sent a report to the directors and producers setting out why it would be important for the editor to be involved in the planning stages of editing the film, notably as regards the timing of the scenes. (This report had no effect.)

Most of the time, indeed, a rough cut⁹ is made out of 4,000 meters of film.¹⁰ What a waste of time and quality when, in the final edits¹¹, you have to cut and recut this material to get the film back to a normal length.

Marguerite Renoir: It used to be that the editor was often involved in the initial stages of a film, which made the editing all the quicker. Today, there isn't one director out of a hundred who works on the editing during the shooting. It's only when the filming is over that the problems in the edit are noticed, and by then it's too late.

Marinette Cadix: The presence of the editor on the set during the shooting should be mandatory.

Marguerite Renoir: That's how it used to be. It's true that in those days the crew was smaller.

Marinette Cadix: Can a good assistant director and a good script girl make up for the absence of an editor on the set?

Marguerite Renoir: Very few script girls know about editing.

Young directors are coming back to working with a regular film crew¹²

Suzanne de Troye: In any case, Marc Allégret usually asks me to time all his films before the shooting. Recently, a young director, Charles Gérard, asked me the same thing.

Marguerite Renoir: It is interesting to note that the more important and the better a director is, the more he requires assistance, whereas others view collaboration as pointless. There's nothing one can do about it.

⁸ It was actually a kind of board – created in 1944 – in charge of 'quality control' of the various activities in film and TV, not just editing.

⁹ "*découpage*" – one of the terms used to refer to cutting, the other being *montage* – used usually as synonyms

¹⁰ 4,000 meters is 13,123 feet. When shooting 35mm film at 24fps, that represents 2 hours and 25 minutes of footage.

¹¹ "*montage*" – see footnote 9

¹² "*équipes permanentes*" – perhaps "repertory film crew" but that isn't a standard term in English. It seems to simply mean working with the same crew on multiple films.

Jean Fléchet: Some people are so lucky, they ask no questions...¹³

Marguerite Renoir: But the results are less fortunate...

Suzanne de Troye: In any case one has to give credit to the young directors for once again working with permanent technical crews. That's a very important aspect for me. [Claude] Chabrol made four films with the same crew. People have forgotten that.

Marguerite Renoir: One can't help people if one doesn't know them. Generally, the crew spends the entire film trying to understand each other. Once that's actually happened, the film is over and then people don't work together again.

Marinette Cadix: But the work is so much easier when people know each other. For instance, right now I'm working on Benedek's film¹⁴ and now I see the difference between the first scenes I edited when I didn't know my director and what I'm doing now. It's like night and day.

It takes one month to edit 2,000 meters

Suzanne de Troye: The same applies to the production: Editors should also be consulted more often. Again, in dealing with the Higher Technical Committee, I argued that a plan for the post-production should be worked out.¹⁵ Once the shooting is over, the director, the producer, the sound engineer and the editor should all meet and work out a precise plan.

Marinette Cadix: There, once again, you can see how much time would have been saved if the editor had been brought sooner into the process.

Suzanne de Troye: Indeed, because after the initial edit come the corrections. And to remove 2,000 meters from a film takes a month, no less. That's an absolute rule. One needs one month to ponder the surgical removal of a third of a film that was shot with so much care.

Marinette Cadix: Moreover, you have to have a consistent approach in regard to the sound. For instance, you have to impose that all the sounds are recorded in the same studio.

Suzanne de Troye: When you plan ahead, it's easy.

Marinette Cadix: But the post-production is done on a day-to-day basis, so we are at the mercy of the studio's schedule.

Marguerite Renoir: The same applies to the sound engineers. Very often, the ones who were part of the filming are no longer available during the mixing.

¹³ Meant to be ironic, as in some "happy" or "lucky" people are too dumb to worry about such things

¹⁴ *Recours en grâce* or *Recourse in Grace* by Laslo Benedek, (1960)

¹⁵ N.B. this is what today is handled under 'post-production'.

Sound has too many complications

Suzanne de Troye: Truly, in the current state of organization of the profession and the technical equipment that's available, sound brings in a lot of complications.

Marguerite Renoir: And what a drop in quality compared to what we used to do.

Marinette Cadix: We have been asking for years for magnetic prints to be numbered according to their date in order to keep track of their origin and production date.

Suzanne de Troye: It's true, we mix up the years and the brands. A director of photography doesn't change film emulsions throughout a film; meanwhile, we record our sounds on uncontrolled, random prints that come from anywhere.

Marinette Cadix: Overall, directors aren't interested enough in sound.

Marguerite Renoir: For instance, we're gradually losing the practice of live takes in favor of post-synchronization. In the old days, everything was recorded live, even exterior scenes.

Suzanne de Troye: I recently watched *La Femme du Boulanger* (*The Baker's Wife*, 1938) again. As I recall, Pagnol had purchased old Phillips equipment and we recorded the film without further ado. Well, in the end I was surprised by the quality of the recording: You don't miss a single syllable of what they are saying.

Old films unplug our ears

Marguerite Renoir: I recently had the same surprise when I watched *Goupi Main Rouges* (*It Happened at the Inn*, 1943) again. It's as if our ears were suddenly unplugged. Those sounds are no longer familiar to us nowadays.

Jean Fléchet: But ladies, don't you think that the care and tenderness you feel towards the films that are like your children may be affecting your hearing?¹⁶ As far as I'm concerned, I agree that these days people sometimes let themselves go in the recordings, and over-use post-synchronization, but if we make the most of what modern equipment can do, we can get amazing results.

Suzanne de Troye: In any case, it seems like young directors today are coming back to live sound recording.

¹⁶ (N.B. The original transcription was careless. The first sentence is not a sentence. From "la tendresse" on something is missing. "que vous" should be followed by a whole phrase. The tenderness that you what? And then the next phrase also makes no sense by itself: that these days there is a bit?? Of what? So, two incomplete and disconnected phrases: error in transcription. Trans.)

Marinette Cadix: The quality of the sound depends above all on the sound engineer – as long as he’s left alone to do his work, of course.

Rudimentary material

Jean Fléchet: What about the technical equipment you use?

Marinette Cadix: Our working conditions are quite primitive. For instance, none of the rooms are equipped with electric-powered rewinds.

Marguerite Renoir: Yes, and all those flying film strips running through your fingers...

Suzanne de Troye: For ten years now, we’ve been asking for the standardization of the reel’s cores.¹⁷ It’s now standard practice, since last year only. When you think that an editor, Gilbert Natteau, had to personally invent and build a numbering machine, which is an indispensable tool for our profession...

Marguerite Renoir: The use of Moritones¹⁸ with two sound heads should become standard. We also need projections with double or triple soundtracks.

Marinette Cadix: We also need a double viewer. Françoise Javet has just brought back from England an extra viewer that can be adapted to the Moritone. This should become standard – we’d save a lot of time.

Magnetic film stock: Don’t present us with a done deal!

Jean Fléchet: What about magnetic film stock?¹⁹

Suzanne de Troye: We asked the directors of photography to bring us together and explain how it works and how to handle it. But it’s still too early, the technology isn’t familiar in France yet.

Marinette Cadix: But in any case, we’re willing to try anything.

¹⁷ “*Noyaux*” – Hard to find information about this. Cores have tended to be a standard size so that they would fit easily on the editing equipment, so it seems they didn’t have that regulation size, making it hard sometimes for a reel of film to run properly.

¹⁸ The Moritone was one of the French brands of an editing machine, similar to a Moviola.

¹⁹ “*l’image magnétique*” – A mystery. As they mention, there was film stock which had a magnetic strip on the side for recording simultaneous sound (also in 16mm and super-8mm). And when sound was recorded separately, it would be transferred to “mag stock”—film stock coated with a magnetic layer which had the sound embedded. The image track and the sound mag track would be synched up for editing. I have never heard of film stock like what they’re suggesting and online searching didn’t uncover the mystery.

Suzanne de Troye: Just don't present us with a 'done deal'²⁰ like they did when magnetic sound recordings were introduced.

Marguerite Renoir: I think the magnetic image will come in when we do the final cut. For the actual editing process, I think we'll continue to work with celluloid.

Marinette Cadix: I don't think so. It'll happen like with magnetic sound. Now and then we'll transfer the material on celluloid film stock, but it'll soon become obvious that it's simpler and cheaper to work directly on magnetic film stock.

Suzanne de Troye: In the U.S., they've developed a dual film stock for sound, that is optical on one side and magnetic on the other. It's a really convenient way to work. But the cost of this kind of film can be prohibitive.

A parallel editing team is a bad idea

Jean Fléchet: Dear chief editors, can I ask you how your relationships are to your collaborators, your immediate assistants?

Marinette Cadix: An assistant is a collaborator, a co-worker. When you can trust your collaborators, everything works fine.

Suzanne de Troye: Generally, we almost always work with the same team. We know each other.

Marinette Cadix: It's necessary that we get along well with our assistants.

Jean Fléchet: Marguerite Renoir and Suzanne de Troye, you're working in parallel²¹ on Jacques Becker's film *Le Trou*. Would you recommend that way of doing things?

Suzanne de Troye: No, it's not a good way of doing things.

Marguerite Renoir: We sometimes agree to it because we can't do otherwise. Sometimes there are constraints—like the need for the film to come out soon—but it's not something that should be generalized.

Marinette Cadix: It's better to have two additional assistants who are very skilled, to whom we delegate some of the work, than two parallel crews.

Marguerite Renoir: In any case, two parallel crews do not do two times the work.

²⁰ *"fait accompli"*

²¹ Two separate-but-equal editing teams, working simultaneously on different sections of a film, not like 'second team' after the first

Editing is the solitary job of the film

Jean Fléchet: Are you considering, or have you considered, doing something other than editing?

Marguerite Renoir: Woman editors think of editing as a vocation in itself, which is its own reward. That is not always true of male editors, who sometimes seek to become directors.

Marinette Cadix: An editor²² can sometimes be an assistant director, but this is just an extension of her job as an editor.

Marguerite Renoir: If I quit editing, I might work somewhere else, but not in film. After having been an editor, it's quite hard to adapt to other parts of this profession.

Suzanne de Troye: That's quite right...There's something about editing that's different from any other part of the craft of cinema: The editor is somehow alone with the film. While everyone else works as a team, the editor is alone for hours, which leads to a very different state of mind.

Jean Fléchet: Thank you, ladies, for having kindly agreed to kick off our series of interviews. I feel like the series will really bring out, issue after issue, just how much cinema owes to the editors, to whom cinema owes more than has been said until now.

Interview conducted by Jean Fléche

Translated by Fabrice Stroun and Charles T. Wolfe
for the "Edited by" website at www.womenfilmeditors.princeton.edu

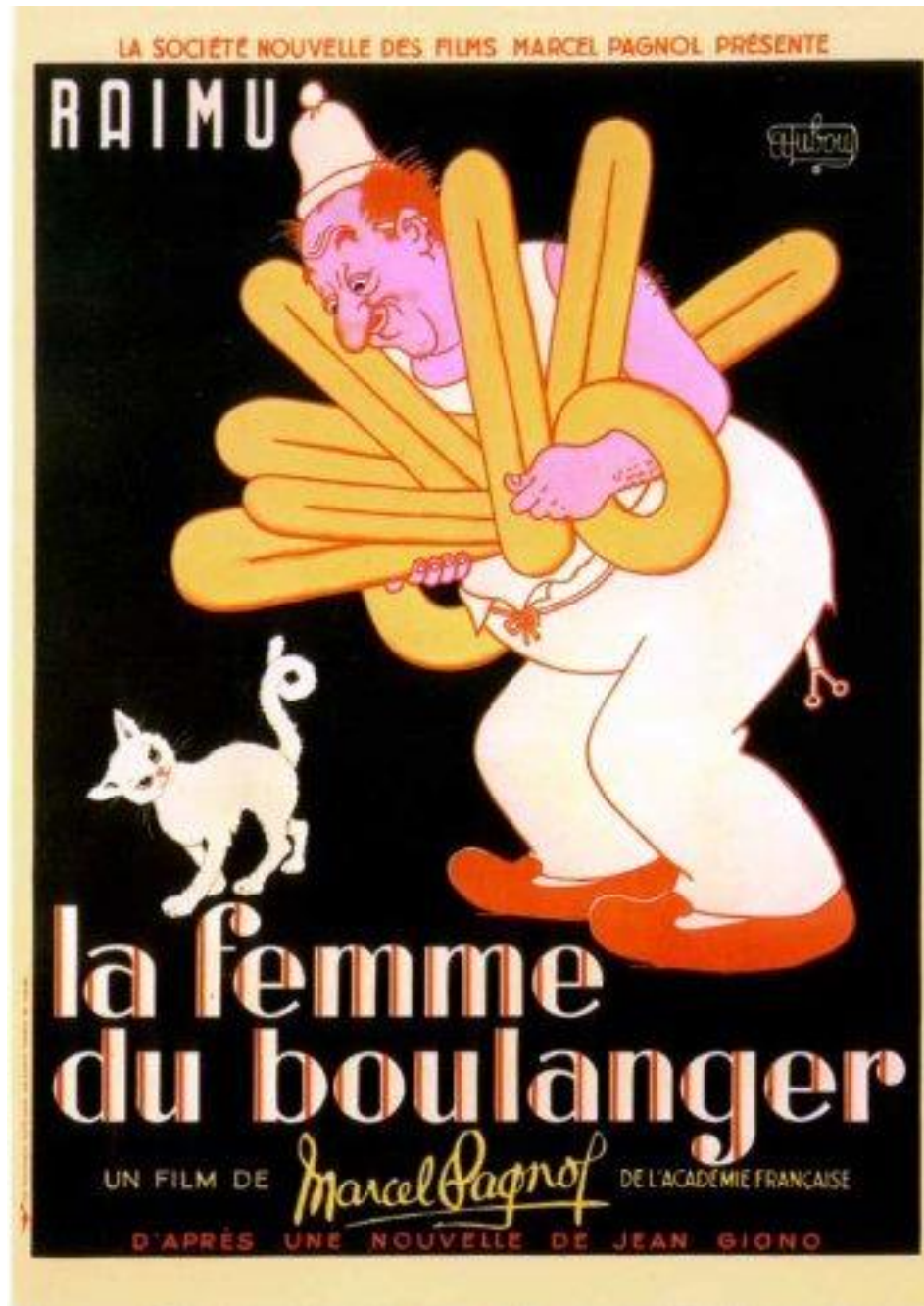
PLEASE SEE THE FOLLOWING PAGES FOR SOME MOVIE POSTERS.....

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<http://womenfilmeditors.princeton.edu>

²² NB She uses the feminine form for "editor"

These were not in the original French journal, but here are three posters of films they edited which they mention in the interview:



La Femme du Boulanger (*The Baker's Wife*, 1938) edited by Suzanne de Troye



Goupi Main Rouges (It Happened at the Inn, 1943), edited by Marguerite Renoir