

CHAPTER

12

Historical Changes in Film Art: Conventions and Choices, Tradition and Trends

Throughout this book, we've urged you to think like a filmmaker. We believe that it's a good way to enhance your appreciation of how films work. We've tried to aid that appreciation by setting out the range of options filmmakers face when they shape their film's overall form (Chapters 1–3), when they employ techniques of the medium (Chapters 4–8), and when they position the film within genres or other categories (Chapters 9–10). The book has surveyed, we might say, a very big menu of artistic choices.

As we've also suggested, filmmakers are obliged to make creative decisions at every stage of the process. But actually all the options we've scanned aren't available to any one filmmaker at any particular period. In different times and places, filmmakers have had narrower menus of options.

We can understand the art of film better if we're aware of those options, of the constraints and opportunities available to earlier film creators. Just as important, when we understand the choices the filmmakers could make, we can have richer experiences of the films. For instance, it wouldn't be reasonable to say that because Buster Keaton couldn't make *Our Hospitality* with sound we couldn't enjoy the movie. Once we notice how Keaton uses deep space, theme-and-variations gags, and other resources of visual storytelling, the film offers us a delightful experience (pp. 154–158). Similarly, some people won't watch black-and-white films, but if we understand that most filmmakers before the 1960s could not afford the costs of color filming, we're in a good position to notice how this constraint could be exploited to make lighting, set design, and costumes vivid in black and white.

In this chapter we consider some options and opportunities available to filmmakers at certain points in history. Sometimes the options seem limited, but surprisingly, they can also nourish creative moviemaking. If you willingly cut down your choices, you can concentrate on working *within* them. For example, if you've embraced intensified continuity (pp. 248–252) as your editing paradigm, you will still face all manner of choices, but they're more focused and specific.

At the same time, limits can be challenges, provoking filmmakers to seek alternatives. Again and again we'll see that filmmakers who found the classical Hollywood model too confining have sought other, equally effective ways to make

movies. But even when filmmakers refuse tradition, that tradition has shaped their creative thinking. And often rebellion against one tradition will draw upon other traditions. We'll see, for instance, that young Soviet filmmakers, refusing the meticulously staged melodramas of the older generation, drew inspiration from the emerging tradition of Hollywood. Studying film history reminds us that, one way or another, filmmakers are always indebted to other filmmakers—their contemporaries, or those who have come before.

CREATIVE DECISIONS

Film Form and Style across History

Why do older movies feel different from those we see today? It's not that their makers were less smart or sophisticated than we are. We can appreciate films from earlier times better if we think in terms we've discussed throughout this book.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to understanding older films is the fact that they operate according to different *conventions*. Across most of film history, for instance, censorship blocked filmmakers from directly presenting intimate sexual situations. That forced screenwriters and directors to hint that two people were erotically attracted or were having an affair. By contrast, many of today's movies present nudity, intercourse, and other sexual displays. That convention of our time doesn't make our films better, just different—although some historians will argue when filmmakers were forced to be indirect, their films became more slyly unpredictable than ours are (12.1).

Because audiences of earlier times knew the conventions, they came in with different *expectations* than we do today. For instance, an audience for silent films expected the acting to be visually expressive. That doesn't mean that silent-film acting was broad or overdone; in fact, we find plenty of subtle performances in the period. (See p. 134.) It's just that viewers of the 1910s and 1920s expected actors to use their whole bodies to communicate emotion pictorially. Our actors are more likely to rely on their facial expressions and line readings.

Most basically, filmmakers of earlier eras had different formal and stylistic options to choose from. Since we're used to thinking that we enjoy a wider range of creative choices than they did, their films might seem limited.

There were certainly technological constraints. Before 1930 or so, most directors couldn't make a film with sound, and before 1960 or thereabouts, most producers couldn't afford to make a film in color. Zoom lenses weren't practical until the 1950s, and digital effects had to wait for faster chips, bigger storage space, and more sophisticated programs.

Less obviously, some storytelling options just weren't thinkable at certain points. Today we routinely see complicated flashback plots in such ordinary movies as *The Hangover*, but we seldom see them in films of the silent era. The discontinuity editing Eisenstein exploited in *October* (1927) wasn't on the menu five years earlier. Nobody thought of it. Likewise, filmmakers could have employed slow motion in fiction features in the 1930s and 1940s, but it was almost unknown. Today it's common.

Do all these factors mean that formal and stylistic options have expanded? Does today's filmmaker have a greater range of choice than in earlier times? To some extent, yes; innovations have accumulated, providing the filmmaker a big toolkit. But some older options aren't live ones for every filmmaker.

For example, directors working with the CinemaScope widescreen process in the early 1950s felt obliged to stage the



12.1 Images say what dialogue can't. Shadows prophesy the outcome of a flirtation in Ernst Lubitsch's *Trouble in Paradise* (1932).



12.2



12.3

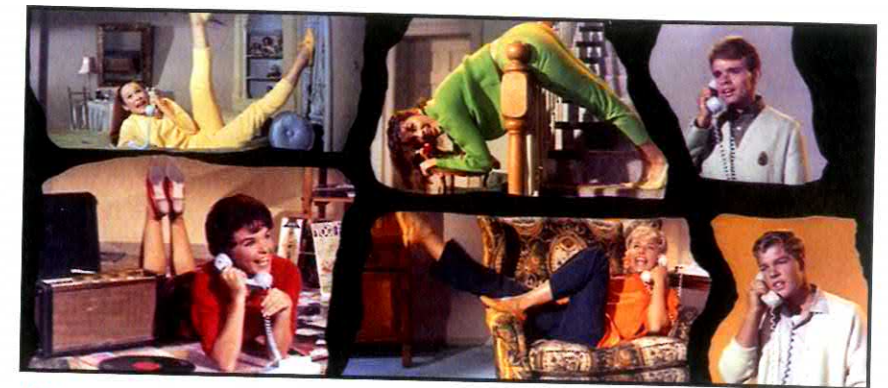
12.2–12.3 Widescreen staging. The anamorphic 2.55 ratio widescreen of early CinemaScope (p. 183) encouraged filmmakers to use broad, distant staging in long takes, as in *The Robe* (1953; 12.2). Director Henry Koster uses several characters' eyelines to call attention to Marcellus, the figure on the near left. This stylistic choice is rare in contemporary Hollywood. Yet some recent filmmakers in other countries have found distant staging a fruitful technique. In *Dust in the Wind* (1986; 12.3) Hou Hsiao-hsien also uses characters' eyelines to direct our attention to the significant action, the father on his deathbed. In addition, Hou's set blocks off the right portion of the frame and minimizes other characters through shadow and aspects of setting. (A chair conceals the face of the kneeling daughter.)

action fairly far from the camera and to spread the action out across the frame (12.2). Fairly soon, improvements in lenses and other equipment enabled them to use more medium shots and close-ups. By the mid-1960s, broad and distant staging became rare, and today a Hollywood filmmaker who decided to revisit that approach would risk looking old-fashioned. The contemporary approach is to frame actors tightly, even in widescreen formats (1.51, 6.119–6.134). Yet this distant, lateral staging was by no means a dead end creatively. Directors in other countries have refined techniques that are similar to what we see in early 'Scope films (12.3).

Or go back to the example of a telephone conversation (p. 266). Suppose you want to show both Jim and Amanda as they talk. Today most directors would simply cut from one to the other. In the 1910s, however, there was another option: a split screen (12.4). It was striking but a bit complicated to shoot, so it was eventually dropped in favor of cutting. But during the 1960s it was occasionally revived



12.4



12.5



12.6

12.4–12.6 Techniques revived. Split-screen presentation of phone conversations was not unusual in the period of *Suspense* (1913; 12.4). For decades afterward it was almost never used, but it was revived in the 1960s occasionally for suspense or comedy, as in the musical *Bye Bye Birdie* (1963; 12.5). It was also a handy way to fill up the wide screen. The 2003 retro comedy *Down with Love* refers back to the 1960s convention (12.6).

for comedies (12.5). Today a director might call on it for comic effect, or to hark back to its 1960s usage (12.6).

The art historian Heinrich Wölfflin summed up this situation in a famous line: "Not everything is possible at all times." At any moment in film history, there are forces—technology, budget, political censorship, prevailing tastes, clashes within the production team—working to limit artistic choices. The limits on today's filmmakers aren't as visible to us, but they are there. In watching an older film, we should try to understand the options that filmmakers had to work with at the time. That will sensitize us not only to the range of possibilities but also to the ways in which some filmmakers, in a quest to try something different, came up with innovations that later creators could use.

Traditions and Movements in Film History

We've presented artistic decision making in film as a matter of individual choice. That's accurate, up to a point. But most filmmakers work in groups, as we saw back in Chapter 1. Members of the group make collective decisions about the project. Moreover, the team members have learned their craft from other filmmakers. The community that shapes a filmmaker's choice includes many who have gone before, who have laid down best practices and solid solutions to recurring problems.

In other words, filmmakers belong to *traditions*. They pass ideas about movie-making from peer to peer, from expert to novice. And many of those ideas are suggestions about what choices you should make. Screenwriters learn to write using three-act structure; cinematographers learn favored ways of lighting faces; actors



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Some modern filmmakers have tried to imitate older films' look and feel. Does it work? On *The Good German*, see "Not back to the future, but ahead to the past." On *Casino Royale*, see "Can they make 'em like they used to? Continued."

learn what counts as a good performance. A tradition, in effect, favors certain creative choices over others.

One of the best examples of a filmmaking tradition is American studio cinema, so at various points in the chapter we'll examine how that tradition emerged and changed. In many respects, the Hollywood tradition influenced filmmaking around the world. A more limited tradition is that of Hong Kong action cinema of the 1980s and 1990s. That too, as we'll see, proved quite influential.

Traditions nudge a filmmaker toward certain choices and away from others. But sometimes filmmakers want to explore those others. In instances like these, we get the shorter-lived trends we call *movements*. In a movement, filmmakers typically operate within a common production structure and share certain assumptions about filmmaking. Above all, they favor a common approach to form, style, and theme that sets them somewhat apart from the usual practices. They innovate. Movements, then, are *untraditional* in some ways. They press filmmakers to make unusual formal and stylistic choices.

Sometimes the filmmakers in a movement know one another well and respond to one another's projects. This situation occurred with the Soviet Montage filmmakers of the 1920s, the Surrealists of the period, and the French New Wave of the 1950s–1960s. Here we find young people cooperating and competing because they wanted to explore some new ideas about what cinema could be. To clarify those ideas, they often wrote books and articles. Other movements are more diffuse, with unconnected filmmakers gravitating toward a common approach to form and style.

Most movements don't last more than a few years, but they can exercise a far-reaching effect. Some movements of the silent and early sound era have affected filmmaking for decades afterward. As we'll see, many movements have been selectively absorbed into broader traditions, particularly Hollywood's. The films of our time reenact creative decisions made by filmmakers in the past.

You should already have a sense of this, because our examples from both recent films and older ones show that today's films often accept or rework choices that were made in much earlier work. In several sections that follow, we mention how some contemporary filmmakers have found inspiration in the choices favored by film movements.

Because we're exploring historical contexts, we'll go beyond noting stylistic and formal qualities. For each tradition and movement, we'll point to relevant factors that affect the filmmakers' options—factors such as the state of the industry, artistic theories held by the filmmakers themselves, technological features, and cultural and economic forces. These factors help explain how a particular trend began and developed. This material will also provide a context for particular films we've already discussed. For example, we introduced you to Georges Méliès in Chapter 4 and Louis Lumière in Chapter 5. In the previous chapter, we analyzed a Soviet Montage film (*The Man with a Movie Camera*) and a French New Wave one (*Breathless*). Now you have a chance to see this work in a broader context.

In the sections that follow, we haven't tried to characterize other important traditions, such as that of Japanese cinema, or other movements, such as French populist cinema of the 1930s and Brazil's Cinema Novo of the early 1960s. Readers interested in knowing more can consult our *Film History: An Introduction*. Here we simply trace how certain possibilities of film form and style were explored in a few typical and well-known historical traditions and movements. The first section sets the stage for them by examining the origins of cinema itself.

Early Cinema (1893–1903)

In Chapter 1, we saw that film is a technology-driven medium. To create the illusion of movement, still pictures must appear in rapid succession. To prepare them and display them at the right rate, certain technologies are necessary.

Photography and Cinema

Most basically, there must be a way of recording a long series of images on some sort of support. In principle, one could simply draw a string of images on a strip of paper or a disc. But photography offered the cheapest and most efficient way to generate the thousands of images needed for a reasonably lengthy show. Thus the invention of photography in 1826 launched a series of discoveries that made cinema possible.

Early photographs required lengthy exposures (initially hours, later minutes) for a single image; this made photographed motion pictures, which need 12 or more frames per second, impossible. Faster exposures, of about 1/25th of a second, became possible by the 1870s, but only on glass plates. Glass plates weren't usable for motion pictures since there was no practical way to move them through a camera or projector. In 1878, Eadweard Muybridge, an American photographer, did make a series of photographs of a running horse by using a series of cameras with glass plate film and fast exposure, but he was primarily interested in freezing phases of an action, not re-creating the movement by projecting the images in succession.

In 1882, another scientist interested in analyzing animal movement, the Frenchman Étienne-Jules Marey, invented a camera that recorded 12 separate images on the edge of a revolving disc of film on glass. This constituted a step toward the motion picture camera. In 1888, Marey built the first camera to use a strip of flexible film, this time on paper. Again, the purpose was only to break down movement into a series of stills, and the movements photographed lasted a second or less. In 1889, George Eastman introduced a crude flexible film base, celluloid. After this base was improved and camera mechanisms had been devised to draw the film past the lens and expose it to light, the creation of long strips of frames became possible.

Projectors had existed for many years and had been used to show slides and shadow entertainments. These magic lanterns were modified by the addition of shutters, cranks, and other devices to become early motion picture projectors.

One final device was needed if films were to be projected. Since the film stops briefly while the light shines through each individual frame, there had to be a mechanism to create an *intermittent* motion of the film. Marey used a Maltese cross gear on his 1888 camera, and this became a standard part of early cameras and projectors.

A flexible and transparent film base, a fast exposure time, a mechanism to pull the film through the camera, an intermittent device to stop the film, and a shutter to block off light—all these innovations had been achieved by the early 1890s. After several years, inventors working independently in many countries had developed film cameras and projection devices. The two most important firms were the Edison Manufacturing Company in America, owned by inventor Thomas A. Edison, and Lumière Frères in France, the family firm of Louis and Auguste Lumière.

Edison vs. Lumière

By 1893, Thomas A. Edison's assistant, W. K. L. Dickson, had developed a camera that made short 35mm films. Interested in exploiting these films as a novelty, Edison hoped to combine them with his phonograph to show sound movies. He had Dickson develop a peep-show machine, the *Kinetoscope* (12.7), to display these films to individual viewers.

But Edison believed that movies were a passing fad, so he didn't develop a system to project films onto a screen. This task was left to the Lumière brothers. They invented their own camera independently; it exposed a short roll of 35mm film and also served as a projector (12.8). On December 28, 1895, the Lumière brothers presented motion pictures on a screen, at the Grand Café in Paris.

There had been several earlier public screenings, but the Lumières found the most practical method for projecting films, and their format largely determined the direction in which the new medium developed. Edison was obliged to follow their example, abandoning the Kinetoscope and creating his own production company to make films for public projection.



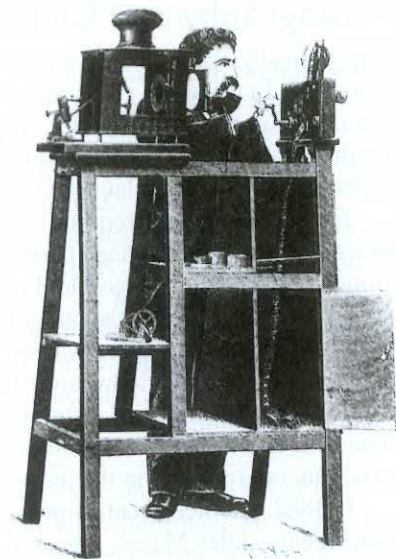
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Early cinema was influenced by other media of its day, including narrative painting. We suggest some similarities in "Professor sees more parallels between things, other things."

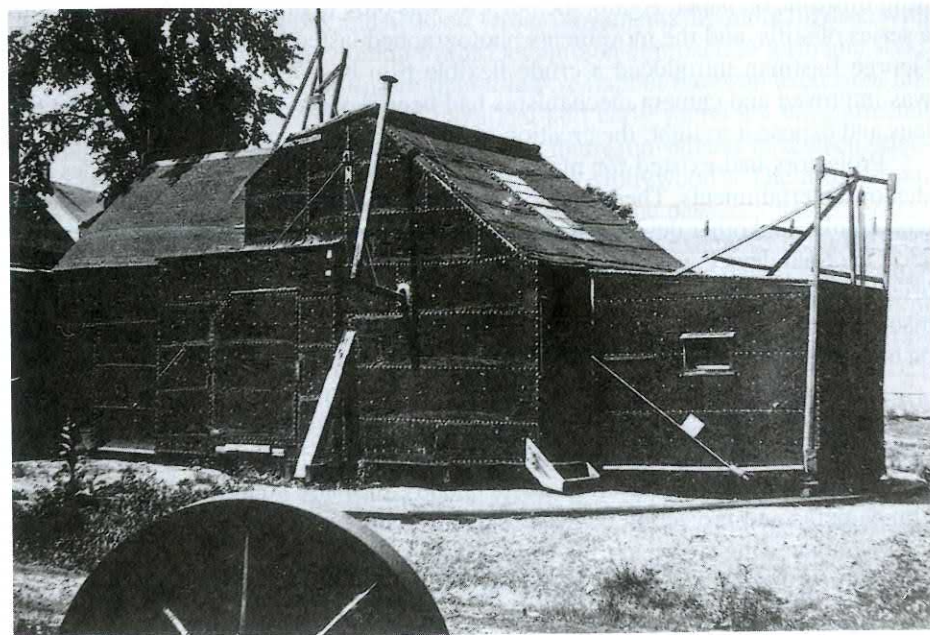
12.7–12.9 Alternative approaches to early filmmaking. Edison's Kinetoscope threaded film in a continuous loop around a series of bobbins (12.7). The film was watched by one viewer at a time. The Lumière brothers aimed for public screenings, so they put a magic-lantern projector behind their camera so the images could be displayed to several viewers (12.8). In Edison's rotating film studio, the Black Maria, a hinged central portion of the roof swung open for filming (12.9).



12.7



12.8



12.9

Early Form and Style

The first films usually consisted of a single shot framing an action, usually at long-shot distance. In the first film studio, Edison's Black Maria (12.9), vaudeville entertainers, famous sports figures, and celebrities such as Annie Oakley performed for the camera. A hinged portion of the roof opened to admit a patch of sunlight, and the entire building turned on a circular rail (visible in 12.9) to follow the sun's motion. The Lumières, however, took their cameras out to parks, gardens, beaches, and other public places to film everyday activities or news events, as in their *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (5.64).

Until about 1903, most films showed scenic places or noteworthy events, so these can be considered early documentaries. The Lumières sent camera operators all over the world to photograph important events and exotic locales. Staged

narratives, brief skits or gags, were also popular. Edison's staff played out comic scenes, such as one copyrighted 1893 in which a drunken man struggles briefly with a policeman. The Lumières made a popular short, *L'Arroseur arrosé* (*The Waterer Watered*, 1895), also a comic scene, in which a boy tricks a gardener into squirting himself with a hose (4.8).

The earliest films may look crude to us today. This is partly because we seldom see good copies. In properly preserved prints, shown at the right projection speed, the films have a photographic richness that has seldom been equaled since. But because they were so short—before 1905, running only a few minutes—the first films couldn't develop complex stories or rhetorical arguments. Relying on unusual events, cute animals, and other brief attractions, they look forward to the amateur videos that show up on YouTube today (12.10). Early films have inspired avant-garde filmmakers to explore movement and abstract photographic qualities (12.11).

Méliès, Magic, and Fictional Narrative

In 1896, Georges Méliès built his own camera, based on a projector he had bought. His first films resembled the Lumières' shots of everyday activities. But as we have seen (pp. 113–114), Méliès was a stage magician, and he discovered the possibilities of simple special effects. In 1897, Méliès built his own studio, filled with flats and trapdoors. These allowed him to control his effects very precisely (12.12).

Méliès built elaborate settings to create fantasy worlds within which his magical transformations could occur. As we've already seen, this care in manipulating setting, lighting, costume, and staging made Méliès the first master of mise-en-scène (4.3–4.6). He was also an important innovator in editing. For one thing, he found that he could create magical transformations by stopping the camera, adjusting elements in the scene, and then resuming filming. Inspecting the original material, historians have found that Méliès trimmed a few frames at each special effect. Stopping and restarting the camera created light bursts on the first few frames, and these had to be snipped out. Moreover, Méliès progressed to longer narratives, with each scene played out in a single camera position, and he used cuts to link them. The most famous of these was *A Trip to the Moon* (1902). Méliès's Star Film company was associated with magic tricks and fairy stories, but it turned out an astonishing variety of films, including scenes from the Bible and a series based on the Dreyfus case. The dazzling special effects, the impressive settings and costumes, and the expansive fantasies and historical narratives made Méliès's films popular and widely imitated. They still exercise a powerful hold, having been painstakingly collected and restored, released on DVD, and given a central role in Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* (2011), which pays homage to Méliès by restaging some of the films.

The work of Lumière, Méliès, and other early filmmakers gained worldwide fame because films circulated freely from country to country. The French phonograph company Pathé Frères moved into filmmaking from 1901 on, establishing production and distribution branches in many countries. Soon Pathé was the largest film concern in the world, a position it retained until 1914, when the beginning of World War I forced it to cut back. In England, several entrepreneurs managed to invent or obtain equipment and made scenics, narratives, and trick films from 1895 into the early years of the 20th century. Members of the Brighton School (primarily G. Albert Smith and James Williamson), as well as others such as Cecil Hepworth, shot their films on location or in simple open-air studios (as in 12.13). Their innovative films circulated abroad and influenced other filmmakers. Pioneers in other countries invented or bought equipment and were soon making their own films of everyday scenes or fantasy transformations.

As films became longer, narrative form became the most prominent type of filmmaking in the commercial industry, and the popularity of cinema continued to grow. French, Italian, and American films ruled world markets. Later, World War I was to restrict the international flow of films, and Hollywood emerged as the dominant



12.10

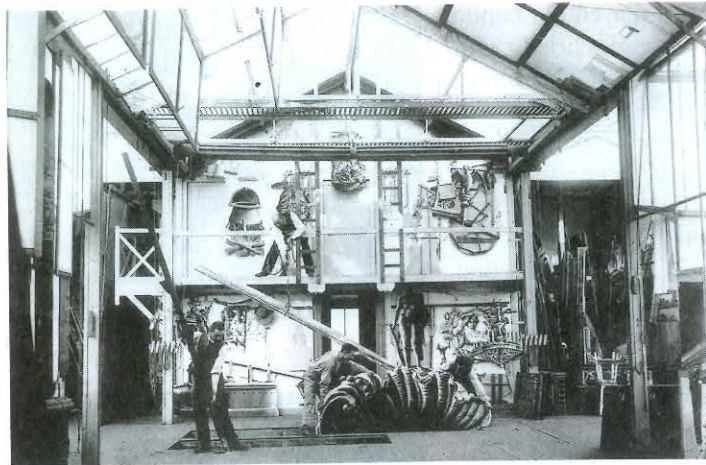


12.11

12.10–12.11 Early film and later interests. A Lumière film from 1900, *La petite fille et son chat* (*The Little Girl and Her Cat*), centers on a perennial attraction of today's online videos (12.10). In *Tom, Tom the Piper's Son* (1969), avant-garde filmmaker Ken Jacobs uses an optical printer to dissect and stylize a 1905 film of the same name, creating what Jacobs calls "a dream within a dream" (12.11).

“In conjuring you work under the attentive gaze of the public, who never fail to spot a suspicious movement. You are alone, their eyes never leave you. Failure would not be tolerated. . . . While in the cinema . . . you can do your confecting quietly, far from those profane gazes, and you can do things thirty-six times if necessary until they are right. This allows you to travel further in the domain of the marvellous.”

—George Méliès, magician and filmmaker



12.12

12.12–12.13 Early studio shooting. Unlike Edison's Black Maria, Méliès's studio was glass-sided, like a greenhouse, and admitted sunlight from many directions (12.12). G. Albert Smith's *Santa Claus* (1898) was filmed in the open air, with a false backdrop (12.13). It displays typical traits of the first fictional narratives: distant camera position, flat lighting, and a rear wall placed perpendicular to the camera lens.



12.13

industrial force in film production. In some countries, filmmakers responded by creating movements that differed sharply from the look and feel of the American product.



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Hollywood wasn't the only place where film form and style were developing in the 1910s. For an international survey of the important year 1913, see "Lucky '13," and for a look at alternatives to continuity editing, see "Looking different today?" We examine the work of two early French masters in "Capellani trionfante" and "How to watch *Fantômas*, and why."

The Development of the Classical Hollywood Cinema (1908–1927)

Edison, determined to make money from his invention, brought patent-violation suits against competing moviemaking firms. When he failed to stamp out his rivals, he allied with several of them in 1908 to establish the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC). Edison and the American Mutoscope and Biograph company were the only stockholders and patent owners. They licensed other members to make, distribute, and exhibit films, and they standardized film lengths at one reel (running about 15 minutes). But this move didn't eliminate the other production companies, who sprang up quickly. In 1912 the U.S. government sued the MPPC, and three years later it was declared a monopoly and forced to break up.

Hollywood and the Studio System of Production

At the same period, both MPPC companies and independents began to relocate from New York and Chicago to California. Los Angeles offered a climate that permitted shooting year-round, and a great variety of locations—mountains, ocean, desert, city. Soon Hollywood and other small towns on the outskirts of Los Angeles hosted film production.

Through the 1910s and 1920s, the smaller firms merged to form the large film corporations that still exist today. Famous Players joined with Jesse L. Lasky and then formed a distribution wing, Paramount. By the late 1920s, most of the major companies—MGM (a merger of Metro, Goldwyn, and Mayer), Fox Film Corporation (merged with 20th Century in 1935), Warner Bros., Universal, and Paramount—had been created. Though in competition with one another, the companies cooperated to some degree, because they realized that the demand for films was so great that no one firm could satisfy the market.

By the early 1920s, the American industry had created a structure that would continue for decades. A few large firms with individual artists under contract were supplemented by small independent producing companies. Within a company, filmmaking

tasks were carefully divided among specialists, and each project was overseen by a producer, who kept an eye on budget and schedule. Thomas Ince, a major producer, pioneered the use of detailed shooting scripts and time sheets so that the shooting could be cost-efficient. The stages of production we surveyed in Chapter 1 (pp. 16–28) were systematized by the Hollywood companies of the late 1910s. This business model came to be known as the studio system. Aiming to turn out narrative films in large quantities, the American cinema became oriented toward narrative form.

Narrative Continuity: Early Prototypes One of Edison's directors, Edwin S. Porter, made some of the first films to use principles of narrative continuity and development. Among these was *The Life of an American Fireman* (1903), which showed the race of the firefighters to rescue a mother and a child from a burning house. Although this film used several striking narrative elements (a fireman's premonition of the disaster, a series of shots of the horse-drawn engine racing to the house), the cutting presents an odd time scheme. We see the rescue of a mother and her child twice, from both inside and outside the house. Porter had not realized the possibility of intercutting the two locales to sustain simultaneous action.

In 1903, Porter made *The Great Train Robbery*, in some ways a prototype for the classical American film. Here the action develops with a linear time, space, and cause-effect logic. We follow each stage of the robbery (12.14), the pursuit, and the final defeat of the robbers. In 1905, Porter also created a simple parallel narrative in *The Kleptomaniac*, contrasting the fates of a rich woman and a starving woman who are both caught stealing.

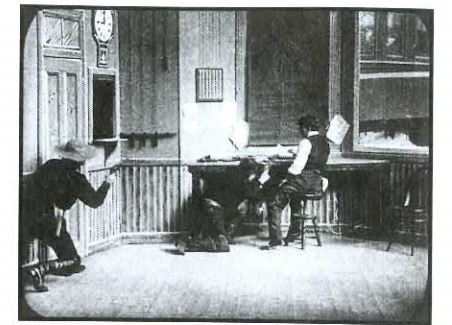
British filmmakers were working along similar lines. Indeed, many historians now believe that Porter derived some of his editing techniques from films such as James Williamson's *Fire!* (1901) and G. A. Smith's *Mary Jane's Mishap* (1903). The most famous British film of this era was Lewin Fitzhamon's 1905 film *Rescued by Rover* (produced by a major British firm, Cecil Hepworth), which treated a kidnapping in a linear fashion similar to that of *The Great Train Robbery*. After the kidnapping, we see each stage of Rover's journey to find the child, his return to fetch the child's father, and their retracing of the route to the kidnapper's lair. All the shots make the geography of the action completely intelligible (12.15, 12.16).

In 1908, D. W. Griffith began his directing career. Over the next five years, he would make hundreds of one- and two-reelers (running about 15 and 30 minutes, respectively). These films created relatively complex plots in short spans. Griffith certainly didn't invent all the devices with which he has been credited, but he did give many techniques strong narrative motivation. For example, a few other filmmakers had used simple last-minute rescues with crosscutting between the rescuers and victims, but Griffith developed and popularized this technique (6.111–6.114). By the time he made *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916), Griffith was creating lengthy sequences by cutting among several different locales.

Griffith made another creative choice that was unusual for the early 1910s: he concentrated on subtle changes in facial expression (4.33). To catch such nuances, he set up his camera closer to the action than did many of his contemporaries, framing his actors in medium long shot or medium shot.

Griffith's films were widely influential. In addition, his dynamic, rapid editing in the final chase scenes of *Intolerance* was to have a considerable impact on the Soviet Montage style of the 1920s. But he wasn't alone in refining technique. Supervising production at his company, Thomas Ince demanded tight narratives, with no digressions or loose ends, and his request for detailed shooting scripts favored breaking scenes up into several camera positions. Films made under Ince's control, such as *Civilization* (1915), *The Italian* (1915), and the Westerns of William S. Hart (p. 339), helped stabilize the emerging continuity conventions.

Cecil B. De Mille, a director who was to have a much longer career than Griffith and Ince, made several feature-length dramas and comedies. His *The Cheat* (1915) reflects important changes occurring in the studio style between 1914 and 1917.



12.14 An early effort at narrative continuity. The robbers in the telegraph office in *The Great Train Robbery*, preparing to board the train seen through the window. The train portion of the image is an early matte shot.



12.15



12.16

12.15–12.16 Matching screen direction. In *Rescued by Rover*, the heroic dog leads his master along a street from the right rear moving toward the left foreground (12.15). The pair is moving from right to left as they reach their destination (12.16).



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A Spanish filmmaking student created a revealing video analyzing a 1912 Griffith Biograph short. We talk about the analysis and link to it in "A Variation on a Sunbeam."

“The cinema knows so well how to tell a story that perhaps there is an impression that it has always known how.”

—André Gaudreault, film historian



12.17



12.18

12.17–12.18 Narrative coherence. The opening scene of *The Cheat* introduces the branding motif (12.17). It returns later when the villain brands the heroine as another item of property (12.18). Both use the “Rembrandt lighting” that made De Mille famous.



12.19



12.20



12.21



12.22



12.23



12.24



12.25

12.21–12.25 Consistent eyelines around a table. In an establishing shot from *Are Parents People?* (Malcolm St. Clair, 1925), the daughter sits down at the table (12.21). In the medium shot she looks leftward toward her father (12.22). He responds to her by looking rightward in the reverse shot (12.23). The daughter then turns to look to the right at her mother (12.24). Her mother returns her gaze in reverse shot (12.25).

in other countries pushed in directions that American cinema had not explored. After examining these alternative movements, in the silent era, we'll return to consider the classical Hollywood cinema after the coming of sound.

German Expressionism (1919–1926)

The worldwide success of American films in the late 1910s and through the 1920s confronted filmmakers with a harsh choice. Should you try to imitate Hollywood? The big budgets of the American studios were hard to match in the aftermath of a war that had devastated the European continent. Or should you try to offer a type of cinema markedly different from the Hollywood standard? Most filmmakers took the first option and adopted American techniques of lighting, staging, and editing. (Principles of story construction took longer to be adopted.) But a few filmmakers sought to be more original, and some of them formed movements that had an enduring effect on world cinema.

In 1914, although some impressive pictures had been made in Germany, the industry's output was relatively small. The nation's 2000 movie theaters were playing



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On two of the most important filmmakers of the early classical period, see our entries on William S. Hart in “Rio Jim, in discrete fragments,” and Douglas Fairbanks in “His Majesty the American.”

During that period, the glass-roofed studios of the earlier period began to give way to studios dependent on artificial lighting rather than mixed daylight and electric lighting. *The Cheat* used spectacular effects of chiaroscuro, with only one or two bright sources of light and no fill light. According to legend, De Mille justified this effect to nervous exhibitors by calling it “Rembrandt lighting.” This north lighting was to become part of the classical repertoire of lighting techniques.

Like many American films of the teens, *The Cheat* uses a linear pattern of narrative. The first scene (12.17) introduces the hard lighting but also quickly establishes the Japanese businessman as a ruthless collector of objects; we see him burning his brand onto a small statue. The initial action motivates a later scene in which the businessman brands the heroine, who has fallen into his power by borrowing money from him (12.18). *The Cheat* was one of several 1915 films that showed that Hollywood films were moving toward greater complexity in their storytelling.

The 180° system of staging, shooting, and editing (pp. 233–235) was developing as well. Eyeline matches became more common from 1910 on, and the match on action was in common use by 1916, appearing in such Douglas Fairbanks films as *The Americano* (1916) and *Wild and Woolly* (1917). Shot/reverse shot cutting became widespread as well, as seen in *The Cheat* (1915), Hart's Western *The Narrow Trail* (1917), and Griffith's *A Romance of Happy Valley* (1919).

Classical Form and Style in Place

By the early 1920s, the continuity system had become a standardized style that directors in the Hollywood studios used to create coherent, gripping storytelling. Screen direction was usually respected. A match on action could provide a cut to a closer view in a scene (12.19, 12.20). A conversation around a table would no longer be handled in a single frontal shot (12.21–12.25). When an awkward match might have resulted from the joining of two shots, the filmmakers could cover it by inserting a dialogue title.

Filmmakers conceived ways to handle large-scale narrative form as well. By 1923, Buster Keaton could construct a perfectly balanced plot for *Our Hospitality*. As we saw in Chapter 4, the action develops logically from the death of Willie McKay's father to Willie's final resolution of the feud. Along the way, motifs like the railroad tracks, water, and pistols are carefully motivated and ingeniously varied.

In only a decade or so, Hollywood cinema had developed into a sophisticated cinematic tradition. As we've indicated (p. 232), classical continuity became a kind of universal language of fictional moviemaking that's still in force today. Yet no sooner had the tradition crystallized than alternatives began to appear. Filmmakers

“That evening I tried to increase my knowledge of motion-picture technique by going to the movies. I sat with a stop watch and notebook and tried to estimate the number of cuts or scenes in a thousand-foot reel, the length of individual scenes, the distance of the subject from the camera, and various other technical details.”

—King Vidor, director, recalling the night before he began directing his first film, c. 1912



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For more on the emergence of Hollywood film style in the late 1910s, see “Happy birthday, classical cinema!”



12.26 The UFA historical epic. *Madame Dubarry*: A crowd scene in the Tribunal of the French Revolution.

mostly French, American, Italian, and Danish films. When the war began, America and France banned German films from their screens immediately, but Germany couldn't afford to ban French and American films, for then the theaters would have had little to show.

To combat imported competition, as well as to create its own propaganda films, the German government began to support the film industry. In 1916, film imports were banned except from neutral Denmark. Production increased rapidly; from a dozen small companies in 1911, the number grew to 131 by 1918. But government policy encouraged these companies to band together into cartels.

The war was unpopular with many in Germany, and rebellious tendencies increased after the success of the Russian Revolution in 1917. To promote pro-war films, the government, the Deutsche Bank, and large industrial concerns combined several small film firms to create the large company UFA (short for Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft) in late 1917. Backed by these conservative interests, UFA was a move toward control of the German market and, its backers hoped, the post-war international market as well. With this huge financial backing, UFA was able to gather superb technicians and build the best-equipped studios in Europe.

In late 1918, with the end of the war, the need for overt militarist propaganda disappeared. But now German films were unwelcome abroad. Although mainstream dramas and comedies continued to be made, filmmakers concentrated on three genres. One was the adventure serial, featuring spy rings, clever detectives, and exotic settings. These films from America, Denmark, and France had proven internationally popular, but the German films failed overseas. Another genre consisted of a sex exploitation cycle, which dealt "educationally" with such topics as homosexuality and prostitution. UFA's third option was to create big-budget historical spectacles like those that Italy had made popular in the prewar period.

This strategy proved successful. Ernst Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry* (1919; **12.26**), a historical epic of the French Revolution, broke down international opposition to German films. Although the French authorities treated it as propaganda, it proved extremely popular elsewhere and helped reopen the world market for local films. Other Lubitsch historical films were soon exported, and in 1923, he became the first German director to be hired by Hollywood.

A more unusual strategy of differentiation emerged at the same time. Despite UFA's expansion, some small companies remained independent. Among these was Erich Pommer's Decla (later Decla-Bioscop). In 1919, the firm undertook to produce an unconventional script by two unknowns, Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz. These young writers wanted their story to be told in an unusually stylized way. The three designers assigned to the film—Hermann Warm, Walter Reimann, and Walter Röhrig—suggested that it be done in an Expressionist style. As an avant-garde movement, Expressionism had first been important in painting (starting about 1910) and had been quickly taken up in theater, then in literature and architecture. Now company officials consented to try it in the cinema, apparently believing that this might be a selling point in the international market. This belief was vindicated in 1920 when Decla's inexpensive film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) created a sensation in Berlin and then in the United States, France, and other countries.

A few German directors made abstract films—for example, Viking Eggeling's *Diagonal-symphonie* (1923)—or Dada films influenced by the international art movement—such as Hans Richter's *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (1928). But thanks to the success of *Caligari* most filmmakers who wanted to explore new paths in form and style stayed within the industry. UFA, along with smaller companies, invested in Expressionist films because these could compete with those of America.

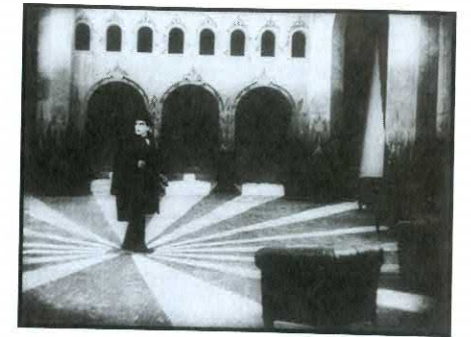
The first film of the movement, *Caligari*, is a powerful example of the Expressionist style. One of its designers, Warm, claimed, "The film image must become graphic art." With its extreme stylization, *Caligari* was like a moving Expressionist painting or woodcut print. In contrast to French Impressionism, which based its style primarily on cinematography and editing, German Expressionism depended heavily



12.27



12.28



12.29

12.27–12.29 Actors as part of setting. In Robert Wiene's *Genuine*, the bedroom is flamboyantly Expressionist. As the heroine leans backwards, she blends in with the curved, spiky shapes behind her (**12.27**). *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*: Dr. Caligari totters along a corridor that suggests a madman's vision of the world (**12.28**). When the hero arrives at Caligari's asylum, he steps into the center of a pattern of black-and-white lines that radiate across the floor and up the walls (**12.29**).

on mise-en-scene. Shapes are distorted and exaggerated to suggest emotional states. Actors often wear heavy makeup and move in jerky or slow, sinuous patterns. Most important, all of the elements of the mise-en-scene interact graphically to create an overall composition. We have already seen an example of this in 4.115, where the character Cesare collapses in a stylized forest, his body and outstretched arms echoing the shapes of the trees' trunks and branches. Characters do not simply exist within a setting but rather form visual elements that *merge with the setting* (**12.27**).

Such a departure from realism demands motivation, which *Caligari* provides through mental subjectivity. We see the world as the mad hero imagines it to be (**12.28**). This narrative function of the settings becomes explicit at one point, when the hero enters an asylum in his pursuit of Caligari. As he pauses to look around, the world of the film is literally a projection of the hero's mind (**12.29**). Later, as Expressionism became an accepted style, filmmakers didn't motivate the style as the subjective state of mad characters. Instead, genre conventions were invoked. Expressionist design could create stylized imagery for fantasy and horror stories, as with *Waxworks* (1924) and *Nosferatu* (1922; see 9.17). *The Nibelungen* (1923–1924) showed that abstract patterning of costume, sets, and crowds could be applied to historical epics as well. All these genres depended greatly on their set designers. In the German studios, a film's designer received a relatively high salary and was often featured in publicity.

By the mid-1920s, German films were widely regarded as among the best in the world. UFA's rich studio facilities attracted foreign filmmakers, including the young Alfred Hitchcock. During the 1920s, Germany coproduced many films with companies in other countries, thus helping to spread its stylistic influence abroad. The rampant inflation of the early 1920s actually favored Expressionist filmmaking, partly by making it easy for exporters to sell German films cheaply abroad. Inflation discouraged imports as well, because the tumbling exchange rate of the mark made foreign purchases too expensive.

In 1924, the U.S. Dawes Plan helped to stabilize the German economy, and foreign films came in more frequently, offering a degree of competition unknown in Germany for nearly a decade. Expressionist film budgets, meanwhile, were climbing. The last major films of the movement, F. W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927; see **12.30**), were costly epics that drove UFA deeper into financial difficulty, leading Erich Pommer to quit and try his luck briefly in America. Other personnel were lured away to Hollywood as well. Trying to counter the stiffer competition, the Germans began to imitate the American product. The resulting films, though sometimes impressive, diluted the unique qualities of the Expressionist style.

“Everything is composition; any image whatsoever could be stopped on the screen and would be a marvellously balanced painting of forms and lights. Also, it is one of the films which leaves in our memories the clearest visions—precise and of a slightly static beauty. But even more than painting, it is animated architecture.”

—François Berge, French critic, on Fritz Lang's *The Nibelungen*

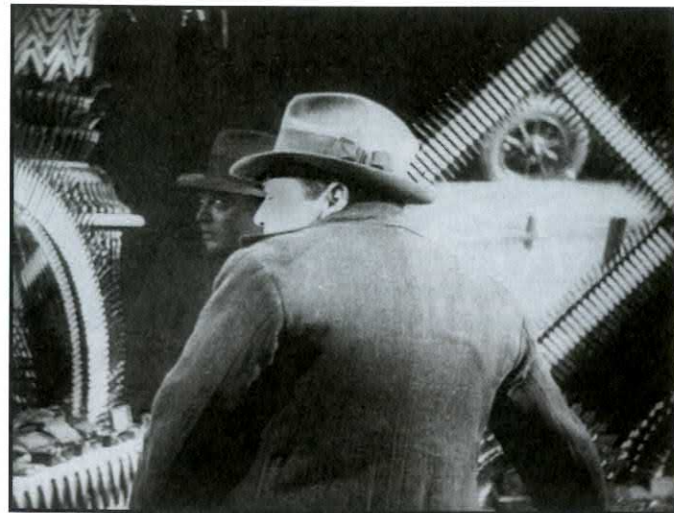
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For many years, incomplete versions of *Metropolis* circulated. In 2008 nearly all the long-lost footage was finally discovered. We tell the story and assess how the new scenes changed the film in “*Metropolis* unbound.”



12.30

12.30–12.31 Lang sustains Expressionism. *Metropolis* contained many large, Expressionistic sets, including this garden, with pillars that appear to be made of melting clay (12.30). In *M*, reflections and a display of knives in a shop window create a semi-abstract composition that mirrors the murderer's obsession (12.31).



12.31



12.32 Expressionism for horror-comedy. Joe Dante's episode of *Twilight Zone: The Movie* (1983) refers to the contorted décor of *Caligari* (12.28).

By 1927, Expressionism as a movement had died out. But as Georges Sadoul has pointed out, an expressionist (spelled with a lowercase “e” to distinguish it from the Expressionist movement proper) tradition lingered on in many of the German films of the late 1920s and even into such 1930s films as Fritz Lang’s *M* (1930; see 12.31) and *Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1932). Some set designers came to the United States and applied their techniques there. Hollywood horror and crime films sometimes displayed expressionist tendencies in their settings and lighting. Although the movement lasted only about seven years, expressionism has never entirely died out as one approach to film style, and even today directors may refer to the original German version of it (12.32).

French Impressionism and Surrealism (1918–1930)

During the silent era, a number of film movements in France posed major alternatives to the emerging Hollywood tradition. Some of these alternatives, such as abstract cinema and Dada filmmaking, weren’t specifically French and constituted instead a part of the growing international avant-garde. But two alternatives to the American mode remained quite localized.

Impressionism was an avant-garde style that operated largely within the film industry. Most of the Impressionist filmmakers started out working for major French companies, and some of their avant-garde works proved financially successful. In the mid-1920s, most formed their own independent companies but remained within the mainstream commercial industry by renting studio facilities and releasing their films through established firms. The other alternative movement, Surrealism, lay largely outside the film industry. Allied with the Surrealist movement in other arts,

these filmmakers relied on their own means and private patronage. France in the 1920s offers a striking instance of how different film movements may flourish in the same time and place.

Impressionism

World War I struck a serious blow to the French film industry. Personnel were conscripted, studios were shifted to wartime uses, and much export was halted. The two major firms, Pathé Frères and Léon Gaumont, also controlled circuits of theaters and they needed to fill vacant screens. As a result, in 1915 American films began to flood into France. Represented by De Mille’s *The Cheat* and films featuring Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, William S. Hart, and other popular stars, the Hollywood cinema dominated the market by the end of 1917. After the war, French filmmaking never fully recovered. The industry tried in several ways to recapture the audience, mostly through imitation of Hollywood production methods and genres. Alternatively, there emerged a movement consisting of younger directors: Abel Gance, Louis Delluc, Germaine Dulac, Marcel L’Herbier, and Jean Epstein.

Films and Feelings The previous generation had regarded filmmaking as a commercial craft, but the younger filmmakers wrote essays proclaiming cinema to be an art comparable to poetry, painting, and music. Astonished by the verve and energy of the American cinema, the young theorists compared Chaplin to a ballet dancer and the films of Hart to *The Song of Roland*. Cinema should, the young filmmakers argued, be what other arts were: a vehicle for feelings. Gance, Delluc, Dulac, L’Herbier, Epstein, and other, more tangential members of the movement sought to put this idea into practice as filmmakers. Between 1918 and 1928, the younger directors experimented with cinema in ways that posed an alternative to the emerging Hollywood tradition.

The movement gained the name “Impressionist” because filmmakers wanted to give their narration subjective depth, to capture the momentary impressions that flit through a character’s mind. Believing that cinema should project heightened and subtle emotional states, the directors concentrated on intimate psychological stories. They favored situations with a small number of characters, often caught up in a love triangle, as in Gance’s *La Dixième symphonie* (1918), Delluc’s *L’Inondation* (1924), and Epstein’s *Coeur fidèle* (1923) and *La Belle niernaise* (1923). These charged situations created fleeting moods and shifting sensations.

An Impressionist film replaces external action with an exploration of the characters’ inner life. Flashbacks depict memories; sometimes the bulk of a film will be one flashback or a series of them. The films register characters’ dreams, fantasies, and mental states. Dulac’s *The Smiling Mme. Beudet* (1923) consists almost entirely of the main character’s imaginary escape from a dull marriage. Despite its epic length (over five hours), Gance’s *La Roue* (1922) rests essentially on the erotic relations among only four people, and the director seeks to trace the development of each character’s feelings in great detail.

Subjective Style The movement earned its name as well for its distinctive film style. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* had evoked its protagonist’s mental states through mise-en-scene, but the French relied more on cinematography and editing. In Impressionist films, optical effects such as superimpositions imply characters’ thoughts and moods (12.33). In *La Roue*, the image of Norma is laid over the smoke from a locomotive, representing the fantasy of the engine driver, who is in love with her. Going beyond mental subjectivity, the filmmakers try to register characters’ optical impressions as well. POV cutting is common, and so are shots suggesting altered states of perception. When a character in an Impressionist film gets drunk or dizzy, that experience is rendered in vertiginous camera movements, or slow motion, or distorted or filtered shots (12.34).

“Another period arrived, that of the psychological and impressionist film. It would seem stupid to place a character in a given situation without penetrating into the secret realm of his inner life, and the actor’s performance is explained by the play of thoughts and of visualized sensations.”

—Germaine Dulac, director



12.33



12.34

12.33, 12.34 Cinematography for subjectivity. In *Coeur fidèle*, the barmaid looks out a window, and a superimposition of the flotsam of the waterfront conveys her dejection at working in a dockside tavern (12.33). In *El Dorado*, a man’s tipsiness in a cabaret is conveyed by means of a curved mirror that stretches his body sideways (12.34).



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We consider the heritage of Expressionism and Impressionism in the work of Martin Scorsese, including *Taxi Driver* and *Shutter Island*, in “Scorsese, ‘pressionist.”

The Impressionists also experimented with pronounced rhythmic editing to suggest the pace of an experience as a character feels it, moment by moment. During scenes of violence or emotional turmoil, the rhythm accelerates—the shots get shorter and shorter, building to a climax, sometimes with images only a few frames long. In *Coeur fidèle*, lovers at a fair ride in whirling swings, and Epstein presents their giddiness in a series of shots 4 frames, then 2 frames, long. In *La Roue*, a train crash is presented in accelerating shots ranging from 13 frames down to 2, and a man’s last thoughts before he falls from a cliff are rendered in a hail of single-frame shots. We’ve seen this pattern of accelerated editing in *The Birds* (p. 224), but these passages from *La Roue* are the first known instances of it.

Impressionist form and style put demands on film technology. Abel Gance, the boldest innovator in this respect, used his epic *Napoléon* (1927) as a chance to try new lenses (even a 275mm telephoto), multiple frame images (called Polyvision), and widescreen ratio (the celebrated triptychs; see 5.70). Impressionists were especially interested in frame mobility. After all, if the camera was to represent a character’s eyes, it should be able to move with the ease of a person. Impressionists strapped their cameras to cars, carousels, and locomotives. For Gance’s *Napoléon*, the camera manufacturer Debrie perfected a handheld model that let the operator move on roller skates. Gance lashed the machine to wheels, cables, pendulums, and bobsleds. In *L’Argent* (1928), L’Herbier sent his camera gliding through huge rooms and plummeting down from the dome of the Paris stock exchange (12.35).

Such innovations had given French filmmakers the hope that their films could be as popular as Hollywood’s product. Some Impressionist films did appeal to the French public, but foreign audiences weren’t attracted. Moreover, although production costs were rising, Impressionists such as Gance and L’Herbier became more free-spending. As a result, filmmakers’ companies either went out of business or were absorbed by the big firms. Two behemoth productions of the decade, *Napoléon* and *L’Argent*, failed and were reedited by the producers; they were among the last Impressionist films released. With the arrival of the sound film, the French film industry tightened its belt and had no money to risk on experiments.

Impressionism as a distinct movement may be said to have ceased by 1929. But the filmmakers’ explorations of psychological narrative and subjective style became a legacy to future generations. These innovations continued in the work of Alfred Hitchcock and Maya Deren, in Hollywood montage sequences, and in certain American genres and styles (the horror film, film noir). Even today, when a director wants to convey what a character is sensing or feeling in some abnormal state of mind, Impressionist techniques of camerawork and editing—blurred imagery, superimposition, slow motion, accelerating cutting—prove to be common choices (12.36; see also 3.42, from *The Road Warrior*).

Surrealism

The French Impressionist filmmakers worked within the commercial film industry, but Surrealist filmmakers relied on private patronage and screened their work in small artists’ gatherings. Not surprisingly, Surrealist cinema was a more radical movement, producing films that would perplex and shock ordinary audiences.

Surrealist cinema was directly linked to Surrealism in literature and painting. According to its spokesperson, André Breton, “Surrealism [was] based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association, heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of dreams, in the undirected play of thought.” The Impressionist filmmakers sought to catch the flow of consciousness as a tumble of sensations and memories. But Surrealist art, influenced by Freudian psychology, wanted to go deeper. Surrealists wanted to plumb the hidden currents of the unconscious.

Automatic writing and painting, the search for bizarre or evocative imagery, the deliberate avoidance of rationally explicable form or style: these became features of



12.36 Camerawork for hallucination. Impressionists would probably have admired the opening of *Apocalypse Now*. Superimpositions, striking compositions, and the mixing of sounds and images of battle with the whirring of the overhead fan—all take us into Willard’s mind.

Surrealism as it developed in the period 1924–1929. From the start, the Surrealists were attracted to the cinema, especially films that presented untamed desire or the fantastic and marvelous. They admired slapstick comedies, *Nosferatu*, and serials about mysterious super-criminals. In due time, painters such as Man Ray and Salvador Dalí and writers such as Antonin Artaud began dabbling in cinema, while the young Spaniard Luis Buñuel, drawn to Surrealism, became its most famous filmmaker.

Hollywood filmmakers, the Expressionists, and the Impressionists were all committed to storytelling, even if their methods differed. But Surrealist cinema was anti-narrative, attacking causality and coherence. If rationality is to be fought, connections among events must be dissolved, as in *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (1928—scripted by Artaud, filmed by the Impressionist Germaine Dulac (12.37). In Dalí and Buñuel’s *Un Chien andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*, 1928), the hero drags two pianos, stuffed with dead donkeys, across a parlor. In Buñuel’s *L’Age d’or* (1930), a woman begins obsessively sucking the toes of a statue.

But even while banishing causality, many Surrealist films tease us to find it. It becomes as evasive as in a dream. Instead, we find events juxtaposed for their disturbing effect. The hero gratuitously shoots a child (*L’Age d’or*), a woman closes her eyes only to reveal eyes painted on her eyelids (Ray’s *Emak Bakia*, 1927), and—most horrifying of all—a man strops a razor and deliberately slits the eyeball of an unprotesting woman (12.38). An Impressionist film would motivate such events as a character’s dreams or hallucinations, but in these films, character psychology can’t be determined. Sexual desire and ecstasy, violence, blasphemy, and bizarre humor take the place of conventional narrative. The hope was that the free form of the film would arouse the deepest impulses of the viewer, even if those impulses were unsavory. Buñuel called *Un Chien andalou* “a passionate call to murder.”

The style of Surrealist cinema is eclectic. Mise-en-scene is often influenced by Surrealist painting. The ants in *Un Chien andalou* come from Dalí’s pictures; the pillars and city squares of *The Seashell and the Clergyman* hark back to the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico. Surrealist editing is an amalgam of some Impressionist devices (many dissolves and superimpositions) and some devices of the dominant cinema. The shocking eyeball slitting at the start of *Un Chien andalou* relies on continuity editing as well as the Kuleshov effect. However, discontinuous editing is also commonly used to fracture any coherence of space and time. In *Un Chien*



12.37



12.38

12.37–12.38 Surrealists’ irrational imagery. *The Seashell and the Clergyman*: the clergyman’s distorted view of a threatening military officer, inexplicably dressed in baby’s clothes (12.37). A shocking eye-slitting scene opens *Un Chien andalou* (12.38).



12.35 The dizzying crane shot. In *L’Argent*, the camera drops toward the floor of the stock exchange in an effort to convey the traders’s frenzied excitement.



12.39 Surrealism's heritage. The mysterious ear, discolored and covered with ants, discovered at the opening of *Blue Velvet* (1986) recalls the heritage of *Un Chien andalou*.

andalou, a woman locks a man out of a room only to turn and find him inexplicably behind her. On the whole, Surrealist film style refused to define itself by any particular techniques, since that would order and rationalize what had to be an “undirected play of thought.”

The fortunes of Surrealist cinema shifted with changes in the art movement as a whole. By late 1929, when Breton joined the Communist Party, Surrealists were embroiled in internal dissension about whether communism was a political equivalent of Surrealism. Buñuel left France for a brief stay in Hollywood and then returned to Spain. The chief patron of Surrealist filmmaking, the Vicomte de Noailles, supported Jean Vigo's *Zéro de Con-*

duite (1933), a film of Surrealist ambitions, but then stopped sponsoring the avant-garde. Thus, as a unified movement, French Surrealism was no longer viable after 1930. Individual Surrealists continued to work, however. The most famous was Buñuel, who continued to work in his own brand of the Surrealist style for 50 years, in works such as *Belle de Jour* (1967) and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972). He was followed by other filmmakers, including the avant-gardist Kenneth Anger. Similarly, David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, *Lost Highway*, and *Mulholland Dr.* owe a good deal to Breton's demand to plumb the unconscious mind “in the absence of any control exercised by reason, and beyond any aesthetic and moral preoccupation” (12.39).

Soviet Montage (1924–1930)

Few artists were as determined to innovate as the men and women who came of age during the Russian Revolution of October 1917. In all the arts, the call went out for a new way of seeing, and the creation of an art that would reflect new social ideals. The film world was galvanized by young people who scorned the current customs. They wanted to forge a cinema that would be revolutionary in subject, theme, form, and style. They wanted to provide filmmakers with brand-new tools.

Most Russian films made before the revolution were somber, slow-paced melodramas featuring bravura performances by popular stars (12.40). The dominant style favored long takes and intricate staging. One master of the period was Yevgenii Bauer, who brought pictorial elegance to tales of flirtation and betrayal among the upper classes. (See 4.129–4.132.) The young filmmakers, fascinated by continuity editing and the extroverted, athletic performance style in westerns and comedies, saw the Hollywood style as the cutting-edge approach that would sweep away the previous generation's work. But the aspiring directors didn't simply copy the American methods. They pushed them to the limit, in the process creating a new and distinctive set of filmmaking tools.

Artists and the State

The government aimed to remake all sectors of life. At first, policy makers tried to nationalize all private property. In response, film companies simply refused to supply films to theaters operating under the government control. In July 1918, the State Commission of Education put strict controls on the existing supplies of raw film stock. As a result, producers began hoarding their stock; the largest firms took all the equipment they could and fled to other countries. Some companies made films commissioned by the government, while hoping that the Reds would lose the Civil War and that things would return to pre-Revolutionary conditions.



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We analyze Bauer's masterful staging in his upper-class melodramas in “Watching movies very, very slowly.”



12.40 The tsarist style. In Yakov Protazanov's 1916 *The Queen of Spades*, the gambling-addicted hero, played by the popular Ivan Mozhukin, imagines himself winning at cards, with his vision superimposed at the right.

Like other Soviet industries, film production and distribution took years to build up a substantial output. To fill the void in theaters, American films, particularly those of D. W. Griffith, Douglas Fairbanks, and Mary Pickford, kept circulating. They became a tremendous influence on young filmmakers.

Faced with little equipment and difficult living conditions, a few young filmmakers made tentative moves that would result in the development of a national cinema movement. Dziga Vertov began working on documentary footage of the war; at age 20, he was placed in charge of all newsreels. Lev Kuleshov, also in his early 20s, was teaching in the newly founded State School on Cinema Art. There he performed a series of experiments by editing footage from different sources into a whole that creates an impression of continuity (pp. 227–228). Kuleshov, perhaps the most conservative of the young Soviet filmmakers, tried to systematize principles of editing based on the emerging Hollywood style. Even before they were able to make films, Kuleshov and his young pupils were working at the first film school in the world and writing theoretical essays on the new art form. This grounding in theory would be the basis of the Montage style.

Other young people moved into cinema, often from scientific backgrounds. The engineer Sergei Eisenstein, after work during the Civil War, began directing plays in a workers' theater in Moscow. For one 1923 production he made a short film, and soon he was directing a feature. Vsevolod Pudovkin, trained in chemistry, made his acting debut in a play presented by Kuleshov's State Film School. He had been inspired to go into filmmaking by seeing Griffith's *Intolerance*, and he would make his first feature a few years later. Some tsarist-era directors, Protozanov, for example, would continue to work under the Soviet regime, but the breakthroughs came from newcomers.

NEP Cinema

Circumstances favored their rise. By 1921, the country was facing tremendous problems, not least a widespread famine. To facilitate the production and distribution of goods, Lenin instituted the New Economic Policy (NEP), which for several years permitted private management of business and a measure of free enterprise. For film, the NEP meant a sudden reappearance of film stock and equipment. Slowly, Soviet production began to grow as private firms made more films.

“Of all the arts, for us the cinema is the most important,” Lenin stated in 1922. Since Lenin saw film as a powerful tool for education, the first films encouraged by the government were documentaries such as Vertov's newsreel series *Kino-Pravda*. Soviet fictional films were being made from 1917 on, but it was not until 1923 that a Georgian feature, *Red Imps*, became the first Soviet film to compete successfully with the foreign films dominating local screens. And not until 1927 did the industry's income from its own films top that of the films it imported.

The NEP brought forth a burst of fresh, daring films from the youngsters. From Kuleshov's class at the State Film School came *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924; 12.41). This satiric comedy, along with Kuleshov's next project, *The Death Ray* (1925), were stunningly different from the tsarist cinema—fast-paced, full of stunts, chases, and fights, and cut with the freedom of an American film. Kuleshov showed that a Soviet film could generate something as entertaining as the Hollywood product. Eisenstein's first feature, *Strike* (1925) mixed cartoonish satire with violent action, including a workers' massacre intercut with the slaughter of a bull. Although it wasn't seen outside the USSR until decades later, historians now consider it the first full-blown exercise in the Montage style. Eisenstein's next film, *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925), came to epitomize the new movement. Stupendously successful abroad, it was praised as a masterpiece. Over the next few years, as silent cinema was coming to an end, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Vertov, Alexander Dovzhenko, and other directors created a series of films that became classics.

“Everyone who has had in his hands a piece of film to be edited knows by experience how neutral it remains, even though a part of a planned sequence, until it is joined with another piece, when it suddenly acquires and conveys a sharper and quite different meaning than that planned for it at the time of filming.”

—Sergei Eisenstein, director



12.41 Soviet satire. *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*: a gang of thieves terrifies the naive American, Mr. West, by presenting him with clichéd caricatures of fierce Soviet revolutionaries.

The Priority of Editing

What was the basis of the Montage movement? In their writings and films, these directors championed editing over all other film techniques. This was a clear attack on the long-take style that had dominated earlier Russian film. Bauer and other tsarist directors used analytical editing occasionally, but usually to accentuate an actor's face after a sustained long shot, the better to register the nuances of performance. Inspired by viewings of American and French Impressionist films, the young Soviet directors declared that a film's power arose not from the delicate performances of expert actors, but from the combination of shots. Through editing, they maintained, two shots give birth to a feeling or idea not present in either one. This is the insight behind Kuleshov's experiments. If you intercut different images with impassive shots of a man's face, or show a couple looking offscreen and then a shot of a building, the editing is what endows the performance with meaning. Here the Soviets went beyond their Hollywood peers, who counted on star actors to help carry the story.

"Montage," the Russian word for cutting, seemed to show the way forward for modern cinema. But not all of the young theoreticians agreed on exactly what the Montage approach to editing should be. Pudovkin, for example, believed that shots were like bricks, to be joined together to build a sequence. Eisenstein disagreed, saying that the maximum effect would be gained if the shots did not fit together perfectly, if they created a jolt for the spectator. Many filmmakers tried out discontinuities of this sort (12.42). Eisenstein also favored juxtaposing shots to create an abstract theme, as we've already seen with his use of conceptual editing in *October* (pp. 261–264). Vertov disagreed with both theorists. He disapproved of the fiction film altogether and promoted montage-based documentary cinema, as in *The Man with a Movie Camera* (pp. 429–433).

However the filmmakers might have disagreed in debate, they often converged in practice. Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia* makes use of conceptual editing similar to that of Eisenstein's *October*. Shots of a military officer and his wife being dressed in their accessories are intercut with shots of the preparation at the temple. Pudovkin's parallel montage points up the absurdity of both rituals (12.43–12.46). Elsewhere *Storm over Asia* employs many jump cuts, breaking spatial and temporal coherence for the sake of stirring the spectator's senses. American continuity style taught the Montagists the power of editing, but once they learned the lesson, they pushed the technique in radical directions that would have shocked Hollywood filmmakers.

The Montage movement went even farther beyond Hollywood in their approach to narrative. Soviet films tended to downplay character psychology as a trigger for plots; instead, social forces provided the major causes. Characters were interesting not as individuals but as examples of how large-scale processes affected people's lives. As a result, Soviet Montage films didn't always have a single protagonist. Social groups could form a collective hero, as in several of Eisenstein's films. In the *October* sequence (pp. 262–263), his editing shows how social groups, such as the soldiers at the front or the women and children on the breadlines, are victimized by brutal government policies.

In keeping with this downplaying of individual personalities, Soviet filmmakers often preferred to cast non-actors. This practice was called **typage**, since the filmmakers would often choose an individual whose appearance seemed directly to convey the type of character in the role. Except for the hero, Pudovkin used non-actors to play all the Mongols in *Storm over Asia*.

The Movement Ends

By the late 1920s, each of the major directors of this movement had made about four important films. The decline of the movement was not caused primarily by industrial and economic factors, as in Germany and France. Instead, the Communist



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For more on Eisenstein's approach to editing, see "Seed-beds of style."



12.42 Discontinuity for shock. In *House on Trubnoi Square*, Montage director Boris Barnet uses a jump cut to convey the heroine's sudden realization that a streetcar is headed straight for her.



12.43



12.45



12.44



12.46

12.43–12.46 Crosscutting for thematic parallels. In *Storm over Asia*, Pudovkin shows a medium close-up of an elaborate piece of jewelry being lowered over the head of a priest (12.43). Cut to a close-up of a servant placing a necklace around the neck of the officer's wife (12.44). Cut back to a large head-dress being positioned on a priest's head (12.45). Cut to a close-up of a tiara being set on the wife's head (12.46).

government came to disapprove of the Montage style. Vertov, Eisenstein, and Dovzhenko were criticized for their excessively formal and esoteric approaches. In 1929, Eisenstein went to Hollywood to study the new technique of sound; by the time he returned in 1932, the attitude of the film industry had changed. While he was away, a few filmmakers carried their Montage experiments into sound cinema. But the Soviet authorities, under Stalin's direction, encouraged filmmakers to create simple films that would be readily understandable to all audiences. Stylistic experimentation and nonrealistic subject matter were condemned.

This trend culminated in 1934, when the government instituted a new artistic policy called Socialist Realism. This policy dictated that all artworks must depict revolutionary development while being firmly grounded in realism. The great Soviet directors continued to make films, occasionally masterpieces, but the Montage theories of the 1920s had to be discarded or modified. Eisenstein continued experimenting with editing and occasionally incurred the wrath of the authorities until his death in 1948. As a movement, the Soviet Montage style can be said to have ended by 1933, with the release of such films as Vertov's *Enthusiasm* (1931) and Pudovkin's *Deserter* (1933).

Yet like other silent film movements, its legacy proved enormous. As Kuleshov and his pupils imitated American films, Hollywood borrowed Soviet strategies by creating the "montage sequences" (p. 254) that became common in the 1930s and are still used today. American filmmakers have paid homage to *The Battleship Potemkin* in movies as different as *Bananas* and *The Untouchables*. The films of Resnais, especially *Hiroshima mon amour*, *Muriel*, and *La Guerre est finie*, rework Soviet Montage principles. Even more pervasive were Montage influences on avant-garde filmmaking. Makers of found-footage films such as *A Movie* owe a good deal to Vertov's *Kino-Eye*, and Eisenstein's idea that discontinuity in editing was one creative option underwrote many modern experiments (12.47). Not least, the writings of the Montage directors, with their passionate call for breaking with the past, have inspired young filmmakers to make daring creative choices.



12.47 Discontinuity multiplied. Panels from old comic books, panned over jerkily and cut together disjunctively, are glimpsed in Lewis Klahr's *Two Minutes to Zero Trilogy* (2003–2004). In a test of Soviet Montage theories, we're invited to assemble the fragmentary shots into an ominous story of crime and panic.

The Classical Hollywood Cinema after the Coming of Sound (1926–1950)

The arrival of synchronized sound filming in the late 1920s dramatically shows how technological change can widen a filmmaker's creative choices. Before that, nearly all music heard in cinema was played on the spot, provided by a piano, organ, or an orchestra. Sound effects might be added; some organs could mimic pistol shots. But there would be no spoken dialogue. The silent cinema had written language in its intertitles, but not speech.

You can argue that film form and style would have been very different if cinema could have recorded spoken dialogue when movies began. Wouldn't the line of least resistance have been to simply photograph stage performances? If cinema had not been condemned to silence, would actors like Chaplin and Fairbanks have developed such a visually expressive performance style? Would Griffith and other directors have developed crosscutting and continuity editing? Would the Impressionists have tried to render the fluidity of thought, or the Soviet Montagists sought to make conceptual points through their cutting patterns? More likely, as many writers thought at the time, cinema would have become primarily a recording medium, and films would have been canned theater, like the opera performances on public television.

From this perspective, the absence of recorded speech was a great gift. It drastically constrained filmmakers' choices. It pushed them to find ways of telling stories visually, and the results yielded a new art form.

With the advent of synchronized sound, filmmakers faced perhaps the most important decision point in film history. Should they give up all the resources of film form and style developed over 30 years of silent moviemaking? Should they simply turn movies into photographed stage plays? Or should filmmakers try to integrate spoken language, along with music and effects, into the sophisticated visual storytelling of the late silent era? Or were there still other options? The decision would shape the future of a medium that was already still very young compared to the other arts.

Converting to Sound

Like many media technologies, synchronized sound was born from a business decision. During the mid-1920s, Warner Bros. was expanding its facilities and holdings. One of these expansions was the investment in a sound system using records in synchronization with film images. By releasing *Don Juan* (1926) with orchestral accompaniment and sound effects on disc, along with a series of vaudeville shorts with singing and talking, Warner Bros. began to popularize the idea of sound films. In 1927, *The Jazz Singer* (a part-talkie with some scenes accompanied only by music) was a tremendous success, and the Warner Bros. investment began to pay off.

The success of *Don Juan*, *The Jazz Singer*, and the shorts convinced other studios that sound contributed to profitable filmmaking. Unlike the era of the Motion Picture Patents Company, there was now no fierce competition within the industry. Firms realized that whatever sound system the studios finally adopted, it would have to be compatible with the projection machinery of any theater. Eventually, the sound-on-disc system was rejected and a sound-on-film one became the standard up to the present. As we saw in Chapter 1, the sound track was printed on the strip of film alongside the image. By 1930, most theaters in America were wired for sound. The question for filmmakers was: What to do with this new technology?

Problems and Solutions

It seemed for a few years that much of the visual storytelling of the silent era would be lost. Camera positions were more limited, because the camera had to be put inside a sound booth so that its motor noise would not be picked up by the microphone (12.48). The camera operator could hear only through his earphones, and

the camera could not move except for short pans to reframe. The bulky microphone, on the table at the right, also did not move. Complicated staging was ruled out because the actors had to stay close to the microphone. Often several cameras in their booths were filming from different angles, so lighting had to be rather broad and flat; it could not be tailored to a particular shot. Such restrictions seemed to confirm critics and filmmakers' worst fears: movies would now be static and stagey.

Still, from the very beginning of sound filming, problems were solved. When several cameras recorded the scene from different angles, the footage could be cut together to provide continuity editing patterns, complete with close-ups. A booth might be mounted on wheels to create camera movements, or a scene might be shot silent and a sound track added later. Early sound films such as Rouben Mamoulian's *Applause* (1929) showed that the camera could regain considerable flexibility of movement. Later, equipment manufacturers came up with smaller enclosures that replaced the cumbersome booths. These *blimps* (12.49) permitted cinematographers to place the camera on movable supports. Similarly, microphones mounted on booms and hanging over the heads of the actors could also follow moving action and maintain recording quality.

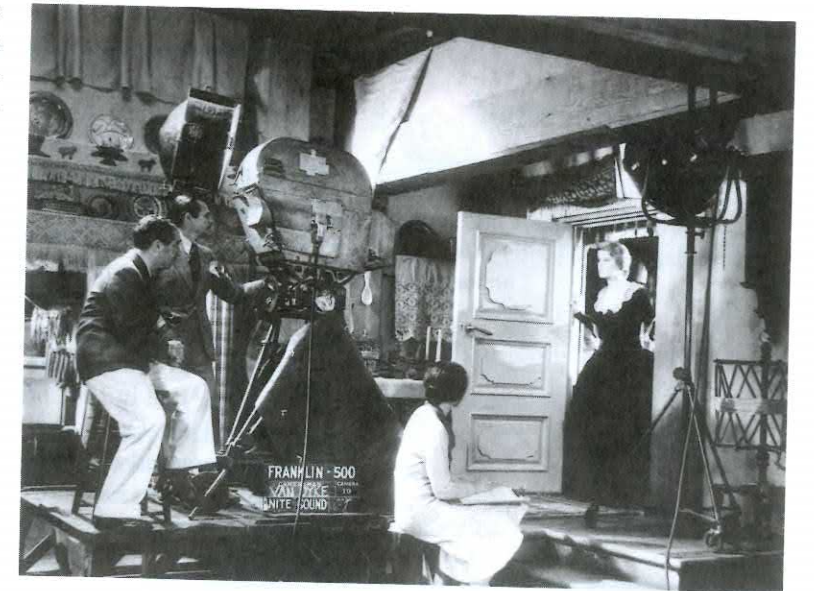
It became clear that instead of wiping out all the options of classical Hollywood form and style, recorded sound would be integrated into that system. Once cutting, camera movement, and fluid staging were restored, filmmakers returned to many of the stylistic characteristics developed in Hollywood during the silent period. Diegetic sound provided a powerful addition to the system of continuity editing. A line of dialogue could continue over a cut, creating smooth temporal continuity. (See pp. 275–277.) In addition, music could be more precisely timed to the action than was possible in live accompaniment. Max Steiner's scores for *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932) and *King Kong* (1933) showed that music could powerfully enhance both the image and spoken dialogue—sometimes amplifying frenzied action, sometimes quietly stressing a single sentence.

Studios, Genres, and Spectacle

Within the overall tradition of continuity style and classical narrative form, each of the large studios developed a distinctive approach of its own. Thus MGM, for example, became the prestige studio, with a huge number of stars and technicians under long-term contract. MGM lavished money on settings, costumes, and special effects, as in *The Good Earth* (1937), with its locust attack, and *San Francisco* (1936), in which the great earthquake of 1906 is spectacularly re-created. Warner Bros., in spite of its success with sound, was still a relatively small studio and specialized in less expensive genre pictures. Its series of gangster films (*Little Caesar*, *Public Enemy*) and musicals (*42nd Street*, *Gold Diggers of 1933*, *Dames*) were



12.48



12.49

12.48–12.49 From booth to blimp. A posed publicity still demonstrated the limitations of early sound filming (12.48). A blimped camera during the early 1930s allowed more freedom of camera placement (12.49).

“You know, when talkies first came in they were fascinated by sound—they had frying eggs and they had this and that—and then people became infatuated with the movement of the camera; I believe, the big thing right now is to move a handheld camera. I think the director and his camerawork should not intrude on the story.”

—George Cukor, director



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Some of these early sound and color films can be hard to find, but we look at some DVD collections that provide lots of information and clips in “All singing! All dancing! All teaching!”



12.50 Studios specialize in genres. Heavy shadows, spiky shapes, and eccentric performances mix a menacing atmosphere with a touch of humor in Universal's *The Old Dark House*.

among the studio's most successful products. Even lower on the ladder of prestige was Universal, which depended on imaginative filmmaking rather than established stars or expensive sets in its atmospheric horror films, such as *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Old Dark House* (1932; 12.50).

One major genre, the musical, became possible only with the introduction of sound. Indeed, the original intention of the Warners when they began their investment in sound equipment was to circulate vaudeville acts on film. Most musicals presented a linear plot with separate numbers inserted, although a few revue musicals simply strung together a series of numbers. One of the major studios, RKO, made a series of musicals starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers: *Swing Time* (George Stevens, 1936) illustrates how a musical can be a classically constructed narrative (see pp. 347–348).

During the 1930s, color film stocks became widely used for the first time. In the 1920s, a small number of films had Technicolor sequences, but the process was crude, using only two colors in combination to create all other hues. The result tended to emphasize greenish-blue and pink tones; it was also too costly to use extensively (12.51). By the early 1930s, however, Technicolor had been improved. It now used three primary colors and thus could reproduce a large range of hues. Though still expensive, it was soon proved to add hugely to the appeal of many films. After *Becky Sharp* (1935), the first feature-length film to use the new Technicolor, and *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1936), studios began using Technicolor extensively. The Technicolor process was used, for either camera originals or release prints, until the early 1970s. (For examples of Technicolor, see 2.14–2.24, 4.2, 4.144, 5.7, and 11.87–11.99.)

Deep Focus and Narrative Innovations

Technicolor needed a great deal of light on the set, so more powerful lighting units were introduced. Some cinematographers began to use the new units for black-and-white filming. These more powerful lamps, combined with faster film stocks, made it easier to achieve greater depth of field in the image. Many cinematographers stuck to the standard soft-focus style of the 1920s and 1930s, but others began to experiment.

By the late 1930s, there was a definite trend toward a deep-focus style. It was *Citizen Kane* that in 1941 brought deep focus strongly to the attention of spectators and filmmakers. Orson Welles's compositions placed the foreground figures close to the camera and the background figures deep in the space of the shot, and all were kept in sharp focus (5.48; 8.28–8.32, 8.37–8.42). In some cases, the image was achieved through matte work and rear projection, not cinematography on the set.

Overall, *Citizen Kane* helped make deep focus a major creative option within classical Hollywood style.

Directors found that depth staging and deep-focus filming allowed them to create striking compositions and to sustain scenes in longer takes (12.52). The light necessary for deep focus tended to lend a hard-edged appearance to objects, a look well-suited to the stories of crime and pursuit that would eventually be called *film noir*. But like every creative choice, the new technique forced fresh decisions. If an object or a face was placed close to the foreground, cinematographers found it hard to keep the composition balanced and in focus when actors moved around the shot. The most famous deep-focus shots in *Citizen Kane* and other films tend to be fixed long takes with simple staging. As a result, many deep-focus images seem more static and enclosed than the fluid performances and framings of films like *His Girl Friday* (pp. 403–406).

During the same period, Hollywood was also broadening its narrative options. Flashbacks had been used since the 1910s, but



12.51 Two-strip Technicolor. *Under a Texas Moon* (1930) captures mostly reddish-orange and green hues.

they gained a new prominence in the 1940s. Films such as *The Long Night* (1947) and *The Big Clock* (1948) start from a point of crisis and go back in time to trace how events led up to it. Or there might be several flashbacks, perhaps threaded together by an investigation as in *Citizen Kane* or *The Killers* (1946). The flashback might replay an earlier scene, but now revealing unexpected information, as in the climax of *Mildred Pierce* (1945). Along with flashbacks, screenwriters began experimenting with voice-over narration, already well-established on radio but given a new power with the accompanying images. Both flashbacks and voice-over narration fed into a new emphasis on mental subjectivity, so more than in the 1930s, films rendered dreams, hallucinations, and drunken or drug-induced visions. There are moments in *Murder, My Sweet* (1944) and *Possessed* (1947) that hark back to German Expressionism and French Impressionism, with subjective sound enhancing the imagery.

All these narrative strategies could have broken with classical narrative principles. Instead, screenwriters strove to sort out their scrambled time-schemes and firmly mark the division between objective reality and subjective states of mind. The principles of classical construction—goal-oriented characters, motivated conflict, clarity of time and space and character traits—remained paramount.

By assimilating sound and color to its system of visual storytelling, the Hollywood cinema laid the foundation of the popular film as we know it today. Later changes in technology, such as widescreen filming, multiple-track sound, computer-driven special effects, and digital capture, would build on this solid tradition (12.53). For decades to follow, the formal and stylistic conventions elaborated in the Hollywood studios of the 1930s and 1940s would guide the creative choices of filmmakers. Those conventions would also become targets for filmmakers who wanted to try something different.

Italian Neorealism (1942–1951)

One of the most influential movements in film history, Neorealism has somewhat diffuse origins. The label first appeared in the writings of Italian critics of the 1940s. From one perspective, the term represented a younger generation's desire to break free of the conventions of ordinary Italian cinema. Under dictator Benito Mussolini, the motion picture industry had created colossal historical epics and sentimental upper-class melodramas (nicknamed *white-telephone films*), and many critics felt these to be artificial and decadent. Something closer to real life was needed. Some critics found that quality in French films of the 1930s, especially works by Jean Renoir. Other critics turned closer to home to praise films like Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1942).

Today most historians believe that Neorealist filmmaking was not a complete break with Italian cinema under Mussolini. Pseudo-documentaries such as Roberto Rossellini's *White Ship* (1941), even though propagandistic, prepared the way for more forthright handling of contemporary events. Other current trends, such as regional dialect comedy and urban melodrama, encouraged directors and scriptwriters to turn toward realism. Overall, spurred by both foreign influences and indigenous traditions, the postwar period saw several filmmakers aiming



12.52 The spread of deep-focus cinematography. Many films using the technique soon appeared. *Citizen Kane*'s cinematographer, Gregg Toland, worked on some of them, such as William Wyler's *The Little Foxes*.



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We examine deep-focus cinematography and staging in the 1930s and 1940s in "Foreground, background, playground."



12.53 Neo-noir pays homage to the past. A deep-focus composition in *The Usual Suspects* adapts Welles-Toland deep focus to the widescreen format.



12.54



12.55



12.56

12.54–12.56 Filming in the streets. In one scene in *Open City*, Francesco is thrown into a truck by Nazi soldiers (12.54). His common-law wife Pina breaks through the guards (12.55), and a rough, bumpy shot taken from the truck shows her running after him (12.56).

to reveal contemporary social conditions. This trend became known as the Neorealist movement.

Leaving the Studio

Economic, political, and cultural factors helped Neorealism survive. Unlike the young Soviet filmmakers, nearly all the major Neorealists—Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, Visconti, and others—came to the movement as experienced filmmakers. They had absorbed lessons from Hollywood and European film traditions. They knew one another, frequently shared scriptwriters and personnel, and gained public attention in the journals *Cinema* and *Bianco e Nero*. Before 1948, the Neorealist movement had enough friends in the government to be relatively free of censorship. There was as well an affinity between Neorealism and an Italian literary movement of the same period modeled on the *verismo* of the previous century. The result was an array of Italian films that gained worldwide recognition: Visconti's *La Terra Trema* (1947); Rossellini's *Rome Open City* (1945), *Paisan* (1946), and *Germany Year Zero* (1947); and De Sica's *Shoeshine* (1946) and *Bicycle Thieves* (1948).

Neorealism created a somewhat distinctive approach to film style. By 1945, the fighting had destroyed most of Cinecittà, the large Roman studio complex, so sets were in short supply and sound equipment was rare. As a result, Neorealist mise-en-scene relied on actual locales, and its photographic work tended toward the raw roughness of documentaries. Rossellini has told of buying bits of negative stock from street photographers, so that much of *Rome Open City* was shot on film with varying photographic qualities.

Shooting on the streets and in private buildings made Italian camera operators adept at cinematography that often avoided the three-point lighting system of Hollywood (4.69–4.70). Although Neorealist films often featured famous stage or film actors, non-actors were also recruited for their realistic looks and behavior. For the adult “star” of *Bicycle Thieves*, De Sica chose a factory worker: “The way he moved, the way he sat down, his gestures with those hands of a working man and not of an actor . . . everything about him was perfect.” The Italian cinema had a long tradition of dubbing, so sound didn’t have to be recorded on site. The ability to postsynchronize dialogue permitted the filmmakers to work on location with smaller crews and to move the camera freely. With a degree of improvisational freedom in the acting and setting went a certain flexibility of framing, well displayed in the death of Pina in *Rome Open City* (12.54–12.56) and the final sequence of *Germany Year Zero*. The tracking shots through the open-air bicycle market in *Bicycle Thieves* illustrate the possibilities that the Neorealist director found in returning to location filming.

A New Model of Storytelling

Just as influential was the Neorealist sense of narrative form. Reacting against the intricately plotted white-telephone dramas, the Neorealists tended to loosen up narrative relations. The earliest major films of the movement, such as *Ossessione*, *Rome Open City*, and *Shoeshine*, contain relatively conventionally organized plots (albeit with unhappy endings). But the most formally innovative Neorealist films allow the intrusion of scenes that aren’t motivated causally—that seem, in fact, to be accidents (12.57). The director may dwell on moments that are worth savoring for their own sake. A famous scene in De Sica’s *Umberto D* (1951) records a pregnant housemaid grinding morning coffee. Her daily routine yields its own fascination, but the effect is very different from Hollywood’s conception of what counts as drama.

Although the causes of characters’ actions are usually seen as concretely economic and political (poverty, unemployment, exploitation), the effects are often fragmentary and inconclusive. Rossellini’s *Paisan* is frankly episodic, presenting six anecdotes of life in Italy during the Allied invasion. Often we are not told the

outcome of an event, the consequence of a cause. In a harsh break with mainstream storytelling, Rossellini abruptly kills off one of his protagonists in *Rome Open City*, wiping out the film’s romance plot.

Both the porous plot structure and the narration often refuses to provide an omniscient knowledge of events. The film seems to admit that the totality of reality is simply unknowable. This is especially evident in the films’ endings. *Bicycle Thieves* concludes with the worker and his son wandering down the street, their stolen bicycle still missing, their future uncertain. *La Terra Trema* concludes with the suppression of the Sicilian fishermen’s revolt against the merchants, but it hints that a future revolt might succeed. Neorealism’s tendency toward slice-of-life plot construction gave many films of the movement an open-ended quality quite opposed to the tidy wrapup favored by American studio cinema.

The Movement’s End and Its Legacy

As economic and cultural forces had sustained the Neorealist movement, so they helped bring it to an end. When Italy began to prosper after the war, the government looked askance at films so critical of contemporary society. After 1949, censorship and state pressures began to constrain the movement. Large-scale Italian film production began to reappear, and Neorealism no longer had the freedom permitted by small production companies. Neorealist directors, now famous, began to pursue more individualized concerns: Rossellini’s investigation of Christian humanism and Western history, De Sica’s sentimental romances, and Visconti’s examination of upper-class milieus. Most historians date the end of the Neorealist movement with the public attacks on De Sica’s *Umberto D* (1951). Nevertheless, Neorealist elements are still quite visible in the early works of Federico Fellini (*I Vitelloni*, 1954, is a good example) and Michelangelo Antonioni (*Cronaca di un amore*, 1951); both directors had worked on Neorealist films. Neorealist impulses periodically returned to Italian cinema, notably in the long career of Ermanno Olmi (*Il Posto*, *The Tree of the Wooden Clogs*).

The production strategies and artistic goals of this movement opened up a vast realm of creative choices. Throughout Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia, filmmakers followed the Neorealist model in rejecting polished studio production values. They realized that they could cast non-actors and let them perform in actual settings. They could rely on available light for shooting. Their screenplays didn’t need intricate plotting and could incorporate the accidents and digressions of everyday life. The plot could even leave the story action unresolved at the end, the better to provoke the audience to weigh possible outcomes. The tenets of Neorealist theory and practice have formed a robust tradition for decades of non-Hollywood cinema. Today, filmmakers in many places continue to devise their own versions of Neorealism (12.58).

The French New Wave (1959–1964)

The late 1950s and early 1960s saw the rise of a new generation of filmmakers around the world. In country after country, there emerged directors born before World War II but grown to adulthood in the postwar era of reconstruction and rising prosperity. Japan, Canada, England, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and the United States all had their new waves or young cinema groups—some trained in film schools, many allied with specialized film magazines, most in revolt against their elders in the industry. The most influential of these groups appeared in France.



12.57 The drama of accident. In *Bicycle Thieves*, the hero takes shelter along with a group of priests during a rain shower. The incident doesn’t affect the plot and seems as casual as any moment in daily life.

“The sentiment of [*Bicycle Thieves*] is expressed overtly. The feelings invoked are a natural consequence of the themes of the story and the point of view it is told from. It is a politically committed film, fueled by a quiet but burning passion. But it never lectures. It observes rather than explains.”
—Sally Potter, director, *Orlando*



12.58 Neorealism’s legacy. Contemporary Iranian filmmakers continue the Neorealist impulse: casual, anecdotal plots using non-actors to present social criticism. In Jafar Panahi’s *Offside* (2006), female soccer fans, trying to attend a match disguising themselves as men, are held under guard.

Critics Become Moviemakers

“We were all critics before beginning to make films, and I loved all kinds of cinema—the Russians, the Americans, the Neorealists. It was the cinema that made us—or me, at least—want to make films. I knew nothing of life except through the cinema.”

—Jean-Luc Godard, director

In the mid-1950s, a group of young men who wrote for the Paris film journal *Cahiers du cinéma* made a habit of attacking the most artistically respected French filmmakers of the day. “I consider an adaptation of value,” wrote François Truffaut, “only when written by a *man of the cinema*. Aurenche and Bost [the leading scriptwriters of the time] are essentially literary men and I reproach them here for being contemptuous of the cinema by underestimating it.” Addressing 21 major directors, Jean-Luc Godard was more insulting: “Your camera movements are ugly because your subjects are bad, your casts act badly because your dialogue is worthless; in a word, you don’t know how to create cinema because you no longer even know what it is.” Truffaut and Godard, along with Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer, and Jacques Rivette, also praised directors considered somewhat outdated (Jean Renoir, Max Ophüls) or eccentric (Robert Bresson, Jacques Tati).

More important, the young men saw no contradiction in rejecting the French filmmaking establishment while loving blatantly commercial Hollywood. The young rebels of *Cahiers* claimed that in the works of certain directors—certain *auteurs* (authors)—artistry existed in the American cinema. An *auteur* usually did not literally write scripts but managed nonetheless to stamp his or her personality on studio products, transcending the constraints of Hollywood’s standardized system. Howard Hawks, Otto Preminger, Samuel Fuller, Vincente Minnelli, Nicholas Ray, Alfred Hitchcock—these were more than craftsmen. Each director’s total output constituted a coherent world. Truffaut quoted Giraudoux: “There are no works, there are only auteurs.” Godard remarked later, “We won the day in having it acknowledged in principle that a film by Hitchcock, for example, is as important as a book by Aragon. Film auteurs, thanks to us, have finally entered the history of art.” And indeed, many of the Hollywood directors these critics and filmmakers championed have become recognized as great artists.

Writing criticism didn’t satisfy these young men. They itched to make movies. Borrowing money from friends and filming on location, each started to shoot short films. By 1959, they had become a force to be reckoned with. In that year, Rivette filmed *Paris nous appartient* (*Paris Belongs to Us*); Godard made *À Bout de souffle* (*Breathless*); Chabrol made his second feature, *Les Cousins*; and in April, Truffaut’s *Les quatre cents coups* (*The 400 Blows*) won the Grand Prize at the Cannes Festival.

The novelty and youthful vigor of these directors led journalists to nickname them *la nouvelle vague*—the *New Wave*. Their output was staggering. All told, the five central directors made 32 feature films between 1959 and 1966; Godard and Chabrol made 11 apiece. So many films must of course be highly disparate, but there are enough similarities for us to identify a broadly distinctive New Wave approach to style and form.

A New Wave Style

The most obviously revolutionary quality of the New Wave films was their casual look. To proponents of the carefully polished French “cinema of quality,” the young directors must have seemed hopelessly sloppy. The New Wave directors had admired the Neorealists (especially Rossellini) and, in opposition to studio filmmaking, took as their settings actual locales in and around Paris. Shooting on location became the norm (12.59). Similarly, glossy studio lighting was replaced by available light and simple supplemental sources. Few postwar French films would have shown the dim apartments and grimy corridors featured in *Paris Belongs to Us*.

Cinematography changed, too. The New Wave camera moves a great deal, panning and tracking to follow characters or to



12.59 Location filming. *Les Bonnes femmes*: While a serial killer stalks them, two of the heroines sit idly at work. Like many New Wave directors, Claude Chabrol followed the Neorealists in shooting on locations like this drab appliance shop.

explore a locale. To make mobile shots cheaply on location demanded flexible, portable equipment. Fortunately, Eclair had recently developed a lightweight camera that could be handheld. (That the Eclair had been used primarily for documentary work accorded perfectly with the realistic *mise-en-scène* of the New Wave.) New Wave filmmakers were intoxicated with the new freedom offered by the handheld camera. In *The 400 Blows*, the camera explores a cramped apartment and rides a carnival centrifuge. In *Breathless*, the cinematographer held the camera while seated in a wheelchair to follow the hero’s winding path through a travel agency (11.32).

One of the most salient features of New Wave films is their casual humor. These young men deliberately played with the medium. In Godard’s *Band of Outsiders*, the three main characters resolve to be silent for a minute, and Godard dutifully shuts off *all* the sound. In Truffaut’s *Shoot the Piano Player*, a character swears that he’s not lying: “May my mother drop dead if I’m not telling the truth.” Cut to a shot of an old lady keeling over.

Along with humor came esoteric references to other films, Hollywood or European. There are homages to admired auteurs: Godard characters allude to *Johnny Guitar* (Ray), *Some Came Running* (Minnelli), and “Arizona Jim” (from Renoir’s *Crime of M. Lange*). In *Les Carabiniers*, Godard parodies Lumière, and in *Vivre sa vie*, he visually quotes *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (12.60, 12.61). Hitchcock is frequently cited in Chabrol’s films, and Truffaut’s *Les Mistons* re-creates a shot from a Lumière short. Such citations, the New Wave directors felt, acknowledged that cinema, like literature and painting, had lofty traditions that could be honored.

Neorealism Recast

New Wave films also pushed further the Neorealist experimentation with plot construction. In general, causal connections became quite loose. Is there actually a political conspiracy going on in *Paris Belongs to Us*? Why is Nana shot at the end of *Vivre sa vie*? In *Shoot the Piano Player*, the first sequence consists mainly of a conversation between the hero’s brother and a man he accidentally meets on the street. The passerby laments his marital problems at some length. In a Hollywood film, he would become a major character, but here he departs and never appears.

The films often lack goal-oriented protagonists. The heroes may drift aimlessly, engage in actions on the spur of the moment, or pass the time chatting in a café or going to movies. New Wave narratives also introduce startling shifts in tone, jolting our expectations. When two gangsters kidnap the hero and his girlfriend in *Shoot the Piano Player*, the whole group begins a comic discussion of sex. Discontinuous editing further disturbs narrative continuity; this tendency reaches its limit in Godard’s jump cuts (6.151, 6.152, 11.37, 11.38).

Perhaps most important, the New Wave film typically ends ambiguously. Antoine in *The 400 Blows* reaches the sea in the last shot, but as he moves forward, Truffaut zooms in and freezes the frame, ending the film with the question of where Antoine will go from there (3.10). We’ve seen a similar lack of resolution in the final scene of *Breathless* (p. 417). In Chabrol’s *Les Bonnes Femmes* and *Ophelia*, in Rivette’s *Paris Belongs to Us*, and in nearly all the work of Godard and Truffaut in this period, the looseness of the causal chain leads to endings that remain defiantly open and uncertain.

Into the Mainstream and Beyond

The filmmakers were often bad-mannered, and the films placed strong demands on the viewer, but the French film industry wasn’t hostile to the New Wave. The decade 1947–1957 had been good to film production: The government supported the industry through enforced quotas, banks had invested heavily, and there was a flourishing business of international coproductions. But in 1957, cinema attendance fell off drastically, chiefly because television became more widespread. By 1959,



12.60



12.61

12.60–12.61 Classic film as a reference point. In Godard’s *Vivre sa vie*, a clip from Dreyer’s *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (12.60) provokes Nana’s sympathy as she watches it (12.61). It also equates her with one of the great suffering heroines of silent cinema (see 4.41).



12.62 Borrowing from, and fighting, the New Wave. In spring 1995, a group of Danish directors founded a movement they called Dogme, to continue the impulse of the French New Wave. The group's manifesto laid down a series of rules, demanding that people shoot on location with a handheld camera and use no postproduction sound editing. One result was the second Dogme film, *The Idiots* (1998). It centered on a gang of young people who practice "spazzing"—going to public places and pretending to be physically or mentally handicapped, chiefly to test ordinary citizens' tolerance.

the industry was in a crisis. One solution was to encourage the independent financing of low-budget projects. New Wave directors shot films much more quickly and cheaply than did reigning directors. Moreover, the young directors helped one another out and reduced financial risk. By 1964, each New Wave director had his or her own production company, and the group had become absorbed into the film industry. By that time as well, the characteristic New Wave form and style had already become diffused and imitated (by, for instance, Tony Richardson in his 1963 English film *Tom Jones*). Most historians would argue that the movement, as a group initiative, had come to an end. Certainly, after 1968, the political upheavals in France drastically altered the personal relations among the directors.

New Wave figures remained powerful filmmakers for decades. Chabrol, Truffaut, and Rohmer became firmly entrenched in the French film industry, whereas Godard set up a facility in Switzerland, and Rivette began to create narratives of staggering complexity and length (such as *Out One*, originally about 12 hours long). Their films, though seldom popular, continued to be supported by government subsidies, international agencies, and private financing. They had, in a sense, become the sort of Old Guard that they had rebelled against. Yet many continued to produce provocative and influential films. Godard

in particular attracted notoriety with his controversial retelling of the Old and New Testaments, *Hail Mary* (1983). He was one of the first filmmakers to embrace video as a medium, and in 2010 he released an HD feature, *Film Socialisme*, that remains as defiantly nonconformist as all his work.

The New Wave not only created several original and valuable films but also demonstrated that a stodgy film industry could gain new energy from talented, aggressive young people inspired by the sheer love of cinema. It has become the prototype of the fully self-conscious movement—aware of its place in film history, able to work with low budgets, and shrewd in its realization that media culture is always looking for the next big thing. The journalists-turned-filmmakers understood the power of publicity, a lesson that later film movements learned. The Danish Dogme 95 group attacked the French New Wave (it “proved to be a ripple that washed ashore and turned to muck”), but they followed the earlier generation in demanding a break with conformity (12.62). And the New Wave was not mere bluff. Like the Neorealists they admired, these young filmmakers showed that making unusual creative decisions could reveal new possibilities in the art of cinema.

The New Hollywood and Independent Filmmaking, 1970s–1980s

Hollywood filmmakers sustained their tradition during the 1930s and 1940s by assimilating the technological demands of sound and color. In the 1950s and 1960s, they faced greater difficulties. There were new technologies, such as widescreen and stereophonic sound, to master, but the real problems lay elsewhere. By government decree, the vertically integrated studios had been broken up in the late 1940s. Distributors could no longer own theaters or demand that exhibitors take weak films. This breakup coincided with a sharp drop in attendance as Americans turned to television and other leisure activities. Filmmakers responded by targeting certain market segments, like young people, and exploring previously forbidden content, like sex and drug use.

The Sound of Music (1965), *Dr. Zhivago* (1965), and a few other big films yielded huge profits, but these could not shore up the declining industry. Television networks, which had paid high prices to broadcast films after theatrical release, stopped bidding for pictures. American movie attendance flattened out at around 1 billion tickets per year. By 1969, Hollywood companies were losing over \$200 million annually.

Blockbusters and Indie Pictures

The industry was saved by what has been called the blockbuster mentality. Along with the predictable favorites, like Disney animation, the top-ranking films of the period included some surprises: *The Godfather* (1972), *The Exorcist* (1973), *American Graffiti* (1973), *Jaws* (1975), *Star Wars* (1977), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), and *Superman* (1978). Unlike most hits, these lacked established stars. They weren't based on Broadway musicals. They were in recognizable, even slightly down-market genres such as horror and science fiction, but they were enhanced by high production values and state-of-the-art special effects. Aimed at young audiences, they became “must-see” events, and many viewers returned again and again to their favorites. The 1970s blockbusters weren't usually designed to be colossal successes, but their box-office triumph convinced producers that a blockbuster could be engineered. In the process, Hollywood could be reinvented.

The studio-designed blockbusters came to be known as “tentpole” pictures because their profits sheltered other, smaller films. Studios spread their investment to star-driven romantic comedies, dramas, and adventure films. They continued to support, often by simply acquiring distribution rights, cheaper genre pictures likely to turn a profit. The studios also encouraged riskier fare that might win critical attention and awards. These might be prestige pictures like *Sleuth* (1972), or more controversial items like *Taxi Driver* (1976).

This division among blockbusters, program genre fare, Oscar bait, edgy experiments, and niche independents would roughly hold good from the 1970s through the 2000s. Tastes and trends would vary; *The Matrix* (1999) and *Inception* (2010) tell more complex stories than *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), but all show that science fiction, garlanded with top-flight special effects, was a steady source of blockbusters. Filmmakers might hop from one category to another. Spike Lee went from being a niche independent (*She's Gotta Have It*, 1986) to directing a prestige picture (*Malcolm X*, 1992), and then to more mainstream genre pictures (*Clockers*, 1995; *Inside Man*, 2006). Few would have predicted on the basis of *Mean Streets* (1973) and *Raging Bull* (1980) that Martin Scorsese would someday direct a children's 3D film budgeted at \$150 million (*Hugo*, 2011). Regardless of such mixing and matching, the strategy of designing projects at different budget levels and for different tastes sustained the Hollywood tradition in the modern era.

The Rise of the Movie Brats

Nearly all the directors of Hollywood's golden age were dead or retired by 1975, so many major trends of that era sprang from young talent. A crucial feature set them apart from earlier American directors. Instead of coming up through the ranks of the studio system, most had gone to film schools. At New York University, the University of Southern California, and the University of California at Los Angeles, they had not only mastered the mechanics of production but also learned about film aesthetics and history. Like the French New Wave directors, the newcomers often had an encyclopedic knowledge of great movies and directors. As a result, they came to be known as the “movie brats.” Whatever level of production they worked in, they were quite aware of the traditions that they inherited, and they set out to both extend the traditions and try something new.

“I love the idea of not being an independent filmmaker. I've liked working within the system. And I've admired a lot of the older directors who were sort of 'directors for hire.' Like Victor Fleming was in a contract all those years to Metro and Selznick and Mayer . . . he made *Captains Courageous*. And you know, his most famous films: *Wizard of Oz* and *Gone with the Wind*.”

—Steven Spielberg, producer/director

“To a whole generation, these [Hollywood classics] were more than just commodities. It was a part of who we are.”

—Martin Scorsese, director



12.63 Staging for multiple points of interest. In *Jaws*, Steven Spielberg displayed a flair for depth staging that has been a hallmark of his work ever since.

So, for instance, when Steven Spielberg and George Lucas revived the science-fiction genre, they did so in full awareness of film history. With *Close Encounters* and *E. T.: The Extraterrestrial* (1982), Spielberg defied the tradition of predatory alien invaders by presenting his creatures as lovable. With *Star Wars* and its sequels, George Lucas consciously revived the disreputable “rocket opera” of Flash Gordon serials and Saturday-matinee kiddie shows. Collaborating on *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), Spielberg and Lucas updated the B-movie serial, giving preposterous plots the dazzle of modern action choreography. Spielberg also tried his hand at Oscar bait, with *The Color Purple* (1985), *Schindler's List* (1993), and other prestige projects. His Amblin company produced lively genre pictures such as *Poltergeist* (1982) and *Gremlins* (1984).

For the studio-oriented movie brats, it wasn't all nostalgia. To turn B-movie material into blockbusters and A-pictures, they called on sophisticated technique. Lucas developed motion-control techniques for filming miniatures for *Star Wars*, and his firm Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) became the leader in new special-effects technology. From *Jaws* onward, Spielberg used deep-focus tactics reminiscent of *Citizen Kane* (5.48, 12.63). Spielberg and Lucas also led the move toward digital sound and high-quality theater reproduction technology. They wanted the modern equivalent of the showmanship that had characterized such 1950s innovations as Cinerama and 3D.

Other filmmakers sought to revive the old Hollywood at a lower budget level. Brian De Palma's admiration for Hitchcock led him to a series of horror films (*Carrie*, 1976) and thrillers (*Obsession*, 1976). *Dressed to Kill* (1980) was an overt redoing of *Psycho*. Peter Bogdanovich's *What's Up, Doc?* (1972) was an updating of screwball comedy, with particular reference to Howard Hawks's *Bringing Up Baby*. John Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976) derived partly from Hawks's *Rio Bravo*; the editing is credited to “John T. Chance,” the character played by John Wayne in Hawks's Western.

Other Paths

For many critics, what made the 1970s an era of rejuvenation was the presence of *anti*-blockbusters, intimate dramas of ordinary people leading more or less recognizable lives. In *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), *The Last Picture Show* (1972), *The Last Detail* (1973), *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974), and other films, everyday crises and psychological tensions came to the fore. They gave American cinema a dose of social realism that had been missing from both old Hollywood and the “New Hollywood” of Spielberg, Lucas, and other movie brats. Some of these films traced their impulse to the work of John Cassavetes, who presented immediate and

visceral confrontations in *Faces* (1968), *Husbands* (1970), and *A Woman under the Influence* (1974).

Small-scale dramas might be backed by a studio or financed and distributed independently. Although they lacked the splashy technique of the blockbusters, they showed that American cinema could adapt the slice-of-life approach to narrative construction seen in Italian Neorealism. But the rationale wasn't wholly formal. Part of these films' appeal came from a sexual frankness that was made possible by the establishing of the film ratings system in 1968. Curses and obscenities, nudity, adulterous affairs, and simulated sex came into the mainstream, and these were motivated as elements of a cinema that dared to shatter classic Hollywood conventions of romance.

Narrative experiments were even more marked in other films of the 1970s. Some directors dreamed of making complex art films in the European mold. The best-known effort is probably Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974), a mystery-story reworking of Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) that plays ambiguously between reality and hallucination (p. 302). Ventures into subjectivity, less clear-cut than the flashbacks and fantasies of the 1940s, were also seen in Robert Altman's *Images* (1972), Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz* (1979), and the opening of Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979; 12.36). Echoing the New Wave were films in which the directors' love of cinema emerged as self-conscious reminders that the audience was watching a film. Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie* (1971) interrupted its flow with a title, “SCENE MISSING.” In Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973), Los Angeles detective Philip Marlowe seems aware that he's playing a hard-boiled detective but is not quite up to the part; the last shot shows him tap-dancing down a road to the tune of “Hooray for Hollywood.”

Altman gave currency to another storytelling strategy, one we might call the “network narrative.” “All-star” movies such as *Grand Hotel* (1932) had occasionally been made in the studio era, but *Nashville* (1975) and *A Wedding* (1978) took the principle of multiple protagonists and interwoven story lines to a new level. In these films, many characters converge in a single locale, such as a city or a social occasion, and then cross each others' paths, each one with individual concerns and no one emerging as a clear-cut hero or heroine. For Altman, the emphasis fell on chance encounters and incidents that might reveal character, rather than on a forward-moving, goal-driven plot.

Stylistically, the films in all these registers didn't challenge the core of the classic continuity system. Most filmmakers were content to employ it but inflect it in certain directions. It's in this period that we start to find that variant of the traditional 180° system we called intensified continuity in Chapter 6 (p. 248). Many filmmakers exploited the new resources of Dolby sound, which allowed for much greater dynamic range and permitted fine-grain detailing of the soundtrack. Altman pioneered a multiple-microphone recording technique that let him record, during a crowded scene, different conversations on different tracks and merge them into a dense mix that could stress or muffle certain lines.

The 1980s and After

With the colossal failure of *Heaven's Gate* (1980), studios lost faith in the auteur-driven blockbuster and turned control of such projects over to more tractable hands. More personal cinema survived, however, in the emerging realm of independent filmmaking. As usual, technology and money had a good deal to do with it.

During the 1980s, both cable television and home video, in the form of the videocassette tape, grew more popular. Small-budget filmmakers learned that they could finance a film by preselling the rights to video companies. In addition, European television channels were eager for American films that were more affordable than Hollywood blockbusters. Films could find funding through the so-called mini-majors, firms that had access to private capital and had solid distribution prospects.



12.64

12.64–12.65 1980s independents. Wide-angle tracking shots follow crawling babies along the floor and under furniture in *Raising Arizona* (12.64) and Eva and Willie, the listless protagonists of *Stranger Than Paradise* (12.65): “These characters,” Jarmusch explains, “move through the world of the film in a kind of random, aimless way, like looking for the next card game or something.”



12.65

For these and other reasons, the 1980s saw a wave of independently made films that achieved fairly wide distribution.

This was the period that launched novelist John Sayles on a directing career that led to his exploration of U.S. social and political history (*The Return of the Secaucus Seven*, 1980; *Matewan*, 1987). Joel and Ethan Coen established their comic-grotesque vision of America and its film genres with *Blood Simple* (1984) and *Raising Arizona* (1987; **12.64**). In *Stranger Than Paradise* (1984) and *Down by Law* (1986), Jim Jarmusch presented quirky, decentered narratives peopled by drifting losers (**12.65**). Susan Seidelman’s *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985) featured a not-yet-famous Madonna in a romantic comedy of mistaken identities. For many observers, this trend crystallized when Steven Soderbergh’s *sex, lies, and videotape* (1989) won the top prize at the Sundance Film Festival, already emerging as a showcase for off-Hollywood work. By the late 1980s there were 200–250 independent releases per year.

Several directors from independent film managed to shift into the mainstream, making medium-budget pictures with widely known stars. David Lynch moved from the midnight movie *Eraserhead* (1978) to the cult classic *Blue Velvet* (1986), and Canadian David Cronenberg, a specialist in low-budget horror films such as *Shivers* (1975), won wider recognition with *The Dead Zone* (1983) and *The Fly* (1986). Oliver Stone won Academy Awards for *Platoon* (1986), which propelled him into the bigger-budget realm. *She’s Gotta Have It* gave Spike Lee access to studio financing for *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and other films. Lee’s success paved the way for other African-American directors during the 1990s, a period that saw several minority and women directors starting careers in Hollywood or the independent realm.

Formally and stylistically, many 1980s films extended tendencies of the 1970s. David Lynch created disturbing, phantasmagoric narration in *Blue Velvet*, and his explorations of subjectivity would become a hallmark of his career up through *Mulholland Dr.* (2001). *Stranger Than Paradise* presented a plot full of hesitations and down time, filmed in a rigorous fashion: one shot per scene, nearly always with the camera anchored to one spot. Jarmusch’s later *Mystery Train* (1989) experimented with multiple stories playing out simultaneously in different areas of Memphis, all linked by the moment of a gunshot. Playwright David Mamet, always fascinated with mind games and power trips, brought his sensibility to the world of gambling in *House of Games* (1987), in which restricted narration conceals a cascade of deceptions.

Hollywood and Independents, To Be Continued

Much has happened since the 1980s, with studios sometimes courting independents and sometimes discouraging them, and animated features coming to play a bigger role at the box office. But many of the trends established in the 1970s persist. The major studios finance tentpole films, support star-driven comedies such as *Date Night* (2010), acquire genre projects as program filler, and occasionally turn a prestige picture such as *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) into a popular hit. Independent companies, or some “dependent” boutique branches of the studios, aim at ambitious genre pictures such as *Hanna* (2011) and *Drive* (2011), along with Oscar bait. Still smaller independents, such as Charlie Kaufman (*Synecdoche, New York*, 2008) and Miranda July (*You and Me and Everyone We Know*, 2005), survive on critics’ accolades and foreign distribution.

As usual, every opportunity demands decisions. James Cameron, with *Titanic* (1997) and *Avatar* (2009), personifies the director who sees his future bound up with blockbusters. The movie brats’ fondness for retooling genre pictures reappears in a younger generation’s *Cloverfield* (2008) and *Source Code* (2011). *Old Joy* (2006), *Rachel Getting Married* (2008), *Frozen River* (2008), *The Kids Are All Right* (2010), and many other films continue the 1970s impulse toward friends-and-family dramas with social implications (**12.66**). At the microbudget level is the trend called Mumblecore, low-tech exercises in psychological observation, with loose plotting and performances that give off an air of improvisation.

At all these levels of production, reworking narrative strategies has become a commanding trend over the last decades. We see it in mainstream romances, science fiction tales, and crime thrillers (p. 334), and even in blockbusters such as *Inception*. M. Night Shyamalan followed Hitchcock in turning narrative subterfuge into a personal signature (**12.67**). Storytelling experiments are a hallmark of the independent realm as well. The 1990s and 2000s saw a burst of network narratives such as *200 Cigarettes* (1999), *Thirteen Conversations about One Thing* (2001), and *Love Actually* (2003), with *Babel* (2006) taking the format to a global scale. Explorations of subjectivity continued as well. Two films of 2011, *Take Shelter* (Jeff Nichols) and *Martha Marcy May Marlene* (Sean Durkin), showed that ambiguous plunges into memories, dreams, and hallucinations still offered powerful resources to enterprising directors.



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Some independent filmmakers use sensationalism to call attention to their work. See “Visionary Outlaw Mavericks on the dark edge: or, Indie Guignol.”



12.66

12.66–12.67 Narrative explorations. The first shot of Ramin Bahrani’s *Goodbye Solo* (2008) avoids traditional exposition and plunges us into a scene that is already at a turning point: Solo is laughing at what his grizzled passenger has just asked him to do (12.66). Many viewers went back to see Shyamalan’s mystery story *The Sixth Sense* (1999) a second time in order to detect how the narration had misled them. His smooth use of intensified continuity techniques, as in the arcing traveling shot here, helped conceal the plot’s secret (12.67).



12.67



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The 50-year career of one director offers us a chance to survey changes in Hollywood and the independent scene in our entry, “Endurance: Survival Lessons from Lumet.”

It’s perhaps no coincidence that the 2000s saw network and cable television experimenting with narrative as well. *The Wire*, *Six Feet Under*, *Damages*, and other ambitious series attracted admirers of independent cinema. Independent distributors began producing television shows, and directors often wound up working on high-profile cable series. With most low-budget films finding their core audience on DVD and video on demand, the boundaries among theatrical film, cable television, and the Internet as exhibition platforms were dissolving. The changes generated more constraints, more opportunities, and more hard decisions for directors who wanted to tell stories in unexpected ways.

Hong Kong Cinema, 1980s–1990s

While independent directors were revamping American films in the 1980s, a young generation of directors in Hong Kong found footing in their industry and recast its traditional genres and creative methods. The result was a vigorous local tradition. Hong Kong’s innovations in cinematic style and storytelling strongly influenced world filmmaking well into the 21st century.

A Local Tradition Goes Global

Although Hong Kong produced films in the silent era and during the 1930s, World War II halted production. When the industry revived in the 1950s, Shaw Brothers became the most powerful studio. Shaws owned theaters throughout East Asia and used Hong Kong as a production base for films in several languages, chiefly Mandarin Chinese. Shaws made films in many genres, but among its biggest successes were dynamic, gory swordfighting films (*wuxia pian*, or “tales of martial chivalry”). In the 1970s, another studio, Golden Harvest, triumphed with kung-fu films starring Bruce Lee. Although Lee completed only four martial-arts films before his death in 1973, he became the most famous Chinese actor of all time. Lee’s graceful, almost feral presence brought Hong Kong cinema to worldwide attention and forever identified it with films of acrobatic and violent action.

Several major directors worked in this period. Most famous is King Hu, who started as a Shaws director. In films such as *Dragon Gate Inn* (1967) and *The Valiant Ones* (1975; 5.76), Hu reinvigorated the *wuxia pian* through graceful airborne swordplay and inventive cutting. Chang Cheh, another Shaws director, turned the swordplay film toward violent male melodrama (such as *The One-Armed Swordsman*, 1967) before specializing in flamboyant kung-fu films such as *Crippled Avengers* (also called *Mortal Combat*, 1978). Neither King Hu nor Chang Cheh was a practitioner of martial arts, but Lau Kar-leung was a fight choreographer before becoming a full-fledged director. Lau created a string of inventive films (such as *36th Chamber of Shaolin*, 1978, and *The Eight-Diagram Pole Fighter*, 1983) that showcased a range of dazzling martial-arts techniques.

The New Generation: Two Schools

By the early 1980s, traditional kung-fu was fading in popularity, and Shaws turned from moviemaking to its lucrative television business. At the same time, a new generation of directors came forward. One group had little formal education but had grown up in the film industry, working as stuntmen and martial artists. Among those who became directors were choreographers Yuen Wo-ping and Yuen Kwei (Yes, *Madam!*, 1985). Sammo Hung choreographed, directed, and starred in many lively action films (such as *Eastern Condors*, 1987).

The most famous graduate of the studio system was Jackie Chan, who labored as a copy of Bruce Lee before finding his feet in comic kung-fu. With *Drunken Master* (1978, directed by Yuen Wo-ping), he became a star throughout Asia and gained the power to direct his own films. In the early 1980s, Chan and his

colleagues realized that kung-fu could be incorporated into action movies in the Hollywood mold. Chan made the historical adventure *Project A* (1983, also starring Hung) and the contemporary cop drama *Police Story* (1985). These and others were huge hits across Asia, partly because of Chan’s lovably goofy star persona and partly because of his resourceful and dangerous stunt scenes (6.49–6.51).

A second group of directors had more formal training, with many attending film schools in the United States or Britain. When Ann Hui, Allen Fong, and others returned to Hong Kong, they found work in television before moving on to feature filmmaking. For a time, they constituted a local art cinema, attracting attention at festivals with such films as Hui’s *Boat People* (1982). But most of this group gravitated toward independent companies turning out comedies, dramas, and action films. Tsui Hark was the leader of this trend. As both director and producer, Tsui revived and reworked a range of genres: swordplay fantasy (*Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain*, 1979), romantic comedy (*Shanghai Blues*, 1984), historical adventure (*Peking Opera Blues*, 1986; 12.68), supernatural romance (*A Chinese Ghost Story*, 1987, directed by Ching Siu-tung), and classic kung-fu (*Once upon a Time in China*, 1990).

Seeing the success that urban crime films were enjoying, Tsui partnered with John Woo on *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), a remake of a 1960s movie (12.69). Woo was something of an in-between figure, having been a successful studio comedy director during the 1970s. With Tsui as producer, *A Better Tomorrow* became Woo’s comeback effort, one of the most successful Hong Kong films of the 1980s and a star-making vehicle for the charismatic Chow Yun-fat. Tsui, Woo, and Chow teamed again for a sequel and for the film that made Woo famous in the West, *The Killer* (1989), a lush and baroque story of the unexpected alliance between a hitman and a detective (12.70).

Story and Style

Hong Kong cinema of the 1980s and early 1990s simmered with almost reckless energy. The rushed production schedules didn’t allow much time to prepare scripts, so the plots, borrowing freely from Chinese legend and Hollywood genres, tended to be less tightly unified than those in U.S. films. They avoided tight linkage of cause and effect in favor of a more casual, episodic construction—not, as in Italian



12.68 Rhythmic staging. Abrupt movements into and out of the frame are characteristic of Hong Kong film style. In this shot from *Peking Opera Blues*, the sheriff and his captive rise into the foreground as the three heroines watch from the rear.



12.69

12.69–12.70 John Woo, influential stylist. A striking long shot as a hero walks to meet his fate in *A Better Tomorrow* suggests Woo’s debt to the Western (12.69). The urban crime thriller often parallels cop and crook—a convention that *The Killer* boldly fulfills in presenting detective and hitman as mirror images (12.70).



12.70



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We examine Hong Kong filmmaking style, and especially the work of Jackie Chan, in “Bond vs. Chan: Jackie shows how it’s done.”



12.71 Hong Kong stylization. Blocks of colored light enhance a gun battle in *The Longest Nite* (1998).

Neorealism, to suggest the randomness of everyday life but rather to permit chases and fights to be inserted easily. Whereas action sequences were meticulously choreographed, connecting scenes were often improvised and shot quickly. Similarly, the kung-fu films had often bounced between pathos and almost silly comedy, and this tendency to mix tones continued through the 1980s. Because of rushed shooting, the plots often end abruptly, with a big action set-piece but little in the nature of a mood-setting epilogue. One of Tsui's innovations was to provide more satisfying conclusions, as in the lilting railroad station finale of *Shanghai Blues*.

At the level of visual style, Hong Kong directors brought the action film to a new pitch of excitement. Gunmen (and gunwomen) leaped and fired in slow motion, hovering in midair like 1970s swordfighters and kung-fu warriors. John Woo, who had been an assistant director for Chang Cheh, pushed such shots to extravagant limits. Directors also developed florid color designs, with rich reds, blues, and yellows glowing out of smoky nightclubs or narrow alleyways. Well into the 2000s, unrealistically tinted mood lighting was a trademark of Hong Kong cinema (12.71). Above all, everything was sacrificed to constant motion; even in dialogue scenes, the camera and the characters seldom stood still.

Aiming to energize the viewer, the new action directors built on the innovations of King Hu and his contemporaries. They developed a staccato cutting technique based on the tempo of martial-arts routines and Peking Opera displays, alternating rapid movement with sudden pauses. If shot composition was kept simple, an action could be cut to flow across shots very rapidly, while one shot could accentuate a moment of stillness (12.72–12.74). Most Hong Kong directors were unaware of the Soviet Montage movement, but in their efforts to arouse viewers through expressive movement and editing, they were reviving ideas of concern to those 1920s filmmakers.

Legacy Overseas

The 1990s brought the golden age of Hong Kong action cinema to a close. Jackie Chan, John Woo, Chow Yun-fat, Sammo Hung, and action star Jet Li began working in Hollywood, with Yuen Wo-ping designing the action choreography for *The Matrix* (1999) and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). A recession after Hong Kong's 1997 handover to China depressed the local film industry. As Hollywood began imitating Hong Kong movies (as in *The Replacement Killers*, 1998), local audiences developed a taste for U.S. films. At the same time, the art-cinema wing became more ambitious, and festivals rewarded the offbeat works of Wong Kar-wai (see the analysis of *Chungking Express*, pp. 425–429). The action tradition was maintained by only a few directors such as Johnnie To, whose laconic film noir *The Mission* (1999) brought a leanness and pictorial abstraction to the gangster genre.



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A week-long series of blog entries devoted to Hong Kong film starts with "PLANET HONG KONG now in cyberspace." "PLANET HONG KONG: The dragon dances" is devoted to analyzing Hong Kong action scenes.



12.72



12.73



12.74

12.72–12.74 Rhythmic editing and movement. During a fight scene in *Yes, Madam!* Michele Yeoh swings swiftly around, in a shot only 7 frames long (12.72). In two more shots, 12.73 and 12.74, she knocks the villain spinning (15 frames), and drops smoothly into a relaxed posture on the rail (17 frames). Her stillness at the end of the shot provides a pause before she launches another assault.

Hong Kong filmmakers had created a new set of creative options for staging and cutting physical action, and some directors took advantage of them. The legions of American fans included Quentin Tarantino, who paid homage to the Asian action cinema in *Kill Bill, Volumes 1 and 2* (2003–2004). He mixed together elements of Japanese swordplay, anime, and low-budget European thrillers, but his allegiance to Hong Kong's tradition shone through (12.75). Just as other countries' cinemas borrow from Hollywood, Hollywood selectively absorbs cutting-edge innovations from overseas.



12.75 *Kill Bill* and Hong Kong cinema. Although the weaponry in this fight consists mostly of samurai swords, director Tarantino pays tribute to the Hong Kong tradition: Yuen Woo-ping serves as martial-arts choreographer and the heroine wears Bruce Lee's signature yellow track suit.

Tarantino was a film fan from childhood. He watched old movies on TV, recent releases in theatres, and anything that caught his fancy on VHS. Like every filmmaker, he started as a film viewer; like many filmmakers, he was keen to explore the entire range of film history. Asked what he does in his spare time, he replied, "What you'd expect—read, listen to music, hang out with friends, watch my video and DVD collection. Get obsessions about this or that. I'm a film historian so I'm always trying to feed my brain."

Just as anyone who thinks, talks, and writes analytically about movies is doing film criticism, Tarantino is right to suggest that seeking out older films and letting them feed your brain is a step toward doing film history. The films he sees nourish his passion to create films himself. Even if you don't follow that career path, thinking like a filmmaker includes opening yourself up to the vast variety of films made in different times and places. By considering what artistic choices were available, by recognizing the creative decisions made by filmmakers who have come before us, we become more sensitive to every movie we see. To fully appreciate the films we watch now, we need to be aware that their makers are struggling with the same problems and decisions that appear at every moment of film history. Technology, tastes, and received traditions offer both opportunities and constraints—sometimes opportunities *within* constraints.

By looking at films from a historical angle, we realize that filmmakers have always been as fascinated by the power of movies as we are today. As Wölfflin says, not everything may be possible at all times. Still, some filmmakers always try to push the boundaries of what *is* possible, and others show us new possibilities in what seems familiar. Their hard work and imaginative energies have given us richer experiences of the art of cinema.



RECOMMENDED DVD AND BLU-RAY DISCS

Many of the films mentioned in this chapter, especially the ones from recent decades, are available on DVD. So are classics from the silent era, but they're sometimes hard to find or buried in a big compilation. Below we offer information about the best editions of some silent-era titles.

Several DVD companies specialize in releasing historically important films: The Criterion Collection (www.criterion.com), Flicker Alley (www.flickeralley.com), Gartenberg Media (www.gartenbergmedia.com), Image Entertainment (www.image-entertainment.com), Kino Video (www.kino.com), Milestone (www.milestonefilms.com), and in the United Kingdom (coded for Region 2), Eureka's "Masters of Cinema" series (www.mastersofcinema.org). Edition Filmmuseum (www.edition-filmmuseum.com/) is a website that sells DVDs issued by several major archives and restoration companies; the website is in German and English, and the offerings all have optional English subtitles and are non-region-coded (Region All). It's an invaluable source for the best prints of classics from around the world. It is as easy to register with Filmmuseum and purchase from the site as it is to buy from Amazon.

Collections of Historically Important Films

Some collections of early films offer an easy way to get a quick overview of a period, filmmaker, or genre. For a brief introduction to the period up to 1913, *Landmarks of Early Film* (1 disc, Image Entertainment) offers 40 shorts. *Edison: The Invention of the Movies* (4 discs, Kino Video) and the Museum of Modern Art collects 140 films from the Thomas A. Edison Company, including *The Great Train Robbery*. It contains interviews with film historians and archivists, as well as program notes and documents. *The Movies Begin: A Treasury of Early Cinema 1894–1913* (5 discs, Kino Video) gathers 133 films arranged thematically: Volume 1, "The Great Train Robbery and Other Primary works"; Volume 2, "The European Pioneers" (including films by the Lumières and early British filmmakers); Volume 3, "Experimentation and Discovery" (mostly early British and French films); Volume 4, "The Magic of Méliès"; and Volume 5, "Comedy, Spectacle and New Horizons."

Slapstick Encyclopedia (5 discs, Image Entertainment) surveys the golden age of comedy shorts—the 1910s and early 1920s. *The Harold Lloyd Comedy Collection* (7 discs,

New Line) provides an extensive program of films with one of the masters of silent comedy, as well as a disc of bonus material.

A broad range of types of films is collected in *Treasures from American Film Archives: 50 Preserved Films* (4 discs), *More Treasures from American Film Archives, 1894–1931* (3 discs, Image Entertainment), and *Treasures III: Social Issues in American Film 1900–1934* (4 discs, Image Entertainment). These include documentaries, home movies, animation, experimental cinema, and fiction films such as D. W. Griffith's 1911 one-reeler *The Lonedale Operator* (illustrating his command of early intercutting), Cecil B. De Mille's *The Godless Girl* (1928), and Ernst Lubitsch's masterpiece of continuity filmmaking, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1925). Each boxed set includes a book of detailed program notes.

Early Cinema

The boxed set "Pioneer Georges Méliès: First Wizard of Cinema (1896–1913)" (Flicker Alley) offers 173 films covering the early director's career; Flicker Alley followed this release with "George Méliès Encore," which includes newly discovered prints. One of the chief early French production firms is represented by "Gaumont Treasures 1897–1913" (Kino). Flicker Alley assembled a collection of restored films from the 1896–1944 era as "Saved from the Flames." It offers a variety of genres, including travelogues and animated films, as well as such classics as Lois Weber's *Suspense*.

The Development of Classical Hollywood Cinema

Many films from the 1910s and 1920s by D. W. Griffith, Cecil B. De Mille, and other major directors are available on DVD. Some notable releases: "Chaplin at Keystone" (Flicker Alley), "The Chaplin Mutual Comedies" (Image), "Douglas Fairbanks: A Modern Pioneer" (Flicker Alley), and "Three Silent Classics by Josef von Sternberg" (Criterion Collection). A little-known but important film from 1915 is Raoul Walsh's *Regeneration* (Image).

German Expressionism

The best collection of Ernst Lubitsch's silent German films is Kino's "Lubitsch in Berlin," with a mixture of his comedies and historical dramas. Kino has also released restored

versions of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *The Golem*, and *Metropolis*.

French Impressionism and Surrealism

The French Impressionist movement is not as familiar as the German and Soviet movements of the same era. Its important films are only gradually becoming available on DVD. Two of Abel Gance's most important Impressionist films, *J'accuse* (1919 version) and *La Roue* have been issued by Flicker Alley. (See our review of the *La Roue* disc on our blog, "An old-fashioned, sentimental avant-garde film.") One of the finest films of the movement, Jean Epstein's *Cœur fidèle*, is available from Eureka! in a dual Blu-ray/DVD set. Epstein's *The Fall of the House of Usher* was released by Image.

Gaumont released two early Impressionist films by Marcel L'Herbier, *L'homme du large* and *El Dorado*, in a boxed set, that lacks English subtitles and is coded for Region 2. L'Herbier's late masterpiece of the movement, *L'Argent*, is available from Eureka!, also Region 2 but with English subtitles. This set includes valuable supplements, including a 40-minute making-of and a 45-minute documentary on L'Herbier's silent career.

The first volume of Kino's "Avant-garde" series, mentioned above, contains Epstein's important film, *La glace à trois faces*, as well as Dimitri Kirsanoff's Impressionist short feature, *Ménilmontant* and Germaine Dulac's Surrealist short, *La coquille et le clergymen*.

Soviet Montage

The films of the best-known Montage directors are available on DVD. Sergei Eisenstein's films are available in so many versions that recommendations are in order: Kino's versions of the restored *Strike* and *Potemkin*, and Image's disc of *October*. *Old and New* is available in Flicker Alley's set, "Landmarks of Early Soviet Cinema," which also includes important but less familiar films such as Lev Kuleshov's *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* and Boris Barnet's *House on Trubnaya*.

On our blog, we occasionally review groups of new releases of historical films on DVD, particularly those from the silent era. Also our annual roundup of the 10 best films made 90 years before gives the DVD availability (if any) of the films on the list.