


A History Of Narrative Film

A stylized red graphic element runs across the top right, featuring a line with circular motifs at the corners. Another red line runs horizontally across the middle, with a circular motif containing four smaller circles. A thick red vertical bar with a film strip pattern is located on the bottom right.

DAVID A. COOK

SECOND EDITION

A HISTORY OF
NARRATIVE FILM
SECOND EDITION

David A. Cook
Emory University



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For my family,
for the journey

A HISTORY OF NARRATIVE FILM

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 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 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 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 reinstruct 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 Second Edition

The second edition of *A History of Narrative Film* is different from the first in several ways. It contains new material on virtually every period and cinema discussed in the first, not merely an updating of information and/or scholarship but a deemphasis of the so-called “masterpiece” model of film history that often plagues works such as this one. I still believe that art is created primarily by human beings, regardless of their instruments; but the weighing of all other factors serves to reemphasize the importance of the human, and several chapters have been rewritten in this light. There are completely new sections on science fiction; on the cinemas of Australia, New Zealand, India, China, the nations of Latin America, and Africa; and on the history of color technology, amplified by an eight-page color insert. There are also approximately three hundred new black-and-white stills to illustrate the new material, and, of course, all sections are expanded and updated at least through mid-1989. Where full coverage of a new national or regional cinema could not be achieved in the text—as in the cases of Belgium, the Scandinavian countries, Spain, the Philippines, Ireland, Scotland, East Germany, and the Netherlands—it is carried on through a system of footnotes.

The most extraordinary thing that has happened since the first edition of this book is the availability on video of nearly every title discussed in it, and this cannot be a bad thing. But we need to remind ourselves that film exists most essentially as the product of a photochemical process that video replicates but feebly and that can be tampered with—by colorizers and time-compressors, for example—quite cavalierly. Video is a wonderful tool for teaching and researching our filmic heritage, but we must never forget the critical importance of experiencing and preserving that heritage in a manner as close to its original form as possible.

Acknowledgments

The revision of this book for its second edition took place actively over a four-year period from 1985 to 1989, and I have incurred numerous intellectual debts in the process. Limits of time and space permit me to acknowledge only the most crucial among them. First, I want to thank the three evaluators of the first edition—Allan Casebier of the University of Southern California, Bruce Kawin of the University of Colorado, and Timothy Lyons of the University of Dayton. Their thoughtful comments resulted in what I believe to be significant improvements to the text. It happened that Kawin was at work simultaneously on his own book *How Movies Work* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), and he shared many valuable insights from that project with me. Equally generous with their expertise were Douglas Gomery of the University of Maryland, Steven P. Hill of the University of Illinois—Urbana, and Charles Musser, editor of the Edison Papers, all of whom read relevant sections of the new material in manuscript and offered numerous constructive suggestions. I should also like to thank my colleagues and students in the Department of Theater and Film Studies at Emory University for their continuing support, and Mr. Robert Troutman of Atlanta for providing us with access to his extraordinary collection of classic films on videocassette. Finally, I thank my editor, Carol Stiles Bemis at W. W. Norton & Company, for a broad range of collaborative efforts and skills throughout the process of putting the revised edition together.

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 Supplementary Material

The endnotes for this volume are gathered in Part III of the Instructor's Manual. They are both documentary and substantive 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 the Color Insert

For discussions of the films illustrated in this insert and their use of color, the reader should consult the appropriate pages of the Index.

Color is used variously in motion pictures including, for example, historical spectacle (*The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *Gone With the Wind*, *Henry V*, *The Ten Commandments*, *Il gattopardo* (*The Leopard*), *Dr. Zhivago*, and *Ludwig*); fantasy and romance (*The Wizard of Oz*, *Fantasia*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *Kismet*, *South Pacific*, and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*); historical realism (*She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, *The African Queen*, *Dr. Zhivago*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Wild Bunch*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, *The Godfather*, *The Godfather, Part II*, and *Heaven's Gate*); psychological and expressive realism (*Vertigo*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Belle de jour*, *Il conformista* (*The Conformist*), *Morte a Venezia* (*Death in Venice*), *The Passenger*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *My Life as a Dog*, and *Manhunter*); and exoticism, otherness, and horror (*Black Narcissus*, *Kwaidan*, *Fellini Satyricon*, *The Shining*, *Poltergeist*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, and *Legend*).

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. 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* [*A bout de souffle*, 1960]). 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 sometimes “beautify” the shots they are intended to represent to the point of distortion. Frame enlargements, on the other hand, are blown-up photographically from 16mm prints of the films themselves, so that they represent the actual images as composed and shot by the filmmakers. Their quality of reproduction is often lower than that of produc-

tion 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, and eighties were shot in some type of widescreen process, with aspect ratios varying from 255:1 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.

Cinema 5: 18.43.

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: 18.40, 18.41.

The New York Film Festival: 18.48.

New Yorker Films: 18.39, 18.46.

Jerry Ohlinger's Movie Material Store: Insert illustrations for *The Adventures of Robin Hood*; *Gone with the Wind*; *The Wizard of Oz*; *Fantasia*; *The African Queen*; *Kismet*; *The Ten Commandments*; *South Pacific*, *Il gattapardo* (*The Leopard*); *Kwaidan*; *Dr. Zhivago*; *Fahrenheit 451*; *2001: A Space Odyssey*; *The Wild Bunch*; *Fellini Satyricon*; *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*; *The Godfather*; *The Godfather, Part II*; *The Passenger*; *Days of Heaven*; *Heaven's Gate*; *The Shining*; *Poltergeist*; *The Year of Living Dangerously*; *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*; *Legend*; *My Life as a Dog*; *Manhunter*.

Superstock International, Inc.: Insert illustrations for *Meet Me in St. Louis*; *Henry V*; *Black Narcissus*; *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*; *Vertigo*; *Belle de jour*; *Il conformista* (*The Conformist*); *Morte a Venezia* (*Death in Venice*); *Ludwig*; *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

Unifilm: 18.1, 18.4, 18.5, 18.15, 18.16, 18.21, 18.22, 18.23

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