From Sennett to Stevens:

An Interview with William Hornbeck

KRISTIN THOMPSON AND DAVID BORDWELL

Introduction

William Hornbeck was born in 1901 in Los Angeles. He lived at his mother's hotel next door to the studios of the Keystone Company, where he got a job in 1916. His various early duties involved winding and processing film in the studio laboratory; later he worked in the drying room, as a printer, and as a projectionist. In 1917, World War I siphoned away much of the company's eligible manpower; Hornbeck, being too young for the draft, moved into the editing department. In June of that year, Mack Sennett left Keystone to form his own company, Mack Sennett Comedies, taking Hornbeck and much of the rest of the company's personnel with him. By about 1922, Hornbeck was in charge of the editing department, and he remained in that position until 1933, when Sennett went out of filmmaking for a few years. A complete filmography for Hornbeck's Keystone/Sennett period would be difficult, if not impossible, to compile, since, as supervising editor, he would have done varying degrees of work on every film put out by the Sennett studio.[1]

After leaving Sennett, Hornbeck worked as Alexander Korda's supervising editor in England until Korda's move to Hollywood in 1942. Among the films he worked on most extensively during this period were *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1935), *Sanders of the River* (1935), *Elephant Boy* (1937), *The Drum* (1938), *The Four Feathers* (1939), *That Hamilton Woman* (1941), *Lydia* (1941), and *The Jungle Book* (1942). For the remainder of World War II, Hornbeck went into the U.S. Army Pictorial Service, a branch of the Signal Corps; his editing work there included the "Why We Fight" series produced by Frank Capra. This connection led him to Liberty Films after the war, where he edited *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) for Capra.

When Paramount bought Liberty Films in May 1947, Hornbeck moved over to work on a number of films at that studio. During these years, he continued his association with Capra and worked closely with George Stevens and Joseph Mankiewicz. He won an Academy Award for *A Place in the Sun*. His main films of the postwar period were: *Singapore* (director, John Brahm, released by Universal in 1947), *State of the Union* (Capra, MGM, 1948), *The Heiress* (William Wyler, Paramount, 1949), *Riding High* (Capra, Paramount, 1950), *A Place in the Sun* (Stevens, Paramount, 1951), *Something to Live For* (Stevens, Paramount, 1952), *Shane* (Stevens, Paramount, 1953), *The Barefoot Contessa* (Mankiewicz, United Artists, 1954), *Giant* (Stevens, Warner Bros., 1956), *I Want to Live!* (Robert Wise, United Artists, 1958), *The Quiet American* (Mankiewicz, United Artists, 1958), *A Hole in the Head* (Capra, United Artists, 1959), and *Suddenly Last Summer* (Mankiewicz, Columbia, 1960).

Hornbeck was negotiating for a job with Universal in 1960 when the studio was working on *Spartacus*. He was hired to help with the editing of the film and was made a vice-president in charge of editorial operations. He remained there for 16 years, editing only a few sequences and never appearing in the credits of films. He retired in 1976.

This interview was conducted on 9 July 1980, in Hornbeck's home in Southern California. In every case, Mr. Hornbeck proved an excellent subject for interviewing: he has a fine memory concerning many things we asked, and in the few cases when he didn't remember something, he told us so, not trying to fill in with anecdotes or call up vague information. We thank him for his kind cooperation in both the recording and publication of this interview.[2]

The Silent Cinema

[We began by asking Mr. Hornbeck about his early work at Mack Sennett Comedies.]

WH: In the early days, we still made a one-reel picture every day, every weekday. On Saturday, we had a two-reel picture. That meant six pictures, and when I became head editor there I used to work on all of those films. We had assistants that would get the film into pretty good shape, and then I would just give it little polishing touches and off it would go. They had 30 companies shooting, 30 different units in order to keep up that kind of a schedule.

Q: Could you tell us what the different duties were for various people? How many assistants there would be and how the jobs were broken down?

WH: They had about five editors, when I first went there, and then about as many assistants, to do the splicing for each editor. And the same editors that did the positive cutting had to do the negative cutting. That was always a very interesting thing. We didn't have key numbers of anything to identify your scene. All we had were scene numbers. We'd put them up in front of a light board and all the scenes would be shown so when you were cutting the negative you'd pick out the shots you wanted and then you'd have to match it frame by frame by action. If there was very little action in the scene it was quite difficult. Key numbers didn't come into use until the twenties, somewhere, '25, '24.

Q: So you were using slates or something at that time.

WH: Yes, they had slates at the beginning of each scene, and at the

William Hornbeck, chief editor, in the editing room of the Sennett Studios in Edendale, 1920. (photo courtesy Marc Wannamaker)

end of the scene the cameraman would use a sign with his fingers, whether the scene was an OK scene or an NG [No Good] scene.

Q: Did they print up all those takes?

WH: No, the cameraman himself would develop the film during the night and break the negative down the next morning. He would come in, and each cameraman would have his own film, and I remember he'd put some white gloves on, and pull his film down, and sometimes a scene might have been marked NG and later the director would say, "Well, you know that scene wasn't too bad, let's OK it." So the cameraman would have to keep a running memory of that, whether some marked NG *would* be OK. He'd be the only one that would know. They didn't keep records or reports or anything like that. The only record they kept was the how much film they'd used that day and how much of it was short ends. The cameraman had to do his own loading of his camera in the morning, carry his own camera; he set it up.

Q: So he'd come in, and in the dark he'd presumably have to cut apart the camera negative.

WH: No, it would be developed, you see. Then he wouldn't have to be in the dark. The next morning he'd have his developed film, and he'd pick out the NGs, and he'd put the NGs in one section and the print in another section. Then I as an assistant would splice all those OK pieces together and send them to the printing room. The

NGs we would store in a box. Each company, each production company would have its own box of NGs, and it often would have to pull the NGs again, to find something that hopefully would be better than the scene they had printed. That happened a lot, for various reasons. They'd say, "Well, look, there's a little piece of that scene that'd be good," so we'd search through. All that would be done by hand and by memory; there were no records kept of how many NGs there were and how many OKs there were.

Q: So editors each had an assistant. I've heard the terms "supervising editor" and "master cutter" used in that period.

WH: That was what I became, the supervising editor, and I would finish the pictures off. I don't think all studios did that, but this company, because it had *so* much film, so many different pictures working, had to have someone to work them up to that top editor.

Q: When you started out as an assistant editor, how would you learn—not so much how to do the physical splicing, because that was obviously pretty easy to learn—but how would you learn the basic ways of putting shots together? How would you judge where to cut?

WH: Well, when I was a projectionist, it was quite easy. I kept watching and each runthrough I'd see what had been done to the film. I would learn from the others that were ahead of me. I can remember when I was transferred to a printing room, that happened to be right next to the projection room, so I bored a little hole in the wall, and I could see clearly when they were running the film. I know pretty well—you know, I was only 17 years old, you're very anxious and you learn so rapidly. Many times I'd get talking to some of the editors, and I'd know quite a lot about their films, and they wondered how I did that. They never caught on that I had this little hole and that I could watch each run. I'd know that they'd changed a certain thing.

Q: Presumably one of the things you were watching for as an editor was to avoid breaks in continuity. What were the kinds of things that you would consider a break in continuity: changes in costume or in screen direction or the like?

WH: If someone had a wrong costume on, what're you going to do about it? Well, you'd have to retake it or cut to something else and hope that the audience didn't notice that there was a change when you came back. I've never run into that. Oh, I guess you'd have the exit the wrong way, but you'd have to assume that the camera was on the other side. I ran into that with Alexander Korda. I used to complain that he would shoot everything from one angle, and suddenly he'd go to the other side and shoot a close-up, and I always objected to that. He didn't mind; he said, "The audience has to know the camera went on the other side."

Q: But that was considered a mistake?

WH: He didn't consider it a mistake. I wouldn't have done it if I had been directing; I would always be careful in getting around. I'd go gradually around, rather than just direct reverse. Direct reverse we considered confusing. Today I don't think they worry about it much; it's considered artistic, I would say.

Q: But in 1917 would they have been worried about that sort of thing?

WH: They were pretty careful in 1917, to be sure that everything was simple so that you'd understand it very well.

Q: Was there any particular way that you would solve a problem? Say you've got a couple of shots that need to go together, and yet the person was moving in the opposite direction in the second shot. Was there anything you could do about it, or did you just edit it together?

WH: Well, you'd try to get a movement that would excuse it, a turn of a head or something, or there were various tricks that you would try. You'd go to a closer shot or a longer shot. Oh, there's dozens of

things that you could devise. Make an insert even; if they were handling something, put an insert in.

Q: One article I read claimed that it was possible to flip the negative over, so that in the second shot the person was going in the correct direction.

WH: Yes. You would have to be careful about hair-combs and be sure that there wasn't a design on one arm that wasn't on the other. You had to be very careful. But often, if there was no identification to show that everything was lefthanded instead of righthanded, you could do it.

Q: Or no signs with lettering in the reverse, or something like that.

WH: Yes, that's the thing that you'd have to guard against.

Q: Did editors ever refer to what nowadays is called either the "center line" or the "axis of action," the idea that the audience should always be oriented to stay on one side of the action unless you got them across gradually? Did it have a name then?

WH: Not that I remember, no. We were such a new business that we didn't realize that it would really become so important and artistic as it is today.

Q: It seems that even though you didn't have a name for it you did intuitively recognize that the audience could be pretty stabilized about where everything was happening.

WH: Yes, well, I think we tried to make it as easy to understand as possible, so you're not going to confuse the audience. You remember they used to always have complete exits and entrances. If you're going to go from here to town, why, they would very near have to have you in an automobile or whatever. Today you just go from one place to another and not even use a dissolve any more. We resorted to dissolves, but they were very hard to make in those days. You had to do them by duping the film, and we didn't have the expert films we have today—internegatives. We use the internegatives and you can't tell the original from the dupe. But in those days we had to be very careful making dupes, because they were terrible. The grain got larger on each change.

Q: If dupes were so difficult, would outtakes, or second choice takes, be used for trailers?

WH: That's what we'd do with the NGs, you see, we'd now look in the NG negatives and maybe there was a little section that would be perfect for a trailer. We also made a foreign version, so we'd always use the outtakes for that. That's in the *very* early days. And on a difficult scene, a scene that they knew they couldn't get a second time, we'd have two and three cameras on it. Of course, there it was very easy to have our foreign version. But for other shots, we'd have to take the NG take. Being silent, why there wasn't any dialogue to
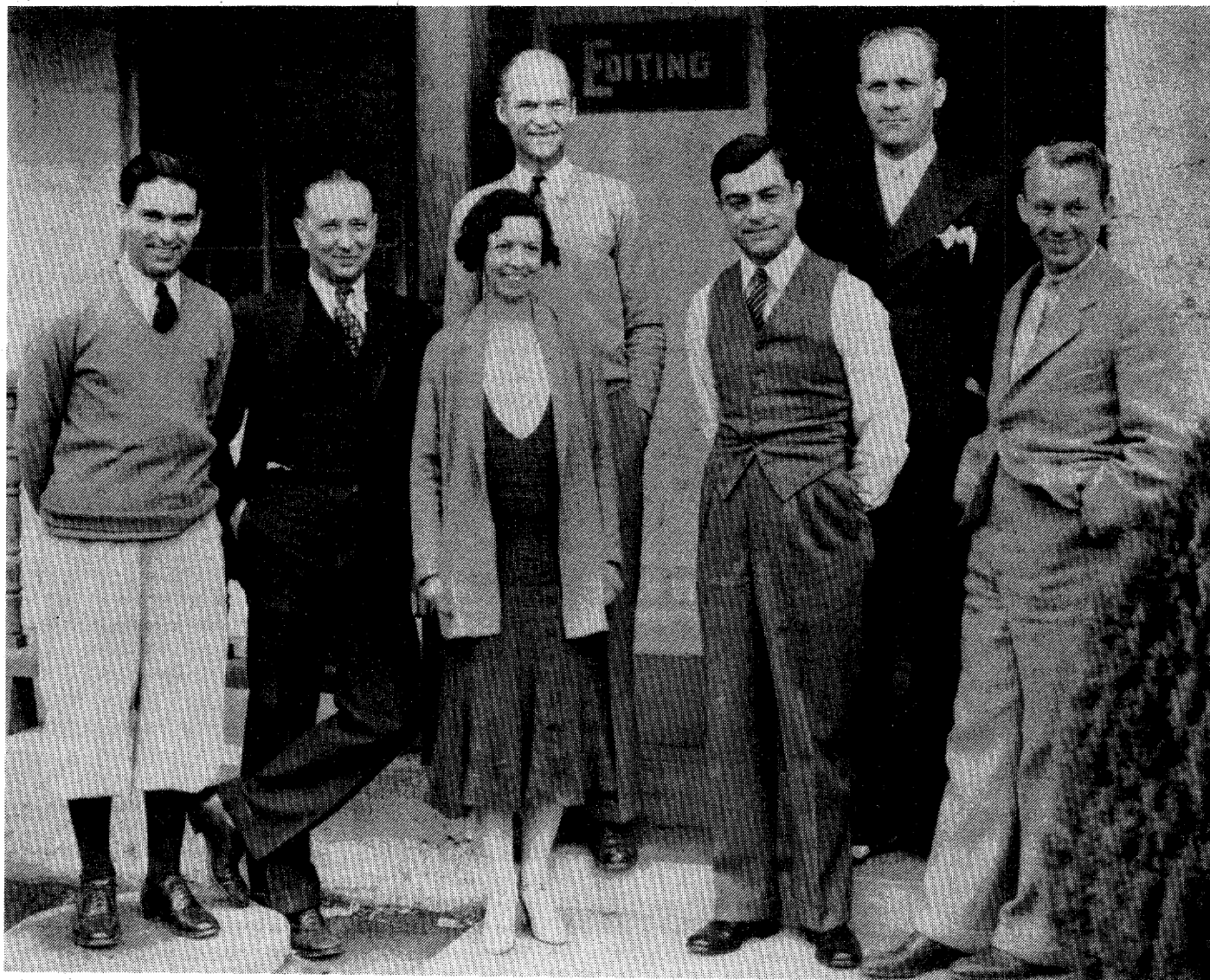
The editing staff of the Sennett studios, Studio City, c.1929. From left to right: George Barto (assistant editor), Bob Crandall (editor), Olive Hoffman (negative cutter), Malcolm Knight (editor), William Hornbeck (supervising editor), Bill Harris (projectionist) and Francis Lyon (editor). (photo courtesy Marc Wannamaker)

worry about, so long as the action was clear, we used that. It would run in foreign countries.

Q: I've also read that during the twenties there would be multiple cameras on the sets, not only to shoot the foreign negatives, but sometimes just in order to get better matches.

WH: Capra did that a lot. He did it on films up into the fifties. He liked that because then he wouldn't have to shoot the scene as many times.

Q: His Harry Langdon films look like he did that.

WH: Yes, he liked to do that. It wasn't for matching purposes, it was just to save time. As long as you had good lenses that would pick it up. Lighting suffered, you see; you couldn't light for close-ups as well as you would have normally, but Capra loved it because it saved time.

Q: He's also a very actor-oriented director, I suppose, and if he felt the scene was going well, he probably wouldn't want to break it up, and, say, get into a closer shot.

WH: Some actors can't pick up and get into the scene very well, so if you run it all the way through, you've really got the feel of the scene.

Q: So it was considered worth using the extra film in order to save time.

WH: Yes, film isn't the greatest cost when you come down to it, unless it's a cheap film. If it's an expensive film, that's a minor cost.

Q: Presumably as the twenties went on, you as an editor would have more and more film available to you to choose from.

WH: Gradually we started using more film, yes.

Q: In the thirties, it seems that a director would have always taken a master scene, that is, have the whole scene played out in long shot or the establishing shot. Then the director would have the cast redo parts of the scene for the closer shots. Was that very common in the twenties?

WH: With Capra it was. He would always try, the last thing of the day, to shoot the master scene for the next day. And that way he could see that scene the next morning—it would be developed during the night—and he would look at it. Now he'd know exactly where he wanted to make his shots, his close shots. Maybe it saved him an awful lot of time; he said, "Well, we don't need close shots for any of this early part; we only need it there." He loved that way of planning. And sometimes he'd change; sometimes if the scene was not good, he could reshoot that master shot. He had several choices that way.

Q: Was he unusual in the twenties, to do that?

WH: Yes.

Q: I gather your editing equipment was fairly primitive, too.

WH: Especially because you had to grind your camera by hand, and we didn't have splicing machines; we didn't have any of the electronic things that we have today for developing and printing. Everything was done by eye.

Q: At what point did you get some sort of viewing machines or Moviolas?

WH: The first Moviola—I think I had the first one built. Oh, in the twenties sometime. It was a little tiny thing, but you could enlarge the film. You know, a lot of the boys didn't like it; we used to work the film through our hand in front of a light. It helped a lot to do that. You got your timing that way. The Moviola had an intermittent movement. But it was terribly noisy. Of course, then we didn't have sound, so it didn't matter.[4]

Q: Do you remember when editors started getting credits on films?

WH: I started in 1922, I believe. I have frames of my old early credits. I was so excited about it, that I saved the frame of my credit. Kevin Brownlow has a collection of my old pictures, the old Keystone comedies, and none of those pictures had credits on them, because whoever he bought them from didn't want him to know where they came from, I guess. Well, I loaned him my little frames, and he put the credits back on them.

Q: You mentioned key numbers and that they weren't in use until around '24 or '25. Now, by key numbers you mean edge numbering?[5]

WH: That's right. You see, in the printers that they used in those days, contact was very important. In order to print the key number, even if it were on the negative, you'd have to have a little slot in the printer so that the light would shine through and print the key number onto the positive. Well, the lab people had a feeling that cutting that little strip in the printer would lose some of the contact and the scene might be a bit out of focus. They wouldn't print it for many years; you had it on the negative, but they wouldn't print it through. So that was two or three years that we battled and battled, and finally we got them to agree that they could print the key numbers for us. It was an awful battle.

And then, too, we were using a film that wasn't allowed to use it. I don't know if it was Agfa, or some foreign film, but they weren't allowed to use the key number. When they did use it, they used a printing process on the negative. Well, you could tell the danger of that, having an ink put on your film before photographing. You have these little smears and things. The company finally had to abandon that; I don't know how they finally got permission to use the same exposure method that Eastman used. It was probably something that they found they couldn't patent—a method of exposure.

I can't remember the details, but I know we did have trouble with the printing method, printing it on the negative instead of exposing it on. Then a lot of cameramen would object to this exposing it on the film. They claimed that there was a chance of fogging the film when those little things were being exposed on the raw film, and I guess they had an argument there. They said, "Supposing this light didn't work, and you exposed, you wouldn't know it until after you'd shot your valuable scene. There's a great danger of that."

Q: That's interesting, because I had assumed that once edge numbering came in on negative, it was a simple matter.

WH: No, it was a long time before all companies would use it. I know our company wouldn't use it for a long time, because they thought there was too great a danger of the contact being bad on the printer.

Q: Did you often go see your own movies projected at theaters?

WH: Yes. Sennett had his own theater, so I was always there, listening to the audience, and sometimes we'd change the picture even after it had opened.

Q: So it functioned as a preview.

WH: In the silent days you could do that, you'd just take the reel home, or to the studio, change it, and bring it back. We had a couple of hours in between. I don't know if other studios did that, but we did. We'd listen to the audience and get reactions, and somebody would be yawning, we said we'd better improve that, so we'd cut the scene out, maybe.

Q: Would you have done that right through the twenties?

WH: That was during the twenties, yes, at the Mission Theatre.

The Sound Period

WH: Well, that was a whole new ballgame. Now you had to be careful; of course, the first sound pictures were pretty rough, too. You couldn't put music in after shooting; you didn't know how to mix your music and sound. On our first pictures, if there was supposed to be music in the scene, we had to put it right in when we shot it.

Q: An offscreen orchestra or piano or whatever?

WH: Yes. Then it would be difficult to cut, because you had to have things match, and they had sometimes two, three cameras. If you

were going to shoot part of a scene in this room and part in the next room, they'd have to have a camera running the whole time here and the whole time there, so that it would match. The technicians that came from RCA and the sound people said, "Oh, you can't cut, you can't make a cut-in at all." So the first couple of films it was just miserable. But we learned then we could cut. Sennett used to get us into a conference, and say, "Look, you fellows have to learn how to do this." I always said, "Well, the engineers from RCA say you can't." He said, "The hell with that." We'd come in on Sunday and fool with their equipment, and he authorized it, and he said, "Look, I don't care if they object to your doing it."

We even dubbed a film one time; actually, we didn't dub it—we wanted to mix some music in a scene, so we got the idea of running two projection machines and having both machines with the loudest sound coming out of the horns. And we recorded that. It was very bad, of course, the quality was terrible. But we did that one Sunday, all of us had watched or turned the knobs, and we ran it for Sennett, and he was delighted. He said, "Now, you see, the engineers said you couldn't mix sounds." And he ran this for them, and of course they knew what we'd done. They said, "Well, the quality's no good, you can't use that." And he said, "Never mind, now these kids got in there and they did this; now it's up to you fellows to get the quality." They said, "Well, we always knew how to do that." He said, "I don't care, you said we couldn't do it." And by golly, they came up with a way to do it. Instead of through a projection machine, you do it through recorders and finally got dubbing started. But it must have been a year before we got them to agree it could be done. So that was the way it was, in the early days, too. We'd run into obstacles and we'd fool around till we found something that would work.

Q: When sound came in, did it affect your sense of timing?
WH: Yes, it changed a lot. It was hard to get used to, because now you'd be forced to change, first because of matching dialogue, and then allowing for sound effects and so forth. You had to change; it was rather surprising, and you had to adjust to it.

Q: In your mind, did you have any sort of practice about, when two people are talking in a shot/reverse-shot conversation situation—would you prefer to cut after Player A had finished his sentence?
WH: There's no rule there, no. You find out, when is that starting to sink in on the other person, when is the other person supposed to react? It could be right in the middle of a sentence.

Q: But you'd go for the reaction?
WH: The question is: when am I anxious to see what this person is thinking of? But if you use a definite rule, that the dialogue must finish, I think you're asking a whole lot.

Q: It seems that many editors would cut to the person listening just before the first person was done speaking—a couple of syllables or words before the end of the speech.
WH: Yes, some of them let it overlap a little. I think that would be proper, if you're going to use that rule to end. Always leave a little bit of a tail over—just like a door slam. If the door starts to go, you don't wait for the door to completely slam, you get your next scene working and you hear the door slamming. That's going to give you better tempo.

Q: But as far as *your* choices were concerned, you would then feel where the reaction of the listener was most important?
WH: When you think, "Now we ought to see what that person's eyes are looking like—are they getting anything out of it?" Maybe the scene doesn't require that. Then you would end on your phrases. And then you know, later on you might start a little sound in the next scene. Even voices, sometimes, come in before the next scene. I'm not fond of that.

Q: Me neither.
WH: I think I was one of the first that tried it, though, in a picture

called *I Want to Live!* We didn't do it with dialogue, but we did it with the sound of the next scene coming in, and I really didn't like it, but the director insisted that it was something that was going to be used a lot, and he had the foresight on it—it *has* been used. But I'm not fond of it, especially when it goes in two or three feet. I think that's very irritating.

Q: You said that when you shot with multiple cameras, you'd have to take the whole scene, and the technicians said that you couldn't cut at all. What was the main problem?
WH: The problem was when you did cut there was an awful sound—it would go "bang," you know. Well, then we devised little triangular pieces of paper which stick on where the splice was [bloops], and the sound literally would go up and down. It would only make a puff, and we lived with that for quite a while. Then we got the air-brush. That still had a little puff on it. It was quite a while, till they had the push-pull sound. Then that eliminated your splice troubles.[6]

Q: Did anyone at any point conceive of just shooting a scene with one camera and just go all the way through? Most directors wanted the freedom that cutting would give, even if they had to use more than one camera?
WH: We always used at least two cameras on it, you know, to get close. We were told we couldn't cut, so if we'd go to a close-up, we'd have the angle.

Q: There wasn't much moving camera in those days?
WH: No, very little moving camera. They did it occasionally. They'd have to get a track built. It was a lot of trouble, you know.

Q: Did moving camera shots pose different problems for an editor?
WH: Well, I've heard editors say you couldn't cut while the camera's moving. I've always cut when the camera's moving. I've never let it bother me. I had a director once, Joe Mankiewicz, he said, "Well, I made a scene today that you can't handle." So we ran it, and when the scenes were over, I said, "What do you mean, I can't handle it?" And he said, "Well, you cut it and you'll find out." So I cut the scene together, and ran it for him the next night. And he said, "Well, for God's sake, it worked!" And I still didn't know what he was talking about. He said, "You know, I have an editor at Fox, and she told me you never can cut on a moving camera." Well, it isn't so at all. It depends on *where* you cut. You can't cut *anywhere* in a moving camera. But he was so delighted; he said, "Well, I learned something now." But I couldn't understand what he meant.

Q: Some articles on filmmaking claim in particular that on a tracking-in or -out, you can't cut; you get too much of a jump.
WH: Oh, not so, not so at all. If you get the right action, you can cut. The audience are not watching the camera move, they're watching the players. You can't do it all the time. And Mankiewicz was so sure that he was going to have a retake.

Q: Some technical articles have said that editors would sometimes have trouble if a cameraman, say, had shot a long shot and then went in for a closer shot. Most cameramen would want to diffuse, especially if it was a woman, and there'd be a gap. Can you cut from a long shot that's very crisp to a closer shot that's very soft?
WH: Well, you wouldn't like to, but there again, I wouldn't say that the rule was you couldn't do it. You'd rather not, since one is kind of soft, but how else are you going to do it? You're going to cut at *some* point, so it'd be better to cut from a straight shot of the person that doesn't have the diffusion to the other one.

Q: So if you'd have your long shot of a man and a woman, you could cut first in to the man...
WH: That isn't quite so bad. I don't care too much about the heavy, diffused things.

Q: You run across references by people writing during the

The simple editing equipment of the mid-1920s: a splicer, film cement, steel straightedge guide, razor blade, and scissors. (from Herbert C. McKay, The Handbook of Motion Picture Photography, New York: Falk, 1927)
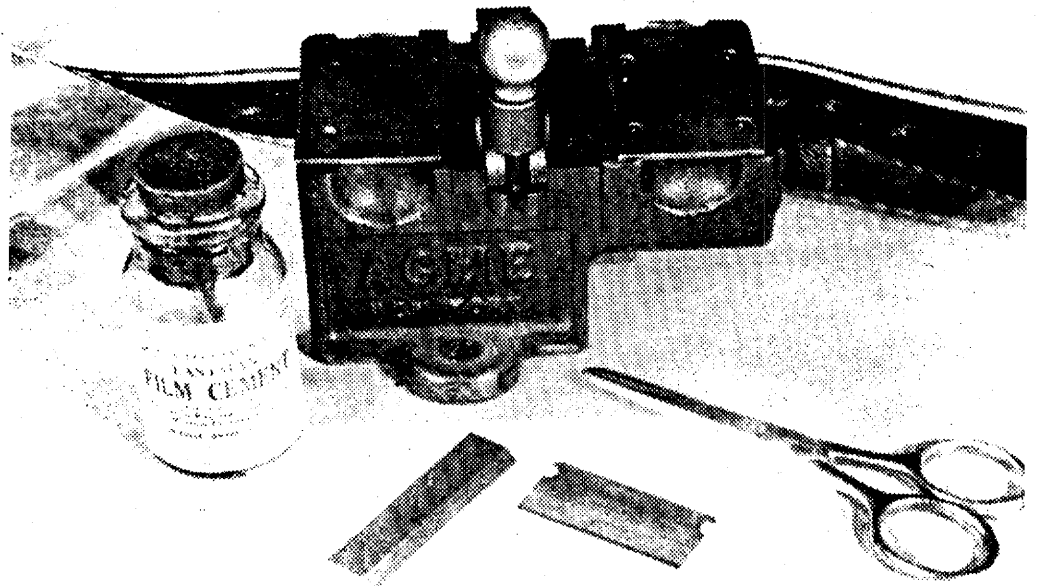
1930s and 1940s, in magazines like *American Cinematographer,* about points like this. Given two shots, let's say: a man's sitting down to play the piano; you have your long shot and you have a medium shot, and his tails of his coat flip out as he sits down. Some editors would say it was considered a very slick cut, to cut as the tails were flipping; but other editors would say, no, cut before the action or cut after the action.

WH: I wouldn't possibly do it. To me it would give away your cutting ability, if you had to rely on that sort of match. Maybe you'd have to, if there were another place that you could match it. But I would never rely on that. My first point would be to find a comfortable place where the audience wouldn't notice the cut. I would run it on a Moviola, and I'd feel where the cut had to come. I detest where someone starts to turn in a shot, and they pick it up from another angle—I detest that. I've done it because there was no other place to do it, but I would guard against that, because now I notice the cut, and I'd much rather change on a spot where you wouldn't be aware of the film being cut. If the audience, after they've seen a movie, say, "Well, I didn't see any cuts in the picture," that's a perfectly cut picture. If you've noticed cuts, that wasn't as good as it should be.

Q: The viewer's attention is deflected from the story?

WH: If you didn't notice the music in a picture, the music didn't distract from the film. If all you keep on saying is, "Wasn't the music wonderful?," well, what about the picture, wasn't that any good? It's a combination of all things, but I've heard so many people say, "Oh, I thought that music was great," and I say, "What about the story?" "Well, it was all right." The perfect movie would be: "Well, I enjoyed the picture, and I didn't notice the music, I didn't notice the cuts, I didn't notice the photography, it was just fine." And that's a nice film.

Q: Did you notice in the early fifties any trend towards longer takes?

WH: Stevens liked long takes, yes. Capra didn't. Well, Capra liked them, but he would cut into them. But Stevens would let things run.

Q: If you did the dissolves in Stevens' films, you have the reputation of having the slowest dissolves in Hollywood.

WH: Yes, I was famous for those dissolves—30-, 40-foot dissolves.

Q: Did he say why he wanted to do that?

WH: We fooled with it together, and I think I accidentally got one. I think I ordered it 10-foot, which was a long dissolve, and it came out 100 feet, because someone had gotten the papers mixed up, and he said, "What are you trying to do there?" And I said, "Well, it's a mistake," but I said, "It's fairly interesting." So he said, "Let's try it, not at 100 feet, let's try it at 30 feet and see what happens." Of course, it gave us an excuse to have music for an incoming scene.

Q: It's a mood-setter, in a way?

WH: Yes, it was fine. In that particular picture [*A Place in the Sun*] it worked well. The courtroom scene was one of the best ones, you know. When you saw the court coming in, you know he was going to go to trial.

[The conversation moved on to rapid editing.]

WH: I tried it in *A Place in the Sun* one time, near the end of the picture. We worked and worked on it for a long time. If you remember the film, Monty Clift was electrocuted at the end, and Stevens and I worked on this a lot. We thought, "What the heck goes through a person's mind when they know they're going to be killed?" And he thought, wouldn't it be an idea if we could get, in this flash, when we know the juice is coming, if his whole life flashed for him in one minute, we'll say, or one second. So we made up a little 20-second piece of all the things that had happened during the movie, hoping that it might develop into something. But we worked on it and we worked on it for weeks and never could get it to gel.

Q: That's very short, 20 seconds.

WH: I don't know if the audience would have known what we were trying, and then the studio were getting very irritated with us for taking so much time cutting the film. They said, "Look, you fellows can play with the film after it's released." (Laughter) They wanted to start getting some money out of it.

Notes

[1] A Sennett filmography for both the Keystone and Sennett studios is available in David Turconi's *Mack Sennett* (Cinéma d'aujourd'hui series, Paris: Editions Seghers, 1966).

[2] This interview was conducted as part of the research for a book the authors have written in collaboration with Janet Staiger: *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (forthcoming from Routledge & Kegan Paul).

The biographic summary was written from material in Kevin

Brownlow's *The Parade's Gone By* (New York: Knopf, 1969), which contains an interview with Hornbeck on pp.307-11; Ephraim Katz, *The Film Encyclopedia* (New York: Crowell, 1979); *Film Daily Yearbook*; and from material provided by William Hornbeck in the course of the interview.

We are grateful to Marc Wannamaker, of the Bison Archives in Los Angeles, for putting us in touch with Mr. Hornbeck, and for providing the stills which illustrate the article.

A note on terminology. During the silent period, the word "scene" was used for what would later be termed a "shot." Practitioners who began their careers at that point tend to retain this usage; thus when Mr. Hornbeck uses the word "scene" in this interview, he usually means "shot."

[3]From the early teens, when many of the American film companies established their European branch offices, filming usually took place with two cameras operating side by side; the second provided the foreign negative. As Hornbeck says, this was because duplicating the negative produced an unacceptable copy. In 1927, Eastman introduced its Duplicating Film, which eliminated this problem. (J.I. Crabtree, "The Motion-Picture Laboratory," *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, 64, No.1 (January 1935), pp.21-22.)

[4]Hornbeck is almost certainly not referring here to a "Moviola" as such, but to a Moviola-style viewer improvised in the Sennett studio. Before the standardization of the Moviola across the industry in the mid-1920s, editing staffs occasionally improvised their own viewers by removing the heads of old projectors in order to use the intermittent mechanism. In his interview with Brownlow,

Hornbeck says: "We constructed a sort of Moviola in 1921, but it was very crude and terribly noisy." (p.309)

Iwan Serrurier, inventor of the Moviola, sold the first few copies of an early model to the Fairbanks, Pickford, and Universal studios in September 1924, and began manufacturing the Moviola Midget in November. The Midget quickly became the industry standard. (See Earl Theisen, "The Story of the Moviola," *International Photographer*, 7, No.10 (November 1935), p.4; and Mark Serrurier, "The Origins of the Moviola," *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers*, 75 No.7 (July 1966), p.702.)

[5]Eastman Kodak introduced edge numbering on its negative film stock in 1919. (Carl L. Gregory and G.J. Badgley, "Attachments to Professional Cinematograph Cameras," *Transactions of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, No.8 (14-16 April 1919), p.83.)

[6]In 1934, sound engineers developed the "push-pull" recording process by splitting the standard track into two narrower ones and putting half of each wave on one track and half on the other. On variable-density tracks, the waves were split so that a "negative" half was opposite a "positive" one; on variable-area tracks, a wave peak was opposite a wave valley. Because the tracks were 180° out of phase, push-pull sound tended to cancel distortions introduced by lab work and splicing; it also increased the volume range of soundtracks. (See Frank T. Jarney, Jr., "The Push-Pull Sound Recording and Reproducing System," *International Projectionist*, 12, No.4 (April 1937), pp.19-20, 29-30; and Watson Jones, "Standard and Push-Pull Soundtrack," *International Photographer*, 11, No.6 (July 1939), pp.11-12.)

William Hornbeck in 1970.
(photo courtesy American Cinema Editors)