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The Editor's Face on the Cutting Room Floor: Fredrick Y. Smith's Precarious Promotion of the American Cinema Editors, 1942-1977

Abstract

This article investigates how editor Fredrick Y. Smith shaped industrial discourse around the craft of editing from 1942-1977. While not a well-known editor, Smith utilized his organizational service in the Society for Motion Picture Film Editors and the American Cinema Editors to advocate on behalf of the craft to the industry and to a wider public. Smith's trade writing, occupational booklets, interviews, and personal papers highlight the discursive and practical strategies the editor employed in his promotional efforts and reveal the editor's struggle to resist prevailing notion of film editing, or "cutting," as a purely mechanical task. While an exceptional organizational force during this period, Smith's own precarity as a working editor was evidenced by his negotiation of limited job contracts in television and independent production and his extensive service to the American Cinema Editor's outreach efforts. The case of working editor Fredrick Y. Smith illustrates the sharp contrast between the ideals of the guild he promoted and the realities of the labor market at the end of the classical Hollywood period.

Editor Fredrick Y. Smith worked in the studio system from 1931 to 1953 and then intermittently in television and independent production into the early 1970s. Smith's credits include work on over fifty feature-films and television programs, *Another Thin Man* (van Dyke, 1939), *The Libeled Lady* (Conway, 1936), and stints on *The Donna Reed Show* (1958-1962). A work-a-day editor, Smith never won an Oscar, an Emmy, or even an Eddie (the American Cinema Editor's annual craft award) for his editing work. Known to few outside of the industry of the period, Smith nonetheless spent the bulk of his career and personal life devoted to the promotion of the editor and the craft of editing within the industry and to the public. In the introduction to Smith's Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences oral history in 1990, interviewer Douglas Bell describes Smith as:

The sort of film worker who, as of this writing, may no longer be as successful or as secure today: the organization man. As Fredrick says in this history, 'Make them like you'... His love of disciplined work, of

studio and clubhouse, frame a portrait of a man who did make them like him and who did tough work for the organization such as the IATSE, the ACE, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. He was a man of both cheerful wanderlust and sustained application.¹

Smith's influence as an "organization man," and his application of "disciplined" craft work next to and away from the Moviola illustrate an important node of horizontal influence during the dissolution of the vertically-integrated classical Hollywood studio system. Smith's mark upon the studio system came not from innovating some new style or technique, but rather in his unpaid organizational service in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), the Society of Motion Picture Film Editors (SMPFE), the University Film Producers Association (UFPA), and most importantly the American Cinema Editors (ACE). As multi-term president and board member of ACE and regular contributor and sometimes editor of its house organ *The Cinemeditor*, Smith played a primary role

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in pivoting the organization's mission and projects towards its stated collective ideals of "recognition," "a greater voice," and "service to the industry."²

Smith's most active years in these guild positions started from his retirement from MGM in 1952/1953 and continued through his years of teaching editing at Columbia College, Los Angeles in the late 1970s. Perhaps most remarkable about Smith's service to the craft during the period was how little this outward-facing idealism in organizational life reflected his limited professional stability. After World War II and the Paramount Decision of 1948, Smith, like so many editors, faced a precarious employment arena of de-integrated studio work,



Fredrick Y. Smith and Fred Berger, ACE First Decade Anniversary Book

television, and independent production. Smith's meticulous personal records and public discourse in trade and occupational writing occasionally reveal the anxious and optimistic struggle of advocacy in the face of limited job security.

Yet Smith's unrelenting advocacy makes a compelling case for rethinking the power of otherwise unremarkable organization members on everyday studio practice and their influence on wider industry mindsets about below-the-line work. Though Smith was a minor figure in film history, his service exemplifies a relative sphere of influence at the most practical level on industrial practices and institutional forces. The impact of his service work was two-fold: first in Smith's public reworking of discursive norms around editing craft and its history and, secondly, Smith's insertion of the editor as powerful arbiter into vibrant contemporary

debates in the 1950s and 1960s around changing production norms (studio restructuring and production efficiency, runaway production, pay TV) and technological change (3D, Cinerama, videotape). In this way, Smith saw and constructed opportunities for the language of craft and style to infuse even the most practical industry conversations around technology, the economy, and platform. Contemporary changes in the industry were not merely a topic to be addressed, but a pulpit from which to inject richer conversations about editing practice and the skilled techniques of editors.

Smith carefully curated organizational materials and personal artifacts in his own collection to tell a particular "great men" narrative of film history that would include not only his contributions, but the ideal of the editor as a vital, if not the primary, maker of meaning in a film text. This heightened emphasis on the ideal editor over communities of editors (despite his service and explicit call for editors to work together) is striking as is his rare attention to women in the craft. Smith's writing and interviews highlight a consistent and sustained attentiveness to retelling a history of editing through casual reclamation projects of name dropping male editors-turned-famous-director, the demotion of manual description or labor issues in favor of conceptual theories of creative editing practice, and a deep ambivalence towards the craft's richly gendered demographics. Smith's universal, moralistic, and altruistic theories about the ideal editor would come to fruition across his career not in his editing work per se, but in his writing of the craft, public speaking events, organizational service, educational projects, and collection of editing history.

From Studio "Cutter" to Film Editor

Understanding Smith's mission to reconceptualize the editor in film history requires knowing a bit about Smith's own personal history. Born in 1903, Smith grew up in northern California and lived briefly with his family in Hong Kong before moving back to California to attend Stanford University. Smith left school early to begin his Hollywood career as an extra and a projectionist

before landing a job as an assistant editor for First National and then Warner Bros in the late 1920s.³ As Paul Monticone has pointed out in his overview of classical Hollywood editing, it was not uncommon for studios to recruit editing assistants from the projectionist and librarian ranks.⁴ As an assistant in the transition to sound whose roles ranged from creating usable trims for other editors, cutting rough cuts for directors, and matching sound to picture, Smith describes his job as “putting music on pictures in which the audience still read the dialogue.”

Unsatisfied with the manual task of just putting music to picture, Smith jumped at a more lucrative and interesting offer at Paramount Studios, Paris.⁵ This stint in Europe working for Paramount, Gaumont-British, and UFA, clearly left an impression on Smith. In particular, Smith began to recognize the degree to which editing could inform even the highest level of creative production on set. Smith recalls:

In Berlin in 1934, I met the head of the great film company UFA, Erich Pommer. He had been an editor and had designed and made up the first German cutting table. Pommer is the only producer I ever sat down with and made a suggestion for a cut who put the film on the table, executed the cut, and spliced the film himself.⁶

Smith’s anecdote illustrates a crucial double-lens of self-recognition: first, Smith seeing himself in Pommer (how the activity of editing might train the mind for other avenues of creative film work like directing) and secondly, being seen *by* Pommer as a creative contributor whose input and suggestions were valuable.

Smith returned to Los Angeles in 1935 and began working at MGM editing B-romance films and comedies into the early 1940s for directors Frank Borzage, Busby Berkeley, and Norman Taurog.⁷ During these years, Smith often saved small unused trims from his films as personal mementos of his work and his scrapbook features a number of these films including *Sweet Mama* (Cline, 1930) and *College Lovers* (Adolf, 1930).

Amelie Hastie, rethinking this desire to collect that which is structurally designed to be wasted writes, “Specifically, the collection is always at once an investment in the future and in history... Any collection is thus an investment in the importance of history, whether a personal and private or an institutional history.”⁸ As Smith recognized and often referenced in interviews and in writing, “Who knows better the process of putting ‘the face on the cutting room floor’ than the man who put it there?”⁹ Smith’s attention to the scrapbook trims as personal collection, but also as a project of recovering his own embodied work product—his own handiwork on the cutting room floor—foreshadows Smith’s later and larger investments in narrating the industrial history and material practices of editing craftsmanship.

Although Smith had begun testing out his foray into writing about editing as early as the late 1930s, he recognized that the most effective way to alter the public and industry perception of the editor was to speak through the strength of fellow editors. While the Society of Motion Picture Film Editors (SMPFE), a hybrid craft organization and unofficial collective bargaining arm for editors (unaffiliated with an International union), formed in 1937, it was Smith’s presidency that called for a more substantial craft orientation within the association. Under Smith’s oversight in the early 1940s, SMPFE published the short-lived house organ *The Leader* in 1943 that argued that the organization should advocate, promote, and publicize editors to gain both craft recognition and to tacitly improve labor negotiations.¹⁰ In its two issues, Smith used *The Leader* to promote an artistic, promotional, and educational vision of the organization than interested most members who were invested in the bargaining aims of SMPFE.¹¹ He wanted a craft organization and not a union, and the temporary SMPFE failed to successfully be either while trying to be both.¹²

During his early organizational tenure, Smith began developing an interest in promoting the artistry of the craft to a larger audience outside other editors. Smith’s writings insist on the value of terminology to reorient producers, directors, and the public’s minds about the creativity of the craft over its mechanical duties. As Smith

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recounted in his AMPAS oral history, "Editing is up here. (points to the head) Not down here. (holds up his hands) This is just the mechanics."¹³ The proposition of this rhetorical division between the head and the hand is clear—editors wanted to be seen and treated as creative professionals over technicians. As Paul Monticone has noted about one of these distinctions, "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."¹⁴ Smith saw part of his mission as responding directly to this long history of the ascribed and self-prescribed moniker of "cutter."

Smith had not been the first person to try to point out the differences between the terms, "cutter" and "editor." Articles as early as the nineteen-teens attempt to explain how the altered distinction might result in both prestige and better pay.¹⁵ Smith was responding to how the term "cutter" was used across trade, press, and fan publications beginning early in the studio system to critique a film's story or structure (as in the cutter's "wicked pair of sheers" which ruined a film) or to describe the work as purely manual and often clumsy (one publication joked about a new cutter coming straight from "Barber college.")¹⁶ Yet, the 'rags to riches' stories of successful directors and producers such as Dorothy Arzner and Frank Borzage, "from the ranks of lowly film cutters" were common enough that one *Hollywood Reporter* article joked in 1934 that "the funny part about it is that some insignificant film cutter whom we were passing by without a thought is probably the Irving Thalberg of 1940."¹⁷

Smith's response to the history of this "lowly" or derisive mechanical terminology sought to abolish the still prevalent currency of "cutting" by targeting other editors, journalist, and producers instead of the public. For Smith, his concern rested not merely in the "cutters" intrinsic tie to the manual work of scissors, but in the pejorative rank and prestige association, "the lowly editor" that would catapult to fame or rot away in his lonely cutting room buried under miles of footage. As early as 1936, Smith reached out to journalists and authors who referenced "the cutter" in books and reviews to

correct this inaccurate perception and circulation. Smith did this by correcting what he saw as a rudimentary term that undervalued the technical proficiency and artistic process at work:

What does a cutter do? Most people ask that question when they visit a studio cutting room for the first time. The answer could be simplified to the fact that he takes an ordinary pair of scissors and actually cuts film. A child of five could do that sort of work without much practice, but to those on the inside who know their business, a cutter is an important technician in the personnel of a studio.¹⁸

In Smith's correspondence and writing, he often reverted to dictionary distinctions between the "cutter" and the "editor." Where a cutter "may describe... one whose work it is to cut a (specified) thing (in a specified way), as in *amethyst cutter, machine cutter, disc cutter, gravestone cutter, timber cutter, film cutter,*" the term "editor" evoked connections to that of a literary editor in evaluating of narrative, story, and scene.¹⁹ In a 1942 talk presented at a SMPFE meeting and later published in *The Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, Smith explained, "Whereas the term film editor is more indicative of the creative nature of the work, the term cutter seems to imply that the process is the work of a technician who performs his duties according to the standards and regulations of the profession."²⁰ Smith wanted to draw clear distinctions between manual labor and conceptual, creative work and his influence on this front is evidenced in the rhetoric of his fellow editors at that time and even two decades later.²¹ Smith may have even convinced directors he worked under to rethink the work of an editor. Smith's influence on Norman Taurog is likely reflected in a speech the director presented during SMPFE's 1940 annual gala:

In the early days, a "cutter" was just that. But they, themselves, in their progress, have forced industry to change the name to that of "film editor." Originally their success depended upon the dexterity of their fingers. Today it is the best

knowledge tucked away in their heads that counts.²²

While it is unclear whether Smith's insistence on discursive norms around editing had a specific impact on Taurog, this is certainly the kind of impact Smith wanted to have on individual editors, producers, and the mindset of the industry.

Even in his early writing, however, Smith's theories and definitions of cutting are not without deeply held positions about the embodied aspects of the craft, especially in relation to emotion. Smith often talks about editing as a composition of emotional response (a kind of *recognition* or *intuition* about the feelings expressed in the acting or the scene manifest in the editor's construction of the scene). Though he never explicitly uses these phrases, Smith describes an experience in which the editor offers their own "presence"—akin to their affect of watching and feeling a scene—into its construction.²³ Attempting to explain these sensations to non-editor audiences, Smith offered two analogies. For one, Smith likened the interpretative aspects of this selection process to a sports announcer observing and calling a football game, the editor saw and felt at the same time they were putting it together.²⁴ The second sensation, Smith equated his bodily memories of acting on screen—"a dramatic feeling in [my] bones"—to conditioning his own emotional instincts as an editor.²⁵ Despite Smith's desire to move linguistically away from the manual language of the craft, the embodied aspects of the practice became inextricable from his description of artistic technique.

Smith's writings and lectures sought not only to demarcate a conceptual differentiation between the technical requirements (the cutter) and intellectual process (the editor who must be skillful at both), but to re-frame the historical progression of editing innovation. In the 1942 talk, Smith marks the periods between silent and sound as the defining break in mechanical difficulty, and the beginnings of truly creative editing practices, "In those days, it may have been possible to edit a picture with a work-bench, a set of rewinds, a pair of scissors, film cement, a viewing device, and a receptacle for the film. Since the introduction of sound, film

cutting has become much more technical."²⁶ These historical distinctions were valuable for Smith's narrative that the editor was destined to work alone, autonomously, and on *his* own creative merits. Smith's writing on film editing history fails to reflect the demographics of silent editors which was publicly and significantly composed of women. Perhaps, more subtly, Smith's attention to what he understood as a growing complexity of the work after the sound transition reveals an underlying assumption that silent editors' work was appropriately titled "cutting" because it was manual, or handiwork, while editing with sound involved more skill, knowledge, and expertise because it was "technical."

The absence of women in Smith's history is striking and what is not said, but perhaps implied, in this transition (that women could "handle" silent editing, because it was not yet an art or science suitable for men like himself) is again difficult to parse out or directly apply to what is written in Smith's history. But, this discursive trend—an editing history absent of women—in Smith's early writing perhaps foreshadowed much of American Cinema Editors' discourse in the first decades of its inception. ACE took for granted the demographics of gender in one of the few technical crafts that prominently employed women and whose prestige and power depended on many of them (including Margret Booth, Anne Bauchens, Viola Lawrence, and Barbara Mclean).²⁷ ACE presumably had a better position from which to facilitate and grow the strengths of its women members, unlike the union who, according to Monticone, "pursed the interests of its male members."²⁸ Yet, the literature from ACE's early years illustrates that while women were celebrated and public members of the organization, their presence, despite the craft's long history of women editors, was sometimes treated as an anomaly rather than tied to its formation. While unclear to what extent Smith played a role in this institutional ambivalence, his goals were focused less on the visibility of individual editors than on promoting the idea of the editor and the craft of editing generally.

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After the War, Part-Time Editor, Full-Time Publicity Man

In the spring of 1943, Smith resigned from his post as president of SMPFE and enlisted in the Navy, joining hundreds of other editors and film industry technicians in the war effort. In 1944, *The Leader* folded when SMPFE dissolved and joined IATSE to form Local 776, The Motion Picture Film Editors.²⁹ After serving in the US Naval Reserve from 1944 to 1946, Smith returned to Los Angeles and continued work at MGM.³⁰ During this period, annoyed that SMPFE was now nothing more than an IA outpost, Smith continued to advocate on behalf of the editor in any forum he could. In addition to Smith's preoccupation with redefining industrial terminology, the editor often reached out to social, professional, and educational groups to lecture on the mechanics, history, and artistry of film editing.³¹

In November 1950, Smith joined a handful of other editors, including Frances D. Lyon, Jack Ogilvie, and James E. Newcomb to form the American Cinema Editors craft organization. ACE was to serve as a social and promotional organization that would complement the work of the newly formed IATSE local. In many ways, ACE editors also benefitted from and contributed to the work of IATSE 776 in its first decade. The improvements in working hours and pay guaranteed by the union, the organization of studio personnel, and the growth of 16mm as an industrial format after WWII provided Smith and other editors more autonomy, power, and arenas in which to share these revised working schemas to broader audiences beyond even their immediate director or studio head.³² These improvements in working conditions alongside changes in editor hierarchies and autonomy (the increased use of supervising editors and studio editors like Margaret Booth) within the studio system are often chalked up to overall labor progression or casualization of efficiency models at all levels of production.³³ Rather than attributing these changes entirely to broader trends, it is productive to think about how communities of editors like ACE, IATSE, and SMPFE influenced and put into place many of the policies that granted them greater authority and prestige.

As part of ACE's mission to "build the prestige and dignity of the craft," the organization, its education and research committee (headed by Smith and Leon Barsha), and their original publicity specialist Ted Leff sought to redefine the image of the editor in trade publications, movie and television reviews, and in the eyes of the public.³⁴ ACE explicitly modeled their organization on the American Society of Cinematographers (including publishing a sustainable trade newsletter, *The Cinemeditor*, and campaigning for an ACE title credit). Smith began his tenure as the organization's president in 1953, the same year he joined the board of AMPAS. Smith's involvement with each of ACE's promotional projects is evident throughout the first two decades of *The Cinemeditor* (in the 1950s and 1960s) and in the publicity write-ups in *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and *Film Daily*. Of all the promotional projects, Smith's largest investment was in the ACE Roundtable series.³⁵ The topics of these industry roundtables were often masqueraded as conversations about "inter-guild" cooperation, which the editors leveraged to evidence how their unique skills could facilitate and problem-solve every group's need from pre-production to distribution. In this way, the editor's influence increased as a key arbiter of relevant industry topics and as a potential continuity mediator at all stages of production.

Smith and the other board members were keenly aware of how this impression of the craft could reflect on bigger advancements for editors in autonomy, prestige, and economic strength; and they took seriously the atmosphere, sophistication, and diplomacy of these professional events. After the first roundtable, Smith even penned an editorial in the *Cinemeditor* instructing the members how they might better represent themselves and the guild through their presentation of questions. Smith discouraged personal and collegial introduction in favor of a more professional mode, "questions should be brief—concise—to the point—impersonal."³⁶ Despite Smith and President Lyon's urging about the value of these roundtables, it is unclear how seriously guild members treated these events as practical advancements in their everyday work.³⁷ Lyon and Smith encouraged members to think of the guild as adjacent to the work of the union and

to think of their roles as “campaign workers” in the fight for the role of the editor.

If Smith was a “campaign worker” for ACE in the 1950s and 1960s, he would have been campaign manager, head of operations, and grassroots activist all in one. In this way, Smiths’ career is both exceptional and representative of the other editors who cut day-to-day dailies as studio employees and also served in the union or ACE to build a community among editors. During ACE’s first decade, Smith served as vice-president from 1951-1953, President in 1953 and 1960, and publication editor from 1959-1961. In addition to serving on the promotion and research committee, Smith attended numerous publicity events, lectured in the college cooperative program at Columbia University in New York, UCLA, and Iberamericano University in Mexico City. Smith also spearheaded the large historical project and events for the organization’s first and second decade anniversary celebrations and books. These enormous commemorative volumes contained articles from famous directors (including some editors-turned-directors) and producers touting the artistry of the editor and the creative craft of editing.³⁸ While such institutional documents can often seem self-congratulatory, these volumes instead feel like a testament to a community Smith and his fellow editors might not have been able to imagine for themselves even decades earlier.

Educating Craft in an Uncertain Future

As ACE marked significant advancements towards that future in its first decade, Smith’s prospects in continuing his studio editing career dwindled. Smith “retired” from MGM around the end of 1952 and like many editors during the same period spent the next twenty years in search of more stable employment. While television offered new opportunities as more and more editors were losing studio work, television editing schedules were more uncertain, short, and sporadic than a studio contract. Not unlike many editors, Smith, now in his early fifties, found himself constantly looking for and travelling to whatever work would come his way. In 1954 and 1958, Smith did short six week stints in New York editing *Cinerama Holiday* and *Cinerama, South Seas*. In 1956, he started serial work

for Walter Lantz’s televised *Woody Woodpecker Show* at Universal International’s cartoon division. While Smith would work with Lantz until the show’s end in 1972, the job did not employ him year-round. In 1957, Smith updated his colleagues about his new work on a US Navy documentary in the “Trims” member round-up column of *The Cinemeditor* joking, “Free-lancing again, Fred had agreed to a return to active duty for just one picture.”³⁹ In 1959 and 1960, Smith picked up two features gigs on *The Gallant Hours* and *For the Love of Mike*. He also reached out to directors George Stevens and John Huston in hopes of establishing serious working relationships with both, but was disappointed and frustrated by their ambivalence or lack of response to his cheerful self-promotion.⁴⁰

While on one hand, Smith’s precarity of employment caused him both practical and ideological distress (how could someone maintain such an idealization of a guild and a craft in which he rarely worked?), Smith’s unsolicited free time provided him an opportunity to re-focus his attentions to promoting those very ideals. During this period, Smith researched and penned a handful of editorials and future-looking exposés for *The Cinemeditor* on the role of automation in newly developed electronic and videotape machines.⁴¹ Smith also took over the role of house organ editor to “save it” from inevitable demise when its editor retired, exclaiming, “To discontinue *Cinemeditor* would, in my opinion, be a regression for the ACE’s ... We need such a service more than the Academy [who had recently started a bulletin] because we have even less opportunity to spread the news of what is happening in our highly specialized craft.”⁴² Unlike his younger counterparts in the field, Smith recognized the power and influence of guild organizations to negotiate the intangibles of craft and the power of using a house organ to bring members together around industrial changes like runaway productions, technological advancements, and jurisdictional disputes.

During the same period, the growth and success of ACE’s college cooperative program had led to the production and distribution of two educational films for high schools, colleges, and universities “Basics of Film Editing” (Leon Barsha, 1958) and “Film Editing: Interpretations and Values” also known as the *Gunsmoke* dailies (Fred Berger, 1958).⁴³ As a result of the success of the two ACE

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films, Smith was invited to the 1962 University Film Producers Association (UFPA) conference to give a talk on the editor's position in the "production chain of commands" with the aid of glass-slides made by Herb Farmer at USC.⁴⁴ This lecture would later become Smith's 1964 occupational booklet *Where does the Editor Fit into The Motion Picture Industry*.

After the lecture, much of the conversation turned to the kinds of potential careers there were "out west" for students looking to apprentice with a Hollywood editor. As Smith bemoaned, "During the question and answer period, the old plea of 'How do you get a job in Hollywood?' raised its ugly head, but I had some startlingly illuminating answers ready—including my own experience of being out of employment for the past six months!"⁴⁵ Smith continued by quoting the current unemployment statistics of the film editor's union and the widespread industry concerns about runaway productions, closed shops, and a competitive and long lasting apprenticeship system. As evidenced by their investment in the widespread teaching of editing, ACE as an organization was not as suspicious about market saturation as some of their other guild counterparts. Smith and fellow editors, even in these precarious circumstances, still encouraged editing students to find jobs in their college or hometown markets.⁴⁶

Reinvigorated by his time with UFPA, Smith returned to ACE and organized a second installment of roundtable presentations, the "ACE Symposium" from 1963 to 1970 and produced the second decade anniversary book—this time with an eye to more pressing technological and industrial change.⁴⁷ Perhaps because of Smith's desire to influence and manage communities of editors, his final organizational project was in teaching Film Editing 1 at Columbia College Los Angeles in the 1977 school year. Smith's papers include his final exams for teaching in the Fall, Winter, and Spring quarters at the college and student evaluations of the course. Perhaps it is these words from students, some of whom would go on to win ACE's student editing award and work in the industry, that best give the fullest picture of Smith's life-long service to the craft of editing. One student, Steve Cannon tells Smith that the course got him to re-evaluate his motivations, "I feel closer to understanding how ultimate happiness comes as the selfishness of the

ego diminishes. In other words, through selfless service—a meaningful contribution can be made."⁴⁸ Another student Jason Freeman reflects, "Besides basic techniques ... I gained a sense of perspective and motivation." Freeman continues, "While our films may disintegrate someday—the minds which they moved or perhaps molded shall inherit the earth."

Smith later collected and donated these teaching evaluations along with his scrapbooks, correspondence, writings, and personal glass slide collection to the Academy archives. This act illustrates to some extent how Smith considered his personal, private, and public work to be of value to the industry's history into the future. Smith's service work and discursive contributions reimagined how editors received credit for their mechanical and creative work and elevated the status of the editor as crucial to the industrial and political economy of post-World War II Hollywood.

Fredrick Y. Smith was a key agent and selfless servant in shaping a desirable idea, image, and definition of the editor for the industry, the public, and editors themselves. Smith's advocacy was less interested in individual editors as auteurs and more devoted to developing an imaginary of an ideal editor in the collective consciousness of the industry and in the minds of viewers. This ideal editor was industrious, hard-working, thoughtful, collaborative, humble, willing to do extra work—and when provided with just the right degree of autonomy and the ears of the writer, director, and producer at all stages of production—could radically improve the continuity, narrative appeal, and aesthetic goals of any project to which he set his mind. As Smith explained in his oral history, "I say, 'please let me make the first cut. Respect my talent, experience, knowledge enough to let me give you the translation I think you want.'"⁴⁹

Smith was both exceptional and typical in his relative anonymity and decline of his actual editing career. Such a case highlights the value in taking seriously those unexceptional individuals—who, though they won no awards and produced no oeuvre of recognizable style—still found ways to shape the industry. Perhaps because he was acutely aware of the industrial and public perception of

the lowly editor, Smith's Academy gift in 1980—a decade before his death and thirty years before the collection was fully processed at the Margaret Herrick library in 2014—offered an aspirational dream for a history of film that included the editor as a central figure worthy of attention and study.

Unlike many editors—whose faces, recollections, and thoughts about their work would not be salvaged from the “trim bin” of film history—Smith conceivably perceived that the recovery of his own “face on the cutting room floor” could stand in place for a recovery project for editors writ large.

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Notes

1 *An Oral History with Fredrick Y. Smith*, interviewed by Douglas Bell, 2. Academy Oral History Program, AMPAS (Academy Foundation, 1994), Margaret Herrick Library, Beverly Hills, CA.

2 Alan Crosland, Jr, “Editorial,” *The Cinemeditor* 1, no. 1 (May 1951): 2.

3 Mike Steen “Film Editor: Fred Y. Smith,” *Hollywood Speaks, an Oral History* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Songs, 1974), 304.

4 Paul Monticone, “Classical Hollywood, 1928-1946: Editing,” *Editing and Special/Visual Effects*. Eds. Charlie Keil and Kristen Whissel. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 52.

5 Steen, 304.

6 Steen, 305.

7 Steen, 305.

8 Amelie Hastie, *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection, and Film History*. (New York: Duke University Press, 2007), 27.

9 Fredrick Y. Smith, “The Film Editor,” Fredrick Y. Smith Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, (Hereafter Smith Papers).

10 For an early history of the editor's guild see: Jeff Burman, Christopher Cooke, Michal Kunkes, “The Great Society: The Beginnings of the Editors Guild.” *Editors Guild Magazine* 32, no. 4 (July-August 2011) <https://www.editorsguild.com/Magazine.cfm?ArticleID-1052>; See also Edward Landler, “The Founding Fathers: Keep the Story Moving I. James Wilkinson,” *Editor's Guild Magazine* 1, no. 3 (May-June 2012) <https://www.editorsguild.com/Magazine.cfm?ArticleID-1099>; Edward Landler, “The Founding Forefathers: A Company Man but a Union Man, Ben Lewis,” in *Editor's Guild Magazine* 1, no. 3 (May-June 2012) <https://www.editorsguild.com/Magazine.cfm?ArticleID-1098>

11 Smith's frustration with the organization—as it was structured to function as a joint craft and pseudo-union arm—stemmed from a precise assessment: “We have members who undoubtedly belong to our organization because they are compelled to belong—who pay for dues in a spirit of duress—who are naturally against almost everything and anything that could be accomplished through cooperation with their fellow workers.” Even during his SMPFE tenure, Smith longed for a division between union matters and the activities of craft promotion. See: Fredrick Y. Smith, “Your Society,” *The Leader* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1943): 1.

12 Smith and other older members of the organization often dismissed the importance of union bargaining for established editors, arguing similarly for a distinction between mere technicians and artisans of the craft. In this way, Smith and others sought an arrangement similar to the American Society of Cinematographers, whose first cameramen held off union alliance for nearly a decade by contracting directly with producers. Smith remained skeptical of IATSE, the international representative of the Motion Picture Film Editors 776, late into his career, remarking in 1970, “unionism takes a talented man and puts him the middle strata. It takes the lazy, inefficient person and brings him up to the same level as the talented person.” Steen, 314.

THE EDITOR'S FACE ON THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

13 *An Oral History with Fredrick Y. Smith*, 25.

14 Monticone, 51.

15 For an early example distinguishing between the “cutter” and the “film editor,” William Lord Wright explains, “It is true that some of the cutters had the name “Film Editor” wished on them in lieu of a raise in salary, but for the most part they are unhonored and unsung.” See, William Lord Wright, “Hints for Scenario Writers.” *Picture-Play Magazine*. 7, no. 4 (December 1917): 248.

16 Robert E. Sherwood, “Surgeons of the Screen,” *Screenland* 8, no. 2 (November 1923): 17; William Lord Wright, “Screenings,” *Picture-Play Magazine*. 10, no. 3 (May 1919): 56.

17 Robert Welsh, “Tradeviews,” *The Hollywood Reporter* 19, no. 1 (January 12, 1934): 1.

18 Fredrick Y. Smith letter to “Paddy,” July 30, 1936. “Correspondence 1936-1954.” Smith Papers.

19 Smith, “letter to ‘Paddy’”; Fredrick Y. Smith, “The Cutting and Editing of Motion Pictures,” *The Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* 34 (November 1942): 284.

20 Smith, “The Cutting and Editing of Motion Pictures,” 285.

21 Editor George Amy used Smith’s logic to celebrate the industry’s move from the “inmate” cutter to the autonomous editor in a 1957 editorial “Why A.C.E.?” Amy writes: “the verb—‘to cut’—as: to carve, to hew, to mow, to reap, to pare, to dilute (as in cutting liquor), to form, shape, or adorn by cutting. Even though I have had the privilege of editing some of the biggest financial successes produced in Hollywood, I still cannot apply any of Webster’s definitions of the word ‘cut’ to my work.” George Amy, “Why the A.C.E.?” *The Cinemeditor* 7, no. 1 (March 1957): 4.

22 Norman Taurog, “From Past to Present,” in *SMPFE Dinner-Dance Commemorative Program, September 20, 1940* (Los Angeles: SMPFE), 19.

23 Smith, “The Cutting and Editing of Motion Pictures,” 288.

24 Smith, “The Cutting and Editing of Motion Pictures,” 290.

25 *An Oral History with Fredrick Y. Smith*, 15.

26 Smith, “The Cutting and Editing of Motion Pictures,” 285.

27 Kristen Hatch, “Cutting Women: Margaret Booth and Hollywood’s Pioneering Female Editors.” *Women Film Pioneers Project*. url: <https://wfpp.cdrcs.columbia.edu/essay/cutting-women/>

28 Monticone, 59.

29 Multiple accounts of SMPFE dissolution/IA adoption point to the membership shift during the war years from an older, established roster (who enlisted and thus could not vote) to a younger, female roster. See: Burman, Cooke, Kunkes; Steen, 314.

30 “Biographical Data,” Smith Papers.

31 For example, in 1947, Smith spoke to the local Los Angeles amateur filmmakers’ organization Cinema Club, screening members’ films and providing his expert feedback and later in 1948, he penned a short editorial about how the editor might contribute to reducing production costs by working with the writer, producer, and director to “pre-edit” the film before it went into production. “With the amateur movie clubs,” *Home Movies* 14, no. 2 (February 1947): 104; Fredrick Y. Smith, “The Future of the Film Editor,” *Film Daily Yearbook 1948*. Ed. Jack Alicoate (New York: Wid’s Film and Film Inc, 1948): 899-900.

32 In Douglas Bell’s oral history interview with Smith, he states: “the editor’s mandated wage tripled from 1942 to 1962 and the work week shortened from fifty-four to forty-eight. Also the standing wager for an on-call work week went up commensurately.” *An Oral History with Fredrick Y. Smith*, 187.

33 Monticone, 56.

34 Those who shared Smith’s vision of the editor as creator and arbiter of meaning in a film banded together during this period to give the seemingly always invisible editor their due. Smith served on the ACE board with members like James E Newcomb, Leon Barsha, Arthur Nadel, George Amy and others who regularly contributed to educational, promotional, and advocacy work on behalf of the organization.

35 The first three roundtables included: Roundtable 1 (June 5, 1951), “Better Pictures Through Creative Co-operation” with invited speaking guests from the Screen Directors Guild (SDG), the Screen Producers Guild (SPG), the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), The American Society of Cinematographers (ASC), and the Screen Writers Guild (SWG), Roundtable 2 (December 1, 1951) “Where Shall We Cut—on Film or on Paper?” with invited speaking guest from SWG; Roundtable 3 (September 23, 1952) “Economy, What’s the Answer?” with invited speakers SPG and guests Eddie Mannix and director Don Hartman. See: Francis D. Lyon, “President’s Report,” *The Cinemeditor* 1, no. 2 (October 1951): 1; Fredrick Y. Smith, “Looking Forward,” *The Cinemeditor* 2,

no. 2 (May 1952): 3.

36 Fredrick Y. Smith, "Mutterings of a Moderator," *The Cinemeditor* 1, no. 2 (October 1951): 3.

37 At one point, Lyon passionately answered members who wanted a breakdown of how their "dollars and cents" dues were being used, "For the fifteen dollars you pay each quarter, you are receiving: (1) Positive increase in the prestige of your profession. (2) the consequent promotions of your individual stature as an editor. (3) New and increased attention given the editing profession by the industry." Francis D. Lyon, "President's Corner," *The Cinemeditor* 2, no. 3 (September 1952): 1.

38 The volumes also consolidated a list of all the publicity events, educational lectures, and membership lists, and featured playfully, but carefully constructed photo collages of organization events, trade mentions, and members. The original photo collages, constructed for the occasion, are available in disheveled hard copy in the ACE scrapbooks at the Margaret Herrick Library. American Cinema Editors Scrapbook, 1951-1965. American Cinema Editors scrapbooks, Margaret Herrick Library.

39 Through the Navy in 1958, Smith also enrolled in a correspondence course in public relations. See: "Trims," *The Cinemeditor* 7, no. 1 (March 1957): 3. "Trims," *The Cinemeditor* 8, no. 2 (June 1958): 4.

40 See Fredrick Y. Smith letters to George Stevens, 1962, George Stevens Papers, Margaret Herrick Library; Fredrick Y. Smith letters to John Huston 1960-1962, John Huston Papers, Margaret Herrick Library.

41 For the entire series see, Smith, "Looking into the Future: Part I." *The Cinemeditor* 5, no. 4 (December 1955): 3; Smith, "Looking into the Future: Part II." *The Cinemeditor* 6, no. 1 (March 1956): 3; Smith, "Looking into the Future: Part III." *The Cinemeditor* 6, no. 2 (June 1956): 3

42 Fredrick Y. Smith, "A Clarion Call to our Fourth Estates." *The Cinemeditor* 8, no. 4 (December 1958): 3.

43 To help support and further promote these widely praised and highly successful films, ACE sent editors Fred Berger and Danny Landres to the 1961 University Film Producer's Association conference in Berkeley to showcase the films. ACE was formally invited back to present at the 1962 Glacier, Montana UFPA conference. See: Danny B. Landres, "A.C.E. represented at UFPA Berkeley Conclave." *The Cinemeditor* 11, no. 3 (October 1961): 2.

44 Fredrick Y. Smith, "Something in Common." *The Cinemeditor* 12, no. 4 (December 1962): 3.

45 Smith, "Common," 3.

46 As many film production programs around the country in the 1950s and early 1960s were more closely tied to educational, industrial, and non-fiction filmmaking hubs of their own, the threat of educating and encouraging young editors may not have seemed as dire as it would even later into the 1960s and 1970s when more students became explicitly interested in auteurist narrative filmmaking. See: Robert W. Wagner, "Cinema Education in the United States," *Journal of the University Film Producers Association* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1961), 112; Marjorie Fowler, "The Film Editor is...The Diminished Man," *The Cinemeditor* 19, no. 4 (Fall 1969): 23; Bob Jacobs, "Yes, Virginia, There is an Oshkosh," *The Cinemeditor* 31, no. 2-3. (Summer/Fall 1981): 18, 26-27.

47 These included "Budget—Can the Film Editor Help to Cut It?" (discussions with the Hollywood Unit Production Managers, April 1963), "The Face on the Cutting Room Floor" (a conversation with SAG, introduced by Stanley Kramer, November 1965), "Do Editors Want to Become Runaways?" (November 1969), "Does the Film Editor Have a Future?" (September 1969), and "Will the Cassette Boom affect the Film Editors?" (1970). American Cinema Editors, *Second Decade Anniversary Book*, Ed. Fredrick Y. Smith (Los Angeles: ACE, 1971), 35. John W. Lehnrs, "A Report About "Runway Production," *The Cinemeditor* 12, no. 1 (February 1962): 1, 3-5; John Dunning, "Report on Visual Tape," *The Cinemeditor* 6, no. 3 (September 1956): 1-2.

48 "Columbia College 1972-1977," Smith Papers.

49 *An Oral History with Fredrick Y. Smith*, 305.