DAVID A. COOK

A History of Narrative Film

FIFTH EDITION

A HISTORY OF NARRATIVE FILM

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David A. Cook

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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For Diane, always

And for our children,
Lindsay, Gregory, and Jessica

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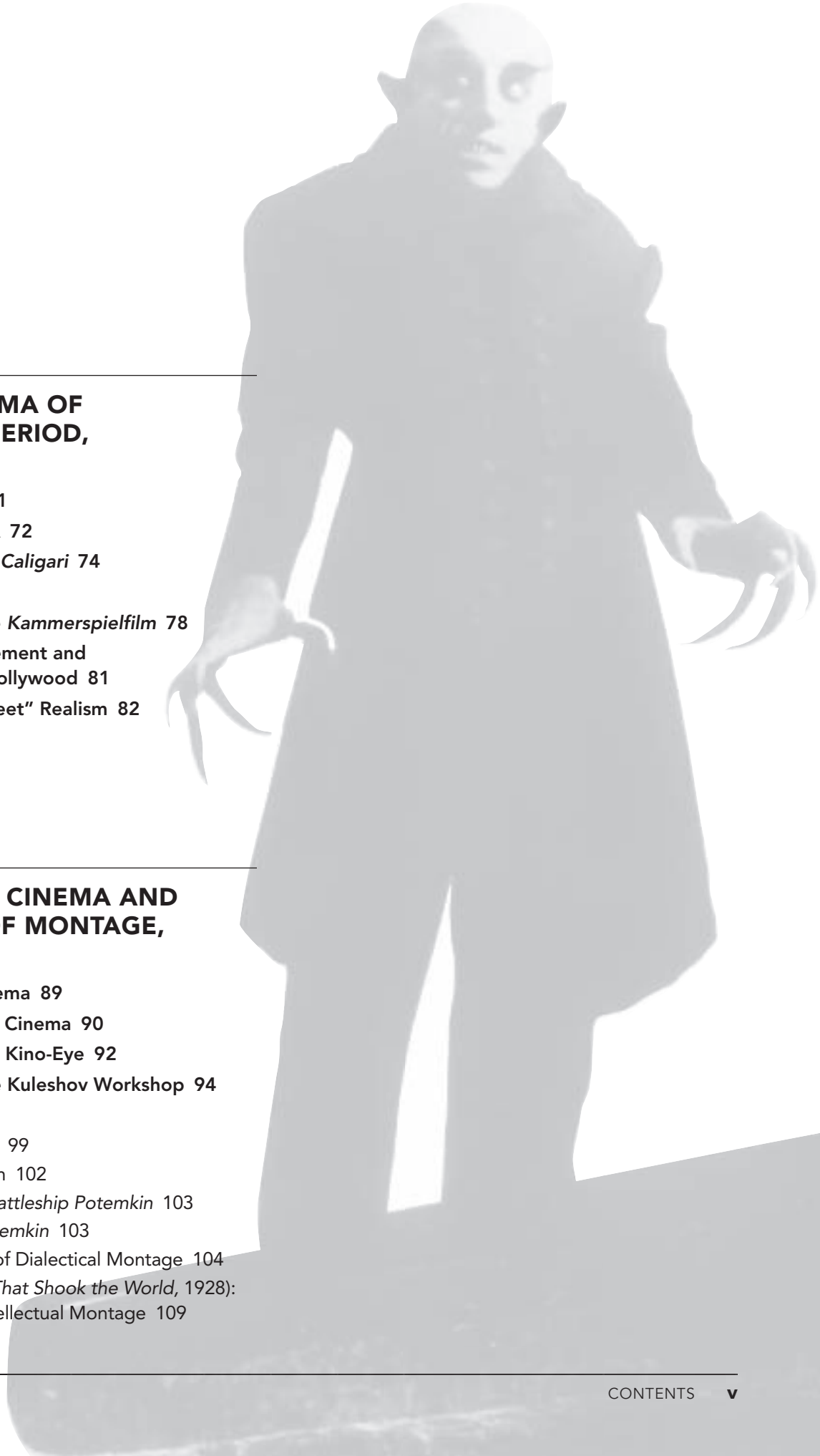

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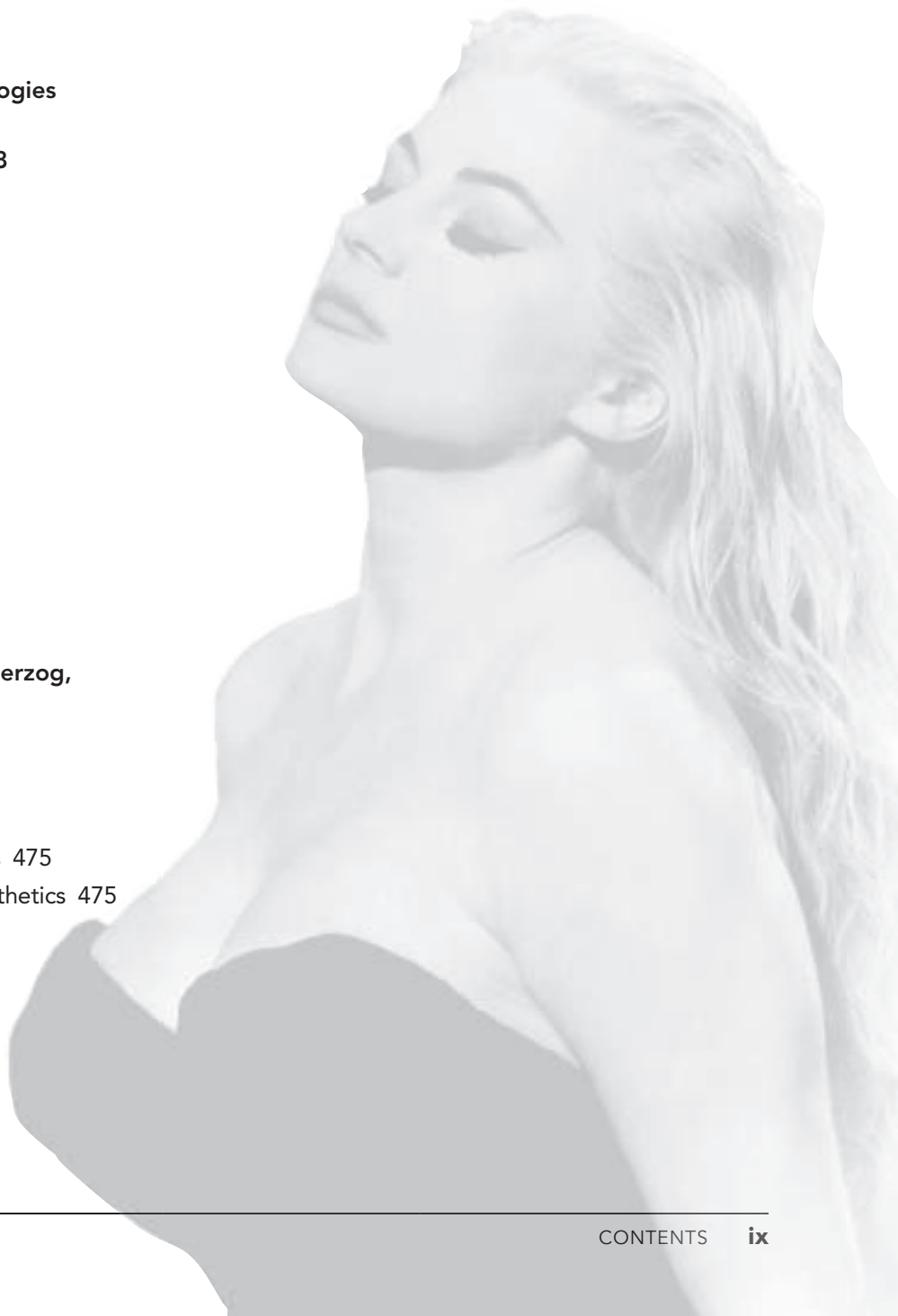

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Preface

We spend much of our waking lives surrounded by moving photographic images. They have come to occupy such a central position in our experience that it is unusual to pass even a single day without encountering them for an extended period of time, through either film or television. In short, moving photographic images have become part of the total environment of modern industrial society and, both materially and psychologically, have a shaping impact on our lives. Yet few of us have been taught to understand precisely how they work. Most of us, in fact, have extremely vague notions about how moving images are formed, and how they are structured to create the multitude of messages sent out to us by the audiovisual media on an almost continuous basis. If we made an analogy with verbal language, we would be forced to consider ourselves barely literate—able to assimilate the language form without fully comprehending it. We would, of course, be appalled to find ourselves living in a culture with a verbal literacy level of a three-year-old child. Most persons living with such limitations, like small children, would be easy prey to whoever could manipulate the language. They would be subject to the control of any entity that understood the language from the inside out and could therefore establish an authority of knowledge over them, just as verbally literate adults establish authority over children. Such a situation would be unthinkable in the modern industrial world, and our own culture has made it a priority to educate its children in the institutions of human speech, so that they can participate in the community of knowledge that verbal literacy sustains.

Imagine that a new language form came into being at the turn of the twentieth century—an audiovisual language form that first took the shape of cinema and then became, in time, the common currency of modern television. Imagine that because making statements in this language depends on an expensive industrial process, only a handful of elite specialists are trained to use it. Imagine that, although there was public anxiety about the potentially corrupting influence of the new language at its birth, it was *perceived* not as a language at all but as a medium of popular entertainment, and in this guise, the language has gradually colonized us as if it were the vernacular speech of some conquering foreign power. Finally, imagine waking up one day to discover that we had mistaken the language for a mode of dreaming, and in the process have become massively illiterate in what has turned into the primary language form, one that not only surrounds us materially but that, as language forms tend to do, also invades our minds. What would we do if that happened? We could choose to embrace our error and lapse into the anarchic mode of consciousness characteristic of preliterate societies, which might be fun but most certainly would be dangerous in an advanced industrial society. Or, we could attempt to instruct ourselves in the language form from ground up and from inside out. We could try to learn as much of its history, technology, and aesthetics as possible. We could trace the evolution of its syntactic and semantic forms from its birth through its present stages of development, and try to forecast the shapes it might take in the future. We could, finally, bring the apparatus of sequential logic and critical analysis to bear on the seemingly random

structures of the language in order to read them in new and meaningful ways.

This scenario conforms quite accurately, I believe, to our present situation in the modern world. The language of the moving photographic images has become so pervasive in our daily lives that we scarcely notice its presence. And yet, it *does* surround us, sending us messages, taking positions, making statements, and constantly redefining our relationship to material reality. We can choose to live in ignorance of its operations and be manipulated by those who control it. Or, we can teach ourselves to read it, appreciate its very real and manifold truths, and recognize its equally real and manifold deceptions. As a lifelong student and teacher of language forms, both verbal and audiovisual, I believe that most intelligent and humane persons in our culture will opt for the latter. It is for them that I have written this book.

Preface to the Fifth Edition

In the past decade, two trends have become abundantly clear—the persistence of blockbuster megapictures (or "tent poles") that dominate the global market, and the renewed vitality of independent films, some of them art films. The advent of low-cost, high-end digital film equipment at the consumer level has meant that indie producers are no longer dependent on the technical resources of the majors. By the 2010s, thousands of small companies could produce films for a fraction of the cost of a Hollywood product. Postproduction was also rendered inexpensive by nonlinear editing software available for home computers. By 2005, about 15 percent of the U.S. domestic box office derived from independent films.

In response to the digitization of production, distribution, and exhibition in the West, digital video increasingly became the medium of choice in the developing world. Recent developments in the cinemas of Nigeria, Turkey, Tunisia, and Romania testify to the increasing globalization of film beyond Hollywood's force-feeding megapicture machine. This has been possible to a large extent because the technology of high-definition (HD) video has put the tools of classical Hollywood cinema into the hands of the world's have-nots and disempowered, or at least those less powerful than America's multinational media conglomerates.

At the same time, American control of the world's mass media has never been stronger. The American film industry in the early twenty-first century has become a crucible for the creation of franchises and brands that achieved nearly universal diffusion through the majors' global distribution network. As film historian Stephen Prince puts it, "Understood in strict economic terms, production by the majors [is] about the manufacture and distribution of commodities (not films) on a national and global scale." Appropriately, the cover image of this edition is from Jean-Luc Godard's 1996 film *Made in U.S.A.*, which, in perfect irony, could not be shown in the United States until 2009 due to a threatened suit for copyright infringement.

Moreover, by the mid-2010s, the United States had the great advantage of sustaining the largest home market for motion pictures in the world: with more than 40,000 screens, an all-time high, American audiences accounted for 44 percent of the global box office in 2014. This domestic market, saturated as it was, provided studios with an opportunity to amortize a film's highest costs (those incurred in production) in the United States, and then derive pure profit from foreign and ancillary markets.

Also by the mid-2010s, both mainstream and independent films had to grapple with the new economic and financial force of television. Increasingly, the vast majority of films that opened at the Sundance Film Festival and its counterparts found their audience not in a theater but on a video-on-demand system. This has meant a partial reconfiguration of film form toward the streaming nature of video.

Changes in the Fifth Edition

To improve the reader's experience, the long lists of films in the previous editions have been moved to an extensive Filmography section online, which can be found at digital.wwnorton.com/narrativefilm5. Also moved online is the Selective Bibliography, while the lengthy footnotes that sometimes cluttered the text

have been deleted. Users of the Fifth Edition's Ebook can find both the Filmography and the Selective Bibliography inside, after the Glossary. The design of the book has been similarly altered to provide fewer but bigger and bolder illustrations, now presented in a four-color format.

A section on new Romanian cinema has been added to Chapter 16, as well as a section on digital 3-D to Chapter 21; information on various national cinemas has been updated through 2015; and finally, a new chapter (Chapter 22) has been added to address major developments since 2004, including the institutionalization of the megapicture, the rise of independent production and distribution, and the influence of video on both "slow cinema" and "long movies" (the frequently binge-watched formulations of serial television known as miniseries). Chapter 22 deals with new developments in the cinema of Nigeria, Turkey (including new material on Nuri Bilge Ceylan), and Thailand (including new material on Apichatpong Weerasethakul), as well as the rise and fall of "torture porn" and the advent of new auteurs in Hollywood—especially those specializing in dramatic comedy, or "dramedy," such as David O. Russell, Spike Jonze, Alexander Payne, Wes Anderson, Richard Linklater, and Paul Thomas Anderson; and others, such as David Fincher, Steven Soderbergh, Joel and Ethan Cohen, and Christopher Nolan. Special attention also is paid to the work of Kathryn Bigelow, Sofia Coppola, Spike Lee, and Steve McQueen.

While it is clear that Hollywood megapictures will continue to dominate the world's theater screens, it is equally clear that motion pictures are no longer primarily consumed on theatrical screens. Mobile, online, and streaming consumption of motion pictures is increasingly common and tends to liberate the cinema from the blockbuster syndrome in the direction of independence. But the more things change, the more they stay the same: cinema is still fundamentally a narrative art whose major purpose is the telling of stories, and storytelling precedes every other form of organized human behavior but the burial of the dead. Its roots lie deep in our consciousness and preconsciousness, and its importance to us will not go away easily. So as the screens grow smaller, the importance of cinema looms ever larger, telling stories of valor and heroism, war and peace, and love and loss, as it always has done and will continue to do until narrative loses its fundamental place in our hierarchy of values.

On Method

For reasons that will become apparent in the course of this book, I believe that the history of film as we have experienced it to date is the history of a narrative form. Many of the greatest films ever made were created by artists seeking to break the constraints of this form as it is defined at different points in time, and there is much evidence to suggest that since the 1960s, cinema has been moving in an increasingly nonnarrative direction. But the fact remains, the language common to the international cinema from the last decade of the nineteenth century to the present has been narrative, both in aspiration and structural forms. For this reason, I have excluded documentary cinema, animated cinema, and the experimental avant-garde from consideration in this book, except when they have influenced narrative form to a demonstrable and significant degree. This is not to suggest that any of these forms is unimportant, but rather that each is important and distinctive enough to warrant a separate history of its own (many of which, in fact, already exist).

On Dates, Titles, and Illustrations

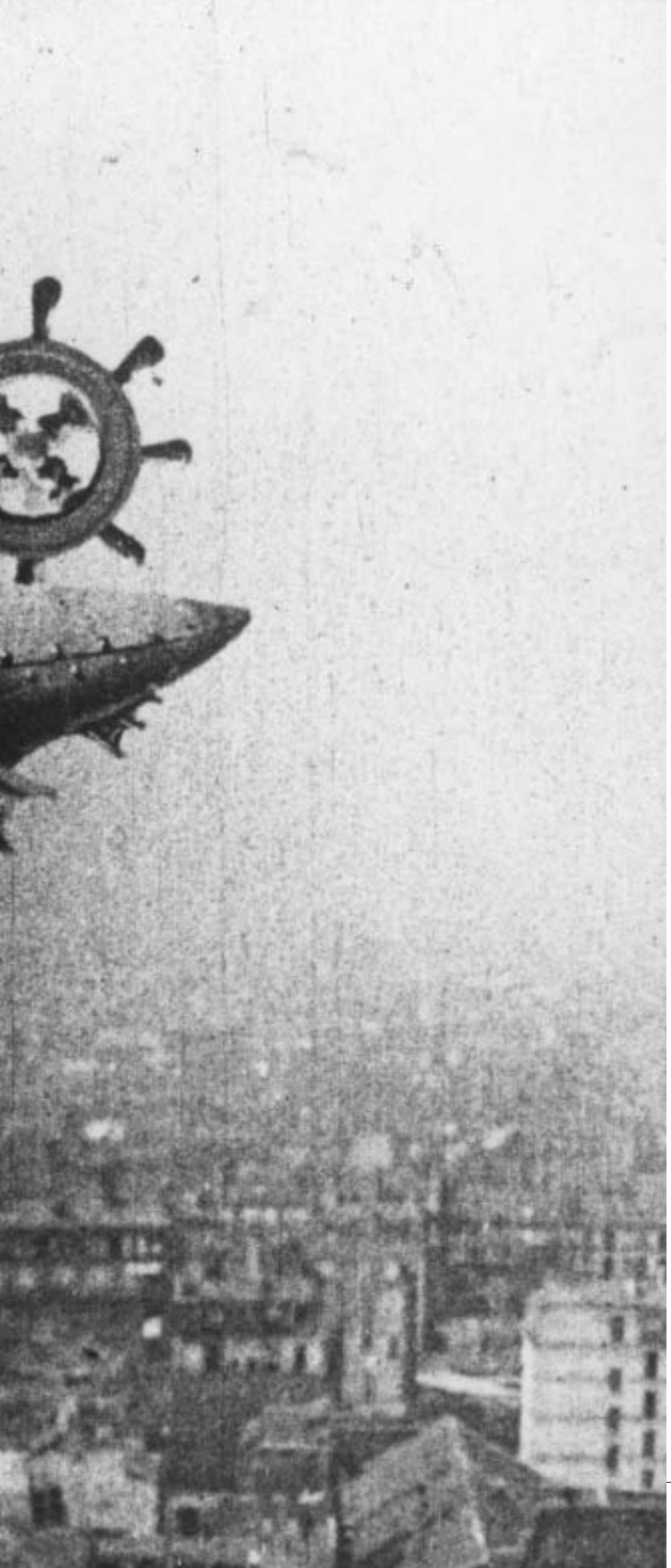
Wherever possible, the date given for a film is the year of its theatrical release in its country of origin. Unless otherwise noted (as in the case of intermittent production or delayed release), the reader may assume a lapse of four to six months between the start of production and the date of release for features. This is important in correlating the history of film with the history of human events—for instance, many American films with the release date of 1942 went into production and were completed before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

As for the titles of films in languages other than English, those in French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and German are given in the original language, followed (in parentheses) by a literal English translation, and an alternate English-language release title, if one exists. After the initial reference, the original foreign-language title is used, except in the case of a film that is best known in the English-speaking world by its English title—for example, Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, 1959). For Scandinavian, Eastern European, Middle Eastern, Asian, and African

languages, the convention is reversed: the initial reference is given in English, followed by the original title in parentheses (a transliteration is supplied if the original title is in an alphabet other than our own). All subsequent references use the English title, unless the film is best known by its foreign-language title—for instance, Akira Kurosawa's *Ikiru* (*Living/To Live*, 1952) and *Yojimbo* (*The Bodyguard*, 1961). In the case of films for which the original foreign-language title is unavailable, only the English title is given.

The photographs used to illustrate the book represent a combination of production stills and DVD frame grabs. Production stills, since they are taken on the set by professional photographers, yield a higher quality of reproduction; but since they are made initially for the purpose of publicity, they are sometimes "beautified" to the point of distortion. Frame grabs, on the other hand, are taken digitally from the films themselves and, therefore, represent the actual images as composed and shot by the filmmakers. Their quality of reproduction is often lower than that of production stills, since several extra steps of transference are involved in printing them, but their correspondence with the film images is exact. I have tried to use frame grabs whenever shot sequences have been reproduced for discussion or when lengthy analysis accompanies an individual image or series of images. I have used production stills when less analytical procedures are involved. (Many films of the 1950s and most films of subsequent eras were shot in some type of widescreen process, with aspect ratios varying from 2.55:1 to 1.85:1. For reasons of typography and design, a few of the stills from such films in this volume have been reproduced in the 1.33:1 aspect ratio of the Academy frame.) Although photographs can never replicate cinema, lacking as they do the essential component of motion, they can be made to represent it. Throughout the book, I have attempted to integrate the stills with the written text in a manner that provides for maximum delivery of information. The reader is, therefore, encouraged to regard both photographic and verbal information as part of the same critical fabric, although neither, ultimately, can substitute for the audiovisual information contained in the films themselves.

A la conquête de l'air (*Conquest of the Skies*; Ferdinand Zecca, 1901).



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Origins

Optical Principles

The beginning of film history is the end of something else: the successive stages of technological development during the nineteenth century, whereby simple optical devices used for entertainment grew into sophisticated machines that could convincingly represent empirical reality in motion. Both toys and machines depended on interactive optical phenomena known as **persistence of vision** and the **phi phenomenon** for their illusions. The former is a characteristic of human perception, known to the ancient Egyptians but first described scientifically by Peter Mark Roget in 1824, whereby the brain retains images cast on the retina of the eye for approximately one-twentieth to one-fifth of a second beyond their actual removal from the field of vision. The latter, whose operation was discovered by the Gestalt psychologist Max Wertheimer in 1912, is the phenomenon that causes us to see the individual blades of a rotating fan as a unitary circular form or the different hues of a spinning color wheel as a single homogeneous color.

Together, persistence of vision and the phi phenomenon allow us to see a succession of static images as a single unbroken movement and permit the illusion of continuous motion on which **cinematography** is based. Persistence of vision prevents us from seeing the dark spaces between the film frames by causing "flicker fusion," when the frequency with which the projection light is broken approaches fifty times per second. Without this effect, our eyes would perceive the alternation of light and dark on the

screen as each projected image succeeded the next, as in fact was the case in the earliest days of the movies. Films became known colloquially as "flickers" or "flicks" for this very reason. The phi phenomenon, also known as the "stroboscopic effect," creates apparent movement from frame to frame at optimal projection speeds of 12 to 24 frames per second (fps). This much is known, but perceptual psychologists still understand very little about the neural and cognitive processes involved in the perception of motion.

The **frames** of a strip of film are a series of individual still photographs that the motion-picture camera, as it was perfected by the Edison Laboratories in 1892 and as it exists today, imprints one at a time. The succession of frames recorded in the camera, when projected at the same or a similar speed, creates the illusion of continuous motion essential to the cinema. Most motion-picture cameras today expose individual frames at the rate of 24 per second. The illusion of continuous motion can be induced in our brains at rates as low as 12 fps, yet speeds have traditionally been set at about 16 fps for silent film and 24 for sound.

On the film strip itself, these frames are separated by thin, unexposed frame lines, but in projection a rotating **shutter** opens and closes to obscure the intervals between frames and to permit each frame to be flashed on the **screen** twice, thereby eliminating the flicker we would otherwise perceive by their movement. When we "watch" a film in a theater, we actually spend as much as 50 percent of the time in darkness, with the projector's shutter closed and nothing before us on the screen, whether the film is digitized or not. Thus, the continuity of movement and light that seems to be the most palpable quality of the cinema exists only in our brains.

Persistence of vision and the phi phenomenon were exploited for the purpose of optical entertainment for many years before the invention of photography. A popular child's toy of the early nineteenth century was the Thaumatrope (from the Greek for "magical turning"), a paper disk with strings attached at opposite points on the perimeter so that it could be twirled between finger and thumb. A different image was imprinted on each face, and when the disk was spun the images seemed to merge into a single unified picture (a rider would mount a horse, a parrot enter its cage, and so on).

Between 1832 and 1850, hundreds of optical toys were manufactured that used rotating "phase drawings" of things in motion to produce a crude form of animation. Drawings representing successive phases of an action would be mounted on a disk or a cylinder and rotated in conjunction with some type of shutter apparatus (usually a series of slots in the disk or the cylinder itself) to produce the illusion of motion. Joseph Plateau's Phenakistoscope (from the Greek for "deceitful view," 1832) and George Horner's Zoetrope ("live turning," 1834) were among the most popular of these toys, which reached increasing stages of refinement as the century progressed.

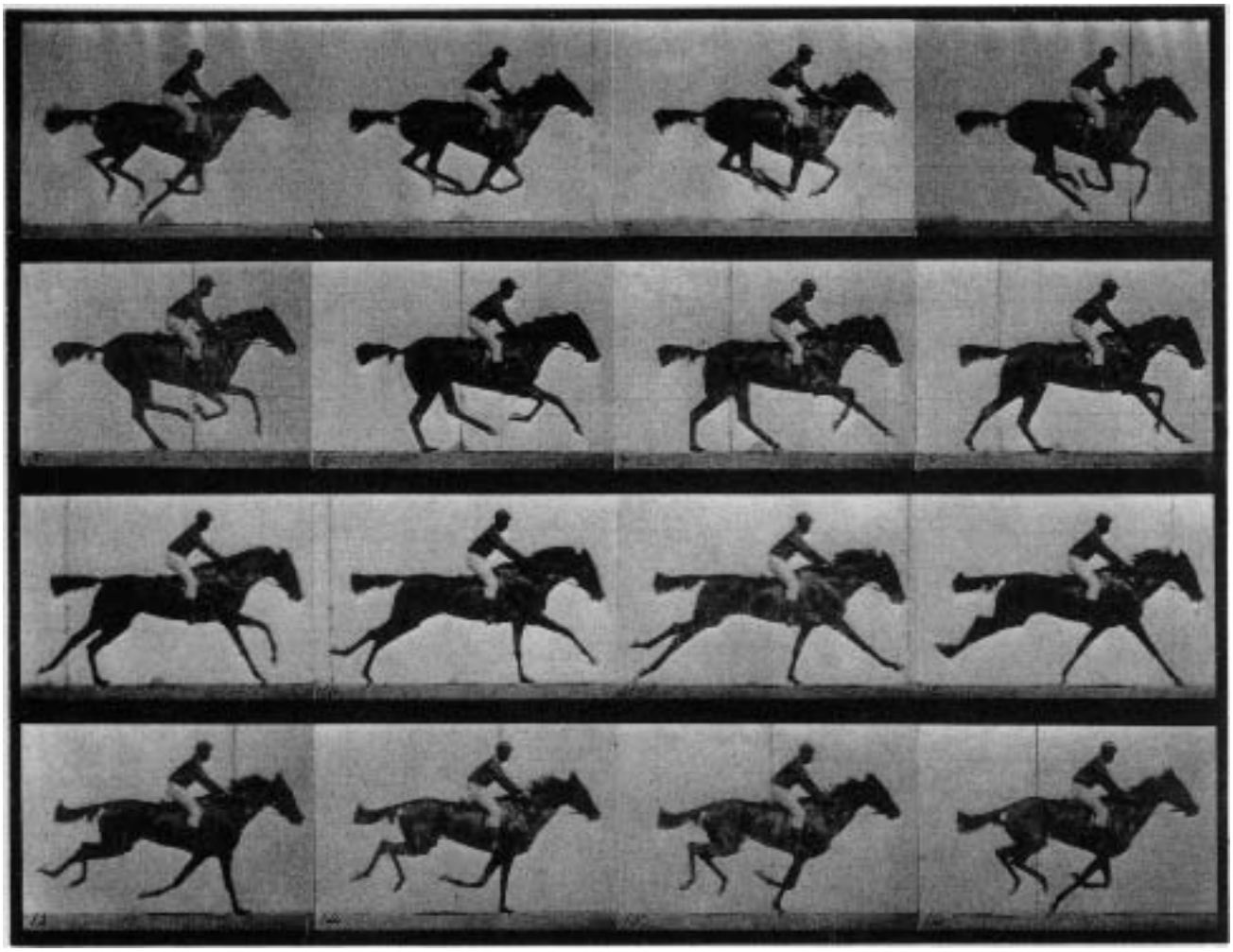
George Horner's Zoetrope.

When still photography was invented by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1787–1851) in 1839 and perfected during the next decade, it was a relatively simple step to replace the phase drawings in the motion-simulation devices with individually posed "phase photographs," as Plateau began to do in 1849. At this point, live action could be *simulated photographically* but not *recorded spontaneously and simultaneously as it occurred*. This required the drastic reduction in photographic **exposure** time from fifteen minutes to one one-thousandth of a second that was achieved between 1876 and 1881 by the replacement of collodion wet plates with gelatin dry plates and by the introduction of "series photography" by the Anglo-American photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904).

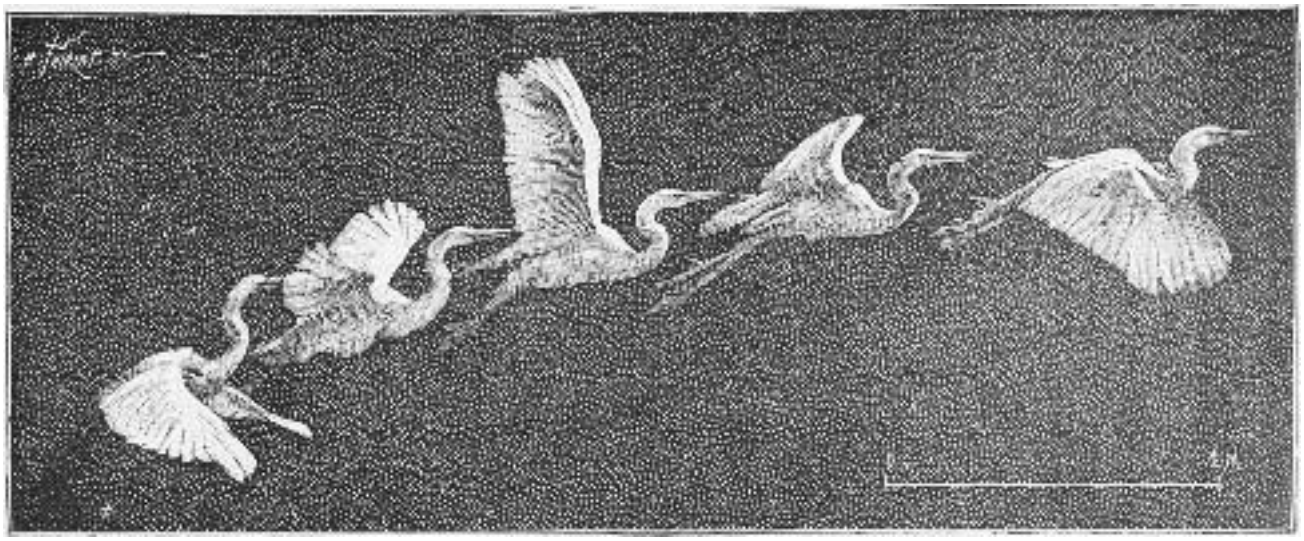
Series Photography

In 1872, Muybridge was hired by Leland Stanford (1824–1893), a former California governor and wealthy businessman, to prove that at some point in its gallop, a racehorse lifts all four hooves off the ground (a convention of nineteenth-century graphic illustration required running horses to always be pictured with at least one foot on the ground). After several years of abortive experiments, Muybridge accomplished this in the summer of 1877 by setting up a battery of twelve electrically operated cameras (later studies used twenty-four) along a Sacramento racetrack and stretching wires across it that would trip the cameras' shutters. As a horse came down the track, its hooves tripped each shutter individually and caused the cameras to photograph it in successive stages of motion during the gallop.

Muybridge demonstrated his results in 1879 on a mechanism he called the zoopraxiscope. This special kind of "magic lantern" projected colored, hand-drawn images that were based on these photographs and placed along the outer rim of a circular glass disk. (The optical, or magic, lantern was a simple projection device invented in the seventeenth century, consisting of a light source and a magnifying lens; it enjoyed great popularity as a projector of still transparencies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and became a major component in subsequent motion-picture projection.) Muybridge devoted the rest of his life to refining his process of series photography, but he was not "the man who invented moving pictures," as a recent biography proclaims. He recorded live action continuously for the first time in history, but he did so with a series of twelve or more cameras. Until the separate functions of these machines could be incorporated into a single instrument, the cinema could not be born.



Eadweard Muybridge's glass-plate series photographs.



"The Flight of a Heron": images from Étienne-Jules Marey's chronophotographic gun.

Emulsion images from Thomas Edison's "Record of a Sneeze" (or "Fred Ott's Sneeze"; 1894).

It was the French physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904) who recorded the first series photographs of live action in a single camera, which, as it happens, was also portable. Marey, a specialist in animal locomotion, invented the "chronophotographic gun" in 1882 to take series pictures of birds in flight. This instrument, a camera shaped like a rifle, took twelve instantaneous photographs of a movement per second and imprinted them on a rotating glass plate. A year later, Marey switched from the cumbersome plates to paper roll film, which had the effect of introducing the film strip to cinematography.

Yet like most of his contemporaries, Marey was not interested in cinematography as such. In his view, he had invented a machine for the dissection of motion similar to Muybridge's apparatus, but more flexible, and never intended to project his results. The next step was taken in 1887 in Newark, New Jersey, when an Episcopalian minister named Hannibal Goodwin (1822–1900) first used celluloid roll film as a base for light-sensitive **emulsions**.

Goodwin's idea was appropriated by the American entrepreneur George Eastman (1854–1932), who in 1889 began to mass-produce and market celluloid roll film on what would soon become an international scale. Neither Goodwin nor Eastman was initially interested in motion pictures, but it was the introduction of a *plastic* recording medium (in the generic sense of both durable and flexible), coupled with the technical breakthroughs of Muybridge and Marey, that enabled the Edison Laboratories in West Orange, New Jersey, to invent the **Kinetograph**, the first true motion-picture camera.

Motion Pictures

Like his predecessors, Thomas Alva Edison (1847–1931) was not interested in cinematography in and of itself. Rather, he wished to provide a visual accompaniment for his vastly successful phonograph, and in June 1889, he assigned a young laboratory assistant named William Kennedy Laurie Dickson (1860–1935) to help him develop a motion-picture camera for that purpose. Edison, in fact, envisioned a kind of "coin-operated entertainment machine," in which motion pictures made by the Kinetograph would illustrate the sound from the phonograph.

Dickson "invented" the first motion-picture camera in a brilliant synthesis of already existing principles and techniques that he had learned from studying the work of Muybridge, Marey, and others. After some ineffectual attempts to record photographic images microscopically on phonographlike cylinders, Dickson began to experiment with the use of celluloid roll film in a battery-driven camera similar to Marey's chronophotographic gun, and he arrived at the Kinetograph in late 1891. The machine incorporated what have come to be recognized as the two essentials of motion-picture camera and projector engineering: (1) a stop-motion device to ensure the intermittent but regular motion of the film strip through the camera, and (2) a perforated celluloid film strip consisting of four **sprocket** holes on the bottom edge of each frame. The former, adapted by Dickson from the escapement mechanism of a watch, permits the unexposed film strip, in its rapid transit through the camera, to be stopped for a fraction of a second before the lens while the shutter opens to *admit* light from the photographed object and expose the individual frames.

In projection, the process is exactly reversed: each frame, now developed, is held intermittently before the projection lamp while the shutter opens to *emit* light through the lens and project the film image onto the screen. Without a stop-motion device in both camera and projector, the film image would blur. The **synchronization** of film strip and shutter (which ensures the exact regularity of this discontinuous movement) and the synchronization of the camera and the projector are accomplished by means of the regular perforations in the film strip—inspired by the perforated paper of the Edison automatic telegraph—which is pulled through both machines by a system of clawed gears.

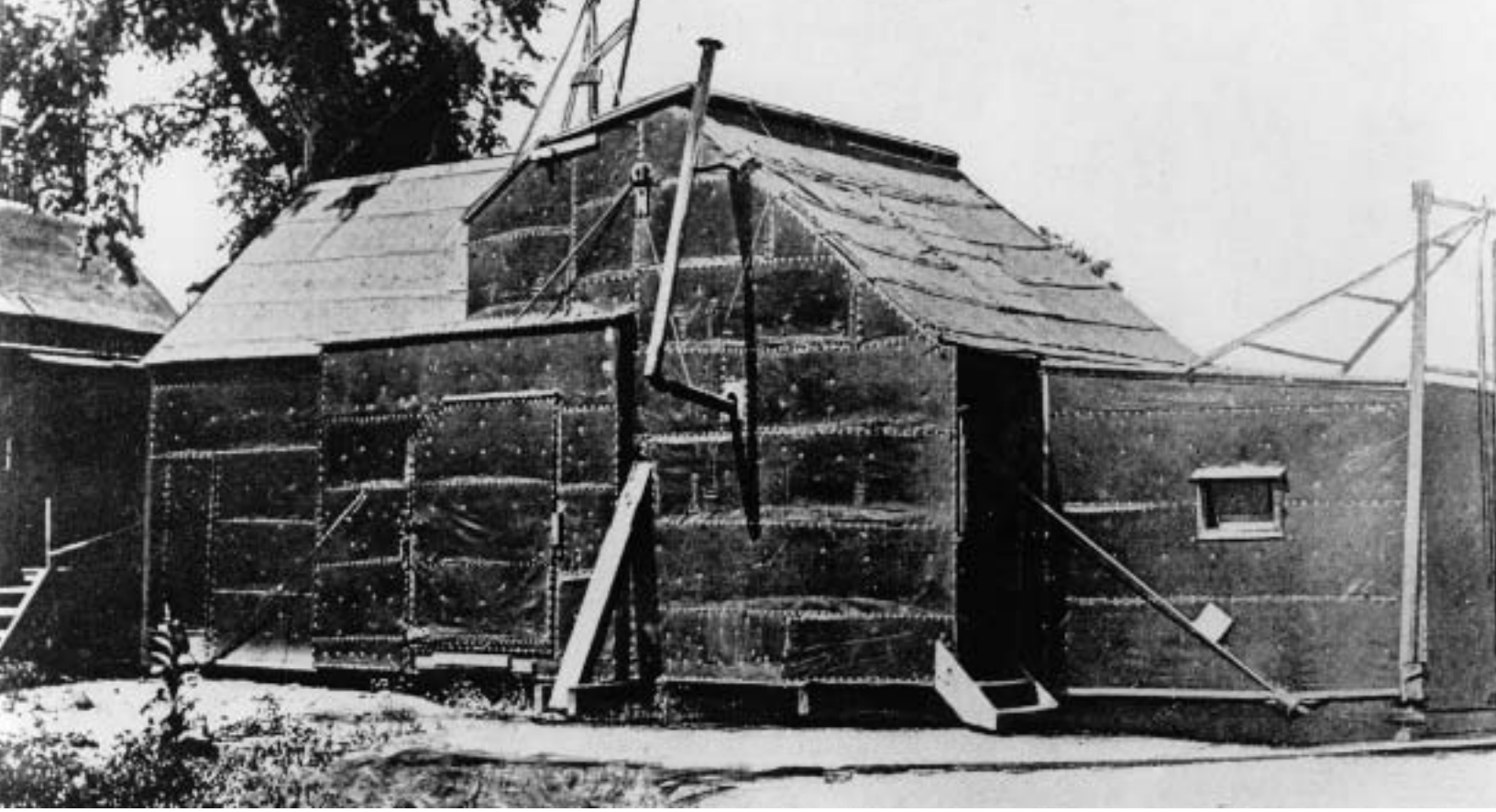
Frames from *Rescued by Rover* (Cecil Hepworth, 1905), illustrating sprocket holes.

Yet Edison was not interested in projection. He mistakenly believed that the future of moving pictures lay in individual exhibition, so he commissioned Dickson to perfect the small viewing machine he had already designed for private use in the laboratory. The first moving pictures recorded in the Kinetograph were viewed by the public individually through the magnifying lens of a boxlike peep-show machine, in which a continuous 40- to 50-foot film loop ran on spools between an electric lamp and a shutter. This device was dubbed the **Kinetoscope**. True to Edison's original intention, Dickson had attempted to design both viewer and camera so that sound and image could be synchronized and recorded simultaneously. Yet, in fact, accurate synchronization proved impossible, and the very few Kinetoscope films made with sound (called "Kinetophones") employed asynchronous musical accompaniment. Furthermore, when speculative emphasis shifted to projection a few years later, the reproduction of sound became doubly infeasible because there was as yet no means of amplifying it for a large audience.

Edison applied for patents on his new machines in 1891 but decided against paying the extra $150 to secure an international copyright, realizing that the Europeans had done so much of the essential mechanical invention of the apparatus that patent claims against them would not hold up. Soon after patents were granted in 1893, Edison began to market Kinetoscopes through several companies. On April 14, 1894, a Canadian entrepreneur named Andrew Holland opened the first Kinetoscope parlor in a converted shoe store at 1155 Broadway in New York City. Holland charged twenty-five cents per person for access to a row of five Edison peep-show viewers, each of which contained a single film loop shot with the Kinetograph. Others followed his lead, and soon Kinetoscope parlors were opened across the country, all supplied with 50-foot shorts produced for them exclusively by the Edison Company's West Orange studio at the rate of $10 to $15 outright per print.

This first motion-picture studio had been constructed by Dickson in 1893 for a little more than $600. Called the "Black Maria" (after contemporary slang for what was later known as a "paddy wagon") because it was covered with protective tar-paper strips, Dickson's studio was a single room measuring about 25 by 30 feet. A section of its roof could be opened to admit

Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope.



William Kennedy Laurie Dickson's studio "Black Maria" (c. 1893).

the sunlight—then the cinema's only effective lighting source—and the whole building could be rotated on a circular track to follow the sun's course across the sky. Here, from 1893 to April 1895, Dickson was the producer, director, and cameraman for hundreds of brief films distributed by the Edison Company to the Kinetoscope parlors.

These first films seem extremely primitive today, in both content and form. The 50-foot maximum format (approximately 16 seconds at a speed of 40 fps; 60 seconds at the later standard rate of 16 fps) was not conducive to the construction of narratives but was eminently suitable for recording quick vaudeville turns, **slapstick** comedy skits, and other kinds of brief performance. Taken together, the earliest Kinetoscope shorts preserve a series of standard theatrical routines whose only requisite content is motion. Structurally, the films are even cruder, consisting of continuous unedited footage of what occurred in front of the lens of Dickson's stationary camera. This stasis was partly the result of technological limitations—especially the small enclosure of the Black Maria studio and the cumbersomeness of the Kinetograph, which resembled a small icebox in shape and size and initially weighed more than 500 pounds. At this point in the history of film, the camera was never permitted to record more than could be seen by a single individual standing in one fixed spot and focusing on a single event for a given length of time.

Projection: Europe and America

Eadweard Muybridge's well-publicized presentations of his zoopraxiscope (in both Europe and America) during the 1880s did much to stimulate interest in perfecting the projection of a series of photographs. The basic requirements of projection engineering were (1) the enlargement of the images for simultaneous viewing by large groups and (2) a means of ensuring the regular but intermittent motion of the developed film strip as it passed between the projection lamp and the shutter (which would correspond with the discontinuous movement of the strip through the camera). The first requirement was easily and rapidly met by applying the principle of magic-lantern projection to film; the second proved more difficult, but was eventually fulfilled by the Maltese-cross system used in most projectors today.