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Tom Gunning

Circulation and Transformation of Cinema; or, *Did the French Invent the American Cinema?*

Circulating the Cinema: International Distribution

As an art of moving images, cinema depends on circulation, movement. This is both literal—even mechanical, as the filmstrip moves through camera first and then the projector—and metaphorical. Films transport us as viewers; they take us through space and time virtually. But circulation in cinema has another literal dimension: the movement of actual films from place to place and across borders—the branch of the film industry known as distribution, as essential to it as production and exhibition, even if generally less evident to the moviegoer. During the nineteenth century, national and even global transportation and circulation of what had once been local commodities became technologically possible. As canning and eventually refrigeration allowed distant transportation of perishable foodstuffs, modern technology also transformed the circulation of popular entertainment.

Entertainers had always traveled; their wandering nature defined their identities as exotic beings outside the routines of settled living. But in the late nineteenth century, the circulation of popular entertainment became rationalized and integrated with modern technology such as the railway. Under P. T. Barnum and his post–Civil War rivals such as the Ringling brothers, the circus became a model of efficient and rapid transportation with huge tents, equipment, animals, and entertainers moving along strictly calculated routes.¹ Even the massive,

Adrien Barrère, “À la conquête du monde” (detail, see fig. 1).



industrially manufactured panoramas popular at the time were designed to be rolled up and transported across land by rail (or across oceans by steamer). Vaudeville shows became organized in “wheels” of rail-connected theaters, while “roadshows” of Broadway hits complete with casts and sets traveled between major cities.² But the cinema truly revolutionized circulating entertainment, by providing a program that could be packaged and shipped with remarkable ease. Films were referred to as “canned vaudeville,” which highlighted not only the way film “preserved” performances but also the ease of their circulation. While the circus and the panorama gained massive audiences through their new systems of circulation, mechanical reproduction allowed the cinema to become a new form of mass entertainment.

As the twentieth century progressed, cinema served as the exemplar, whether for praise or blame, of modern machine art. Cinema not only was produced and exhibited by machines (the camera, the projector), but was itself a mass-produced object (reels of film) that embodied mechanical reproduction’s most revolutionary aspects. Universal circulation, a new sort of transcendental homelessness, seemed to beset cinema, even as it strove for national identity by producing national historical epics (e.g., *The Birth of a Nation*, 1915; *Napoleon*, 1929). Hollywood became less a southern California location than an international brand of entertainment, crossing borders as few previous art forms could have. Just as national magazines could present the same issue across the nation, the cinema as an art of mechanical reproduction allowed the same exact show to be shown across the nation or around the world. Cinema emerged as an art whose nature was partly determined by its possibilities of circulation. From its origins, cinema distribution was conceived of as global. This world vision began primarily in France.

The Movies Come from . . . France

The idea that the cinema came from France contradicts the way we usually think about the movies. In 1937, Gilbert Seldes, former editor of the modernist journal *The Dial* and one of the first American critics to take the popular (or as he called them, “the lively”) arts — movies, comic strips, vaudeville, and especially jazz — seriously, published a book entitled *The Movies Come from America*.³ Seldes was stating what was an acknowledged fact in 1937: movies came from Hollywood and then circled the globe, especially its urban centers. In the thirties, not only were Hollywood films seen in Delhi, Tokyo, Shanghai,

Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Berlin, and Paris, but the fashions, music, lifestyles, and even jokes seen in the movies affected urban culture around the world, resulting in what Miriam Hansen has described as a “vernacular modernism,” a new view of modern life as seen on the screen.⁴ Further, the plots and situations from Hollywood films were absorbed and transformed by indigenous filmmakers from China to India to Japan and Mexico in films that were less remakes than cannibalizations of Hollywood topoi. The movies may have come from America, but they were watched and reinterpreted around the world.

However, if Seldes had been writing three decades earlier, say in 1907, about ten years after the apparatus of cinema was launched on its global career (by 1896 films were projected in nearly every international urban center, including all those mentioned above), his study would have been titled *The Cinema Comes from France*. This claim does not rest simply on invention. France has consistently claimed that local heroes Louis Lumière (1864–1948) and Auguste Lumière (1862–1954) “invented” cinema, and certainly their apparatus, the Cinématographe, gave the new medium one of its most enduring names. But the national provenance of inventions is always disputed. The United States promotes Thomas Edison and Francis Jenkins as “inventors” of cinema; Germany, the Skladnowsky brothers; and Great Britain, William Friese-Greene and (more credibly) French immigrant Louis Le Prince. The Lumières’ claim to preeminence makes sense especially in terms of projected motion pictures and reliable performance (Edison’s initial motion-picture invention, the Kinetoscope, was a peep show device limited to a single viewer at a time). As a product of a major international photographic supply company, the Lumières’ new invention had a major impact in Europe.

Unlike the other pioneers, the Lumières almost immediately conceived of their invention in global terms. Although the first films produced by the Lyon-based Lumière Company were essentially local views of its hometown (workers leaving the Lumière factory, the arrival of a train at a local station, people milling about town squares, a family breakfast in the garden of Auguste Lumière), by 1896 the company launched a worldwide strategy. Lumière cameramen crisscrossed the globe projecting films and filming new ones in Mexico, Indo-China, Egypt, the United States, England, Sweden, and Japan, among other countries. The Lumière Company set a pattern for early cinema by defining the attraction of the new medium as not only capturing motion but transporting viewers around the world. The

A LA CONQUÊTE DU MONDE

scène vécue
PAR

PATHÉ FRÈRES

1894-19...



Souvenir de l' "OMNIA-PATHÉ"

5. Boulevard Montmartre

ETAB^{TS} ROBERT & C^{IE}. PARIS

A. Barère

modern identity of cinema depended on this ease of circulation. The Lumière Cinématographe had a premiere in New York and across the United States in 1896, and it was generally greeted as one of the finest new motion-picture devices, although it had competitors in the Vitascope and some months later the Biograph.⁵ Despite the positive reception of the Cinématographe on its premiere in the United States, American cinema interests headed by Edison managed to curtail its American career. This was the first foray in a battle that would last over the next two decades as American film companies strove to keep the French producers out of the United States. Initially the Americans failed.

If the Lumière Company did not manage to dominate the public projections of motion pictures in the United States, the near colonization of America's cinemas by the French was achieved—at least for a while—by the French film company Pathé Frères. The Lumière Cinématographe was received very favorably in 1896, but left no lasting impact. Some years later the popularity of the trick films of Georges Méliès (1861–1938), especially *The Trip to the Moon* from 1902, deeply impressed the entrepreneurs of American vaudeville theaters. American film production companies not only imitated Méliès's films (as in Edwin Porter's *Jack and the Beanstalk* [1902] for the Edison Company)⁶ but also rushed to dupe their own copies of the French films, which they often sold as their own productions in this era before films had established copyright. By 1903, the Lumière Company had abandoned film production, and Méliès's Star Film Company remained stuck with an artisan mode of production in which almost all tasks were under the control of the company head, Georges Méliès. It was Charles Pathé (1863–1957) who, in the words of André Gaudreault, “institutionalized” the cinema by industrializing film production.⁷ The Pathé studio from 1905 on instituted a program of maximum efficiency in production with multiple directors filming individual films simultaneously, greatly increasing output. Further, the market Pathé envisioned was global rather than national with branch offices across the globe and subsidiary production companies in several countries. Although a global conception of the cinema had existed from the Lumières on, Pathé was in a position to actually make it work as a modern model of circulation.

As Richard Abel's meticulous research has shown, Pathé Frères had a fundamental influence on the emerging American film industry. While the major players in American film production, the Edison Company and the Biograph Company, were mired in a patent war

1
Adrien Barrère,
illustrator, “À la
conquête du monde,”
satirical drawing,
1906. Poster. Collection
Julien Anton.

over their rival apparatuses, Pathé released a great number of films to American exhibitors and the independent film exchanges that handled national distribution. While the American system of production remained underdeveloped, the popularity of the movies with an expanding audience stimulated the growth of both film theaters and independent exchanges that distributed films. These factions of the industry (rather than the producers) led the way to the emergence of movies as a form of mass entertainment, an event known as the “nickelodeon boom.” Movie theaters sprang up by the hundreds and exchanges could deliver product nationwide, but where were the films coming from? As Abel demonstrates in his book *The Red Rooster Scare* (1999), it was the output of Pathé, films imported from France, that fueled and enabled the American nickelodeon boom of 1904–1908.⁸

The nickelodeon boom was almost more important to the history of American cinema than the “invention” of cinema ten years earlier. From 1896 to about 1904, movies played primarily in vaudeville houses to middle-class audiences along with a bill of live acts. By the early twentieth century, film had almost worn out its popularity as a technological novelty or living newspaper presenting current events. The nickelodeon boom redefined film as something more than a vaudeville act or source of news and sought a broader audience than vaudeville patrons. The movies were born. The proliferation of cheap movie theaters (admission one nickel, hence the name “nickelodeon”) that primarily showed films rather than live acts defined film as a form of mass entertainment that initially appealed to working-class patrons and eventually was embraced by all classes. Further, during this period the main attraction of cinema moved from actualities and technical novelties to the story film. The nickelodeon boom was literally an explosion, unanticipated by most film manufacturers, as first hundreds and then thousands of nickel theaters popped up in American cities and small towns. They attracted a new audience paying cheap prices who gathered informally to catch a show. City officials and “guardians of culture” were often alarmed at this primarily proletarian audience, including recent immigrants, women, and children, without benefit of tradition and apparently without supervision. These thousands of new movie theaters, which tended to change bills several times a week, demanded large quantities of films, which the laggard American producers could not supply.

Pathé filled this vacuum as the industrially organized studio was uniquely positioned to supply a volume of films American producers could not dream of offering. As Abel has shown, up till 1907 Edison

and Biograph were only producing about two films a week, while Pathé could offer eight to twelve new films every week.⁹ Therefore, from about 1905 to 1908, American nickelodeons primarily showed French films produced by Pathé (although Pathé's chief French competitor, Gaumont, also contributed to the nickelodeon programs of the United States). Pathé had realized early on the key role the United States would play within its global strategy. The enormous US population (85.5 million in 1906, more than twice the population of France the same year) and its high standard of living marked the United States as the most promising of markets. Pathé had opened a business office in New York in 1904, and then another in Chicago (the center of the film exchanges). In 1909, it opened a plant in New Jersey for manufacturing prints, cutting the expense of importing each individual print from France.

Pathé was known for quality as well as quantity. Its trademark, the red rooster, became to American audiences synonymous with the best in cinema. What did quality mean in this era before film stars or auteurs? Clarity of photography and detailed sets were often cited. But, as Abel stresses, Pathé's use of color gave it a competitive edge against American films.¹⁰ Pathé used a variety of techniques, including tinting and toning, to make its films colorful, but its stenciled multicolored process was probably the most outstanding. Its fairy-tale films, filled with cinema tricks and bright colors, were immensely popular in the United States. Pathé's mastery of narrative techniques (the studio was a pioneer in the use of both parallel editing and close-ups) allowed it to lead the way in the newly popular story films. The three or four years of French dominance of American screens may not seem long-lasting, but these few years represented perhaps the greatest transformation of American cinema.

A conscious industrial nationalism followed by the global cataclysm of World War I reversed French dominance of American theaters. American film producers were slow to respond to the nickelodeon boom, but by 1907 they realized that their internecine fighting had to be resolved. American producers, especially Edison and Biograph, had two goals after they realized that the nickelodeon boom had caught them off guard: First, they wanted to assert dominance over the other factions of the film industry, including the nickelodeons and the film exchanges (which had gained control over distribution). Secondly, they wanted to limit the share foreign films (read French) had taken of American screens. From 1907 through 1908, the leading producers jockeyed for prominence, threatening legal actions with their various patents. They realized that only a policy of combination and patent pooling could give

them the leverage they desired over the industry and foreign rivals. Their efforts culminated in the late 1908 announcement of the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC), which subordinated all the major US production companies to a licensing agreement that recognized the preeminence of the patents of Edison and Biograph. Pathé was admitted to this organization after a great deal of negotiation.¹¹ The MPPC brought order to the American film industry, establishing regular release dates for films sufficient to supply the voracious nickelodeons. American producers, including Edison and Biograph, committed to increasing both the quality and quantity of their production (it was often noted that Biograph and its new director D. W. Griffith had begun following Pathé's lead in terms of acting and narrative clarity). Although Pathé found a secure place within the new organization and remained a major supplier of films, the new release schedule actually reduced the number of films it placed on the American market. The reign of Pathé over American nickelodeons was ended.

Economic collusion (the MPPC was broken up by US antitrust laws in 1914) primarily dethroned the Pathé cock in the United States. But, as Abel has detailed, economic organization was accompanied by an ideological campaign, sowing suspicion of "foreign" films while calling for a virile, healthy, and clean American cinema.¹² Whereas French provenance had previously carried connotations of refinement and culture, American cinema trade journals now associated France with decadence and loose morals. The MPPC had vowed to clean up American films, to make them suitable for middle-class tastes, and to shed the carnival trappings the cinema had previously displayed. Calls for censorship were met by a board of censorship adopted by the MPPC, which criticized certain Pathé films for their Grand Guignol gruesomeness and piquant portrayal of situations of adultery. Whether Pathé films were any more obscene or suggestive than other films could be debated, but moral outrage merged into a jingoistic call for "American subjects." As Abel has shown, American filmmakers responded by increasing production of action-dominated films of national subjects, especially westerns.

Pathé opted to join rather than defy its American competitors, not only by becoming part of the MPPC and accepting its restrictions, but by trying to adapt to the newly nationalistic American market. Pathé had already established production subsidiaries in a number of European countries (Spain, Italy, Russia), and in 1910 it opened a studio in the United States specifically to produce films with an

American flavor and targeted at native audiences but likely to have worldwide popularity (westerns soon showed international appeal and paved the way for increased exports of American film throughout the world). The first Pathé American production was, not surprisingly, a western, *The Girl from Arizona* (1910). Pathé hired James Young Deer a Native American actor and director to produce western films, and in 1911 the company established a studio in California, following the migration west of other American production companies, partly motivated by the search for authentic western landscapes.

By 1913, the landscape of American cinema had been transformed. Storefront nickelodeons gave way to purpose-built neighborhood theaters, while downtown shopping areas saw the creation of picture palaces with elaborate façades, comfortable seating, and uniformed attendants. The variety-based nickelodeon program of a number of one-reel (fifteen-minute) films of differing genres was replaced by an evening's entertainment dominated by a feature film sometimes lasting two hours or more. Stars, like Mary Pickford, replaced the trademark of studios (such as Pathé's cock) as the guarantee of quality and the focus of audience desire. The MPPC broke apart and ceded prominence to the "independent" studios that became Universal and Paramount. From the entertainment of the working class, movies became the pastime of all classes, and middle-class standards of taste and comfort became the norm.¹³ Pathé continued to have a presence in American theaters, but mainly for its American productions and stars, such as the 1914 serial drama *The Perils of Pauline* starring Pearl White and its popular newsreel (which continued to show the Pathé rooster crowing on American screens until the 1950s, although the Pathé Film Exchange was bought by Americans in 1921). Imported French film became specialized fare shown in urban art theaters in the 1920s and never regained the broad popularity it once, if briefly, held.

If the international and especially the American market for Pathé films had shrunk by 1913, the outburst of World War I in 1914 seriously curtailed the export of French films to the United States. Soon the war stalled film production in France. Since the United States did not enter the war until 1917, this period allowed the newly transformed American film industry to cohere and consolidate. The stability of the business, the elimination of foreign competition, and the formulation of feature-length American genres and stars not only guaranteed the domestic market but poised American cinema to launch a project of American hegemony over movie theaters worldwide. After World War I, the movies did indeed "come from America."¹⁴

Recoil and Redefinition: Another Phase of Circulation

Pathé instituted a basic transformation not only in French film distribution and export but also in film production after World War I. Unlike his early rival Georges Méliès, whose filmmaking career had ended by World War I (following a brief stint working for Pathé), Charles Pathé was less a filmmaker than a businessman. It became clear to him, as the 1920s approached, that the money in filmmaking was more likely to come from film distribution and exhibition than the production of films for a restricted domestic market instead of an expanding global one. In 1918, Pathé Frères announced that it would no longer produce films but would serve exclusively as a film distributor and exhibitor, especially of the newly popular films imported from the United States.¹⁵

French film production no longer dominated worldwide distribution. But here the focus of my essay shifts from economic circulation to the circuit of ideas. In this area, French film culture after World War I truly comes into its own, and I would claim (admittedly retrospectively) that this culture inaugurated not only a new serious understanding of the nature of cinema but also a definition of American cinema. At the same time, and emerging out of the same culture of serious discussion of film, a small group of French filmmakers, known now as the “Impressionists” and including Louis Delluc (1890–1824), Germaine Dulac (1882–1942), Marcel L’Herbier (1888–1979), Jean Epstein (1897–1953), and René Clair (1898–1981), fashioned an alternative film culture based in pursuing artistic goals more than commercial success. Together and in a dialogue between critics and filmmakers (most of these figures both wrote criticism and made films), this group undertook to define cinema as an area of aesthetic practice equal to, and different from, the other arts. Critical discussions in new film journals that were more than trade publications or fan magazines and lectures in the newly formed noncommercial ciné-clubs approached cinema as a new modern art form.¹⁶ But if these discussions were aesthetic rather than economic, they nonetheless depended on and articulated the international circulation of films, offering a uniquely French reception of American movies

Of course film remained primarily a commercial business and even the work of these avant-garde filmmakers existed within the orbit of commercial filmmaking. All of them made films that were in some degree commercial, and of course their output constituted a small proportion of French filmmaking in the twenties. But I am claiming that this film culture represented a form of the circulation of film

based in critical reception and discourse. After World War I, France moved from an exporter of films to the United States to an importer of American movies, but its reception of American cinema was far from passive. The film culture that emerged in France not only viewed American cinema but redefined it discursively. The movies may have come from America, but France (re)defined them. Although the full American reception of French film culture was probably accomplished with the rise of film studies in the 1970s, already by the twenties French critics discussed American films with a seriousness surpassing their reception in their native land. The French were fascinated, attracted, and occasionally a bit repelled by the American cinema. They undertook discussing and finally defining what the American cinema was. It is in this sense that we could claim (with conscious irony) that France invented “the American cinema.”

In contrast to the in-depth research by early cinema scholars, especially the redoubtable Richard Abel, that formed the basis of the first section of this essay, this section remains a bit speculative and launches a thesis rather than summarizing a history. The influence of French critics and theorists on film studies is well known, and the impact of French criticism on the understanding of American cinema has long been recognized. But its history remains to be thoroughly researched and written. I restrict myself here to the founding moment of this history, following directly on the worldwide expansion of American movies.

One could focus this discussion on the French reception of Charlie Chaplin (1889–1977), a love affair that was enthusiastic to the point of mania and lasted as long as Chaplin’s career (see the wonderful later essays André Bazin devoted to Chaplin in the 1950s embracing not only the most famous silent film but his later films, such as *Monsieur Verdoux* [1947] and *Limelight* [1952]).¹⁷ But Chaplin, with his British roots and his final exile from a red-baiting America, seems to float above nationalism and become the closest thing cinema has produced to a truly international or transnational filmmaker. Further, enthusiasm for Chaplin was an international phenomenon from Europe to Asia, even if the French probably articulated it better than any other nation.¹⁸ But Chaplin was less appreciated by the figures of French film culture than he was adopted and absorbed by them, as his rebaptism as the Gallic “Charlot” indicates. But the figures of post-World War I film culture also discovered and celebrated the American cinema qua American and contrasted it to the (as they saw it) old-fashioned and unimaginative French cinema.

Even as perceptive a historian as Richard Abel has defined this alternative French film culture of the post-World War I era in opposition to Hollywood—following a sort of critical reflex of the post-1970s film study in which the avant-garde was understood more as a critical conception than a historical phenomenon.¹⁹ Certainly the filmmaking of the Impressionist directors opposed key aspects of modes of film production that have become associated with what film historians David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger have defined as the “classical Hollywood cinema”: studio production, narrative structure determining film style, and the central role of the star. One could also claim that the Impressionist films with their emphasis on poetic imagery; loose, elliptical, and even ambiguous narrative structures; and embrace of visual abstraction were the opposite of the action-driven Hollywood narratives based in clearly volitional and well-defined characters with narrative resolution and closure.²⁰

But the French reception of the American cinema beginning after World War I poses a paradox in need of decoding. Rather than scorning Hollywood, proponents of this alternative cinema culture often looked to the fast-paced, action-oriented, genre-driven American movies as a model for what modern cinema could accomplish, beginning with their admiration of Cecil B. DeMille’s 1915 film *The Cheat*. This early French film culture understood American cinema in a very different way from the imperialist, highly capitalized, narrative-driven leviathan that was constructed by film studies in the seventies. I am not claiming that this interpretation of American cinema is more historically accurate. Indeed, accuracy is not the issue here. Rather the French film culture after World War I selectively reconfigured American cinema and highlighted those aspects it found new and exciting and useful for fashioning a new sense of cinematic possibilities. This involved seeing America as a unique modern culture that possessed an energy that could unmoor the static traditions and devotion to the traditional arts of theater and literature that the French avant-garde felt had ossified their native cinema. This enthusiasm for American movies can be seen as an aspect of the “Americanism” evident in much of the European avant-garde of the 1920s, perhaps most vividly in the embrace of American jazz and dance.

I am dealing with an international phenomenon that embraced many aspects of American culture, especially the lively arts, celebrated by Gilbert Seldes, of jazz, comic strips, slapstick comedy, and vaudeville. Film historian Yuri Tsivian has written brilliantly on what was called “Americanitis”—an obsessive fascination with things American—

in relation to early Soviet culture, and far from shying away from its contradictions, he addresses them head-on in a manner that helps me resolve the paradox of the importance of American cinema for early French alternative cinema culture.²¹ It perhaps seems even more paradoxical that Hollywood cinema provided a model for a socialist revolutionary cinema. Although post-World War I modernism has many facets, admiration for the machine remains central to it. The machine functioned for modernist aesthetics as the nude had in post-Renaissance painting, providing not only an image of beauty and a model of visual form but also a guide to artistic practice. As opposed to the organic unity and sense of luminous surface that the nude provided, the machine represented form as an assemblage of separate elements joined by a functional logic.

In the Soviet Union, the machine carried multiple significances: an emblem of reason, an actual tool of industrial development and progress, the companion of productive proletariats rather than luxury-seeking bourgeois. The cinema was a machine-art directed at the masses, a scientific-based medium capable of instructing its audience, all of which made Lenin proclaim it the most important of the arts for the new socialist state.²² The ideology of the new Soviet cinema may be directly opposed to that of Hollywood, but Hollywood (like the other American industries from which the Soviet Union sought advisers and models) also showed a knowledge of this machine art that was radically different from that of traditional arts. The American cinema embraced industrial processes as opposed to the European cinema (read French), which had tried to adapt cinema to the practices of theater. Compared to French films, not to mention prerevolutionary Russian films, American films aggressively placed the camera closer to its subjects and cut from place to place and scene to scene quickly, building a sense of intensity and tempo through editing. The young Soviet filmmakers embraced these radical aspects of the American cinema.²³ Therefore the early Hollywood cinema performed for the Soviets one of the essential roles of the avant-garde: destroying previous norms and traditions borrowed from the older arts. Tsivian accents, as other historians have, two particular aspects of fragmentation in American cinema: closer framing (the close-up being its most radical form) and rapid cutting (editing, which the French and Russians called “montage”).

Hollywood cinema employs these techniques of fragmentation and tempo at the service of the story. This is the mantra not only of Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger, but also of the Hollywood industry

itself. Fragmentation becomes subordinated to a purpose, constructing a narrative that makes these elements cohere. This subordination of editing and framing to a consistency of narrative space and time and cause and effect has been christened the continuity system. While I feel that its absolute rule over all periods and genres of American cinema can be questioned, its general dominance cannot be denied. Tsivian sees the legacy of American movies to the Soviet cinema as split: the Soviets took the meat but not necessarily the potatoes. As Tsivian puts it, "It may sound paradoxical, but the montage theory in the Soviet sense descends directly from the Hollywood continuity techniques minus the very thing it served: the fluent and unobtrusive rendering of the film story."²⁴

I cannot agree more wholeheartedly with Tsivian's analysis or applaud more heartily his research and argument. However, I want to stress two modifications, perhaps implicit in his account, but perhaps not. The first is that the Hollywood calculation of the way elements of fragmentation serve to drive the story seems to me very consistent with the admiration the Soviets had for rational construction. The continuity system understood as the coordination of disparate elements corresponds to a mechanical model of the Constructivist sort. The purpose-driven use of fragmentation, while problematic for the Formalist critics that Tsivian quotes who celebrated an awareness of form for its own sake, was very acceptable to the later Soviet Constructivists who applied Formalist techniques for the purpose of integrating art into the new Soviet state. My other modification has to do with claiming that the function of cinematic technique in "classical Hollywood cinema" lies primarily in narrative clarity, in other words, serving a cognitive process. This role cannot be denied, but the close-up was never only a means of clarification; it served as an intensification of emotional affect, as much as it served narrative efficiency. The Soviets learned from American movies, as Eisenstein makes especially clear, the means to affect the viewer, to control and direct his or her emotions. Lev Kuleshov, praising American cinema in his 1922 essay "Americanitis," declared, "The public especially 'feels' American films."²⁵ Of course in contrast to the petty bourgeois emotions that the American cinema seemed to aim at, Soviet cinema evoked horror, anger, and sympathy in order to foster a revolutionary consciousness.

Viewing the reception of American silent film by French critics and filmmakers as a part of the dynamic of cinema's international circulation, I hope to stress its transformative nature, its role in (re)defining American cinema. There are numerous differences between the Soviet reception of Hollywood film in the era after the Bolshevik revolution

and the French situation after World War I, but the similarities in the use made of American movies are also striking. Politics plays a less essential role in the alternative film culture the French intellectuals were fashioning, and an interest in a scientifically rational and efficient Constructivist form of cinema was not as important. But I would claim that two essential aspects of a transformative reception were common to the Soviet and French receptions of American movies: the sense that the new very modern pace and fragmentation of the American cinema would help cinema overcome its ties to theater; and the decoupling of the formal devices of closer framing and rapid editing from strictly expository or narratively driven tasks. I explore both of these in the French context but also indicate some aspects that give this remediation of American cinema a uniquely French accent.

The Critic's Role in Circulation

Let me begin with Louis Delluc, the critic who in his writings introduced in the late 1910s many of the principles of the alternative French film culture, including its key word *photogénie*. Delluc was also a pioneer in setting up *ciné-clubs*, noncommercial sites where films were shown and accompanied by discussions and lectures, which not only supplied alternative exhibition sites but embedded cinema in serious discourse. Editor from 1917 on of the film magazine *Le Film* and later of other film journals and author of a regular film column in *Paris-Midi*, Delluc became the major voice defining the new art of cinema in France, arguing for a very particular view of what cinema was and should be. He was particularly excited by the beauty of natural landscapes in cinema and praised along with American westerns the new Swedish films of Victor Sjöström and Maurice Stiller. He saw the movie star as a cinematic physiognomy as much as a personality. These two highly visual mappings, the landscape and the face, reveal what the somewhat vague term *photogénie* meant to Delluc. *Photogénie* referred not only to photography's ability to capture the world and its objects through a technological process but to the unexpected aspects of beauty that photography revealed. Often briefly defined as the qualities that the photographic process brings to the world, *photogénie* was not simply a theory of distortion or stylization (such as the Russian Formalists offered) but rather a claim, almost mystical, that a deeper layer of reality became visible through photography. *Photogénie* offered an essentially modern beauty, the product of a mechanical process, but also the product of a new experience of instantaneity that photography introduced, profoundly related to what Baudelaire half

a century earlier had described as the smack of the instant of modernity.²⁶ Delluc, like Baudelaire, saw this as a somewhat paradoxical “impression of evanescent eternal beauty,” precisely the “beauty of the passing moment.”²⁷ Later French theorists, especially Jean Epstein, would extend and expand the concept of *photogénie*, especially the dimensions opened up by movement, seeing it as a source of the magical animism of the film image, as the primitive and the modern blended in the visual fascination cinema could offer.

For Delluc, American cinema offered a vivid demonstration of these cinematic qualities. He became, as Abel puts it, “the leading French advocate of American film.”²⁸ Delluc dubbed Hollywood “the factory of American beauty.”²⁹ The American movie star had a quality not found in the actors of French cinema who came primarily from theater. Delluc articulated the French fascination with three American stars in particular: Chaplin, Sessue Hayakawa (1889–1973), and William S. Hart (1864–1946). In a discussion of Hayakawa, Delluc stressed that when he praised the movie star he was not talking about “talent” (presumably the quality of the traditional theatrical actor), but rather referred to his “face as a poetic work.” Chaplin, likewise for Delluc, went “beyond the actor’s art.”³⁰ William S. Hart, the cowboy actor known in France as “Rio Jim,” was for Delluc the “tragedian of the cinema . . . the synthesis of that plastic beauty which marks the schematic and almost stylized Far West.”³¹ The faces of these movie stars were “forces of nature,” beyond the traditional theatrical values of artifice or talent. Delluc claimed, “The true dramatic film was born one day when someone realized that the translation of theater actors and their telegraphic gestures to the screen had to give way to nature.” By “nature,” Delluc did not mean “naturalism,” a more realistic style of acting, but rather an intense shift in focus from the actor to the surrounding world: “Vegetation or everyday objects, exteriors or interiors, physical details, anything material, in the end, offers a new dimension to the dramatic theme.”³² These domains of nature and physiognomy are not simply conveyed by the cinema: they become revealed through *photogénie*, as surely as a microscope or telescope reveals new worlds of scale. Cinema provided a new art form, based in a modern technological vision of the natural world.

“It is to the Americans that we owe this miracle,” Delluc announced, referring to cinema’s revelation of the drama of material nature. “In their Far West films . . . they got us interested as much in the cowboy’s horse as in the cowboy himself.”³³ Perhaps the essence of the American cinema as the French discovered and celebrated it after the First

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William S. Hart in
Two-Gun Bill pose,
ca. 1920. Photograph.
William S. Hart
Collection, Los Angeles
County Museum
of Natural History,
P-75-H-3509.



World War lies in William S. Hart's genre, the western. Ironically, the production of westerns by American production companies in the early 1910s had served to establish a nativist cinema and thus aided in wresting the American movie audience from French films. As mentioned above, Pathé opened its American studio in 1910 partly to produce authentic-seeming westerns. Now with the battle over and the American audience lost, the western became perhaps the most popular American genre internationally. In the post-World War I reception of the American cinema, the French appreciation of the western as both quintessentially cinematic and American offered a bold interpretation of the genre.

As I hope is clear to anyone who knows later French reception of American cinema, this earlier reception established patterns that would endure for decades. The French love for, and especially their understanding of, the western extends beyond Louis Delluc and his generation, at least until the seventies, as writings by André Bazin, Jean-Luc Godard, Raymond Bellour, and others testify.³⁴ But the western played a specific role in the early French reception of American cinema. It embodied that modern synthesis of nature (the landscapes of the Far West) and technology (the cinema itself, but also the drama of the railway and the six-shooter) that so attracted this earlier generation to film. The Wild West provided an energy that early French cinephiles hoped would inoculate the cinema against the ossifying effects of the older arts. For instance, Blaise Cendrars (1887–1961), an early devotee to the modern possibilities of the cinema, collaborator with director Abel Gance (1881–1981), and major figure in modernist poetry, bitterly denounced the 1920 import from Germany *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, claiming it was “not cinema”: “It is theatrical. . . . All effects are obtained with the help of means belonging to painting, music, literature, etc. Nowhere does one see the camera.” Expressing his judgment against such artistic hybridity, he proclaimed in a parenthesis as a healthy alternative, “Long live cowboys!”³⁵

The western embodied the freshness and openness, the tempo and action that the French avant-garde celebrated in American films. Delluc often referred to the major effect of American cinema as “santé” (health), declaring, “The children who shout with joy or blush deliciously watching the harmonious and adventurous health of Douglas Fairbanks are not wasting their time.”³⁶ Delluc claimed that the western seemed to renew (and presumably replace) the traditional art of tragedy. He described Rio Jim “as simple as Orestes, he moves through an eternal tragedy free of psychological snare.” He felt the

same way about Hart's leading ladies: "Doesn't the terrible bitch played by Louise Glaum possess the fatal splendor of Clytemnestra? Doesn't Bessie Love evoke the chaste, savage energy of Electra?"³⁷ Delluc was fascinated by the French title for one of Hart's westerns, *The Man from Nowhere* (1915) (he later reformulated it for one of the films he directed, which he titled *The Woman from Nowhere* [1922]). His description of Rio Jim not only succinctly describes the western hero from Hart to Clint Eastwood but conveys a particularly French grasp of the genre (existential avant la lettre): "We never know where Rio Jim comes from. He just passes through. He crosses the West—and the West is so huge. He arrives on horseback. He leaps down onto the ground where other men live. Generally the time that he remains there is devoted to suffering, that is, loving. When his forehead has been ravaged enough, his fingers tortured, and all his cigarettes crushed out, he refuses to continue to suffer on earth or in an enclosed room—he mounts his horse again, and that done, disappears."³⁸ But the western as exemplar of American cinema went beyond the mythic and archetypal qualities of its hero and action; its cinematic quality lay in its setting: "All that *photogénie* is so satisfying. Gray plains void of obstacles, high mountains shining like white screens, horses and men full of animal vitality and the ready intensity of a simple life that affords rhythm, dimension, beauty, and provides a burst of incomparable humanity to the simplest feelings—love, duty, vengeance—which loom there."³⁹ I know of no American writing on the western this early (Delluc's review of *The Cold Deck* appeared in 1919, and his essay comparing Rio Jim to Orestes comes from 1921) that so deeply grasps the unique nature of this American genre.

The seriousness with which the western was taken by Delluc and others marks one of the extraordinary aspects of the circuit between French cineasts and the American films: an ability to take the most popular American movies seriously. Delluc's comparison of westerns to Greek tragedy would have many offspring; in the United States such similes often smack of irony, but the French indicate thereby a profound respect for the genre. Invoking Greek tragedy or the epic tradition (as when Delluc compared Hart to "Hector, Achilles, Orestes, Renaud or Roland")⁴⁰ does not simply provide the western with a cultural pedigree but rediscovers through this comparison the primitive energies of Greek ritual and fatality. I would go so far as to claim, that, as in the case Edgar Allan Poe's reception by Baudelaire, the French ultimately taught Americans what was valuable about their own cinema.

A French Tradition: American Subjects

As influential as Delluc was, his views of American cinema were by no means unique among this post-World War I group of French cinephiles. The great art historian Élie Faure (1873–1937) in his important essay “The Art of Cineplastics” from 1923 declared: “The French film is only a bastard form of a degenerate theater and seems for that reason to be destined to poverty and death if it does not take a new turn. The American film, on the other hand, is a new art, full of immense perspective, full of promise of a great future. . . . For the Americans are primitive and at the same time barbarous, which accounts for the strength and vitality which they infuse into the cinema.” This vitality manifested itself in an intuitive visual quality, the cinematic dynamics Faure named “cineplastics”: “The interpenetration, the crossing, and the association of movements and cadences already give us the impression that even the most mediocre films unroll in musical space.”⁴¹ The American cinema for Delluc and Faure used dramatic action to create a new art of space, time, and rhythm, delivering a powerful visual effect directly to the viewer.

Hollywood’s classical continuity signified for certain French avant-garde critics and filmmakers a specific cinematic modernity rather than a conservative classicism. This does not mean that they entirely ignored those aspects of the American cinema that could be associated with a sort of classicism: a clarity of image, a vectorization of editing in terms of action, an address focused on the emotions and physical sensations of the viewer. Indeed these formal elements often occurred in violent narratives set within a natural landscape of barren hostility that recalled for them the stark fatality of Greek tragedy. But this classical reference evoked for these critics an archaic and Dionysian primitive energy, not simply a rule-bound model of harmony and repose. American cinema offered a dynamic, if sometimes contradictory, model of cinema to these filmmakers and critics: simultaneously primitive, classical, and modern.

But as the twenties progressed, this paradoxical and dynamic model resolved itself into separate aspects. A consciously experimental filmmaker and theorist such as Jean Epstein clearly articulated the move that Tsivian attributes to the Soviets: separating the formal aspects of the American cinema from their narrative purposes. Epstein began the section of his 1921 book *Bonjour cinéma* (which was illustrated with images of Hayakawa, Fairbanks, Chaplin, and other American stars) entitled “Magnification” with these words: “I will never find a way to say how much I love American close-ups. Point

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Illustration by Claude Dalbanne, from Jean Epstein, *Bonjour cinéma* (Paris: Éditions de la Sirène, 1921), n.p. Cinémathèque française, Paris.



blank. A head suddenly appears on screen and drama, now face to face, seems to address me personally and swells with an extraordinary intensity. I am hypnotized. Now tragedy is anatomical. The décor of the fifth act is this corner of a cheek torn by a smile. Waiting for the moment when 1,000 meters of intrigue converge in a muscular denouement satisfies me more than the rest of the film.”⁴² Epstein values the enlargement and fragmentation of the American close-up more for its startling discontinuity than for its role in clarifying the story. But rather than seeing Epstein’s focus on the formal aspect of the close-up as a willful modernist imposition on a classical mode of narration, we need to recognize the revelatory intention of such criticism. Epstein does not see the close-up simply as a formal move, which he isolates from its context, but as a dynamic and direct way to address to the viewer a gesture intent on a physiological affect. As a move in the French reception of American cinema I have been summarizing, Epstein performs an act of creative redefinition—a transformation, certainly—but also a discovery.

Epstein’s slightly later comment on the close-up in his 1924 essay “On Certain Characteristics of Photogenie” reveals how, instead of clarifying narrative action, the close-up can render a moment in a film resonantly mysterious. Narrative impulses are not evacuated here, but rather lifted from a causal chain to expose an energy made more powerful by its abstraction from context, evoking a primitive animism: “And a close-up of a revolver is no longer a revolver, it is a revolver-character, in other words the impulse toward or remorse for crime, failure, suicide. It is as dark as the temptations of the night, bright as the gleam of gold lusted after, taciturn as passion, squat, brutal, heavy, cold, wary, menacing. It has a temperament, habits, memories, a will, a soul.”⁴³ For Epstein, the power of the cinematic image does not lie in what it signifies, in how it conveys narrative information, but in what it makes him dream of, the associations it engenders. We enter here into a new phase of the French avant-garde reception of American cinema, which we could call Surrealist, especially if we think in terms of Surrealism’s more flexible, pre-manifesto and pre-Breton forms, which, as Christopher Wall-Romana has shown, Epstein played a crucial role in formulating.⁴⁴

A French Avant-Garde Cinema

Around 1923, a newly self-conscious and confident French avant-garde film culture asserted itself. The films of L’Herbier, Delluc, Abel Gance, and Germaine Dulac began to appear in the late 1910s and early 1920s,

but 1923 saw the masterpieces of *La souriante Madame Beudet* (Dulac), *Cœur fidèle* (Epstein), and especially (in terms of impact) Gance's *La roue*. Gance's film showed the influence of American cinema with its action-filled melodramatic plot and its invocation of the mechanical rhythms of the railway, but it pushed the rapid editing of Griffith and Sennett further than anything to be seen before the Soviets. Epstein and Dulac reveled in close-ups, but in service of narratives far removed from American action genres: psychological, deeply interior, and elliptical. The French cinema had steeped itself in the lessons of American cinema in order to purge itself of a "degenerate theater," but it now emerged as something entirely different from its model, a truly alternative cinema, not simply modern but self-consciously modernist.

Likewise around 1923, critics associated with the alternative French film culture began to display a historical perspective and to view their discovery of American cinema in the late 1910s with a sort of nostalgia (in 1921, Delluc had celebrated a Parisian revival screening of Hart's 1916 *The Aryan* by wistfully recalling the earlier films of Hayakawa, Hart, and Fairbanks as a memory).⁴⁵ Delluc's praise of American movies for their visual presentation of faces and landscapes, or movement and rhythm, rather than their stories, had opened a fissure that widened from 1923 on. One of the most talented filmmakers and theorists of the era, Germaine Dulac, in an essay from 1926, located the power of cinema in its control of movement rather than its scenario and explained the French enthusiasm for American cinema after the war as an early stage in rediscovering cinema's true path as the art of motion: "At that time the Americans were kings. Little by little, after a detour, a sense of life, if not of movement, was recovered. One still worried about a plot, but the images were decanted so that they were no longer burdened with useless gestures and superfluous details. They were balanced in harmonious juxtaposition." But even as Dulac celebrated the clarity, energy, and—dare we say—classicism of American movies, she felt they had led cinema away from its true path toward "literary dramatic and decorative conceptions." Dulac saw the future paths of cinema leading elsewhere, toward a truly avant-garde conception quite different from the American films that had provided inspiration: "To divest the cinema of all elements not particular to it, to seek its true essence in the consciousness of movement and of visual rhythms that is the new aesthetic appearing in the light of the coming dawn."⁴⁶ This concept of "pure cinema" would define a radically alternative avant-garde cinema for which American cinema could only serve as prelude or a nostalgic memory.

The stakes of this bifurcation in film culture between a narrative cinema and a pure cinema based on visual rhythms is beautifully articulated in an imaginary dialogue written by Henri Fescourt (1880–1966) and Jean-Louis Bouquet (1898–1978) in 1925. Recalling the power of the American close-ups, in contrast to Epstein, the authors emphasized narrative tasks more than abstraction: “With a new technique, the Americans pursued a previously agreed-on aim: they told stories. Their films had no other purpose.” But they also recognized that narrative purpose had not initially drawn critics like Delluc to American films: “From his first contact with American films, Delluc was dazzled, enthusiastic. Was it by the intrigue? No, it was by the ‘atmosphere,’ by the detail that cropped up, by the picturesqueness of the décor.”⁴⁷ Criticizing the new avant-garde ideal of visual rhythm, these authors, declared that narrative form need not imply an out-moded theatricality. Their implication is that French films, rather than following the avant-garde path outlined by Dulac, could learn something by paying closer attention the narrative form of American cinema without regressing to the older theatrical model.

But this simple dichotomy between a pure cinema based in visual form and a narrative cinema whose formal aspects serve the purpose of story remains too static. What we could call a Surrealist reception of American cinema detoured around this dilemma. It was indifferent if not hostile to the abstract *cinéma pur* that appeared in the late twenties, but it did not celebrate American movies for their narrative form. Epstein’s celebration of the American close-up lies at antipodes from Fescourt and Bouquet’s analysis, but it sounds the keynote of a Surrealist reception, valuing fragmentation not simply as an abstract formal technique but as a critical method that lifted moments and images out of narrative context. André Breton described the essence of such a method in his description of his discovery of cinema during wartime, when, accompanied by Jacques Vaché, he would attend a movie without looking at its starting time, entering at an arbitrary point in the narrative, becoming fascinated by ambiguous images—and leaving as soon as the images coalesced into a story, moving on to another nearby cinema and repeating the process.⁴⁸

A number of writers associated with the Surrealist movement wrote about the cinema before the movement’s founding manifesto was issued in 1924. In 1918, an incisive essay by Louis Aragon (1897–1982) on the role of “décor in cinema” (which Delluc had solicited for his journal *Le Film*)⁴⁹ sketched a path from Delluc’s appreciation of the energy of American movies to the Surrealist discovery of their

mystery and ambiguity. Picking up the antitheatrical theme, he praised “those American films that enable a screen poetry to be redeemed from the farrago of theatrical adaptations.” But in praising the “modern beauty” of the cinema, its poetry formed from the common objects of everyday life, Aragon anticipates Epstein’s invocation of the aura that the close-up gives to things, its intensification of an undefined significance that goes beyond mere formal beauty: “All our emotions exist for those dear old American adventure films that speak of daily life and manage to raise to a dramatic level a banknote on which our attention is riveted, a table with a revolver on it, a bottle that on occasion becomes a weapon, a handkerchief that reveals a crime, a typewriter that’s the horizon of a desk, the terrible unfolding telegraphic tape with magic ciphers that enrich or ruin bankers.”⁵⁰ This aura of mystery comes from a cinematically heightened intensity and focused attention. These techniques may clarify narrative information, but the Surrealists found in them an energy that exceeded any possibility of a fixed significance.

Perhaps most beautifully, writing in 1923, Philippe Soupault (1897–1990) (who continued to write on film even after he left the Surrealist movement), invoked (again with a slightly nostalgic tone) the moment of discovering American movies in the late 1910s:

We lived swiftly, passionately. It was a beautiful period. Without doubt, many other elements contributed to its beauty, but the American movie was one of its fairest graces. I have kept my memories of these films, which even today I find delightful to recall. . . . There were long rides on horseback without a word being spoken, without a useless gesture, sensational abductions. There were films of Douglas Fairbanks, of Rio Jim and of Tom Mix. . . .

*This novel beauty, discovered so easily, so naturally, was accompanied by a technical perfection hitherto unknown. The directors in America understand all the drama that is hidden in a keyhole, in a hand, in a drop of water.*⁵¹

By 1929, Surrealist poet Robert Desnos would explicitly attack what he termed “avant-garde cinema” in favor of the American films of Erich von Stroheim and the performances of George Bancroft and Betty Compson, stars of Joseph von Sternberg’s *The Docks of New York* (1927).⁵²

Conclusion: A Hermeneutics of Transnational Circulation

I cannot claim that my survey of the reception of the American cinema by an alternative French film culture is anything other than selective. As even this limited survey reveals, there were variations in the reception of American movies in France. Especially toward the end of the twenties, separate camps were forming within the culture of cinephiles. But I do want to abstract from this rich and evocative critical language a number of principles, which hopefully raise issues of the circulation of art in the modern era that have implications beyond the reception of the films of one nation by another. These in effect form the conclusion of my essay.

First, and most broadly, I claim that, even granting the often-drastic effects of the hegemony of American cinema from the 1910s on, we must also allow for the creative and transformative role critical reception of films by different cultures plays. The enormous economic expansion of American cinema around the world during and after World War I must be understood not only in terms of economic imperialism, but in cultural terms as part of the vernacular modernism that Miriam Hansen has described in which American cinema appeared as a vehicle of cultural transformations that various cultures digested in different manners. To understand the circulation of American cinema beyond its borders, critical reception plays an essential and even transforming role. The international brand that became known as Hollywood, even in everyday language, refers not simply to a national product, but to a way of representing and imaging. This does not belie American economic or ideological hegemony, but it does indicate that the mode of circulation, as it is transformed materially, takes radical new form and possesses new effects in an era of mechanical reproduction.

My next point stresses this transformative aspect, and not simply one of hegemonic imposition. Critical reception is never a passive act but rather affects what it receives. Within a hermeneutic tradition (following Gadamer, Jauss, and Ricoeur), the process of reading and interpretation is invited by aesthetic works that remain incomplete without this process.⁵³ Thus circulation between cultures becomes a creative act, but far from a merely willful imposition of alien meaning. Between texts and viewers a process akin to pollination and blossoming takes place. Thus, as I indicated in my discussion of Delluc's understanding of the American western, the French did to some degree "invent" the American cinema, defining its qualities and possibilities. More research is needed to see to what degree these early French readings of American cinema influenced US film culture. In this essay, I have only discussed the first phase of the French reception of

American cinema. Later, after another world war, American cinema again arrived in Paris after a long absence and triggered another round of discovery and interpretation. The writings on American cinema by André Bazin, Edgar Morin, and then the critics of *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif* share many elements with the earlier reception I have described in this essay. But in this later case, the rebound of French ideas about American cinema onto American film culture and filmmaking appears unmistakable. The fact that key terms used in understanding American cinema, such as the *auteur theory*, *mise-en-scène*, and *film noir*, are taken from French indicates the enormous debt American cinema owes to post-World War II French discourse. Film studies in America would not exist, I would claim, without a series of crucial French texts.

My third point becomes more specific: I believe aspects of the first French reception of American cinema still have resonance. First, there is the determination to look at American cinema not just in narrative or thematic terms but visually and formally, trying to isolate and reflect on the devices that American movies bring to the table. The close-up, the use of natural landscapes in the western, and the power of décor and objects within *mise-en-scène* are primary among these. These could be treated in relation to, or separate from, their narrative roles. But to avoid the deadlock of this dichotomy, I have also stressed the importance of these devices as providing an intensification of affect, central to a modern art form based in a deep experience of movement, tempo, and excitement. Along with this dedication to a new art of intensity (perhaps best understood in terms of Miriam Hansen's reading of Walter Benjamin's concept of cinema's capacity for innervation) comes the cultural seriousness with which this critical discourse treated American films.⁵⁴ This demanded some fancy rhetorical footwork, since these writers celebrated the popular and even carnivalesque nature of the cinema but also placed movies alongside traditional artworks, partly as an act of provocation. The comparison of westerns to Greek tragedy was one such move. Rather than simply canonizing a low genre, this comparison sought to renew and defamiliarize traditional culture by bringing it into the ambit of cinema. Greek tragedy viewed in this context became primitive. Like Vachel Lindsay in the United States at the same time, these French critics praised the movies as tapping primitive energies.⁵⁵ This view, as Rachel Moore has shown, became a major motif of later cinema theory and played a key role in post-World War II French theory, including the writings of André Bazin, and, especially, Edgar Morin.⁵⁶

American film studies as it became institutionalized in the seventies mainly imbibed later currents of academic French discourse, such as structuralism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Althusserian Marxism. These sources were often used to criticize the capitalist-inspired ideology of patriarchal Hollywood cinema. But currents of earlier French discourse, especially *Cahiers du cinéma* auteurism, also inflected ways American films were understood. One might look to the extraordinary television series by Jean-Luc Godard *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1930–) to see a late descendant of this defamiliarizing and fragmenting approach to American movies (one which also includes political and psychoanalytical references). Godard provides an investigation of the intensity of the visual and aural image of American movies and of the enduring impact of an art form perhaps no longer new (and here filtered through the new media of video and television)—but always modern.

But all of this points beyond the discourses of cinema studies to a broader understanding of a new media landscape in which forms become cannibalized and translated between media, as Godard in *Histoire(s)* uses video to render cinema into a malleable form of imagery that will be carried by television and DVDs. On Godard's screens, moments from a John Ford western, a Japanese film, the paintings of Goya and Rembrandt, and newspaper photographs all meet in a video mash-up that circulates through centuries and nations in a media space that becomes the space of exchange transformation and circulation itself.

Dedicated to my old friend and colleague in the investigation of early cinema, film historian Richard Abel.

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- 2 Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (New York: Dover, 1968), 208–42.
- 3 Gilbert Seldes, *The Movies Come from America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937).
- 4 Miriam Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," in *Modernism/Modernity* 6, 2 (1999): 59–77.
- 5 Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990), 135–45, 176–77.
- 6 Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 209.
- 7 André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 88–91.
- 8 Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- 9 *Ibid.*, 64.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 40–47.
- 11 Besides Abel's account, Pathé's relation to American markets is discussed in Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); and Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907–1934* (London: British Film Institute, 1985).
- 12 Abel, *Red Rooster*, 151–75.
- 13 See Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907–1915* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), as the best synoptic account of this transformation.
- 14 Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment*.
- 15 Georges Sadoul, *Le cinéma français* (Paris: Flammarion, 1962), 23.
- 16 Again Richard Abel leads the way in the discussion of this aspect of French cinema with his early book *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915–1929* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), and then in his detailed introductions in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, vol. 1, 1907–1929 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988). The French *ciné-culture* is insightfully described by Christoph Gautier in his *La passion du cinéma, cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929* (Paris: Association française de recherche sur l'histoire du cinéma, 2002).
- 17 André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 2:101–39.
- 18 A lively account of the French reception of Chaplin, focusing on the Surrealists, is given in Jennifer Wild, *The Parisian Avant-Garde in the Age of Cinema, 1900–1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).
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- 20 David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
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- 22 The canonical history of the Russian and Soviet cinema remains Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of Russian and Soviet Film* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960).
- 23 See especially Lev Kuleshov, "Americanitis," in *Kuleshov on Film: Writing by Lev Kuleshov*, trans. and ed. Ronald Levaco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 127–30. Also see his "The Art of the Cinema," in *ibid.*, 49–50.
- 24 Tsivian, "Talking to Miriam," 65.
- 25 Kuleshov, "Americanitis," 127.

- 26 Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1970), 13.
- 27 Louis Delluc, "Beauty in the Cinema," in Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 1:137. Delluc's film criticism is collected in two volumes: *Le cinéma et les cinéastes*, vol. 1 of *Écrits cinématographiques* (Paris: Cinémathèque française, *Cahiers du cinéma*, 1985); and *Le cinéma au quotidien*, vol. 2 of *Écrits cinématographiques* (Paris: Cinémathèque française, *Cahiers du cinéma*, 1986). For translations, I have mainly relied on Abel's anthology.
- 28 Richard Abel, "Photogénie and Company," in Abel, *French Film Theory*, 1:101.
- 29 Louis Delluc, "Cinema: *The Outlaw and His Wife*," in Abel, *French Film Theory*, 1:188.
- 30 Louis Delluc, "Beauty in the Cinema," in Abel, *French Film Theory*, 1:139.
- 31 Louis Delluc, "Cinema: *The Cold Deck*," in Abel, *French Film Theory*, 1:171.
- 32 Louis Delluc, "From Orestes to Rio Jim," in Abel, *French Film Theory*, 1:255, 256.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 1:256.
- 34 André Bazin, "The Western or the American Film *par excellence*," in *What Is Cinema?*, 2:140–48; Jean Luc Godard, "Superman: The Man of the West," in *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings by Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. Tom Milne (New York: Da Capo, 1986), 116–22; Raymond Bellour, *Le western* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1966).
- 35 Blaise Cendrars, "On *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*," in Abel, *French Film Theory*, 1:271.
- 36 Louis Delluc, "Douglas Fairbanks dans *l'Île du Salut*," in *Le cinéma au quotidien*, 56.
- 37 Delluc, "From Orestes to Rio Jim," 1:257.
- 38 Delluc, "Cinema: *The Cold Deck*," 1:171.
- 39 Delluc, "From Orestes to Rio Jim," 1:257.
- 40 Delluc, "Rédemption de Rio Jim," in *Le cinéma au quotidien*, 53.
- 41 Elie Faure, "The Art of Cineplastics," in Abel, *French Film Theory*, 1:262–63, 260.
- 42 Jean Epstein, "Magnification," in Abel, *French Film Theory*, 1:235.
- 43 Jean Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie," in Abel, *French Film Theory*, 1:317.
- 44 Christopher Wall-Romana, *Jean Epstein: Corporeal Cinema and Film Philosophy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 171–75.
- 45 Louis Delluc, "Pour sauver sa race," in *Le cinéma au quotidien*, 244.
- 46 Germaine Dulac, "Aesthetics, Obstacles, Integral Cinégraphie," in Abel, *French Film Theory*, 1:392, 397.
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- 49 Abel, "Photogénie and Company," 1:110.
- 50 Louis Aragon, "On Décor," in Abel, *French Film Theory*, 1:66–67, 166.
- 51 Philippe Soupault, "Cinema USA," in Hammond, *The Shadow and Its Shadow*, 56–57.
- 52 Robert Desnos, "Avant-Garde Cinema," in Abel, *French Film Theory*, 1:429–31.
- 53 See, for instance, Han-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975); Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- 54 Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W.*

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55 See my essay “Vachel Lindsay: Theory of Movie Hieroglyphics,” in *Thinking in the Dark: Cinema, Theory, Practice*, ed. Murray Pomerance and R. Barton Palmer (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

56 Rachel O. Moore, *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). Moore does not discuss Morin whose *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) is an essential work of French film theory.