expand the moviegoing audience. Readings of other films—both more familiar Griffith films like *The Lonely Villa* and *A Corner in Wheat* and less familiar ones like *The Drive for Life* and *A Country Doctor*—demonstrate Gunning’s intimate familiarity with Griffith’s films and his sensitivity as a critic/historian of text and context.

One might define a good book as one which makes the reader want more. I felt that way in reading *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of Narrative Cinema*, and if the book were longer, I would have looked for clarification or elaboration on two fronts. First, the relationship between the “narrator system” and what has come to be called the classical Hollywood system is a bit sketchy in the book. It seems to me that the narrator system, as Gunning defines it, is central to what has been called classical Hollywood cinema. However, Gunning says it is both a “founding moment” in the classical system yet also “at odds” with it (295), an observation that warrants further discussion. Second, Gunning’s conception of film history as an examination of individual films, the film industry, and “the larger forces of social history” focuses more on the first two than on social history. A longer book could have defined the conception of “social history” more fully, clarified the way(s) social history links to films and the film industry, and integrated more social history into the discussion. I found the book especially interesting when, as in the discussion of *A Corner in Wheat*, social history was central to the discussion. More such analysis would have been welcome.

But considering the thoughtfulness, the wealth of detail, and the thoroughness of research that characterize this book, one suspects that the author has much more to say about these and other subjects. *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of Narrative Cinema* establishes Tom Gunning as an authoritative historian not only of Griffith’s Biograph films but also of that crucial period when American movies were learning to tell stories as they had never been told before.

**Charles Maland**

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**Early Cinema**

**Space, Frame, Narrative**


This new reader is an essential, if intermittently irritating, book for anyone concerned with contemporary modes of reading and writing film history. It anthologizes 28 essays by 20 scholars originally published between 1978 and 1988 in such venues as *Cinema Journal, Cinetexts, Framework, Iris, QRFS, Screen, Sight & Sound*, and *Wide Angle*, some of which have been revised and some not. For Thomas Elsaesser, however, all are informed by the “new historicism” that emerged from the 1978 FIAF conference in Brighton, especially Noël Burch’s conceptualization (in “Porter, or Ambivalence”) of the “primitive cinema” as a distinct “mode of representation” (the PMR) when compared to the “institutional mode” (the IMR). According to Elsaesser, the spirit of that conference has led a new generation of film scholars to reformulate the history of early cinema, demoting intrinsic filmic evidence in favor of verifiable data about the industrialization of entertainment and leisure, with the ultimate goal of integrating all of film history into the wider cultural and economic context of the entertainment and consciousness industries.

In the current volume, Elsaesser brings together some of the most important contributions made since Brighton and, through introductions comprising fully 20 percent of its text (84 of 413 pages), casts them into “a kind of story” with two major themes: the cinema’s turn toward narrative as its mainstream form, and the industrialization/commodification of the feature as its standard product. The book is organized into three parts—“Early Film Form: Articulations of Space and Time,” which asks, *pace* Burch, whether early cinema should be viewed as an autonomous system of representation, or as part of something larger; “The Institution Cinema: Industry, Commodity, Audiences,” which addresses questions of historical specificity in the economic and technological spheres; and “The Continuity System: Griffith and Beyond,” where the emergence of (near) classical narrative logic gives rise to cinematic subjectivity and “the isolation of the spectator.” Each section is further subdivided into an editor’s introduction and a series of topics, more or less chronologically arranged (e.g., part 1 proceeds from the subheading “Shot Relations, Narration: Articulating Space and Time” through “Lumière: Actualities, Fiction, Narrative” and “Méliès: Continuity, Non-Continuity” to “Porter: Adapting, Presenting, Narrating”). The vol-
ume concludes with the editor’s afterword and a select bibliography (which unaccountably omits Joyce Jese-

In his general introduction, “Early Cinema: From Linear History to Mass Media Archaeology,” Elsaesser explains that a quarter of the material selected for inclusion had to be cut for reasons of space, while other important essays were unavailable for republication. These circumstances have led him to summarize and then contextualize the missing pieces in his introduc-
tions—a practice alternately illuminating and confusing, since in telling his “story” (the recasting of traditional film history from dramas centered on early cinema), he makes no distinction between what is present and absent in the text that follows. Thus, in the 20-page introduction to part I, Elsaesser spends several pages discussing the work of scholars who do not appear in the volume at all (e.g., Marshall Deutelbaum and David Levy) and several more discussing essays by Noël Burch (“Porter or Ambivalence,” “Passion, Pursuit”), although Burch’s single contribution to Early Cinema appears not in part I but part II. There are implicit rea-
sons for this disproportion, of course, but it will prove confusing to those not intimately familiar with the historiography of the period. A further problem with the introductions has to do with Elsaesser’s occasional descent to the nadir of poststructuralist jargon.

There are also logical contradictions: in the intro-
duction to part III we are given a specific list of Griff-
ith’s practices that led to the development of narrative features—“his ability to subdivide plot-lines,” “Griff-
ith’s involvement in the contemporary theatre,” “Griffith’s own ‘Victorianism,’” and “his ability to use parallel editing” (my italics)—and then told flatly on the same page that “Griffith’s stylistic developments are determined not by individual genius but by the pressures on the emergent cinematic institution.” Such lapses are infrequent, however, and on the whole the introductory essays are inscribed with subtlety of thought and keen intelligence. And they do, finally, achieve Elsaesser’s goal of reconstructing the trajectory of work in early cinema since Brighton “in intelligible form” and making its contours clear.

The essays chosen for the reader are of the highest quality, most having broken new ground and/or contributed to an ongoing debate (“monstration” [showing] v. narration [telling] in the PMR; “externality” v. “integration” [regarding parallel editing, crosscutting, and the insert] in the IMR, etc.) in a major way. But they offer few surprises, continuing in the post-Brigh-
ton tradition of Roger Holman’s/André Gaudreault’s Cinema 1900–1906: An Analytical Study (Brussels: FIAF, 1982) and John Fell’s Film Before Griffith (Ber-
keley: University of California Press, 1983), both of which Elsaesser acknowledges as predecessors. In the areas of early film form and mode of representation/presentation, there are four selections by Tom Gunning, four by André Gaudreault, two by Charles Musser, two by Ben Brewster, and one each by Barry Salt, Richard de Cordova, Noël Burch, Miriam Hansen, and Yuri Tsivian. Dai Vaughan, Stephen Bottemore, and Kevin Brownlow also appear for these categories in articles reprinted from Sight & Sound. Mode of production and the struggle for economic control are represented by Michael Chanan, Janet Staiger, and Patrick G. Lough-
ney; and pieces by Anne Friedberg, Jacques Aumont, and Raymond Bellour are collected in the continuity system/Griffith section, as are new writings by John Fullerton and Leon Hunt on European versions of the classical paradigm. Where appropriate, selections are illustrated by handsomely reproduced frame enlargements which are especially valuable in the representa-
tion of deep space.

Nearly all of these essays, regardless of their spe-
cific subjects or points of view, are concerned in some way to comprehend that crucial process whereby an early cinema of noncontinuity (associated with spatial coherence and the PMR) became the classical cinema of coded narrative logic (linked to continuity editing and the IMR)—that historical movement, in other words, in which a unique kind of modern consciousness was born. It is a moment that commands our attention because the very discipline of Film Studies is grounded in it, but too is much else, since, in Elsaesser’s terms, narrative film became “the successful prototype of virtually all popular culture this century.” Furthermore, it seems likely that in the next century the classical cinema will itself be understood less as a destination point than as a transitional phase in the movement toward some other system of audiovisual representa-
tion—one, perhaps, less narrative and less linear in its formal organization than we can yet imagine. In his Afterword, in fact, Elsaesser makes the initially aston-
ishing suggestion that recasting traditional film theory might result in “nothing less than the reconstruction of the fabric of history itself.” And, yet, why not? If, as he argues elsewhere in the volume, the cinema intro-
duced a radically new, universally comprehensible logic of the visible, transforming the ways in which knowl-
edge is stored and disseminated, social experience is recorded, and subjectivity is constructed, has not that logic in our own time become the discourse of history itself? By proposing that a direct line can be drawn from Prometheus, Faust, and Dr. Frankenstein to...
Thomas A. Edison, and, inversely, that contemporary televisual culture throws us back upon the early cinema's performative and (in Tom Gunning's sense) "attractive" modes, Elsaesser's volume invites us to speculate in this direction. And it fulfills rather admirably its ultimate promise—namely "to develop a framework which is capable of understanding the changes between early and classical cinema in a non-reductive and non-linear way."  

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Entertainment Industry Economics

A Guide for Financial Analysis


It is now possible to understand the mechanics of film industry economics. Harold Vogel, an eminence grise of the movie biz, has updated his 1986 book because changes in the industry prompt a reevaluation of certain economic indicators. As a vice president and senior entertainment industry analyst for Merrill Lynch, Vogel looks only at the bottom line in macro-economic terms. In some sense, this text is directed primarily to industry specialists and/or investors looking for an economic overview of the American film industry. It's like reading Variety without the lingo. Its slightly less arcane language is that of accountants.

Vogel's book is divided into film, cable, TV, video, radio—and even explores the increasing economic power of gaming, sports, theme parks, and performing arts. Precisely because he does not confine his analysis to film, he puts into perspective the position of cinema in the larger picture of the "entertainment industry," reflecting why so many Hollywood corporations have diversified into other areas. This is a cold-blooded and often chilling account of how money is processed through the business of leisure, and should be required reading for anybody presuming to enter the film biz—including all those formerly socialist industries attempting an overnight conversion to capitalism. This book ignores the social good or cultural value of cinema and insists on treating it as a capitalist organ that can and does function with integrity.

This is not to say that Vogel ignores the possibilities of slick operations in such a capital-intensive business with a high risk. One of his more charming traits is the regularity with which he defends film executives as highly reputable, given the loopholes, temptations, and nature of accountability. He insists that in a business in which management slips back and forth from one side of the desk to another—i.e., studio executives become producers and vice versa—reputation can be more important than a fast buck. (Tell it to Begelman.) Vogel does show exactly where and how money is manipulated by those in control, and he applies phrases like "considerable discretionary variation" to dubious practices.

The text is studded with charts and graphs. We see the "contracyclical" nature of film, that is, its tendency either to make or lose money in an economy doing the opposite. Depression-resistant box office, however, has never been tested in an industry as diversified as this one, where video and cable can siphon off audiences disinclined to pay steep ticket prices. Vogel belongs to the camp that believes ancillary markets have failed to develop beyond the "enhancement of profits" stage. Still, his figures show that in 1980 theatrical sources accounted for half the revenues of a film, while ten years later they represent one quarter.

Vogel, of course, deals with data, and Hollywood studios provide the biggest chunk of such numbers. The accounting procedures of studios are more easily scrutinized and comprehended by someone with his corporate acumen than by, say, Art Buchwald. When Vogel concludes that the size of a film's budget has nothing to do with its earning power, he is technically correct, but he is not dealing with the odds. His conclusion should not legislate against the potential profitability of independent video companies or low-budget pictures to recoup in all media other than theatrical.

Vogel's primary subject is the method(s) of accounting that permit apparent contradictions of, for example, "income recognition," something "generally unrelated to cash collections," because, as he explains, "it is entirely possible to report earnings and be insolvent at the same time." The complex chain of transactions from the box office to the producer encourages the tendency to "ride the float," or hang on to money for one's own economic advantages. Years can pass without revenues unless a company has enough industry muscle to pry payments out of reluctant theater owners and distributors. That is business as usual.

Vogel's analysis of the 1976 tax code revisions is as thorough and useful as has ever been written. Because these revisions stipulated that the costs of producing a recording, film, or book are only deductible on a flow-of-income basis, prorated over the period during which the property generates income, U.S. artists were effectively discouraged from any creative activity that was not paid in advance, with a full set of projections of recoupment of cost. Only Vogel's refusal to editorial-