

## Study Notes I

### How to use these notes

These notes are intended to support and extend your developing understanding of film as a result of viewing *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*, Chapter 1. They propose activities you can undertake as a member of a study group, in discussion sessions, and activities you can undertake on your own. To get a sense of what's proposed for this study session, you should read these notes all the way through before you do anything else.

To prepare properly for a discussion session you should watch the relevant chapter of *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*, then read the discussion questions carefully and watch the chapter again with the questions in mind. This is the core individual activity of the programme. For this session you need to watch *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* Chapter 1: 1895–1918 *The world discovers a new art form* (DVD 1: first hour - see footnote below).

Repeat viewings are the best way to really grasp what a film-maker is aiming at - whether the film is a fictional narrative or an essay film like *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*. There's nothing wrong with using the step-back on the remote control either, to make sure you've understood or seen something properly. The other individual activities are an important enhancement, but not a substitute for the core. They are intended to offer

you a range of options for extending your individual study, and they are designed to feed into the discussion sessions (sometimes directly, when participants are asked to say what individual studies they have pursued).

### Key films

Your preparation should also include watching the key films for the session. These are films selected from those that Mark Cousins cites as exemplary within the chapter being studied, and they are listed in each set of study notes. You will find that discussion flows much better if everyone has seen the key films recently (and of course it is essential to watch a key film if your group has chosen a discussion topic that is about that specific film, so you can participate properly).

Normally we specify two feature-length films as key films, or their equivalent in time commitment. All the key films are shown in the *Key Films* list, which should be part of your study pack. The key films for Chapter 1 are:

Any 1950s film by Yasujirô Ozu that you can easily get hold of (go to IMDB for a full list)

*Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith, 1915).

(On Youtube you can find a complete English version under the Spanish title *El Nacimiento de una Nación*).

Note: *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* was originally released as 15 one-hour broadcast chapters, and this is reflected in the DVD box set, but in cinemas it is shown as a single film (with intermissions). This study programme was accordingly organised around 15 sessions each based on the viewing of one chapter. For the convenience of study groups the programme has been subdivided into 3 segments, each focusing on 5 chapters of the film. On the DVDs released in the UK, the chapter heading intertitles can be found by stepping through the DVD with your remote control. For clarity, we also identify Mark Cousins' chapters by referring to DVD 1, first hour and so on.

## Group activities

There is much to discuss in Chapter 1, in which Mark Cousins introduces or touches upon some of the big questions he'll be looking at throughout the whole series. You shouldn't expect to get your head around everything he's driving at straight away. For now, discuss two or more of these topics, depending on the time available - but do spend time on Topic 1.

### Topic 1

This may well be the first time you have used a film (Chapter 1) as an object of close study. It takes some getting used to - watching a section, then watching it again to make sure you got what Mark Cousins was saying, taking notes, maybe, and identifying unresolved issues for future inquiry. You do need to listen carefully, and make sure you've taken the developing argument on board. It will help in this first session if you share problems, difficulties and helpful strategies. Concentrate on these questions: what problems did you encounter in teasing out what Mark Cousins was saying, and what did watching the Chapter more than once reveal to you?

### Topic 2

In his introduction, Mark Cousins sets out the first part of his argument about the nature of film and film-making. It is based on what he calls three 'surprises' that his examination of film has revealed, which can be summarised like this:

1) 'Hollywood is not classical, Japan is': 'films like *Casablanca* are too romantic to be classical in the true sense. Instead, Japanese films like this (Ozu's *Record of a Tenement Gentleman*) are the real classical movies' because they are slow-paced ('romantic films are always in a rush').

2) 'Money doesn't drive films'. What does? – ideas, visual ideas and images, most usually produced by innovative directors who 'know how to get inside your head'.

3) Cinema is a world-wide phenomenon. 'Much of what we assume about the movies is off the mark. It's time to redraw the map we have in our heads. It's factually inaccurate, and racist by omission'.

Discuss these assertions in the light of your own viewing experience. Don't expect to resolve all the questions they throw up - all these issues, and particularly the significance of the classical/romantic divide, are running themes throughout the series, and you will return to them again. Without getting too bogged down in specifics, think about the evidence he has put forward - do you agree with him? How do his assertions connect with your own perceptions?

### Topic 3

In Chapter 1, Mark Cousins discusses how, as early cinema developed, the 'language' of film narrative gained new functions. Through continuity cutting it gained the narrative function of 'then', through parallel cutting it gained the narrative function of 'meanwhile', and in D. W. Griffiths's use of parallel storylines it gained a comparative function akin to metaphor (this is like that). Why do you think that the new art form of cinema developed complicated storytelling capability so quickly?

### Forward planning

Together, choose one or two of the discussion questions from *Study Notes 2*. You should note that some preparation is needed, and that the key films for the next Chapter are

*The Kid* (Charles Chaplin, 1921)

*The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928).

Both are currently available complete on Youtube (search for Chaplin the kid, Dreyer Joan of Arc).

## Individual activities (Internet research, Youtube and Wikipedia)

### HEALTH WARNING: ONLY THE SERIOUSLY KEEN SHOULD ATTEMPT TO DO ALL OF THESE.

Most people just won't have enough time. We've included a lot of activities because some groups will allow enough time for them by meeting relatively infrequently, and because, frankly, some participants just can't get enough. You should set your own limit and stick to it. The activities are designed to feed into the group discussion, so you should do more than none at all, but stay within the bounds of the possible.

One other thing. Do remember that many of these websites have areas where anyone can post comments. Take these comments with a pinch of salt. But then, you already knew that.

### Internet research

Below there is a list of URLs to get you going, and you will find that many other options are presented to you in forward links on the websites (and in the Youtube sidebar). In all these study notes, by the way, the intention is that you should simply open the study notes on-screen and click on a link where one is provided. The web page should then open in your browser. One other thing: the internet is notoriously inconstant - pages and sites appear and disappear all the time. We try to keep this list up to date. Please let us know if any URL no longer works. You could also tell us if you find a great new site that would be suitable for inclusion.

Note: these URLs (website addresses) are not a full list of what's available online, but merely some examples to show you the kind of thing you could be looking for. Some of the examples are from online journals with a very extensive back catalogue of articles, some from blogs, and some are one-offs.

You can do it too - just get stuck into your search engine of choice, and be prepared to search beyond the first five pages of results (sometimes well beyond). You will quickly develop an instinct for which sites are likely to be interesting - and there's nothing wrong with emailing links to interesting websites around the study group.

- Luke McKernan's bioscope blog - a marvellous resource on early cinema, with a wealth of articles and on-ward links: <http://thebioscope.net>
- Victorian cinema - a labour of love by Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan: <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/>
- Earlycinema.com - useful for fleshing out your knowledge: <http://www.earlycinema.com/index.html>
- Good *Senses of Cinema* article on Georges Méliès (NB: all *Senses of Cinema* articles provide extensive further links to other useful material): <http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/great-directors/melies/>
- Another good *Senses of Cinema* article, on D. W. Griffith: <http://sensesofcinema.com/2006/great-directors/griffith/>
- A very useful potted history of early cinema: <http://www.filmsite.org/pre20sintro.html>
- A large archive of old magazine articles, including a number about film - you have to rummage around, but some people enjoy that kind of thing: [http://www.oldmagazinearticles.com/Silent\\_Movie\\_History](http://www.oldmagazinearticles.com/Silent_Movie_History)
- A very nice article on early cinema by Martin Scorsese: <http://goo.gl/aLc9Bu>

(NB: in the case of some very long URLs, we have used Google URL shortener)

## Wikipedia articles

Film is well-served on Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). Here is a list of article titles which will flesh out your understanding of the topics Mark Cousins discusses in Chapter 1: just copy and paste (or type) them into the Wikipedia search field (top right of screen):

Georges Méliès; Auguste and Louis Lumière; Silent Film; Edward Muybridge; Étienne-Jules Marey; George Eastman; Thomas Edison; Edwin Stanton Porter; Cinema of France; Alice Guy; Julia Crawford Ivers; Lois Weber; Mary Pickford

NB: this is just a short selection from the many topics available, and you will probably want to use embedded links within articles to follow up topics you're interested in.

## Youtube clips

Many of the films Mark Cousins discusses are available in whole or in part on Youtube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)). Here is a short list of topics which produce interesting results if you copy and paste them into the Youtube search field: Blacksmith scene 1893; Lumiere brothers; Louis-Aimé-Augustin Le Prince; Georges Méliès; Edwin S. Porter; Way Down East; The BFI Edwardian cinema collection: Alice Guy; Lois Weber

## Movies/DVDs

Some DVDs to enhance your knowledge and awareness:

*Early Cinema – Primitives and Pioneers* (BFI DVD)

*Before the Nickelodeon: The Early Cinema of Edwin S. Porter* (BFI DVD)

*Hugo* – Martin Scorsese (DVD) Gives a great sense of what Méliès's studio might have been like (and you might enjoy the book which inspired it, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick).

## Books about film studies

If you want to extend your knowledge about this field of study, or look up terminology or concepts:

*A Dictionary of Film Studies* (Oxford Paperback Reference): Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell

*The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*: Richard Dyer, E. Ann Kaplan, Paul Willemen and John Hill

*The Cinema Book* (BFI): Pam Cook

*Cinema Studies: the Key Concepts* (Routledge): Susan Hayward

## Further reading on this chapter

If you want to explore the ground covered in this chapter in more detail:

*The Parade's Gone By* (University of California Press 1992): Kevin Brownlow

*Hollywood: the Pioneers* (HarperCollins 1979): Kevin Brownlow

*The Last Machine: Early Cinema and the Birth of the Modern World* (BFI 1995): Terry Gilliam and Ian Christie

*Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* (Taylor and Francis 2007): Richard Abel (Ed) (also available as Kindle edition)

*Motion Studies: Time, Space and Edward Muybridge* (Bloomsbury 2003): Rebecca Solnit