

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF EARLY CINEMA

Edited by Richard Abel

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Kobayashi Shokai. He even founded a private institute of motion picture study at his own home in Tokyo. Inoue was one of the most intelligent and ambitious actors in the 1910s and 1920s in Japan.

HIROSHI KOMATSU

intermediality and modes of reception

Recent theories of literature and art have emphasized the importance of reception for the understanding of an artwork. However, as a historical phenomenon, reception must always be reconstructed. Our richest sources, of course, are essays and reviews, but these generally were written by professional writers or intellectuals and so may not reflect the response of an average audience member, which ultimately may be beyond our reach as historians. However, the way works are targeted at specific audiences may well tell us a great deal about the intended or envisioned reception.

Early cinema developed within an atmosphere of intermediality and could be seen as the culmination of several different media; therefore, its earliest reception was partly determined by the context within which it was viewed. **Lumière** first premiered its **Cinématographe** before specialists in **photography**, alongside experiments in **color photography**. Thus these groups saw moving pictures as a "peculiar development of instantaneous photography." The operation of moving pictures also were featured in Albert A. Hopkins' book, *Magic: Stage Illusion and Scientific Diversions* (1898), which placed them in a long tradition of visual illusions, a frequent context for the reception of early films, which often were exhibited by stage magicians (e.g., Leopoldo **Fregoli**, Albert **Smith**, Felicien Trewey, David Devant). Thomas **Edison** premiered his **Kinetoscope** before the Brooklyn Institute of Art and Sciences in 1893, one of many scientific demonstrations of the new invention of moving pictures that saw the apparatus primarily as an example of new advances in technology, parallel to the developments in air travel, wireless telegraphy, the telephone, or the X-ray. This reception context placed moving pictures as a direct development of the scientific **chronophotography** of Edwaerd **Muybridge**, Etienne-Jules **Marey**, and Alfred

Londe. Kinetoscope films soon featured **vaudeville** performers—strongmen, acrobats, and serpentine dancers—and the commercial premiere of projected films in New York City took place in vaudeville theaters, so that moving pictures perhaps ultimately were seen as part of the entertainment world. Within the vaudeville circuit films often were most popular when they showed current events and **British Mutoscope and Biograph** especially, under the leadership of William Kennedy Laurie **Dickson**, promoted the idea of the weekly Biograph offerings as a "Living Illustrated Newspaper," a model that other companies also followed. Moving photographs, the latest visual illusion, the latest scientific development of technology, canned vaudeville, or a living **newspaper**—all these were reception contexts for early cinema, shaping audiences' expectations and experiences of the new medium.

If one turns to written reports of first viewings of cinema, we can distinguish two basic modes of reception that sometimes fused. The first is a reception that stressed the scientific, technological aspect of the films and their means of production and frequently invoked their realism. The second reception I will call "uncanny," because it stressed the strange effect of moving pictures, their ghostly or bizarre quality. Interestingly, these two modes relate dialectically rather than as opposites, and sometimes occurred in the same review. Although the uncanny mode would seem to deny the realism of moving pictures, in fact, it often located their uncanny effects in an excess of realism. In noting the novel perceptual aspects of moving pictures, the uncanny mode also supplied some of the earliest phenomenological accounts of cinema.

The scientific/technological receptions of early projections stressed the processes by which moving pictures were made. The earliest newspaper reports on Edison's kinetoscope, for instance, emphasized that they comprised hundreds of separate photographs on flexible film. Projected moving pictures usually were described (more or less correctly) as a combination of the kinetoscope and the **magic lantern**, occasionally invoking such devices as the zoetrope or phenakistoscope, relating the new invention to previously known ones and providing it with a scientific pedigree. Such accounts also offered explanations of the phenomenon of persistence of vision, discussed the rates of speed of photography

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and projection, and often related the innovation to other recent inventions, frequently citing Edison. These articles often speculated on the future of the nascent industry, announcing the possibilities of combining the invention with the **phonograph**, and filming both stage plays and **operas**. Film was seen as a triumph of realism and even proclaimed a hedge against mortality, since films would preserve the living appearance of people long after they were dead.

This concept of cinema as a pathway to immortality relates directly to the uncanny reception. Articles written by Maxim Gorky on first viewing the Lumière films in 1896 typify this mode of reception when he described cinema as "the kingdom of shadows." Perhaps the most detailed and thoughtful appreciation of first screenings, Gorky's and another appearing in London's *New Review* (February 1897) under the name O. Winter both emphasized that while moving pictures were realistic in some respects they were unreal in others, lacking especially both color and sound. Winter claimed, "It is all true and all false." He also felt that the *Cinématographe* was inartistic because it was not selective, and compared it to the avant-garde movements of the era, the Pre-Raphaelites in **painting** and Emile Zola in literature, both of which he considered similarly "unselective" in their realism.

A number of commentators stressed the strange power that moving pictures seemed to exert over viewers, especially when representing rapidly moving objects such as trains. One New York reviewer declared, "attention is held almost with the vice of a fate," while Gorky mused, "You forget where you are. Strange imaginings invade your mind. Your consciousness begins to wane and grow dim." The novel formal effects of moving pictures frequently were noted, such as the sudden disappearance of a view when it came to an end or the strange fact that people disappeared as they walked past the edge of the screen. Almost universally, early commentators focused on the dynamic effect of a train coming towards the camera (although no authentic record of audience panic from first showings in metropolitan areas has been located) as well as the subtlety of motion shown in capturing the effects of wisps of smoke and the spray of water.

See also: archaeology of cinema/pre-cinema; communication; electricity; transportation

Further reading

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TOM GUNNING

intermittent movements

The intermittent presentation or recording of sequential photographs was a key element of moving picture systems. The necessary intermittency, 12 to 16 images per second or above, could be achieved either mechanically, by starting and stopping the image-carrying **celluloid** band, or optically, by combining a number of mirrors or lenses with a continuously moving image carrier. Mechanical systems quickly predominated due to their ease of construction, while optical intermittents remained largely one-off designs needing expensive and delicately adjusted precision components, as in the intermittent illumination of the **Anschütz Schnellseher**, the moving lenses of the Maskelyne camera/projector, or the revolving mirrors of the Leiz projector.

Mechanical intermittent movements converted the constant motion of a hand crank, spring winding, or electric motor into discontinuous motion at the aperture of a camera or projection device. In the beater, or dog, movement first applied by Georges **Demený** to a **Marey**-style chronophotographic camera in 1893, a short rod mounted at the edge of a revolving disk struck the film band so that one frame of film was pulled forward at each revolution. Many times improved, the beater was considered the most reliable early design, and was available from many manufacturers until about 1910. The claw movement used first in the *Cinématographe Lumière* of 1895 featured two small hooks at the end of an oscillating arm, also attached at the edge of a revolving disk, to pull down single frames to its working aperture.