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THE TROUBLE DEPARTMENT: MAY BROTHERTON AND THE AGENCY OF WOMEN CUTTERS IN THE EARLY FILM INDUSTRY

by

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Much about the early filmmaking industry remains a mystery, but most research tends to emphasize directors, actors, and producers—names like Thomas Edison, Charlie Chaplin, and Clara Bow are still well-known today. Less is known about the workers behind the scenes, like camera operators, scenario writers, and film cutters. The information becomes even more obscured when looking for women working as crew in early film studios. Fortunately, some contemporary scholars have recently begun to unearth evidence of women in powerful roles during the early days of Hollywood. Erin Hill writes that, "women were never absent from film history; they often simply weren't documented as part of it because they did 'women's work,' which was—by definition—insignificant, tedious, low status, and noncreative."[1] J.E. Smyth makes similar arguments in her book *Nobody's Girl Friday* and, through a revisionist examination of archives, finds evidence that women working in a variety of roles were making many creative decisions.[2] Women were especially prominent in the early cutting rooms.[3] The early years of film editing are particularly significant since film was a brand-new medium at the time, and much about how these cutters navigated its potential was found in those early days. And yet, most film scholars have breezed past the existence of women cutters and regurgitate secondary sources that anecdotally make this claim. As such, there is very little published data around the names of these women, the nature of their work, or their labor conditions. If we do not learn from the pioneers, we not only do them a disservice for their efforts, but we also miss out on their insights that may be useful to us today. My research was motivated by figuring out who these women in the early cutting rooms were and their influence upon the success of the film industry.

Movie studios had to industrialize their manufacturing methods to keep up with demand. Lilya Kaganovsky notes that, "work roles became more specialized, and they also became more segregated, with gender emerging as one of the principal determinants in who worked in such roles as producer, director, and editor."[4] The *LA Times* reported in 1926 that the film cutter position was, "one of the few vocations in the industry at which practically only women are engaged."[5] Hill's research analyzes these "feminized labor sectors" noting that "as studios excluded women from certain work sectors, they inevitably allied them with others on the basis of gender."[6] However, the role of cutting film was perceived as so inconsequential that cutters did not even receive screen credit for their contributions.[7] Ironically, the development of editing allowed the film business to advance to the point where industrialization was necessary. Without editors, the film industry would not have existed.

For years, editing was viewed as rote, finicky labor requiring feminine patience. However, the editing craft obtained legitimacy when D.W. Griffith acknowledged editing as the principal expression of filmmaking.[8] Recruitment shifted to focus on men once "editing became recognized as a critical step in the production of what were now often million-dollar films" and it "became a masculinized craft."[9] Women were declared unworthy of the work they had forged for years. It was also around this time the prestigious title of "film editor" was established, which I will discuss in more detail later.[10] It is important to note that the position and its tasks were not manifested by a professional title—those who cut and assembled strips of film were doing the same job, no matter what they were called. And in the early days, almost all those workers were women—women like May Brotherton.

Mary “May” Brotherton was the head of the Balboa Amusement Producing Company’s editing department located in Long Beach, California. *Long Beach Press* wrote a “Personal Mention” on her in 1915 which read:

> One of the most interesting persons connected with Balboa is May Brotherton. The picture goers do not know her directly. For she is never visible in any of the Balboa feature films; yet her work is always in evidence. Miss Brotherton has charge of the assembly department that is where the various parts of the film are pasted together after having been properly cut. Miss Brotherton is an expert in this line, having started years ago when picture making was in its infancy.[11]

To be cited as “an expert” within any burgeoning industry is impressive, but it is more noteworthy that she had an incredibly early start. In 1915, women still did not have the right to vote in the state of California, much less nation-wide. Nevertheless, many women found impactful work in the movie business, especially in cutting rooms. Unfortunately, “picture goers” would never come to know Brotherton or any other women cutters directly. This is shocking considering how prolific she was cutting hundreds of titles with a team of women for Balboa in the span of five years.[12] For reference, Charlie Chaplin produced only 81 films in his entire lifetime.[13] Yet her impact on the film industry—and the impact of the women she worked alongside—would be lost to history.

Despite being recruited for cheap and “uncreative” labor during film's industrialization, May Brotherton and other women were pioneering filmmakers who discovered and cultivated cinematic standards through editing. Far from “following a pattern,”—as the oft-cited sewing metaphors might lead one to believe—these women cutters developed film language itself. Brotherton even achieved seniority in her position by becoming the chief assembler for an entire

studio. The collective efforts of these women inspired insights from academics and theorists, but acknowledgement of the craft's significance resulted in two unfortunate outcomes: their brilliance was ultimately credited to male directors, and men were hired to replace women in the editing rooms.

Research question

In 1926, the *LA Times* stated that most film cutters were women, but by 1945 they released an updated number reporting only "eight women among the 300 film editors."[14] This decrease in representation is dramatic, and yet it remains unexplored by film historians to date. In my research, I use the pioneering film editor May Brotherton as a case study to explore how studio industrialization in early Hollywood influenced the contributions of women post-production workers. My larger analysis is not speculative but informed by the primary sources I found in archives that were not readily available. My research builds upon Hill's work which sheds light upon "feminized sectors"[15] of the film production industry, Smythe's study of women's employment in Hollywood, and Cari Beauchamp's research on women's influence in early Hollywood. Using Brotherton as a case study, I consider why film editing, once categorized as a feminized sector, was recategorized after its creative power and financial implications were realized. As a result, we may become aware of the systematic gender discrimination in studio film, as well as an extremely important but unrecognized editor.

The Significance of Women Film Editors

Early film studies theorists posited that film editing—or montage—was the most influential process on the medium, as opposed to elements like shot composition, an actor's performance, or even a director's on-set choices. Before auteur theory began circulating within film discourse in the 1940s, early film pioneers were theorizing the significance of montage. The popular use of the word "montage" refers to a sequence that serves to compress the passage of time, so it should be noted that when these theorists discussed montage, they were essentially speaking of editing as we know it today. J. Dudley Andrew surmised that, "classical film theory conferred on editing the ability to interpret events in the same way that stylization can interpret objects. Malraux, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein all say explicitly that without montage cinema is not an art."[16] Although the views of influential Soviet filmmakers and theorists—including Bazin, Malraux, Pudovkin, Vertov, and Eisenstein—varied, they all recognized that editing transformed the medium. André Bazin references Malraux noting, "it was montage that gave birth to film as an art, setting it apart from mere animated photography, in short, creating language."[17] In his own work, Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov "focused on montage as the fundamental guiding force of cinema."[18] Pudovkin argued that editing is not only the practice that makes cinema art, but it is the defining characteristic of cinema.[19] He explained, "the concepts of close-up, mid-shot, and long-shot first appeared in cinematography, concepts that later played an enormous part in the creative craft of editing, the basis of the work of film direction."[20] It is also my conviction that film theory reclaims its emphasis on editing because, unlike photography or performance, it is a unique, inherent, and therefore a definitive feature of cinema.

These renowned theories arose directly because of Griffith's influence and conviction in the power of editing. However, based on his production schedules, it is unlikely that he edited his

own films. And yet, these theorists never credited the women who did edit these films, even though it was their work that inspired these reflections. Women editors utilized the principles of montage before Griffith, Pudovkin, Kuleshov, or any other film theorist studied them. However, much like the trims they left on the cutting room floor, women editors were largely omitted from film history.

The designation of "film editor" has been historically fraught with inconsistencies. When recognizing historical film contributions, understanding of language and its historical context is crucial. For example, scholars Melody Bridges and Cheryl Robson note the disparity between titles used in the past and titles used today in their quest to find the first female African American director, observing that filmmaker Maria P. Williams would write, produce, and act in her films but not receive directing credit.[21] Alison McMahan similarly struggled to identify the contributions of Alice Guy, the first female film director. She observes,

> First of all, we need to understand what we mean when we say a film. Then, we need to clarify what we mean by fiction film. Finally, we need to sift carefully through archival evidence in order to settle questions of dates and production. It is only in this way that we can then say with confidence what Alice Guy did and did not do, why her work is important, regardless of whether she directed the first film or not, and why her story should be told.[22]

Similarly, Viola Lawrence is erroneously credited by many reputable sources as the first woman editor. California State University, Fullerton keeps a Viola Lawrence Collection and their finding aid states, "Viola Lawrence was the first female film editor in Hollywood."[23] However, a 1960 newspaper article reports, "In 1913, Anna McKnight blazed the trail for her sex by going to work at the Brooklyn Vitagraph studios as a film cutter [another term for editor],

thus becoming the first woman to follow that exacting craft."[24] While both Lawrence and McKnight certainly made vital contributions to cinema, it is doubtful that either of them was the first female editor—only that they may have been the first to have that title. Understanding the historic contexts of the fluctuating titles in film production historiography is essential when tracing where power has resided and how historians have presented those positions. The subject of this dissertation, May Brotherton, predates both Lawrence and McKnight, and yet she has been barely documented within film history scholarship.

Examining Brotherton's work illustrates the crucial discoveries made by women in the editing room as film language was being developed and refined. In fact, as I will discuss in this dissertation, existing interviews with Brotherton reveal that she articulated several ideas about editing that were eventually incorporated into prominent film theories, many of which are still taught in introductory film courses at universities around the world. A brief biographical sketch will help to contextualize Brotherton's role in the early film industry.

May Brotherton

Brotherton was born Mary Catherine Brotherton in September of 1879 in Droitwich, Worcestershire, England, to Elijah and Catherine Brotherton as their fifth child and only daughter. She had five brothers—Charles Henry—who died when May was only seven—Clarence, Claude, Robert, and Joseph. At the age of 16, Brotherton came to America with her father and two brothers, Clarence and Claude. Their ship, the Southwark, left Liverpool on July 24, 1895, and arrived at the Port of Philadelphia on August 3, 1895. The family's intended destination was Denver, Colorado, but they chose to find employment in Chicago until the rest of the family joined them by 1901. In 1906, May became employed in the motion picture industry,

which was in its infancy. May worked at the Selig Polyscope Company in Chicago as both a photographer (or camera operator) and a film cutter. Describing Selig's editing staff, Hill notes that, "'hundreds and hundreds' of 'deft-fingered girls' [were employed] in its Chicago laboratory to cut apart negatives and to patch, retouch, tint, and splice film."[25] A newspaper article profiling May some years later stated she was in fact the "first woman taken into the assembly department" at the Selig Polyscope Company.[26]

Most east coast film companies were eager to expand, particularly to a region of the country where year-round sunshine would allow them to make more films, as the east coast's weather made outdoor filming unfeasible for most of the year. The Selig Polyscope Company set up their LA studio in 1909 and May was transferred to the new branch the following year, relocating most of her family to California.[27] However, within just a few years of moving to California in 1913, May would leave the Selig Polyscope Company and begin to work for the Balboa Amusement Producing Company in Long Beach, California. May was counted among five distinct members of "The Thick and Thin Club" who offered "loyalty and splendid support" to their boss H.M. Horkheimer.[28] May was the only woman considered to be a member of the studio's founding organization, not simply a "deft-fingered girl" in the assembly department, as she would still be classified today. She was the head of Balboa's assembly department and supervised a team of women cutting and constructing hundreds of their produced films. Her parents were even extras in the background of some of Balboa's films, making the movie business truly a family affair. Unfortunately, according to film historian Cari Beauchamp, Balboa was a big success, but for a very short time, and the studio closed in 1918 after only five years in operation.[29]

May continued to work in the industry as a film cutter until at least 1940, according to the US Census. She even assisted her niece, Margaret Brotherton Jewell, the daughter of her brother Joseph, in finding work as a film cutter. According to her living relatives, May always prioritized the care of her family. She bought her own house in Los Angeles and took care of her parents until their deaths. She never married, but she was engaged at one point. Her brother Robert did not marry either and, due to a hand injury during his years as a film chemist, he had difficulty staying employed. May promised her parents she would always take care of Robert and he lived in a section of May's house. Once she retired, they both moved to the Motion Picture & Television Fund's Country House and Hospital for former industry employees in Woodland Hills, California.[30] On April 3, 1962, Brotherton died at the age of eighty-two. She was buried near her father, mother, and brother Robert in Long Beach, California.

A statement by Brotherton's great niece Tresa Lively, granddaughter of Joseph Brotherton, aptly summarizes the editor's story:

> My takeaway of Great Auntie May is she was a perfect example of [a] woman living her life on both sides of the turn of a century. A proper 1800's lady would take care of her family especially her parents. May went to America to take care of her father and brothers at the age of 16. A new world and a new time. She worked to help support her family, but not [just] any job, one that was as new to the world as her new country was to her. The moving pictures industry! May's whole family together again, now in America, the moving picture industry took them out west. In California, May led the life of a modern 1900's woman, she worked and was very successful at her career. She could pay her own way even buying her own home. She was not taken care of; she took care of others. The family around her was very close, (They were a real immigrant family (close-

knit)) and I wonder if Aunt May wasn't the reason why? May was a gentle and strong woman, an 1800's and 1900's woman![31]

Chapter Previews

In this chapter, I introduced you to the subject of this dissertation, Mary "May" Brotherton, and began to demonstrate the value of her achievements as well as the historical and sociological factors that erased her accomplishments from film history. My focus has been to highlight factors like studio industrialization and how it affected the contributions of women working in post-production.

Chapter two offers background on the historical contexts of Brotherton's work. This includes context on women in society generally, followed by historical context on the industrialization of film. Here, I focused on the early days when the technology was invented and then streamlined for profit. Finally, I explored women who worked in the early days of the film industry. While I referenced women working in all areas of the film industry, I focus on women in the cutting room.

Chapter three outlines my methodology and specific approaches to data collection and analysis. In this chapter, I detailed my primary and secondary sources on early film industry development, focusing on May Brotherton and testimony from other women cutters to examine cutting rooms in general to make sense of the experiences of early women cutters. I then specified my plan to analyze archival artifacts, interviewed her descendants, and considered personal observations of my own production experiences. I approached the work through methodology rooted in cultural studies, intersectionality, and revisionist historiography methods.

Chapter four will investigate early film industry development, following Brotherton from Chicago and ending up in Long Beach. First, we will look at how varying circumstances, including the idea that cutting room work was similar to assembly-line work, made women seem like good candidates for editing movies. After that, we'll look at Brotherton in her senior position as the head film assembler and how it makes her a trailblazer in the movie business. Finally, we will look at the interpersonal dynamics of early studios to paint a picture of early industry culture.

The process and positions in the cutting room will be reconstructed in Chapter 5, which is required to disprove the notion that their work was not creative. This will also provide the foundation necessary to analyze Brotherton's vital essay on the cutting room.

In the conclusion chapter, I will comment on the implications of my findings, disclosing the limitations of this project. Understanding the history of women in cutting rooms can provide crucial background for examining the craft today and how it is represented.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will explore literature on the historical backdrop of women in the early twentieth century, the history of studio industrialization, and women working specifically in post-production during that period to set the framework for my research question: How did the development of studio industrialization in pre and early Hollywood affect the contributions of women working in post-production?

Women's Historic Context

A foundational context for this dissertation is the fact that the same work is often valued more when it is performed by men. Conversely, once jobs are taken by men, their economic and cultural value often increase. One framework for understanding this historical pattern in media technology is the concept of spheres. Linda K. Kerber observed that the concept of a sphere "was the figure of speech, the trope, on which historians came to rely when they described women's part in American culture" in the early twentieth century.[32] The assumption was that a woman's sphere was in the home or other private spaces, "free of personal ambition, self-interest, and most of all politics."[33] Aileen S. Kraditor noted that this concept of a "woman's sphere"—whether in private or public life—contrasts with the notion of autonomy as, "men have never had a 'proper sphere' since their sphere has been the world and all its activities."[34] Suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton subverted the idea of spheres—at least for white women—when she wrote, "There is no such thing as a sphere for a sex. Every man has a different sphere, and one in which he may shine, and it is the same with every woman; and the same woman may have a different sphere at different times."[35] By including men in her remark, she challenged the assumption that spheres were solely applicable to women—such a phenomenon was more based

on surrounding conditions and individual decisions rather than gender. Women in the United States have worked to fight their way out of limiting spheres and have encountered several obstacles, especially as they have labored in the public sector. These obstacles range from poor compensation to discriminatory and abusive work practices.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the Second Industrial Revolution was in full force—much labor in the production of goods had become mechanized, which sped up production. A gendered division of labor in the workforce was also established, which "broadened the distinctions between men's and women's occupations and certainly provoked new thinking about the significance and permanence of their respective 'spheres.'"[36] Despite the fact that women were partaking in public employment, it was still assumed that certain types of work were more appropriate than others—usually out of sight and with no power. Even the general variations in work patterns between men and women—with men being more time-oriented and women being more task-oriented—reinforced the belief that men and women were fundamentally dissimilar.[37] All of this "made it difficult for male artisans to regard women as fellow workers, include them in the ideology and politics based on their work culture, or see in the experience of working women what awaited all workers under industrialization."[38] The inability of men to relate to women as equals meant that power disparities remained, even in the emerging modern age.

This differentiation not only served to divide men and women, but also women from women. Gerda Lerner argues that industrialization highlighted the "differences in life styles between women of different classes" thereby polarizing "social attitudes toward women."[39] Depending on a woman's economic situation, race, ethnicity, and other factors, the severity and specificity of their opposition varied significantly. These experiences were compounded for

women of color, who would have been especially pervasive at the time because the majority of women working in the public sector were young, unmarried, and Black or impoverished immigrants.[40] As the Industrial Revolution was sustained by a capitalist economy, Kerber notes that it, "balanced precariously on the fictions that women 'help' rather than work, that their true 'place' is in the home, that when they venture 'out' of the home they are best suited to doing work that replicates housework."[41] The most crucial thing to understand about spheres is that any separation indicates a power imbalance, and historically, men's spheres have held all the power.

The women's suffrage movement largely coincided with the Progressive Reform movement, which occurred roughly between the end of the nineteenth century and 1920.[42] In fact, the "first major outpouring of scholarship on the subject arose out of feminist social reform in the Progressive era."[43] While the interests of upper-class white women were ultimately prioritized in the movement, efforts were made to persuade working-class white women to mobilize.[44] Harriett Blatch, the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, took suffrage to working-class white women in offices, factories, and shops. Labor issues like the "exploitation of female and child factory workers" and minimum wage became a focus of suffrage mobilizing efforts.[45] However, many women were excluded from participating because they were busy working, while others critiqued or were disinterested in the movement since it did not address the issues surrounding their intersecting identities, such as race, ethnicity, and immigrant status. The needs of many immigrant and Black women, who were arguably the most marginalized workforce population, were not addressed.[46] Even so, the Progressive Era did see the beginnings of legal and legislative support for some women in the workplace.[47] By the 1910s, Progressive Reform brought more men around to the suffragist movement, most notably Teddy Roosevelt. However, there were certainly more men that were considered antisuffragists, due partially to ingrained

cultural attitudes towards women, fear that the women's vote would bring about temperance, and resistance to reevaluating their own identities as men.[48]

Despite these oppositions, the 19th Amendment was finally ratified on August 18, 1920, in Nashville, Tennessee. After seventy years of lobbying, white women had the legal right to vote at the federal level.[49] This victory was hollow, as white women allowed their prejudices to disenfranchise women of color. Immigration surged at the end of the 19th Century and a common complaint among white suffragists was that immigrant men were given the right to vote before them.[50] Black women continued to be disenfranchised and not extended irrefutable voting rights until the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

In the 1920s, white women entered a new age of modernity due to their new rights but—having achieved their goal—some internal momentum was lost.[51] The economic collapse of the Great Depression then greatly hampered women's advancement, as men's current financial needs eclipsed women's equality ambitions.[52] When Franklin D. Roosevelt took presidential office in 1932, he quickly took steps to enact the New Deal which was designed to stimulate the economy.[53] New Deal organizations were founded to provide employment for millions of out-of-work citizens, but many of the positions available largely benefited men and were even viewed as unacceptable for women, with the exception of a few administrative and domestic jobs.[54] Even when women were able to find work, they were accused of stealing jobs from men who needed to support their families.[55] However, these women were also supporting their families, as a dual income was often necessary on working class wages. Single women had an especially difficult time with employment, earning far less than men and rarely protected by labor laws or unions.[56] White men in the United States were the last group to lose their jobs.[57] In fact, the New Deal may have been a direct response to "the imperiled white, male head-of-household, whose

hardship they could understand as the nation's concern."[58] Karen Anderson asserted that the "New Deal welfare policies thus helped to form a divided and unequal citizenship based on gender and race."[59] When the privileged in society started to struggle, the government mobilized executive measures to bail them out, but no such consideration was granted to marginalized groups.

The same arguments that kept women out of the workforce would need to be backtracked in as little as a decade when the United States joined World War II. As a vast number of American men were deployed for service, recruitment efforts began to bring more women into the workforce, presenting "a serious ideological challenge to definitions of womanhood constructed around domesticity."[60] However, these recruitment programs utilized language designed to maintain a woman's place in men's occupations, lest the economy's need for women workers uncover "the emancipatory possibilities of wartime changes."[61] For example, advertising campaigns attempted to keep women's priorities in check by stressing the worth of their domestic responsibilities.[62] They also minimized the ability to earn an income as a motivator for women to work outside the home, preferring to depict their strenuous labor romantically as "a form of feminine sacrifice."[63] Even though these women were proving their capacity for work that had traditionally been deemed masculine, they were instructed to view their contributions with feminine motivations. Additionally, as soon as the war was over, women were expected to exit the workforce and hand their jobs to men returning home from fighting overseas. The postwar GI Bill as instituted the return of women to low-skill, low-wage employment.[64] Despite the progress accomplished by women in the new century, strong systemic forces conspired to restrict them to a limited domain.

In this section, I examined the concept of women's spheres, which pervaded the landscape of women's context in public life at the turn of the century. I focused on the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the Progressive Reform Movement on the opportunities available to women from various backgrounds. Finally, I looked at how the Great Depression impeded women's advancement and how women's ambitions were tempered as they were drafted into the public sector during WWII. Shifts in gender-based political rights and cultural norms ran alongside shifts in labor generally. In the next section, I retrace the economic contexts of the early twentieth century, focusing on class and labor rather than gender, and connecting these issues to the industrialization of early film in the studio system.

Labor Reform

Chicago in the early 1900s was a booming metropolis with a diverse population, due to its institutional and industrial growth.[65] The explosion in growth coincided with the Second Industrial Revolution, where the process and production of goods had become routine and mechanized, speeding up production. These developments coincided with the Progressive Era, a movement that challenged many wealth disparities brought on by the unbalanced industrial practices of the Gilded Age.[66] Labor historian Richard Schneirov also argues that conditions created by the economic depression started in 1893 and "growing cross-class acceptance of a moderate version of socialism as part of public discourse" assisted in this labor recognition.[67] As early as the 1870s, Chicago was one of the major hubs of the labor movement, primarily among immigrants of English, German, and northern European descent.[68]

The public labor sector's demography changed in the span of about thirty years due to immigration. Chicago's population ballooned to five times its original size, with 1.7 million

people living in the city at the open of the twentieth century.[69] A vast majority of this growth came from an influx of European migrants. [70] Whilst immigrant groups were not legally turned away due to their inability to speak English, President Theodore Roosevelt implemented literacy testing in 1907, which could have been retaliatory [71] This vetting was reflected in three simple prompts on the US Census form -- Can Read: Yes; Can Write: Yes; Can Speak English: Yes. Growth brought diversity, but the linguistic differences were monitored.

However, worries about literacy were negligible compared to the doubts that laborers from eastern Europe would not be able to adapt to America's "democratic ways."[72] Roosevelt preferred the "old immigrants" of western Europe, based primarily in the baseless, yet prevalent beliefs about "Anglo-Saxon superiority" based upon "scientific racism."[73] Immigrants, Black people, women, and other demographics represented with the Progressive movement were already present in Chicago and throughout the country. According to Chapoulie, there was a hierarchy among immigrants that was evident in the preferences for the "old immigrants," which "partly reflect seniority by order of arrival."[74] The "social ladder" of Chicago immigrants that Chapoulie lists within the hierarchy are the following: the Irish, Germans, the Czechs, the Scandinavians, eastern and southern Europeans, then African Americans.[75] The trajectory here indicates cultural assimilation was the initial concern among citizens. As people from Russia, Poland, and Italy began to enter the United States economy, not only did their respective cultural customs and languages set them apart from the presiding population, but their non-Anglo-Saxon physical features also assigned them as non-white. However, the arrival of African Americans in Chicago before and during the Great Migration revealed the subjectivity of whiteness and priorities.[76] Adherence to "democratic ways" were of less concern than emancipated Black people, as they had lived in the US for centuries, but they were relegated to the lowest rung in

society. Cultural and racial integration were managed based on the government's priorities, although both were discriminatory.

The general conditions of labor reform in the first half of the twentieth century paved the way for industrialization in the studio system, as I explore in the next section.

Studio Industrialization

A.R. Fulton rightly observed that, "the motion pictures, the newest of the arts, the only art to originate in the twentieth century, are a product of the Machine Age. The motion pictures did not originate as art but as a machine. They were invented."[77] The fact that the Industrial Revolution and the development of motion pictures occurred at the same time cannot be a coincidence; both reflect a reliance on technologies to achieve profit. Prior to their projection, moving pictures could be seen on a device called the Kinetoscope, which only allowed one viewer per machine. Because these viewing halls were so profitable, entrepreneurs began to explore if the technology might be modified to showcase each screening to a wider audience to increase revenue.[78] In 1895, The Lumière brothers in France premiered a projection device called the *Cinématographe*, making the criteria for the birth date of motion picture dependent upon their projection rather than their ability to render motion. Technicians in England and America developed similar devices with the purpose of profit in mind.[79] While the new technology was popular, it was only a few years before the novelty wore off and producers realized they would need to make movies that had more significance if the industry could continue.[80]

Between 1900 and 1903, longer films with simple stories amused some viewers, but it was not until Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) that filmmakers recognized

film's potential fully demonstrated through the principle of editing. For the first time, individual shots were timed and juxtaposed with one another to imitate "a compelling and dramatic story with a daring train holdup, a brave and desperate pursuit, and a thrilling last-minute capture."[81] French filmmaker Georges Méliès had previously used in-camera editing for effects. Such techniques include jump cuts, multiple exposures, and dissolves. It was also standard practice to remove overexposed frames from a strip of film to guarantee that all of the shots were viewable. Yet, a creative assembly of the footage, in which story was considered rather than utility, had yet to be demonstrated.[82] To say that editing altered film's capabilities and influenced the motion picture industry's longevity is an understatement.

Film editor Margaret Booth noted in an essay that, "in the old days directors did their own cutting when production was finished."[83] However, as studios grew and needed to streamline their process for maximum output and profit, many production practices shifted and distinct crafts emerged like writing, producing, acting, even directing.[84] While there is little research to indicate when directors stopped editing the films they worked on, we can estimate the timeframe of "the old days." According to Charles Musser, editing started to be done by film studios in 1903, likely to help filmmakers create their stories as opposed to exhibitors who would show individual reels in the order they preferred.[85] The formation of the title of "film editor" is also a useful reference point.[86] After being impressed by then-film cutter Margaret Booth's story skills, MGM production head Irving Thalberg established the role from "cutter" to "editor" in the late 1910s. Between 1903 and the late 1910s, film cutting became a separate profession. As with other areas like writing and producing, delegating editing to a specific department sped up production. As such, "the increased quantity of work could now support such specialists, thus encouraging and improving their expertise. This

natural economic development—the studio system—would have profound effects on the course of the industry from that point onward."[87]

In subsequent decades, the film industry only continued to grow. During the 1920s, an expansion of the industry was enabled by stocks and bonds backed by Wall Street and LaSalle Street investors and bought by the public. During this time, investors praised the film industry "not [in terms of] the film's value as a medium of human expression, but [in terms of] the industry's vertically integrated structure, assembly-line production techniques, efficient worldwide distribution system, air-conditioned movie palaces, and conservative accounting practices."[88] Like all other industries, Hollywood struggled through the Great Depression but survived by lowering ticket prices, lowering budgets (including employee salaries), and choosing quantity over quality with the installment of double feature exhibition practices.[89] By World War II, the domestic market had plenty of money to spend on entertainment, and theaters were strategically placed to encourage attendance.

In this section, I gave a brief timeline of the motion picture industry's beginnings when the technology was invented and developed for profit. Finally, I looked at the development of labor and hiring practices in the subsequent decades. In the next section, I will explain the conditions in which women worked as editors in Hollywood.

Women Working in Post-Production: A Gap in the Literature

With a general understanding of women's contexts from various backgrounds in the early twentieth century, as well as the development of the studio system, we have established the framework to see the emergence of women working as editors in Hollywood. In this section, I will describe the context of editing to clarify its impact. Then, I will look at how

the early film industry recruited women, though mostly white or white-passing women, into post-production positions.

The art of film editing is arguably the most powerful contribution to the craft of filmmaking, but very few people outside of the industry understand its significance. In an essay, Margaret Booth defined film editing by saying:

> If you remember that a film is composed of thousands of tiny photographs arranged in a certain order to tell a story, you will realise that to assemble them in the most effective sequence is an exacting and delicate task. I think it has also a claim to be called an artistic one. This shaping and editing of photographs into dramatic narrative form is the function of the film editor. He or she juggles with photographs as another kind of editor does with words—to make them tell a story.[90]

Booth's description of "thousands of tiny photographs arranged" references the analogy of a puzzle that many editors have used over the years to explain how editing works. However, this example is somewhat limited since a puzzle always produces the same image and different editors with the same footage could never produce exactly the same film. Anne Bauchens agreed, but clarified, "I would say it is very much like a jigsaw puzzle, except that in a jigsaw puzzle the littler pieces are all cut out in the various forms and you try to fit them together to make a picture, while in cutting films you have to cut your pieces first and then put them together."[91] In short, when a film crew shoots footage, there are usually dozens of angles with multiple takes for a single scene. Not only are there different options for what is shown on screen, but there are even more decisions to be made concerning when the audience looks at something and how long it will be before showing them something else.

While these days editing is done digitally on computers, film editors or "film cutters ran the film on reels controlled by hand-cranked rewinds, through a small box that was set into a table and covered with frosted glass."[92] With thousands and thousands of rolls of footage to wrangle and cut, the process could be messy and time consuming. However, editors were not simply pairing shots together according to a script, but they were creating rhythm and enhancing the mood of the story. One newspaper article from 1936 wrote,

> These film cutters are the true story-tellers of the screen. A writer concocts a plot, a director guides it and actors portray it, but what the customers like or dislike on the screen is the work of the cutter…They must cut a scene on the precise dramatic moment at which it should be ended, for, if it is too short, it may lack conviction; if too long, it may drag and spoil the effect.[93]

The decisions the editor makes about the film's shot selection, timing, rhythm, and a host of other factors leave an undeniable impression on the film.

It was not uncommon for directors to shoot up to 100,000 feet of film for a final picture of 5,000 feet, so the labor needed to organize and assemble the material into a finished product was extensive.[94] Directors were known to recruit very young women, suggesting that studio executives were looking for cheap laborers to perform, as film historian David Meuel puts it, "menial and monotonous (work akin to knitting or sewing)."[95] Here Meuel makes an important connection—a feminized impression of the labor being done and the subsequent implication of its importance. Discussions surrounding the work of early female editors often make comparisons to sewing. Renown editor Walter Murch writes that "many editors in those days were women" who "*stitched* the *fabric* of her film together."[96] While sewing was undoubtedly a domestic activity carried out by women at home, it was also certainly a domain for women's

labor in factory production, like the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.[97] In addition to sewing metaphors, women were thought to be well-suited to editing because it required emotional "sensitivity" and "patience."[98] Here, we see evidence of women's spheres in action. At this point I should clarify that such traits were most typically associated with white femininity. While the job was still deemed lowly work for inexperienced women, there was still an advantage for white or white-passing women.

The physical nature of editing in the early days meant that a variety of positions—from patchers to joiners, inspectors, negative cutters, and positive cutters—were required to handle the footage, and job titles were in flux. Other than a few paragraphs based on anecdotal references from secondary sources, it is difficult to grasp the particulars of what these workers were accomplishing in the editing room.

While film editing eventually became recognized as creative work, innovation was not retroactively granted to early women editors. A 1936 *New York Times* article wrote, "Film editing is one of the few important functions in a studio in which women play a substantial part. Possibly this is because in the early days cutting was a mechanical rather than a dramatic job. Women were cheaper than men and so they grew into it."[99] The writer observed the origins of women in the position, but still held that the work they were doing was "mechanical." This terminology was regurgitated over the years in the press. While an article on editor Barbara McLean admirably described her painstaking attention to detail, her role was still summarized as one who "follows through on the mechanics of the editing" after receiving instructions from the male producer.[100] However, these women were making creative decisions about the film every step of the way. It is important to note that women editors did not simply acquiesce to the director's every whim and demand—relationships behind the scenes did not always reflect the

dynamic documented in the newspapers. Barbara McLean always approached the films she worked on from her own judgment and frequently requested for the director to shoot a variety of angles in their coverage. Assertiveness from any editor irritated director John Ford, but he specifically undermined the presence of female editors on set through sexist tactics. He even went so far as to claim that his films were "editor proof" due to the scant amount of footage he shot, but McLean negated the validity of that statement saying, "No, I never found that."[101] It is more likely that editors were the secret savior for many acclaimed directors. While working on an Orson Welles film, Viola Lawrence "reported to studio boss Harry Cohen that the footage from 'The Lady From Shanghai' was a jumbled mess. She was forced to spread the continuity cutting sheets across her office floor in order to reconstruct the sequences."[102] Women editors used just as much autonomy in their judgment as men eventually would in the cutting room, but the self-sufficiency male editors would eventually claim publicly allowed them to define their position as creative rather than mechanical.

What we have here is a question of which came first—an undervaluing of the film editing position which made it available to white women (and thereby feminized it), or the perception that the work was intrinsically feminine, and therefore, undervalued. Either way, there is a distinct correlation between delegitimized work and feminine labor. From an industry perspective concerned with the bottom line, this correlation aids in profit revenue—hire cheap labor for monotonous work. This might have been the story with editing as a vocation, until men realized that it was actually incredibly powerful and important.

Although most film editors were women in the 1910s and into the 1920s, those numbers soon dwindled. In 1940, the *LA Times* noted this downward trajectory in an article titled, "Lady Film Cutters: A Vanishing Profession." The author speculated, "learning to cut and splice is an

exacting task—one that, from apprenticeship to seniority, ordinarily takes seven years. This is one reason most cutters are men."[103] The author did not elaborate, but the clear implication is that most women would be unable to fulfill such long-term career commitments as they were responsible for childbirth and childrearing. Of course, as I have discussed, scores of women had been effectively undertaking this "exacting task" for decades, resulting in overwhelming success for the film industry. The same article also indicated that another reason was increased "resentment" from men towards the established women editors. "At any rate," the author continues, "you aren't likely to see their [women's] ranks increase as time goes on."[104] Between women's biology being used as men's favorite excuse for keeping women out of power and the daily trials women endure from resentful men in the workplace, it is clear that women did not choose to leave their vocation. They were forced out.

Women's removal from the editing room by men is certainly not the preferred narrative within film history—the more common story is that complications arose due to the addition of sound to film, and men stepped in to navigate the new technology. During an interview with film editor Anne Coates, film editor Walter Murch stated, "When editing started out in the early years of the century, the larger portion of editors were women, and it was with the coming of sound that men proportionately began to be more involved in editing."[105] Without being explicit, Murch implies that the connection between the rise of men in the editing room and the advent of sound is the stereotype that technical competency is gendered as masculine. Hill notes that, "female cutters were often replaced by department heads who thought they couldn't cope with the new technology."[106] However, female cutters like Blanche Sewell and Barbara McLean successfully transitioned to the new technology and even cut the first sound pictures for their respective

studios.[107] Anne Coates also denied a lack of technical competency as the true reason for women being pushed out. She replied to Walter Murch:

> But I have a different theory about the beginning. As you rightly say, most of the editors were women…as it became a more important job, men started to get in on it. While it was just a background job, they let the women do it. But when people realized how interesting and creative editing could be, then the men elbowed the women out of the way and kind of took over.[108]

For years editing was viewed as rote, finicky labor requiring feminine patience, but once it was understood that powerful story manipulation happens within the editing room, the craft was finally legitimized and therefore desirable to male laborers.

In this section, I explained the art of editing, then examined how and why the early film industry recruited women into post-production positions. However, while it is clear that women were forced from editing rooms, the details of this process are not as clear from the available literature. This dissertation project will take the case of May Brotherton, an early leader in the industry during her time, and show how she thrived. Before I present my archival findings, analysis, and argument, I use the next chapter to define my collection and analysis techniques, as well as the tools I used in my study and why I chose them.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

In comparison to the rest of film history, recent years have seen an increase in the number of publications that aim to recognize the achievements of women working in early Hollywood. Many names that would have been lost to history have been rescued thanks to the scholarship of Cari Beauchamp, Erin Hill, and J.E. Smyth. While their methodologies vary, many emphasize contemporary production studies and feminist studies in connection with historical subject matter. Because I contend that the editing process is more critical to the formation of meaning than other production processes, which have dominated academia and historically undervalued the editor's contributions, I have opted to focus on editing. Of course, the other contributions are significant, but editing's misunderstood yet prominent position among women places it in a unique location within the field of film history studies. My project uses cultural studies and feminist history methodologies to ask: *how did the development of studio industrialization in pre and early Hollywood affect the contributions of women working in post-production?*

The use of cultural studies as a methodology in my dissertation emphasizes the need to know the industry's historical background and production practices. In contrast to the dominant film theories, which tend to derive meaning primarily from textual analysis by studying the films themselves, analyzing the contributions of women looks at the context of filmmaking. Feminist history methodology is essential because it requires us to consider a feminist approach to archival research to determine which women's experiences are being validated. Specifically implementing intersectional methodology will reveal gender disparities not just in comparison to men, but also in comparison to other women of varying racial or class backgrounds. For my data analysis, I will also use articulation. Articulation is a hallmark method of cultural studies and important to analyze created connections among social forces.[109] By using both, I can address

both how meaning presents itself within an artifact as well as its historical social context by merging both archive and articulation methods.

Cultural Studies Methodology

Cultural studies methodologies focus on overarching questions of how culture is formed and what counts as culture. Scholars in the field focus on the abstractions that make up culture, including "signs, images, language, beliefs."[110] Culture notably carries with it a close association with society and social practices. Richard Johnson notes that, "cultural processes are intimately connected with social relations" then proceeds to clarify these relations are informed by class, race, gender, and other identity groups.[111] For example, in their cultural analysis of the Sony Walkman, Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Jones, High Mackay, and Keith Negus argue that "…all social practices are meaningful practices, they are all fundamentally cultural. In order to conduct a social practice we need to give it a certain meaning, have a conception of it, be able to think meaningfully about it."[112] Based on these assertions, we understand that culture is not confined to the domains of high art or obscure traditions but is created by meaningful social relations that dynamically navigate power within specific contexts.

Additionally, cultural studies understands that elements like language and cultural artifacts move through particular stages in their development. Stuart Hall conceptualizes the process of communication in the context of mass communications as, "a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments—production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction."[113] Extending this process to cultural development, Johnson and du Gay et al. (including Hall) each present their own circuit of culture models to depict culture's dynamic nature and illustrate the ways these meaningful social relations give and

receive influence. According to Du Gay et al., the significance that an artefact acquires is the result of a set of distinct progressions. Their model labels these progressions as, "Representation, Identity, Production, Consumption and Regulation."[114] Johnson's circuit of culture model varies in its formation around productions > texts > reading > lived cultures.[115] Common to both models is an emphasis on understanding production.

Johnson argued that production-related studies examine power behind "the means of cultural production," for example, "radical political parties."[116] Industry studies emerged as a subfield to study "the means of cultural production" within industries. Michele Hilmes describes industry studies as, "the translation of authorship into a dispersed site marked by multiple, intersecting agendas and interests, where individual authorship in the traditional sense still most certainly takes place, but within a framework that robs it, to a greater or lesser degree, of its putative autonomy."[117] Put simply, a group of people working with and against each other within an industrial complex still produce cultural artifacts, but their contributions are obscured. In our understanding of meaning making, this approach is much more detailed as opposed to previous approaches that discerned meaning by just looking at a produced text, its author, or both. Johnson argues, "The neglect of (structured) human activity and especially of conflicts over all kinds of production seems in retrospect the most glaring absence."[118] In other words, there is a need to analyze the past and present contexts within which industrialized cultural artifacts are created and the people who created them. Uncovering these meanings results in an examination of the production processes of a cultural object or practice, the meanings that get attached during its production, and the people that are involved in its manufacturing. By examining culture via the method of articulation, we can discuss the implications of power among social relations. Cultural studies primarily advocate the interests of common/working class people, centers their

personal experiences in the discussion of culture, and overall critiques the distribution of power. Hall writes that "domination and subordination" were "an intrinsic feature of cultural relations."[119] Acknowledging the imbalance of power gives us a foundation to critique cultural processes, which made this methodology ideal for my analysis. It enabled me to look at women editors and take their work seriously enough to resurrect them from the archives.

Archive Research Methodology

Archives traditionally refer to primary sources ordained and housed by universities, libraries, and other records of the state. For example, historian Marisa Fuentes pulled primary sources from the Bridgetown and British Caribbean archives in her book, *Dispossessed Lives.* However, Fuentes critiqued the archive she utilized—as well as archives writ large—as "knowledge produced…by white men and women in this society, and that knowledge is what survives in archival form."[120] In one form or another, archives have been cultivated by institutions of the state within particular cultural and historic with their own implicit biases surrounding axes of oppression like race and gender. As a result, many topics, and views in history, such as accounts of women, people of color, and enslaved people, have been diminished.

Within my research specifically, the lack of intentional preservation of women in the archives via artifacts like screen credits and employee records has made it challenging to identify which women were working in these cutting rooms during the turn of the 20th century. When seeking to identify uncredited women working in the industry, it is important to utilize a feminist intersectional analysis to account for all women. Though not given equal opportunities as white men, disparate opportunities were still afforded to white women. Racial segregation particularly impacted the burgeoning film production industry, as it did the rest of society during this time.

However, it is possible to apply a variety of theoretical readings to a source to uncover alternative meanings. Fuentes practiced this masterfully in her book as she sought out the margins "along the bias grain" within official archives to uncover new meanings.[121] For example, Fuentes pieces together what she called mutilated historicity of a woman named Jane who appears briefly in an ad calling for her capture after she ran away. Following John Lewis Gaddis' example, I will attempt to "simulate what transpired in the past" through "reconstructions, assembled within the virtual laboratories of our minds, of the processes that produced whatever structure it is we're seeking to explain."[122] In other words, my methodology necessitates reading between the lines.

Feminist History Methodology

This project adopts an intersectional feminist methodology. Joan Wallach Scott's article, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," begins with a review and critique of the theoretical positions employed by feminist historians who were fighting for acceptance within the academy at the time. These include, first, explanations of the origins of patriarchy, second, Marxist philosophy, and third, post-structuralism and object-relations theory.[123] For her own theoretical standpoint, she observes that the academy's usage of the term gender is a language tactic to suggest that women's historical experiences are connected with men's established histories. Scott's definition of gender occupies a substantial portion of the essay, but she emphasizes that gender's social implications are rooted in its disparities and that it is a key means of signaling power relationships.[124] There is a correlation between the ideas of power and difference—as those in power see it, their power is only maintained when difference is maintained. Scott concludes, "gender then provides a way to decode meaning and to understand

the complex connections among various forms of human interaction. When historians look for the ways in which the concept of gender legitimizes and constructs social relationships, they develop insight into the reciprocal nature of gender and society."[125] The role of film editor evolved based on difference and power or status. Here, the concept of gender is useful to identify attempts to distinguish between men and women throughout film industry history and the subsequent power imbalance. Scott's analysis of difference also extends to class and race, as we see in Kimberlee Crenshaw's description of intersectionality, which "needs to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed."[126] Class and race dynamics are also useful to identify power imbalances throughout film industry history.

Film historians like Miranda Banks,[127] Jane Gaines,[128] and Paolo Cherchi Usai[129] argue the limitations of constructing film history on the films themselves and not the modes of production. The most popular film production history textbooks elevate auteur theory, which asks us to analyze the films as texts while primarily considering the film director. However, a feminist historic methodology has uncovered the importance of considering the modes of production within the study of filmmaking. In this way, Smyth finds evidence that women working in a variety of roles were making many creative decisions. Despite the significant contributions women have made to a film's production, film production historiography's fixation on elevating the vision of auteur directors leaves these contributions unaccounted. Much of film history has been deliberately limited to the myopic narrative of film directors as the only ones on a production worthy of being counted and chronicled as filmmakers. In *Theories of Authorship*, John Caughie draws upon film critic Andrew Sarris' definition of auteur theory stating, "that a film, though produced collectively, is most likely to be valuable when it is essentially the product of its director…; that in the presence of a director who is genuinely an artist (an auteur) a film is

more than likely to be the expression of his individual personality; and that this personality can be traced in a thematic and/or stylistic consistency over all (or almost all) the director's films."[130] To be an auteur, one must hold the position of director and express an interior meaning to the film through a distinct style. What is particularly insidious about adherence to auteur theory is that it is not limited to simply a tool for analysis, but it insists upon restricting which films should be chronicled as significant film history. Sarris asserted that a film's director is its auteur, and subsequently, the primary thread with which all of film history should be traced. He wrote, "I now regard the auteur theory primarily as a critical device for recording the history of the American cinema, the only cinema in the world worth exploring in depth beneath the frosting of a few great directors on top."[131] Since film directors from Western countries were and continue to be mostly white men, limiting representation in scholarship about film history to the work of auteurs erases women and people of color working on films simply because they were not directors. Caughie is quick to recognize the maleness of the theory in his discussion on his book's use of pronouns, saying, "where I refer to a more notional 'figure of the author' I use 'he.' This is, of course, not entirely satisfactory; but to adopt the 'he/she' form throughout seems to run the risk of masking, with a linguistic equality, an institutional situation that is historically and notoriously unequal."[132] Smyth argues that auteur favorite John Ford is only able to occupy his rank because he discounted the contributions of his female editors, such as Barbara McLean.[133] Hill agrees, saying that, "women's contributions to film history have been vast, important, and ongoing from inception to present, even when their names didn't appear above the titles—or in the credits at all."[134] Hill's reference to gender reveals an implicit argument articulated by Scott: "Attention to gender is often not explicit, but it is nonetheless a crucial part of the organization of equality or inequality. Hierarchical structures rely on generalized

understandings of the so-called natural relationship between male and female."[135] The maleness attributed to auteur theory is important to identify in film production historiography because the elevated status of the male director actively undermines the contributions of feminized positions in film production. As this work will reveal the significance of women editors, it is important to analyze their presence through a feminist lens.

Data Collection and Analysis

While researching several years back for an essay on the gendered rhetoric around early female film editors, I limited the date search range roughly between 1900 and 1940, then searched newspapers.com for terms like "film editor," "film cutter," "negative cutter," "film cutting," and "patcher." The term "film cutter" was the search that produced Brotherton's 1917 essay, "Making the Movies: The Cutting Room." In her essay, which I have not found discussed in any other literature, she explained her work as a film cutter in great detail, and it was striking how much of what she wrote in 1917 resonated with my own working experience as a professional video editor in the 21st century. Since finding Brotherton's essay, I established her existence and much of her career through a variety of online databases including mediahistoryproject.org, ancestry.com, and newspapers.com. However, while her name appeared as a passing mention in a handful of references, specifically *Balboa Films* by Jean-Jacques Jura and Rodney Norman Bardin II, I could not find a detailed discussion of Brotherton's life or work in published secondary research. Understanding the significance of her insights, along with the realization that she was largely unhistoricized, prompted me to investigate her in my studies—an undertaking that I anticipate will become my life's work.

During the summer of 2021, I located and contacted Brotherton's living relatives through ancestry.com, and they have since become invested in this project. Brotherton's great niece has provided documents like federal census and naturalization records, along with personal family photos. I also completed a personal review of archival documents from the Historical Society of Long Beach and the Long Beach Public Library. Both institutions carry artifacts on Balboa Studios, where Brotherton worked from 1913 to 1918, which were primarily newspaper clippings, but also drawings of the original studio site, guest lists for studio banquets, and original photo negatives.

The artifacts I analyzed in this study include primary sources and secondary sources. As previously noted, no secondary sources discuss Brotherton's life or work. The artifacts that directly reference Brotherton are all primary sources, mostly from newspapers and movie trade magazines with interviews of Brotherton, personal mentions, and her 1917 essay "Making the Movies: The Cutting Room." Many of these newspaper sources include quotations from Brotherton, which provided useful data to analyze as I argue the significance of her work. Newspaper artifacts will also be essential for providing important details in conjunction with census records about Brotherton's history. She was known in trade circles as an expert and early employee of the industry, and thus appears in more primary sources than is typical for women in the industry during this period. Yet, these sources remained in the archives rather than published scholarly material. My articulation of secondary sources with primary artifacts on Brotherton analyzed how the events and experiences of other early Hollywood laborers intersect with her personal reality.

Conclusion

The analysis of my data includes articulation and some personal observations of my own experiences working as an editor. The painstaking labor of reviewing every frame of footage multiple times leads to an intimacy with the material that does not happen in any other role. Brotherton observed, "There is much detail in the work which the uninitiated cannot understand, for it is hard to explain. One must really grow up in the work to grasp what it comprises. Each production is a separate problem and must be worked out as such. There is little routine about it."[136] As a critical scholar, I have approached this topic with my own experiences and ideologies in mind, and I believe these experiences led me to make connections in my research I had never considered. Over the years, scholars and filmmakers have tried to decode why women have become such good editors—some of those reasons have been that she is patient, nurturing, and sensitive, but never that she is hard-working or skilled. Such reasoning exists even today as women try to justify their presence in certain spaces. Even though they were delegitimized and pushed out, a few women editors held on to their jobs. What I wish to stress is that the work women were doing in the editing room was always important—not just when men took over.

CHAPTER FOUR: EARLY FILM INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

It was by chance that May Brotherton entered the movie business, but she certainly got in on the ground floor. Her first studio was the first to create a permanent studio in California, and the second studio she worked for was situated on the same property that housed the first movie studio to originate in California.[137] But her story differs from those who journeyed with stars in their eyes and dreams of becoming filmmakers because filmmaking was an entirely unheard-of endeavor. During the early stages of the pre-Hollywood film industry, studios were often referred to in news publications as "film factories"—a rhetorical impression of the commercial labor being done inside.[138] One of the few occupations available to women in her position as a young woman in an urban setting was factory work, so she applied to a local "film factory" called the Selig Polyscope Company. Brotherton would have been among some of the first employees hired to a state-of-the-art industrialized film studio.

A strange chain of events put May Brotherton in the right place at the right time to help pioneer an unheard-of job—film cutting—in the brand-new movie industry. Her story starts as a teenager in England, where her father Elijah Brotherton was in the business of needle making. According to family stories, Elijah Brotherton's partner stole money from their business and fled to Africa. To avoid debtor's prison, Elijah set sail on the Southwark for a fresh start in America with three of his six children, intending to bring over the rest of the family once they were settled. After a little over two weeks of crossing the Atlantic, the family arrived in Philadelphia on August 3, 1895. In just one month, May would celebrate her sixteenth birthday. May's whereabouts between 1895 and 1900 are not yet known, but she reemerges on the US Census at

the age of twenty living in one of the fastest growing cities in the world: Chicago. The city was a fitting destination for the Brotherton family to find employment until the rest of the family joined them in 1901, though they planned to move to Colorado eventually. Historian Jean-Michel Chapoulie noted similar trends among immigrants landing in Chicago before heading west around this time, as the city became served "as the home base of westward expansion."[139] Chicago also happened to be home to some of the first movie studios.

Before Hollywood became synonymous with the motion picture industry, the filmmaking business got its start further east. While Edison's Biograph Studios in New York is traditionally credited as the first major pre-Hollywood film studio, Chicago was an early participant in the film industry as well. Chicago was also the birthplace of Black cinema, with filmmakers like William Foster employing all-Black casts in his movies.[140] Additionally, two film studios in Chicago helped the industry gain momentum—Selig Polyscope Company and the Essanay Film Company, where Charlie Chaplin filmed several shorts. In 1906, Brotherton joined the Selig Polyscope Company and got her start in the business as both a film cutter and a camera operator, the latter being very unusual for a woman in the industry even today.[141] In a 1917 article, she attributed her experience as a camera operator to part of the reason she was an expert film cutter, especially in her ability to review negatives.[142]

Brotherton's story is truly serendipitous, as she entered the public workforce in urban Chicago at the start of the 20th century—in the burgeoning film industry, no less. The development of studio industrialization can be studied nicely using Brotherton as a case study due to her historical context, geographic location, and filmmaking background. She was as new to the nation as the burgeoning film industry, and they grew up together.

This chapter examines the interrelated factors that led to women being viewed as suitable candidates for cutting films. Many established film historians hold that early cutting room labor was uncreative "factory" work. However, evidence indicates that these women had more creative freedom than was acknowledged in their works. Studio industrialization created the space to recruit women under some unflattering hiring criteria, but this did not limit their creativity once they were alone with the footage. Rather than rows of robotic women working quietly according to men's commands, these women worked together across departments to make the most compelling and highest quality movies they could. Although each step of the process was separated and specialized to speed up production, the result was a collaborative environment where women developed film syntax.

"Nimble-Fingered Girls"

As previously noted, editing started to be done by film studios in 1903, likely to help filmmakers create their stories as opposed to exhibitors who would show individual reels in the order they preferred.[143] As studios took on this new labor, women were recruited to fill the positions. The presence of women in early editing rooms has never been contested. Film history scholarship often provides passing mention that "many editors in those days were women."[144] However, this fact is rarely explored further. Historic primary sources from silent-era movie magazines and photographs verify women in cutting rooms, but also provide clues as to the significance of their presence. One newspaper article advertised "more than fifty occupations open to women in the movies" including "film cutter."[145] Writers describing their tours of these new film factories reference the "bright, intelligent and clear-faced girls" that "cemented in one continuous whole the various scene sections of each reel."[146] Film industry historian Karen Ward

Mahar describes etchings published in a source from 1897 showing that "at least two dozen women dry, cut, retouch, and inspect the films" while in another room "several women peer through projector-like film-cutting machines."[147] The *LA Times* reported in 1926 that the film cutter position was, "one of the few vocations in the industry at which practically only women are engaged."[148] Film historian Erin Hill notes the vertical mobility afforded to women prior to the mid 1920s, stating that "studios recruited women from the polishing and joining rooms to become 'cutter girls,' which was how a number of successful female editors entered the field."[149] These women were also young—one article profiled a film cutter named Marjorie Miller, who was described as "about ready for high school."[150] Brotherton also verified the presence of other women cutters she encountered throughout her career, saying developed film "is sorted over by women whose duty it is to put the various parts together and thereby make a continuous whole."[151]

One newspaper article claimed that Brotherton was the first woman to work in the Selig Polyscope Company's assembly department.[152] Another source published later in 1916 claims "She started as a girl, ten years ago, in Chicago, and then came to the Coast. She advanced rapidly, becoming expert in the new work," putting the start of her employment around 1906.[153] However, as evidenced by Brotherton's employment as both a cutter and a camera operator in Selig's studio, it is likely that the men working in the assembly department were hired for multiple positions and moved between them before departments became siloed. Brotherton's dual role at Selig is supported by film historian Jane Gaines' "they were there" thesis where she argues there was more "worker versatility than one might have assumed."[154] Her thesis indicates that the presence of women ("they were there") in studios prior to work specialization suggests that they worked in many positions at the same time, like Brotherton being both a cutter and a

camera operator. Knowing about worker versatility makes space for a narrative that places women in powerful roles at the beginning of cinema. Charles Musser also argued that filmmaking was a more collaborative endeavor, but the popularity of narrative films "encouraged film companies to adopt modern management structures after 1907 in order to keep track of costs and clarify studio hierarchies."[155] By 1909, women had taken over the cutting room at Selig Polyscope, as confirmed in an essay written by James E. McQuade for the publication "The Film Index." Throughout the writer makes references to "girls," "other girls" and the "lady examiner," broadly placing women at key steps of the editing process.[156] Additional sources describe the "rooms of girls" throughout Selig's postproduction process in 1909, 1911, and 1915 which mentioned the "hundreds and hundreds of girl experienced operators."[157] Without question, it was women who were recruited as dedicated cutters in the early days of cinema.

However, both historic and modern discourse surrounding the contributions of these women assumes there was very little latitude or creativity exercised in their work. A 1936 *New York Times* article assumed that "in the early days cutting was a mechanical rather than a dramatic job."[158] This "mechanical" terminology was regurgitated over the years in the press. Decades later an article on acclaimed editor Barbara McLean—one of the few women still employed as an editor in the industry—described her painstaking attention to detail, but the journalist still summarized her job as following "through on the mechanics of the editing" after receiving instructions from the male producer.[159] Editors certainly collaborated with producers, but their work has always been framed as doing the technical work of cutting and pasting while the creative story work came from the minds of the men. Mahar notes that "women printers, cutters, joiners, and polishers were to be nimble fingered but not creative."[160] A primary goal of this dissertation is to challenge the assumption that women in early editing rooms were

uncreative. However, we must also investigate why young, working-class women with little formal education like May Brotherton——whose own formal education ended at the 8th grade level—were considered suitable for cutting room labor in the first place.

Industry studies scholar Erin Hill observed that, “Areas in which women’s work was deemed acceptable in major industries derived from essentialist views of women’s natural sphere and innate qualities and skills.”[161] However, the demands of a capitalist economy made excuses for the presence of any woman in the workforce by limiting them to the sphere of “work that replicates housework.”[162] Jobs like “domestic service, teaching…baking, garment work” were, and continue to be, considered women’s work, and were performed out of sight and held little power or influence.[163] Given the perception that putting together a film was viewed as "work akin to knitting or sewing," women were sought to work as film cutters.[164] The work could be difficult and tedious, though it had unrealized creative control by studio heads.

Due in part to the gendered division of work, power imbalances lingered during the Progressive Era. Single women, like Brotherton, had an especially difficult time with employment, earning far less than men and less likely to be protected by labor laws or unions.[165] There were also occasions where women were used as competition by capitalist employers, interpersonally isolating them from male workers. During the printers’ strike at the Chicago Times, the owners tried to replace male union workers with women, which had the added benefit of saving money since they could pay the women far less, further polarizing men from women in the workforce.[166] Even in the newly developing modern age, power imbalances persisted because men would not see women as equals. Women of color appeared to be unfairly excluded from editing positions in major studios like the Selig Polyscope Company.[167] Existing photographs show women who are white or white-passing working in the labs and assembly rooms. The

sources required to investigate the early presence of Black women cutters do not appear to be available, but I hope that this project paves the way to identifying the earliest appearances of Black women and other women of color in cutting rooms.

For film cutters, three perceived conditions of the work overlapped with the spheres and qualities assigned to women—natural skill, isolation, and low wages. First, we will look at how common perceptions of a woman's natural skill intersected with perceptions of the skills needed in the cutting room. One can view natural skill in two ways—temperament and physical ability. As I list these attributes, it is important to remember that these qualities were the justifications in the minds of the men hiring these women, not reality.

As the industry grew and studios expanded, many of these male filmmakers moved into a dedicated position as a film's director and began to train the women who were hired to cut.[168] The work was considered lowly and unimportant by those who were doing the hiring, and therefore, suited to women. Mahar said of joining that "this simple but laborious procedure, requiring 'dexterity but not skill,' was quite literally a textbook example of a female-typed job."[169] To an outsider, it may even appear so—looking "through huge quantities of filmed footage by hand" seems positively mind-numbing.[170] Journalists who witnessed the intricate detail work of handling thin and delicate celluloid ribbon had an odd obsession with women's fingers, describing them as "nimble," "dexterous," and "deft." However, rather than acknowledge that the women were capable of learning and perfecting a skill, they assumed women had to be good at cutting because of some innate ability or their small hands.

Women were also perhaps considered for this role because they had established their capability to work with the physical medium of film for still photography. As early as 1888, the tasks of "'retouching, printing, mounting, and colouring'" were deemed to be "'within the sphere

of women's abilities.'"[171] When still photography progressed into moving pictures, the men in charge of hiring may have assumed there were parallels between cutting room labor and the job of established female still retouchers, since both were handling the medium of film. While I will not make assumptions about the creativity women exercised as still retouchers, the work is inherently different from that of editing. Still photography focuses on the effect of individual images while film editing focuses on the timing and juxtaposition of individual images to create meaning. As such, women may have been recruited under erroneous comparisons to female still retouchers.[172] If that is the case, it suggests that hiring managers may have been at least somewhat inexperienced in the specifics of post-production.

Directors who would have known the importance of editing were known to recruit young women to cut. Before Anne Bauchens became an editor, she was watching Cecil B. DeMille cut one of his films and declared, "Some day I'm going to cut your pictures." DeMille curtly replied, "No one will ever cut a picture of mine, except me!"[173] DeMille eventually changed his mind and went on to work exclusively with Bauchens, perhaps owing to the demanding work he had to manage as a director. Film editor Irene Morra learned editing from director D.W. Griffith right out of high school. Over the course of six years, she worked from "the bottom of the ladder as a film 'patcher,' and quietly and gradually ascended the various rungs of the ladder to inspector, then negative cutter—then positive cutter—until at the time she left Mr. Griffith she was in complete charge of print production for all of the Griffith masterpieces."[174] As a young woman, Margaret Booth was also hired as a film joiner for Griffith.[175] Since film history has always cited editing innovations to Griffith—though certainly erroneously—he at the very least articulated the importance of editing.

Brotherton never cited reasons like hand size or inherent seamstress skills to justify the large number of women working in the cutting room. When writing about the "assembly department," Brotherton spends most of her time making the case for the creativity of her department. The next chapter will fully unpack an important article Brotherton wrote about film cutting, but portions are worth mentioning here. She wrote that effective cutting depended "largely on the intelligence exercised in the cutting and matching up of scenes."[176] Rather than affirm the common narrative that early female editors were mechanical and unimaginative, Brotherton held that, "much latitude is given the workers in this department."[177]

Sadly, the latitude exercised by an editor is only recognized when editors became men.[178] Rather than have their labor described as mechanical, male editors were praised as "perfectionist" and well suited to editing because it required ruthlessness to leave entire scenes on the cutting room floor.[179] The same production heads who would have recruited women for cheap labor turned around by the 1920s and recruited men to replace their female employees, since, as Hill argues, "cutting rose in desirability and prestige."[180] Editor Viola Lawrence recalled that her husband Frank—also an editor—hated the remaining women cutters and would prohibit them from editing, but "broke in a lot of boys."[181] By the 1930s, editor Adrienne Fazan was told by her studio's production head that film editing was "just too tough for women," who "should go home and cook for their husbands and have babies."[182] By the 40s and 50s, archival research reveals, journalists would interview the eight remaining women editors and pepper the published story with constant references to their success, despite working in "a man's world."[183] The equivalence between film editing and masculinity had become so strong that journalists tended to stress the femininity of women editors in their remarks. Editor Barbara McLean was constantly on the receiving end of these remarks, frequently being referred to as, "diminutive"

and "attractive."[184] One article went so far as to highlight McLean's emotional reaction to a film she was working on, writing: "Though she is a spectacular success in what is usually considered a man's world, Barbara is still feminine enough to admit, 'I cried most of the time I was cutting 'The Song of Bernadette.' It was so beautiful and so sad.'"[185] Some women editors tried to play the imposed feminine temperament to their advantage. In an interview, editor Viola Lawrence said, "If you ask me, women have more heart and feeling than men in this work. Now, listen to my masculine contemporaries yell when they hear this!"[186] Barbara McLean admitted to asserting her judgements to the director "like a mother would, with affection and understanding and tolerance."[187] When reflecting upon how she became a successful editor despite the industry's sexism, Margaret Booth said that men were usually glad to have "a feminine point of view available to them" while also indicating her belief that most women did not have the "degree of technical aptitude" needed to be an editor; Booth, it seems, was not immune to the sexist assumptions of the industry at this time.[188] Despite any problematic implications of this gendered logic, it seems that many female editors felt the burden to justify their right to be working in the cutting room, since having nimble fingers was not a strong enough justification for their presence anymore.

Filmmaker and feminist film scholar Karen Pearlman posed the questions, "Were women eventually excluded from most jobs in filmmaking but able to work in editing departments because the creative decision making of editing was unrecognized? Or could it be that the creative decision making of editing was unrecognized because it was work done by women?"[189] I believe the answer to both questions is "yes"—the creative potential of editing was initially unrecognized, but once women revealed it through narrative storytelling, they were eventually excluded. Either way, there is a distinct correlation between delegitimized work and feminine

labor—a narrative which can be observed in other fields as well. Ultimately, because early film executives did not understand that cutting room work was inherently creative, women—who were assumed as not inherently creative—were a natural fit. The beautiful irony is that young women with few professional prospects were recruited for menial labor, but unbeknownst to their employers, were instead positioned to develop and refine the conventions of a new art form. Yet tragically, creativity has never been retroactively granted to the early women cutters.

The same presumptions that were made about women's natural abilities just so happen to restrict those roles to isolated spaces. A woman's sphere in society not only functioned symbolically, but literally as these spaces were always private rather than public. If a woman stayed within her sphere, her domain could be either her home or some other private space. Karen Mahar said that film factory work "fit within the culturally defined arena of women's work at the turn of the century" in terms of natural ability and isolation as the jobs offered to them were generally "performed indoors, it did not require great strength or invite danger." [190] Contrasted with the very public and exposed realm of a movie set with directors, camera operators, and actors, the cutting room kept the women working behind its doors practically invisible. It was not enough that the women fit the contrived job description in terms of dexterity and emotional sensitivity—the cutting room itself was a private room where women were put away and hidden from view. The private nature of the work intersecting with a demography that many wanted to keep hidden was ideal, as the inherent nature of cutting room work does determine a practical need for some isolation. The suitability of the space was recognized by studio heads as well as those in the press. Movie magazines praised cutting room work as "'a most congenial occupation for a number of girls and young women'" because it was a "'clean opportunity for many to earn a good living, free from many of the objectionable features of

factory life.'"[191] However, such congenial conditions obscured the lack of fair pay and opportunities for leadership.

It is unsurprising that the isolated sphere is also the sphere which lacks "visible leadership."[192] The lack of a visible leadership role in the cutting room is especially ironic since editing has garnered the reputation as the invisible art—if you do not notice it, then it has been done well. This description also serves as an unfortunate metaphor for women. Hill rightly observes that the fields offered to women in the film business distanced them "from the site of real creative power: the masculinized spaces behind the camera and in executive suites."[193] The rhetorical subjectivity of women's designations indicates that their seclusion was prioritized above their natural aptitude. For example, directing actors on the stage had been within a woman's sphere.[194] One may have argued that a woman's emotional sensitivity made them a natural fit for such a position, and many women did direct films during this era. However, the nature of directing a film set was in a very public space with explicit authority over a crew of men and women. The isolated realm of the cutting room is perhaps another aspect of why men were not attracted to the work. Once the editor's authority was recognized, men were willing to work in these isolated spaces.

Perhaps a greatest influence on the hiring of women cutters was the cost of industrial studio growth. Leading up to the industry's expansion due to Wall Street investments in the 1920s, studio budgets were limited. Even more than their nimble fingers, women were likely hired primarily because they could be paid less. Filmmaking technology was initially invested in solely for the sake of profit rather than creative expression. As a result, studios needed to scale production for studio growth while minimizing labor costs. Hill notes by the 1910s that sex segregation in industrial production systems brought "a particular benefit to the bottom line."[195]

Judith McGaw argues that the very concept of a defining a job as *low-skill* was a "fiction that ensured a steady supply of cheap labor."[196] At the time, cutting film was categorized as a low-skill job. A 1936 *New York Times* article opined that, "Women were cheaper than men and so they grew into [cutting]."[197] Female film inspectors—another position in the assembly department— could receive $2 to $5 less weekly than male inspectors, even though women represented a higher percentage of the department.[198] There does not seem to be a source in which Brotherton compares her wages as a cutter to men, but there is a quote where she compares her earnings to on-camera female actors. She quipped, "Of course, we don't get what the actresses do, but then we don't have many of the things to contend with which confront them."[199] Women working in the studios were "a consequence of industrial reorganization" and their lower wages reflected the discrimination they faced.[200] The assembly department, without a doubt, required a surplus of workers. It was not uncommon for directors to shoot up to 100,000 feet of film for a single picture, so the labor needed to organize and assemble the material into a finished product was extensive.[201] Women worked on multiple pictures at any given moment. Whether studio executives realized that editing was creative or not is almost immaterial—the physical footage needed an army to manage and assemble into the final pictures. The nature of the work directly informed the labor required—lots of footage meant lots of employees working long hours. Prior to the New Deal, working class citizens worked excessive hours, and the cutting room was no exception. Margaret Booth, who got an early start in the industry as a film joiner and advanced to MGM's supervising film editor, described the long hours leading up to a film's premier date. She said, "During this time we often work twenty-four hours a day. Food is sent in from the studio restaurant and what sleep we get is taken in brief snatches on a camp bed in the cutting-room."[202] The lack of investment in advancing resources to speed up the cutting

process also affected their workload. All they had was a "light table, a pair of rewinds, and a splicing block" along with "a pair of scissors to cut the film, a razor blade to scrape the emulsion, and a bottle of film cement."[203] Nevertheless, these women developed techniques to save time. For example, constantly threading and projecting the footage for proper review would have slowed down production, so many cutters used the technique of pulling the film through their fingers to judge the pacing and rhythm, prior to the introduction of the review device called a Moviola in 1924.[204]

It was this type of efficiency that attracted investors. During the early 1920s, an expansion of the film industry was enabled by stocks and bonds backed by Wall Street and LaSalle Street investors and bought by the public. During this time, investors praised the film industry "not [in terms of] the film's value as a medium of human expression, but [in terms of] the industry's vertically integrated structure, assembly-line production techniques, efficient worldwide distribution system, air-conditioned movie palaces, and conservative accounting practices."[205] Mahar wrote that the film industry had become a "Wall Street—defined, vertically integrated big business" which affected the opportunities offered to women.[206] By 1925, film historian Jane Gaines argues that the involvement of bank investors opened "a monopoly capital approach to U.S. industrial culture over the cinema century."[207] In light of the industry's access to real money, managers reassessed their female staff.[208] Not coincidentally, these investments also line up with the time frame when women cutters were starting to be replaced with men in the assembly departments. For years, editing was viewed as rote, finicky labor requiring feminine patience, but once "editing became recognized as a critical step in the production of what were now often million-dollar films, it, like direction and production, became a masculinized craft."[209] Film editing, despite lacking visible leadership potential, more readily

transitioned to men's domain by the 1920s because it directly interacted with the actual physical film medium, as opposed to the important work of planning the film on paper—another job designated as suitable for women.[210] As outside investments enabled studios to make more ambitious films, the film strips themselves grew to represent millions of dollars. As such, "women who had once been welcomed were now defined as unfit."[211] Pre-Hollywood studios in the early 1900s had recruited women for cheap labor in the cutting room, but then actively hired men to take their place by the 1920s. By the 1930s, editor Adrienne Fazan was told by her studio's production head that film editing was "just too tough for women," who "should go home and cook for their husbands and have babies."[212] These working-class women established the narrative film syntax that propelled the industry to success, but endured low wages, gender segregation, and efforts to discredit their achievements. In return, they were later fired from their jobs, and their accomplishments were misrepresented and ignored.

Brotherton: Film Industry Pioneer

Before Hollywood was established, it was anyone's guess as to where the filmmaking capital of the world would have ended up. As a theater town with a consistent supply of actors, directors, and technicians, Long Beach was just as attractive as any other sunny California city.[213] For someone to affiliate themselves with Balboa in Long Beach at this time was a smart choice. Long Beach's population increased significantly during the start of the 20th century by an astounding "691 percent as the city became a major entertainment and seaside resort center."[214] It was here that The Balboa Amusement Producing Company decided to settle.

The Balboa Amusement Producing Company spent five years from 1913 to 1918 as "one of the most productive plants in the history of world cinema."[215] While Balboa was not the first

film plant in Long Beach, the city was the first to house an "American studio to originate west of Chicago" known as the California Motion Picture Manufacturing Company.[216] Edison moved into these facilities for a while and "transformed the studio into one of the most complete film plants, one of the rare ones that included an indoor studio."[217] Balboa would eventually inhabit these same facilities around 1913, when Long Beach was the "fastest growing city in the United States"[218] By 1917, Balboa Studios "had become Long Beach's biggest employer and biggest tourist attraction."[219] Celebrity actors like Mary Pickford attended Balboa's first company Christmas party.[220] In many ways, Balboa set industry standards.[221]

Balboa was not filming in the studios at Long Beach in early 1913, but instead shard space with other studio companies in Hollywood. According to Jura, "Hollywood had not yet been defined, and obviously this sharing of facilities seemed to be a rather common occurrence among film companies of Los Angeles County."[222] Though evidence to support this is not available, it is possible that Balboa shared Los Angeles premises with the western outpost of the Selig Polyscope Company and perhaps facilitated Brotherton's recruitment from her film company. Horkheimer, president of Balboa, recruited Brotherton to lead his assembly department in 1913 as the studio started production. Her brother Robert was also hired as a film chemist and went on to innovate a tinting process that resulted in more realistic flesh tones. She had worked for around seven years in the industry and considered a veteran in her field by 1913. These three factors—the prominence of the studio, Brotherton's influential position, and the key period in film production history—place Brotherton as a film industry pioneer. She was also beloved by her employers and the only female member of the "Thick and Thin Club," which represented studio founders who had a steadfast commitment to the studio. While I will offer some specific stories about Brotherton and her relationship to the studio managers, throughout I

intend to highlight the overwhelming presence of women in their assembly department and their placement within the context of the industry.

Balboa followed suit with the hiring practices of other studios to hire women in the cutting rooms. As previously argued, part of the reason women were given this space was because the work was viewed as insignificant. Because these women were not regarded as creative, the way they have been represented is incorrect. Brotherton's example challenges all those preconceptions, but not in such a way that she should be classified as an exception. The women she supervised at every stage of assembly were all positioned to make creative decisions, and their work, in many ways, defined contemporary film syntax.

Balboa was significant because it was in Long Beach, it was cutting edge, and had a lot of star power, connections, and high-quality films. Without access to copies of their films, it is difficult to explain the significance of Balboa. It was one of the first studios in California. Stars known even today, like Fatty Arbuckle, starred in their films. At Balboa, quantity was the name of the game. The studio produced "150,000 feet of positive film per week."[223] They were able to print positives on site, unlike other studios who needed to ship their negatives across the country. This contributed to their quick turnaround, equipping Balboa to "make its own releases and deliver them to the exchanges ready for immediate projection onto the screens."[224] With these printing resources, women were cutting films at lightning speed. However, as noted by historian Jura, quality was also important to the studio heads. Interestingly, the details that Jura provides as standards for quality are almost immediately attributed to the Brothertons, and Jura's book is also the only published source where I have found May Brotherton's name. He shares that Balboa had,

> expert technicians and state-of- the-art equipment [that] guaranteed top quality in photographing, printing, and processing films [. It was] much superior to the quality of the average production during the silent era. The Brothertons were among the best technicians at the studio. May Brotherton was in charge of assembly of the films, while Robert Brotherton was chief chemist.[225]

In 1914 alone, Brotherton oversaw assembly of 200 separate titles produced at Balboa, an astronomical output which further that demonstrates Brotherton's professional experience—by comparison, the renowned editor Walter Murch has cut only 27 titles in his entire career (to be fair, the reels from *Apocalypse Now* were astronomical).[226] The judgment of the final film's quality rested with her. It is improbable that the studio head, producers, or directors visited to examine rough cuts for official approval, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter. Once the cutters were satisfied with the film, it was immediately printed and shipped to theaters, which considering the constant output from the studio.[227] This lack of oversight further verifies that those in senior leadership positions viewed the cutting process as very technical and not creative.

It is a very popular false argument that women stopped being editors when sound was introduced.[228] The industrialization of the Hollywood system occurred during the Silent Era, or films produced before recorded, synchronized dialogue. Because they were not bound by a soundtrack, silent film editors arguably had more freedom in terms of timing and juxtaposition. One could argue that the unhinged nature of filmmaking created circumstances that enabled these women to exercise even more creative control than the men who would subsequently replace them because of the supposed technical challenges of adding sound. The development of initial editing practices in tandem with the development of studio industrialization historically demonstrates that women not only implemented routines to expedite the cutting process, but they

also creatively controlled the narrative through the flexibility of rearrangement, providing context with title cards, etc.

It is critical to recognize Balboa's significance as a cutting-edge studio since it helped establish industry standards with Brotherton holding a significant role of creative leadership. As one Horkheimer brother said, "Yes, sir, glory and undying fame is our mark with the Balboa films. And we shall earn both without any doubt. I tell you that when people see our pictures they will proclaim them artistic triumphs—every-one of them. Each picture will have something original in it. When I tell you they positively took the United States by storm you will understand they are just out of the ordinary."[229] His comment demonstrates the studio's commitment to both quantity *and* quality, goals that made Brotherton's prolific career almost unthinkable, even with today's digital technology.

The Thick and Thin Club

Balboa fostered a culture of loyalty, not because it was demanded, but because the Horkheimer brothers had been on several occasions indebted to their staff. The studio had a rocky financial start, but there were six employees who not only went through periods without pay, but each "voluntarily withdrew $500 each from their savings and placed the money into the empty coffers of the film company so that Balboa would not fail." [230] Jura's book on Balboa alludes to an unnamed woman who insisted on giving her life's savings, "having full faith in his know-how to overcome the temporary setback."[231] Her faith was rewarded, and Balboa "paid all salaries, even those in arrears, and redeemed everyone's savings, with money to spare."[232] This woman must have been Brotherton. She was the only woman in the Thick and Thin Club.[233]

As multiple sources confirm, Brotherton and her boss Horkheimer had a convivial relationship. He helped her win a car in a contest from *The Times* who reported, "When news of The Times campaign reached Mr. Horkheimer he was deeply interested, and he recalled a young woman who has faithfully served the Balboa company ever since its organization."[234] Based on this and stories from her living relatives, Horkheimer appeared to have a good working relationship with Brotherton based upon mutual respect and support. He would support her, and she would support him. As Brotherton was a woman leading a department of women and her leadership position and her relationship with her boss gave her an advantage that granted her some recognition at the time.

While she was certainly an expert, there were almost certainly dozens of women in her department who were just as talented. However, other than helping her own niece get a job as a cutter, there is little evidence that she actively pulled other women in her department up. One quote indicates that she felt women specifically could have actively done more to advance their careers "if they would apply themselves."[235] This statement does not consider the disadvantages other women faced that did not affect her own career at the time. While believing that hard work and dedication will always pay off sounds nice, it is rarely the reality of most women. Brotherton herself would experience career setbacks in the coming decades, as she eventually was relegated to negative cutter—the one position in the assembly department that did not make creative decisions. While she recognizes and welcomes the presence of women on her team, the unanswered question is whether she could have done more to elevate the women around her so that the role of cutters was not eventually taken over by men.

Conclusion

Brotherton was among the first women hired into one of the earliest film studios. As an immigrant settled in Chicago, she started a job that looked like any other factory work. However, she discovered that there was enormous creativity and satisfaction in film cutting, despite her employers hiring her under the assumption that the work was not creative.

In this chapter, I traced the historical development of early cutting rooms and then examined why women were initially recruited to be cutters as studio systems grew. Early filmmakers cut their own films, but as early as 1903 studios sought to distinguish and streamline their production process for maximum output and profit. There was domesticized impression of editing, which correlated to the idea that it was also uncreative. There was also a historic precedent for women working with celluloid in the industry of still photography. Finally, since women were cheaper than men, they were the more frugal option for a role that required extensive labor. Men let the women do the task since it seemed to be dull, unpleasant, and endless. Contrary to popular belief, which holds that the development of synchronous sound drove women out of the field of editing, the fact is that men took their place after the task was reclassified in light of its enormous creative potential and financial implications.

In summary, men allowed women to perform the task since it seemed monotonous, thankless, and endless to their uninitiated eyes. However, within the drudgery, an important familiarity with the footage emerged. Every turn of the head, every expression, and even the tears in an actor's eyes burned into the cutter's brain and informed the assembly and pacing of the story. Film editing scholar Karen Pearlman made an astute description of the editor's autonomy from the director when she wrote, "Thousands of decisions, made before showing the director anything and asking: 'how about this?' so that the director can make one yes or no decision…"[236] As I mentioned, film historians and academics have no problem acknowledging

the existence of women in early cutting rooms, but the implications of this fact are maddeningly understated. The presence of women is a crucial aspect of film history because it demonstrates the significant role that they played at a historic moment in the evolution of cinema into an art form.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EARLY CUTTING ROOM LABOR

Introduction

The concept of film editing as a storytelling technique was still on the horizon when filmmaking technologies were first developed. Two practices emerged, each employing a different technique to achieve shot juxtaposition—one because of technical necessity, the other by chance. One was film patching and the other was the stop-camera technique.[237] Initially, filmmakers and exhibitors would use patching techniques to remove overexposed frames from a strip of film or to connect individual scenes. The stop-camera technique involved stopping the film and moving the camera or scene elements to a different setup. While the full potential of each technique had yet to be discovered, it was the stop-camera technique that was responsible for unlocking the storytelling potential of editing.

Georges Méliès, a theatrical performer and magician, is credited with discovering the stop-camera technique. After attending the first public film screening by the Lumiere brothers at the Grand Cafe in Paris on December 28, 1895—the date often attributed to the birth of cinema itself—an inspired Méliès integrated the new technology into his stage performances. One day while shooting footage of a bus coming out of a tunnel, Méliès' camera jammed. Without moving the camera, he fixed the issue and started cranking his camera again on the same piece of film. Upon reviewing the developed footage, he found that the bus appeared to magically transform into a hearse. This effect is similar to what is now known as a *jump cut*. The result was compelling and Méliès started using the in-camera technique to simulate magic tricks. The most significant result of this technique was the shift in film production toward narrative storytelling.

Méliès' innovative use of the medium inspired other filmmakers, including Edwin S. Porter, a projectionist, director, and camera operator for Edison Studios. Porter made two films that historians consider demonstrating the earliest examples of film editing techniques—*Life of an American Fireman* (1903) and *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). In *Life of an American Fireman*, Porter used the patching technique to splice existing stock footage of firefighters with staged scenes. For decades, historians claimed that this film was the first to use the *cross-cutting* technique, but this was later disproved. However, the film remains significant because the shots were arranged in a linear narrative sequence. [238] *The Great Train Robbery*, on the other hand, used more sophisticated cutting and was a huge hit with audiences. This film is best known for its final scene of a gun being fired toward the camera, which allegedly sent theatergoers ducking in fear. While it is unclear whether *The Great Train Robbery* had a direct impact on investor participation, the film industry was a growing financial opportunity at the time, and studios sought to optimize their production process for maximum profit. Yale film professor Charles Musser argues that during 1903 was also when editing became "rapidly centralized inside the production company" as opposed to exhibitors who would present individual reels in their preferred order.[239]

It is important to remember that, in contrast to how early filmmakers performed almost every step of the process, the role of director was also formed as a specific position due to the need to streamline. Most filmmakers took on the title of *director*, yet their roles remained multifunctional, and they often continued to cut their own films for a while. However, most studios hired extra staff to manage the footage. Production techniques also became standardized between 1907 and 1913.[240] Interestingly, this timeframe also saw an increase in cutting rates, which silent cinema professor Charlie Keil argues had a significant impact on the development

of film's narrative storytelling. In what he refers to as the transitional era, Keil charted that the average number of shots used for a 1,000-foot reel more than doubled between 1909 and 1913, utilizing techniques like cut-ins and crosscutting.[241] As women were brought in to cut films, they unearthed the potential of individual shots by increasing their frequency in creative ways.

Reconstructing the Cutting Room Process

To this point, no published work has documented the step-by-step process of post-production during this time in film history. Without such an overview, primary sources become difficult to decipher. I have pieced together an overview of the responsibilities required in postproduction and some of the roles formed roughly between 1896 and 1922, which encompasses the years of standard practice development. Many details of the process and roles are limited, especially as I attempt to reconstruct the process prior to the unionization of such positions. However, a broad sketch of the possible structure and organization of the industrialized cutting department will be useful moving forward in part to define key terms for the reader, but also to illuminate the contributions of women in the first cutting rooms. Where I have discovered the names of some of the women doing this work, I will include them. Nobody seems to know who they are, but they lived and had a variety of jobs with debatable levels of latitude.

While the previous chapter examined the business and working relationships, this chapter will dive deep by reconstructing the process and positions in the editing room. After that, I will provide an analysis of the Brotherton essay where she details her work and asserts some early film theory ideas.

Step 1: Negatives Developed

Negative film is the most primal form of the medium, for it is the raw material that is threaded into a dark chamber of the moving picture camera and strategically exposed to light during the photography process. A writer named James E. McQuade in 1909 described negative film as a "thin, semi-transparent, tenacious strip of gelatinous substance" being both "pliant" but "not elastic."[242] Once the negative film captured images that played before the camera lens, it was sent to a dark negative developing room to go through a chemical procedure that would make the acquired images permanent.[243] One writer from 1914 described the employees as the "denizens of the land of eternal night."[244] Sources indicate that negative developers were all men.[245] In a 1914 interview with an unnamed female film assembler—who presumably interacted with the negative film after development—described the delicate process of handling negative film, saying that it "must be handled like an egg as the least scratch will blemish the positive printed from it."[246] She continued, "To realize how cautious the workers in a film factory actually are, one has only to consider how many hands a piece of negative film passes through before being made positive. That roll lying there has been treated by at least ten different persons, and yet there isn't a scratch on it."[247] That these workers also worked in the dark to protect the negatives from light exposure shows an additional level of technical skill and not simply sloshing chemicals around haphazardly. In a task that might have been perceived as rote and mechanical, this assembler attributes characteristics that demonstrate care and attention to detail.

Step 2: Negatives Examined

After the negative film has been developed, or "fixed," the negatives must be inspected for quality and to ensure that all the day's necessary footage was completed. According to a 1909

publication documenting The Selig Polyscope Company in Chicago's filmmaking process, this was done by a producer to analyze "minute flaws of detail" to see if "offending scenes must be taken over again."[248] Despite what the publication implies, the producer would have needed assistance to analyze the footage. Karen Ward Mahar, an industry studies scholar, indicated that negative examination may have been done by the head of the negative department and the film's director, and theorized that some direct cutting of the negative may have occurred during the examination process because films made prior to 1910 were typically short, and "the scenario laid out all the shots in a numbered order."[249] Evaluating and selecting developed negatives before making a positive print demonstrates that this task required a skilled eye, as judging a negative is more difficult because it is an inverted version of the final image. Using May Brotherton as an example, a newspaper article mentions that during her years at the Selig Polyscope Company she had personally "made a thorough study of photography, because the first essential is to be able to judge the photographic value of negative film" which is "somewhat difficult, until one gets used to it."[250] Brotherton is quoted in a separate article saying that the inspection step of a negative's photographic quality can be "projected for this purpose, although film experts can judge negative by looking at it."[251] The negative review could have also been the first step in a process that included a script or scenario review to ensure that the footage was not only technically sound but also required for the final story. Moreover, there are also the financial considerations; one brief anecdote shares how the studio's superintendent told an actor that she could go home after "the negative of the scene is developed, and if everything is O.K."[252] The practice of sending cast members home after the scenes had been inspected is a bottleneck of studio resources with interesting financial implications. Negatives would need to be developed and examined as quickly as possible to avoid paying actors to wait. The judgement

needed to identify whether “everything is O.K.” involved examining a broad scope of criteria that transcended whether the footage was exposed properly or that all scheduled shots were in the can. It also judges the framing of the shots, the action within them, the quality of the performance, pacing, etc. Considering the experience needed to judge a negative as Brotherton described and the fact that it had to be done quickly, it seems unlikely that producers made all the decisions when verifying the footage. The negative inspector probably had more latitude in the selection process than one might have assumed. However, it is unclear whether many women would have been negative examiners. One comment from Brotherton implies that she did not see many female negative inspectors since she encouraged more women to try it as it “pays better wages than the average run of work done by women and the field is steadily enlarging.”[253] Brotherton tried her hand at every stage of filmmaking, truly becoming an expert ready to lead her team of cutters once she transitioned to California.

Step 3: Negatives Sorted for Positive Printing

The next step is to prepare the negatives for a positive print, or, “what is used by the operator on the motion picture machine for projection on the screen.”[254] Brotherton stated that the negative must first be “cleaned and assorted as to density.”[255] Footage from the Ince Studio Tour circa 1920 shows two men gauging the density of the negatives to select the appropriate printing light.[256] Prior to this time, some evidence suggests that women were tasked with sorting the negatives, as a 1909 source claims that women, or "deft-fingered girls," occupied the position of *printer* and were tasked with printing the positives "on rapid automatic printing machines" while "working by the dim light of ruby lanterns," presumably to ensure that negatives remained protected from unwanted light.[257] There is some significance in recognizing that this duty may

have been transferred from women to men between 1909 and 1920, because it was during this period that the title *film editor* was formed, and men sought employment in this now-legitimized field.[258]

Step 4: Positive Prints Colored and Polished

Ince Studio footage reveals that positive prints were colored prior to making their way to the cutting room.[259] Brotherton's brother Robert was the chief chemist at the Balboa Amusement Producing Company and even developed a new solution that allowed him to "tint films various colors without disturbing the natural hue of the faces of actors and actresses in the scenes."[260] Coloring film does have a distinct history of employing women in the work of hand painting each frame.[261] Additional laborers would then dry the positive work print on a special drum then "wiped with cloths by nimble fingered girls, section by section," known as *film polishers*.[262] Access to the 1920 Los Angeles Census reveals the names of two women who worked as film polishers in the motion picture business—Y. Maybelle A. Currier and Augusta V. Crittenden. Viola Lawrence, who would eventually edit films for renown director Orson Welles, was employed as a film polisher in 1911.[263] At this point, the footage was finally "turned over to the cutting room which is also known as the assembly department."[264] Similar to the cautious treatment of the negatives, all of this care has implications about the delicate medium of film and the skill that would have been required in its handling.

Step 5: Positive Print Assembled and Patched

With the positive prints developed and tinted, the assembly department could begin the artistic and technical process of cutting and assembling individual shots into a continuous

sequence. This department was staffed by a large group of women who worked as *film joiners* under the guidance of a supervisor.[265] The title of the worker in the supervising position varied from studio to studio but would eventually be christened *film editor* once men were interested in the position. Three alternative titles I have come across are *positive cutter, examiner,* and *chief assembler.*[266] According to one newspaper article, Irene Morra was a positive cutter, the highest level of seniority in the cutting room.[267] Brotherton held the title chief assembler while working for Balboa Pictures. In contrast, the position of *film joiner* was the lowest "rung" on the cutting room ladder that many women climbed in their editing careers.[268] The 1910 US Census for the state of New York has records of at least two women employed as *film joiners* for the motion (or *moving)* picture industry named Marion A. Noble and Isabelle Leckie. Sometimes referred to as *patchers* or *splicers,* the film joiner's main task was physically cementing footage together at several stages. More specifically, the film joiner "searched for the correct frame, snipped the film, brushed on odorous glue out of a bottle, and held the splice together with her fingers."[269] However, splicing was not as straightforward as the above description implies. To join two pieces of cut film, joiners needed to cut the frame above the desired frames in half, scrape away the emulsion with a razor blade, overlap with the selected piece of film prepared in a similar way, and then joined with film cement.[270] American film director Edward Dmytryk learned this process from women working in the cutting department at Paramount, describing the skill needed to—

> [L]earn just how much of a frame to cut, how to lick the overlapping bit of film with just enough spit to soften the emulsion that had to be removed, how to scrape it off with an Eveready razor blade without weakening the celluloid base underneath, how to apply the

right amount of cement and then fit the pieces together so precisely that the doubled film would ride smoothly through the sprockets of the projection machine.[271]

Many historical primary sources and more recent secondary sources refer to these film joiners as mechanical and uncreative, reinforcing the notion that the work they did was dictated by the director's or editor's creative choices rather than their own. Several sources which usurp the autonomy of film joiners have made vague references to the idea of "cutting by numbers," which refers to the numbers assigned to scenes based on the written scenario.[272] Such statements present themselves as evidence that these women were somehow mechanically following a pattern. However, in 1909—when Brotherton would have been working as a cutter for the Selig Polyscope Company—James E. McQuade wrote an essay for the publication *The Film Index* which inadvertently challenges this assumption about the film joiner's work. He writes that after women film polishers have wiped the positive film, "scene sections" are "passed on to other girls who carefully cement them, taking care that the scenes follow each other in proper succession."[273] At this point, some might argue that the film's "proper succession" would be dictated by the written scenario, or script. However, the subjectivity of which shots are placed next to each other, and their duration are just two examples of editing that are ignored by this assumption. Deciding where a shot goes in relation to another shot and how long it needs to be are the foundation of editing and its potential for creative expression.

When you consider that directors frequently shot footage that was not in the screenplay, Brotherton said that the cutter "is compelled to use his intuition."[274] After their work was completed, a "lady examiner" at Selig Polyscope would check "every mark on the film, noting that telegrams, letters, scenes, title, etc., are all in proper place."[275] After this, McQuade indicates that the film would have been wound up immediately and shipped off to theaters. This may have

been unique to Selig, as other accounts of the cutting process focused on review, stating that the main assembler would have met with the director and producer to review the positive prints and go over which footage, referred to as rushes, should be used.[276] Some indicate that joiners simply organized the positive prints into workable reels for the editor, who would make the first cut of the film and the trimmed and arranged footage would return to the film joiners to be cemented together for review.[277] Film joiners were also the last to get their hands on the final positive film print before theatrical distribution to join by hand films that exceeded two hundred feet "since the developing racks could handle only two hundred feet of film."[278] Arguably, film joiners were the most familiar with the footage.

However, even if joiners had all their decision undone by producers and supervisors, even the physical act of cutting has implications about the creativity and collaboration among the women in early assembly rooms. Filmmaker and feminist film scholar Karen Pearlman elevates the process through her research on cognition and visual memory. She argues that the act of "physically cutting and joining shots" manifests the film's "timing, pacing and trajectory phrasing."[279] As the women interact with the footage, they develop a "visual memory" of the frames, resulting in "an integrated, embodied mental or cognitive aspect of their expertise with tools of editing and film objects."[280] In other words, the physical process granted joiners invaluable intimacy with the footage. As they cemented the footage, these joiners would be exposed to every scene, every angle, and every take. Since organization enables the reviewer to see what footage already exists and then imagine how to connect it to other footage, it is a form of creative expression. One unnamed female editor described the nuanced details that the assembly room gets to see: "To an amateur, looking at film, many of the scenes will seem alike. But the expert is able to distinguish every detail of action—even to a turn of the head or change

of expression. It is fascinating to trace out the scenario on the positive, and make up the picture." She lovingly concludes, "Why, you can even tell when a person has tears in her eyes in the film."[281] Knowing the speed with which these films were produced, it is likely that joiners were called upon to share their knowledge and even opinions of the footage with the main assembler. Pearlman concludes that the physical and technical act of cutting required, "complex procedural memory of precise and fluent execution" and was "integral to the act of creative decision making."[282]

I contend that there was a more collaborative process between the women of discussing, cutting, and joining. It is easy to imagine the chief assembler retreating into a private room to make decisions and then hand them out to joiners waiting to mechanically follow instructions, but photos show a shared a workspace where ideas could bounce around freely. While it is possible that she may have done some joining herself or had a dedicated film joiner, it is more likely that she would have snipped the footage and then used her team of joiners to cement, as the early joining process was time-consuming. Joiners would have been positioned to catch mistakes, exercise quality control, and make suggestions based on their knowledge of the footage.

Step 6: Film Inspected

After the film was trimmed and cemented, *inspectors* would check the positive print for errors before making the decisions permanent with the original negative film. A seemingly candid photograph from 1911 shows "a glimpse of the inspecting and finishing room" at the Selig Polyscope Company in Chicago where Brotherton worked.[283] The room is filled with dozens of women, all appearing to be white or white passing. There is one man in the

background, but it is not clear what role he is performing. It is likely Brotherton worked in this room at some point during her years in Chicago, but I doubt she is in the picture since she was probably relocated to Selig's California branch by 1911. The position of *inspector* could be the second rung on the ladder women climbed in the cutting room—one could be promoted from a film joiner to an inspector.

Step 7: Original Negative Cut, Printed, and Patched

After paying one's dues as an *inspector*, the next rung on the cutting room ladder to ascend was that of negative cutter. Brotherton worked as a negative cutter later in her career. While less latitude was afforded to women occupying this position, the work was incredibly important. Once the work print had been cut, reviewed, and inspected, the final cut would need to be reflected on the original negative for final printing. Precision and technical aptitude were essential as any mistakes would compromise the original negative. For the decisions made on the work print to be applied to the negative accurately, numbers were eventually printed onto the edges of the film strips so the two copies could be accurately matched.[284] However, in the early days there were no numbers to reference and the negative cutter had to do it all "by eye," according to veteran editor Margaret Booth.[285] Booth said, "We had to match the action. Sometimes there'd be a tiny pinpoint on the negative, and then you knew you were right. But it was very tedious work. Close-ups of Lillian Gish in *Orphans of the Storm* would go on for miles, and they'd be very similar, so we all had to help one another."[286] What strikes me most about this statement is the collaboration Booth acknowledges about these early days among women in the cutting room.

"Making the Movies"

In her 1917 essay "Making the Movies: The Cutting Room," published by *The Daily Telegram* of Long Beach, California, Brotherton describes the technical process of editing as part of a collection of essays about the making of movies. She also emphasizes the prevalence of women working in the cutting room and shares creative insights about the craft. This essay is especially significant as 1917 is included in what can be considered the early cutting room era, where film historians are quick to dismiss the work of women in those rooms as "mechanical."[287] It is crucial to keep in mind that Brotherton is regarded as an expert in her profession and presumably draws on more than ten years of expertise when offering her observations. We can understand the work Brotherton describes as representative of the work women were doing in the cutting rooms of other studios. As Balboa was considered on the cutting edge of studio technology, we can be assured that the techniques they utilized were not only standard, but they established the quality expectations for the industry. Brotherton's essay illuminates the contributions she and the women working with her made to their studio and the craft of filmmaking. Beyond the significance of documenting Balboa's processes during this crucial period of film history, the essay importantly recognizes the agency and creativity exercised by women cutters, traits that were not readily acknowledged by Brotherton's contemporaries or even film historians today.

"Sorted Over by Women"

Brotherton begins her essay with a comparison of her work to that of a newspaper copy editor, likely to give her readers an accessible reference point for film editing. She says of cutting that, "Its function is editorial, for here the finishing touches are applied to the film after the

photoplay has been produced and photographed." She goes on to offer a technical explanation of the process, in which she seems to suggest that the work of the cutting department is more involved than that of a newspaper copy editor.

She writes the first step is an examination of the developed negatives coming to the cutting room from the lab. Brotherton lists several reasons for this step including "to determine if the photography is satisfactory" and to make sure "the scenes are checked up, to see if all are there."[288] The title given to these workers was that of *inspector*.[289] I argued for the inspector's autonomy in the last chapter, but I'll bring some points up again here. The step of examination might easily be overlooked as a mechanical process, but it is essentially an assessment of quality. It is not only vitally important to the finished film, but also demonstrates the laborers needed to exercise critical judgment. Their assessment functions as a preliminary edit by omitting unsatisfactory takes and making sure the coverage is sufficient by comparing it to the script. Brotherton herself refers to the workers who perform this task as "film experts" as some in this line can "judge negative by looking at it" without projecting it.[290] She became an expert at judging negatives during her years at the Selig Polyscope Company, learning not only film cutting but camera operation.[291] While the examination task did not necessarily involve cutting or assembling—though some of the very first films were cut at this stage—it is the first round of decisions that determines which footage will end up in the finished picture and which will not.

Once the positive print was developed, it was sent to the cutting room where "it is sorted over by women whose duty it is to put the various parts together and thereby make a continuous whole."[292] Brotherton would have overseen the work in her position as chief assembler and this comment confirms two points: the ubiquitous presence of women and the collaborative nature of their work. Brotherton's generalizing statement about "women" is useful. Rather than use a

gender-neutral term, she calls out women specifically, which indicates that they were the primary workers at that time. Though no further evidence of women working in early cutting rooms is necessary, every opportunity to highlight the fact must be taken.

Brotherton's description implies that the women collaborated. On one hand, collaboration was a side effect of the physical nature of the work, because it took many hands to efficiently manage tens of thousands of feet of film. On the other hand, collaboration was needed beyond the physical—footage cannot be "put together" until it is "sorted," and the succession of selection choices has a direct impact on how the footage is cut. For example, how much of a single take needs to show? Brotherton put it this way—"Often, more of a scene is taken than would be well to show. Accordingly, it is trimmed to bring out the big action by eliminating the dead stuff. It is literally cut out."[293] Sorting, combining, and creating "a continuous whole" are all duties these women performed and Brotherton never minimized the other women employees whose individual efforts helped to collectively produce the finished movie.

She then informs the reader that, since the footage is not shot "consecutively" during production, it must be later "assembled" in the cutting room "to bring out the big action."[294] The phrase "big action" could be understood many ways, depending on the cutter. Those without editing experience might assume that "big action" is the intended action as reflected in the script. For example, if the script notes that an actor is supposed to jump, the "big action" on film would show the actor performing said jump. However, the camera captures everything, the intentional and the unintentional. The editor has a lot of options for how to effectively stage the moment given the variety of behaviors that occur before and after the "big action." Additionally, the pace of a shot and how it is placed in relation to other shots produce a certain mood and additional meaning. Is the character hesitant or eager? These meanings are determined by the cut. Pearlman

surmised this idea by stating that the “juxtaposition of two shots will yield a meaning and replacing one of the shots or changing its duration will yield a different meaning.”[295] To yield meaning through the cut is to tell the story of the film. Brotherton understood that editing was not simply a matter of using the “big action” as dictated by the script, but by the arrangement the women cutters found to be the most compelling.

“Most Surprising Effects”

In her essay, Brotherton goes beyond chronologically describing the events that bring the footage to the cutting room. She also pauses to reflect on the effects of editing and articulate the creativity of women cutters. She wrote, “What has come to be known as ‘film tempo’ depends largely on the intelligence exercised in the cutting and matching up of scenes.”[296] It is relevant that she refers to the skill needed to enact film tempo as *intelligence.* As we learned in the previous chapter, citing the intelligence of female cutters contrasts sharply with those who describe their work as "mechanical." At this point, I will remind the reader that Brotherton makes her remarks after working in the industry for over a decade (in an industry that had barely existed a decade, no less), awarded the title of expert, and holding a leadership position in Balboa's cutting room. If anyone could have figured out a routine for the cutting process, it would have been her. However, she affirms the profession's truth: there is no mechanized procedure to fall back on. Problem-solving in the cutting room required intelligence and creativity then, when men took over, and even to this day.

While Brotherton does not define “film tempo” in her essay, Pearlman has done unique and extensive research on the work and cognition of the film editor. She offers a definition of *rhythm* in relation to film editing, which we can equate with *film tempo*. She writes that it is “time, energy and movement shaped by timing, pacing and trajectory phrasing for the purpose of

creating cycles of tension and release."[297] In other words, the captured footage represents "time, energy and movement"—how long does an action last, what is its energy, and how does it move in the frame? When that footage is *shaped*, or edited, it must be a particular duration balanced in step with the preceding moment while considering the movement of the objects and people captured within the frame. While this definition is complicated, editors throughout history have attempted to compare their work to working out a puzzle. Even Brotherton uses this comparison, writing, "this work is in the nature of a puzzle…"[298] She clarifies her use of this analogy by mentioning that some of the footage that made it to the cutting room was not "included in the script," but this analogy is still incredibly limited.[299] A puzzle is made up of precut pieces that fit together to form a single predetermined image. The analogy holds only if puzzles included pieces that had to be cut out by hand, trimming them to fit cohesively with other pieces that had also been cut out, eventually forming a final image that differed from the image that someone else could have made with the same materials. Nonetheless, this more complex interpretation of a puzzle still ignores the temporal nature of film editing, and as a result, tempo is a more useful measure.

Her reflections on film editing were published prior to formal attempts to develop filmmaking theory by Russian filmmakers. In 1917 she wrote, "Most surprising effects can be obtained by judicious cutting."[300] What Brotherton described as "surprising effects" match the later thoughts of Russian filmmakers like Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Sergei Eisenstein's early montage or editing theory. A year after Brotherton's insights and a world away, Kuleshov explained that "The content of the shots in itself is not so important as is the joining of two shots of different content and the method of their connection and their alteration."[301] This thought was the foundation of the infamous Kuleshov Effect—an editing

experiment which pairs a shot of an actor with a neutral expression with varying shots to produce different meanings.[302] Pudovkin wrote in 1929, “Film art begins from the moment when the director begins to combine and join together the various pieces of film. By joining them in various combinations in different orders, he obtains differing results.”[303] Though Eisenstein disagreed with Kuleshov on the exact function of montage, he too described editing as, “an idea that derives from the collision between two shots that are independent of one another” that “are juxtaposed and explode into a concept.”[304] Although their views varied, they all recognized that “without montage cinema is not an art.”[305] Editing is the one practice in the filmmaking process that is unique to film and therefore the definitive feature of cinema, transforming it into art. Brotherton's succinct definition of editing as "surprising effects" encompasses the nuance between all of these bloviating definitions, whether altering, combining, or "exploding into a concept." And yet, these theorists never credited the women working in the editing rooms during that time, even though it was their work that inspired their reflections.

To the question about who received credit for women’s editing innovations, I want to draw attention to how Pudovkin unquestioningly attributes the editing process to the director when he claims that “the director begins to combine and join together the various pieces of film.”[306] This is no doubt due in part to Griffith's influence upon the men developing these montage theories. As I have established throughout, editing credit should not go to the director unless they actually did the physical work of editing. This is unlikely for Griffith, especially as he began to scale his productions. He was usually on set while his editors, Rose and James Smith, worked on previously shot scenes. Brotherton briefly acknowledged in her essay that, “In some studios, the director cuts his picture and assists in assembling it” but maintains that that most choices “must be left to the discretion of the assembly department.”[307] Brotherton made her

"surprising effects" comment out of her own experiences. She never worked with Griffith, to whom some critics may try to attribute her insights. Brotherton's career in filmmaking (shooting and editing) started at the Selig Polyscope Company years before he started working at Biograph. The work of women in cutting rooms utilized these principles before Griffith, Pudovkin, Kuleshov, or any other film theorist decided it was worth studying.

"The Assembler Must Decide"

Throughout the essay, Brotherton stresses that the story created in the cutting room was formed from decisions made by women in the department. Directors regularly shot footage that was not in the script, but this reality directly contradicts the line of reasoning advanced by film authorities who claim that the early days of cutting were prescriptive. Brotherton insists this is not the case and stresses that the "assembler must study the story and then decide how to arrange the photographed scenes to the best advantage."[308] Studying the story involves viewing all the raw material and comparing that with the original script, the new footage not included in the script, and "other departures."[309]

Once the assembler is familiar with the story's intended goal and all of the footage that may or may not meet that goal, she decides on the story's final form with the goal to showcase the story to its "best advantage" and "make it stronger."[310] These somewhat nebulous ideas indicate the authority exercised by Brotherton and other women cutters. What is the "best advantage" for a given story? How is a film made stronger? These are subjective decisions, but undoubtedly within the editor's domain. Brotherton writes, "It is often found that a rearrangement will clear up a story markedly and make it stronger. Therefore, much latitude is given the workers in this department."[311] Here, Brotherton not only reiterates the reality of cutters' latitude, but she also confirms that this freedom directly related to the quality of the

finished film. She refers to contemporary discourse which stated that "a picture is made or spoiled in the cutting."[312] She also attributes this freedom to the entire department, not just the chief assembler and certainly not the director. As previously stated in this chapter, she confirms that some directors may cut their own films, but this is most likely a reference to established directors who were involved in filmmaking prior to industrialization and did all of the work themselves.[313] Each woman in the cutting room exercised autonomy in her work, which time and again produced quality pictures.

"Hence, She is Really a Film Editor"

Unlike the film academics of today, Brotherton does not attribute gendered qualities such as "nimble fingers" to the work these women were doing in the editing room. One quality she says is required is patience, specifically "the proverbial patience of Job."[314] Such patience is required, she explains, because the job requires close attention to detail. While detail work has historically been attributed to feminine sensibilities, Brotherton make no indication that she thinks it is a gendered skill.

She segues into commentary on mysterious nature of the work, a far more nuanced explanation than her contemporaries who said women were good at editing because of their small hands. She writes, "There is much detail in the work which the uninitiated cannot understand, for it is hard to explain."[315] The "uninitiated" refers to those who have not done the work of editing. Brotherton herself admits that editing is hard to explain, but she is hardly alone in her assessment. For years, editors have described their work as intuitive, especially after editing was recognized as a creative endeavor. Women who were able to keep their editing jobs would translate this intuition as a uniquely feminine advantage. Editor Anne Bauchens said, "Women are generally more sensitive than men….And I've noticed that in editing a picture, just

as in seeing one, men hold themselves aloof—they're more objective than women."[316] Whether the work has been considered creative or not, notice how a woman's gender has been used or excused to justify her presence. When the work was labeled mechanical, women were perfect for the tedious work. Women framed the stereotypes around women's intuition to their advantage to level the playing field once the work was considered creative (though it was still largely misunderstood). Perhaps the inability to accurately describe the work, an issue Brotherton brings up when she refers to the "uninitiated," has partially impacted historians mislabeling the work of these early women cutters as "mechanical" and "tedious."[317] It is more likely that these associations were due to the workers' gender rather than an inherent understanding of the challenges of editing. Brotherton's essay predates the generations of women who used their femininity to justify their place in the masculinized editing room, so her observations make no such connections. She does, however, refer to an editor's intuition in a separate article—male or female.

In addition to patience, Brotherton believes that dedication is required to understand film editing. She writes, "One must really grow up in the work to grasp what it comprises."[318] Time must be dedicated to the craft to fully comprehend the details and nuance of the cutting process. As if she knew what her contemporaries and future film historians would assume, she goes on the record saying, "Each production is a separate problem and must be worked out as such. There is little routine about it."[319] This comment could be understood as a reaction to the discourse in her day, which assumed the work was standard and mechanical. She worked out the problems of each film by, as previously stated, rearranging the intended order of shots. In addition to rearrangement, the cutting department would see deficits and frequently suggest additional shots and reshoots during the cutting process. She insists that such suggestions are "needed" and "must

be." Again, such suggestions came from the creative judgements of the women in the cutting room. Barbara McLean also talked about this practice of requesting additional shots, something male directors like John Ford took great offense to. This is subtle, but it's important to recognize what is happening. Brotherton is developing film syntax. They were the first to intimately interact with the temporal nature of footage and exercise its impact through juxtaposition, so their insights were greatly needed. She concludes, "The sub-titles are put into their proper place and if any part of the film is obscure, the assembler may suggest additional printed matter. Hence, he or she is really a film editor."[320] Brotherton held the title "chief assembler" for her work at Balboa, but at this point the title of film editor had been developed. It is interesting she draws this comparison, as the newly developed title of "film editor" perhaps carried more clout in the industry. As her expertise predates that development of this designation, she clarifies the tasks, insights, and responsibilities to make sure the readers know the positions are essentially the same. The development of "film editor" as a title came out of Griffith's influence on the industry, but the work never changed. It only received a title fitting for the men who wanted to close in.

Once the women in the cutting department finished editing the film, Brotherton says the next step is to project the film for review. She writes, "Any flaws apparent are then corrected and more runs follow until everything has been straightened out."[321] She does not state who is present for this screening or who determines what is considered a flaw. While a producer may have been present, there is nothing in her statement to indicate that anyone other than the women working in the cutting room would have been present. She emphasizes the influence of her department as "the last word before a picture production leaves the studio and is sent out broadcast for the people to see."[322] She also mentions her department as responsible for "final

inspection."[323] This sentiment is essentially a variation on a saying that circulates in filmmaking discourse—as a filmmaker, three movies are made: the film that is written, the film that is shot, and the film that is edited. Of course, the edited film is the only version that survives for "the people" to see, and women cutters were the last sets of hands crafting the film. While this review process would later become bloated by the inclusion of directors, producers, and even test audiences, the perception of the uninitiated during Brotherton's time was likely that the film would "edit itself," so no supervision would have been necessary. Supervision was certainly not necessary, as editors had developed the techniques for achieving a high-quality movie without the need for directors and producers in the cutting room, so the women went through the process of cuts and drafts on repeat until the film was good, according to their standards.

"The Trouble Department"

Brotherton concludes by reflecting upon another name for her department—the "trouble department."[324] She is upfront about the reason for the nickname, which is to "correct the trouble" caused by the contributors to the films whose work is "found wanting."[325] She does not elaborate on what could be found wanting, but based upon my own experience as a cutter, it could be anything from an unclear story to a bad performance. Once again, identifying that the film is "wanting" is squarely in the editor's realm of discretion. "It must be done and it usually is done," Brotherton continues. "How successfully, the public's reception of the picture decides."[326] Brotherton's filmmaking is not concerned with any self-serving personal expression or adherence to the director or writer's original vision—she just wants a movie that an audience will enjoy. The responsibility rests on her shoulders, for she knows if the movie flops the studio will blame the cutting department. As she puts it, "the cutter is not without honor save in his own studio, since all other workers make a goat of him."[327] If the picture is good, the actors or writers

or the directors are praised. If not, the editor is blamed—all of the responsibility with none of the recognition.

This article is the lynchpin for the work of early women editors. Her writing reveals that it was women doing the early work of cutting. It also verifies that the work they were doing was creative, not mechanical. It was their diligence that launched the industry to commercial success.

Conclusion

Brotherton was a creative and talented cutter. Highlighting her contributions help to reexamine decades of presumption that early women cutters were not creative. In a newspaper interview, the journalist marvels that Brotherton made a habit of attending the movies frequently, when one might assume she would be tired of movies. She said, "I like to watch what the other producers are doing. And strange to say, the way the pictures are put together appeals to me most, although I try not to concentrate on that point. But whenever there is a flaw in the cutting and pasting it jars me just like a discord grates the musician's sensibilities."[328] Her emotional reaction to someone else's cutting style continually verifies that it was not a technical process that was as simple as putting all the scenes in order.

However, lest I repeat the same failings as historians before me, the significance of all the women in the cutting department must be recognized as guiding the film business to success, not just one woman. Brotherton is emblematic of all the working-class women who were hired because producers assumed cutting was in line with their feminine sensibilities. Even still, taking note of how these women acquired and then lost their jobs also reveals who the industry admitted and who was excluded. Though they were young and working-class, these women were white and spoke English, excluding Black women, other women of color, and many immigrants from

consideration. Even as I shed light on the significance of these invisible laborers by highlighting one particularly prolific example, there are even more who were not even represented early in the industry. Going back to my research question as to how studio industrialization affected the contributions of women cutters, we must acknowledge the unspoken narrative of the women who were not hired.

Brotherton spent five years leading the assembly department at one of the most prolific studios in the world, when she wrote a vital essay which detailed her department's postproduction process and its overwhelming presence of women. When we consider how much work she put in while holding a position of influence during a key period in film production history, it is obvious that Brotherton was an industry pioneer. Her first studio was the first to create a permanent studio in California, and the second studio she worked for was situated on the same property that housed the first movie studio to originate in California. Her career was born and grew along with the film industry. In addition to her insights, Brotherton's early induction validates her historical significance.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Because women's historic contributions to post-production have been overlooked, the goal of this dissertation was to investigate how the development of studio industrialization influenced their efforts. These outcomes were determined by using archival methods and articulation. Together, these methods were significant to my evaluation of the industrialized assembly room environment by highlighting the connections among social forces. Data came from primary sources and secondary sources. By articulating secondary sources with primary artifacts, I analyzed the historical context of the field and production methods in the editing room, in contrast to the mainstream film theories, which frequently draw meaning solely from the content of the studied films.

May Brotherton was used as a primary case study, but examples of other early women editors made their way into the study when the data was available. Most information about Brotherton came from primary sources like newspapers and movie trade magazines with interviews of Brotherton, census records, naturalization records, and her 1917 essay “Making the Movies: The Cutting Room.” I collected the some of this information through a variety of online databases including mediahistoryproject.org, ancestry.com, and newspapers.com. After contacting Brotherton's surviving relatives via ancestry.com, they provided the personal records such as census and naturalization records. I also completed a personal review of archival documents from the Historical Society of Long Beach and the Long Beach Public Library. Both institutions carry artifacts on Balboa Studios, where Brotherton worked from 1913 to 1918, primarily newspaper clippings, but also drawings of the original studio site, guest lists for studio banquets, and original photo negatives.

Secondary sources examined production studies and feminist history methodologies with the aim to recognize the achievements of women working in early Hollywood. Many names that would have been lost to history have been rescued thanks to the scholarship of Cari Beauchamp, Erin Hill, and J.E. Smyth. To understand the significance of women's experiences and which women's experiences are being verified, this technique offered a feminist approach to archival research, and helped me to piece together decontextualized fragments from the archives.

Chapter four examined how, due to the early reputation of the film studios as "film factories," women were taken into consideration for departments like the cutting room. Editing practices were in development, so the importance of the work was not yet realized by those in hiring positions. There was domesticized impression of editing, which correlated to the idea that it was also uncreative. In the history of still photography, there had already been instances of women developing images. Finally, since women were cheaper than men, they were the more frugal option for a role that required extensive labor. Men let the women do the task since it seemed to be dull, unpleasant, and endless. Contrary to popular belief, which holds that the development of synchronous sound drove women out of the field of editing, the fact is that men took their place after the task was reclassified in light of its creative potential and financial implications. We then followed Brotherton from Chicago to California where she took a leadership position at the Balboa Amusement Producing Company in Long Beach. Pre-Hollywood, Long Beach was a promising location for film production and Brotherton enjoyed five years leading the assembly department at one of the most prolific studios in the world. There, she was extensively profiled by newspapers and movie magazines and wrote a valuable essay detailing her department’s postproduction process and its overwhelming presence of women. She was, however, the only woman in the "Thick and Thin Club," whose membership

indicated unwavering devotion to the studio. Her first studio was the first to create a permanent studio in California, and the second studio she worked for was situated on the same property that housed the first movie studio to originate in California. Her career was born and grew along with the film industry and her early induction validates her historical significance. when we consider how much work she put in while holding a position of influence during a key period in film production history, it is obvious that Brotherton was an industry pioneer.

Chapter five traced the historical development of early cutting rooms and reconstructed the process and positions in the editing room and then examined the many why women were initially recruited to be cutters as studio systems grew. Early filmmakers cut their own films, but as early as 1903 studios sought to distinguish and streamline their production process for maximum output and profit. In this chapter I also offered an in-depth analysis of her essay from 1917, “Making the Movies.”

Interpretation

Here are the contributions that this dissertation makes to the literature on communication and cultural studies, film history, and feminist historical perspectives. First, May’s work predated the publications of film montage theorists like Kuleshov, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein. Brotherton wrote in 1917, "Most surprising effects can be obtained by judicious cutting." All of the Soviet filmmakers credited Griffith for elevating cinema to the level of art through editing. However, Griffith was usually on set while editors Rose and James Smith worked on the previous day's footage. Su Friedrich built the website "Edited By" after noticing that film history books credited editing innovations to a film's director and not the editor, who was usually a woman. This trend is still pervasive in film discourse today, the most recent example being film director Zack

Snyder's version of his film Justice League being marketed as the Snyder Cut, even though the film's credited editors are David Brenner, ACE; Dody Dorn, ACE; and Carlos Castillon. Brotherton made her "surprising effects" comment out of her own experiences. She never worked with Griffith—her career in editing and camera operation started three years before he started working at Biograph. Had film theorists looked to the cutters for editing insights as opposed to the directors, these women might have escaped obscurity.

Second, this dissertation contributes to the study of communication arts by highlighting the female representation that had a huge impact upon early media industry development. As the early presence of women cutters has not been denied, the conversation around them has usually focused on explaining their initial presence and subsequent absence. Why were these women here and why did they leave? The reasoning is not flattering. At its most offensive, women's presence has been explained by misrepresenting the importance of editing in early assembly rooms. May Brotherton and women like her working in this era undermine our previously held assumptions.

Third, May's work made massive contributions to early cinema, despite being unacknowledged. Her output alone during her years at Balboa alone demonstrates her proficiency, but she also shared her thoughts and insights about her work. May Brotherton insisted that early women cutters were the final story authorities of a film. Directors regularly shot footage not in the script, but this reality contradicts those who insist that early cutters simply arranged shots in the order dictated by the script. She stressed that the "assembler must study the story and then decide how to arrange the photographed scenes to the best advantage."[329] Studying the story involves viewing all the raw material and comparing it with the original script, but ultimately deciding its final form. Her aim is to showcase the story to its "best

advantage" and "make it stronger." [330] These somewhat nebulous ideas indicate the autonomy exercised by Brotherton and other women cutters. What is the “best advantage” for a given story? How is a film made stronger? These are incredibly subjective decisions, but undoubtedly within the editor’s domain. Brotherton writes, “It is often found that a rearrangement will clear up a story markedly and make it stronger. Therefore, much latitude is given the workers in this department.” And never mind utilizing unplanned footage—shot duration and juxtaposition to other shots produce different tones, impressions, and rhythms. Two different cutters with the same footage never make the same movie.

Fourth, this dissertation provides the only comprehensive list of the steps in the early cutting process by pulling from primary and secondary sources, dated roughly between 1896 and 1922. Key positions were specified in this rough outline of the industrialized cutting department's structure and organization, and it also shed light on the creativity of women in any one of the postproduction positions from joiner to inspector.

Fifth, this dissertation links film cutting to creative activity as a constant in film history rather than as a case-by-case argument. Often labeled tedious and mechanical, film theorists and historians misrepresented the creative aspects of their work, partially due to ignorance. Using Brotherton as a case study quickly undermines this thinking. She discussed the mysterious nature of film cutting, writing, “There is much detail in the work which the uninitiated cannot understand, for it is hard to explain.”[331] The “uninitiated” of course, being those who have not done the work of editing. The "uninitiated" were put in hiring roles where they recruited women for cutting room occupations as a result of studio industrialization. As I research Brotherton’s life and career, I see the "uninitiated" as decades of film historians. Without personal cutting experience, historians do not understand the work, much less how to explain it. All Brotherton’s

published reflections on her work dismantled the assumptions that early women editors were "dexterous" but “not creative.” These working-class women established film syntax for narrative films, which launched the industry to success.

The sixth and final contribution brings me a lot of personal satisfaction—this dissertation recovers an editor who is *not* attached to a particular director. The pioneering female editors who have earned recognition throughout the years were often made famous by their affiliation with a well-known male director—Anne Bauchens with Cecil B. DeMille, Thelma Schoonmaker with Martin Scorsese, Sally Menke with Quentin Tarantino, Svilova with Vertov—the list goes on. The renown and celebrity of male directors—a result of an emphasis on auteur theory—overshadows the contributions of the women in the editing rooms. I was able to study May independently, not because of some adjacent curiosity that still primarily propped up a male director.

In my research, I use the pioneering film editor May Brotherton as a case study to explore how studio industrialization in early Hollywood influenced the contributions of women post-production workers. Early industry development recruited women for cheap labor and then forced them out once film editing was recognized as creative. The uninformed speculations on women’s subsequent absence from studios are galling. Some said the reason women stopped cutting film in studios was because it took many years to get proficient, the implication being that most women did not remain in the workforce long enough before getting married and having children. However, this reason is patently false since women originated those departments and almost exclusively performed the work, which resulted in overwhelming success for the film industry. The more ridiculous and common reason that I have read is a blatant misunderstanding of the editing job in those early years. Many claim that the work was somehow inherently

different and therefore more suitable to women, but once the process became seemingly more sophisticated between longer narrative pieces and synchronized sound, many assumed that the presence of women in early editing rooms proved that the work was somehow uncreative. But they were the first to intimately interact with the temporal nature of footage and exercise its impact through juxtaposition. As a result, according to Brotherton, the cutting department would see deficits and frequently suggest additional angles and reshoots while cutting. This is how film syntax was developed, transforming cinema into an art form. These achievements inspired film theorists, but recognition of the craft's importance resulted in two bad outcomes: their brilliance was ultimately credited to male directors, and men were hired to replace women in the editing rooms. Women did not choose to leave the editing room—they were forced out.

Limitations

The primary limitations are similar to other endeavors in uncovering early studio-era film: partial data and implicit biases. The first way that data was limited was in its omission of nonwhite women in the cutting rooms of burgeoning studios. Most sources tend to verify the overwhelming whiteness of these spaces but identifying the Black women who may have cut for these studios or for Black filmmakers like William Foster or Oscar Micheaux would have enriched my analysis.

Limited data were available to learn more about Brotherton's cutting career after 1918. She continued to be a cutter but by the time it was the 1940s, the census record indicates that she was a negative cutter and family records indicate she remained geographically close to her family, there is a good chance that she also worked for Universal Studios with her brother Joe

Brotherton. I know that Brotherton was eventually a negative cutter, which was a more mechanical process, but I do not know what led to this shift or how she felt about it.

The data was limited to women cutters in the United States, though the writing of Karen Pearlman on women cutters in the Soviet Union indicates that perceptions of editing and the opportunities available to women may have been similar internationally. The Labor Standards Act of 1947 in Japan, which prohibited women from working overtime, on weekends, or on holidays, seems to have been one of the reasons that led to the exclusion of women from the cutting room, although I was only able to gather that information through conversations with other film historians—I did not find that material in any publications, nor did it come up in any clear way in my research on Brotherton.

Future Research

Future research should seek the earliest instance of Black women and other racial minorities in industrialized editing rooms. Did they make it in the rooms before white women started getting fired? Lillian Benson was first African American female editor admitted to the ACE and she is still living and working. As in other professional industries, this early discrimination delayed admittance for African American women in the cutting room until living memory. While it is likely that some early women filmmakers Alice B. Russell and Zora Neale Hurston may have cut their own films, the data to verify this was not available.

In future projects, I would like to seek out data that tracks Brotherton's career after Balboa. Despite my thorough searches of online and in-person archives, I was not able to uncover this information. However, I have several prospects to discover more information. I plan to look through UCLA's archives to see where she went once Balboa closed to figure out which

studios she worked for. One lead is a 1929 issue of *American Cinematographer* magazine that mentions her brother Joseph Brotherton as a member of the American Society of Cinematographers and his place of employment as Universal Studios.

It is my hope that other academics will apply my analysis of women cutters internationally to discover the differences and similarities in cutting room hiring practices across the world.

Final Thoughts

Only thirteen women have won the Academy Award for Best Editing. Understanding the history of women in cutting rooms can provide crucial background for examining the craft today and how it is represented. The belief is director's cuts is as prevalent as ever and this mindset subtly undermines the contributions of the editors, especially considering the craft's historic roots as a woman's occupation.

The more that I learn about Brotherton, the more curious I am as to why she has not been held up and celebrated. Perhaps it was because she was a woman. Perhaps it was because she selected to align herself with studios that were ultimately unsuccessful. Perhaps it was due to the skill of editing not being held in the artistic regard that it should have. My own interest in this topic comes in part from my education in industry studies and feminist studies, where I read the research of Cari Beauchamp, Erin Hill, and J.E. Smyth. My initial motivation, however, was driven by my own experiences as a professional video editor. Through my own agency as an editor, I discovered the impact of postproduction on the filmmaking and story process. It results in the third—but more importantly, the final—version of the film, with the first two versions being the script from the screenwriter and the second being raw footage from the production

crew. While many of my male and female colleagues encouraged my insights and creativity, one incident with the human resources department deeply affected me. When my supervisor informed the human resources director that my title and salary needed to reflect my creative contributions, she replied in an email, “Her job duties are more mechanical in nature, using the software primarily, thus she’s using little imagination, originality or invention while performing her editing duties.” While the matter was eventually resolved, I was struck by the parallels between the uninformed impressions of my work and the impressions of those who recruited young women to assemble reels of film over one hundred years ago. Many just have no idea what is required within the field of editing.

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