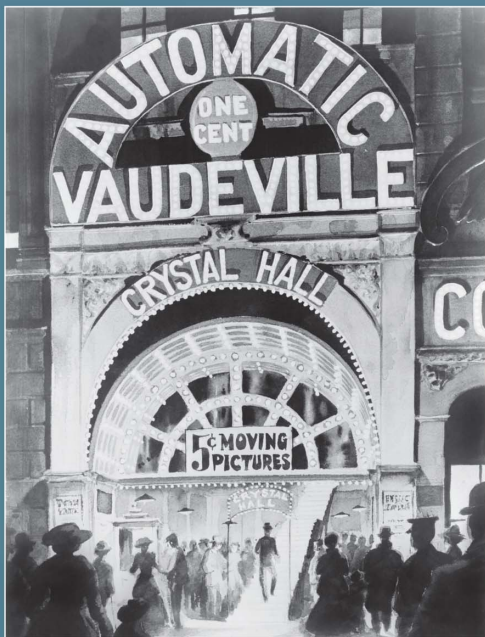


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Fifth Edition

FILM HISTORY

AN INTRODUCTION



KRISTIN THOMPSON
DAVID BORDWELL
JEFF SMITH

Mc
Graw
Hill

FILM HISTORY

An Introduction
Fifth Edition

Kristin Thompson

David Bordwell

Jeff Smith

University of Wisconsin—Madison

**Mc
Graw
Hill**



FILM HISTORY

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To Gabrielle



Chez Léon tout est bon

CONTENTS

About the Authors xiii

Preface to the Fifth Edition xv

Part One EARLY CINEMA 1

1 THE INVENTION AND EARLY YEARS OF THE CINEMA, 1880s-1904 3

The Invention of the Cinema 4

Preconditions for Motion Pictures 4 / Major Precursors of Motion Pictures 5 / An International Process of Invention 6

Early Filmmaking and Exhibition 11

Scenics, Topicals, and Fiction Films 11 / Creating an Appealing Program 11 / The Growth of the French Film Industry 12 / England and the Brighton School 13

BOX: GEORGES MÉLIÈS, MAGICIAN OF THE CINEMA 14

The United States: Competition and the Resurgence of Edison 17

Reference 21

2 THE INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION OF THE CINEMA, 1905-1912 22

Film Production in Europe 22

France: Pathé versus Gaumont 22 / Italy: Growth through Spectacle 24 / Denmark: Nordisk and Ole Olsen 25 / Other Countries 26

The Struggle for the Expanding American Film Industry 26

The Nickelodeon Boom 26 / The Motion Picture Patents Company versus the Independents 27 / Social Pressures and

Self-Censorship 29 / The Rise of the Feature Film 29 / The Star System 30 / The Movies Move to Hollywood 30

BOX: THE BEGINNINGS OF FILM ANIMATION 31

The Problem of Narrative Clarity 33

Early Moves toward Classical Storytelling 33

BOX: D. W. GRIFFITH AND ALBERT CAPELLANI: TWO EARLY MASTERS OF THE CINEMA 40

An International Style 42

References 43

3 NATIONAL CINEMAS, HOLLYWOOD CLASSICISM, AND WORLD WAR I, 1913-1919 44

The American Takeover of World Markets 45

The Rise of National Cinemas 46

Germany 46 / Italy 48 / Russia 48

BOX: THE BRIEF HEYDAY OF THE SERIAL 50

France 51 / Denmark 52 / Sweden 53

The Classical Hollywood Cinema 56

The Major Studios Begin to Form 56 / Controlling Filmmaking 57 / Filmmaking in Hollywood during the 1910s 58

BOX: PRECISION STAGING IN EUROPEAN CINEMA 60

Films and Filmmakers 61 / Streamlining American Animation 66

Trends in Smaller Producing Countries 67

References 68

Part Two THE LATE SILENT ERA, 1919–1929 69

4 FRANCE IN THE 1920s 71

The French Film Industry after World War I 71
Competition from Imports 71 / Disunity within the Film Industry 72 / Outdated Production Facilities 72

Major Postwar Genres and Filmmakers 73

The French Impressionist Movement 74
The Impressionists' Relation to the Industry 74

BOX: A CHRONOLOGY OF FRENCH IMPRESSIONIST CINEMA 75

Impressionist Theory 76 / Stylistic Traits of Impressionism 77

The End of French Impressionism 83
Problems within the Film Industry 84

References 84

5 GERMANY IN THE 1920s 85

The German Situation after World War I 85

Genres and Styles of German Postwar Cinema 86
Spectacles 86 / The German Expressionist Movement 87

BOX: A CHRONOLOGY OF GERMAN EXPRESSIONIST CINEMA 88

Kammerspiel 92 / German Films Abroad 93

Major Changes in the Mid-to-Late 1920s 94
The Technological Updating of the German Studios 94 / The End of Inflation 95

The End of the Expressionist Movement 96

New Objectivity 97

BOX: G. W. PABST AND NEW OBJECTIVITY 98

Export and Classical Style 99

References 100

6 SOVIET CINEMA IN THE 1920s 101

The Hardships of War Communism, 1918–1920 101
The Kuleshov Group 103

Recovery under the New Economic Policy, 1921–1924 104
Centralized Distribution 105 / Regularized Production 105

Increased State Control and the Montage Movement, 1925–1930 106

Growth and Export in the Film Industry 106 / The Influence of Constructivism 107 / A New Generation: The Montage Filmmakers 108

BOX: A CHRONOLOGY OF THE SOVIET MONTAGE MOVEMENT 110

The Theoretical Writings of Montage Filmmakers 111 / Soviet Montage Form and Style 111

Other Soviet Films 119

The First Five-Year Plan and the End of the Montage Movement 120

References 121

7 THE LATE SILENT ERA IN HOLLYWOOD, 1920–1928 122

Theater Chains and the Expansion of the Industry 123
Vertical Integration 123 / Picture Palaces 124 / The Big Three and the Little Five 124

The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America 125

Studio Filmmaking 125

Style and Technological Changes 125 / Big-Budget Films of the 1920s 128 / New Investment and Blockbusters 130 / Genres and Directors 131

BOX: 1920s COMEDY IN HOLLYWOOD 132*Foreign Filmmakers in Hollywood 136***Films for African American Audiences 140****The Animated Part of the Program 142**

Reference 144

8 INTERNATIONAL TRENDS OF THE 1920s 145**“Film Europe” 145***Postwar Animositities Fade 145 / Concrete Steps toward Cooperation 146 / Success Cut Short 147***The “International Style” 147***The Blending of Stylistic Traits 147 / Carl Dreyer: European Director 149***BOX: THE SPREAD OF “ART CINEMA” INSTITUTIONS 151****Film Experiments outside the Mainstream Industry 151***Abstract Animation 152 / Dada Filmmaking 153 / Surrealism 155 / Cinéma Pur 156 / Lyrical Documentaries: The City Symphony 157 / Experimental Narrative 159***Documentary Features Gain Prominence 161****Commercial Filmmaking Internationally 162***Japan 162 / Great Britain 163 / Italy 164 / Some Smaller Producing Countries 164*

References 166

Part Three THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOUND CINEMA, 1926–1945 167**9 THE INTRODUCTION OF SOUND 169****Sound in the United States 170***Warner Bros. and Vitaphone 170 / Sound-on-Film Is Adopted 170 / Sound and Filmmaking 171***BOX: EARLY SOUND TECHNOLOGY AND THE CLASSICAL STYLE 172****Germany Challenges Hollywood 175***Dividing the International Pie 175 / The Early Sound Era in Germany 175***The USSR Pursues its Own Path to Sound 178****The International Adoption of Sound 179***France 179 / Great Britain 181 / Japan 182 / Wiring the World's Theaters for Sound 183 / Crossing the Language Barrier 183*

References 184

10 THE HOLLYWOOD STUDIO SYSTEM, 1930–1945 185**The New Structure of the Film Industry 186***The Big Five 186***BOX: THE HAYS CODE: SELF-CENSORSHIP IN HOLLYWOOD 188***The Little Three 188 / The Independents 190***Exhibition Practice in the 1930s 190****Continued Innovation in Hollywood 191***Sound Recording 191 / Camera Movement 192 / Technicolor 192 / Special Effects 193 / Cinematography Styles 195***Major Directors 196***The Silent Veterans 196 / New Directors 198***BOX: CITIZEN KANE AND THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS 199***New Émigré Directors 200***Genre Innovations and Transformations 200***The Musical 200 / The Screwball Comedy 201 / The Horror Film 202 / The Social Problem Film 203 / The Gangster Film 204 / Film Noir 204 / The War Film 206***Animation and the Studio System 207**

References 208

11 OTHER STUDIO SYSTEMS 209**Quota Quickies and Wartime Pressures:
The British Studios 209**

*The British Film Industry Grows 209 / Export
Successes 211 / Alfred Hitchcock's Thrillers 212 / Crisis and
Recovery 212 / The Effects of the War 214*

**Innovation within an Industry:
The Studio System of Japan 216**

*Popular Cinema of the 1930s 216 / The Pacific
War 218*

**BOX: YASUJIRO OZU AND KENJI MIZOGUCHI
IN THE 1930s 219**

India: An Industry Built on Music 224

*A Highly Fragmented Business 224 / Mythologicals,
Socials, and Devotionals 224 / Independents Weaken the
System 225*

**China: Filmmaking Caught between
Left and Right 225**

References 227

**12 CINEMA AND THE STATE: THE USSR,
GERMANY, AND ITALY,
1930-1945 228****The Soviet Union: Socialist Realism and
World War II 228**

*Films of the Early 1930s 229 / The Doctrine of Socialist
Realism 229*

BOX: SOCIALIST REALISM AND CHAPAYEV 230

*The Main Genres of Socialist Realism 231 / The Soviet
Cinema in Wartime 234*

The German Cinema under the Nazis 236

*The Nazi Regime and the Film Industry 236 /
Films of the Nazi Era 237 / The Aftermath of the Nazi
Cinema 241*

Italy: Propaganda versus Entertainment 241

*Industry Tendencies 241 / A Cinema of Distraction 242 /
A New Realism? 244*

References 246

**13 FRANCE: POETIC REALISM, THE POPULAR
FRONT, AND THE OCCUPATION,
1930-1945 247****The Industry and Filmmaking
during the 1930s 248**

*Production Problems and Artistic Freedom 248 / Fantasy and
Surrealism: René Clair, Pierre Prévert, and Jean Vigo 248 /
Quality Studio Filmmaking 250 / Émigrés in France 251 /
Everyday Realism 251*

Poetic Realism 252

*Doomed Lovers and Atmospheric Settings 253 / The Creative
Burst of Jean Renoir 254 / Other Contributors 255*

Brief Interlude: The Popular Front 256

**BOX: POPULAR FRONT FILMMAKING: LA VIE EST À
NOUS AND LA MARSEILLAISE 257**

Filmmaking in Occupied and Vichy France 260

*The Situation in the Film Industry 260 / Films of the
Occupation Period 262*

Reference 264

**14 LEFTIST, DOCUMENTARY, AND
EXPERIMENTAL CINEMAS, 1930-1945 265****The Spread of Political Cinema 265**

*The United States 266 / Germany 267 / Belgium and the
Netherlands 267 / Great Britain 268 / International Leftist
Filmmaking in the Late 1930s 269*

**Government- and Corporate-
Sponsored Documentaries 270**

The United States 270 / Great Britain 271

**BOX: ROBERT FLAHERTY: MAN OF ARAN AND THE
"ROMANTIC DOCUMENTARY" 272**

Wartime Documentaries 274

*Hollywood Directors and the War 274 / Great Britain 275
Germany and the USSR 277*

The International Experimental Cinema 277

*Experimental Narratives and Lyrical and Abstract
Films 278 / Surrealism 279 / Animation 280*

References 282

.....

Part Four THE POSTWAR ERA: 1945–1960s 283

.....

15 AMERICAN CINEMA IN THE POSTWAR ERA, 1945–1960 285

POSTWAR CHANGES, 1946–1948 286

The HUAC Hearings: The Cold War Reaches Hollywood 286 /
The Paramount Decision 286

The Decline of the Hollywood Studio System 287

Changing Lifestyles and Competing Entertainment 288

BOX: SEE IT ON THE BIG SCREEN 289

Hollywood Adjusts to Television 292 / *Art Cinemas and Drive-Ins* 293 / *Challenges to Censorship* 294

The New Power of the Individual Film and the Revival of the Roadshow 294

The Rise of the Independents 295

Mainstream Independents: Agents, Star Power, and the Package 295 / *Exploitation* 297 / *Independents on the Fringe* 297

Classical Hollywood Filmmaking: A Continuing Tradition 298

Complexity and Realism in Storytelling 298 /
Stylistic Changes 299 / *New Twists on Old Genres* 300

Major Directors: Several Generations 303

Veterans of the Studio Era 303 / *Émigrés Stay On* 304 /
Welles's Struggle with Hollywood 305 / *The Impact of the Theater* 305

BOX: ALFRED HITCHCOCK 306

New Directors 307

References 308

16 POSTWAR EUROPEAN CINEMA: NEOREALISM AND ITS CONTEXT, 1945–1959 309

The Postwar Context 309

Film Industries and Film Culture 310

West Germany: "Papás Kino" 310 / *Resistance to US Encroachment* 311 / *Art Cinema: The Return of Modernism* 313

Italy: Neorealism and After 315

Italian Spring 315

BOX: NEOREALISM AND AFTER: A CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS AND SELECTED WORKS 316

Defining Neorealism 318

BOX: UMBERTO D.: THE MAID WAKES UP 320

BOX: OPEN CITY: THE DEATH OF PINA 321

BOX: LUCHINO VISCONTI AND ROBERTO ROSSELLINI 322

Beyond Neorealism 322

A Spanish Neorealism? 325

References 326

17 POSTWAR EUROPEAN CINEMA: FRANCE, SCANDINAVIA, AND BRITAIN, 1945–1959 327

French Cinema of the Postwar Decade 327

The Industry Recovers 327

BOX: POSTWAR FRENCH FILM CULTURE 328

The Tradition of Quality 329 / *The Return of Older Directors* 331 / *New Independent Directors* 334

Scandinavian Revival 336

BOX: CARL THEODOR DREYER 337

England: Quality and Comedy 338

Problems in the Industry 339 / *Literary Heritage and Eccentricity* 339 / *Art-House Success Abroad* 342

References 342

18 POSTWAR CINEMA BEYOND THE WEST, 1945–1959 343

General Tendencies 343

Japan 345

Industry Recovery under the Occupation 345 / *The Veteran Directors* 346 / *The War Generation* 347

Postwar Cinema in the Soviet Sphere of Influence 348
The USSR: From High Stalinism to the Thaw 349 / *Postwar Cinema in Eastern Europe* 351

People's Republic of China 355
Civil War and Revolution 355 / *Mixing Maoism and Tradition* 357

India 358
A Disorganized but Prolific Industry 358 / *The Populist Tradition and Raj Kapoor* 359

BOX: MUSIC AND POSTWAR INDIAN FILM 360

Swimming against the Stream: Guru Dutt and Ritwik Ghatak 361

Latin America 362
Brazil and Argentina 362 / *Mexican Popular Cinema* 363
 References 364

19 ART CINEMA AND THE IDEA OF AUTHORSHIP 365

The Rise And Spread Of The Auteur Theory 365

Authorship and the Growth of the Art Cinema 366

Luis Buñuel (1900–1983) 367

Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007) 368

Akira Kurosawa (1910–1998) 371

Federico Fellini (1920–1993) 374

Michelangelo Antonioni (1912–2007) 375

Robert Bresson (1907–1999) 377

Jacques Tati (1908–1982) 379

Satyajit Ray (1921–1992) 381

References 384

20 NEW WAVES AND YOUNG CINEMAS, 1958–1967 385

The Industries' New Needs 385

Formal and Stylistic Trends 386

France: New Wave and New Cinema 389
The New Wave 389

BOX: FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT AND JEAN-LUC GODARD 391

New Cinema: The Left Bank 393

Italy: Young Cinema and Spaghetti Westerns 396

Great Britain: Kitchen Sink Cinema 398

Young German Film 401

New Cinema in the USSR and Eastern Europe 402
Young Cinema in the Soviet Union 402 / *New Waves in Eastern Europe* 404

BOX: MIKLÓS JANCsó 409

The Japanese New Wave 412
An Industry in Search of Youth 412 / *Oshima and Others* 413

Brazil: Cinema Novo 415
Government Support and New Directors 416 / *Coups and the Cinema* 417 / *Tropicalism and Cannibalism* 418

References 419

21 DOCUMENTARY AND EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA IN THE POSTWAR ERA, 1945–MID-1960s 420

Toward the Personal Documentary 421
Innovative Trends 421 / *The National Film Board and Free Cinema* 423 / *France: The Auteurs' Documentaries* 423 / *Jean Rouch and Ethnographic Documentary* 425

Direct Cinema 426
The United States: Drew and Associates 426

BOX: NEW TECHNOLOGY FOR THE NEW DOCUMENTARY 427

Direct Cinema in Bilingual Canada 428 / *France: Cinéma Vérité and Provocation* 429

Experimental and Avant-Garde Cinema 432

BOX: THE FIRST POSTWAR DECADE: MAYA DEREN 433

Abstraction, Collage, and Personal Expression 435 / *Success and New Ambitions* 441

BOX: THE SECOND POSTWAR DECADE: STAN BRAKHAGE 442

Underground and Expanded Cinema 444

References 449

Part Five THE CONTEMPORARY CINEMA SINCE THE 1960s 450

22 HOLLYWOOD'S FALL AND RISE:
1960-1980 452

The 1960s: The Film Industry in Recession 453

*The Studios in Crisis 453 / Styles and Genres 454 /
Modifying the Classical Studio Style 455 / Identifying the
Audience 456*

BOX: NEW PRODUCTION AND EXHIBITION
TECHNOLOGIES 457

The New Hollywood: Late 1960s to Late 1970s 458

*Toward an American Art Cinema 458 / Hollywood Strikes
Gold 460*

BOX: PERSONAL CINEMA: ALTMAN AND ALLEN 461

The Return of the Blockbuster 463

BOX: THE 1970s BIG THREE: COPPOLA,
SPIELBERG, AND LUCAS 464

Hollywood Updated 467 / Scorsese as Synthesis 469

Opportunities for Independents 470

References 473

23 POLITICALLY CRITICAL CINEMA
OF THE 1960s AND 1970s 474

Political Filmmaking in the Third World 475

*Revolutionary Aspirations 476 / Political Genres and
Style 476 / Latin America 477*

BOX: TWO REVOLUTIONARY FILMS: MEMORIES OF
UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND LUCÍA 480

*Black African Cinema 486 / China: Cinema and the Cultural
Revolution 488*

Political Filmmaking in the First and Second
Worlds 490

*Eastern Europe and the USSR 490 / Political Cinema in the
West: A Culture of Dissent 493*

BOX: FILM ACTIVITIES DURING THE MAY EVENTS
IN PARIS 494

BOX: BRECHT AND POLITICAL MODERNISM 498

References 510

24 DOCUMENTARY AND EXPERIMENTAL
FILM SINCE THE LATE 1960s 512

Documentary Cinema 513

Direct Cinema and Its Legacy 513

BOX: FREDERICK WISEMAN AND THE TRADITION
OF DIRECT CINEMA 514

*Synthesizing Documentary Techniques 516 / Questioning
Documentary Actuality 518 / Documenting Upheavals and
Injustice 520 / Theatrical Documentary in the Age of Video
and the Internet 522*

BOX: FACTS, TRUTH, AND ATTITUDE: MICHAEL
MOORE AND ERROL MORRIS 523

Structural Film and After 526

*Structural Film 526 / Reactions to Structural Film:
The Return of Narrative 531 / New Mergers 537*

BOX: CUTTING THE TIE TO PHOTOGRAPHY:
ANIMATED DOCUMENTARY 538

Film, Video, and Entry into the Museum 540

References 542

25 NEW CINEMAS AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS:
EUROPE AND THE USSR SINCE THE
1970s 544

Western Europe 545

Crisis in the Industry 545

BOX: TELEVISION AND AARDMAN
ANIMATIONS 547

National Traditions and International Trends 548

BOX: DURAS, VON TROTTA, AND THE EUROPEAN
ART CINEMA 558

The Arresting Image 560

**BOX: ART CINEMA: SLOWING DOWN
AND JUMPING AROUND 564****Eastern Europe and the USSR 566***Eastern Europe: From Reform to Revolution 566***BOX: ROMANIA: A NEWER WAVE 571***From the USSR to the CIS 572*

References 578

**26 A DEVELOPING WORLD: CONTINENTAL
AND SUBCONTINENTAL CINEMAS
SINCE 1970 579****New Cinemas, New Audiences 580****African Cinema 580***North Africa 581 / Sub-Saharan Africa 582 / The 1990s
and Beyond 583***Filmmaking in the Middle East 586***Israel and Palestine 586 / Egypt 587 / Turkey 588 / Iran:
Revolution, Renaissance, and Retreat 589 / Countries in
Conflict 592***South America and Mexico: Interrupted Reforms
and Partnerships with Hollywood 593***Brazil 593***BOX: LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND
CINEMA 594***Argentina 596 / Chile and Elsewhere 597 / Mexico 598 /
Cuba, Industry in Isolation 601***India: Mass Output and Art Cinema 602***Alternatives to the Mainstream 603 / Coproductions and
Satellite TV 604 / Popular Cinema Changes with the
Times 605 / Indian Cinema on the Global Stage 607*

References 608

**27 CINEMA RISING: PACIFIC ASIA
AND OCEANIA SINCE 1970 609****Australia and New Zealand 610***Australia 610 / New Zealand 613***New Cinemas in East Asia 614***Thailand 615 / The Philippines 616 / Taiwan 617***BOX: EDWARD YANG AND HOU HSIAO-HSIEN 619****Japan 621***Independent Filmmaking: Two Generations 621***BOX: THE POPULAR ARTISTRY OF HAYAO
MIYAZAKI 625****Hong Kong 626****South Korea 631****China: The Great Success Story 634***Economic Reforms and the Fifth Generation 634 /
The Sixth Generation and Illegal Films 636 / The Cinema
and "Market Socialism" 637 / The Dragon Grows
Stronger 638*

References 641

Part Six CINEMA IN THE AGE OF NEW MEDIA 642**28 AMERICAN CINEMA AND THE
ENTERTAINMENT ECONOMY:
THE 1980s AND AFTER 643****Hollywood, Cable Television, and Home Video 644***Movies in the Home 644***Concentration and Consolidation in the Film
Industry 645***The Majors Stay Major 645 / The Blockbuster Mentality 647***BOX: DISNEY WORLD GETS BIGGER 650***The Bottom Line 652 / Multiplexing and Megaplexing:
The New Face of Exhibition 654***Artistic Trends 655***Genres 655 / Narrative Form and Style 658***BOX: INTENSIFIED CONTINUITY: A STYLE
FOR THE VIDEO AGE 660**

Directors: Midrange Options and Blockbuster Obligations 662

A New Age of Independent Cinema 667

Indie Aesthetics 668

**BOX: INDIE AUTEURS: LOW-BUDGET
BRANDING** 669

Indies and the Industry 673

References 677

29 TOWARD A GLOBAL FILM CULTURE 679

Hollyworld? 680

The Media Conglomerates 681 / *Cooperation and
Cooptation* 681

BOX: JURASSIC PARK, GLOBAL FILM 682

Multiplexing the Planet 683

**Regional Alliances, Media Empires, and the
New International Film** 684

Europe and Asia Try to Compete 684 / *Media Empires, West
and East* 684 / *Global Films from Outside Hollywood?* 686

BOX: BACK TO BASICS: DOGME 95 687

Diasporic Cinema 689

The Festival Circuit 690

Festivals and the Global Film Business 691

Video Piracy: An Alternative Distribution System 692

Fan Subcultures: Appropriating the Movies 693

References 696

**30 DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
AND THE CINEMA** 697

Digital Tools: Piece by Piece 698

Preproduction 698 / *Postproduction* 699 / *Shooting in Digital:
Experiments on the Margins* 700 / *Digital Tools for 35 mm
Shooting* 701 / *Publicity and Marketing* 702

Digital Convergence: Putting the Pieces together 703

The Digital Cinema Initiative 703 / *Theaters Go
Digital* 703 / *Promoting Digital Production: Early Adopters and
Film Diehards* 704 / *Effects on Film Form and Style* 705

**BOX: DIGITAL ANIMATION: BORDERLINE
BECOMES MAINSTREAM** 706

Digital Distribution 709

**BOX: DIRECTING DIGITAL: DAVID FINCHER AND
JEAN-LUC GODARD** 710

Digital Distribution to Theaters 712 / *DVD: Sales and
Rental* 712 / *Online Distribution: Downloads and
Streaming* 712 / *Streaming: The Long Tail Wags the Dog* 713

New Media and the Future of Film 717

Video Games 717 / *Virtual and Augmented Reality* 718

References 720

Glossary 722

Index 728

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell are married and live in Madison, Wisconsin.

Kristin Thompson is an Honorary Fellow in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she earned her Ph.D. Her books include *Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible* (1981), *Exporting Entertainment: America's Place in World Film Markets 1901–1934* (1985), *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (1988), *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (1999), *Herr Lubitsch Goes to Hollywood: German and American Film after World War I* (2005), and *The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood* (2007).

David Bordwell is Jacques Ledoux Professor Emeritus of Film Studies in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He also holds a Hilldale Professorship in the Humanities and an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Copenhagen. He has also held the Kluge Chair in Modern Culture at the Library of Congress. His books include *Narration in the Fiction Film* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), *On the History of Film Style* (Harvard University Press, 1997), *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Harvard University Press, 2000; 2nd ed., Irvington Way Institute Press, 2011), *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (University of California Press, 2005), *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (University of California Press, 2006), *The Rhapsodes: How 1940s Critics Changed American Film Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), and *Reinventing Hollywood: How 1940s Filmmakers Changed Movie Storytelling* (University of Chicago Press, 2017). He has also written books on Carl Theodor Dreyer, Yasujiro Ozu, Sergei Eisenstein, digital cinema, and Hong Kong film.

Jeff Smith is a Professor of Film Studies in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where he earned his Ph.D. He is the author of two books: *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (1998) and *Film Criticism, the Cold War, and the Blacklist: Reading the Hollywood Reds* (2014). He has also published several articles and book chapters on the role of sound and music in American cinema. He is currently at work on a book that traces development of the classical Hollywood film score during the 1930s that examines how studios allocated musical resources to films based on their position within the hierarchy of prestige pictures, programmers, and “B” films.

The authors have previously collaborated on *Film Art: An Introduction* (McGraw-Hill, 11th ed., 2017). Bordwell and Thompson are coauthors of *Minding Movies: Observations on the Art, Craft, and Business of Filmmaking* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), *Christopher Nolan: A Labyrinth of Linkages* (Irvington Way Institute Press, 2013), and, with Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (Columbia University Press, 1985).

All three authors have been active in digital media culture. Thompson has contributed supplements for Criterion DVD/Blu-ray releases of *The Only Son/There Was a Father*, *A Man Escaped*, and *Cluny Brown*, as well as a booklet essay for the Kino Lorber Blu-ray release of the restored *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*. Also for Criterion discs, Bordwell has provided DVD notes and commentary for *Alexander Nevsky*, *An Autumn Afternoon*, *Notorious*, *His Girl Friday*, *The Flavor of Green Tea over Rice*, and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. Smith has done supplements focusing on music for three other Criterion discs: *Shoot the Piano Player*, *Odd Man Out*, and *Now Voyager*.

All three authors host an ongoing series, “Observations on Film Art,” for the Criterion Channel streaming service. The many entries offer video essays on films from all eras, including *The Phantom Carriage*, *L’Aventura*, *Memories of Underdevelopment*, *My Brilliant Career*, *Girl Shy*, *Vampyr*, *Hiroshima mon amour*, *Shock Corridor*, *Vagabond*, *The Long Day Closes*, *Chungking Express*, and many other classics. The service is available by subscription at <https://www.criterionchannel.com>.

For their weblog and other online information, visit www.davidbordwell.net.



PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

Around the world, at any instant, millions of people are watching movies. They watch mainstream entertainment, serious “art films,” documentaries, cartoons, experimental films, educational shorts. They sit in air-conditioned theaters, in village squares, in art museums, in college classrooms, in their homes before a television screen, in coffee shops before a computer monitor or cell-phone screen. Through the 2010s, the world’s movie theaters sold about 8 billion tickets each year. With the availability of films on video—whether broadcast, fed from cable or satellites or the Internet, or played from disc or digital file—the audience has multiplied far beyond that. In 2019, the combined global market for theatrical, home, and mobile entertainment exceeded \$100 billion for the first time.

Nobody needs to be convinced that film has been one of the most influential media of the past hundred years. Not only can you recall your most exciting or tearful moments at the movies, you can also probably remember moments in ordinary life when you tried to be as graceful, as selfless, as tough, or as compassionate as those larger-than-life figures on the screen. The way we dress and cut our hair, the way we talk and act, the things we believe or doubt—all these aspects of our lives are shaped by films. Films also provide us with powerful artistic experiences, insights into diverse cultures, and new ways of thinking.

In this book, we introduce the history of film as it is presently conceived, written, and taught by its most accomplished scholars. *Film History: An Introduction* is not, however, a distillation of everything that is known about film history. Researchers are fond of saying that there is no film history, only film *histories*. This partly means that there can be no single survey that puts all known facts into place. The history of avant-garde film does not match neatly up with the history of color technology or the development of the

Western or the life of Alfred Hitchcock. For this reason, the enterprise we call “writing film history” is a big tent housing people who work from various perspectives and with different interests and purposes.

So there is no Big Story of Film History that will list, describe, and explain everything that took place. We think that writing film history involves asking a series of *questions* and searching for *evidence* in order to answer them in the course of an *argument*. When historians focus on different questions, they select different evidence and formulate different explanations. For example, the historian who wants to know how European cinema developed in the Cold War will not pay much attention to why Marilyn Monroe had career problems near the end of her life. For this reason, historians create not a single, infinitely extended history but a diverse set of specific historical arguments.

Three Questions

In writing this book, we have focused on the following three key questions.

1. *How have uses of the film medium changed or become normalized over time?* Within “uses of the medium,” we include matters of film form: the overall organization of the film. Often this involves telling a story, but a film’s overall form might also be based on an argument or an abstract pattern. “Uses of the medium” also include matters of film style, the patterned uses of film techniques: mise-en-scène (staging, lighting, setting, and costume); camerawork; editing; and sound. In addition, any balanced conception of how the medium has been used must also consider film modes (documentary, avant-garde, animation) and genres (such as Westerns, thrillers, musicals). So, we also examine these phenomena. All such matters are central to most college courses in film history.

A major purpose of *Film History: An Introduction* is to survey the uses of the medium in different times and places. Sometimes we dwell on the creation of stable norms of form and style, as when we examine how Hollywood standardized certain editing options in the first two decades of filmmaking. At other times, we examine how filmmakers have proposed innovations in form, technique, and genre.

2. *How have the conditions of the film industry—production, distribution, and exhibition—affected the uses of the medium?* Films are made within *modes of production*, habitual ways of organizing the labor and materials involved in creating a movie. Some modes of production are industrial. In these circumstances, companies make films as a business. The classic instance of industrial production is the *studio system*, in which firms are organized in order to make films for large audiences through a fairly detailed division of labor. Another sort of industrial production might be called the *artisanal*, or *one-off*, approach, in which a production company makes one film at a time. Other modes of production are less highly organized, involving small groups or individuals who make films for specific purposes. In any event, the ways in which films are made have had particular effects on the look and sound of the finished products.

So have the ways in which films are distributed and consumed. For example, the major technological innovations associated with the early 1950s—widescreen picture, stereophonic sound, increased use of color—were actually available decades earlier. Each could have been developed before the 1950s, but the US film industry had no pressing need to do so. Theater attendance was so high that spending money on new attractions would not have significantly increased profits. Only when attendance dropped in the late 1940s did producers and exhibitors feel compelled to introduce new technologies to lure audiences back into theaters. Exhibition in turn changed film styles and genres, with new approaches to staging and a trend toward more spectacle.

3. *How have international trends emerged in the uses of the film medium and in the film market?* In this book, we try to balance the consideration of important national contributions with a sense of how international and cross-cultural influences were operating. Many nations' audiences and film industries have been influenced by creators and films migrating across borders. Genres are vagabond as well. The Hollywood Western influenced the Japanese swordplay film and the Italian Western, genres that in turn influenced the Hong Kong kung-fu films of the 1970s; Hollywood films then began incorporating elements of the martial arts movie.

Just as important, the film industry itself is significantly transnational. At certain periods, circumstances closed off countries from the flow of films, but in general there has always been a global film market, and we understand it best by tracing trends across cultures and regions. We have paid particular attention to conditions that allowed people to see films made outside their own country.

Each of these *how* questions accompanies a great many *why* questions. For any event in the processes we focus on, we can ask what conditions caused it to turn out the way it did. Why, for instance, did early Soviet filmmakers undertake their explorations of disturbing, aggressive narrative? Why did Hollywood's studio system begin to fragment in the late 1940s? Why are more films produced now with international investment than in the 1930s or 1940s? Historians are keen to investigate causes and effects, as you will see in this text.

If film history is a generative, self-renewing activity, then we cannot simply offer a condensation of "all previous knowledge." We are, in a sense, casting what we find into a new form. Throughout the thirty years spent researching and writing and rewriting this book, we have come to believe that it offers a unique version of the shape of film history, both its overall contour and its specific detail.

Answering the Questions: Our Approach

We divide film history into five large periods: early cinema (to about 1919), the late silent era (1919–1929), the development of sound cinema (1926–1945), the period after World War II (1946–1960s), and the contemporary cinema (1960s to the present). These divisions are fairly conventional, and they have the advantage of capturing important developments in the areas that our questions address—form and style, the film industry, and international trends.

But our book differs significantly from most other surveys. For one thing, it is very comprehensive. Some books restrict themselves to the most famous films. This probably made sense in an era when access to films was more restricted. Today, however, people can obtain DVDs or stream files from all over the world, and our sense of film history has expanded enormously. As the field of film studies has grown, small countries and little-known films are now objects of intense research. A textbook should reflect our new vision of world cinema and introduce readers to great films that have been rediscovered.

For similar reasons, we have not confined ourselves just to live-action fiction films. Documentary and experimental cinema are important in their own right, as vehicles for innovations in form and style. In this text, we consider these modes from the earliest efforts to the recent work of

William Greaves, Wang Bing, Phil Solomon, and Christian Marclay.

Organization and Distinctive Features

Film History: An Introduction is comprehensive in another way. Most textbooks are organized as a chronological string of national cinema chapters. Each major producing country typically gets a single chapter summarizing its accomplishments across many years. Sometimes we also take this tack, usually when a country's contribution to a period is very significant. But a unique feature of our book is the way we try to relate developments in one nation to parallel developments elsewhere.

Why is this important? Cinema began as an international art, and for most of its history, it has functioned that way. Filmmakers in one country are often well aware of what their counterparts elsewhere are doing. And several national film industries are often responding to the same conditions at the same time. For example, during the 1930s, many countries were working to meet the challenge of making sound films. Today, filmmakers face shared problems of global distribution and digital convergence. To trace each country's cinematic history in isolation would miss the common features at work in a particular period.

As a result, most of our chapters compare developments across different national film traditions. Instead of devoting a single chapter to the French cinema of the 1960s, Chapter 20 situates the French New Wave within the emergence of New Waves and Young Cinemas around the world. Similarly, instead of treating major directors of the 1950s and 1960s such as Fellini and Bergman solely as individuals, Chapter 19 explains that they rose to prominence thanks to an international film culture driven by festivals, magazines, and a new idea of the filmmaker as a creative artist. Most chapters of our book use this comparative approach because it helps answer our general question of how cinema has developed as an international art. By presenting broad patterns rather than isolated facts, the strategy also helps the reader make new connections.

A concern for this broader view informs another unique feature of our book. Filmmaking and the film industry operate within a broad social, economic, and political context. We cannot fill in all the details of that context, of course, but most chapters do point out this wider frame of reference. For example, the development of Soviet cinema, in both the silent period (Chapter 6) and the sound era (Chapters 9 and 18), cannot be understood outside the political imperatives at work in the USSR. Less obviously, the rebuilding of European cinema after World War II owes an enormous amount to the Marshall Plan, a new emphasis on central planning and regional cooperation,

and shifts in the world economy (Chapter 17). Our need to situate film history within broader trends is just as pressing in recent eras. What we call the "critical political cinema" of the 1960s (Chapter 23) developed in response to postcolonialism, the rise of a new generation, America's involvement in the Vietnamese civil war, and other wide-ranging conditions. Likewise, economic and cultural factors are at the center of our discussion of globalization (Chapter 29). Our treatment of digital convergence in Chapter 30 considers overarching technological changes from the 1990s into the 2010s.

Film History: An Introduction relies on another unusual feature. For illustrations, many textbooks are content to use photos that were taken on the set while the film is being shot. These production stills are often posed and give no flavor of what the film actually looks like. Instead, nearly all of our illustrations are taken from the films themselves. Collecting frame enlargements has obliged us to pursue elusive prints in film archives around the world, but the results are worth it because we are able to study exactly what viewers see on the screen. Thanks to these images, we can enrich our historical argument and focus on a short sequence of images that is typical or innovative, as when we study 1910s techniques of precision staging versus continuity editing (Chapter 3), cutting patterns in Soviet montage cinema (Chapter 6), and typical Neorealist sequences in *Umberto D.* and *Open City* (Chapter 16). These moment-by-moment analyses bring important films alive for readers, who can step through video versions frame by frame.

Yet another distinctive feature of our text is that it rests on fifty years of our research. Putting aside our two textbooks, we have published several books on cinema, many of them devoted to film history. *Film History: An Introduction* is deeply indebted to the work of many other scholars, but to a considerable extent it reflects the breadth and depth of our original research into silent film, the history of US, European, and Asian cinema, and contemporary film trends across the world. We have done research in many of the world's major film archives. We have written books on films and filmmakers from Germany, Russia, Japan, France, Denmark, China, and the United States. One of us has written a book on the historiography of film. *Film History: An Introduction* is the fruit of decades of watching films, studying them, and thinking about their relations to other arts, to culture, and to the larger world.

Changes in the New Edition

As film history develops, we not only confront new films and filmmakers, but we often reconsider the past. In most chapters, we have corrected errors and added material reflecting recent research. Some of these small changes

reflect new perspectives on innovations related to film sound, early cinema, documentary film practice, and cycles of exploitation cinema.

The major revisions in this fifth edition reflect our rethinking of post-1970 film history. Most of the changes introduce fresh information and ideas. Chapter 22 updates the box on Francis Coppola, Steven Spielberg, and George Lucas to reevaluate their later business ventures. It also includes new material on Martin Scorsese. We show how a new generation of directors cite his work in much the same way that Scorsese himself paid homage to his predecessors. Similarly Chapter 24 on documentary and experimental film updates our coverage of the surging demand for nonfiction films released outside the mainstream theatrical market.

The biggest changes have been made to the last five chapters. These chapters reflect the fact that cinema continues to grow as a worldwide medium. Although American movies are the best known, other countries are becoming global players. The most obvious emerging industries are in India and China, but other countries are also finding (or refinding) their voices. In Chapter 25, we consider the continued legacy of art cinema modernism through brief discussions of Berlin school directors Thomas Arslan, Angela Schanelac, Christian Petzold, and of Greek filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos. Chapter 26, which focuses on continental and subcontinental cinemas, spotlights rising talents from Africa, Egypt, Iran, Argentina, and Mexico.

Chapter 27, “Cinema Rising: Pacific Asia and Oceania Since 1970,” shifts to another epicenter of change. In the new millennium, two regional powers have ascended, South Korea, replacing Hong Kong as a source of major genre and arthouse films; and mainland China, whose explosive economic expansion fueled the fastest growing film industry in postwar history. Since our previous edition, South Korea has solidified its place, largely on the strength of new work by Hong Sang-soo, Lee Chang-dong, and Bong Joon-ho. Bong’s *Parasite* (2019) garnered acclaim as no Korean film before it had, winning the Cannes Film Festival’s Palme d’Or and the Oscar for Best Picture. China, meanwhile, consolidated its position as one of the world’s most important film markets. The chapter highlights the continued importance of Chinese blockbusters made both domestically and as coproductions. It also examines new films produced in the independent sector by directors Bi Gan and Hu Bo.

Where does American cinema fit into all this? Part Six, “Cinema in the Age of New Media,” opens with a consideration of this problem. Chapter 28 discusses how Hollywood adjusted to new forms of entertainment—notably cable television and home video. We also consider

Hollywood’s continued emphasis on blockbusters and franchises. A box devoted to Disney shows its supremacy in those domains. With its acquisition of 20th Century Fox and a new streaming service, Disney reinforced its status as Hollywood’s most powerful studio. The chapter also revises its take on the industry’s search for synergy, focusing on the most recent round of mergers and acquisitions. Finally, throughout the chapter, we address the increased visibility of minority and women filmmakers.

The book ends with two wide-ranging surveys of the contemporary film landscape. Chapter 29, “Toward a Global Film Culture,” examines the effects of globalization on contemporary cinema. We offer fresh information and ideas about Hollywood’s domination, regional responses to it, cinemas of the diaspora, film festivals, and piracy. We also expanded our coverage of fan subcultures. Here we not only underscore the myriad ways filmmakers provide fan service, but also how fans sometimes function as a source of friction, either through their criticism on social media or their creation of unofficial versions of studio classics.

The final chapter, Chapter 30, “Digital Technology and the Cinema,” explores the degree to which digital technology has almost completely taken over film production, distribution, and exhibition. We trace this process in many domains, from computer animation to 3D projection, from production methods to mobile distribution and Virtual Reality. We’ve also updated our coverage of America’s major tech companies (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix, and Google). With the exception of Facebook, all of these companies have established streaming services, emerging as significant competitors to Hollywood’s existing oligopoly. More importantly, by producing their own content, these tech companies effectively revamped the classic strategy of vertical integration to fit the era of digital convergence. We hope that our readers will recognize the current media landscape in the story we tell here.

Throughout the fifth edition, we’ve also tried to address the coronavirus pandemic’s manifold effects on cinema. Obviously, this is a daunting task, as the situation in every country in the world has proven to be fluid. Yet, as COVID-19 cases proliferated, film production ceased, theaters closed, and release schedules were shuffled in the hopes that the industry’s normal business operations would eventually resume. The short-term impacts of the pandemic were devastating. Yet, even as theaters gradually reopen and film production restarts, the pandemic casts a huge shadow over cinema’s future. None of us have a crystal ball, and it would be rash to suggest that cinema won’t continue in some form or other. But the calamity caused by COVID-19 outbreak seems likely to wreak havoc on the world’s film industries for years to come.

We trust that teachers and students will go beyond what the book offers and explore film history on their own. To this end, we offer many supplements that try to tease you into byways we could not pursue in an already wide-ranging text.

New to the fifth edition is a collection of one hundred video clips that bring the text and images on the printed page to life. The clips present entire sequences, typically running from five to eight minutes. They cover the entire history of world cinema with most chapters featuring three to four video examples. The extracts survey a broad spectrum of cinematic modes, styles, genres, movements, and traditions. We also spotlight the work of comparatively new voices, such as Lucrecia Martel, Greta Gerwig, and Sean Baker, alongside directors well established within the canon.

Next, we have prepared a broad background essay, “Doing Film History,” which is available online at www.davidbordwell.net. A version of this served as an introductory chapter in earlier editions of this book, and in order to expand the essay’s availability, we have moved it online. In addition, many of the bonus materials that appeared in earlier editions can be found in the Student Resources section at the end of the eBook. There you will find bibliographies keyed to each chapter as well as a bibliography for more general topics.

Just as important are the “Notes and Queries” sections we had appended to chapters in earlier editions. Now those and new ones reside in the Student Resources section at the end of the eBook. We urge both teachers and students to consult them. The Notes and Queries discuss general issues of historical research as well as topics we find intriguing. (How did Japanese anime become so popular in the United States? Why do some Italian critics think that Neorealism never existed?) The advantage of moving the Notes and Queries online is that we can update them and add others as the need arises.

Finally, we invite everyone to visit our blog, *Observations on Film Art*, at www.davidbordwell.net/blog, which often considers historical topics relevant to the questions, evidence, and explanations we present in this book.

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*Kristin Thompson
David Bordwell
Jeff Smith
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PART
ONE

EARLY CINEMA

As the twentieth century began, Western Europe seemed to many the center of the world and the pinnacle of modern civilization. New inventions, economic expansion, and rising standards of living suggested that society had begun a new phase of progress. Yet in a few years Europe would be ravaged by war, and the United States of America would take Europe's place as a global power.

The late 1800s saw a dazzling procession of new technologies. Steam power and train transport had already revolutionized industry, but now life was radically changed by electricity and the internal combustion engine. The "second industrial revolution" of the 1890s transformed fields as diverse as pharmaceuticals (aspirins, disinfectants, anesthetics), metallurgy (the steel industry), and motor power (the Diesel engine). Breakthroughs in synthetic chemistry enabled scientists to devise plastics, the basis of the motion picture film.

Industrialization led to the growth of cities. European capitals were packed with migrants from the countryside and from other countries. Paris grew to nearly three million residents, London to almost seven million. Inequality was severe, with most people becoming factory workers, servants, or home-based artisans. Noise, pollution, traffic accidents, and poor sanitation were common. Still, urbanization created a distinct mass culture. Electricity turned major streets into dazzling displays of shop windows and advertising. Publishing boomed, with books and magazines joined by newspaper comic strips. Many people could sample entertainments—sports events, dance halls, cabarets, stage shows, amusement parks, and motion-picture theaters.

The major Western European countries continued to rule vast colonial empires. In 1901, the British Empire controlled India, Egypt, Hong Kong, Burma, Malaya, several areas of Africa, and other regions, while granting "dominion" status to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Nearly all portions of Africa became colonies of Belgium, Spain, Italy, Portugal, or

France. Southeast Asia was similarly carved up. Britain, along with Russia and Japan, seized areas of China.

Territories were split up with little concern for natural divisions of local cultures. The Western powers used their technological superiority to extract resources from their territories and subjugate the populations. Throughout the twentieth century, colonized peoples would struggle to throw off foreign rule.

The role of colonies was chiefly to supply rare items (tea, silk) or raw materials for European manufacturing. Even the nominally independent countries of South America depended upon European markets to buy their exports of copper, tin, nitrate, wool, wheat, coffee, and cocoa. Britain was central to the entire system of trade and manufacture. It controlled the strongest navy and merchant marine, and London was the world's center of finance.

As the nineteenth century was ending, Europe had a new rival. The Spanish-American War of 1898 resulted in the United States gaining control of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, Hawaii, and part of Samoa. England had been known as the "workshop of the world," turning raw materials into consumer goods. But US manufacturing and service industries took the lead. During the late nineteenth century, railroad, oil, tobacco, and other industries were expanding rapidly.

Owing to hard times in Southern and Eastern Europe, a new wave of immigrants arrived on American shores after 1890. The population grew to 75 million in 1900, about the same as in France and far more than in Germany or England. America's enormous economic takeoff in the next three decades is partly attributable to this influx of new workers. Living mostly in ethnic communities within cities, these non-English speakers would form a sizable audience for the silent cinema.

The first decade of the new century saw a progressivist impulse in America, under the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt. There were movements to give women the vote, to prohibit child labor, to enforce antitrust laws, and to institute regulations to protect consumers. This era was also one of virulent racism, scarred by many lynchings. African American progressives formed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909.

American expansion came at a time when major European powers were continuing to jockey for global influence. Such maneuvering, as well as mutual distrust, led to the outbreak of World War I in 1914. This conflict gradually drew in countries from all over the globe. Although many Americans wanted no involvement, the United States entered hostilities in 1917 and broke the stalemate that had developed, ultimately forcing Germany to surrender in 1918.

The global balance of power had shifted. Germany lost all of its colonies, and the United States replaced

Britain as the world's leading financial force. President Woodrow Wilson tried to expand progressivist principles on an international scale, proposing a League of Nations to foster world unity. The League, formed in 1919, helped to build a spirit of international cooperation during the 1920s, but it proved too weak to prevent lingering tensions from eventually causing a second international conflict.

During the two decades before World War I, the cinema was invented and grew from a small amusement-arcade business to an international industry. Films began as brief moving views presented as novelties, and, by the mid-1910s, the lengthy narrative feature became the basis for cinema programs.

The invention of cinema was a lengthy process, involving engineers and entrepreneurs in several countries. Struggles among patent holders in the United States slowed the development of the industry there, while French companies quickly seized the lead in markets throughout the world (Chapter 1).

From 1905 on, a rapid expansion in demand for motion-picture entertainment in the United States led to the spread of small movie theaters called nickelodeons. This demand was fueled in part by the rising immigrant population and in part by the shorter work hours gained by the increasingly militant labor-union movement. Soon America was by far the world's largest market for films—a situation that would allow it to increase its selling power abroad as well.

During the period of the "nickelodeon boom," the story film became the main type of fare offered on programs. Films made in France, Italy, Denmark, the United Kingdom, the United States, and elsewhere circulated widely around the world. Narrative traits and stylistic techniques changed rapidly as influences passed back and forth among countries. Movies grew longer, employed more editing, added explanatory intertitles, and featured a greater variety of camera distances. Adaptations from literature and lavish historical spectacles added prestige to the new art form (Chapter 2).

World War I had enormous effects on the cinema. The outbreak of hostilities triggered a severe cutback in French production, and the country lost its leading position in world markets. Italy encountered similar problems. The growing Hollywood film industry stepped in to fill the gap, expanding its distribution system abroad. By the war's end, American films had an international grip that other countries have struggled ever since to loosen.

During this era, filmmakers in many countries explored film form. Film editing grew subtle and complex; acting styles became varied; and directors exploited long takes, realistic decor, and camera movement. By the end of World War I, many of today's cinematic conventions had been established (Chapter 3).

CHAPTER 1



A Trip to the Moon

THE INVENTION AND EARLY YEARS OF THE CINEMA, 1880s–1904



The Big Swallow

The nineteenth century saw a vast proliferation of visual forms of popular culture. The industrial era offered ways of mass-producing lantern slides, books of photographs, and illustrated fiction. The middle and working classes of many countries could visit elaborate *dioramas*—painted backdrops with three-dimensional figures depicting famous historical events. Circuses, “freak shows,” amusement parks, and music halls provided other forms of inexpensive entertainment. In the United States, many dramatic troupes toured, performing in the theaters and opera houses that existed even in small towns.

Hauling entire theater productions from town to town, however, was expensive. Similarly, most people had to travel long distances to visit major dioramas or amusement parks. In the days before airplane travel, few could hope to see firsthand the exotic lands they glimpsed on display in books of travel photographs or in their *stereoscopes*, handheld viewers that created three-dimensional effects by using oblong cards with two photographs printed side by side.

The cinema was to offer a cheaper, simpler way of providing entertainment to the masses. Filmmakers could record actors’ performances, which then could be shown to audiences around the world. Travelogues would bring moving images of far-flung places directly to spectators’ hometowns. Movies would become the most popular visual art form of the early twentieth century.

The cinema was invented during the 1890s. It appeared in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, as did the telephone (invented in 1876), the phonograph (invented in 1877), and the automobile (developed during the 1880s and 1890s). Like them, it was a technological device that became the basis of a large industry. It was also a new form of entertainment and a new artistic medium. During the first decade of the cinema’s

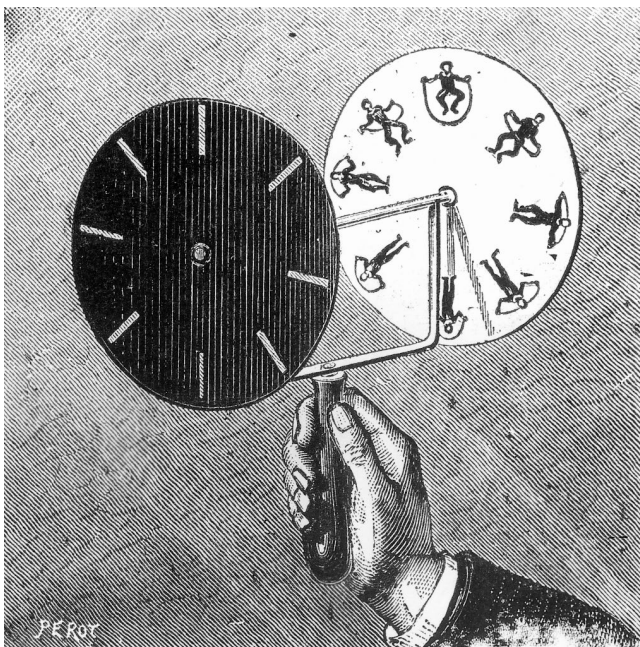
existence, inventors worked to improve the machines for making and showing films. Filmmakers also had to explore what sorts of images they could record, and exhibitors had to figure out how to present those images to audiences.

THE INVENTION OF THE CINEMA

The cinema is a complicated medium, and before it could be invented, several technological requirements had to be met.

Preconditions for Motion Pictures

First, scientists had to realize that the human eye will perceive motion if a series of slightly different images is placed before it in rapid succession—minimally, around sixteen per second. During the nineteenth century, scientists explored this property of vision. Several optical toys gave an illusion of movement by using a small number of drawings, each altered somewhat. In 1832, Belgian physicist Joseph Plateau and Austrian geometry professor Simon Stampfer independently created an optical device called the Phenakistoscope (1.1). The Zoetrope, invented in 1833, contained a series of drawings on a narrow strip of paper inside a revolving drum (1.2).



George Eastman International Museum of Photography, Rochester.

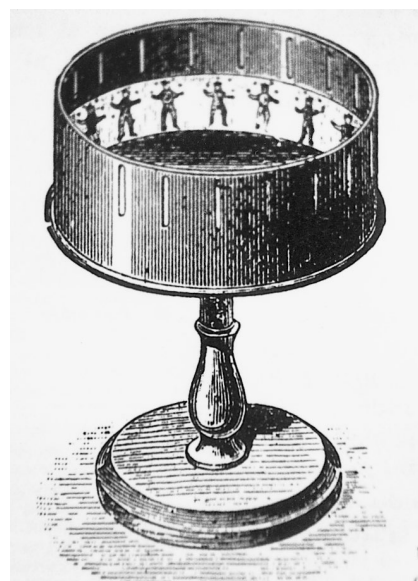
1.1 A Phenakistoscope's spinning disc of figures gives the illusion of movement when the viewer looks through a slot in the stationary disc.

The Zoetrope was widely sold after 1867, along with other optical toys. In these toys, the same action was repeated over and over.

A second technological requirement for the cinema was the capacity to project a rapid series of images on a surface. Since the seventeenth century, entertainers and educators had been using “magic lanterns” to project glass lantern slides, and some could rapidly flash two or three changes of a figure's position. But there had been no way to show a large number of images fast enough to create a sustained illusion of movement.

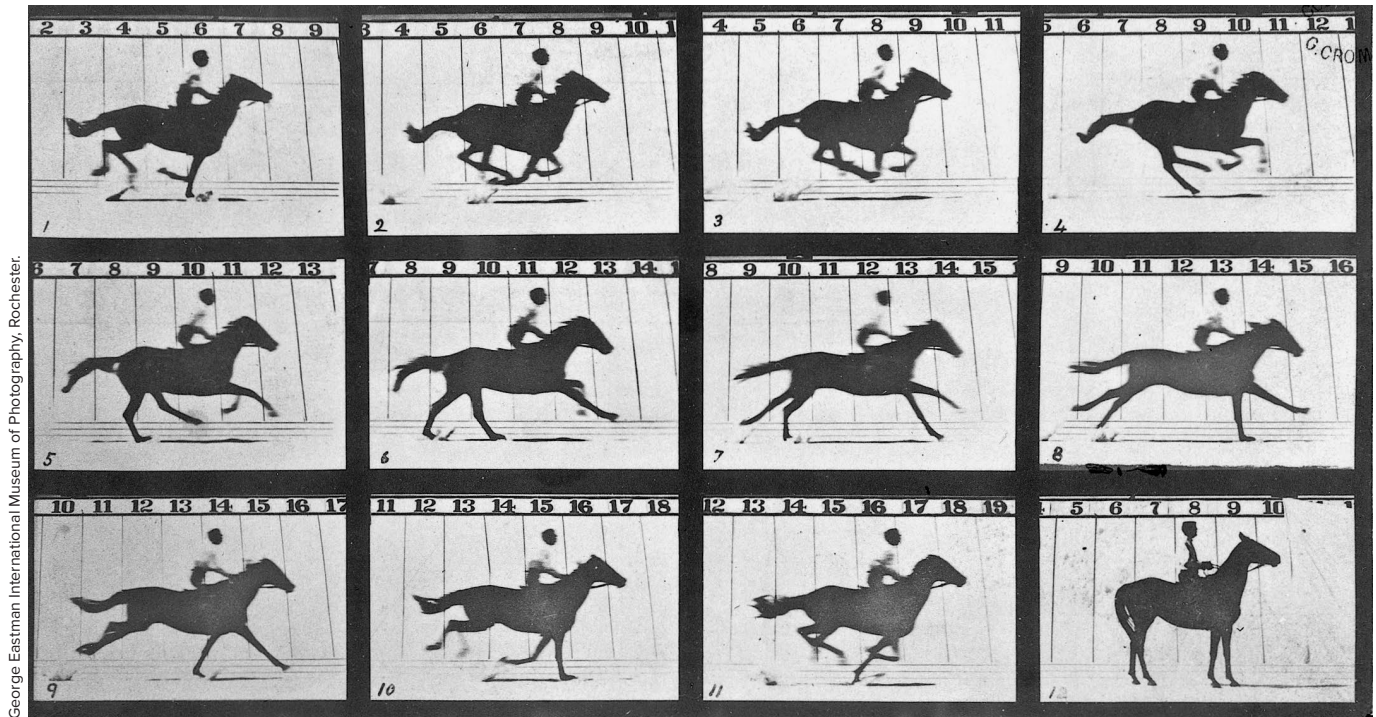
If it had been easy to make a long series of drawings on some support, cinema would not have needed photography. Photography, however, was the simplest way to produce many lifelike images. The problem was that the illusion of movement needed at least sixteen photographs exposed per second. It took inventors several years to achieve such a short exposure time. The first still photograph was made on a glass plate in 1826 by Claude Niépce, but it required an exposure time of eight hours. For years, photographs were made on glass or metal, without the use of negatives, so only one copy of each image was possible; exposures took several minutes each. Not until 1878 did split-second exposure times become feasible. Rapid photography became the third precondition for cinema as we know it.

Fourth, the cinema would require that photographs be printed on a base flexible enough to be passed through a camera rapidly. Strips or discs of glass could



George Eastman International Museum of Photography

1.2 Looking through the slots in a revolving Zoetrope, the viewer receives an impression of movement.



George Eastman International Museum of Photography, Rochester.

1.3 One of Muybridge's earliest motion studies, photographed on June 19, 1878.

be used, but only a short series of images could be registered on them. In 1888, George Eastman devised a still camera that made photographs on rolls of sensitized paper. This camera, which he named the Kodak, simplified photography so that unskilled amateurs could take pictures. The next year Eastman introduced transparent celluloid roll film, creating a breakthrough in the move toward cinema. The film was intended for still cameras, but inventors soon used the same flexible material in designing machines to take and project motion pictures.

Fifth, and finally, experimenters needed to find a suitable intermittent mechanism for cameras and projectors. In the camera, the strip of film had to stop briefly while light entered through the lens and exposed each frame. A shutter then covered the film as another frame moved into place. Similarly, in the projector, each frame stopped for an instant in the aperture while a beam of light projected it onto a screen. Again a shutter passed behind the lens while the filmstrip moved. At least sixteen frames had to slide into place, stop, and move away each second. (A strip of film sliding continuously past the gate would create a blur.) Fortunately, other inventions of the century also needed intermittent mechanisms to stop and start quickly. For example, the sewing machine (invented in 1846) advanced strips of fabric several times per second while a needle pierced them. Intermittent mechanisms

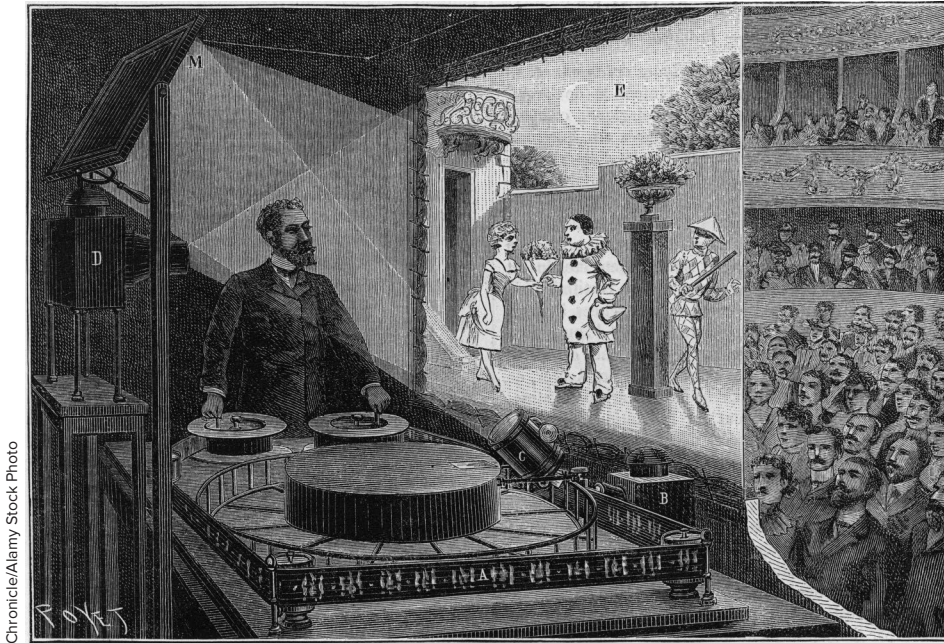
usually consisted of a gear with slots or notches spaced around its edge.

By the 1890s, all the technical conditions for the cinema existed. But who would bring the elements together in a way that could be exploited on a wide basis?

Major Precursors of Motion Pictures

Some inventors made important contributions without creating moving photographic images. Several men were simply interested in analyzing motion. In 1878, ex-governor of California Leland Stanford asked photographer Eadward Muybridge to find a way of photographing running horses to help study their gaits. Muybridge set up a row of twelve cameras, each making an exposure in one-thousandth of a second. The photos recorded one-half-second intervals of movement (1.3). Muybridge later made a lantern to project moving images of horses, but these were drawings copied from his photographs onto a revolving disc. Muybridge did not go on to invent motion pictures, but he made a major contribution to anatomical science through thousands of motion studies using his multiple-camera setup.

In 1882, inspired by Muybridge's work, French physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey studied the flight of birds and other rapid animal movements by means of a photographic



1.4 Using long flexible bands of drawings, Reynaud's Praxinoscope rear-projected cartoon figures onto a screen on which the scenery was painted.

gun. Shaped like a rifle, it exposed twelve images around the edge of a circular glass plate that made a single revolution in one second. In 1888, Marey built a box-type camera that used an intermittent mechanism to expose a series of photographs on a strip of paper film at speeds of up to 120 frames per second. Marey was the first to combine flexible film stock and an intermittent mechanism in photographing motion. He was interested in analyzing movements rather than in reproducing them on a screen, but his work inspired other inventors. During this period, many other scientists used various devices to record and analyze motion.

A fascinating and isolated figure in the history of the invention of the cinema was Frenchman Émile Reynaud. In 1877, he had built an optical toy, the Projecting Praxinoscope. This was a spinning drum, rather like the Zoetrope, but one in which viewers saw the moving images in a series of mirrors rather than through slots. Around 1882, he devised a way of using mirrors and a lantern to project a brief series of drawings on a screen. In 1889, Reynaud exhibited a much larger version of the Praxinoscope. From 1892 on, he regularly gave public performances using long, broad strips of hand-painted frames (1.4). These were the first public exhibitions of moving images, though the effect on the screen was jerky and slow. The labor involved in making the bands meant that Reynaud's films could not easily be reproduced. Strips of photographs were more practical, and in 1895 Reynaud started using a camera to make his Praxinoscope films. By 1900, he was out of business, however, due to competition from other, simpler motion-picture projection systems. In

despair, he destroyed his machines, though replicas have been constructed.

Another Frenchman came close to inventing the cinema as early as 1888—six years before the first commercial showings of moving photographs. That year, Louis Le Prince, working in England, was able to make some brief films, shot at about sixteen frames per second, using Kodak's recently introduced paper roll film. To be projected, however, the frames needed to be printed on a transparent strip; lacking flexible celluloid, Le Prince apparently was unable to devise a satisfactory projector. In 1890, while traveling in France, he disappeared, along with his valise of patent applications, creating a mystery that has never been solved. His camera was never exploited commercially and had virtually no influence on the subsequent invention of the cinema.

An International Process of Invention

We cannot attribute the invention of the cinema to a single source. There was no one moment when the cinema emerged. Rather, the technology of the motion picture came about through an accumulation of contributions, primarily from the United States, Germany, England, and France.

Edison, Dickson, and the Kinetoscope In 1888, Thomas Edison, already the successful inventor of the phonograph and the electric light bulb, decided to design machines for making and showing moving photographs. Much of the work was done by his assistant, W. K. L. Dickson. Because Edison's phonograph worked by

recording sound on cylinders, the pair tried fruitlessly to make rows of tiny photographs around similar cylinders. In 1889, Edison went to Paris and saw Marey's camera,

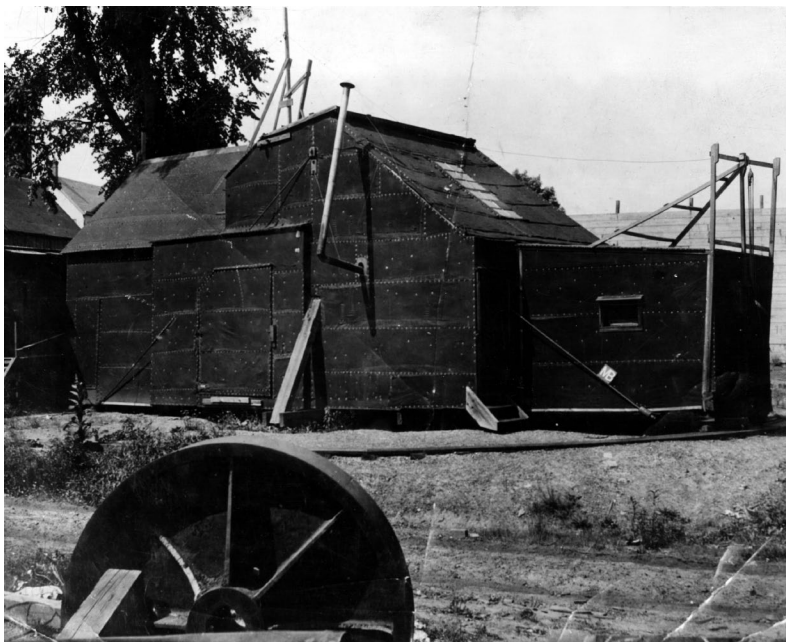


George Eastman International Museum of Photography, Rochester.

1.5 The Kinetoscope was a peephole device that ran the film around a series of rollers. Viewers activated it by putting a coin in a slot.

which used strips of flexible film. Dickson then obtained some Eastman Kodak film stock and began working on a new type of machine. By 1891, the Kinetograph camera and Kinetoscope viewing box (1.5) were ready to be patented and demonstrated. Dickson sliced sheets of Eastman film into strips 1 inch wide (roughly 35 millimeters) and spliced them end to end. He punched four holes on either side of each frame so that toothed gears could pull the film through the camera and Kinetoscope. Dickson's early decisions influenced the entire history of the cinema; 35 mm film stock with four perforations per frame remained the norm for more than a hundred years. Initially, however, the film was exposed at about forty-six frames per second—much faster than the average speed later adopted for silent filmmaking.

Before Edison and Dickson could exploit their machine commercially, they needed films. They built a small studio, called the *Black Maria*, on the grounds of Edison's New Jersey laboratory and were ready for production by January 1893 (1.6). The films lasted only twenty seconds or so—the longest run of film that the Kinetoscope could hold. Most films featured well-known sports figures, excerpts from noted vaudeville acts, or performances by dancers or acrobats (1.7). Annie Oakley displayed her riflery, and a bodybuilder flexed his muscles. A few Kinetoscope shorts were knockabout comic skits, forerunners of the story film.



Everett Historical/Shutterstock

1.6 Edison's studio was named after the police paddy wagons, or *Black Marias*, that it resembled. The slanted portion of the roof opened to admit sunlight for filming, and the whole building revolved on a track to catch optimal sunlight.



Library of Congress Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Washington, D. C. 20540 USA dcu [LC_00694109]

1.7 Amy Muller danced in the *Black Maria* on March 24, 1896. The black background and patch of sunlight from the opening in the roof were standard traits of Kinetoscope films.



Department of the Interior/PhotoQuest/Getty Images

1.8 A typical entertainment parlor, with phonographs (note the dangling earphones) at left and center and a row of Kinetoscopes at right. Later videogame arcades would operate on the same business model.

Edison had exploited his phonograph by leasing it to special phonograph parlors, where the public paid a nickel to hear sound through earphones. (Only in 1895 did phonographs become available for home use.) He did the same with the Kinetoscope. On April 14, 1894, the first Kinetoscope parlor opened in New York. Soon other parlors, both in the United States and abroad, exhibited the machines (1.8). For about two years the Kinetoscope was highly profitable, but it was eclipsed when other inventors, inspired by Edison's new device, found ways to project films on a screen.

European Contributions Another early system for taking and projecting films was invented by the Germans Max and Emil Skladanowsky. Their Bioskop held two strips of film, each 3½ inches wide, running side by side; frames of each were projected alternately. The Skladanowsky brothers showed a fifteen-minute program at a large vaudeville theater in Berlin on November 1, 1895—nearly two months before the famous Lumière screening at the Grand Café. The Bioskop system was too cumbersome, however, and the Skladanowskys eventually adopted the standard 35 mm, single-strip film used by more influential inventors. The brothers toured Europe through 1897, but they did not establish a stable production company.

The Lumière brothers, Louis and Auguste, invented a projection system that helped make the cinema a commercially viable enterprise internationally. Their family

company, Lumière Frères, based in Lyon, France, was the biggest European manufacturer of photographic plates. In 1894, a local Kinetoscope exhibitor asked them to produce short films that would be cheaper than the ones sold by Edison. Soon they had designed an elegant little camera, the Cinématographe, which used 35 mm film and an intermittent mechanism modeled on that of the sewing machine (1.9). The camera could serve as a printer when



George Eastman International Museum of Photography, Rochester.

1.9 Unlike many other early cameras, the Lumière Cinématographe was small and portable. This 1930 photo shows Francis Doublier, one of the firm's representatives who toured the world showing and making films during the 1890s, posing with his Cinématographe.



Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory



Rough Sea at Dover

1.10, left The Lumière brothers' first film, *Workers Leaving the Factory*, was a single shot made outside their photographic factory. It embodied the essential appeal of the first films: realistic movement of actual people.

1.11, right Birt Acres's *Rough Sea at Dover*, one of the earliest English films, showed large waves crashing against a seawall.

the positive copies were made. Then, mounted in front of a magic lantern, it formed part of the projector as well. One important decision the Lumières made was to shoot their films at sixteen frames per second, rather than the forty-six frames per second used by Edison. Sixteen frames per second became the most commonly used rate for about twenty years. The first film made with this system was *Workers Leaving the Factory*, apparently shot in March 1895 (**1.10**; **Video 1.1**). It was shown in public at a meeting of the Société d'Encouragement pour l'Industrie Nationale in Paris on March 22. Six further showings to scientific and commercial groups followed, including additional films shot by Louis.

On December 28, 1895, one of the most famous events in film history took place. The location was a room in the Grand Café in Paris. In those days, cafés were gathering spots where people sipped coffee, read newspapers, and were entertained by singers and other performers. That evening, fashionable patrons paid a franc to see a twenty-five-minute program of ten films, about a minute each. Among the films shown were a close view of Auguste Lumière and his wife feeding their baby, a staged comic scene of a boy stepping on a hose to cause a puzzled gardener to squirt himself (later named *L'arroseur arrosé*, or "The Waterer Watered"), and a shot of the sea.

Although the first shows did moderate business, within weeks the Lumières were offering twenty shows a day, with long lines of spectators waiting to get in. They moved quickly to exploit this success, sending representatives all over the world to show films and make more of them.

At the same time that the Lumière brothers were developing their system, a parallel process of invention was going on in England. The Edison Kinetoscope had premiered in London in October 1894, and the parlor that displayed the machines did so well that its owners asked R. W. Paul, a producer of photographic equipment, to make some extra machines for it. For reasons that are still

not clear, Edison had not patented the Kinetoscope outside the United States, so Paul was free to sell copies to anyone who wanted them. Because Edison would supply films only to exhibitors who had leased his own machines, Paul also had to invent a camera and make films to go with his duplicate Kinetoscopes.

By March 1895, Paul and his partner, Birt Acres, had a functional camera, which they based partly on the one Marey had made seven years earlier for analyzing motion. Acres shot thirteen films during the first half of the year, but the partnership broke up. Paul went on improving the camera, aiming to serve the Kinetoscope market, whereas Acres concentrated on creating a projector. On January 14, 1896, Acres showed some of his films to the Royal Photographic Society. Among those was *Rough Sea at Dover* (**1.11**), which became one of the most popular first films.

Seeing such one-shot films of simple actions or landscapes today, we can hardly grasp how impressive they were to audiences who had never seen moving photographic images. A contemporary review of Acres's Royal Photographic Society program hints, however, at their appeal:

The most successful effect, and one which called forth rounds of applause from the usually placid members of the "Royal," was a reproduction of a number of breaking waves, which may be seen to roll in from the sea, curl over against a jetty, and break into clouds of snowy spray that seemed to start from the screen.¹

Acres gave other demonstrations, but he did not systematically exploit his projector and films.

Projected films were soon shown regularly in England, however. The Lumière brothers sent a representative who opened a successful run of the Cinématographe in London on February 20, 1896, about a month after Acres's first screening. R. W. Paul went on improving his camera and invented a projector, which he used in several