

Documentary

A HISTORY OF THE NON-FICTION FILM

2nd Revised Edition

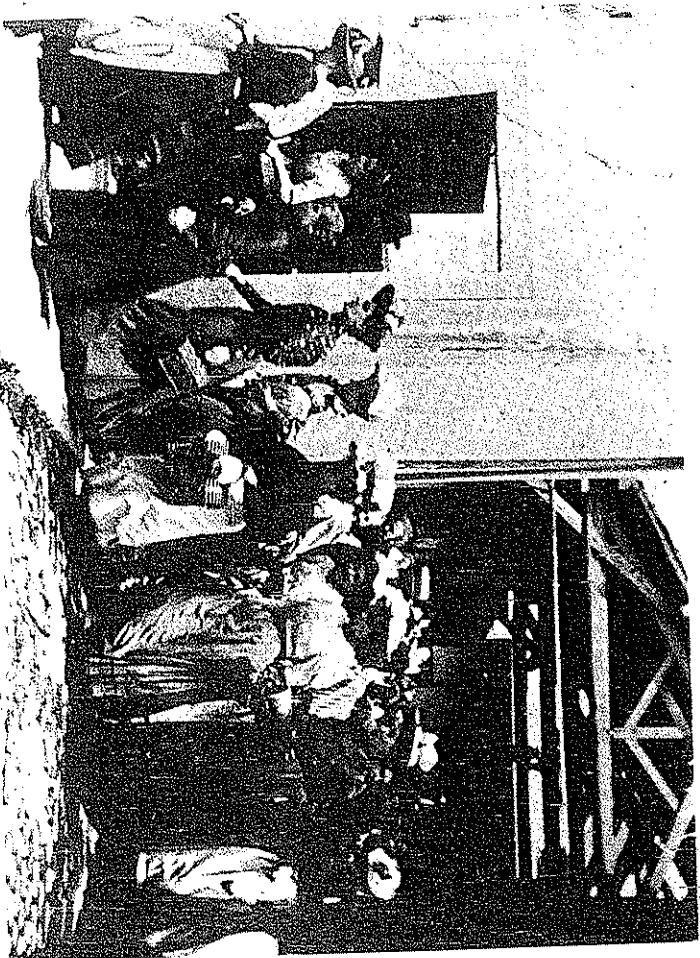
Erik Barnouw

New York Oxford
Oxford University Press
1993

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GLIMPSE OF WONDERS

attacca subito



*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory, 1895. Filmed by Louis Lumière.
Museum of Modern Art*

Prophet

The inventors of cinema, who were legion, included diverse showmen, and others with interests far from showmanship. Some of these were scientists who felt a compelling need to *document* some phenomenon or action, and contrived a way to do it. In their work the documentary film had prenatal stirrings.

Thus the French astronomer Pierre Jules César Janssen wanted a record of Venus passing across the sun, an event of 1874. He developed what he called a *revolver photographique*—a cylinder-shaped camera in which a photographic plate revolved. The camera automatically took pictures at short intervals, each on a different segment of the plate. The result—photographed by Janssen in Japan—was not yet a motion picture, but it was a step in that direction, and it gave ideas to others. For Janssen the important thing was: it documented the event.¹

About the same time the English-born Eadweard Muybridge was doing experiments sponsored by Leland Stanford, former Governor of California. Stanford, a horse-breeder, sensed that the devices used by his trainers to improve gait and speed were based on imprecise knowledge of how a horse runs. Muybridge, already a celebrated photographer, undertook to provide data. He placed a series of cameras—at first twelve, later several times that many—side by side along a track. From these cameras, parallel threads ran across the track. A horse galloping through them clicked the cameras in swift succession. The photos gave information on each stage of the gallop.

The study of animal motion became an obsession for Muybridge. By 1880 he had learned to project sequences of his photos with an adaptation of the magic lantern, and thus to present a galloping horse on a screen—at various possible speeds. The results were eye-opening to many who saw them. Muybridge had foreshadowed a crucial aspect of the documentary film: its ability to open our eyes to worlds available to us but, for one reason or another, not perceived. Muybridge applied the technique to numerous animals and later to men and women—athletes, dancers, and others, sometimes photographed in lovely nude sequences. These often evoked the poetry of ordinary, familiar actions: a woman stooping to pick up a jug. Such painters as



Muybridge sequences—from *Animal Locomotion*, published 1888.

Thomas Eakins and Jean Louis Ernest Meissonier began to use Muybridge's work as a guide in depicting figures in motion.²

The celebrated French physiologist Etienne Jules Marey followed the work of Janssen and Muybridge with intense interest. Having seen a Muybridge galloping-horse projection, Marey wanted to do similar work with bird-flight, but birds could hardly be made to trip a series of threads on a pre-selected route. So Marey followed Janssen's lead, devising a *fusil photographique*, a photographic gun, with which he could follow a bird in flight while "shooting" at split-second intervals. At first, as in Janssen's camera, the photos were successive images on the same glass plate; but in 1887 he switched to strips of photographic paper and the following year to celluloid strips, putting forty images on one strip. Besides birds in flight, he "shot" such phenomena as a cat falling backwards from a height and landing on its feet. He too learned to project the results on a screen. He was approaching motion picture technology, but his embryo documentaries were scarcely three or four seconds long.

Georges Demeny, who began as assistant to Marey, was especially interested in problems of the deaf. He felt deaf people could be taught to lip-read, perhaps to speak, if they could see over and over the characteristic mouth movements connected with sounds. So in 1892, with his own adaptation of Marey's equipment, he began to shoot and project close-ups of mouths articulating short phrases—"Vive la France" or "Je vous aime." Again an experimenter with special interests provided intimations of things a documentary film might be and do.³

The achievements of these and other experimenters were widely



heralded. It remained for protean professional inventors like Thomas Alva Edison and Louis Lumière—racing against scores of other inventors throughout the world—to develop the experiments into a commercial reality and an industry. Edison began the process; Lumière and others carried it forward.

To some extent, Edison shared the documentary ardor of the early experimenters. Before he created his peep-show *kinetoscope*—launched with explosive but short-lived success in 1894—he had met Muybridge and Marey and discussed their work with them. He himself often spoke of the archival and instructional value of motion pictures and sound recordings—in education and business. But in practice his film work quickly took a "show business" direction. In the end it was Louis Lumière who made the *documentary* film a reality—on a worldwide basis, and with sensational suddenness.

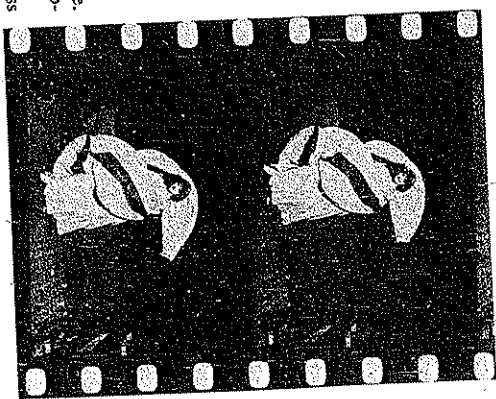
The reason why Lumière and not Edison played this key role is rooted in sharp contrasts between their technical inventions. The camera with which Edison began film production was an unwieldy monster; several men were needed to move it. Also, Edison was intent on integrating the invention with another Edison specialty, electricity, to ensure an even speed of operation. For both these reasons, the Edison camera was at first anchored in the tarpaper-covered studio called "the Black Maria," built at West Orange, N.J. This camera did not go out to examine the world; instead, items of the world were brought before it—to perform. Thus Edison began with a vaudeville parade: dancers, jugglers, contortionists, magicians, strong men, boxers, cowboy rope-twirlers. They appeared at a fixed distance from the camera, usually against a black background, deprived of any context or environment.

Library of Congress



Serpentine Dance—performed by Annabelle. Filmed in the Black Maria for Edison's peep-show kinetoscope, 1894.

Library of Congress



The Louis Lumière camera, on the other hand—the *cinématographe*, launched in 1895—was totally different. It weighed only five kilograms; according to film historian Georges Sadoul, this was about a hundredth of the weight of the Edison camera. The *cinématographe* could be carried as easily as a small suitcase. Handcranked, it was not dependent on electricity. The world outdoors—which offered no lighting problems, at least during the day—became its habitat. It was an ideal instrument for catching life on the run—"sur le vif," as Lumière put it.

A remarkable fact about this small box—a trim hardwood item of much elegance—was that it could with easy adjustments be changed into a projector, and also into a printing machine. This meant that an *opérateur* with this equipment was a complete working unit: he could be sent to a foreign capital, give showings, shoot new films by day, develop them in a hotel room, and show them the same night. In a sudden global eruption, Lumière operators were soon doing precisely that throughout the world.⁴

Louis Lumière, first magnate and major prophet of documentary film, was the son of Antoine Lumière, a painter who had turned to portrait photography, photographing well-to-do clients against backdrops he had painted. Louis and his brother Auguste received a technical education, but Louis left school at an early age because of severe headaches, and took up laboratory work for his father. While still a teenager he invented a new procedure for preparing photographic plates, which gave such startlingly fine results that the Lumières be-

gan to manufacture plates for others, using the new formula. Soon the family sold the photo studio and on the outskirts of Lyon organized a factory to manufacture plates. Louis designed the equipment and supervised every detail of the installation. By 1895 the factory had 300 workers, sold fifteen million dry plates a year, and was the leading European manufacturer of photographic products—surpassed internationally only by the Eastman plant in Rochester, N.Y. The elder Lumière now lived in semi-retirement, painting landscapes. Louis and Auguste produced further inventions, always patented in both their names, although in the case of the *cinématographe* Louis was the sole inventor, having worked out all the problems during one night of insomnia near the end of 1894.

In March 1895, at a meeting in Paris to promote French industries, Louis Lumière demonstrated his invention with the short film *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (*La Sortie des Usines*).⁵ In June he gave a demonstration at a photographic meeting in Lyon. This time he photographed convention members—they included the astronomer Janssen—as they arrived by river steamer; next day, at the meeting, he let them see themselves disembarking. The familiar, seen anew in this way, brought astonishment. Other closed showings were held for scientists in Paris and a photography assemblage in Brussels.

A public unveiling was planned, but Louis Lumière held this off until late in December 1895. Early in the year he had placed an order with the engineer Jules Carpentier for twenty-five *cinématographes*. Throughout the year Carpentier was at work, in constant consultation with Louis Lumière. Every secret of the apparatus was meanwhile guarded: the only existing *cinématographe* was the one used at the demonstrations. All films shown and shot during 1895 were made with this equipment by the Lumière brothers themselves—almost all by Louis.

The films made during this year numbered several dozen, all about a minute long—at the moment, this was the maximum length of a reel. They included several films that were soon to be world famous. One of the most successful was Louis Lumière's *Arrival of a Train*

⁴ In this volume titles will be translated into English where advisable for clarity, with the original title supplied in parentheses when the film is first mentioned. Many Lumière films were shown under a number of different titles; the French titles here used are as they appeared in Lumière catalogues.



Lumière's *Arrival of the Conventioners*, 1895. Leading the way, astronomer Janssen.

Cinémaèque Française

(*L'Arrivée d'un Train en Gare*), filmed at La Ciotat in southern France—the first of many such “arrival” films. In this we see a train approach, from long-shot to close-up. The camera is placed on the platform near the edge of the track. The arrival of the train—virtually “on camera”—made spectators scream and dodge. As we see passengers leave the train, some pass close to the camera, seemingly unaware of it. The use of movement from a distance toward the viewer, and the surprising depth of field in the sequence, offered audiences an experience quite foreign to the theater, and different from anything in the Black Maria performances.

While a few of these early films involved deliberate performances for the camera, such as *Feeding the Baby* (*Le Repas de Bébé*) and *Watering the Gardener* (*L'Arroseur Arrosé*),* most were “actuality” items. None used actors; Louis Lumière rejected the theater as a model for motion pictures. He presented instead a panorama of

* In this renowned little film, a boy steps on a garden hose being used by a gardener. When the gardener examines the nozzle to see what is wrong, the boy withdraws his foot and the gardener is drenched. Some regard it as the first fiction film.

French life that grows more fascinating as the years recede: fishermen and their nets; a boatride; swimmers; firemen at work; men sawing and selling firewood in a city street; a bicycle lesson; the demolition of a wall; children at the seaside; a blacksmith at work; a potato-sack race at a Lumière employees' picnic. The events are small but vivid.

In mid-December of 1895 Carpentier began delivering to Lumière the *cinématographes* ordered early in the year. Manufacturing methods had been developed, and Lumière now ordered 200 more. A world-wide offensive was in the making.

The training of *opérateurs* was meanwhile beginning. In the film *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* a youth with a cap is seen leaving on a bicycle. He was Francis Doublier, and he was chosen to be one of the first of the Lumière world travelers; soon he would film the Tsar of Russia. Another was Alexandre Promio, to be sent to Spain, Italy, and elsewhere. Another was Félix Mesguich, an Algerian youth just completing military service with the Zouaves. He visited the Lumière factory looking for a job, was interviewed by Louis Lumière himself, and was hired. He knew nothing of photography, but this did not seem to trouble Lumière, who apparently felt Mesguich had the proper personality and precision of mind. His training, and that of several dozen others, began promptly at Lyon.

With equipment and personnel for world exploitation assured, Louis Lumière was finally ready for the première run in Paris. It began on December 28, 1895, in the Salon Indien—a room in the basement of the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines, with its own entrance from the street. Louis and Auguste did not attend. They had delegated arrangements for this première to their father, Antoine, who was glad to emerge-from semi-retirement for the ceremonial occasion. The brothers were busy with preparations for larger events.

The run began quietly, with little advance notice, but soon queues waited at every performance. The Salon Indien, which seated 120 people, was soon giving twenty shows a day, at half-hour intervals. At one franc a ticket, receipts ran to 2,500 francs a day. To meet the overflowing demand the Lumières began showings at additional locations. By the end of April, four concurrent Lumière programs were running in Paris. One developed into a permanent cinema.



Fishermen . . .



Embarkation . . .



Swimmers . . .

Photos from Library of Congress

Among those at the first performance was the magician Georges Méliès. He at once expressed ardent interest in buying a *cinématographe* but was put off with various excuses by the elder Lumière. Within two months the Lumières had more than 100 purchase offers, including many from abroad. They were answered with a form letter, stating that a date for the sale of equipment had not been set. For the immediate future other plans were afoot.

Starting in February in London, an avalanche of foreign *cinématographe* premières began. Within six months after the Paris opening the *cinématographe* was launched by the Lumière organization in England, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Serbia, Russia, Sweden, the United States—and soon thereafter in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey, India, Australia, Indochina, Japan, Mexico. Within two years Lumière operators were roaming on every continent except Antarctica.⁵

A triumphant opening in a foreign metropolis followed by a run of weeks or months became a normal sequence. Foreign concessionaires shared in the revenue, but only Lumière operators handled the equipment. Their instructions warned them to reveal its secrets to no one, not even kings and beautiful women. Invited to a banquet, a Lumière operator took his *cinématographe* with him and kept it between his feet. Showings generally began at a small theater or a hotel, earning quick revenue. In a number of cities, success prompted a move to a larger location or additional screenings elsewhere.

Meanwhile—a spectacular feature—operators filmed new items and soon announced a “change of program” with local events. The filming of these was done as publicly as possible; the idea was to lure people to the shows in hope of seeing themselves—which they sometimes did. In any event, the local items were often the high spot of the run: in Spain, *Arrival of the Toreadors* (*Arrivée des Toréadors*); in Russia, *Coronation of Nicholas II* (*Couronnement du Tzar*); in Australia, *Melbourne Races* (*Les Courses*)—all 1896 products. To local audiences they seemed ultimate proof that the *cinématographe* was no “trick.”⁶

At Lumière headquarters in Lyon the arrival of such material from abroad rapidly enriched the catalogue, so that operators went forth with increasingly international assortments. The Lumière program



**TEATR MIEJSKI
W KRAKOWIE**

Wcześniejsze dni 8 Grudnia 1896 r.

PRZEDSTAWIENIE POPOŁUDNIOWE

GRUBE RYBY

Ceny miejsc niskie

Przedstawienie o godzinie 3.

Komedia w 3 aktach M. Halickiego.

Osoby:
Dziękow
Benedykt
Wanda
Wanda
Krzysztof

Pr. Dziękow
Wanda
Wanda
Krzysztof

Pr. Dziękow
Wanda
Wanda
Krzysztof

Pr. Dziękow
Wanda
Wanda
Krzysztof

PO KRAJU OŚWIATLONY

Demonstracja „Żywych fotografii” zaplanowana „Lumière”

wynalazca pp. August i Ludwik Lumière z Lyonu

PP. ER. OD. G. ER. O. W.

Ulica w Londynie.
Oglądanie 06 p. p. francuskiego.
Cyfry i liczby.
Fotograf. scena.
Atak królów i królowych.
Kto pod królową kopie...
Taniec i muzyka.
Dziś wojna zwałczająca.

Wczoraj o godzinie 7. „Kuchnia pod Raczycą” obraz historyczny przez A. W. Lassalle.

Wczoraj o godzinie 7. „Kuchnia pod Raczycą” obraz historyczny przez A. W. Lassalle.
Wczoraj o godzinie 7. „Kuchnia pod Raczycą” obraz historyczny przez A. W. Lassalle.
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Lumière poster, Kraków, 1896.

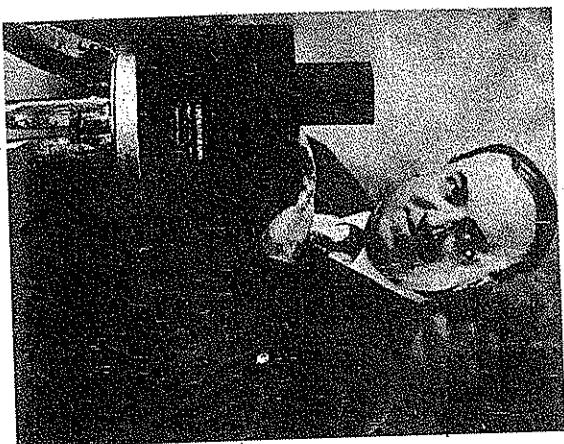
shown by operator Félix Mesguich at Proctor's Pleasure Palace in New York in March 1897 included:⁶

- The Baby's First Lesson in Walking
- The Electrical Carriage Race from Paris to Bordeaux
- A Gondola Scene in Venice
- The Charge of the Austrian Lancers
- Fifty-ninth Street, Opposite Central Park
- A Scene near South Kensington, London
- The Fish Market at Marseilles, France
- German Dragons Leaping the Hurdles
(also a reverse view of this picture)
- A Snow Battle at Lyon, France
- Negro Minstrels Dancing in the London Streets
- A Sack Race Between Employees of Lumière & Sons' Factory, Lyon
- The Bath of Minerva, at Milan, Italy
(also a droll effect obtained by reversing the film)

In 1897 the *cinématographe* was already giving its audiences an unprecedented sense of seeing the world.

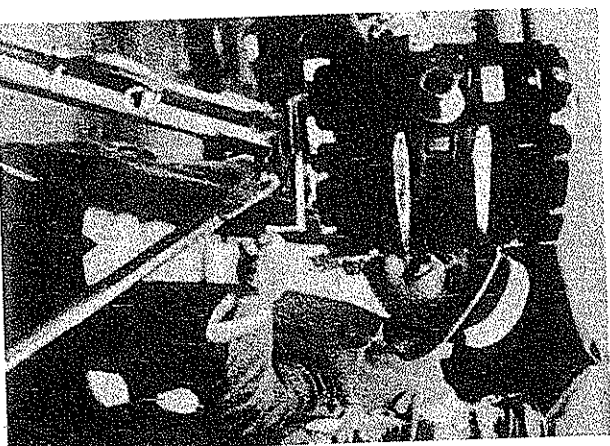
By the end of that year some hundred Lumière operators at work throughout the world had swelled the Lumière collection to more than 750 films. In advertisements and press releases “Lumière” and “*cinématographe*” were always featured; the name of the operator seldom appeared in print. Thus the creators of many Lumière films are not known. A fire destroyed pertinent company records. Louis Lumière in later years recalled the names of some of the operators; others are mentioned in memoirs—their own or those of others. Thus we know that Maurice Sestier went to India, then on to Australia. Félix Mesguich handled screenings in various French cities, then was sent to the United States, and later did service in Russia. Alexandre Promio ranged widely, with early activity in Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Turkey. Latin America was opened by operators Porta and Tax. Francis Doublier, accompanied by Charles Moisson, launched the program in Russia, and later traveled widely in Asia, ultimately settling in the United States.

The Russian tour of duty involved extraordinary and tragic events.



Francis Doublier. Photographed in 1945, with an 1896 *cinématographe*.

Sadoul collection



Félix Mesguich.

a change in policy. The company would discontinue its world demonstration tours, and would proceed to sell its equipment to any one who wished to buy. The Lumières would thenceforth concentrate on manufacture and sale—of *cinématographes*, raw film, and films in the Lumière catalogue. Thus a strange and dizzying chapter ended.

It meant the early withdrawal of the Lumières from film production. Within a few years their catalogue was taken over by others.

All this may have been as Louis Lumière had planned it: he was most at home in research and manufacture. The monopolistic opening drive could not in any case have been maintained. Lumière had been in a neck-and-neck race with other men working on cameras and projectors. At the time of the Lumière whirlwind, a number of these had achieved some success: Max and Emil Skladanowsky in Germany; Birt Acres and Robert William Paul in England; Thomas Armat and C. Francis Jenkins in the United States—and others. Some had even begun demonstration tours. But Lumière's swift campaign and the standard set by his equipment and films caught them all short. Now there was a frenzied scramble to catch up—to pirate, adapt, imitate, surpass.

In the United States Thomas Edison, when he sensed that the *cinématographe* had doomed his peep-show *kinetoscope*, had hastily arranged to take over the projector developed by Armat and Jenkins—which thus became the "Edison Vitascope"—and to launch it in New York at Koster & Bial's Music Hall—on the site later occupied by Macy's department store—two months before the *cinématographe* reached the United States. The Vitascope was also, almost instantly, dispatched on foreign promotion tours, vying with the *cinématographe* and with others. World struggles now became fierce and often violent. Lumière had made clear the possibilities of profit.

Throughout the world new enterprises sprang up. In the United States, Edison was confronted by Biograph, Viagraph, Essanay, Selig, Lubin, Kalem; in France it was Méliès, Pathe, Gaumont; in England, Urban, Hepworth, Williamson; in Italy, Ambrosio, Cines, Itala; in Germany, Messter; in Denmark, Nordisk; in Russia, Drankov; in India, Madan; Japan had its own M. Pathe-inspired by, but unrelated to, the French Pathe brothers.

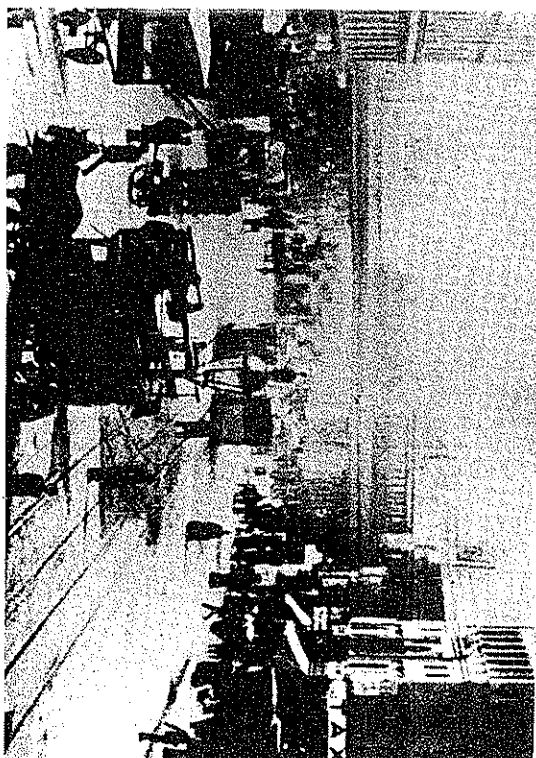
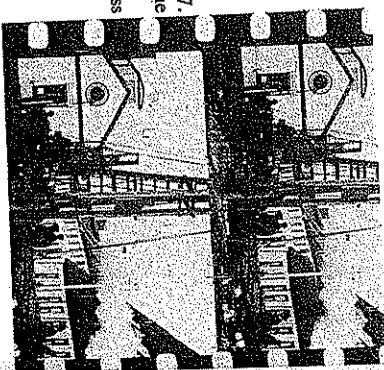
Some of these companies were founded by former peep-show operators; others, by alumni of traveling shows. Most entrepreneurs, including Edison, sought or built portable equipment for field work.



Copyright application, 1897. The Edison company began the practice of submitting a paper print of an entire film—as a “photograph”—for copyright protection. The paper strips survived the nitrate films; much of our knowledge of early films is based on new negatives made in recent years from these paper strips. This copyright procedure lasted until 1912, when an amendment to the copyright law made special provisions for films. See Niver, *Motion Pictures from the Library of Congress Paper Print Collection 1894-1912*.

Pile Driving-Washington Navy Yard, 1897.
From the Edison paper strip submitted with the above application.

Library of Congress



Alexanderplatz in Berlin, by Skladanowsky, 1896.

Staatliches Filmarchiv der DDR

Many started with nonfiction items—calling them *documentaires*, *actualités*, *topicals*, *interest films*, *educational*s, *expedition films*, *travel films*—or, after 1907, *travelogues*.

The Lumière company, withdrawing from this chaotic arena, had in three years achieved extraordinary things. It had reaped, financially speaking, the main harvest from the novelty value of film. It had set a new industry in motion on five continents. It had enshrined the word *cinema*, an early shortening of *cinématographe*, in innumerable languages—rivaled only by derivatives of the Skladanowsky term *bioskop*. It had put France in the lead as film producer and exporter, a position it would hold for more than a decade. It had also set an entertainment pattern—a program of short filmed items, predominantly of a documentary sort—that would likewise persist for many years.

In scores of countries, the visit of a Lumière operator marked the beginning of film history. New entrepreneurs took up where the Lumière emissaries had left off. Many did so with Lumière equipment or imitations of it; some with the help of former Lumière operators. The Lumière pattern thus continued under other auspices.

In Sweden, where the Lumière opening run had lasted more than a year, Alexandre Promio taught cinematography in 1897 to Ernest



Peter Elfelt, court cinematographer, Copenhagen.

Danske Filmmuseum

Florman, son of the court photographer, who thus became Sweden's first cameraman. The Danish royal photographer Peter Elfelt had visited Paris in 1896 and had tried to buy Lumière equipment, but had been refused. However, he managed to have similar equipment built by a Copenhagen master mechanic, and began film production and public showings; early projects dealt with Greenland dogs, street scenes, and royal ceremonies. In England, former Lumière operator Félix Mesguich went to work for Charles Urban, who had come to London as Edison representative; his company soon became one of England's most vigorous enterprises, specializing in documentary films. In Spain, Fructuoso Gelabert of Barcelona, crediting Lumière as his inspiration, began in 1897 to manufacture film equipment; the next year he filmed the visit of Queen Maria Cristina and her son Don Alfonso XIII to Barcelona, marking the start of Spanish film production. Another Spaniard, Antonio Ramos, on finishing military service in the Philippines, became one of the first to buy a Lumière *cinématographe*; also buying twenty Lumière films, he inaugurated the motion picture era in the Philippines. Later, after Spain lost the Philippines to the United States, he moved to Shanghai and in 1903

became its first film entrepreneur. His Ramos Amusement Corporation long dominated the Shanghai scene. In India the portrait photographer Harischandra Saktharam Bhattacharjee had been an enthralled spectator at one of the first Lumière showings and then became an early—probably the first—Indian purchaser of a *cinématographe*. In 1897 he photographed a wrestling match at Bombay's Hanging Gardens, marking the start of Indian film activity.

Although the establishment of permanent cinemas accelerated, Lumière-style tours continued, shifting from cities to towns and villages. With programs in the Lumière pattern, they carried the film to rural fairgrounds throughout Europe, and also to distant colonial areas. From 1901 to 1907 the tent showman Abdullaly Essoffally moved throughout southeast Asia with showings in Singapore, Sumatra, Java, Burma, Ceylon. He then traveled in India, eventually settling there. His tent, 100 feet long and propped by four posts, could hold 1000 people. He later recalled:

When I started my bioscope shows in Singapore in 1901, little documentary films I got from London helped me a lot in attracting people. A short War showing the British Commander-in-Chief Lord Roberts' triumphant entry into Pretoria against the forces of Paul Kruger, the President of the Transvaal republic, proved wonderful draws. People who had merely heard or read some vague reports about the war were thrilled beyond description when they saw the famous figures of the Boer War in action.¹⁰

Throughout the world, such showings had common characteristics, but there were also variations. Speakers who stood beside the screen, explaining things, were especially popular in Asian countries. In Japan, where they were known as *benshi*, they acquired great prestige.

For many years the one-reel film remained the staple, but there were changes. Improvement in equipment brought longer reels. At the turn of the century a one-reel film was one to two minutes long; five years later it was five to ten minutes long. And while documentary items in most countries outnumbered fiction films as late as 1907, the mix was changing. Fiction films were increasing in number and beginning to dominate audience interest. The documentary was declining—in quantity and in vigor.

Several factors were involved. The documentary was to some extent a victim of its quick successes. Many producers continued to follow the formulas that had won such instant acclaim. Meanwhile the

fiction film was in a period of innovation—by Méliès, Porter, and soon many others. It was in fiction, not documentary, that the art of editing was beginning to evolve—and to change the whole nature of film communication.

Still other factors stifted the growth of documentary. The films of Louis Lumière himself, shot in 1895–96, had often been fascinating reflections of French middle-class life. But in the *cinématographe* tours his emissaries, as a matter of promotional practice, had sought royal sponsorship—with triumphant success. King, Tsar, Kaiser, Emperor, Maharajah had readily played their part in launching the wonder of the century—and had meanwhile tended to become infatuated with it, not only permitting but expecting film coverage. All this facilitated access to official functions and clinched other permissions, but the film men paid a price. They became purveyors of royal performances, agents of imperial public relations.

In the Swedish film archives—typical, in this respect, of most such collections—one finds the following 1907 items:

Oscar II and Sofia's Golden Wedding Anniversary
The Kaiser at Swinemünde
Wilhelm II and Nicholas II Coming Aboard the Deutschland
Kaiser Wilhelm Visit to London
Kaiser Visit to Portsmouth
Pictures From the Life of Oscar II
Funeral of Oscar II

The 1908 items include:

British King Inaugurates Olympics
King Carl I of Portugal and Crown Prince Ludwig Philip Assassinated
English Royal Couple Visits Stockholm
Gustaf V and Queen Victoria in Berlin
Crown Princess Margaret Visits Lund
King Gustaf Visits Ystad
Prince Wilhelm and Princess Maria Arrive in Stockholm

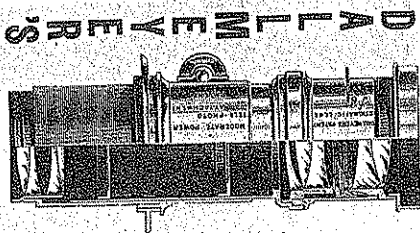
In the United States the situation was no different. Theodore Roosevelt, even before he became President, was an especially eager per-

former. In 1898 during the Spanish-American War he showed—according to Albert E. Smith, Vitagraph co-founder and cameraman—"a willingness to halt his march up San Juan Hill and strike a pose."¹¹ During speeches he noted any cameraman and gave him the full benefit of vigorous grins and gestures, sometimes walking to the side of the platform to do so. He inevitably became a favorite subject; Library of Congress film files include innumerable Theodore Roosevelt items, many collected by Roosevelt himself.

Along with world-wide ties to rulers there came, perhaps inevitably, growing involvement with military leaders. Spanish-American war coverage was such a bonanza for Vitagraph that Biograph the following year sent its co-founder and chief cameraman, W. K. L. Dickson—Edison's aide during *kinetoscope* days—to photograph the Boer War. During his work there he acquired a primitive telephoto lens. Albert E. Smith, for Vitagraph, also headed for Africa, with assurance of a lucrative contract with Koster & Bial's Music Hall. Film men were on hand for the Boxer Rebellion, and provided footage of the Russo-Japanese War from both sides. The military, after initial suspicions and hostility, became as cooperative as royalty. In the Boer War, when Smith felt he needed close shots of Boers in action, British soldiers were put in Boer uniforms to provide a few skirmishes. When Dickson, for Biograph, wanted to film Lord Roberts, British Commander in Chief, at work with his staff, Lord Roberts had his table taken out in the sun "for the convenience of Mr. Dickson." He was, according to Dickson, delighted to be "biographed."¹²

The leading film-producing countries of this period were nations with colonial empires. Not surprisingly, their work reflected the attitudes that made up the colonial rationale. Coverage of "natives" generally showed them to be charming, quaint, sometimes mysterious; generally loyal, grateful for the protection and guidance of Europeans. Europeans were benevolently interested in colorful native rituals, costumes, dances, processions. The native was encouraged to exhibit these quaint matters for the camera.

Most "native" shots probably gave western audiences a reassuring feeling about the colonial system, but there were exceptions. The 1903 film *Native Women Cooling a Ship and Scrambling for Money*, made in the West Indies by an Edison cameraman, must have left some disturbing feelings. It presented a picture of degradation such as seldom reached the screen.



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Advertisement for telephoto lens, 1901.
From the end pages of *The Biograph in
Battle*, by Dickson.

Along with colonialist tendencies, documentary film was infected with increasing fakery. This started early. When Albert E. Smith returned to New York from Cuba with his San Juan Hill footage, he was worried: in spite of the Roosevelt posturing, it looked like a dull uphill walk, in no way fitting the "charge up San Juan Hill" trumpeted by newspapers. Meanwhile theaters clamored for the Cuban material, already publicized. So Vitagraph held off its distribution until Smith and his partner J. Stuart Blackton had shot a table-top "battle of Santiago Bay" complete with profuse cigarette and cigar smoke, explosions, and cardboard ships going down in inch-deep water. Combined with the shots brought from Cuba, it became the hit of the war coverage. The public apparently did not suspect its true nature.

In the feverish competition of the time, such activity was not so much "deceit" as "enterprise." Deceit was sometimes avoided by special promotional phrases. A 1902 film shot by Méliès in Paris, de-

picting the coronation of Edward VII in Westminster Abbey, was announced as an authentic "reconstruction." This material, as in the case of the Cuban film, was intercut with genuine footage—shot outside Westminster Abbey.

In a period when news weeklies had long been illustrated with wood engravings "from photographs taken in the field," there was not likely to be concern about the precise meaning of a "reconstruction." The public was accustomed to news pictures having an uncertain and remote link to events. The relationship was scarcely thought about.

Reconstructions and fakes had an impressive record of "success." Memorable genuine footage came back from the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, but other footage of the event, contrived in table-top miniature, was equally applauded. Several volcanic eruptions were triumphantly faked, as in Biograph's 1905 *Eruption of Mount Vesuvius*. Film companies did not want to ignore catastrophes or other headline events merely because their cameramen could not get there; enterprise filled the gap. In this spirit the British producer James Williamson shot his 1898 *Attack on a Chinese Mission Station* in his back yard, and some of his Boer War scenes on a golf course. The snows of Long Island and New Jersey provided settings for such action as Biograph's 1904 *Battle of the Yalu* and a competing Edison film, *Skinship Between Russian and Japanese Advance Guards*. In the latter we see soldiers surge back and forth before the unmoving camera, while many fall in their tracks. To help audiences identify the players, Russians were dressed in white, the Japanese in dark colors. The acceptance of such items probably discouraged more genuine enterprise—at least among some competitors.

A different kind of fakery was exemplified by a project of Doublier, who in 1898-99 continued his travels in Russia—no longer for Lumière, but under the auspices of producer Ivan Grunwald. Visiting predominantly Jewish districts in the south of Russia, Doublier found an intense curiosity about the Dreyfus affair. The court-martial of Dreyfus had taken place in 1894, before the debut of the *cinématographe*, but agitation by Émile Zola, along with confessions of forgery by a colonel in the French War Office and the colonel's subsequent suicide, brought interest in the scandal to a new pitch in 1898. Doublier proceeded to satisfy it with footage that originally had no connection with Dreyfus. A few words to the audience, and their

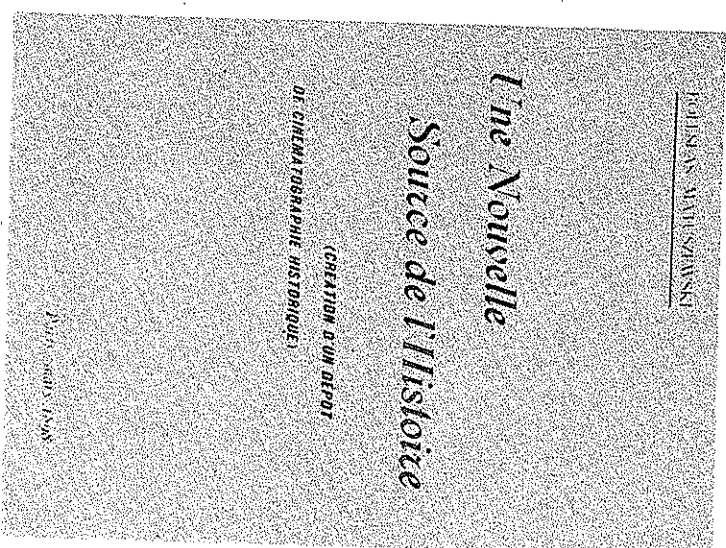
own imagination supplied connections. Footage of a young French captain at the head of an army parade was promptly accepted as "Dreyfus." A large Parisian building became "scene of the court-martial." A tug going out to meet a barge became "Dreyfus taken to a battleship." A long shot of the Nile Delta became "Devil's Island," a scene of the imprisonment.

Audience imagination was often relied on for such services. A curious instance involved a much-publicized 1907 African hunting trip by Theodore Roosevelt. William Selig, working in Chicago, found a Roosevelt look-alike and photographed him stalking through a studio jungle, followed by black "native" porters, also from the Chicago area. He encountered an aged lion, who was then shot on camera. The film was a great financial success. The name "Roosevelt" was never mentioned. The item was merely titled *Hunting Big Game in Africa*.¹³

In Denmark that same year Ole Olsen, founder of Nordisk—and previously a peep-show operator—had a similar smashing success. He bought two aged lions from the Copenhagen zoo and put them on a small wooded island; there a group went "on safari" and the lion was shot on camera. The "jungle" footage was intercut with close shots of a hippopotamus, a zebra, and other animals photographed in the Copenhagen zoo—downward from above to avoid backgrounds and fences. The film ended with a group posing with a lion skin; a black man was included for authenticity.

Amid such projects, the documentary tended to become a dubious and perfunctory part of film programs. The rise of multi-reel fiction films—and then of film stars—downgraded it further. In 1910 the newsreel, with weekly or semiweekly issues, made its debut. The Pathe and Gaumont newsreels were followed by numerous others throughout the world. They tended to turn the customary documentary items into a ritual composite: a royal visit, a military maneuver, a sports event, a funny item, a disaster, and a native festival in costume. The newsreel institutionalized the decline of the documentary. Little now remained of its first vitality; the Lumière period was over. It had been an era of beginnings, and an astonishingly prophetic one.

As early as 1898 a *cinématographe* operator in Warsaw, Bolesław Matuszewski, had written *A New Source of History* (*Une Nouvelle*



Title page of Matuszewski manifesto.

Source de l'Histoire), a short book published in Paris.* Asserting that the work of the camera deserved a place beside stamps, medals, ornamental pottery, sculpture, etc., he proposed a "cinematographic museum or depository" for material "of a documentary interest . . . slices of public and national life." Its contents would be far more meaningful for the young, he suggested, than the words in books. Once established, material would flow in abundance into such an institution. He offered footage of his own. The depository should contain, he argued, not only meetings of rulers and departures of troops and squadrons, but "the changing face of the cities."

He recognized that history does not always happen where one

* Polish title: *Nowe Źródło Historii*. It was republished in Warsaw in 1955 for a meeting of FIAF—Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film. Another Matuszewski volume, *La Photographie Animée*, was also published in 1898.



Louis Lumière.

Museum of Modern Art

waits for it, and that effects are easier to find and photograph than causes. He also realized that the film camera would often want to penetrate where not wanted. Yet in so doing, he felt, it might shed a valuable ray of light.

Film evidence, he suggested, would be able to shut the mouth of the liar.

The high cost of film would fall, he predicted, and come within reach of the many.

He urged the use of film in the arts, industry, medicine, military affairs, science, education.

He himself, in 1898 in Warsaw, showed to a group of doctors a film of an operation, exemplifying the versatility he foresaw for the medium.

The aura of prophecy surrounds much of the work of this first documentary period. It foreshadowed the many potential roles of a documentary film maker. Louis Lumière, in his first film, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, was making what would later be called an industrial film, and was acting as a promoter. In *The Arrival of the Conventioniers* (*Arrivée des Congressistes*, 1895) he was a reporter. The maker of *Wood Cutters in the Street in Paris* (*Sciieurs de Bois*, 1897) was more a genre painter. In the works of many Lumière operators, such as the "panoramas" of Venice and other cities and the later *Coolies at Saigon* (*Coolies à Saigon*, 1897) and *Elephant Processions at Phnom Penh* (*Promenades des Elephants à Phnom-Penh*, 1901), we see the documentarist as travel lecturer. The *Pueblo Eagle Dance* and *Ward Dance* filmed by an Edison cameraman in 1898 are considered early examples of ethnographic film. That same year zoologist Alfred Cord Haddon took a Lumière camera with him on a Cambridge Expedition to the South Pacific Torres Straits, to record and report research findings. In films of the Charles Urban Bioscope Expeditions, a series launched in 1903 to depict remote areas such as Borneo, we see the documentarist as popular educator. Urban assumed a similar function in science with his "micro-bioscope" series *Unseen World*, launched in 1903 and including such items as *Circulation of the Blood in the Frog's Foot*. He also made advertising films for Dewar's Whiskey and Swan's Soap. W. K. L. Dickson, in his Biograph coverage of the Boer War, performed as war reporter. But in Biograph's *Changing the Flag at Puerto Rico*, which brought United States audiences to their feet with the sight of a Spanish flag

being ripped down and replaced by an American flag, the film maker was serving more as war propagandist. Edison's *Rowt of the Filipinos* had a similar bugle-call purpose, fanning the imperialistic emotions of the hour.

None of these functions can be neatly separated. They never occur separately. The documentarist is always more than one of these. Yet different occasions, different moments in history, tend to bring different functions to the fore. This was true in the first decade of documentary history, and it remained true in later decades.

As the documentary entered a period of decline and seemed headed for oblivion, the documentarist-as-explorer showed the clearest signs of continuing vitality. Interest in distant places was effectively stimulated by the Urban Bioscope Expeditions. It was fanned for several years, starting in 1904, by the ingenious *Hale's Tours*, in which a small auditorium, shaped like a train, was entered from the back by paying a "conductor." Once seated, audiences found the car vibrating and shaking as wondrous scenes rushed by. *Hale's Tours* units were operated in many cities of America and Europe. More substantial were films shot on a 1909 Carnegie Museum Expedition to Alaska and Siberia, and the extraordinary footage filmed in 1911 by Herbert G. Ponting during the disastrous expedition of Captain R. F. Scott to the Antarctic. Sponsored by Gaumont, the material began to reach theater screens with enormous success in 1912.¹⁴

It is perhaps not surprising that in the exploration field, the documentary had its first rebirth.

National Education and Information Films Ltd, National Film Archive, Naya Sansar Productions; (Italy) RAI; (Japan) Iwanami Productions, Japan Association of Cultural Film Producers, Japan Film Library Council, NHK, Nippon AV Productions, Toho Company, Towa Company; (Latvia) Riga Film Museum; (Netherlands) Centrale Filmotheek, Netherlands Filmmuseum; (Poland) Association of Polish Film Makers, Krakow Festival, Film Polski, FilMOTEKA Polska, Wytwórnia, Filmów Dokumentalnych; (South Korea) Motion Picture Promotion Union, National Film Production Center; (Sweden) Film Centrum, Svensk Filmindustri, Svenska Filminstitutet, Sveriges Radio-TV Arkivet; (Switzerland) Locarno Festival, Praesens Film; (USA) Contemporary Films, George Eastman House, International Film Seminars, Library of Congress, Museum of Modern Art, National Archives, Time-Life Films, Tricontinental, U.S. Information Agency, Whitney Museum of Modern Art; (USSR) Association of Film Makers of the USSR, Central Documentary Studio, Gosfilmofond, Institute of Fine Arts; (West Germany) Institut für Film und Bild, Riefenstahl-Film; (Yugoslavia) Dunav Film, Film and Television Academy, Jugoslovenska Kinoteka, Neoplanta Films, Zagreb Films. To all, our warmest thanks.

The names of many of the artists interviewed will be found in the following source notes.

New York City
June 1992

E. B.

SOURCE NOTES

Prophet (pp. 3-30)

1. For the prehistory of cinema see Ceram, *Archaeology of the Cinema*; also Jacques Deslandes, *Histoire Comparée du Cinéma*, v. 1; Macgowan, *Behind the Screen*.
2. Ramsay, in *A Million and One Nights*, is intent on ridiculing Mybridge, while concentrating all honors on Edison. Mybridge's odd adopted name (he was born Edward James Muggeridge) may have encouraged this, but his achievements were formidable. For discussion and a Mybridge bibliography, see *Film Comment*, Fall 1969; also Hendricks, *The Edison Motion Picture Myth*; MacDonnell, *Edwardward Mybridge*.
3. Macgowan, *Behind the Screen*, p. 276; Sadoul, *Histoire du Cinéma*, p. 17.
4. Sadoul, *Louis Lumière*, is a good introduction to the Lumière saga; but see Jacques Deslandes, *Histoire Comparée du Cinéma*, v. 2, for additional material, and corrections of Sadoul errors. Mesguich, *Tours de Manivelle*, is an absorbing memoir by a widely traveling Lumière opérateur. English-language material on Lumière is scant, but the impact of his shows is reflected in film histories of various countries, as noted below.
5. See the chronology and filmography in Sadoul, *Louis Lumière*.
6. Robinson, *The History of World Cinema*, p. 23.
7. As told to Jay Leyda by Doublier. Leyda, *Kino*, p. 19.
8. Baxter, *The Australian Cinema*, pp. 2-3; Barhouw and Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, pp. 2-5. Sestier's *Melbourne Races survives in the Australian compilation film, The Pictures That Moved* (1968).
9. Mesguich, *Tours de Manivelle*, p. 10.
10. "Half a Century in Exhibition Line: Shri Abdullally Recalls Bioscope Days," *Indian Talkie*, pp. 121-22.
11. Smith, *Two Reels and a Crank*, p. 148.

12. Ibid. p. 102; Dickson, *The Biograph in Battle*, p. xiii.
13. Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights*, pp. 520-21.
14. The Ponting material reached the screen again in 1930 in the film *Ninety Degrees South*. Low, *The History of the British Film 1906-1914*, p. 156.

Explorer (pp. 33-51)

1. The quotation—one of several accounts of this episode—is from an autobiographical document in *The Flaherty Papers*, Box 59. *The Flaherty Papers* are the main source for this section, along with Calder-Marshall, *The Innocent Eye*, and other sources as noted.
2. All diary quotations are from *The Flaherty Papers*.
3. The letters are dated April 14 and March 6, 1915. *The Flaherty Papers*, Box 15.
4. Griffith, *The World of Robert Flaherty*, p. 38.
5. Flaherty, Robert J., "Life Among the Eskimos," *World's Work*, October 1922.
6. *Theatre Arts*, May 1951.
7. *New York Times*, June 12, 1922.
8. Sherwood (ed.), *The Best Moving Pictures of 1922-23*.
9. From the autobiographical document, *The Flaherty Papers*, Box 59.
10. See de Bigard, *Anthropological Cinema*.
11. *Film Culture*, Spring 1972.

Reporter (pp. 51-71)

1. The section is based largely on Drobashenko, *Dziga Vertov* (German edition); Sadoul, *Dziga Vertov*. Other sources as noted. There is scant English-language material on Vertov.
2. Leyda, *Kino*, pp. 138-39. Leyda worked for a time with Vertov.
3. See *ibid.* p. 163, for a list of features playing in Moscow's "NEP-nourished" theaters late in 1922.
4. *Sovetskoye Kino*, November-December 1934; quoted by Leyda, *Kino*, pp. 161-62.
5. Interview, Mikhail Kaufman.
6. Siney (ed.), *Film Culture Reader*, p. 362.
7. Note ebullient comment by French documentarist Chris Marker: "Let us now praise Dziga Vertov, for if I had to choose the Ten Best Documentaries of All Time, I'd call it preposterous, but if there's ONE to choose: *A SIXTH OF THE WORLD*." Quoted, Klaue *et al.* (eds.), *Sowjetischer Dokumentarfilm*, p. 70.
8. Leyda, *Kino*, p. 176. The lecture, translated by S. Brody, appeared in *Filmfront*, 1935.
9. *Film Comment*, Spring 1972, offers an illuminating discussion by David Bordwell on disputes surrounding Vertov.
10. See Leyda, *Films Begot Films*, pp. 22-28, for Shub's contribution to the evolution of the compilation film.

Painter (pp. 71-81)

1. Richter, "The Film as an Original Art Form," *Film Culture*, January 1955.
2. Manvell and Fraenkel, *The German Cinema*, pp. 45-47.
3. See Klaue (ed.), *Alberto Cavalcanti*, for several discussions of *Rien Que Les Heures*.
4. Interview, Boris Kaufman. Gomes, *Jean Vigo*, pp. 55-80.
5. Interview, Henri Storck. Maistaf, *Henri Storck*, pp. 5-23. The Vigo-Storck letters were published in *Centrofilm*, February-March, 1961.
6. Ivens, *The Camera and I*, pp. 13-46.

Advocate (pp. 85-139)

1. For the early Grierson years, see Jack C. Ellis, "The Young Grierson in America, 1924-1927," *Cinema Journal*, Fall 1968.
2. Quotations are from Hardy (ed.), *Grierson on Documentary*, except as otherwise noted.
3. Interview, Edgar Anstey.
4. Material on the EMB and GPO units is based on Rotha, *Documentary Film*, and reminiscences by Grierson co-workers in *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1972, and in *The Journal of the Society of Film and Television Arts* (II, 4-5), 1972—reminiscences gathered as Grierson memorials. A similarly illuminating document in cinema form is the film *Grierson* (1973), produced by James Beveridge for the National Film Board of Canada; it includes historic Grierson footage and interviews with co-workers in Europe, America, Asia, and Australia.
5. *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1972.
6. *Take One*, January-February 1970.
7. Interview, Basil Wright.
8. *Film News* (XIII, 3), 1953.
9. Rotha, *Documentary Film*, pp. 106-7.
10. *Ibid.*, 1951 preface by Grierson, p. 17.
11. Material on Goebbels is based on Hull, *Film in the Third Reich*, except as otherwise noted.
12. The account of Leni Riefenstahl's career is based largely on material assembled by Gordon Hitchens in *Film Culture*, Spring 1973, and, earlier, in *Film Comment*, Winter 1965. Other sources as noted.
13. Riefenstahl, *Hinter den Kulissen des Reichsparteitagfilms*, pp. 16-24.
14. *Ibid.* p. 15.
15. Interview, Leni Riefenstahl.
16. For Budd Schulberg comments, see "Nazi Pin-Up Girl," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 30, 1946.
17. The Jaworsky comments are in *Film Culture*, Spring 1972.
18. Fielding, *The American Newsreel*, p. 278.
19. See "Pioneers," an interview with Thomas Brandon, *Film Quarterly*, Fall 1973.