



DAVID A. COOK

A HISTORY OF  
NARRATIVE FILM

FOURTH EDITION

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David A. Cook

EMORY UNIVERSITY

FOURTH EDITION

# A History of Narrative Film



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# Preface

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

Imagine, though, that a new language form came into being at the turn of the twentieth century, an audiovisual language form that first took the shape of cinema and became in time the common currency of modern television. Imagine that because the making of statements in this language depended upon an expensive industrial process, only a handful of elite specialists were trained to use it. Imagine, too, that although public anxiety about the potentially corrupting influence of the new language was constant from its birth, it was *perceived* not as a language at all but as a medium of popular entertainment—that in this guise the language was gradually allowed to colonize us, as

if it were the vernacular speech of some conquering foreign power. Finally, imagine waking up one day to discover that we had mistaken language for a mode of dreaming and in the process become massively illiterate in a primary language form, one that had not only surrounded us materially but that, as language forms tend to do, had invaded our minds as well. What would we do if that happened? We could choose to embrace our error and lapse into the anarchic mode of consciousness characteristic of preliterate societies, which might be fun but would most certainly be dangerous in an advanced industrial society. Or we could attempt to instruct ourselves in the language form from the ground up and from the inside out. We could try to learn as much of its history, technology, and aesthetics as possible. We could trace the evolution of its syntactic and semantic forms from their birth through their present stages of development, and try to forecast the shapes they might take in the future. We could, finally, bring the apparatus of sequential logic

and critical analysis to bear on the seemingly random structures of the language in order to read them in new and meaningful ways.

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

# Preface to the Fourth Edition

The cinema has undergone two major changes in the eight years since the third edition of this book was published. The first is the hegemonic control by American distributors of virtually every film market in the world—the conscious and calculated effect of “globalization.” The other is the fact that the majority of films produced in the United States and much of the developed world are previsualized, produced, and post-produced at least partially in the digital domain. In this edition, the dominance of American distributors is duly noted in the treatment of individual national cinemas, and the digitization of the filmmaking process is given a new chapter (21) of its own. This chapter argues that since the mid-1990s digital imaging technology has transformed the making of feature films in the industrialized West—and will soon transform their distribution and exhibition as well—in a way that redefines the very nature of cinema by bringing it closer to the condition of animation. I believe, in fact, that a shift has taken place in film aesthetics in which postproduction has acquired a status equal to production and in which cinema is no longer exclusively the art of the moving photographic image: the replication of the real is giving way to simulation through computer-generated imagery, or CGI.

Digital technology has clearly served to extend and solidify Hollywood’s hegemony in the early years of the twenty-first century; it has also produced the potential (at least) to fracture it. A collateral effect of the cinema’s digitization is the ability to produce feature-length films at relatively small expense using digital video (DV) cameras and desktop software editing programs like Final Cut Pro. Because these films begin and end as digital files, they can be transferred to DVD and/or distributed on the internet without the mediation of photographic film stock at any stage of the process. (Hollywood blockbusters can also be digitized, as they routinely are for transfer to DVD, but they are initially distributed as analog media—i.e., as 35mm prints for projection in brick-and-mortar theaters.) Thus, the reshaping of cinema as a digital form points in two directions at once: toward global market dominion by CGI-laden Hollywood spectacle, on the one hand, and toward the leveling, democratizing influence of independent DV

features on the other. The anxiety with which the Hollywood majors currently view motion-picture file sharing on the internet relates as much to their fear of competition from independent producers as to their fear of copy-right infringement and piracy.

In addition to its treatment of CGI, other new features of this edition include substantial sections on French and British cinema of the 1980s and 1990s, extensive material on recent filmmaking in New Zealand and Canada, and a new section on Dogme95. There are new discussions of the Japanese industry during the 1980s and 1990s and the rise of Bollywood cinema in India. Significant new material has also been added on the cinemas of the three Chinas, especially Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as substantial new sections on Iranian cinema and New Korean Cinema, since these have become increasingly influential around the world.

Another notable change in this edition is its increased attention to exploitation genres. From the new discussion of Hammer Films in Chapter 14, through the new section on Italian exploitation in Chapter 15, to the new treatment of Japanese *roman porno* and horror in Chapter 18, the fourth edition acknowledges the economic and aesthetic importance of the low end of the cinematic scale. Not only is it often the case that a given industry's exploitation product subsidizes its art films, but exploitation films can have a permanent and lasting effect on film style—as in the pervasive influence of the Italian spaghetti Western, British and Italian gothic horror, and Hong Kong action genres.

Like art films, exploitation films have been recently saved from physical extinction by a remarkable by-product of the digital revolution—the technology of DVD, which has done more to preserve the heritage of international cinema, high and low, than any medium that preceded it. Translated into digital files, films can be digitally manipulated to restore their original color or black-and-white imagery; their sound can be remixed; and missing elements from their negatives can be repaired. Played back (or projected) on a reasonably good system, restored and/or remastered films on DVD can look and sound better than they did in most theaters at the time of their release.

Thus, through DVD, digital technology has made this a particularly rich time for the study of film history. Ironically, and perhaps appropriately, this same technology portends the end of the photographic cinema in whose preservation it excels. The ability to generate photorealistic images directly in the computer displaces live-action photography as the only basic material of the cinema; conversely, live-action footage, when scanned into a computer and digitized, becomes just another set of pixels to be manipulated together with computer-generated ones. It is this circumstance that led Lev Manovich, in a 1997 article entitled “What Is Digital Cinema?” to predict that cinema would soon become “a particular case of animation which uses live action footage as one of its many elements.”

But the more things change, the more they stay the same. The cinema is still fundamentally a narrative art whose major purpose is the telling of stories; and storytelling precedes every other form of organized human behavior except the burial of the dead. Its roots lie deep in our consciousness and preconsciousness, and its importance to us will not go away. Everyone acknowledges that the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy is great cinema, and director Peter Jackson is the first to admit that the films could never have existed without CGI. But, less obviously, neither could *Gladiator*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Moulin Rouge*, and dozens of similar films that, whatever their merits as art, possess powerful narrative arcs. These are films that use CGI to enhance and transform the narrative language of cinema while telling simple stories of valor and heroism, war and peace, love and loss—just like *Cabiria*, *The Birth of a Nation*, and *Broken Blossoms* did before them. We value those older films for the same reason that we should value the newer ones—for meeting difficult challenges of narrative expression at a time when the rules of their respective media were young. But we watch them today for another reason: they are still somehow relevant to our experience, either as we actually live it or as we imagine/desire it to be. CGI is finally just another way of telling stories, and that will probably not change much, however far the rules by which it operates may grow from the photochemical process we call “film.”

# Acknowledgments

The revision of this book for its fourth edition began with an invaluable helpful planning meeting in Santa Monica, California, in July 2001, in which Dana Polan of USC, Pete Simon of W. W. Norton & Company, and I discussed at length the strengths and weaknesses of the existing text and made decisions that would eventually cast it in new form. The revisions themselves were done between the fall of 2001 and the summer of 2003, and, as always, I incurred numerous intellectual debts in the process. Limits of time and space notwithstanding, I would like to thank the five reviewers of the third edition: Tom Stempel of Los Angeles City College; Christopher Sharrett of Seton Hall University; Catherine Lupton of the University of Surrey Roehampton; Richard Neupert of the University of Georgia; and Dana Polan. I also want to thank three Emory colleagues who read and corrected portions of the revised text: Wenli Wang of Emory's Goizueta School of Business, who gave me valuable insights into the cinema of mainland China; James Steffen of Emory's Institute for the Liberal Arts, who contributed information on Transcaucasian cinema and helped to regularize the spelling of Georgian and Armenian proper names; and Galina Aksenova, a Visiting Lecturer in Russian Culture, who shared with me her detailed knowledge of Soviet film history and contemporary Russian cinema. Thanks must also go to the several Film Studies graduate students who worked with me as research assistants during various stages of the revision process: Laurel Brooks, Tara Key, Irene Taylor, Matt Kiesner, and Aubry D'Arminio. Aubry's revision of the Selective Bibliography was extensive enough to earn her a byline as its coauthor (not forgetting that much of the groundwork was laid in the third edition by James Steffen and David Pratt). For helping to reconfigure the book's illustration program and preparing the online test files, I give special thanks to Evan Lieberman, whose status as both practicing filmmaker and academic film scholar make him uniquely suited to the task.

Nearly all of Chapter 21, "Hollywood Enters the Digital Domain," was written during a semester's sabbatical leave, for which I have to thank the Dean of Emory College, Robert A. Paul. That chapter was vetted at various points through several readers, the



most important of whom was Evan Liebermann, who gave me professional advice about photographic versus digital color processes, and James True, an Atlanta-based graphics designer who fact-checked all of my descriptions of computer-graphics software against his own extensive knowledge of these systems.

The ability to screen 35mm films on campus in state-of-the-art facilities has been a valuable research tool for this revision. In that regard, I need to thank two successive deans of Emory College, Steve Sanderson and Robert Paul, for their sustained support of the Emory Cinematheque, a joint effort by the College and the Department of Film Studies begun in 1999 to provide the Atlanta community with programs of important international films throughout the academic year in a 35/70mm repertory cinema environment. For nurturing that environment and equipping it with state-of-the-art technology, thanks are due to Senior Associate Dean of the College Rosemary Magee. The richness of film culture at Emory has also been enhanced by the regular visits of archivist David Shepard, who hosts and programs our annual "Silent Heaven" series; our regular 35mm series of classical Japanese films with the Japanese Consulate; our annual 35mm series of recent and classical Indian films with the High Museum of Art and the Georgia-Indo American Chamber of Commerce; our yearly 35mm "Festival of New Italian Cinema" co-sponsored by Cine-

città Studios-Rome; and our biannual film series with the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Atlanta, which in 2001 donated over 150 feature-film prints to Emory, representing the entire history of Taiwanese cinema.

As ever, I owe thanks to my colleagues in Emory's Department of Film Studies—Matthew Bernstein, Nina Martin, and Karla Oeler—for their many helpful comments on my work and for putting up with me while I produced it. I need also thank our departmental administrative assistant, Annie Hall (her real name), and secretary, Cecelia Shannon, not only for helping me with the revision's myriad clerical chores but for their unstinting kindness toward me in the process.

Finally, I want to thank my editor, Peter Simon at W. W. Norton & Company, whose generous, insightful collaboration has made working on this edition a highly rewarding experience. Among much else, I am indebted to his help (and that of his assistant, Rob Bellinger) in retooling the book's illustrations. Others at Norton I should thank are manuscript editor Carol Flechner and project editor Thom Foley, both of whom have done remarkable jobs in their various ways of ordering a complicated manuscript; Rubina Yeh, who redesigned the text for this edition; Debra Morton Hoyt, art director; Benjamin Reynolds, production manager; Marian Johnson, managing editor; and Nicole Netherton, editorial assistant during the first half of my work on the book.

# A Note on Method

For reasons that will become apparent in the course of this book, I believe that the history of film as we have experienced it to date is the history of a narrative form. Many of the greatest films ever made were created by artists seeking to break the constraints of this form as it defined itself at different points in time, and there is much evidence to suggest that since the 1950s the cinema has been moving in an increasingly non-narrative direction. But the fact remains that the language common to the international cinema from the last decade of the nineteenth century through the present has been narrative in both aspiration and structural form. For this reason, I have excluded documentary cinema, animated cinema, and the experimental avant-garde from consideration in this book except where they have influenced narrative form to a demonstrable and significant extent. This is not to suggest that any of these excluded forms is unimportant, but rather that each is important and distinctive enough to warrant a separate history of its own (several of which, in fact, already exist).

## A Note on Dates, Titles, and Stills

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

As for titles of films in languages other than English, those in French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and German are given in the original language, followed, in parentheses, by a literal English translation (and an alternate English-language release title, if one exists), followed by the date of release. After the initial reference, the original foreign-language title is used, except in the case of a film that is best known in the English-speaking world by its English title (for example, Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* [*À bout de souffle*, 1959]). For Scandinavian, Eastern European, Asian, and African languages the convention is reversed: the initial reference is given in English, followed by the original title in parentheses (a transliteration is supplied if the original title is in an alphabet other than our own). All subsequent references use the English title, unless the film is best known here by its foreign-language title (as in the case, for instance, of Akira Kurosawa's *Ikiru* [*Living / To Live*, 1952] and *Yojimbo* [*The Bodyguard*, 1961]). In the case of films for which the original foreign-language title was unavailable, only the English title is given.

The photographs used to illustrate the book represent a combination of production stills and frame enlargements. Since they are taken on the set by professional photographers, production stills yield a higher quality of reproduction; but since they are made initially for the purpose of publicity, they are sometimes "beautified" to the point of distortion. Frame enlargements, on the other hand, are blown up photographically from 16mm prints of the films themselves and, therefore, represent the actual images as composed and shot by the filmmakers. Their quality of reproduction is often lower than

that of production stills since several extra steps of photographic transference are involved in printing them, but their correspondence with the film images is exact. Whenever shot sequences have been reproduced for discussion or when lengthy analysis accompanies an individual image or series of images, I have tried to use frame enlargements. When less analytical procedures are involved, I have used production stills. (Many films of the 1950s and most films of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s were shot in some type of widescreen process, with aspect ratios varying from 2.55:1 to 1.85:1. For reasons of typography and design, some of the stills in this volume have been reproduced in the 1.33:1 aspect ratio of the Academy frame.) Although photographs can never replicate cinema, lacking as they do the essential component of motion, they can be made to represent it. Throughout the book, I have attempted to integrate the stills with the written text in a manner that will provide for maximum delivery of information. The reader is, therefore, encouraged to regard both photographic and verbal information as part of the same critical fabric, although neither, finally, can substitute for the audiovisual information contained in the films themselves.

The illustrations in this book were obtained from the Museum of Modern Art's Film Stills Archive with the following exceptions (and excluding frame enlargements supplied by the author):

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences: 10.24.

The British Film Institute: 17.6, 17.7, 17.8, 17.9.

Forrest Ciesol of International Cinema Concepts: 17.18, 17.19, 17.20, 17.21, 17.22, 17.23, 17.24, 17.25, 17.28, 17.31, 17.32, 17.33, 17.34, 17.35, 17.36.

The Library of Congress: 1.11, 1.17, 2.1.

New Line Cinema: 15.69.

The New York Film Festival: 15.72.

New Yorker Films: 15.68.

Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store: Insert illustrations for *Gone with the Wind*, *Kismet*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Superstock International, Inc.: Insert illustration for *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*.

Unifilm: 19.12, 19.22, 19.31, 19.32.

Photofest: Insert illustration for *Toll of the Sea*

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