When the movie business adopted some of the ways of other big industries in 1920s America, women—who had been essential to the industry's early development—were systematically squeezed out of key behind-the-camera roles. Yet, as female producers and directors virtually disappeared for decades, a number of female film editors remained and rose to the top of their profession, sometimes wielding great power and influence. Their example inspired a later generation of women to enter the profession at mid-century, several of whom were critical to revolutionizing filmmaking in the 1960s and 1970s with contributions to such classics as *Bonnie and Clyde, Jaws* and *Raging Bull*. Focusing on nine of these women and presenting shorter glimpses of nine others, this book tells their captivating personal stories and examines their professional achievements.

A lifelong student of films, DAVID MEUEL has also published more than 100 poems, numerous short stories, and hundreds of articles on subjects ranging from theater to U.S. national parks, to writing and speaking for business. He lives in Menlo Park, California.

Front cover: Anne Bauchens, first female film editor both to be nominated for and to win an Academy Award (Paramount Pictures); background © 2016 iStock

McFarland

MEUEL Women Film Editors

WOMEN FILM EDITORS

Unseen Artists of American Cinema

DAVID MEUEL

 by DAVID MEVEL

From here, we slowly dissolve to the next scene. Again, it is the bow of the boat, but a little time has passed. The remaining six characters sit around each other, all spent, subdued, in a bit of shock, and trying to absorb what has just happened and how they came to do it. The cutting returns to the pace it has been for most of the story.

From the fade in until the dissolve out, this scene runs about nine and quarter minutes, consists of about 60 separate shots, and is a masterpiece of pacing and cutting. The cutting between shots begins slowly, picks up as Willi prepares to and eventually does push Gus overboard, and quickens as the other characters learn about Gus's death and Willi's hoarding of water, building to a moment of climax. Then, there's the release—the long and very disturbing single shot in which the others gang up on Willi and kill him. Finally, there's even a mini-denouement—a last, relatively brief shot showing Gus's shoe falling from Rittenhouse's hand to the deck of the boat, a subtle suggestion that the civilized people who thought they were above murder have also fallen.

Altogether, this scene is a highlight in a film that's superbly crafted throughout. And, while Hitchcock was clearly at the helm of this production, Spencer's great sense of knowing exactly where to cut for maximum effect clearly had an impact. Without her, neither this scene nor this film would have been quite the same.

A Special Stamp

Calling Spencer "a consummate studio craftsperson," writer Peter Flynn has noted that "her competence in the field, her success within the industry, and her devotion to her craft remain uncontested."[8]

Looking at films Spencer worked on 40, 60, and 80 years ago, it is totally understandable that so many great directors wanted to work with her. Even supremely confident people such as Ford, Hitchcock, Lubitsch, and Mankiewicz sought her out because—as they knew as well as anyone else—her editing choices often gave their films a special truth and vitality. And they appreciated that. While not a great innovator who changed the art of editing, she nevertheless had a special stamp that she put on each film she collaborated on. And, if it is true that films really are made or destroyed in the editing room, her impact on U.S. film history really has been immense.

6

The Revolutionary

Dede Allen Upends American Film Editing in the 1960s and 1970s

"If I have to get up and pee," Hollywood mogul Jack Warner told director Arthur Penn before seeing Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* at a private screening prior to the film's 1967 release, "I'll know it's a lousy movie."[1]

As Penn reported many years later, not only did the crusty 75-year-old studio head get up before the end of the film's first reel but he was also up several more times before the film had finished. "He didn't like it, didn't understand it, didn't get it," Penn said. "It was the beginning of a dark time, because it was clear that, if he didn't like it, it was going to get dumped.[2]

Among his many complaints with *Bonnie and Clyde*, Warner had a special disdain for the film's editing. From the very first live-motion shot, when viewers see only a young woman's painted red lips in extreme close-up, the experience seemed alien, confusing, and probably very amateurish to him. "Why begin there?" he must have been wondering. "Lips don't tell the viewer anything about where or when this is supposed to be."

Warner's displeasure was certainly understandable. For more than half a century, he (and nearly everyone else) had watched films that told the story in a very particular, and usually very literal, way, the classical Hollywood editing style. Developed by D.W. Griffith and others in the 1910s, this style called for editors to follow certain conventions when cutting films, conventions that soon became hard and fast rules the entire industry adhered to: gospel. Individual scenes, for example, should begin with establishing shots, usually long shots that identified the setting for viewers, and then progress to a mix of medium and close shots. Any change to another time or place should be signaled by a dissolve or fade.

Sound from one scene should never overlap into another. And so on. Although these conventions often slowed the pace of a film, people continued to use them because they assumed that viewers needed these visual cues to sufficiently understand the film's action.

Now, as he watched *Bonnie and Clyde*, Warner saw these and countless other "rules" repeatedly—and almost defiantly—broken. There was even talk that, if the project were to continue at all, the editor should be fired and the film re-cut.

Penn and *Bonnie and Clyde*'s producer/star, Warren Beatty, were adamant in their opposition to compromising their vision for the film, however, and eventually prevailed. The two were also so impressed with the film's editing (which they considered brilliant and highly innovative) that—in recognition of this contribution—they lobbied hard to assure that the editor received a separate title card in the opening credits. Again, they prevailed, and, for first time ever in a Hollywood feature film, an editor—the person who for decades had shared semi-anonymity on a group title card with other contributors ranging from a film's costumer to its make-up specialist—had been so honored.

The person at the center of this post-production firestorm was 43-year-old Dede Allen (1923–2010), a 20-year film industry veteran, who, after a long apprenticeship in such jobs as a production "messenger girl," editing assistant, sound editor, and editor of television commercials and industrial shorts, had edited only a handful of feature films. Her big break had come in 1959 when director Robert Wise asked her to cut his gritty film noir *Odds Against Tomorrow*. She then followed up with highly praised work on Robert Rossen's *The Hustler* (1961) and Elia Kazan's *America America* (1963). And, while these films—*The Hustler*, in particular—showed signs that Allen was not only a fine editor but also a major new editorial stylist, many people were simply not ready for her breakthrough in *Bonnie and Clyde*.

Her work on that film was—without exaggeration—revolutionary. It integrated numerous aspects of the French New Wave movement and other innovative foreign films, her own work in sound editing and television commercial editing, and traditional feature film editing techniques to create something groundbreaking and—for millions of enthusiastic film viewers—breathtaking. Gone were many of the time-honored literal conventions of the classical Hollywood editing style. And in their place were a plethora of different (and often non-literal) storytelling techniques from the use of slow motion mixed with regular action (to distort time or emphasize critical moments) to "pre-lapping" sound (the introduction

of sound from a film's next scene into the last moments of the current scene in order to speed action), rapid-fire cutting within scenes (to intensify action and build drama), to "shock" cuts (abrupt, jarring, and unexpected changes between scenes that are intended to jolt the viewer). In addition to drawing upon new storytelling techniques, Allen, as she had done in her previous films, used editing whenever she could to bring more nuance and depth to characters. To do this, she often retrieved previously overlooked or discarded bits of film—an actress's insecure glance or an actor's surprised reaction—that provided just a bit more information to enrich the cinematic moment. As film scholar Hope Anderson has written, "*Bonnie and Clyde* features superb acting, directing and cinematography, but the editing makes it a masterpiece."[3]

Drawing upon numerous influences ranging from French New Wave films to 1950s American television commercials, Dede Allen helped transform and revitalize American film editing in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of her most respected work is in films such as *The Hustler* (1961), *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), and *Reds* (1981) (Photofest).

Almost immediately, others began to imitate the film and its editing style. Soon, in technique as well as sensibility, American films became very different from what they had been just a few short years before. And, as film editors began to enjoy new creative freedoms and revel in the prospects of expanded possibilities, they also received enhanced status. As film writer Claudia Luther has noted, "[In *Bonnie and Clyde*], Allen raised the level of her craft to an art form that was as seriously discussed as cinematography or even directing."[4]

For the next two decades, Allen continued to push the limits of her art in films not only for Penn (1970's *Little Big Man*, 1975's *Night Moves*, and three other films) but also for other auteur directors such as Sidney Lumet (1973's *Serpico* and 1975's *Dog Day Afternoon*) and George Roy Hill (1972's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and 1977's *Slap Shot*). In addition, she worked on major films for some of the industry's most respected actor/directors such as Paul Newman (1968's *Rachel, Rachel*), Warren Beatty (1981's *Reds*), and Robert Redford (1988's *The Milagro Beanfield War*).

After an executive stint as head of post-production for Warner Brothers for most of the 1990s, Allen returned to editing, working on Curtis Hanson's *Wonder Boys* (2000) and several other films until she was well into her 80s. In all, she edited or co-edited about 30 films over nearly a half century. And along the way she received numerous honors for her work, including the prestigious Crystal Award from Women in Film in 1982 and the Career Achievement Award from American Cinema Editors in 1994.

Although Allen received Academy Award nominations for her editing work in *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Reds*, and *Wonder Boys*, she never won an Oscar. In fact, she wasn't even nominated for her work on *The Hustler* or on *Bonnie and Clyde*, perhaps her two most impressive and influential achievements. She often attributed this to what she saw as the Hollywood community's prejudice against filmmakers on the East Coast, where she was often based. But this lack of Oscar appreciation could also be due to the nature of much of her earlier work, which was so radically new that it took many people time to understand and appreciate its power and value.

Coming into her own professionally during the 1960s, a decade of enormous upheaval for American films, Allen was a true editing revolutionary: a person who literally transformed her art by integrating her own sensibilities and experiences deeply into her editing process, by innovating relentlessly, by helping to break down the strict adherence to the more literal classical editing style, by freeing other editors to think differently and explore the storytelling possibilities of their art more fully, and by inspiring the next generation of superstar editors from Walter Murch to Michael Kahn, to Thelma Schoonmaker. She was—and remains—one of the all-time editorial greats.

"I wouldn't let it go if I thought I could make it better."

"I think I developed my interest in film because my mother had been an actress," Allen observed late in her life. "[She] took me to the movies a lot because she loved them. When I lived with her—which was not that often—we would go all the time."[5]

In those three short sentences, Allen revealed much about an unusual childhood that shaped her adult life in numerous ways.

Born Dorothea Carothers Allen on December 3, 1923, in Cincinnati, she was named after her mother, a theater actress who had quit the stage

under pressure when she married Dede's father, a Union Carbide executive named Thomas H.C. Allen III. The marriage was both unhappy and short-lived. When Dede was just three, her mother traveled to Europe (without Thomas), settled in Paris, and placed Dede and her sister, Manette, in a boarding school in the Swiss Alps. A year later, Thomas was killed in an automobile accident, and Dorothea stayed in Paris, keeping her daughters in the boarding school for another six years. Although young Dede loved her life at the school, she eventually realized that she had—for all intents and purposes—been "orphaned."[6]

After these years and until she went to college, Dede lived with her mother for short periods of time, but more often than not other relatives took care of her. "My mother was like a Gypsy," Allen once said. "She loved to move on. She loved to travel and she wasn't very much into raising kids."[7] During those times when she stayed with her mother, however, one experience both enjoyed sharing was the movies. "In Tryon, North Carolina, they changed the movie almost every day," Allen recalled. "We were down there for a winter and I went to the movies every day."[8]

Back in Cincinnati during her teens, Allen attended College Preparatory School, where she met a teacher named Ruthie Jones. According to Allen, Jones, who became a kind of surrogate mother during these years, had a "tremendous effect" on her and what eventually became her very liberal political thinking.[9]

After graduating from College Preparatory School, Allen went to Scripps College in Claremont, California. There she took a basic liberal arts curriculum, focusing on architecture and taking courses in subjects such as weaving and pottery.

During these years, Allen's interest in films remained passionate, and in 1943, when she had finished at Scripps, she persuaded her grandfather to call in a favor from a family friend, a director at Columbia Pictures named Elliot Nugent. Happy to help, Nugent had her hired as a part-time "messenger girl" at the studio, a job that Allen greatly appreciated in later years because it gave her access to virtually all the studio's many departments and turned into an extremely valuable learning experience. Soon, she moved into the sound department, where she worked as an assistant, recalling that—as preparation for her work as a film editor—this was "the best thing that ever happened to me."[10]

In 1945, however, Allen took a break from her film career when she married filmmaker Stephen Fleischman and, in 1946, the two moved to Europe for his work. During this time, Allen (who remained "Allen" after her marriage) worked as a translator.

In 1951, Allen and Fleischman returned to the U.S., Stephen went to work as a producer for CBS-TV in New York, and their son Thomas was born. (They also had a daughter, Ramey.) During the next few years, Allen worked at a variety of jobs around New York, mainly as a sound editor for television commercials and industrial films. Part of what impressed her about this work, especially the commercials, was their staccato pace and startling sound and visual shifts. In commercials, a great deal of information usually had to be crammed into a very small amount of time, and people putting them together were employing techniques that were strikingly different from standard 1950s filmmaking. This experience would prove hugely influential in her later work.

Meanwhile, Allen's work had also impressed a sound editor named Dick Vorisek, who recommended her for a job that would prove to be her big break: as film editor on *Odds Against Tomorrow*, a noir crime drama director Robert Wise was making in New York. The prospect of working with Wise—who had risen to fame 18 years earlier when he edited Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* and soon gone on to become a highly respected director in his own right—was at first quite intimidating for the first-time feature film editor. "I was terrified," Allen said. "But we had a wonderful relationship. I adored Bob; he was a wonderful man."[11] Part of what Allen admired about Wise was his enthusiasm for her risk taking, something that made her "juices flow."[12] The fast pace of her cutting (something she had learned from her work on commercials) had greatly impressed him, and he encouraged her to continue to experiment.

Considering that she was just beginning as a film editor, Allen's work on *Odds Against Tomorrow* is quite confident and distinctive. One contribution she made to this film that would soon became a signature technique is the pre-lapping of sound over visuals: just a split second before the scene changes we hear a significant sound from the next scene. As well as speeding the action just a bit, this pre-lapping also served to ease some of the transitions while also heightening the contrasts between others. One of numerous examples of the latter is the cut between a quiet shot of a front door to a boisterous merry-go-round at the park, with just a split second of merry-go-round noise over the front door. Another contribution was Allen's fast cutting in certain scenes to increase tension and intensify drama. One scene when this is especially effective is the first time the three main characters (played by Robert Ryan, Harry Belafonte, and Ed Begley, Sr.) meet to discuss the robbery they are planning. Here, the rapid cutting between the characters both emphasizes the hostility between Ryan's racist character and Belafonte's African-American and the anxiety

Begley's character feels, knowing, that for their robbery to succeed, he needs these two men to get along. Still another contribution is the deliberately slow pacing as the three men wait for the appointed time of the robbery. All essentially sit around, waiting, waiting. As viewers, we feel their growing tension acutely. We want this waiting to be over almost as much as they do.

As these scenes suggest, *Odds Against Tomorrow* also gives us a very early glimpse of another of Allen's editorial strengths: an ability to draw something extra out of actors' performances by the timing and ordering of cutting. She was a master at this. "I love actors," she once said. "I think it helped having come from a theatre background, because of my mother.... I am very much an actor's editor and a director's editor. And it takes a lot of patience. You go through the stuff and find these little jewels and gems and then you put them together in a certain way and it becomes something else. It takes perseverance. I wouldn't let it go if I thought I could make it better."[13]

On another occasion, Allen took this subject even further, revealing some intriguing aspects of her work process. "When I start cutting a movie, I always cut with ambivalence," she observed, continuing:

> I have a definite intention, a definite starting point: the thematic function of the scene, the psychology of the characters, etc. But, when I become absorbed in the material, I suddenly see all the possibilities the material contains—the unexpected, intended, and unintended possibilities. I can't help wandering into the material. I milk the material for all the small possibilities I see in it—a look, a smile I see after the director has said "Cut," an unintentional juxtaposition of two images. Afterwards, I form a general view again. But it is in the ambivalence, in the collision between the general strategy and the pleasant abstractions along the way that constitutes editing as art.[14]

~

In addition to the attention she gave both her family and her work in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Allen began to pay more attention to the growing number of fresh, innovative foreign films flowing into the U.S. during this period. For her—as well as many other Americans attracted to new and different filmmaking styles and sensibilities—these were thrilling times. From the U.K., for example, came films of stark realism such as Tony Richardson's *Look Back in Anger* (1959) and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962). From France, there were the "New Wave" films such as Jean Luc Godard's *Breathless*, which—in their efforts to open up the possibilities of visual storytelling—broke many of the seemingly sacred rules of traditional editing. From Sweden, came Ingmar Bergman's films of existential angst. From Italy, there were Federico Fellini's idiosyncratic

blends of bizarre fantasy, baroque images, and earthy humor. And from Japan came Akira Kurosawa's stylish, highly distinctive tales that often evoked mythical pasts.

As they did for many other Americans, these and other foreign films both energized Allen, giving her a better sense of the medium's enormous untapped potential, and dampened her enthusiasm for conventional Hollywood efforts, which increasingly seemed old fashioned and out of touch. Looking back to many of the major U.S. releases at this time, it's difficult to disagree. They were largely a mix of tired westerns, bloated historical epics, even more bloated musicals, and strangely regressive sex comedies often starring Doris Day and Rock Hudson. If filmmaking around the world is changing so radically, Allen must have thought, it can happen here as well.

It would, however, be a couple of years until she could follow through on turning this wish into a reality. After *Odds Against Tomorrow*, Allen had to go back to commercials and industrial films. Then, in 1961, veteran director Robert Rossen hired her to edit his edgy, craftily subversive drama, *The Hustler*.

Allen's work on *The Hustler*, a similarly dark but otherwise very different kind of film from *Odds Against Tomorrow*, was—especially when we take her relative lack of film editing experience into account—quite notable. In addition to her use of pre-lapping sound to bridge many key scene transitions, she also created several amazing montages highlighted by long, lingering dissolves between scenes to convey the seemingly endless days and nights the film's characters spend in dark, claustrophobic pool halls. As viewers, we feel that we're right there with these people, experiencing the long, long sessions. Film writer Kevin Lewis has called this "a remarkable feat" considering that the film was shot in wide screen Cinema-Scope, which he added was "no friend to intimate moments."[15] Allen was also excellent at fleshing out the film's two main characters played by Paul Newman and Piper Laurie, showing in wordless reaction shots the many sides of this sad, vulnerable, highly insecure couple as well as the fragility of their tender but doomed relationship.

In commenting on Allen's work on *The Hustler*, film scholar Greg S. Faller has also cited both the new British films such as *Look Back in Anger* as well as the French New Wave films such as *Breathless* as key influences. "The realism of the British school and the radical editing of the French school made strong impressions..." he has written. "*The Hustler* employs a [style derived from both]: lengthy two-shots, unexpected shot/reverse-shot patterns, and strategically placed 'jump cuts....' The combination of these two schools and the focus on character over a seamless narrative flow gives *The Hustler* its unique quality of realism and modernism."[16]

Allen must have impressed Paul Newman as well, because seven years later the actor asked her to edit his first directorial effort, 1968's *Rachel, Rachel*. Here, Allen again does a wonderful job of mixing sound—particularly atmospheric sound—with the visuals, minimal music, and strategic silences to create the sad and empty world of the main character, a lonely school teacher named Rachel (beautifully portrayed by Joanne Woodward). Interesting here is Allen's respect for silence as well as sound as a critical storytelling component in film. "Sound and silence are so important in a film," she has noted. Coming out of sound "helped me become a better picture editor."[17] In addition, Allen's sensitive cutting also gives resonance to the periodic flashbacks that let viewers in on key events in Rachel's life.

In addition to working on several more projects for Arthur Penn after *Bonnie and Clyde* (which we'll look at in some depth later in this chapter), Allen spent the 1970s working with great success with other directors such as George Roy Hill and Sidney Lumet. Among these collaborations, two of the three films she edited for Lumet are clearly standouts.

The first is 1973's *Serpico*, the story of real-life New York undercover policeman Frank Serpico. As film writer Hope Anderson has noted, the Allen imprint is unmistakable here from the opening credits when we hear blaring sirens, a rhythmic beating sound, and the sound of someone struggling to breathe; see a close-up of Al Pacino's bleeding face; and then realize that the rhythmic sound (which reminds us of a heartbeat) is actually the sound of the windshield wipers of the car taking his injured character to the hospital. "Plunging headlong into the story's emotional center was Dede Allen's signature," Anderson wrote. "Though the decision to open the film with the immediate aftermath of the shooting was probably in the script, the heart-pounding elements—pre-lapping sound and rapid cutting—were purely editorial."[18]

While her work on *Serpico* certainly reinforced Allen's standing as a bold innovator, her work on her next Lumet project, *Dog Day Afternoon*, was in many respects even more significant. Here, as Faller observes, she "continued to refine her editorial signature (audio shifts, shock cutting, and montage) ... especially the temporal and spatial shifts."[19] One striking example of her work in action is the film's famous "Attica" moment, when Al Pacino's bank robber protagonist incites a crowd by referring to an episode of law enforcement brutality that had recently taken place at New York's Attica prison. Coming after the film's fairly subdued opening, this

scene—a few moments of great energy and chaos—explodes on the screen. To reinforce the fragility of this situation, the mounting tension, and the potential for violence, Allen overlaps audio and cuts rapidly—and often disruptively—between various people (both outside and indoors) and even to a helicopter flying overhead. Even 40 years after the film's initial release, this scene remains very strong stuff.

While it's irresistible to focus on Allen's bold stylistic touches in *Dog Day Afternoon*, it's important to not overlook—especially in the early and mid–1970s, an era known for its self-conscious filmmaking flourishes—that she never sacrificed character to style. And, in *Dog Day Afternoon*—despite its often dramatic editing—her focus throughout is on character. Both Pacino's Sonny and his fellow bank robber Sal (John Cazale), the film's two main roles, are handled beautifully, Allen's editing often revealing additional facets to their already multi-dimensional characters. She is particularly good, for example, at bringing out Sonny's incredible frustration with various developments as shown in Pacino's body language and Sal's naïve, deeply troubled, dysfunctional personality as shown in Cazale's. She also does a wonderful job of showing both the deep feeling in—and the impossibility of—the relationship between Sonny and his gender-conflicted "wife" Leon (Chris Sarandon) in the one interaction, a telephone conversation, they have in the film. Faller also notes how Allen's sometimes unconventional editorial choices in this scene "intensified their performances."[20]

For her work on *Dog Day Afternoon*, Allen—at age 52—finally received an Academy Award nomination. Unfortunately, though, she was up against some stiff competition that year, including Verna Fields' work on Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*, which ultimately won.

For the rest of the 1970s, Allen continued to work with familiar directors such as Penn (1975's *Night Moves* and 1976's *The Missouri Breaks*), Hill (1977's *Slap Shot*), and Lumet (1978's *The Wiz*), bringing her distinctive style to the western, sports, and musical genres.

Then, at the end of the decade, Allen tackled a film epic that would prove to be an epic experience for her as well. As had happened with actor Paul Newman after she had worked with him on *The Hustler,* Warren Beatty, the star of *Bonnie and Clyde*, asked her to edit a major film he planned to direct—a love story set against the 1917 Russian Revolution, 1981's *Reds*. Partnering with (and effectively mentoring) a younger editor named Craig McKay, Allen, from a logistical standpoint, was taking on her biggest challenge ever. Overseeing a team of more than 60 assistants, Allen and McKay edited six or seven days a week for two years—a huge

undertaking even by the standards of big three- and four-hour-long Hollywood epics.

In addition to the immense size of their task, Allen and McKay had an additional and quite unusual challenge with *Reds*: to successfully interweave interviews with elderly survivors of the era (often people who had actually known the story's characters) with the dramatic narrative. This was a risky venture, and the result could have been choppy and pretentious. But Allen and McKay managed to pull it off, introducing these "witnesses" at the very beginning of the film and incorporating their memories and observations, often commenting on characters or developments in the story, at just the right times. It's a very complex undertaking that ultimately appears seamless.

Allen and McKay also had all the challenges people normally have with epics—foremost among these to make sure that the large historical events depicted in the film don't overwhelm the intimate personal story. The pair managed this delicate balance as well. The love story between Beatty's John Reed and Diane Keaton's Louise Bryant has real complexity and more than holds its own in the larger story. The editing of Keaton's not-always-likable character is especially sensitive as well, helping to give the portrayal added depth and poignancy.

For their work on *Reds* Allen and McKay were nominated for both an editing Academy Award and the American Cinema Editors (ACE) Eddie Award for best editing on a feature film. Again, she lost, this time to Michael Kahn, who won both awards that year for his work on Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, Allen stayed busy editing a variety of films for directors as diverse as John Hughes, Robert Redford, Philip Kaufman, and Barry Sonnenfeld. While she continued to deliver polished work in her distinctive style, her work increasingly seemed less radical because, simply put, so many other editors were imitating her. Her style had become the norm. She continued to experiment, however. In Kaufman's *Henry and June* (1990), for example, she played with fades and partial fades in quite interesting ways to distort time and point of view.[21]

In 1992, Allen made a major career shift, moving from editing to an executive post as head of post-production for Warner Brothers. By the late 1990s, however, the creative challenges of editing lured her back to the editor's suite, and she worked on five more films between 2000 and 2008. Of these, perhaps the most notable was her contribution to Curtis Hanson's quirky drama *Wonder Boys* (2000). While not as groundbreaking as her earlier work, the film's editing still "works beautifully," according

to Hope Anderson. "[B]eginning with the opening frame, [we see] a blur of colors over which bells and murmuring voices can be heard," Anderson wrote. "As the scene comes into focus, we see an academic quadrangle through rain-speckled glass and hear Michael Douglas's voiceover, which begins as the reading of a short story and veers into witty commentary. In *Wonder Boys* the story begins just before our arrival; the fact that we're immediately in the thick of it says everything about her [Allen's] genius."[22]

For her work on *Wonder Boys*, Allen received her third and final Academy Award nomination. Once again, though, Oscar eluded her. That year she lost to Stephen Mirrione for his work on Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic*.

~

With the focus usually on Allen's innovative technique, emphasis on character, and contributions to transforming the way American films are edited, many people overlook another important facet of her work: her long history of mentoring talented young editors. In addition to Craig McKay, who partnered with her on *Reds*, these have included several editors, such as Steven Rotter, Jim Miller, and Robert Brakey, who have gone on to successful careers.

When once asked about this practice, Allen responded with a story from her early years in the business. "I remember I was working as an assistant to a man who shall remain nameless, trying to anticipate what he might need next," she said. "I remember him turning around and saying, 'Young lady, would you mind *never ever* looking over my shoulder…! It's taken me a great many years to learn this craft, and I don't intend to have young people like you come in and think you can learn it overnight.'" Allen continued, adding: "I believe whatever I've learned, I've learned from someone else, and it's up to me to pass it on—because we're here, and we're gone. I have a loyalty. People work very hard for you."[23]

In evaluating his experience with Allen, McKay confirmed that this indeed was the person he knew. "When I worked with Dede," he said, "she was willing—and wanted—to hear what I had to say and what I could contribute; I think that was the case for most of the people she worked with…. She helped create a lot of very successful careers."[24]

~

Just as Allen learned from bad professional experiences, she followed a similar path in her personal life. Disturbed by the pressure put on her mother to give up her acting career for marriage, her parents' unhappy

relationship, and her mother's lack of interest in her and her sister when they were children, Allen mapped out a very different course for herself. She and her husband remained a two-career couple throughout most of their happy 65-year marriage, balancing jobs with parental responsibilities. And she cultivated very close relationships with her two children, both of whom—no doubt inspired by Allen and their father—became involved with film business. Daughter Ramey Ward became a producer, writer, and production coordinator. And son Tom Fleischman became a sound editor. Tom, who has done sound work on such highly regarded films as *Goodfellas* (1990), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *The Departed* (2006), even surpassed his mother in one respect: In 2012, for his sound work on Martin Scorsese's *Hugo*, he won an Academy Award.

In addition to leading the kind of life she wanted for herself, Allen—believing that forthright talk can lead to increased awareness and change—was never hesitant to talk about the difficulties women typically faced in the film business. "I came out of a period that you just didn't take a job from a man," she once remarked. "You just didn't. It was a sin."[25]

Once employed as a "messenger girl" at Columbia, however, Allen wasn't shy about seeking advancement and soon set her sights on opportunities in editing. "When I finally pestered my way into the cutting room, I carried more film cans and swore more than anyone else," she recalled. "That way I proved myself. I felt the men accepted me." And, she added, "[A]s a woman, I can tell you I had to work harder to prove I was equal."[26]

When asked in her mid–80s if she felt she had inspired younger woman with her example, Allen (no doubt with her tongue in her cheek) shared an anecdote. In the 1970s, when she was in her 50s and solidly established in the industry, she gave a seminar at Ohio State University. "It was just when women's liberation was happening. There were two young women sitting in the front with their feet on the rail, kind of defiant," she said, perhaps sensing that these women might be viewing her as a dinosaur. "One of them said to me, 'What do you know about women's lib?' I laughed and said, 'I beg your pardon. I *am* women's lib.'"[27]

~

Despite her Oscar disappointments, Allen nevertheless received numerous awards and recognitions for her work. Just a few of the honors include a Crystal Award from Women in Film for helping "to expand the role of women within the entertainment industry"[28] in 1982, an ACE Lifetime Achievement Award in 1994, a Hollywood Film Festival award in 1999, and a Las Vegas Film Critics Association Career Achievement Award

in 2000. The Crystal Award, which is given each year to women throughout the film industry, has to date honored only three other film editors, Margaret Booth, Verna Fields, and Anne V. Coates.

Continuing to work until she was 84, Allen suffered a stroke on April 14, 2010, and died at her home in Los Angeles on April 17. She was 86. Her husband of 65 years, Stephen, and her two children, Tom and Ramey, survived her.

Hearing of her death, her long-time friend and six-time filmmaking partner, Arthur Penn said: "She was just an extraordinary collaborator.... Indeed, she wasn't an editor, she was a constructionist."[29]

"Constructionist" was perhaps an odd term to choose. But Allen apparently didn't like the term "auteur" when applied to her, and Penn very possibly was trying to call her an auteur without actually calling her one. In any case, she was much more than an editor in the traditional sense. Her work—especially in the 1960s and 1970s—was radically different from what had come before in American films, often electric in its immediacy, and enormously influential. She was in the truest sense an editor's editor.

Allen Puts Her Signature on Bonnie and Clyde

"The movie opened like a slap in the face," wrote film critic Roger Ebert in 1998, recalling his initial experience seeing the film 31 years earlier. "American filmgoers had never seen anything like it."[30]

Ebert was of course writing about *Bonnie and Clyde*, the film many critics have called the first modern American movie and one of those rare examples of cinema—like *Birth of a Nation*, *Citizen Kane*, and perhaps *Psycho*—that literally changed the way people think about and make films. Reviled by most critics at the time for its graphic violence and what seemed to be its bizarre shifts in tone from slapstick comedy to harsh, often brutal reality, it nevertheless thrilled audiences and is now considered one of the most innovative and influential American feature films ever made.

The story of how the film finally came together could also make for an entire book in itself, one filled with all kinds of burning aspirations, gut-wrenching setbacks, strange plot twists, and much more. Many times the project was on the verge of being scrapped, and many times people tampering with the unfinished product could have done it irreparable harm. But, largely due to the persistence and toughness of its two prime movers, producer/star Warren Beatty and director Arthur Penn, it managed—somehow—to be released intact and go on to become the stuff of film industry legend.

Part of the great thrill of seeing *Bonnie and Clyde*, especially for a person seeing it in 1967 or 1968, was, as Ebert suggested, this striking newness. Americans had flocked to films about outlaws since the first decade of the 20th century, even films with very similar plotlines, characters, and themes such as Joseph L. Lewis' fine noir *Gun Crazy* (1950). But they had never seen anything quite like this. Some Americans had also seen films from the French New Wave such as *Breathless* and *Jules and Jim* that both explored subjects such as life on the run and doomed love and experimented with startling new editing techniques. But again, they had never seen anything like this that was also so fundamentally American. Americans had seen plenty of chase scenes, too. But they had never seen any that incorporated such a strange mix of slapstick comedy and explicit, sometimes horrific violence. In addition, Beatty and Penn consciously sought out new faces and cast many of the roles with stage actors new to film. Ironically, the stunning nature of their debuts made instant film stars of Faye Dunaway and Gene Hackman and launched film careers in character roles for Michael J. Pollard and Estelle Parsons.

In fact, in every creative contribution from the writing and directing to the acting and cinematography, there is a new dynamic at work here. But, it is in the film's bold and highly innovative editing that everything comes together.

When discussing the editing in *Bonnie and Clyde*, almost everyone focuses on the film's ending: the scene when Bonnie and Clyde are ambushed in a barrage of bullets after they've stopped by the road to help Malcolm Moss (Dub Taylor). And it is an amazing moment. Consisting of about 50 cuts and lasting a little more than a minute, the scene, shocking for audiences in 1967, retains nearly all of its impact today. Critic Pauline Kael, who, along with Roger Ebert, was one of the few critics to give the film a positive review upon its initial release, made a special point to praise the way this was handled. Calling it "brilliant," she referred to the moments as we watch Bonnie's body jerking back and forth as bullets enter it in rapid fire, naming it the "rag-doll dance of death." Continuing, Kael noted that the horror in the scene "seems to go on for eternity, and yet it doesn't last a second beyond what it should."[31]

In addition to the rapid cutting to portray a horrific event, which clearly owes a debt to Sergei Eisenstein's famous use of montage in the "Odessa Steps" sequence in his 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin*, Allen gives this scene richness and dimension in a number of ways.[32]

One is in how it ambushes viewers in the audience similarly to how the law officers ambush the film's two protagonists. The scenes leading up

***Bonnie and Clyde*'s notorious Barrow Gang poses for the camera. From left to right: Buck (Gene Hackman), Blanche (Estelle Parsons) Clyde (Warren Beatty), Bonnie (Faye Dunaway), and C.W. Moss (Michael J. Pollard). Considered radical for its time, Dede Allen's editing on this film has been hugely influential and widely imitated (Warner Brothers/Seven Arts/Photofest).**

to it are quiet, under control, happy. There is a bit of concern when Clyde sees some law officers in town, but he and Bonnie manage to quietly slip away. He is even munching on an apple, relaxed, happy. The two have finally consummated their relationship, achieving a new level of harmony with each other as well. At first, as Malcolm waves at them to stop, they are happy to help. Then, as they see a flock of birds bolt out of nearby trees, they seem confused, concerned. Immediately, Malcolm jumps under his truck, and they are a bit more confused. Even so, they each have one more look at each other, and we see the contentment in both their faces. Then, of course, all hell breaks loose, and the contrast is stunning.

Another is the artfulness of the actual killing scene. The cutting back and forth between the two bullet-ridden bodies is perfectly timed to keep us simultaneously shocked and mesmerized. In addition to Bonnie's "rag-doll dance of death," we see slow motion shots woven in to accentuate certain moments—Clyde's body rolling over on the ground, Bonnie's body

falling down beside her seat with her limp arm also falling and simply dangling in the air.

Yet another is the absolute silence and stillness after the fact. Everything stops for a moment until the law officers and Malcolm come in to assess the scene. Much like us in the audience, they are all still in a state of shock and absorbing what has just happened. Again, the timing seems just right. And again, as in other films, Allen uses silence to punctuate a critical moment. We all have a few seconds to digest and perhaps begin to process what we have seen. Then the film ends. Bookended by this scene and the calm, peaceful scenes before it, the moment of stunning, bloody violence becomes all the more horrific—and beautifully balletic.

The influence of this scene on American and some international films has been profound. Sam Peckinpah, Quentin Tarantino, Hong Kong's John Woo, and countless other directors have used key elements in it from the fast cutting to graphic violence, to slow-motion punctuation over and over again in work seen by hundreds of millions (perhaps even billions) of viewers worldwide.

The editing of many of *Bonnie and Clyde*'s chase scenes is also discussed frequently. Combined with the famous Flatt and Scruggs guitar and banjo tunes we hear over the chases, the fast-paced comic style gives these scenes a slapstick quality that was new, strange, and, certainly for some viewers, off-putting. These are people who, after all, have just committed armed robberies, yet their escapes are portrayed as broad comedy. What is ultimately so compelling about these scenes, however, is how they mirror the states of mind of Bonnie, Clyde, Buck, and C.W. These are all virtual children who see their bank robbing as a naughty, thrilling game and these chases as part of that game. Initially, they are all only vaguely aware of what they are really doing and ultimately what the consequences will be. Everything is a big joke. Only as they continue on their course do they see that this will only end in violent deaths for most of them. As the story proceeds, of course, the chases become far less whimsical and more violent, now mirroring their growing understanding of the real situation they are in.

We see some characteristic Allen touches in the film's first scene as well. As mentioned earlier, it opens—not with a traditional establishing shot—but with a signature "shock cut" on a tight, sensual close-up of a woman's painted lips. In a succession of fast, hard cuts, we then see that she is naked, assume that the temperature is probably hot, and that she is clearly in need of a man. Then, outside her window, she notices a young man trying to steal her mother's car. He sees her looking down from the

window. There is another quick succession of shots, suggesting an immediate, shared attraction. The two have already begun to bond.

Here, the film's very first live-action shot of a woman's lips takes us instantly to the heart of the story—this lonely, sexually charged young woman is in need of a man and adventure. The handsome but shifty young man she meets is someone who quite possibly can supply her with both. With great economy and artfulness, the story has been launched. We don't need an establishing shot to tell us where and when this story is taking place. All that is apparent almost immediately, anyway.

Although Allen's touch is particularly evident in specific scenes, film writer Mark Harris, in his excellent 2008 book, *Pictures at a Revolution: Five Movies and the Birth of the New Hollywood*, offers a very insightful analysis of Allen's overall contribution to *Bonnie and Clyde*—one that goes well beyond the construction of a string of showcase scenes:

> [Allen] was almost peerless in her ability to focus on "character, character, character." She had visited the set for a few days to get a sense of what Penn and his cast were trying to accomplish and returned to her Moviola with a sense of what to bring forth in each actor. Allen knew just how long she could hold a shot of Beatty to reveal the insecurity beneath Clyde's preening; she seemed to grasp instinctively that sudden cuts to Dunaway in motion would underscore the jagged, jumpy spirit of Bonnie Parker and that slow shots of Michael J. Pollard's C.W. Moss would mimic his two-steps-behind mental processes. And Allen cut *Bonnie and Clyde* with an eye and ear for the accelerating pace of the story, making the building of its panicky momentum her priority.
>
> Allen and Penn shared an admiration for the suggestive, almost sensual editing of French New Wave movies: The sequence in which Bonnie first sees Clyde's pistol—the series of disembodied shots of her moist lips and flashing eyes, his gun at his waist, her lips parting in excitement as her mouth plays over the rim of a Coca-Cola bottle, her hand tentatively reaching over to fondle his gun, and a couple of close-ups of his distracted, detached expression—conveys Bonnie's charged, troubled sexual appetites and Clyde's uneasy relationship to his own body purely through the rhythm of shot selection and cutting. Beyond that, Allen proved instrumental in shaping the performances of a group of actors who, aside from Beatty, were largely new to film and whose work could vary widely from take to take and within single takes as well. "Dede is enormously sensitive to a good, well-acted moment," says Penn. "A lot of actors owe a great deal to her."[33]

Although signs of the distinctive Allen style are evident in earlier films such as *Odds Against Tomorrow* and *The Hustler*, this style came into full bloom in *Bonnie and Clyde*. From her Hollywood roots, she brought both her respect for the primacy of character and story and her abiding belief that, rather than drawing attention to itself, editing should always be done in service to these elements. From her work on television commercials, she brought unusual, arresting shot combinations and rapid-fire cutting. From her exposure to British Neo-Realism and French New Wave films, she brought a host of new editing techniques such as shock cuts that gave films rough, threatening qualities and heightened audience anxiety. And, with help from Arthur Penn, she integrated it all into a harmonious whole. "What we essentially were doing," Penn once said, "was developing a rhythm for the film so that it has the complexity of music."[34] And judging from the continuous praise *Bonnie and Clyde* has received over that last half-century, the two succeeded admirably.

An Influence on Feature Films ... and Beyond Them

When Dede Allen first came on the scene, feature film editing in the U.S. had become very staid and traditional. The editorial style of Griffith and others, which began to dominate in the 1910s, had, by the late 1950s, become a set of hard and fast rules that editors were usually forced to follow.

But the world was changing, and films and film editing were bound to change with it. In the classic sense, Allen was the right person at the right time—a major artist who brought a new way of seeing to her art, a way that was very much in sync with the turbulent times in which she was working. In directors such as Robert Wise, Robert Rossen, and Arthur Penn—and later Sidney Lumet, Warren Beatty, and others—she found collaborators who saw her special talents and encouraged her to cultivate them. And she responded, delivering in a big way. Influenced by experiences from her work on television commercials to her exposure to innovative European films, she literally created a new style of American feature film editing—one that spoke more directly to the film audiences of the 1960s and 1970s and that remains fresh and vibrant decades later. In the process, she raised the stature of editing as a film art and made editing more a part of the ongoing discussion of cinema.

In addition, her influence—because it of its enormity—has gone well beyond the making of feature films. Today, we see bits and pieces of her distinctive style in virtually every kind of video form including television drama and comedy series, television commercials, animation and children's television, and especially music videos, which almost entirely depend on fast cutting, shock cuts, and other signature Allen techniques.

Much more than just innovative film editing, Allen's way of seeing—because it was (and remains) so right for the times—has also been woven into the larger tapestry of our culture. Even if we haven't seen one of her films for a while, she is with us every day.