

Quadrant II – Notes

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Origins and History of Cinema

The origins of cinema can be traced back to certain key inventions of the 19th century: the thaumatrope, the zoetrope and other optical toys that relied on the principle of persistence of vision. Persistence of vision refers to the phenomena in which the human eye continues to see an image for a fraction of a moment after the object is removed from sight. Keeping this concept in mind, in the early 1800s, inventors created and marketed toys that gave an illusion of movement by using a small number of drawings, each altered from the previous image slightly.

Developments in the field of photography also played an important role in the growth of cinema.

Eadweard Muybridge, created “motion studies” of cats, birds, horses, and the human figure in 1872, using a series of up to forty still cameras whose shutters were released by trip wires activated by his subjects. Inspired by Muybridge's work, French physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey developed the chronophotographic gun to study the flight of birds and other rapid animal movements.

Early cinema also owes itself to Thomas Edison and his assistant, W. K. L. Dickson's invention of the Kinetograph camera, which used a flexible celluloid roll film, invented by George Eastman (the founder of the Kodak film and camera company) and the Kinetoscope: a type of peep show box, activated by putting a coin in the slot.

Inspired by Edison's Kinetoscope and Kinetograph, the Lumière Brothers invented a projection system that helped make cinema a commercially viable enterprise internationally. In 1895, the Lumière brothers, Louis and Auguste Lumière debuted the Cinématographe. The Cinématographe operated as a recording camera, printer or developer of the filmed images, and projector, while also being small and portable, making it the first all-in-one commercially viable film camera. *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895) is considered to be the very first motion picture made with the Cinématographe. Another popular early Lumière brothers film was *Arrival of the Train at La Ciotat Station* which depicted the arrival of a train at a train station. These early films were single moving scenarios taken in one shot, composed like a photograph or painting, and short in length, usually under a minute long.

The realism of early cinema was challenged by the work of Georges Méliès, a former magician. His use of set design and special effects or magic tricks—which popularized multiple exposures, jump cuts, dissolves, stop motion and split-screen photography—made him the godfather of special effects cinema. Méliès's most famous film, *A Trip to the Moon* (*Le Voyage dans la lune*, 1902) is one of the most influential early films of science fiction, combining fantasy, spectacle, sensation, technology and narratives of scientific discovery.

A return to realism and narrative was brought about by Edwin S. Porter. Porter's 12-minute film, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) used editing, camera pans, rear projections, and diagonally composed shots to produce a continuity of action and realistic narrative. D. W. Griffith developed continuity editing in his controversial but influential film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Though this was the highest-grossing film of the silent film era, the narrative of the Ku Klux Klan, white supremacy and racial tensions made it a controversial and problematic film.

Till 1926, motion pictures only relied on images. It was the silent era: consisting only of images and acting, accompanied by live music, played by musicians in the theatre, and written titles to create a mood and narrate a story. However, in 1926, Warner Bros debuted the Vitaphone technology system with the release of *Don Juan*, a costume drama accompanied by a recording of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra; incorporating sound into film. In 1927, Warner Bros released its second sound film, *The Jazz Singer*, in which the actor Al Jolson improvised a few lines of synchronized dialogue and sang six songs. This marked the rise of talkies, films with sound. Sound in film was further enhanced by Foley sound, that is the reproduction of sound effects, created and recorded by a Foley sound artist in order to enhance a particular sound, which contributes to the storytelling.

Technicolour film was introduced in the 1930s. Films like Disney's *Three Little Pigs* (1933) and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1936) and films with live actors, like MGM's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) used the technicolour film system.

Alongside developments in film in the USA, the industry was growing in other countries as well. Film movements were growing and developing across the world. Some examples of popular film movements: French impressionism, German expressionism, Italian neorealism, Parallel cinema, Bollywood, Iranian new wave, Martial arts, etc.

By the 1970s, large-budgeted, heavily marketed and advertised, and widely-released films came to be called blockbusters. These were films that were popular with audiences and made lots of money at the cinema. The development of new technologies such as CGI and digital cameras also benefitted the growth of cinema. The 1990s saw the rise of the blockbuster with special, computer-generated effects, and the independent, low-budget film. This growth continues to the present day with production studios now also distributing films through online video streaming sites.

Types of Films

There are different ways to classify and categorise different types of films. The most common categories of films are documentary versus fiction, live-action versus animated, and mainstream versus experimental cinema. However, even these categories are not fixed and determined, there are films that cannot be boxed into one category or the other because they are a combination of the stated types.

Films can also be divided into different types based on their genre. A film genre can be understood as a broad category shared by both filmmaker and audience. Films are categorised into particular genres based on shared and similar conventions, elements, form, content, technique, narrative, etc. The detective film, the romance, the comedy, the biography, the Western, the musical, the horror movie, science fiction, the superhero film, etc. Genre categories are flexible, and more often than not, films mix and intermingle two or more genres together.

Some Aspects of Filmmaking

Filmmaking (or, film production) is the process by which a film is made. Filmmaking involves a number of complex and discrete stages including an initial story, idea, or commission, through screenwriting, casting, shooting, sound recording and pre-production, editing, and screening the finished product. The filmmaking process can be divided into five main stages: development, pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution.

1. **Development:** The start of a film project begins with the idea of the film. It involves the development of a script and the writing of a screenplay. Development may also start with a director and/or a writer pitching an idea to a Producer. The financing and budget of the film are also looked into at this stage.
2. **Pre-Production:** At this stage, arrangements and preparations begin for the film - locations are chosen, casting and film crew are finalised, sets are constructed, costumes are designed. The logistics of the film are assessed. Script-reading, rehearsals and scheduling also take place during this stage.
3. **Production:** In production, the film is created and shot. The audio, visuals and other elements for the film are recorded during the film shoot, including principal photography.
4. **Post-Production:** The footage is reviewed and the movie is assembled through the process of editing. The images, music, sound and visual effects are combined into a final product.

5. Distribution: Once the film is completed, it is distributed, marketed, and screened in cinemas or distributed via various online video streaming platforms such as Amazon Prime, Netflix, and Hotstar etc.