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CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD, 1928–1946: Editing

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> *"A cutter"—even the phonetics of this name imply a rather menial laborer, and there are even today a great number of studio employees who think that all a cutter has to do, is clip the ends of the shots handed to him and paste them together, according to the identification "slates" and scenario numbers.*
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> *Criticus, "'Only a Cutter,'"* International Photographer*, July 1930, 30*

The studio-era film editor was perhaps the consummate self-effacing craftsperson of the Hollywood cinema. While the term most frequently used to identify this production task—"cutting"—accurately described the technical process of splicing and cementing together lengths of celluloid, it did little to differentiate between what we now understand as film editing—creating a finished film from footage shot by directors and cinematographers—and negative-cutting and patching, mechanical tasks carried out before and after prints are struck and put into distribution. Moreover, while the work of cinematographers and art directors was evidenced by what was on the screen, the "cutter's" job was often understood by what was left out: faces on the cutting room floor or "unnecessary" footage excised.[1] And, indeed, much early academic film criticism, especially that under sway of the auteur theory, valued filmmakers to the

degree they evaded editorial control or confounded studio attempts to insert gaudy close-ups of stars.[2]

While the *International Photographer* editorial does correctly point out that the editor's contribution to Hollywood cinema was unjustly overlooked in this era, the assumption that "Criticus" argues against manages to capture some of what has made the studio editor so elusive in film history. David Bordwell finds the term *découpage* most appropriate to characterize Hollywood editing's "parceling out of images in accordance with a script, the mapping of the narrative action onto the cinematic material."[3] As "in accordance with a script" implies, this "mapping" did not occur only in the editing room. Jean Mitry positions editing as one of three "operations" that comprise *découpage*. The continuity script, shooting "with a view to a certain editing," and editing itself are aspects of "the same creative process" that "differ only with respect to the craftsmen who carry them out."[4] Though part of an art practice that was always highly collaborative, the domain of the Hollywood editor was particularly crowded, as one Oscar-winning editor's typically modest description of her work suggests: "Film editing is telling the story with film. Good film editing is selecting the best of the film. Great film editing occurs when you begin with great pictures."[5]

Although this period's basic style of editing was in place before 1928 and continued after 1946, the studio era was a distinctive moment in the development of film editing. While studio editing departments were formed in the previous decade, the mature, sound-era oligopoly brought changes in technology and production practices that would uniquely situate the work of editors in the production process. In some ways, editors were never—and would never again be—more powerful, but, paradoxically, the so-called "rules" that governed the editor's work were never more assiduously followed. Editorial departments, among all production departments in the studio system, were also notable for the prominent positions held by women. Though generally content to remain invisible, this period's editors began to formulate a craft discourse that would distinguish them from mere "cutters," and through that discourse, as well as through oral history interviews, we can better understand how editors' efforts contributed to the style of classical-era film. Finally, minority practices within the studio system that bordered on, and sometimes supplanted, the work of the editor—pre-cutting and montages—suggested alternative work procedures and aesthetic functions, which augured later developments.

Sound Transition: Technology, Style, and Work Practices

The basic technology necessary to edit film remained remarkably stable from the silent era through to the advent of digital editing systems, but studio-era editors perceived a significant shift with the transition to sound. In the silent period,

editors could take their work home: they needed only a pair of geared rewinds, a light table, a splicer in order to cut, and film cement. With the transition to sound, several new technological innovations entered their workspace, and editors had to adapt the dominant stylistic devices of the late silent era to synchronous sound filmmaking. But the transition's most significant impact was in altering the place of editing in the overall production process, as well as the editor's relationship with other craftspeople.

After the transitional period of sound-on-disc and Movietone prints, editors became accustomed to working with separate reels of sound-on-film and image tracks, which doubled the amount of material they had previously handled and added the problem of synchronization. A rewind of multiple sprockets on the same shaft—the "gang sprocket" or multiple synchronizer—moved sound and image in unison and allowed editors to cut image and dialogue tracks at the same point.[6] Numbers stamped on frame edges at one-foot intervals became standard by 1932, and these freed the editor from the necessity of returning to the multiple synchronizer to ensure image and sound still lined up after making a cut.[7] These technologies increased efficiency of the physical process of cutting both image and dialogue, and edge numbering in particular has been credited with encouraging faster cutting. But these technologies did not simplify the process of choosing a precise cutting point.[8]

Viewing machines manufactured by the Moviola Company had been used in studios since 1925, replacing homemade viewers and jeweler's glasses and eliminating the need to screen work piecemeal as it was assembled. In 1930, the company offered an attachment to handle sound reels and playback, which enabled editors to cut words between syllables, though not all studios acquired this model immediately and many editors developed the ability to "read" sound track.[9] Further innovations to the Moviola followed throughout the decade. The Triplex model, which offered three sound reproducers, was introduced in 1933, though it found more use in re-recording departments than in editing departments.[10] The Moviola "Preview," released in 1937, supplemented the viewing lens with a small, ground-glass screen, thereby allowing editors to view details in longer-shot scales more clearly, which also might have contributed to increasing shot lengths later in the decade.[11]

The problems that came with obtaining adequate image and sound recording during production were met with an industry-wide effort, coordinated through the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Research Council, to develop quieter lights and cameras.[12] No such institutionalized industry-wide coordination was necessary to meet the challenges that the sound transition presented to editors. Instead, trade papers occasionally reported on individual studios' ad hoc development of their own versions of each of the innovations described above, which preceded service firms such as Moviola creating models for industry-wide use.[13] These new technologies primarily served to streamline editing tasks, and

their effect on style was similar to that which Kristin Thompson attributed to the 1910s innovation of workprints: "Editing technology in general must have influenced film style in a minor but pervasive way, permitting existing stylistic devices to be better executed."[14]

The central importance of Hollywood editing's core stylistic device—analytical cutting—undergirded the adoption of multiple-camera filming from 1929 to 1931. Sound recording needs dictated that one full-set lighting scheme suffice for several camera setups to satisfy the demands of editing. This retention of the same lighting schema for different camera positions brought with it a resultant loss of control over the properties of the image. Still, this compromise ensured that classicism's aesthetic norms were preserved: "What made all this trouble worthwhile was the option of cutting, especially cutting to a variety of angles."[15] The underlying rationale for analytical editing's fluid movement from long shots to close-ups was to follow and highlight the personalized causal chain that constituted the classical narrative. Thus a dialogue scene in *Showgirl in Hollywood* (1929) is covered in such a way that the editor can choose among several setups: a long shot orients the viewer to characters' positions in a dressing room; a two-shot covers a conversation in the rear of the set; and single close-ups underline the dramatic climax of the scene (see figure 9).

This is not to say, however, that sound presented no significant aesthetic challenges to editors. Dialogue initially limited the editor's ability to control the

FIGURE 9: *Showgirl in Hollywood* (1929). Multiple-camera filming was adopted in order preserve classical editing's fluid movements between shot scales.

tempo of scenes. The difficulty in editing sound track on Vitaphone discs and Movietone prints meant that dialogue's pace led that of the image track.[16] An early scene in *Showgirl in Hollywood* displays this tendency. A quarrel between the Hollywood-bound heroine and her playwright boyfriend alternates images as the two exchange lines at a nightclub table; unable to speed the pace of scene by cutting to the listener and excising dialogue, the scene repetitively exchanges images of speakers and preserves gaps between lines of dialogue. Once the sound track was separately printed, it became easier for editors to coordinate the visual tempo and that of vocal performance and to speed the pace of performance in editing.[17] A convention governing when to cut the image in relation to dialogue—a few frames before a line finished, with the image shifting to the listener—became standardized by 1930, but varying this convention became a technique to manage tempo during dialogue scenes: cutting earlier would allow the editor to manipulate the speaker's lines and increase the tempo, while letting the dialogue finish before cutting to the reaction could create a moment's pause.[18]

On the whole, the sound transition reinforced classicism's dissection of narrative space. Multiple-camera shooting not only ensured that analytical editing remained the aesthetic norm during the sound transition, but it also functioned to standardize the practice of shooting entire sequences in the "master scene" or long shot, after which selected portions of the scene would be repeated from closer angles.[19] This new production convention, calculated overshooting, provided editors standardized coverage of scenes and a predictable set of choices to make in assembling sequences. Sound thus brought about an alteration in production practices that increased efficiency in the editor's aesthetic function—distinct from the mechanical task of cutting film—which was necessitated by the most important change in editing affected by the transition.

If picture editing itself underwent no major technological or aesthetic transformation, the broader postproduction process, of which editing was part, certainly did. Those who worked in cutting rooms during the late silent era recalled a lengthy editing phase that often did not begin until after principal photography concluded and was overseen, and often carried out, by the director.[20] After the sound transition, the postproduction phase involved not only assembling the image track but also adding sound effects and music, dubbing dialogue, and creating a final sound mix. As a result, the editor's completed working print, with dialogue in sync, was expected a week after shooting finished, so that a "feeler print" could be made and sent to the relevant departments.[21] The editor's involvement in postproduction after this point differed somewhat among studios. But what was true at all studios is that additional postproduction steps were accompanied by a further subdivision of labor among postproduction departments.

In order for the production schedule to accommodate the additional steps necessary to produce an answer print, editors began working on pictures shortly after production began. Films were not only shot out of sequence but, in their

first cut, assembled out of sequence. Each morning the director would screen the previous day's footage with the editor, and select which takes—or portions of takes—he thought best. After screening dailies, the director would return to the set to begin the day's photography, and the assistant editor would break down reels, file away takes not chosen by the director, and deliver the rest to the cutting room, where the editor would assemble the sequence. Directors would view the edited sequence and recommend revisions, and this process of batch editing would continue such that an editor had a rough or first cut within days of photography's completion.[22] Since editing proceeded alongside shooting, directors were no longer able to do their own cutting, and increased responsibility for a first cut devolved to editors. Moreover, editors increasingly functioned in a supervisory capacity during production, assessing whether the scene was adequately covered to cut together, and, when it wasn't, they would often request that the director or second unit supply retakes, cutaways, or inserts. Editors might also order frame enlargements or reversals from the lab, and in some cases even shoot this material themselves.[23] After the final scene was edited, all the completed sequences were combined; subsequent additional changes necessitated by the film's overall pace, and identified in conjunction with the director, would be made at that point. Only then would the first cut be submitted to the producer for approval.[24]

The sound transition served simultaneously to remove the director from the editing room, increasing the editor's control over the image track, and to shorten the production time available for this process, increasing his reliance on the aesthetic norms of continuity and analytical editing. These work practices became so entrenched that editors beginning their careers in the late 1930s would view the director's post-studio-era return to the cutting room an unwanted intrusion.[25] In 1973, Grant Whytock, whose career spanned the 1910s through the 1960s, reflected that "the editorial department was," in the studio era, "more powerful than it is today. It was almost the last word. . . . You see, the first thing they had to do was make that schedule and you couldn't carry on like they do today where a director goes in and stays with the picture for a year in the cutting room."[26] These basic, industry-wide work practices uniquely placed the editor in a distinct position within the film production process. But studio-era departments did not operate uniformly, nor did the day-to-day work practices of sound cinema fix occupational paths for editors or constitute a professional identity.

Studio Variation, Women's Work, and Professional Identities

Despite the standardization of practices discussed above, there were nevertheless notable differences between one studio and the next. At most studios, editors were only present on set to oversee first-time directors.[27] Paramount's practice of having the assigned editor stay on set to assist the director in getting adequate

coverage was unique, as was its penchant for allowing assistant editors to make the first cut, after which the head editor would tighten the rough cut to running length while maintaining smooth continuity.[28] At some studios, such as Warner Bros., the editor's work concluded promptly after the first cut received producer approval: "With this working print approved, I can sit back and draw a deep breath of relief and await the first appearance of the next production—which usually comes the next day."[29] Where previews were customary (notably at MGM and with comedies), the editor would remain assigned to the picture to make further revisions and would thus participate in later stages of postproduction. At MGM and Twentieth Century–Fox, the supervising editor would take over from the assigned editor and guide the film through the final phases of postproduction, overseeing the addition of music, sound effects, and, later, the rerecording of dialogue.

The position of supervising editor was the most distinctive organizational variation in studios' editorial departments. While all departments had administrators who were responsible for managing personnel and assignments, MGM was the first sound-era studio to create a supervisory position to oversee rough cuts and to monitor productions. Margaret Booth worked on Irving Thalberg's productions until his death in 1936, at which time she was promoted to the new position (see figure 10). From then until 1969, she cut no film, but from her personal projection room she screened and monitored the studio's output and

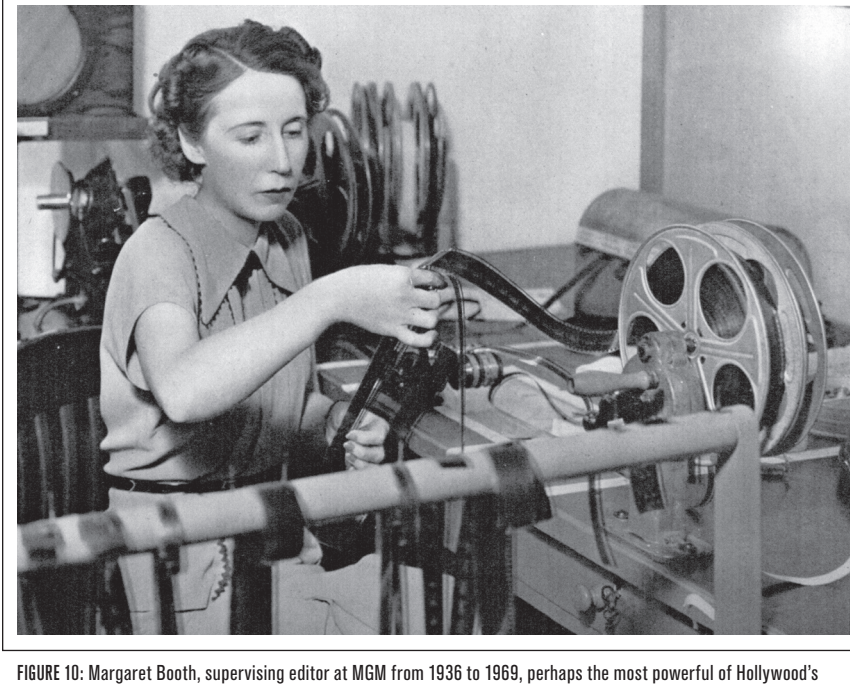

FIGURE 10: Margaret Booth, supervising editor at MGM from 1936 to 1969, perhaps the most powerful of Hollywood's notable women editors.

reported directly to the studio chief, Louis B. Mayer, during his tenure, and to his successors for decades thereafter. Ralph Winters recalled: "'Miss Booth,' as she was called . . . was a tough taskmaster and used to drag me over the coals every day—but I learned. . . . Time and again, editors were sent back to their cutting rooms to adjust their work to her liking."[30] While she wielded much power at MGM, Booth used her position to maintain the invisibility of editing: she believed "a perfect film ought to give the illusion that it was all done exactly as seen on the screen, that there never was any person such as a cutter."[31]

Although women have been notoriously underrepresented in film production, several in addition to Booth rose to such prominence in editorial departments that behind-the-scenes interest pieces rarely failed to take note. "Film editing," observed the *New York Times* in 1936, "is one of the few important functions in a studio in which women play a substantial part."[32] Viola Lawrence began her career in 1913 at Vitagraph in New York, came to Hollywood in 1917, and by the 1930s was Columbia's top editor, assigned to prestigious films such as *A Man's Castle* (1933) and *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939). Blanche Sewell, like Booth, worked on prestige productions at MGM, including *Queen Christina* (1933) and *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Dorothy Spencer worked with independent producer Walter Wanger on *Stagecoach* (1939) and *Foreign Correspondent* (1940) before moving to Twentieth Century–Fox in 1943, where she would remain through the 1950s. Lasting over forty years, Anne Bauchens's collaboration with Cecil B. DeMille is among the longest filmmaker-editor partnerships in film history, from 1915 until his death in 1959. Barbara "Bobby" McLean moved with Darryl F. Zanuck to Fox in 1935 and remained after his departure, becoming the studio's supervising editor in the late 1940s.

McLean was regularly assigned to Henry King's films—twenty-nine in all, including *Wilson* (1945), for which she won an Oscar—but she is most closely associated with Zanuck, at whose side she sat through years of dailies and rough cuts. She attributed at least part of her success to providing a "woman's perspective" among Zanuck's trusted male collaborators. Such statements can fuel essentialist assumptions about female patience and organization, often enlisted to explain the success of women within this profession.[33] Of particular note was the purported ability of women to manage the egos of directors and producers, which often clashed in the editing process, though this assumption likely reveals less about women editors than the competing demands all editors needed to negotiate. In the end, the editor was the producer's representative, and it is no coincidence that the most enduring studio-era collaborative relationships involving editors were not actually with directors but with executives like Mayer and Zanuck, producers like Wanger, and producer-director hyphenates like DeMille. This pattern of professional affiliation was not to change until the rise of independent production, at which point editors were selected by directors, who became more directly involved in cutting.

Despite the presence of women among the ranks of the industry's top editors, the profession was still overwhelmingly male throughout the studio era and became increasingly "masculinized" through the 1930s, as Karen Ward Mahar has observed.[34] As a result, women who had already begun to ascend the ranks or had established reputations before the sound transition continued to do so, but few new women editors entered the profession during this period.[35] Three factors seem to have brought a temporary halt to women's advancement. Nearly all the major female editors of the period started their careers in the silent era, working in joining rooms and as negative cutters. The transferability of these negative-cutting skills to positive-print editing was relatively direct. With the transition to sound, editing became a more technologically intensive task, and several women retired to the negative-cutting room or were dismissed by heads of editing departments, who believed these women to be less technologically savvy than their male peers.[36]

In addition, silent-era editors often saw their responsibility limited to assisting the director, who did his own editing. Most women editors began in this fashion and were eventually entrusted with more responsibility, putting together first cuts. Here, the silent era's flexibility of work roles enabled women to rapidly ascend from negative cutting, to assisting in editing, to becoming full editors—and to move into still other occupational areas.[37] With the increasing importance of the assistant editor, and the attendant course of systematic training for full editors, women's paths into the job were narrowed. These assistants were typically recruited from the ranks of librarians and projectionists—members of the editorial department whose responsibilities involved hauling cans of film to and from screening rooms.[38] Finally, the formation of the Society of Motion Picture Film Editors (SMPFE) in 1937 supported this more formalized system of training that required editors to begin as assistants and, like many unions, pursued the interests of its male members. A 1940 *Los Angeles Times* article declared "Lady Film Cutters: A Vanishing Profession" and quoted the secretary of the society as saying that "women cutters are 'resented' by their male co-workers."[39]

That the editors' industry-wide association focused on such labor issues is not surprising—in order to improve their working conditions, most crafts formed guilds and unions in the late 1930s—but it is telling how little attention the editors' society paid to the task of crafting a shared professional identity and promoting this through industry-wide organizations. In contrast to the American Society of Cinematographers, the SMPFE had no publication of its own in which to fashion an occupational identity, promulgate notions of "good artistry," or ally itself with other, established crafts in order to stake its claim to a distinct self-image within the studio-era production system. Indeed, the only craft discourse that editors generated appeared in articles in other unions' and guilds' publications, and these were often overviews written for amateur filmmakers, not for their peers or other craftspeople.[40] Editors did not organize a section within the technicians' branch of the Academy until late 1932, and no Academy Award

honored editing until 1935.[41] The DGA offered to make full editors members, a proposal that appealed to editors interested in increased prestige, but the editors' membership—80 percent of whom were assistants, stock-footage librarians, negative cutters, and studio projectionists—voted the resolution down.[42] In 1944, the SMPFE's membership voted to affiliate with IATSE, after which it became the Motion Picture Film Editors, Local 776. A guild devoted to advancing the profession's status was not formed until 1950.

Still, there are signs editors were dissatisfied with being viewed as anonymous craftspeople or mechanics who culled the director and photographer's best footage. A booklet produced by the society on the occasion of its first annual ball included "Facts About the Society," and several anonymous editors used the space to recommend that the society "impress the producer that our work is as important as [that of] the director, writer, and camera man" and "take away the theory that editing is mechanical."[43] The booklet also included brief notes of praise from notable directors who had started in cutting rooms—among them Frank Capra, Norman Taurog, and Dorothy Arzner—and an essay by producer Sam Zimbalist on the distinction between "cutters" and "editors." While the former merely assembled shots into their script continuity, the latter imbued them with a tempo and rhythm such that stars, directors, and producers would be "so interested in the story the sequence tells that they're [*sic*] forgotten all about their pet scenes, their likes and dislikes."[44]

Studio-Era Continuity Editing

In 1934, speaking at an Academy Symposium on scene transitions, Cecil B. DeMille stressed that self-effacement was the hallmark of a technician whose artistry distinguished him from the mere mechanic: "[The] technician who is an artist wants to play in perfect harmony with the picture. The minute an audience becomes conscious of the effect, the picture is over as far as drama and story go."[45] Such sentiments found themselves echoed in oral histories and interviews with studio-era editors. DeMille's editor Anne Bauchens elaborated: "It takes away from the reality. If you want the audience to believe the story, you should keep away from anything tricky."[46] Somewhat counterintuitively, devices that called attention to themselves—mixing types of wipes or elaborate dissolves—were *not* recognized as signs of artistry, but mere technical ability. The aesthetic criterion recognized is the subordination of technical ability to the "unity" of the work—its dramatic effects—and invisibility. The dominant devices used to cue transitions between scenes, as well as to manage space and time within scenes, function, in the first instance, compositionally; they are efficient means of delivering narrative information. The "rules" editors followed accomplished this basic task, but, within these rules, editors varied devices to heighten dramatic effects.

The task of scene transitions is to signal the elision of story time and a change in location. This task was, in the first place, accomplished in the writer's construction of the scene: exposition clarifies what time has passed and dialogue hooks at the end of the scene cue viewers to expect the next scene's action. Editing devices were codified "punctuation marks" that supported these scripted cues. The optical printer moved the creation of transitions from the set, where they were created in camera, to the laboratory, from which editors would request dissolves, wipes, and fades.[47] The function of each of these devices was highly conventionalized: a lap-dissolve indicated a brief, indeterminate, and—from the perspective of the narrative—inconsequential passage of time, either within a scene or to a scene that shortly followed, while a fade to black signaled the end of an "act" and presaged a lengthier temporal gap. Editors' reluctance to use straight cuts between scenes—or for short temporal gaps within scenes—was, in part, to avoid potential viewer confusion.[48] But dissolves additionally functioned to "soften spatial, graphic, and even temporal discontinuities,"[49] and, in the major studios, became markers of quality. Gene Fowler recalls McLean dogmatically enforcing the convention at Twentieth Century–Fox and dismissing straight cuts as "cheap Republic tricks."[50]

With respect to narration, wipes were the functional equivalents of dissolves, denoting brief ellipses, but they better maintained a fast pace and were thus thought appropriate for comedies and action films. In these cases, graphic smoothness was accomplished by matching figure movement within the shot to the direction of the wipe, as in *Libeled Lady* (1936) when a wipe follows a harried newspaperman across the frame. The affective dimension of scene transitions could also motivate a fade to black for relatively brief temporal ellipses. Although the temporal gaps in *Phantom Lady*'s (1944) trial sequence called for dissolves, several fades to black slow the scene's tempo, creating a disjunctive contrast with the offscreen voice of the prosecutor, who rapidly and assertively makes his case. The entire trial episode thus becomes somewhat disjunctive, matching the experience of the accused's secretary, whose subjective response to the trial—confusion and concern—structures the sequence. Thus editing devices offered a menu—albeit limited—of options that could perform the necessary function of clear narration while also subtly modulating tempo and pace.

Some scene transitions could more forcefully announce the process of narration. In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), a diagonal wipe is held, thus bisecting the screen and contrasting Jekyll's bedridden patient with the fiancée he ignores (see figure 11). Similarly, dissolves are extended to allow the final shot of one scene to become superimposed over the first shot of the following scene. For example, after Jekyll's near-liaison with a prostitute is interrupted, the image of her swinging leg continues over the first thirty seconds of the next scene, during which he discusses, in clinical terms, the nature of impulses with his colleague. Since neither dialogue, performance, nor framing cues the viewer

FIGURE 11: In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), a diagonal wipe and extended dissolve renders narration overt by pointing up ironies and foreshadowing later events.

to read this as subjectively motivated by the character's lingering interest, the editing device here makes narration overt in foreshadowing later events. More intrusive, though diegetically motivated, is *Our Town* (1940), in which the narrator appears to grab the camera by its lens and turn it toward himself—in a different space—in order to relate the details of a courtship that have preceded the wedding we are about to see.

The devices that governed intra-scene editing aided not just temporal legibility, but also the impression of continuous duration. Moreover, editing devices oriented viewers to the fictional space and characters' relative positions within it. As discussed in the previous chapter, the principles of scene dissection were established by the early 1920s, and, as already noted, the sound transition accommodated and reinforced these principles. Historians of film style have demonstrated that violations of the conventional deployment of continuity editing devices are exceedingly rare; accordingly, it is "no wonder that, of all Hollywood stylistic practices, continuity editing has been considered a firm set of rules."[51] Though the conventions of intra-scene editing sought to create the impression of continuous time and coherent space, editors would sacrifice strict "realism" to other considerations. The most emphatic device for signaling temporal continuity was the precise match-on-action cut, in which an action begun in one shot was continued, with neither repetition not elision, in the next shot. Throughout this period, however, editors instead relied on continuous diegetic sound and eyeline matches to *imply* durational continuity, and dismissed the perfect graphic demonstration of it as distracting showboating or "a hangover from the old silent days."[52] Similarly, the practice of "cheating" the positions of actors between shots, creating better-balanced compositions within individual shots but also continuity errors between shots, did not bother editors.[53] The infrequent reliance on devices that most rigorously enforced continuous space and time illustrates the logic that undergirded continuity editing devices: not "realistic" spatial and temporal representation for its own sake, but in order to unobtrusively guide viewers' attention to the

"character-centered—i.e., personal or psychological causality—[that] is the armature of the classical story."[54]

Despite the rather strict paradigm of intra-scene cutting, editors understood their work here to possess a subtle artistry that exceeded mere adherence to "rules." Ted Kent, editor for James Whale's films in the early 1930s, recalled that the director gave precise instructions as to which shot scale to use for each line of dialogue. Whale's instructions followed the basic principles of analytical editing, but Kent still thought his understanding of editing "elementary": "every cut that he would come in on would be on dialogue," which resulted in undesirable "jumping around." Better, Kent and his colleagues believed, were gradual changes in shot scale in order to "ease into" close-ups.[55] Evincing their commitment to classicism's aesthetic norms, Ralph Winters cites the ordinary scene of character interaction as that which editors took the most pride in and looked to when assessing their peers' abilities:

> The editing of the sequence that takes place between and among people, is really the most important. . . . Some of the chases and action sequences are difficult to edit. But the real, I think the real—what's the word I'm searching for? The *art* is centered around people, what you can do with people. To keep your editing smooth, to glide in and out of close-ups and medium shots, and letting the audiences' eyes be exactly where they want to be.[56]

The rapid alternation of tight close-ups or extreme changes in shot scale—from long shot to tight close-up—were shunned as shortcuts to "keep it alive" that blunted the force of editors' most reliable device for emphasizing an important narrative development—the judicious cut to the close-up. Moreover, "keeping it alive" was a shabby substitute for the subtle quality editors most often claimed was their contribution to the film: a smooth "rhythm" that absorbed viewers in the unfolding narrative.

This rhythm was not, however, the only quality editors viewed as an inviolable ideal. As Patrick Keating has extensively documented in his study of this period's cinematography, Hollywood stylistic conventions accommodated generic variation that admitted more expressive displays of style, and, to some extent, this was also true of editing.[57] As indicated above, certain transitions were thought appropriate to some genres, and musicals in particular could tolerate a variety of wipes that might be thought gaudy or distracting in drama. More common, as the Winters quote indicates, were variations *within* a film, with certain sequences—"chases and action sequences," for example—calling for certain "moods." Notwithstanding his dislike of Whale's approach to editing dialogue, Kent advised "the more cuts the merrier" when the monster comes alive in a horror film.[58] Similarly, action sequences could be cut more rapidly. Much of *Dead End*

(1937) demonstrates a tendency toward long takes and ensemble staging (overall average shot length, or ASL, of 9 seconds), but its climactic alley fight and rooftop shootout comprises fifty shots in 3:14 of screen time (ASL of 3.8 seconds). In such scenes, editors not only cut more frequently but also cut between more setups than would be used to cover dialogue sequences. As a result, genre-scene conventions could motivate sacrificing the editing ideal of smoothness and invisibility, but only if these sacrifices were motivated by narrative action.

Despite the acceptability of more assertive cutting in different genres, historians of style have found overall average shot lengths varied little between films of different genres.[59] Generically marked scenes, such as musical numbers and action sequences, offer many of the studio-era cinema's most conspicuous passages of editing, but these are rendered statistically insignificant by the preponderance of the era's basic unit of narrative construction, the dialogue scene. Studio-era editing departments most frequently worked with these scenes, and thus editors developed a nascent practitioner discourse that privileged modest aesthetic values such as "smoothness" and narrative support.

Alternative Editing Practices in the Studio System

The work processes and aesthetic ideals of the studio-era sound cinema subtended an ongoing stabilization of formal conventions established in the preceding decade. Editing departments were the location where classicism's aesthetic norms were most forcefully sustained. This mandate—containing stylistic excesses that risked undermining narrative comprehension—was accompanied by the corresponding production function of maintaining producer control over directors. However, editing was not uniformly an extension of the studio system's mode of production and commitment to invisible storytelling. Ironically, such exceptions are most evident when editing took place outside of its dedicated studio department.

"Pre-editing" was a process that eschewed "master scene" coverage for a precise visual design in advance of shooting. A 1932 article describes this practice as necessary for complex sequences, such as the ballroom scene in *One Hour with You* (1932), in which images needed to follow a previously recorded sound track.[60] But the practice could be used in a more thoroughgoing fashion. For *Gone with the Wind* (1939), David O. Selznick sought greater control over production and engaged art director William Cameron Menzies as a "production designer" so that "we might be able to cut a picture eighty percent on paper before we grind the cameras."[61] Selznick's habit of rewriting to the last minute ultimately forced him to abandon Menzies's elaborate designs, and directors were instructed instead to "substitute simple angles" that could be assembled by editor Hal Kern. Although Selznick's ambitions went unrealized, Menzies's subsequent films with

Sam Wood more fully incorporate the designer's ideas about the harmonization of set design, cinematography, and shot sequence. While the results did not fully overturn continuity principles, Menzies's pre-cutting led to some variation in the execution of these principles and departed from the ideal of invisibility. Extreme shifts in shot scale—long shots to very tight close-ups—and the eccentric shot reverse/shot patterns in *Our Town* draw more attention to editing than more conventionally shot and edited sequences.[62]

Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), among the most stylistically baroque films of the classical era, was similarly pre-cut. Robert Carringer's book-length study of the film details how many scenes were edited in camera by Welles and cinematographer Gregg Toland and dispenses with the editor in a line: "Few films can have left an editor with a narrower range of choices."[63] The most celebrated passage of editing in *Citizen Kane* (1941), the breakfast table montage that charts the collapse of Kane's first marriage, was conceived and executed by Welles, and editor Robert Wise's contribution was limited to fine-tuning the rhythm and pace of the sequence. Treating narrative material that would typically be developed through a series of ordinary scenes as a flamboyant montage—conceived and executed during principal photography—is itself notable. Montage sequences were used throughout this period, particularly in the 1930s and in adaptations of lengthy novels, but these transitional sequences were more typically assigned to a specialized department or unit within the special effects department and segregated from principal photography.

Since Hollywood's montages comprised rapid editing, inserts, photographic effects, and optical printing, special effects departments (discussed in Ariel Rogers's chapter in this volume) housed units dedicated to their production. From Bungalow 9 on the MGM lot, Slavko Vorkapich headed a montage unit consisting of a cameraman and an editor, and established himself as the industry's leading montage specialist. His influence is registered in the informal labeling of these montage sequences as "Vorkapich shots." Other studios followed suit and established their own units. Warner Bros.'s special effects department, for example, promoted Don Siegel, a former assistant editor, from shooting inserts requested by editors to designing and directing montage sequences. The fact that these sequences incorporated effects and were made by effects departments is the result of their mixed lineage. The vogue for montages began in the 1920s, when filmmakers such as Ernst Lubitsch and F. W. Murnau brought to Hollywood superimpositions used in Germany to summarize narrative events or depict subjective states.[64] Soviet montage cinema provided additional devices that would be absorbed by the classical system.

When the montage theories of Soviet filmmakers reached America's filmmaking center in the mid-1930s, they were viewed suspiciously as the "devious mysticisms of the 'cinema art form' fraternity."[65] Some Hollywood technicians rejected the notion that "montage" was anything new, and none understood it

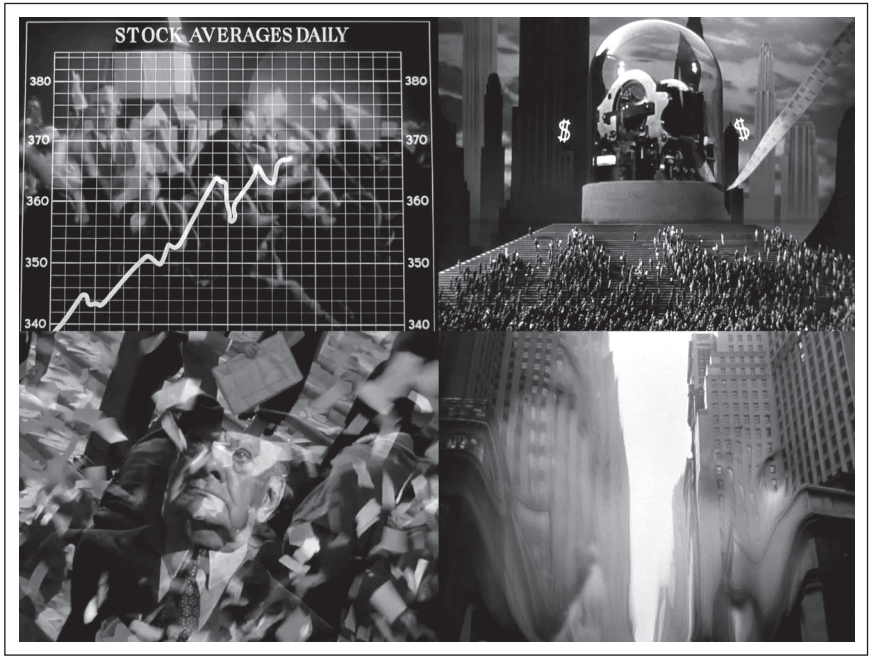

FIGURE 12: Events that exceeded the grasp of classicism's personalized causality were often depicted in montage sequences, such as Don Siegel's montage representing the stock market crash of 1929 in *The Roaring Twenties* (1939).

as a global theory of filmic construction.[66] Instead of a constructive "building up" of meaning through the juxtaposition of shots unrelated in their content, Hollywood's language posited a profilmic whole. That narrative world preceded and existed apart from the work of the editor, whose job was to hone the replete profilmic reality and extract the essential dramatic material. As a result, Soviet "montage" came to be understood as particular applications of "creative editing," as opposed to "simple continuity" editing.[67]

Passages of "creative editing" were thought useful for two purposes. First, a montage sequence could compress the passage of time and indicate what narrative developments had been elided. For example, the rise of stars in *What Price Hollywood?* (1932) and *Maytime* (1937) is condensed in montage sequences. Such sequences could also economically depict narrative events that would be prohibitively expensive to film more conventionally, as in *Cleopatra* (1934), when the Battle of Actium is rendered in a four-minute montage combining miniature work, inserts, and footage from DeMille's earlier *The Ten Commandments* (1923). Complex scenes such as stock market crashes, riots, police bulletins, and so on also depicted supraindividual narrative developments, which the classical style's prioritization of personalized causality was ill equipped to handle (see figure 12).

While the narrative function of the montage was quickly conventionalized, the sequence's narrative condensation and abstraction did permit more formal

experimentation. If the narrative "point" of the montage was simple—time passes, the stock market crashes, news travels—within these sequences filmmakers were given free rein to explore graphic matches, staccato cutting rhythms, and overt symbolism—all devices typically eschewed by studio-era filmmakers. In the many talks and interviews he gave promoting his own theories of montage, Vorkapich predicted that in the near future, perhaps by 1945, montage would be liberated from their narrow narrative functions and its devices would come to dominate the entire film.[68]

Studio-era work practices and norms would prove more durable, and these alternatives remained minority practices. Pre-cutting as explored by Welles and Menzies was an infrequently employed approach to editing within the studio era, where production and postproduction practices overwhelmingly favored master-scene shooting and continuity editing. Similarly, montage sequences were specialized units of film, segregated from the larger work; they related narrative information that classicism's dominant aesthetic practices were not designed to convey. The studio-era film was predominantly composed of scenes of character interaction that adhered to the invisible art of continuity editing, carried out by the cutter. Although rare exceptions within a stable system, both alternatives suggest possibilities abandoned by the establishment of classical norms and left to be explored by later generations of editors.