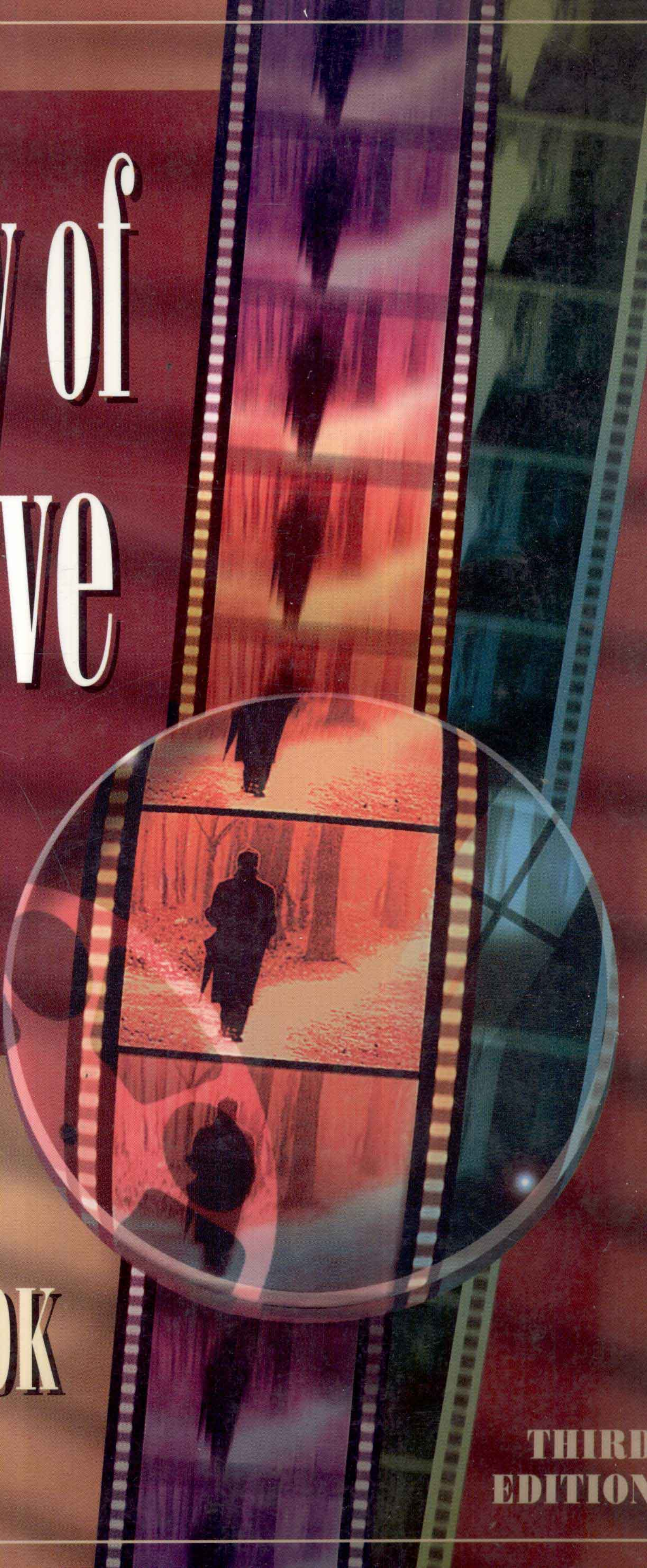
A History of Narrative Film



DAVID A. COOK

THIRD EDITION

A HISTORY OF NARRATIVE FILM

THIRD EDITION

David A. Cook

Emory University

W · W · Norton & Company · New York · London

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Printed in the United States of America.

The text of this book is composed in Sabon
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Composition by Maple-Vail Composition Services.
Manufacturing by The Maple-Vail Book Manufacturing Group.
Cover illustration: Kevin O'Neill

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cook, David A.
A history of narrative film / David A. Cook. — 3rd ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Motion pictures—History. I. Title.
PN1993.5.A1C65 1996
791.43'09—dc20 95-31987

ISBN 0-393-96819-7 (pbk.)

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 10 Coptic Street, London WC1A 1PU

6 7 8 9 0

For Diane,
always

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 continual 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 whomever 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 in the last quarter of the twentieth century 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

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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 Third Edition

The third edition of *A History of Narrative Film* is different from the second in a number of ways. It updates the scholarship and filmographical material on virtually every period, cinema, and filmmaker discussed in the second. There are new sections on ethnic cinema ("race movies" and Yiddish cinema), Scandinavian or Nordic cinema, New Spanish cinema, the cinemas of the former Soviet republics—Baltic (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), Transcaucasian (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan), and Central Asian (Ubekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Tadjikistan, and Turkmenistan)—post-Soviet cinema in Russia and Eastern Europe, and the cinemas of the Middle East (Iran and Israel) and the Pacific Rim. The terminal points of film history are reconsidered to reflect new thinking about the "cinema of attractions" on the one hand and computer generated imagery (CGI) on the other. There has also been a reorganization of chapter contents, so that New German Cinema now appears at the end of Chapter 15 ("European Renaissance: West"), Eastern Europe and the former USSR each have their own chapters (Chapter 16, "European Renaissance: East," and Chapter 17, "The Former Soviet Union, 1945–Present), Chapter 18 becomes "Wind from the East: Japan, India, and China," Chapter 19 is "Third World Cinema," and Chapter 20 is "Hollywood, 1965–Present." Finally, there is a revised and updated Selective Bibliography for this edition which proceeds chapter by chapter, with a large section on "Theory and Aesthetics" at the end.

For all of this new material and restructuring, however, the interpretive core of *A History of Narrative Film* and the principles informing it remain unchanged. There is a prevailing opinion in some quarters today that the essence of the postmodern condition is its chaos of images and that "meaning" is something manufactured by academic critics to justify their paychecks. If this were true, the teaching of film history could only be approached by quantification—as the study of intersecting vectors, subject to analysis of varients in the manner of a social science—and, indeed, in some quarters, that is the way film history is now being taught. But the film history represented by this volume does not conform to that approach, because it assumes the primacy of human agency among the myriad economic, technological, and social determinants that have made motion pictures the quintessential art form of our century. As the twentieth century closes and we mark the one-hundredth anniversary of cinema's birth in the closing years of the nineteenth, we should remember that what we celebrate has been overwhelmingly a *narrative* form concerned with individual and collective human destiny. Whether the product of the classical Hollywood paradigm or Zen Buddhist aesthetics, motion pictures have existed for a century mainly as a remarkably effective way for *people to tell stories about people.* And, unless human nature itself is somehow altered, nothing is likely to happen in the twenty-first century to change that signal fact.

Acknowledgments

The revision of this book for its third edition took place intermittently over a three-year period from 1992 to 1995, and, as always, I incurred numerous intellectual debts in the process. Limits of time and space notwithstanding, I would like to thank the four reviewers of the second edition—Charles Ramirez Berg and Joann Hershfield of the University of Texas, John Koshel of Long Island University, and, especially, Richard Allen of New York University for his scrupulous chapter-by-chapter evaluation of the text and its historical method. I also want to thank Bill Lafferty of Wright State University and Hap Kindem of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill respectively for urging my consideration of "race movies" and Yiddish cinema as alternative modes of film practice; Sandy Flitterman-Lewis of Rutgers University for clarification of Germaine Dulac's crucial role in the development of French avant-garde impressionism; Hillel Tryster of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive for detailed information about Israeli cinema and early filmmaking in Palestine; and Forrest Ciesol of International Cinema Concepts, San Diego, for sharing with me his vast knowledge of Central Asian cinema, as well as for enabling me and my students to see key films from the region in beautiful 35mm prints. Similarly, I must thank the filmmakers from former Soviet Georgia—the directors Aleko Tsabadze and Gogi Chkonia, and the actress Nato Shengelaia—and from Norway—the directors Bente Erichsen, Ola Solum, and Lasse Glomm—who visited my classes with their work over the past few years, offering valuable insights into their unique national cinemas. Much of my research on the cinema of the former Soviet republics was funded by a 1991 Hewlett Visiting Fellowship in the Carter Center's International Media and Communications Program directed by Dr. Ellen Mickiewicz, currently director of the DeWitt Wallace Center for Communications and Journalism at Duke University. Special thanks are due to David Pratt and James Steffen, doctoral candidates in Emory's Film Studies Program who have worked tirelessly as my research assistants to prepare the new Selective Bibliography for this edition, and to Adrienne McLean, Ph.D., of the Film Studies Program for her help in preparing the Instructor's Manual. Finally, I want to thank my editor, Peter Simon at W. W. Norton & Company, whose skilled and expeditious collaboration on this project has made working on it a true delight. The publisher, in turn, gratefully acknowledges the valuable help of Nancy Palmquist, Margaret Farley, Diane O'Connor, Marian Johnson, David Sutter, Tara Parmiter, Ben Gamit, Regina Dahlgren-Ardini and Ann Tappert.

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 fifties 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 Supplementary Material

The endnotes for this volume are gathered in Part III of the Instructor's Manual. They are both documentary and substantative in nature, and instructors should note that some of the stills appearing in the latter chapters of the text are discussed therein.

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 the titles of films in languages other than English, those in French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and German are given in the original language, followed, in parentheses, by a literal English translation (and an alternate English-language release title, if one exists), 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 intially for the purpose of publicity, they sometimes "beautify" the shots they are intended to represent to the point of distortion. Frame enlargments, 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 fifties and most films of the sixties, seventies, eighties, and nineties 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, most of the stills in this volume have been reproduced in the 1.33:1 aspect ratio of the Academy frame.) Though 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: 10.30.

The British Film Institute: 17.11, 17.12, 17.13, 17.14, 17.15.

Forrest Ciesol of International Cinema Concepts: 17.30, 17.31, 17.32, 17.33, 17.34, 17.35, 17.36, 17.37, 17.38, 17.39, 17.40, 17.42, 17.43, 17.44, 17.45, 17.46, 17.47, 17.48, 17.49, 17.50, 17.53, 17.54, 17.56, 17.57, 17.64, 17.65, 17.66, 17.67, 17.68, 17.69, 17.70, 17.71, 17.74, 17.75.

Cinema 5: 15.121.

Cinemabilia: 10.24, 10.26.

Howard Cramer: 2.7.

The Library of Congress: 1.12, 1.13, 1.21(a), 2.1, 2.2.

New Line Cinema: 15.118, 15.119.

The New York Film Festival: 15.126.

New Yorker Films: 15.117, 15.124.

Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store: Insert illustrations for *The Adventures of Robin Hood; Gone With the Wind; Fantasia; Kismet; The Ten Commandments; Kwaidan; 2001: A Space Odyssey; The Wild Bunch; Fellini Satyricon; The Godfather; The Shining; Poltergeist.*

Superstock International, Inc.: Insert illustrations for *Meet Me in St. Louis; Black Narcissus; She Wore a Yellow Ribbon; Vertigo; Il conformista (The Conformist); Picnic at Hanging Rock.*

Unifilm: 19.2, 19.9, 19.22, 19.23, 19.29, 19.30, 19.31.

Photofest: Insert illustrations for *Queen Kelly; Toll of the Sea; Ran; Do the Right Thing; Dick Tracy; Terminator 2: Judgment Day; Bram Stoker's Dracula; Farewell, My Concubine.*

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NARRATIVE FILM

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