

Film text and context: culture, history, and reception

19

Film and history

Dudley Andrew

Attitudes

We are concerned here with film and with history; so let's begin by calling up a film that nearly half a century ago abruptly burrowed into the past so unforgettably that it was said to inaugurate the modern cinema, thus constituting itself an event of history. *Viaggio in Italia* ('Voyage to Italy', Italy, 1953) 'burst open a breach, and all cinema on pain of death must pass through it', wrote Jacques Rivette in a famous declaration of faith. 'With the appearance of *Viaggio in Italia* all films have suddenly aged ten years', he continued (Rivette 1955/1985: 192). Like James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Rossellini's film was controversial in its own day and remains recalcitrant even now, because it minutely records a contemporary civilization that appears at once diminished and sacred in the light of its ancient counterpart. Rossellini's film defines the modern by clinically analysing

post-war European values and by inventing a form to do so. A meandering essay, a sort of 'ba(l)ade', in Deleuze's term (1983: 280), it ignores the classicism of narrative cinema and the hermeticism of the avant-garde to thrust cinematography up against a reality that is both material and spiritual. Rossellini had the audacity to name his main character Joyce and to send him and his wife Katherine (Ingrid Bergman) on a journey as full of the ordinary and the extraordinary as that of Leopold Bloom.

This voyage of a couple in domestic crisis across strange and ancient landscapes becomes a descent into a past that is both personal and public, where private ethical choices are equivalent to decisive historiographic options. Mr Joyce (George Sanders), acerbic, sceptical, and practical, will sell Uncle Homer's(!) estate, eager to convert the 'strangeness' of what he has inherited into the familiarity of negoti-



Ingrid Bergman overwhelmed by her feelings—the Pompeii sequence in *Voyage to Italy* (1953)

able currency that he can take back with him to England. His wife, by contrast, gradually allows the features of the landscape and the people she sees to break through her preoccupations and her diffidence. Slowly she opens herself to the stunning world that she is drawn to visit. We see her looking, available, though she averts her gaze when confronted by those of a pregnant woman and then of an immense Roman statue.

Two magnificent sequences analogize the historian's encounter with the past. In the first of these Katherine visits the phosphorous fields around Vesuvius guided by an old and garrulous caretaker. Annoyed by his patter of arcane lore, she is about to return to her car when he demonstrates the effect of holding a torch near any of the volcanic openings on this torn-up crust of earth. Even the warmth of a cigarette produces a startling release of smoke far across the field, an immense exhalation from inside this ancient but living and explosive mountain. Later, at Pompeii, the couple assist at the exhumation of what turns out to be another couple buried by the volcano 2000 years ago. As the archaeologists dextrously bring out the outline of a man and woman caught by sudden death in bed

together, Katherine finds herself overwhelmed. She runs from the spot, followed by her estranged husband. 'I was pretty moved myself,' he confesses. She is more than moved. She recognizes to her fullest capacity the tedium and insignificance of her own existence measured against this unmistakable sign of the holiness and the brevity of life. This is the epiphany she had earlier avoided when, at the art museum, she ran from the statue of Apollo, whose gaze accused her small-mindedness.

Viaggio in Italia alerts her and us to the possibilities of exchange between past and present, through the manner by which we look and through our response to being looked at, that is, being measured by a living past. When we take time to locate the fissures on their surfaces—their breathing-holes—we allow films to exhale, to release a fine mist that is evidence of an immense power they still retain while locked away in archives or in the pages of history books. Like any history, that of the cinema is an account—even an accounting—of a former state of affairs. But as *Viaggio in Italia* continues to prove, this is a history of living matter, whose inestimable power to affect us should be found and released by our probing.

In what follows, I aim to track the tension between the sheer existence of films and our ways of making sense of their appearance and effects, that is, the tension between *films* as moments of experience and the *cinema* as a tradition and an institution. The discipline of film history tends to leave the moments of experience alone, since these are singular, whereas it strives instead to explain the system that holds them suspended.

Traditionally the primary task of the film historian has been to unearth unknown films or unknown facts and connections relating to known films, in an effort to establish, maintain, or adjust the value system by which cultures care about a cinematic past. Not long ago this seemed a simple thing, unproblematic compared to theory or criticism. Done well or badly, film history was in essence a chronicle of inventors, businessmen, directors, and, most particularly, films. Not all films naturally, just as not all directors or inventors, but the worthy ones, those that made a difference, from *A Trip to the Moon* (France, 1902) to *Wings of Desire* (West Germany and France, 1987) or *Jurassic Park* (USA, 1993). The early accounts by American Terry Ramsaye (1926) or by Frenchmen Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach (1938), interrogate 'worth' hardly at all; instead they directly attribute worth to this or that movie or personality.

• Traditionally the primary task of the film
• historian has been to unearth unknown
• films or unknown facts and connections
• relating to known films, in an effort to
• establish, maintain, or adjust the value
• system by which cultures care about a
• cinematic past.

This attitude paved the way for the auteurism of the 1960s and 1970s, when the critic Andrew Sarris (1969) could claim to be providing film history by delivering his notorious seven-tiered ranking of film directors. Of course such a canon answers to values which are of purely aesthetic, not historical, interest. This is confirmed by the auteurist's attraction to masterpieces, films that, by definition, escape history and speak timelessly.

Lists of significant films, directors, and events may

not constitute good history, but they do form the basis for the overviews of the development of film art written after the Second World War and that spawned the many histories of film available as textbooks today. Multi-volume treatises by Georges Sadoul (1975) and Jean Mitry (1968–80) in French, Ulrich Gregor and Enno Patalas (1962) in German, and Jerzy Toeplitz (1979) in Polish and German have had single-volume counterparts in English (by Arthur Knight (1957), David Robinson (1973/1981), and many others) that trace what might be thought of as the biography of cinema, from its birth through a clumsy adolescence to an increasing maturity after the Second World War. Maturity is measured less by the growth of the industry than by the subtlety and variety of techniques of expression, by the extension of themes and subjects, and by the respect accorded the medium by the culture at large.

Aesthetic film histories strive to account for all significant developments that cinema has undergone, but therein lies the problem, for a single conception of significance constrains them to think of difference in terms of the formation of identity. This is clearest in Mitry's monumental project, which traces only those cinematic rivulets and streams that feed into the current of the present. If a source dried out or went permanently underground, it was deemed unfit for study, because demonstrably unfit for life. This was the case, for instance, with the Shanghai melodramas of the early 1930s and with Brazilian *cangaços* of the 1950s, neither of which show up in Mitry or in other aesthetic overviews. Mitry's volumes can be read as a Darwinian tale of survival, that is, as the tale of 'ourselves' and 'our' cinema, since 'we' are the ones who have survived and have commanded a history. This explains his dismissal (and not his alone) of other forms of film (animated, educational, and home movies), of other peoples making films (the massive output of Egypt and Turkey, scarcely ever mentioned), and of 'others' represented in film (women and minorities in particular). The force of these less visible 'phenomena' surely carved out underground galleries and waterways, or seeped into swamps and bogs, but canonical historians abandon them there without much thought, until recently when one can note an effort to give them a place in textbooks.

Confidence in a grand, singular story of film art began to erode in the 1970s even before news of the general crisis in historiography reached the ears of film scholars. It was in order to dig beneath taste and to interlink isolated observations and judgements that

'professional' history came to insist on a more positivist approach to the study of cinema's past. All along there have been devoted individual archival researchers who know what it is to establish evidence and advance defensible (and refutable) claims about this or that aspect of film history, but only towards the end of the 1970s can one sense the emergence of an entire positivist ethos among film scholars concerned with, or suddenly turning to, historical matters. Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery in their important *Film History* (1985) coupled good film historiography with standard social history, thereby giving to film history maturity and a method its earlier phases completely lacked.

∴ **Confidence in a grand, singular story of film art began to erode in the 1970s even before news of the general crisis in historiography reached the ears of film scholars.**

Under positivism one can group every disciplinary approach to film, including the discipline of history itself with its tradition of balances and counterbalances. Those writing on film from historical perspectives no longer can exempt themselves from the burdens of exhaustive research and the ethics of corroboration. They have also felt the responsibility of incorporating within their historical research the gains made possible by the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, economics, and even psychology, all of which have been called upon to make cinema studies responsible to modern criteria of plausibility and of appropriate academic discourse. And, more recently, they have sought to apply these rationalized approaches to an indefinitely large corpus, recognizing that all films, not just the canonical, participate in broader systems that require systematic understanding.

The priority now accorded to discipline and system obliterates the concept of intrinsic value. The laws and rules by which events occur or by which names emerge into history are far more significant to the positivist than those events or names themselves. Most historians today are out to show the forces and conditions that produced the past and thus indicate the present, whether in a strict (determinist) or loose (conjunctural) manner.

A recent essay by one of the most prominent of such scholars, David Bordwell (1994), bears an indicative title: 'The Power of a Research Tradition: Prospects for Progress in the Study of Film Style'. Tradition and progress are precisely terms that can anchor a notion of 'positivism', since they implement regulated research protocols complete with systems of checks and balances. In this way history can become less idiosyncratic, apparently less dependent on taste, rhetoric, or ideology. And in this way scholars from utterly different perspectives and background can contribute to the project of increased understanding of the various factors at play in the cinema complex. Particular topics or problems (the emergence of film noir during and after the Second World War, the growth of the blockbuster style along with its attendant marketing strategy, the anomaly of *Viaggio in Italia* and the dispersal of neo-realism) are analysed less through attention to their own properties than by a calculus of determination which brings to bear from the full complex those factors that are pertinent to the case at hand.

Bordwell's essay generously credits work from various historiographic paradigms, including those who gave us 'the standard version of the basic story'. According to Bordwell, André Bazin countered the standard version of film as a standard art by emphasizing not the development of cinema's signifying prowess but the tension between stylization and realism. Bazin's 'dialectical' view accounted for many more types of film that grew up once the sound era had overturned many original conceptions about the medium. Bordwell completes his survey of histories of film style by isolating the 'revolutionary' views of Noël Burch, the first scholar to scour the back alleys of film production for those neglected films and movements that, by the fact of their neglect, provide a particularly apt index to the technical, stylistic, and social range of possibilities for the medium. Burch studied the special cases of primitive cinema, Japanese pre-war works, and the avant-garde, isolating for analysis types of film that are seldom mentioned in either the standard version or its dialectical Bazinian counterpart.

These three versions of history, along with Bordwell's compendium that includes them all, are themselves largely determined by the moment of their own composition. All help form the zigzag pattern of knowledge about film style to which we in the university today should feel urged to contribute. The excesses of one version call for the correctives of the next. In this way, a

more and more refined view takes shape under successive rhetorics and with increasingly subtle research strategies. Positivism would let nothing be lost. It was born in the university and flourishes there.

And yet in its sober procedures academic film history, history as autopsy, gives up the surprising life the movies may still retain for those who adopt the attitude of revelatory history Walter Benjamin wanted to foster. For Benjamin the past can catch up with and overwhelm the future in sudden bursts. If lived vigilantly and in high expectation, the present may suddenly illuminate shards of the broken mirror of the past scattered throughout the rubble of that catastrophe we call history. Benjamin—fetishistic book collector yet visionary Marxist—married the sacred to what he understood to be the post-historical. The cinema precociously serves both functions, for films exist not just in archives but in ciné-clubs and on video, where they can still release their power. *Viaggio in Italia* certifies this. The most modern of films, abjuring tradition, beauty, and premeditation to grasp its subject with unprecedented swiftness and immediacy, it nevertheless stands in awe of something quite ancient: the Neopolitans who coexist with statues, legends, icons, and a landscape that speaks to them incessantly and to which they respond in prayer and patter. Like Ingrid Bergman's eye, Rossellini's darting camera, indiscreet on the streets of Naples, probing caves, museums, holes in the crust of the earth, is an opening into which pours something at once ancient and of the moment, something that struck André Bazin forcefully in 1953 and can strike us anew today. We should not have been surprised when Rossellini later took up his grand project to film the history of civilization. It was meant to be a living history.

Though he claims professional allegiance to the positivist line, Pierre Sorlin recognizes the persistence of an unprofessional, unruly, and revelatory history of exceptional moments when he patronizingly observes: 'The pre-positivist attitude remains widespread, is unlikely to disappear, and if it is not taken too seriously this baroque—or even surrealist—encounter with mystical moments (Expressionism, film noir, the nouvelle vague . . .) and madonnas (Marilyn Monroe, Brigitte Bardot) . . . is not without its charm' (Sorlin 1992: 5).

Sorlin's characterization, and even his vocabulary, play into a dichotomy Robert Ray (1988) laid out some years ago in reviewing David Bordwell's work: on the one side lies the progressive, disciplined, impersonal, verifiable, classical paradigm of knowledge; on the other, the haphazard, personal, baroque, surrealist, form (see

also Ray, Part 1, Chapter 8). Think of scholarship as travel. One may move into cinema's past in several different fashions. The positivist approach I have characterized as a military march that conquers ground under the direction of a general (who surveys the field from on high, plotting strategic approaches). In utter contrast, the baroque, surrealist approach remains personal, whimsical, effectively unrepeatable and non-transferable. Though best exemplified by the *flâneur*, if one sought a military model to oppose to the general it would be the 'knight errant', for this historian works by chance encounters, by erring, by finding order in error.

These two extremes, the one fully public and accountable, the other private and creatively irresponsible, do not exhaust the approaches open to anyone interested in going into the past. There lies a third approach, what Claude Lévi-Strauss in the introduction of his *Tristes tropiques* (1955) termed the 'excursion'. The historian intent on an excursion—preparing to write an 'excursus'—sets off with a goal vaguely in mind but is prepared to let the event of the journey itself and the landscape it traverses help steer or even dictate the inquiry. Such a historiography is patently hermeneutic, for it opens the vision of the historian to a different vision altogether. In our field that different vision may be provided by a powerful film or by a different culture indexed by a host of films. We may despair of understanding these in the way they were first understood, but we can 'comprehend' their significance for ourselves as well as for others (see Andrew 1984: 180–7 for an elaboration on this distinction). Let us keep this array of research attitudes in mind as we turn to historical methods in film scholarship.

Methods

The archives of films

Cinema grew to its majority just in time to participate in a serious shift in historiography towards an account of existence and away from the recounting of the triumphs and defeats of the powerful. Goaded on in the latter half of the nineteenth century by the emergence of sociology and anthropology—nascent disciplines eager to understand the micro-operations of everyday life among seldom heard 'other peoples'—a new breed of historian began to question the utility of the age-old historical enterprise of providing the pedigree for, and singing the exploits of, some ruler, ruling

class, or nation. Before this century, even the most measured 'story of civilization' was inevitably one of princes and the vicissitudes of their political and military struggles. While the legacy of this tradition persists, particularly in more popular books, professional historiography since 1900 looks more often and more closely at the complex weave of the tapestry that makes up civilization rather than reading the colourful patterns that stand out as its dramatic picture.

Unquestionably, this lowering of historical goals suggests an evolution of a discipline as old as Herodotus, an evolution visible in literary mimesis as well, whereby the means of representation have increasingly taken sustenance from the everyday, the heterogeneous, the facticity of teeming life. History, like fiction, and like cinema, involves a ratio of brute material to intelligible organization. At the turn of this century, the coefficient of the material side of this ratio grew dramatically as historians took account of new sorts of archive telling of different sorts of life, telling in effect a different history.

Cinema constitutes a crucial historical archive of this sort, and in two senses. First, all films preserve visual information gathered through the lens, some parading this function, others oblivious to it. Of all film types, home movies would seem most intent to gather and preserve; next would come newsreels, since these claim merely to capture and catalogue the events they purport to address. Distant relatives of newsreels are documentaries, which rely on the veracity of the images they steal from newsreels or capture themselves, organizing these to some purpose or argument whose intent interacts with this material. Fiction films would seem to be at the far end of the archive, made to tease the imagination; nevertheless, such films can occasionally be caught napping, as they reveal to the vigilant historian (seldom to the paying customer) some raw matter undigested by the stories they tell (Ferro 1988: 30).

Cinema's second archival function derives from fiction films once again, only this time when they operate alertly, and quite properly, as fiction. Movies, especially popular ones, comprise a record of the aspirations, obsessions, and frustrations of those who spend time and money making or viewing them. Such investment guarantees and measures the value attached to fiction—value which it is the job of the historian to calculate, explain, or extend. Marc Ferro, perhaps the most notable historian to have devoted full attention to the cinematic archive, puts it thus: 'Every film has a value as

a document, whatever its seeming nature. This is true even if it has been shot in the studio . . . Besides, if it is true that the not-said and the imaginary have as much historical value as History, then the cinema, and especially the fictional film, open a royal way to psycho-socio-historical zones never reached by the analysis of "documents"' (Ferro 1988: 82–3).

Given its double archival existence, films have sustained two quite different types of historical investigation: social historians raid films for the direct (audio)visual evidence they supply about social existence at a precise moment, while film historians interest themselves in the indirect testimony fiction films deliver concerning fads, prejudices, obsessions, moods, neuroses. Generally the former consult the fullest archive available for their topic (several years of a newsreel, for example, or all the home movies taken by a particular family), while the latter may focus on a few fiction films, selected as the richest examples, the most indicative source, of indirect evidence.

: **Social historians raid films for the direct**
 : **(audio)visual evidence they supply**
 : **about social existence at a precise**
 : **moment, while film historians interest**
 : **themselves in the indirect testimony**
 : **fiction films deliver concerning fads,**
 : **prejudices, obsessions, moods,**
 : **neuroses.**

It must be said immediately that the social historian maintains no special relation to 'historical films' (*La Marseillaise*, France, 1938; *Scipione l'Africano* Italy, 1937; *October*, USSR, 1928) since these constitute merely one genre among others that may attract certain historians personally but that offer no intrinsically privileged site for professional historical investigation. On the other hand, the aesthetic and rhetorical elements and patterns of all films must at some level and at some point concern all historians. This is the case even in the most straightforward newsreels where camera placement or movement and shot juxtaposition contribute to defining the event under consideration. Ferro (1988: 30–44) proved this point by giving equal analytical attention to a series of quite different films from the Soviet silent period: newsreels, propaganda

efforts by both Reds and Whites, commissioned historical fictions made by Eisenstein and Pudovkin, and a purportedly neutral fiction by Kuleshov (*Dura Lex*, 'By the Law', USSR, 1926). Each film can be read for its inclusions and exclusions, for its structure, and for what French historians have called the 'mentalité' it expresses. Ferro entitles another brief article 'Dissolves in *Jud Süß*', to signal that even when dealing with explicitly social effects (anti-Semitism in the case of this notorious piece of Nazi propaganda art) the historian can (and often must) work directly with the language of cinema (Ferro 1988: 139–41). Whether or not the historian claims aptitude in this regard, it is assumed by all that cinematic techniques reveal patterns and intentions of organization as the medium shapes to some extent (depending on the genre) the material in the chosen archive.

By conducting minute analyses of aspects of little-known films, Ferro edged close to another sort of film history, that coming from buffs, collectors, and critics. Such people are unashamed to be concerned with something much smaller than social history: with films, their makers, their mutual influences, and their processes of production and reception. Film historians, as we commonly know them and as opposed to social historians, descend from this family tree of 'amateurs', often those who have laboured within the cinema community and feel authorized to report upon its workings. Today's more conscientious film students riffle through archives of movies, studio records, private papers of famous personalities, and journalistic criticism just to step into the footprints of their predecessors who sauntered nonchalantly alongside the film industry and culture of some earlier epoch. They understand that they must break out of the bubble of lore and engage the social and cultural reach of a favourite movie or personality just to explain properly its particular resonance and fascination.

And so both types of historian, those primarily concerned with movies and those concerned with society, find that they need to enter the other's domain simply to do justice to their topic. The latter now must adopt a disciplinary vocabulary and learn techniques of analysis seldom employed in the days when films were raided unproblematically as an open archive to be moved wholesale into the historian's discourse. And the former must read widely in the records of a bygone era so as to place a prized or fascinating phenomenon in a context where it becomes significant, not just iridescent.

The social historian and film

Partisans of one or another tradition of social science discourse may want to claim for some forebear the role of first pioneer to enter the unexplored domain of films. German scholars mark the date 1914, when a stunning dissertation on patterns of film spectatorship appeared seemingly from nowhere (Altenloh 1914). For a long time it had been felt that the earliest serious writing on cinema concerned artistic issues alone, with Hugo Münsterberg and Vachel Lindsay generally cited in front of a phalanx of French aestheticians led by Louis Delluc and Riccioto Canudo, all of whom were intent to distinguish the remarkable properties of this new medium. This dissertation, however, inaugurates a different tradition of writing about film, a social analysis that takes account of cinema's sharp intervention in modern history (see Gripsrud, Part 1, Chapter 22).

The most common sociological studies consider cinema a mirror to society, and in two senses. First, one can tabulate the frequency with which various social types crop up in the movies of a particular time and place. This quantitative study is usually preliminary to an interpretation of the way groups are depicted and therefore valued. The very effect of interpretation makes cinema a mirror in a second sense, for it displays the face not just of those whom the movies are about but of those who make and watch the movies. It may be shocking for us today to see how a social group has been misrepresented (see e.g. the studies of Jews (Sorlin 1981), women (Flitterman-Lewis 1989), and North Africans (Slavin 1996) in French pre-war movies), but the greater shock comes from recognizing the face of those by whom and for whom such misrepresentations were exactly what fit.

German sociology of cinema has unquestionably produced the most profound work of this sort, primarily through the Frankfurt School, which was a product of the Weimer culture it learned to analyse. Arguably the most celebrated of all social film histories was written by Siegfried Kracauer, who eventually consolidated his daily reflections on the portentous movies he watched during the Weimar years into the magisterial *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947). This full-blown psycho-social analysis makes the ugly visage of a nascent Nazism emerge from the several-score films under consideration. While his audacious thesis has inspired countless other social historians to enlarge their ambitions *vis-à-vis* cinema, Kracauer has been reproached for having set up his conclusions in the very choice of films that

guide his vision. That choice rests on the conviction that the cinema gives privileged access to a national unconscious and its predispositions, equally in films whose ambitions do and don't go beyond that of simple entertainment. Kracauer here encounters a perpetual conundrum, for at one and the same time he relies on the instinctive, unthought relation of film images to the culture that produces them while he also gives priority to the most complex, resonant, and sophisticated examples—examples that have behind them a good deal of thought as well as the prestige of art. In fact, his corpus consists of the export cinema of the Weimar period, from the Expressionist masterpiece mentioned in his title to *M* (1931) and *The Blue Angel* (1930), films, it is fair to say, that extend and transmit certain literary obsessions from the Romantic era right up through the Weimar period.

Kracauer was certainly not alone in believing that the cinema had in fact become the mechanism for the massive dissemination of significant cultural values. Moreover, he paid scant attention to the popular sources of popular genres (comedies, for example, other than those of Lubitsch, or Tyrolian films). Paul Monaco (1976), on the other hand, investigating the same Weimar period, explicitly restricts himself to the films with the highest box-office success so as to exclude his own judgements, letting the audience decide what is important through their attendance. While box-office performance still serves as an important indicator of the social influence of films, clearly television has taken over cinema's mass entertainment function. Hence films engender numerous competing criteria for their importance, whereas in our day statistical head-counts (Nielsen ratings) are justified as the prime research protocol in the study of television's impact.

In short, most film histories accept the role interpretation plays from the outset, including the selection of those films that promise to respond most fully to a certain social interrogation. In his influential articles, ostensibly written to correct Kracauer, Thomas Elsaesser (1982, 1983) doesn't hesitate to name and work with a limited number of Weimar films that entwine an intricate cinematic discourse with a deeply psychoanalytic one. He argues that these privileged examples foster a particularly trenchant understanding of German culture applicable to the hundreds of films he chooses to leave by the wayside, including those where attendance may have been highest.

No matter how consistent Elsaesser's arguments

may be, by openly adopting an interpretive stance he will leave unsatisfied those historians intent on emphasizing different values. Exactly this dissatisfaction is visible in still another book on German films of the 1920s, Patrice Petro's *Joyless Streets* (1989). Petro forthrightly admires the work accomplished by Kracauer and Elsaesser, yet she senses something more to be said, another interpretation of the period accessed not by a statistical selection à la Monaco, but by a different—in this case feminist—critical insight. Petro's corpus includes only films that rather openly appeal to women, specifically melodramas of the street. Hers is not—or not yet—a reception study, although she has obviously divided national psychology into male and female subjectivity, implying that further subdivisions (according to social class, education, urbanization, profession) might provide a more refined understanding of the specific attractions and psycho-social 'work' cinema performed in this epoch. Petro remains on the side of textual analysis, however, because her impressive contextual research doesn't displace cinema, but assists her in choosing the films worth analysing and the terms of analysis that seem most warranted. The street films, she discovers, directly solicited a female audience that was larger than the male one that Kracauer inevitably speaks about. Producers must have had women in mind for these melodramas and for other genres as well. The burgeoning magazine trade aimed at women supports this supposition, especially when one learns of the business ties between the press and the cinema in late Weimar.

As Petro among others makes clear, cinema never exists in a sphere by itself but is supported by other cultural phenomena that it draws on, transforms, or transmits. And so one might categorize film histories less on the basis of the films chosen for discussion than on that of the intertexts (explicit or implied) from which those films derive their power for the historian. Petro's interest in contemporaneous journalism and fashion sets her directly against Lotte Eisner, for instance, whose influential version of Weimar cinema, *The Haunted Screen* (1969), bears its context in its subtitle: *Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*.

Having reached Eisner, we have drifted beyond social historiography and into the history of film as art, where interpretation unapologetically establishes both the corpus to be investigated and the pertinent contexts within which to read the films. But even

Eisner's comparatively rarefied art-historical attitude illustrates that all film histories bear a social dimension. When she details the persistence in key films of nightmarish metaphors or when she places Weimar masterworks alongside theatre productions of inhuman scale on the one side and of private anguish on the other, she characterizes the troubled era she writes about and the spiritual key of its social dysfunctionality. Petro, meanwhile, though anxious to contribute to a precise understanding of a broader spectrum of society, happily makes her case through the astute analysis of films that take on importance in their difference from other films we know about, that is, in a film-historical context.

Only the pure sociologist, hoping to avoid interpretation, escapes this hermeneutic situation, but thereby risks escaping film history as well, making films no different from other cultural phenomena that could equally have been chosen as indices (or mirrors) of peoples at a given place and moment. The interests of film history lie beyond the purely social.

The film historian and culture

It has already been argued that the primary task of the film historian has traditionally been to unearth unknown films or unknown facts and connections relating to known films. First of all this has meant refining the map that displays these films and relations. Spatially, historians, after having so regularly mined Hollywood and Europe, look to other centres of production, discovering archives in distant locations. In the United States alternative production practices such as the New York avant-garde, black film companies, and studios based in Chicago have been excavated. Small in scale though these may be, they point to a cinematic potential that the dominant paradigm denies or suppresses. As for the temporal map, our lazy reliance on decades has always been questioned by historians who measure rhythms of change on more intrinsic criteria: on changes in technology, for instance, or artistic and cultural movements.

As for the content of the map, film historians are ever goaded to startle us, to upset or adjust our picture of how things have been. They do this most patently through discoveries of lost films (Oscar Micheaux's *œuvre*) or misunderstood practices (the *benshi* in Japan, the *bonimenteur* in Quebec). We are also startled by new configurations of things already known, or new ideas about the significance of these.

The surge of interest in early cinema, for instance, measures the strength of the 'cinema of attractions', a comparatively recent idea that rescued—for attention and for preservation—hundreds of films and techniques from the dustbin to which they had been assigned, a dustbin labelled 'false starts' or 'primitive' (see Gunning, Part 2, Chapter 4).

⋮ **Film historians are ever goaded to**
⋮ **startle us, to upset or adjust our picture**
⋮ **of how things have been.**

Still another way historians upset the historical horizon that surrounds us is by changing scale. Zooming in to snoop on the minutiae of a film or a studio or a distribution agency can reverse received opinions about the standard operations of something presumably as well known as the classical Hollywood cinema. This was the case with the standard assumption that Hollywood studios of the 1930s were hothouses of self-engendered fictions. Intense examination of daily trade journals has now shown that all studios employed personnel to ferret out news stories that might be capitalized upon in both production and distribution. Far from this being an era of pure fiction, the documentary impulse was systematically exploited at all levels (Benelli 1992). Baseball movies, films about current events like the birth of the Dion quintuplets, and of course the entire gangster genre were part of a strategy that became visible when historians zeroed in on micro-operations of studios.

At the other extreme are relations exposed for the first time when a historian gambles on a very distant perspective. Jacques Aumont (1989) has studied cinema in relation to the long history of painting. Cinema participates in a relatively new function of the image that ever since the French Revolution has addressed what he dubs 'the mutable eye'. With the modern spectator in mind, he links cinema to various nineteenth-century optical phenomena (the diorama, the railroad car) and ties techniques satisfying this spectator that originated in silent movies to the most recent of Godard's inventions.

Each of these disruptions of the historical horizon provides a contrary view of the past through the assertion of a new perspective. Even more disruptive, however, and therefore in some senses more genuinely in

line with critical historiography, are the efforts—increasing in recent years—to invalidate any single perspective whatever. In cinema studies, historians now take pride in describing situations wherein more than one temporal framework is at play (African cinema's laconic pace, both tied to indigenous life and to the European art film), more than one audience function (the appeal to gays and to straights of Judy Garland), more than one idea of the national (the self-conflicted Irish cinema, or the *œuvre* of Juzo Itami in relation to a Japan he references but scarcely believes in), and so on. The acknowledgement, and often the celebration, of subcultures and fragmented nations goes hand in hand with the description of hybrid genres and films. This assertion of the power of specific elements over unity and order comes at a high price. Historians risk occupying a position from which they can understand only singularities, which are by definition unrepeatable, and from which no generalizations can be drawn. Historical detail can stand in the way of the story of history.

In fact every history that treats the cinema must calculate the importance of films within a world larger than film. Culture can be said to surround each film like an atmosphere comprised of numerous layers or spheres, as numerous as we want. One may identify these as though they successively encompass one another moving from the centre (the individual film) out towards the stratosphere of national and international politics and events. Intermediate layers might include the film industry, traditions of genres, the biographies of filmmakers, the status of the other arts, the institutions of culture, and the organization of social classes. The further out from the centre the historian navigates, the more difficult it is to steer research in a way that is powered by the medium and not by some other agenda or discipline. Thus a political history of Hollywood in the 1950s needs to articulate the links that connect decadent film noir, self-conscious musicals, and budding docu-dramas to the concerns of Capitol Hill and of voters comfortable with Dwight Eisenhower at their helm but uncomfortable about their own security. Of course the blacklistings and the McCarthy hearings have provided precisely this type of linkage, as do biographies of the Hollywood Ten, the agenda of the Legion of Decency, and other such factors.

The permeability of these spheres an event at one layer to affect elements in another layer, producing interactions that can bring individual movies or the cinema as a whole into prominence. The direction

of this interactive flow is reversible, although it is usually tracked from the top down. For example, a change of government may bring in a new minister of education who promotes the expansion of literary journals. These journals may, in turn, promote an aesthetic that works its views on the legitimate theatre. Ultimately film acting, including the kinds of roles created for, or chosen by, key actors, may encourage a specific cinematic style, amounting to a significant alteration in the way the culture represents itself on the screen (see Andrew 1995, chapter 1, for an exemplification of this process).

Cultural interaction of this sort—a trickle-down process from government to popular expression—may be rare in a country like France, but occurs regularly in states exercising rigid political control. But the pervasiveness of censorship, even in democratic societies, reminds us that governments themselves can be disturbed by images bubbling up from beneath the cultural surface. Censorship bears witness to the power that films evidently deploy beyond the sphere of the strictly cinematic.

No history with aspirations of thickly representing an era's cinema can ignore this traffic among spheres. Yet every history needs to identify the most pertinent spheres within which to track the (shifting) values of cinema. Pertinence depends both on the researcher and on the topic under scrutiny. In my study of French films of the 1930s (Andrew 1995), for example, I was at pains to establish the special relevance of a particular cultural sphere containing subgroups such as the Surrealists and the novelists published by Gallimard Press. This choice challenged an earlier study, Francis Courtade's *Les Malédictiones du cinéma français* (1977), which examines French films within the atmosphere of official history (political proclamations, censorship rulings) and official events in the film world (technological innovations like sound, economic developments like the fall of Gaumont). In certain revolutionary eras such as that of the Soviet Union of the 1920s, Courtade's focus seems apt; one would expect the Soviet film historian to follow very closely the major events of public life, since cinema explicitly participated in a national reawakening. But in the inter-war period of France, cinematic values were forged and debated less in the political sphere than in the cultural sphere, or rather in the nebulous zones where transactions between high and popular culture were possible. Here the effect on cinema of personalities from the established arts outweighed, from my perspective, all

governmental and most economic pressures. And so the involvement in cinema of novelists and publishing houses, classical composers, painters, architects, and playwrights serve as more than anecdotes and do more than validate a popular art. Their involvement testifies to changes in the function of cinema and helps specify the direction such changes took. This cultural sphere is pertinent precisely because it identifies the site of development in a cinema that, from the perspective of the political or economic spheres, can hardly be said to have changed at all.

• **A cultural history of cinema proceeds
• neither through the direct appreciation
• of films, nor through the direct
• amassing of 'relevant facts' associated
• with the movies, but through an indirect
• reconstruction of the conditions of
• representation that permitted such
• films to be made, to be understood,
• even to be misunderstood.**

In brief, a cultural history of cinema proceeds neither through the direct appreciation of films, nor through the direct amassing of 'relevant facts' associated with the movies, but through an indirect reconstruction of the conditions of representation that permitted such films to be made, to be understood, even to be misunderstood (see King, Part 1, Chapter 23). This is a doubly hermeneutic venture, for it puts into play the reading of films for their cultural consequence and the reading of culture for the values or moods conveyed in films. Deciding which films are appropriate in relation to which spheres constitutes a founding act of interpretation.

Against interpretation: history without the historian

Aware how blind official culture has been to the presence (and the history) of women, minorities, the disfranchised, and the unrepresented, how can a film historian guard against simply repeating or varying the tastes she or he has inherited? Since interpretation selects and values, some historians work to dispense with it altogether by refusing to discriminate amongst

the objects brought in for examination. This applies to a certain sociological film history that avoids the pre-judgement involved in selecting material, through a protocol of inclusion that chooses automatically. In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985), for example, Bordwell and his co-authors developed an algorithm to select films for analysis so as to avoid the vagaries of personal or cultural preference.

In current terminology, 'histoire sérielle' counters standard interpretive history, where a 'series' is any set of homogeneous elements (such as films, or studio contracts) that can be ordered into chronological sequence and counted. Originally developed to help map the history of slow-moving factors (prices of corn across decades, for example, as opposed to a peasant rebellion cropping up in one concentrated moment), serial history has been adopted by certain film historians, who have begun to treat films as elements in a series (see Burguière 1984: 631–3). Michèle Lagny, arguing for this new form of history, reminds us that, no matter what their quality, films are produced regularly and under conditions that apply equally to neighbouring films (Lagny 1994). Instead of singling out one film or making an intelligent selection, serial history submits all films in a given corpus to an unchanging inquiry. Trends can thus be measured statistically.

Serial methods seem ideally suited to documentaries, where the distinctiveness of the individual text or auteur is seldom a significant factor. But nothing prohibits a historian from employing this method for the fiction films of a period, measuring their length, for example, or their cost, or the number of dissolves, or the number of actors they employ. In this sort of history individual films lose their 'centrality' in favour of the extended lateral series. Moreover, the series constituted by a chronology of films is not surrounded by decreasingly relevant spheres, as in the model put forth above, but coexists with other series that can be called into play by the intuition (or whim) of the historian. On the other hand, just as in the concentric model, any series becomes significant only when significantly related to something outside it, usually to other series that are parallel or that intersect it at some nodal point. Thus a series of wartime documentaries might be placed alongside a series of newspaper editorials or against the number of troops conscripted. In short, statistics never really speak for themselves. They must be articulated, that is, put into relations that form a discourse and eventually an argument.

The significance of a group of simultaneous series

suggests the existence of a pervasive and distinct approach to experience obtaining in a given culture, a *mentalité*, linked to what is often discussed as the 'sensitivity', 'ideology', or 'mood' of a substantial period of time. A *mentalité* is, like a climate, something that humans have no control over, and something that usually exists before and after them; yet to establish such an entity would seem to require far more interpretation than statistics. One might track the *mentalité* of a nation by analysing the kinds of material set for baccalaureate examinations or the fields of research of professors promoted to national chairs. In our period, the vocabulary of top-forty songs over a couple of decades might be examined in conjunction with dialogue in top-grossing films, and these two series could be placed alongside various demographic studies (teenage pregnancy, suburbanism, and so on).

Few film histories have rigorously employed the methods of the history of *mentalités*. Most studies of films written in this vein aim for global characterizations of national mood. For the period of 1940s America, for example, Dana Polan's book *Power and Paranoia* (1985) samples a number of genres and styles in characterizing the prevalent mood and dominant aesthetic of the time. Obvious social conditions are mentioned as fostering this attitude (the war and its aftermath with attendant shifts in work, status, and values). Yet to what specific institutions, policies, or events can films be tied? Segregation? The bomb? Communism? These are constant sources of irritation that undoubtedly affected, or directly motivated, films from the end of the war into the 1950s, yet the terms themselves are unruly, requiring detailed analysis before we can see the issues actually affecting a specific arena such as the cinema. We are led to ask what sort of historical, as opposed to thematic, examination might reveal the connections between films and these weighty concerns. And once again interpretation seems inevitable, perhaps not at the initial point of selecting material, but at the later stage of putting it into significant relation with other material.

Participating in a gnawing debate between objectivity and interpretation, the most sophisticated kinds of historical examination (in cinema studies as elsewhere) share much with the discipline of anthropology, conceived as a dialogue between self and other, a dialogue whose rules are constantly being renegotiated. In our case, this means maintaining a dialogue between films and culture that remains open and under constant revision. Rather than becoming

trapped inside a closed field of movies, yet before giving the movies over to laws that sociologists and economists have already arrived at, the film historian may interact with movies on behalf of culture. This is the middle road located somewhere between the highway of socio-economic history and the folk path of personal biography. Along this road lies the varied landscape of culture, a landscape whose ecology features the complex and contradictory interplay of institutions, expressions, and repressions, all subject to the force fields of power. The cultural historian bears, to the limit, the burden of the contested middle, by insisting on a stance between the already hermeneutic enterprises of the critic and the historian. Refusing to stop where most critics do, at the boundaries of texts, refusing as well the comfort of a direct pipeline to an era's 'imaginary' held out by certain brands of socio-economics, the cultural historian reads and weighs culture in texts and texts in culture. In this way the logic of changing values can be understood as felt.

It is no coincidence that this section on method should conclude with an affirmation of hermeneutics, exactly as did the first section, on attitude. History, as Siegfried Kracauer observed in his book on the subject, *The Last Things before the Last* (1969), hovers above the particulars of life, but not so high as theory, whose obsession with regularities and design blinds it to the contours of the landscape below. Historians can drop down low for detail, then rise to gain the perspective that seems to suit them or gives them densest significance. If those 'details' be movies playing, we might imagine, at some drive-in theatre below, the film historian can home in to watch something projected on a social landscape. Fascinated, the historian may momentarily cease thinking of the past as past, but directly view his or her own world as touched by what is shown; this is when history is projected straight through our present and into an open future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- *Allen, Robert, and Douglas Gomery (1985), *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf).
- Altenloh, Emilie (1914/1977), *Zur Sociologie des Kinos* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs; Hamburg: Medienladen)
- Andrew, Dudley (1984), *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- (1989), 'Response to Robert Ray: The Limits of Delight', *Strategies*, 2: 157–65.

CRITICAL APPROACHES

- Andrew, Dudley** (1995), *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Aumont, Jacques** (1989), *L'Œil interminable* (Paris: Librairie Séguier).
- **André Gaudreault**, and **Michel Marie** (1989), *Histoire du cinéma: nouvelles approches* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne).
- Bardèche, Maurice**, and **Robert Brasillach** (1938), *History of the Moving Pictures*, trans. Iris Barry (New York: Museum of Modern Art).
- Bazin, André** (1967/1970), *What is Cinema?*, 2 vols., trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Benelli, Dana** (1992), 'Jungles and National Landscapes: Documentary and Hollywood Film in the 1930s' (doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa).
- Benjamin, Walter** (1930/1968), 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books).
- Bordwell, David** (1994), 'The Power of a Research Tradition: Prospects for Progress in the Study of Film Style', *Film History*, 6/1: (Spring), 59–79.
- **Kristin Thompson**, and **Janet Staiger** (1985), *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Burch, Noël** (1979), *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- (1991), *Life to those Shadows* (London: British Film Institute).
- Burguière, André** (ed.) (1984), *Dictionnaire des sciences historiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France).
- Cinémaction* (1992), no. 65, Special Issue: *Cinéma et histoire: autour de Marc Ferro*.
- Courtade, Francis** (1978), *Les Malédiction du cinéma français* (Paris: Alain Moreau).
- Deleuze, Gilles** (1983), *L'Image-Mouvement* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit).
- Dyer, Richard**, and **Ginette Vincendeau** (eds.) (1992), *Popular European Cinema* (London: Routledge).
- Eisner, Lotte** (1969), *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Elsaesser, Thomas** (1982), 'Social Mobility and the Fantastic: German Silent Cinema', 5/2, 14–25.
- (1983), 'Lulu and the Meter Man: Louise Brooks, Pabst and Pandora's Box', *Screen*, 4–5 (July–Oct.), 4–36.
- (1984), 'Film History and Visual Pleasure: Weimar Cinema' in Patricia Mellencamp and Philip Rosen (eds.), *Cinema Histories/Cinema Practices* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America).
- ***Ferro, Marc** (1988), *Cinema and History*, trans. Naomi Greene (Detroit: Wayne State University Press).
- Film History: An International Journal* (1994), 6/1, Special Issue: *Philosophy of Film History* (Spring).
- Flitterman-Lewis, Sandy** (1989), *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press).
- Godard, Jean-Luc** (1980), *Introduction une véritable histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Albatros).
- Gregor, Ulrich**, and **Enno Patalas** (1962), *Geschichte des Films* (Gütersloh: S. Mohn).
- Iris* (1984), 2/2, Special Issue: *Toward a Theory of Film History*.
- Knight, Arthur** (1957), *The Liveliest Art* (New York: Macmillan).
- Kracauer, Siegfried** (1947), *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- (1969), *History: The Last Things before the Last* (New York: Oxford).
- Laguy, Michèle** (1992), *De l'histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Armand Colin).
- (1994), 'Film History, or History Expropriated', *Film History*, 6/1 (Spring), 26–44.
- Mitry, Jean** (1968–80), *Histoire du cinéma*, 5 vols. (Paris: Éditions Universitaires).
- Monaco, Paul** (1976), *Cinema and Society* (New York: Elsevier).
- Petro, Patrice** (1989), *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Polan, Dana** (1986), *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative and the American Cinema 1940–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Prédal, René**, *La Société française à travers le cinéma* (Paris: Armand Colin).
- Ramsaye, Terry** (1926), *A Million and One Nights* (New York: Simon & Schuster).
- Ray, Robert** (1988), 'The Bordwell Regime and the Stakes of Knowledge', *Strategies*, 1 (Fall), 143–81.
- (1995), *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).
- Rivette, Jacques** (1955/1985), 'Letter on Rossellini', in Jim Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma. The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press).
- ***Robinson, David** (1973/1981), *The History of World Cinema* (New York: Stein & Day).
- Rotha, Paul** (1949), *The Film till Now* (London: Vision Press).
- Sadoul, Georges** (1975), *Histoire générale du cinéma* (Paris: Denoel).
- Sarris, Andrew** (1969), *the American Cinema: Directors and Directions* (New York: Dutton).
- Schefer, Jean-Louis** (1980), *L'Homme ordinaire du cinéma* (Paris: Gallimard).
- Slavin, David** (1996), 'Native Sons? White Blindspots, Male Fantasies, and Imperial Myths in French *Cinéma Colonial* of the 1930s', in S. Ungar and T. Conley (eds.), *Identity Papers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

***Sorlin, Pierre** (1980), *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (NJ: Barnes Noble).

— (1981), 'Jewish Images in French Cinema of the 1930s', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and TV*, 1/2: 140–9.

— (1991), *European Cinemas, European Societies* (London: Routledge).

— (1992), 'Cinema, an Undiscoverable History?', *Paragraphs*, 14/1 (Mar.), 1–18.

Toeplitz, Jerzy (1979), *Geschichte des Films*, 4 vols., trans. Lilli Kaufman from Polish (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard).

Weinberg, Herman G. (1970), *Silent Cinema* (New York: Dover).