

Emergence, Growth and Challenges of Films and Home Videos in Nigeria

Edited By

Olufemi Onabajo

Ritchard M'Bayo



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Contact in Nigeria:
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e-mail: conceptpublications@gmail.com
Phone: 0805 259 4490 & 01-8183150

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Chapter 1

Film / Cinema Development: From Still to Motion Picture

Christopher Enwefah

Introduction

IT is not possible to give credit to any single individual for the invention and development of motion picture. Just like any other technological development; that of film is cumulative. It was a result of several individual and institutional efforts.

Films are nothing but 'moving' pictures or pictures in 'motion'. They are a series of slightly different pictures (still pictures) passing before our eyes in a sequential order, and at a regular speed to tell a story. The movement of the pictures is done so rapidly that it seems as though they are moving. This is known as *optical illusion*. The illusion of movement in films is merely an optical trick. Films must be exposed in the camera and projected at a regular speed if they are to reproduce the illusion of movement. In sound films, 24/25 frames of images are projected per second to achieve the illusion of normal movement. But old silent films play at a variety of slower speeds, e.g. Charlie Chaplain films. The consequence of this is that seemingly jerky or too fast images are produced when the silent films are projected at modern speeds.

Early Attempts at Producing Motion

Early days of human civilization revealed some attempts by man to capture, re-enact and recreate motion. Examples of such attempts are found in cave drawings depicting a horse with eight legs, the fleeting arrow from a hunter's bow, or detailed drawings of kings with one leg or foot outstretched to suggest a walking motion.

Aside from man's attempt at drawing, painting and capturing the world around him in order to depict the impression of movement, Arab astronomers during the 10th century used an early camera obscura to look at images of the sun without damaging their eyes. From the 15th century, this idea was used by artists to project images onto canvasses to help them draw accurately. But only the invention of a camera in the 19th century has enabled people to produce exact copies of the things we see.

Film Mechanism

A film strip contains a series of pictures, and each picture is a little different from the one before. The illusion of motion is created when these pictures are shown one after the other in very quick succession such that our eyes and brain merge them together and what we see appears to be a moving picture. The pictures form a series on a strip of photographic material called *Celluloid*. Celluloid is a versatile material, strong and flexible enough to curl round the mechanical parts of cameras and projectors without tearing. It is sensitive enough for images in it to be clearly projected at several times their original size. Celluloid can also be cut *cleanly* and joined again, an essential quality for editing together separate sections of a film. Two machines are responsible for transforming the celluloid strip into moving pictures. These are the *Camera* and *Projector*. The camera exposes light onto the celluloid, and this enables it to record the image of whatever is in front of the camera lens, while the job of the

projector is to beam a light source through the fast moving film strip onto a screen some distance away.

The projector contains an electrical motor that winds the film through it. Each frame or picture is held in place for a moment and projected onto the screen by a bright light. A lens focuses the image, while a spinning shutter cuts off the light and moves the film on by one more frame. Therefore, when we watch a film, we are actually in darkness for precisely half the duration of that film. The reason is that the shutters in the projector open on one frame at a time and closes until the next frame replaces the preceding one. This happens so fast that the brain believes there is continuous movement.

Film Strip (Cinema Film)

The film strip comprises both pictures and sound. One soundtrack is made up of two squiggly lines and is printed between the holes along the edge of the film strip in digital form. In order to pick up the sound-track, a light is shone through the edge of the film onto a photo-sensor. The cinema film comes in various sizes such as: 16 mm, 70 mm, and 35 mm. However, most movie makers prefer the 35 mm.

Film and the Theory of Illusion of Movement

The theory of illusion of movement is the underlying principle of motion picture. It was first noted in the early 19th century, precisely in 1824, by the English physician, Peter Mark Roget in his article, "The Persistence of Vision with regard to Moving Object". The theory postulates that the eye retains an image a fraction of a second longer than it exists. So, when a film strip containing series of slightly different pictures is rapidly projected, one picture after the other, the brain retains each preceding picture and merges them with the ones that follow, and what we see is an impression of movement.

The illusion of motion came under intense study by such scientists as Joseph Plateau, who studied timing, colour intensity, and other matters related to the perception of movement. Many inventors tested the theory with pictures (hand-drawn) pasted on coins that were twirled; with books of pictures that were flipped by the thumb, and with rotating discs of drawings. These various attempts gave rise to such devices as the *Thaumatrope*, the *Phasmatrope*, the *Phenakitoscope*, the *Praxinoscope*, and the *Zoetrope* (a particular favourite) which is the slotted drum through which could be seen as clowns and animals that seemed to leap. They were hand drawn on strips of paper fitted inside the drum. The *Phenakitoscope*, which was earlier referred to as 'the wheel of life', became highly developed by the middle of the century. It consisted of a large disk, about three feet in diameter. A series of still pictures showing an object in different positions as it moved were mounted around the rim. The individual viewed these through an aperture as the wheel turned and perceived smooth motion. When the principles of these devices were elaborated upon and combined with the photography of things in motion, they provided the basis for movies.

Film and Photography

Early attempts at testing the theory of illusion of movement were made with hand-drawn pictures. Photography was still a pipe dream, until the 18th century when people began to realize that certain chemicals were affected and changed by light. They discovered that materials coated with these chemical substances would record or capture patterns of light which fell across them.

In 1826, a French physicist named Joseph Niepce (1765 – 1833), made history when he took the world's first photograph. He obtained special sheets of *Pewters*, called

plates, which had been coated with bitumen, a light-sensitive substance. Using a camera obscura, he projected an image onto the plates, and eight hours after, a blurred image was formed on them. The length of time that light is allowed to fall on photographic plates or film is called the *Exposure Time*. Niepce's pictures were blurred, exposure time of eight hours was too long, and photographic techniques were crude.

Thirteen years later, Niepce's partner Louis Daguerre (1789 – 1851) came to the rescue. By 1839, Daguerre was able to obtain photographs after a considerably reduced exposure time of only 20 minutes. His pictures were called *Daguerreotypes* and were very popular, especially for portraits. Although Daguerre's pictures were clearer than Niepce's and exposure time much shorter, they also had their problems. People who posed for a portrait wore clamps around their heads since they had to remain still throughout the exposure time. The metal plates were very expensive and the pictures could not be replicated.

Advanced Stage of Photography

William Fox Talbot (1800 – 1877), an English scientist, laid the foundation for solving the problem of expensive plates and picture replication when he invented a new method of developing pictures. He soaked paper in light-sensitive chemicals thereby making the paper capable of capturing any image that fell on it. When Talbot projected an image onto the paper, the brightest areas turned the image black, while the darkest parts left it white. This version of the image is called a *Negative*. To produce a positive image or print, Talbot then shone light through the negative onto another sheet of light-sensitive paper. This version of positive prints he called *Calotypes*, from the Ancient Greek words meaning "Beautiful Pictures".

Following Talbot's discovery, pictures became printable on paper, which was light-sensitive, and replication was made possible contrary to when images were captured on expensive metal plates. Meanwhile, an American inventor, George Eastman (1854-1932), was standing by to exploit the potentials of Talbot's invention. Eastman realized the commercial potential of bringing photography to the doorstep of the common people. He developed a simple, hand-held camera called the *Kodak No. 1*, which was sold already fitted with a roll of film. After a shot, the user wound the film on, ready for the next shot. And after the exposures were exhausted, the camera was returned together with the film to the Eastman factory where the pictures were developed and printed. Eastman's company was associated with the motto, "You press the button, we do the rest".

In 1885, Eastman devised a long strip of strong paper, coated with a layer of photographic emulsion and coiled into a roll. This could be wound into a camera to take many photographs. Subsequently, in 1888, *Kodak 2* was developed. It was supplied with a paper roll for 100 photographs. The paper roll was soft; so, sometimes it either tore or wrinkled. Eastman thereafter experimented with the use of celluloid which was much stronger and also transparent, for the type of photographs called *Transparencies*. *Celluloid* roll film was introduced in 1889.

Sequential Photographs

This is the era of still photograph; but to advance beyond the world of still picture, the next challenge was how to capture images of an object in slightly different positions in their successive order. Remember that 'Persistence of Vision', the principle on which motion picture works, suggests that any image produced in our eyes takes a moment to fade. And that, if many pictures of an object which is changing position are viewed in rapid succession, the brain perceives the object

to be in motion; hence, the need for sequential photographs.

An opportunity came in 1872 when the Governor of California, Leland Stanford, and some of his friends made a large wager over whether a running horse ever had all its feet off the ground at once. To settle the bet, a British photographer, Edward Muybridge (1830-1904) was hired by the governor. To perform this task, Muybridge set up a series of cameras on a racing track and -connected to each camera was a trip cord so that when the horse ran by, it tripped the cords and then the cameras, giving Muybridge a series of photographs of the horse in various stages of running. Even at this, one thing remained lacking; a film and a camera capable of taking rapid pictures of moving objects; pictures that, when developed, could be "played back" for an illusion of motion. Although Muybridge's pictures could be viewed through a special lantern and appeared almost as moving pictures, they were not, since they were not taken by one camera. However, Muybridge's pictures were later projected in sequence using a machine called *Zoopraxiscope*, developed by Emile Reynard. This was a major attempt at unifying photography and projection.

Camera and Viewing Mechanisms

Although many people contributed to the invention and development of motion picture, two people, William Dickson and Thomas Edison, both of Edison's Laboratory, made very remarkable attempts at moving George Eastman's contributions in photography beyond the world of still camera.

The first workable motion picture camera, the *Kinetograph*, was developed in Edison's Laboratory in 1889. Edison and his associate, Dickson, successfully took motion pictures a year after (1890) with the *Kinetograph*. And by 1891, Edison constructed a motion picture studio which he called "Black Maria" because of the tarpaper shack from which it was made.

The studio was crude, but it laid the foundation for the development of commercial motion picture industry in America.

Motion pictures were yet to be projected onto a screen to a viewing audience. Instead, viewing was limited to a single customer viewing them one at a time. By 1896, Edison had taken cinema to the next level when he developed the *Kinetoscope*; a projecting system which offered its penny-paying customers sensational but jerky pictures of locomotives rushing towards the cameras, fisticuffs, cockfights, Annie Oakley shooting clay pigeons, Hootchie-Kootchie dancers, Vaudeville acts, practical jokes and sea waves. Although about this period, other projecting systems such as the *Vitascope* and *Biograph* were also refined to project the films recorded with Edison's *Kinetograph* onto screens to entire paying audiences instead of single customers, the *Kinetoscope* was more popular.

The Cinematographe and the First Cinema

The next hurdle was to produce a machine capable of recording motion picture and projecting same at the same time. Two brothers, Auguste and Louis Lumiere, were key contributors here. Using the knowledge of the technology they learned from Edison's work, the Lumiere Brothers improved both the *Kinetograph* and *Kinetoscope*. The outcome of their efforts was a portable camera that was less cumbersome than Edison's. It had the capability of printing and projecting pictures with a crude yet intermittent motion. The machine was called the *Cinematographe*. The cinematographe was both a camera and a projector (when a lamp was attached).

With the *Cinematographe*, the individual pictures, or frames, were projected onto the screen at a projection rate of 16 frames per second (fps). Since the device was mechanically operated, the speed varied from 12 to 24 fps, depending on how fast the

operator turned the handle. Improvements on later versions included clock work and electric motors and by the 1920s, 24 fps projection rate became the movie industry's standard.

On March 19, 1895, the Lumiere Brothers, using their cinematographe, shot the first motion picture in the history of cinema – “La Sortie des usines Lumieres” (Leaving the Lumieres’ Factory). The duration was 50 seconds, and 800 frames of separate photographs. On December 28, 1895, at 9.00pm, in the basement of a Paris Café, they had the first public show of their films – the world’s first cinema was born, signalling the beginning of the motion picture industry.

The Lumieres followed with other films such as “Teasing the Gardener” (cinema’s first make-believe story or fiction, rather than a scene from real life, and the first comedy), “Feeding the Baby”, “The Train enters La Coitac Station”, “The Cat’s Meal” (The first cinema close-up) and “The Snowball Fight”.

Just as boredom shortly set in after the novelty and excitement that trailed the projection of sensational but jerky pictures of locomotives and cockfights to a single paying audience, when the ‘flickers’ left the peep-show arcades and were projected before larger audiences in Vaudeville palaces, the same circle occurred. The initial wonderment at the technology soon wore off quickly and was followed by boredom with the content. New gimmicks were needed in order to maintain audience interest, and these were provided by the imaginative French film-makers, Georges Melies and Edwin S. Porter.

Melies is identified as the father of the formative (expressionistic) tendency. He ignored the workings of nature out of the artist’s delight in sheer fantasy. He brought cinematic effect into movie making. Melies discovered trick photography such as stop motion and animation. He created over a thousand short films, including a 14-minute version of Jules Verne’s “A

"Trip to the Moon" in 1902, that made use of professional actors, animation, many varied costumes and sets, and a detailed scenario. Film became more of an artistic creation.

Melies' theatric artistry was recognized and copied by many contemporaries. One in particular, Edwin S. Porter, an employee at Edison Manufacturing Company, was especially impressed with the potential of film to tell stories. In 1902, he assembled and edited a collection of short films about fire fighters into the long dramatically narrative work, which he called "The Life of an American Fireman". Sequel to an improvement in his editing techniques, he came up with "The Great Train Robbery" – a 10-minute action-packed movie which historians believe revolutionized all movie making. It is cited as the first film to tell a story. The earliest theatres were storefronts where half-hour showings ran continuously. In 1905, the first time theatre was constructed in Pittsburgh and named, appropriately, the *Nickelodeon*, because the price of admission was a nickel.

The turning point in this chain of events was marked by the 1915 production of "Birth of a Nation", a film as significant as "The Great Train Robbery" had been a dozen years earlier. "Birth of a Nation", a three-and-a-half hour historical epic, cost between \$100,000 and \$125,000 to produce. The producer, David Wark Griffith, a kantuchian and son of a confederate officer, selected the civil war as the focal point around which he fulfilled his version of history, where the heroes were Ku Klux Klansmen. The film was eloquent and powerful, a masterpiece of camera and editing techniques, and was presented with full orchestration by theatre musicians. President Woodrow Wilson referred to the film as being "like history written in lightning". Indeed Griffith proved in 1915 that film could have powerful emotional and propagandist effects, at a time when the film industry was

reaching wider and wider audiences who were coming to larger and more opulent theatre with greater expectations of entertainment and involvement.

Film and Reality

Film is viewed as an art; a simulation of reality. Art holds the mirror up to nature. In other words, it reflects nature. The ideal of art is to create an illusion of reality, and motion picture is unique in pursuing this ideal. That the ideal of art is simply to create an impression of reality has been subjected to critical evaluation by the realist and anti-realist traditions of film theory.

The anti-realist tradition argues contrary to this ideal. It believes that film goes beyond merely copying the world or nature, but it is an addition of another and very special object to the world. Others believe that the artist's feelings may be expressed abstractly and the result may be purely imaginative. The work of art may not allude to nature at all. In other words, it could just be an expression of the feelings and emotions of the creator of an art object. Its value, therefore, may be subject to the fact that the creator's work provides a platform or basis for interpreting and idealizing the world. Other critics have opined that film cannot reproduce reality, rather film like any other form of art, simply attempts to offer an interpretation of the world, or by the manipulation of the camera, create an alternative world.

Rudolph Arnheim is a leading exponent of the anti-realist tradition in film theory. He is of the view that if cinema were the mere mechanical reproduction of real life, it could not be an art at all. He acknowledges the existence of a primitive desire to get material objects into one's power by creating them afresh, but he believes that this primitive impulse must be distinguished from the impulse to create art. The artistic urge, as distinct from the primitive impulse, is not simply to

copy, but to originate, to interpret, and to mold. And these are laced with the feelings and emotions of the creator, which are capable of robbing the work of its realistic essence.

Siegfried Kracaur, a leading exponent of the realist view of cinema, argues that it is the clear obligation and special privilege of film (a descendant of still photograph) to record and reveal, and thereby redeem, physical reality. Kracaur believes that film art actually redeems (literally) this world from its dormant, innate state, its state of virtual nonexistence, and perhaps a state of inertia, by endeavouring to experience it through the camera. He believes that film delivers us from technology by technology.

However, V. F. Perkins attempts to incorporate the insights of both the realist and the anti-realist traditions. For him, the film medium is capable of both documentation and fantasy of copying as well as creation. But the central achievement of film is to be found in fictional narration, and this type of movie achieves a synthesis or fusion of films of two tendencies *realism* and *expressionism*. Film thereby achieves its unique blend of photographic realism and dramatic illusion.

Realistic and Formative Tendencies

Their prototypes were the Lumiere Brothers – Auguste and Louis Lumiere, strict realists, and French Magician, Georges Melies, who gave free rein to his artistic imagination. The Lumieres and their co-realists took advantage of the scientific consummation of photography (especially sequential photography) and projection, to create illusion of motion, and merely captured simple scenes of human activities on celluloid and projected on screen for a paying audience. Realism, as represented by the Lumieres, appealed to the sense of observation, the curiosity about ‘nature caught in the act’. The Lumieres were said to have told Melies that they considered film nothing more than a “scientific

curiosity”, thereby implying that cinematography could not possibly serve artistic purposes.

A realist approach to production creates and sustains an illusion of reality. Realist techniques rarely call attention to themselves. Spaces seem to be contiguous to one another within specific scenes and time seems to flow continuously and without interruption, similar to our experience of the everyday world. A realist production strives to create the illusion of real people living a real life. According to William Earl (1986), realist art “feels most at home living among familiar things in their familiar places, or among persons with recognizable characters acting or suffering in comprehensible ways” – (cited in Kindem and Robert, 1997). Realist films include classical Hollywood films. A standard Hollywood film, for example, sustains an illusion of reality and usually makes us forget that we are watching a movie. The illusion of reality in Hollywood films is based on stylistic conversions. Editing techniques, such as matching of a character’s action over a cut from one shot to the next shot in traditional Hollywood films, for example, help to sustain an illusion of reality and are often referred to as realist conventions of classical Hollywood cinema.

The formative tendency is itself expressed in different forms, which are encapsulated in the various philosophical movements in art, e.g. surrealism, dadaism, cubism, abstract films, etc. These different forms (formative forms) could be referred to in totality as avant-garde films. They are films which reflect a marked departure from conventional and narrative content.

Avant-gardism in film began simultaneously in France and Germany as a conscious cinematic movement at the end of the First World War. Before this time, film was actually a kind of commercial endeavour. In revolt, avant-garde film

makers began to use film as a medium of personal expression, replacing narrative structure with their own patterns and often taking advantage of cheaper and more possible modes of film-making to play their own sensibilities off the very nature and visual immediacy of the film image. In avant-garde films, ideas are fragmented and associations made at random. This makes interpretation very difficult. The avant-garde movement can be divided into three inextricably commingling groups – absolute and abstract films, surrealist films and didactic / futuristic films.

Absolute and abstract films attempt an exploration of the film image itself in terms of time and space using non-representational forms. Science fiction films, most of which do not express surrealist ideas, belong to this group. Films such as, “Batman” (1989), “Aliens” (1986), “Cyborg” (1989), “Tron” (1982), and a host of other computer game films, are also very good examples.

Surrealist films explore the unconscious, tapping into our dream and fantasy states, while maintaining real world images. They dwell in our vivid and fertile imaginations, our subconscious, our deepest feelings concerning the world around us. The horror film genre and the fantasy and supernatural sub-genres provide excellent examples of surrealist films. Examples are: “Evil Deed” I & II, “Embalmed”, “Ghosts”, etc.

Futuristic/Didactic films: These present the subjective impressions, imaginative creations and projections of the outside world itself, which are products of our internal visions and reactions to actual places in the real world. Didactic films have the objective of sanitizing society, while futuristic films visualize through imaginative and fanciful settings of what is probable, following scientific and technological developments. Films such as science fiction films and fantasy

films belong here, e.g. George Milies'. "A Trip to the Moon" (1902), "Destination Moon" (1950), "Water-world" (1995), "Armageddon" (1998), "The Matrix" (1999), "X-men" (2000), "A. I. : Artificial Intelligence" (2001), etc.

Avant-garde works often call attention to forms and techniques themselves. This is reflected in the modernist approach to production. Modernist works fail to create a realistic world that is familiar, recognizable and comprehensible. A modernist media artist instead feels free to explore the possibilities and limitations of the film medium itself without sustaining an illusion of reality. Avant-garde film production goes beyond realism to create a world that might have been or might be in the future, for example, Kevin Costner's "The Water-world". Modernist films portray familiar objects and events in a new light through the use of their innovative techniques. They often appear less objective than realist art, sometimes probing the subjective or inner psychological world of the creator and often reflecting feelings of ambiguity as opposed to objective certainty. Time is not always continuous and space not contiguous.

Properties of the Film Medium

The film medium comprises two main properties—basic and technical properties.

(1) *The Basic Property*: Film is an extension of photography, so, when we talk about film's basic properties, we refer to its properties as related to the properties of photography. Like photography, film has the unique ability to record and reveal physical reality, which is perceptible, comprehensible and recognizable. There are different visible worlds – stage performance and a painting are real and can be perceived. However, the concern here is actually existing reality – the transitory world we live in, "material reality", "physical existence", "actuality" or "nature" (loosely used), or even

“camera reality”. Film is a reproductive medium. It is a re-enactment of a three dimensional reality on a two-dimensional screen. The other visible worlds reach into this world without, however, really forming a part of it.

(2) *The Technical Property*: This refers to editing, camera works, “special effects”, “cinematic effects”, (quick and slow motion), ‘lighting’, etc. However, editing remains the most general and indispensable of all the technical properties of film. How? Editing is done not for its own sake; rather, it is to determine the contributions which editing may make to cinematically significant achievements. However, the basic properties take precedence over the technical property, in that they are responsible for the cinematic quality of a film. The technical properties cannot exist by themselves; they are absolutely dependent on the basic properties.

Major Film Categories

Films may be categorized into three major groups: Non-fiction (documentary films), fiction (feature films) and animation.

Non-fiction (Documentary Films)

Documentary films are as old as cinematography itself. As the name suggests, these are factual works of art, which are sometimes referred to as *cinema verite*. They are non-fictional ‘slice of life’. Thomas Edison and the Lumiere Brothers, who were among the earliest film makers, started with what could be called documentary films. One can therefore, conveniently say that the documentary is the oldest film type. Cinema was, according to history, born on the 28th of December, 1895, when the Lumiere Brothers became the first filmmakers to show a film to a paying audience. The film, entitled “*Le Repas de Bebe*” (“Leaving the Lumiere Factory”), which focused on workers going out of the Lumiere factory, was indeed a perfect example of a ‘slice of life’.

Documentary films are the easiest and perhaps the cheapest to produce, considering the fact that no elaborate acting, make-up and costumes are required. In fact, in most documentaries, there is actually no form of acting and the artistic and creative imagination of the scriptwriter in crafting an interesting story that could win large audience appeal is not required. The event in a documentary film is a major determinant of its appeal to the audience.

Documentary films are used to make pertinent statements, and also to keep records of important and remarkable events for future generation. They comprise a broad and diverse category of films. Examples of documentary films are: Biographical films about a living or dead person, an examination of a specific subject area-nature, or science-related themes (animals, plants, the solar system), or historical surveys such as *The Civil War* and *the World Wars*, expose' documentaries of social and political issues, Sports documentaries, a collection and compilation of footage from government sources, etc.

Fiction (Feature) Films

Fiction films are the opposite of documentary films, with narrative structure and exploring different plot patterns. Feature films task the creative and artistic ability of the scriptwriter/film-maker in creating an interesting story, which is a major determinant of film's appeal to its audience. Feature films involve elaborate acting, costume, make-up and other creative effects with the aim of creating a film world that is similar to that of the real world.

Feature films are usually "full-length" motion pictures, which are more than 60 minutes' duration, but within the precinct of 90-120 minutes, and on one particular topic. Virtually all the films under the major film genres and sub-genres belong to this category of film.

Animation

Animated films are those in which individual drawings and paintings, or illustrations, are photographed frame by frame (stop-frame cinematography). Usually, each frame differs slightly from the one preceding it, giving the illusion of movement when the frames are projected in rapid succession at 24 frames per second. The earliest cinema animation was composed of frame-by-frame, hand-drawn images. These two-dimensional static arts came alive when combined with movement, and created pure and imaginative cinematic images; animals and other inanimate objects could become evil villains or heroes. Animations generally appeal to children, but that is not to say adults do not also find them appealing. In other words, they can be enjoyed by all. Early animated films could be traced to the newspaper comic strips of the 1890s.

Some examples of early animated films are: “Snow-white and the Seven Dwarfs” (1937), “Cinderella” (1980), “Gulliver’s Travels” (1939), “Alice in Wonderland” (1951), “Peter Pan” (1983), etc., while recent examples include: “Aladdin” (1992), “The Lion King” (1994), “Dinosaur” (2000), “Shrek” (2001), etc.

Film Genre

Dirks (2007) describes film genre as the various forms or identifiable types, categories, classifications or groups of films that have similar, familiar or instantly recognizable patterns, syntax, techniques or conventions that include one or more of the following: settings (and props), content, themes, plot, central narrative events, motifs, styles, structures, situations, recurring icons (e.g. six guns and ten gallon hats in westerns), stock characters (or characterizations) and stars. Many films straddle several film genres. In other words they are a combination of several different genres. An action film can straddle other genres such as adventure, epic gangster etc.

The most common and identifiable film genre categories include: action, adventure, comedy, westerns, gangster, epic, drama, musical/dance, science fiction, horror and war films.

Action Films

The action film genre actually began with the silent era's serial film around the time of Edwin S. Porter's Classic action-Western, "The Great Train Robbery" (1903). And it has remained strong throughout all of cinematic history. Action films then expanded in the '80s and '90s, with the growth of special effects' techniques and in response to jaded audiences who demanded faster plots (coherent or not), greater violence and stimulation – Dirks (2007).

As the name implies, action films are seethed with action; they have tremendous impact, continuous high energy, lots of physical stunts and activity, possibly extended chase scenes, races, rescues, battles, martial arts, mountaineering, destructive disasters (floors, explosions, natural disasters, fires, etc.), fights escapes, non-stop motion, spectacular rhythm, and pacing and adventurous heroes – all designed for pure audience escapism with the action sequences at the core of the film. Action films and adventure films have tremendous cross-over potential as film genres, and *road films* often overlap with action films. Both types of films come in a variety of forms or genre-hybrids: Sci-fi or space, thrillers, crime-drama, war, horror, Westerns, etc. Oftentimes, action films are great box-office hits, but lack critical appeal because of their two-dimensional heroes or villains.

In action films, the main action centres around a male action hero or protagonist – portrayed by these most prominent actors: Bruce Lee, Steven Seagal, Sylvester Stallone, Harrison Ford, Bruce Willis, Chuck Norris, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jean Claude Van Dame, Charles Bronson, etc. Women in action films usually play the roles of accomplices or romantic

interests of the hero, although modern films have featured strong female characters to broaden demographic appeal; e.g. Halle Berry in "Cat woman."

Action films almost always have a resourceful hero(ine) struggling against incredible odds, life threatening circumstances, or an evil villain, and/or trapped or chasing each other in various modes of transportation (bus, auto, ship, train, plane, horseback, on foot, etc), with victory or resolution attained by the end after strenuous physical feats and violence (fist fights, gunplay). Action films have traditionally been aimed at a male audience, from ages 13 to the mid-30s in both American and world-wide markets.

Early classic action films include: "The Great Train Robbery" (1903), "The Most Dangerous Game" (1932), "The Sea Hawk" (1940), etc. In recent years we have: "Dr. No" (1962, UK), "From Russia with Love" (1963), "Enter The Dragon" (1973), "Assault on Precinct 13" (1976), "Predator" (1987), etc. The very recent ones include: "Rush Hour" (1988), "Matrix" (1988), "Spiderman" (2002), while local examples are: "The Tyrant", "Desperadoes", "Ultimate Risk", "The Mighty One", etc.

Adventure Films

These are exciting stories, with new experiences or exotic locales. Adventure films are very similar to the action film genre, in that both are designed to provide an action-filled, energetic experience for the film viewer. The difference between the two genres is that, while the viewer of adventure films can live vicariously through the travels, conquests, explorations, creation of empires, struggles and situations that confront the main characters, actual historical figures or protagonists, action films merely emphasize violence and fighting, without necessarily taking the viewer through either the antagonist's or protagonist's experience.

Adventure films were intended to appeal mainly to men, creating major male heroic stars through the years. These courageous, patriotic, or altruistic heroes often fought for their beliefs, struggled for freedom, or overcame injustice. Modern adventure films, some of which have been successful blockbusters, have crossed over and added resourceful action heroes, and often-times heroines.

Under the category of adventure films, we have traditional swashbucklers, serialized films, and historical spectacles which are similar to the *epic film* genre, searches for lost continents, 'jungle' and 'desert' epics, treasure hunts and quests, disaster films, and heroic journey or searches for the unknown. Adventure films share many elements with other genres such as *Si-fi*, *fantasy*, and *war* films with character of this genre.

Adventure films, in a broader context, could include boxing money, motor racing films, and films adapted from literary novels. Adventure films are often set in an historical period, and may include adapted stories of historical or literary adventure heroes, kings, battles, rebellion, or piracy. Some early examples include: "The Thief of Baghdad" (1924), "The Three Musketeers" (1921), "Robin Hood" (1922), and "The Mark of Zorro" (1920). Examples of some modern-day adventure films are: Steven Spielberg's "Raiders of the Lost Ark" (1981), "Romancing the Stone" (1984), which is a pot-pouri of the adventure-action-romance-comedy genres, and its sequel "The Jewel of the Nile" (1985) starring Michael Douglas. More recent examples include: "Indiana Jones and the last Crusade" (1991), "Cliffhanger" (1994), "Gladiator" (2000), "The Perfect Storm" (2000), etc. A typical local example is "Igodo."

War Films

In the war film genre, combat fighting or conflict against nations or humankind often provides the primary plot or

background for the action of the film. War films often recognize the horror, pain and heartbreak of war, and provide a platform for decisive criticism of senseless warfare and for making political statements. Identifiable icons or features include: *Pow* camp experiences and escapes, submarine warfare, espionage, personal heroism, brutalities, air dog fights, tough trench/infantry experiences, etc. War films explore such themes as combat, survivor and escape stories, inhumanity and futility of battle, the effects of war on society, and even moral and human issues, in an intelligent and profound manner.

War films have often been used as flag-waving propaganda to inspire national pride and morale, and to display the nobility of one's own forces while harshly criticizing and displaying the villainy of the enemy, especially during war or post-war periods – Dirks (2007).

Some early war films include: "The Birth of a Nation" (1915), "Intolerance" (1916), "Hell's Angels" (1930), "Confessions of a Nazi Spy" (1939), "Gone with the Winds" (1939), "Action in the North Atlantic" (1943), "The African Queen" (1951), "The Manchurian Candidate" (1962), etc. Recent examples are: "First Blood" (1982), "Missing in Action" (1984), "The Hunt for Red October" (1990), "The Last Days" (1999), "The Pianist" (2002), etc. *Nollywood* films like "Battle of Musanga" and "Across the Niger", may fall into this category.

Comedy Films

Comedy films are designed to elicit laughter from the audience. They are light-hearted dramas, crafted to amuse, entertain, and provoke enjoyment. The comedy genre humorously exaggerates the situation, the language, action, and characters. Comedies observe the deficiencies, foibles and frustrations of life, providing merriment and momentary escape from day-to-day life. They usually have happy

endings, although the humour may have a serious or pessimistic side.

Comedies usually come in two general formats: Comedian led (with well-timed gags, jokes, or sketches) and situation-comedies that are told within a narrative. Both comedy elements may appear together and/or overlap. Comedy hybrids commonly exist with other major genres, such as musical-comedy, horror-comedy, and comedy-thriller. Comedies have also been classified in various subgenres, such as romantic comedy, crime/caper comedy, sports comedy, teen or coming-of-age comedy, social-class comedy, military comedy, fish-out-of-water comedy, and gross-out comedy. There are several other kinds, types or forms of comedy. They include: *Slapstick* – This is primitive and universal comedy with broad, aggressive, physical and visual action, including harmless or painless cruelty and violence, horseplay, and often vulgar sight gags (e.g. a custard pie in the face, collapsing houses, a fall in the ocean, a loss of trousers or skirts, runaway crashing cars, people chases, etc). Cartoons are the quintessential form of slapstick.

Some early examples of comedy films are: “The Gold Rush” (1925), “The General” (1927), “A night at the Opera” (1935), etc. Recent examples include: “Trading places” (1983), “Beverly Hills Cop” (1984), “Three Men and a Baby” (1987), “Home Alone” (1990), “Pretty Woman” (1990), “Naughty Professor” (1998), “The Big Fat Greek Wedding” (2002), etc. Local equivalents may include: “Police Recruit”, “Mr. Nobody”, “Big Dream”, “Apama”, etc.

Western Films

Dirks (2007) also describes Western films as the major defining genre of the American film industry, a nostalgic eulogy to the early days of the expansive, untamed American frontier (the borderline between civilization and the

wilderness). Westerns are one of the oldest, most enduring and flexible genres, and one of the most characteristically American genres in their mythic origin.

The Western film genre often portrays the conquest of the wilderness and the sub-ordination of nature, in the name of civilization, or the confiscation of the territorial rights of the original inhabitants of the frontier. Specific settings include lonely isolated forts, ranch houses, the isolated homestead, the saloon, the jail, the small town Main Street, or small frontier towns that are forming at the edges of civilization. Other iconic elements in Westerns include the hanging tree, stetsons and spurs, lassos and colts, 45's, stagecoaches, gamblers, long-horned cattle drives, prostitutes (or madams) with a heart of gold, and more. Westerns have also been called the horse opera, the oater (quickly made, short Western films which became a commonplace as oats for horses), or the cowboy picture.

The Western film genre, according to Dirks, may extend back to the time of America's colonial period or forward to the mid-20th century, or as far geographically as Mexico. Western films have portrayed much about America's past, glorifying the fast-fading values and aspirations of the mythical bygone age of the West. However, Westerns have been, over time, redefined, reinvented and expanded, dismissed, rediscovered, and spoofed.

Typical elements in Westerns include hostile elements (often Native Americans), guns and gun fights (sometimes on horseback), violence and human massacres, horses, trains (and train robberies), bank robberies, and hold-ups, runaway stage coaches, shoot-outs, and showdowns, outlaws and sheriffs, cattle drives and cattle rustling, stampedes, posse in pursuit, barroom brawls, 'Search and destroy' plots, breath taking settings and open landscapes (the Teton and

Monument valley, etc.) and distinctive Western clothing (denim, jeans, boots, etc). Heroes in Westerns are often local lawmen or enforcement officers, ranchers, army officers, cowboys, territorial marshals, or a skilled, fast-draw gunfighter. They are normally masculine persons of integrity and principle – courageous, moral, tough, solid and self-sufficient, maverick characters (often with trusty sidekicks) possessing an independent and honourable attitude (but often characterized as slow-talking).

Usually, the central plot of the Western film is the classic, simple goal of maintaining law and order on the frontier in a fast-paced action story. It is normally rooted in archetypal conflict – good vs. bad, virtue versus evil, white hat vs. black hat, man versus man, new arrivals versus Native Americans (inhumanely portrayed as savage Indians), settlers vs. Indians, humanity vs. nature, civilization vs. wilderness or lawlessness, school teachers vs. saloon dance-hall girls, villains vs. heroes, lawman or sheriff vs. gunslinger, social law and order vs. anarchy, the rugged individualist vs. the community, the Cultivated East vs. West, settler vs. nomad, and farmer vs. industrialist, etc. Often the hero of a Western meets his opposite “double”, a mirror of his own evil side that he has to destroy.

The ‘first real movie’ or commercially narrative film that gave birth to the Western film genre was Edwin S. Porter’s pioneering Western “The Great Train Robbery” (1903). The film had almost all the essential elements or conventions of typical Westerns such as good guys vs. bad guys, a robbery or wrong-doing, a chase or pursuit and a final showdown, all in a natural setting. Some great early westerns include: “The Squaw Man” (1914), “The Iron Horse” (1924), “Annie Oakley” (1935), “The Western” (1940), “The Outlaw” (1943), etc. Recent Western films include: “The Magnificent Seven” (1960), “A Fistful of Dollars” (1964), “The Good, the Bad, and

the Ugly” (1966), “Dead Man” (1996), “The Wild, Wild West” (1999), “The Missing” (2003), etc.

Epic Films

The story line of epics often revolves round historical or imagined events, mythic, legendary or heroic figures, and usually portraying extravagant settings and lavish costumes, accompanied by grandeur and spectacle and a sweeping musical score. Epics are historical films that recreate past events. Epic films are very expensive to produce, due to elaborate and panoramic settings, on-location filming, authentic period costumes, inflated action on a massive scale and large casts of characters. Epics are often called *Costume dramas*, since they emphasize the paraphernalia of a period setting: historical pageantry, costuming and wardrobes, locales, spectacle, décor and sweeping visual style. Viewers are often transported to other worlds or eras.

Epics often share elements of the more elaborate adventure films genre and swashbucklers subgenre, such as the Robin Hood tale of “The Adventure of Robin Hood” (1938). They may be combined with other genre types too, like: epic/historical Westerns, epic science-fiction, epic/historical dramas, epic war films, unconventional epics, and auteur epics. Epics often rewrite history, but with accuracy sometimes sacrificed, because chronology is abridged or modified, and the political/historical forces become secondary to the personalization and ideological start of the story.

Epics have existed since the earliest days of American cinema, from D. W. Griffith’s ground-breaking “The Birth of a Nation” (1915), to the more recent “Titanic” (1997), and “Gladiator” (2000). Some great early epics include: Enrico Guazzoni’s epic *Quo Vadis* (1912) which is often considered the *first* successful feature-length motion picture and one of the first films with over two hours’ running time, David

Griffith's "Intolerance" (1916), "The Battleship Poternkin" (1925, USSR), and "Cleopatra" (1934). Recently we have: "The Longest Day" (1962), "The Great Escape" (1963), "The Sand Pebbles" (1966), "Jurassic Park" (1993), and "The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers" (2002). "Igodo", "Battle of Musanga", "Wisdom of the Gods", "African Queen", etc, are some local examples.

Science Fiction Films

Just as the name suggests, they are usually scientific. Sci-fi films are also visionary, comic-strip-like, and imaginative and usually visualized through fanciful, imaginative settings, expert film production design, advanced technology gadgets (i.e. robots and spaceships), scientific developments, or fantastic special effects.

One common thrust of sci-fi films is that they tend to express society's anxiety about technology and how to forecast and control the impact of technological and environmental change on contemporary or modern society. Science fiction films often express the potential of technology to destroy humankind through Armageddon-like events, wars between worlds, earth-imperilling encounters, or disasters. SF films have a prophetic nature; they often attempt to figure out or depict the future, and are often set in a speculative future time. Sci-fi films often portray the dangerous and sinister nature of knowledge, vital issues about the nature of mankind and our place in the whole scheme of things, the results of germ-warfare and laboratory-bred viruses or plagues, futuristic genetic engineering and cloning, strange and extraordinary microscopic organisms or giant, mutant monsters - 'things or creatures from space' - either created by misguided mad scientists or by nuclear havoc, etc.

The pioneering science fiction film was George Melies "A Trip to the Moon" (1902). Some other great Sci-Fi films include:

“Mysterious Island” (1929), “Island of Lost Souls” (1933), “The Day the Earth Stood Still” (1951), “Godzilla” (1956). etc. Recent ones are: “One Million Years, BC” (1967), “West World” (1973), “Superman” (1978), “Star Trek – The Motion Picture” (1979) “E.T: The Extraterrestrial” (1982), “The Terminator” (1984), “Water World” (1995), “Jurassic Park” (1993), “The Matrix” (1999), “X-Men” (2000), “Minority Report” (2002), etc.

Horror Films

Horror films are usually disturbing and unsettling. They are designed to frighten and create panic, cause dread and alarm, and to invoke our hidden worst fears, often in a terrifying, shocking finale, while captivating and entertaining us at the same time in a cathartic experience. To effectively achieve these objectives, horror films centre on the dark side of life, the forbidden, strange and alarming events. They deal with our most primal nature and its accompanying fears, our nightmares, our vulnerability, our alienation, our revulsion, our terror of the unknown, our fear of death and dismemberment, loss of identity, our fear of sexuality. From our earliest days, we use our vivid and fertile imaginations to see ghosts in shadow shapes, to be emotionally connected to the unknown and to fear things that are impossible. Seeing a horror movie has the capability of transporting us into that scary world, into an outlet for the essence of fear itself, without actually being in danger. Horror films can also be described as chillers, scary movies, spook fests, and the macabre. As a matter of necessity, the earliest horror films were Gothic in style. In other words, they were usually set in spooky old mansions, castles, or fog-shrouded, dark and shadow locales. They have as their main characters, “unknown” human, supernatural or grotesque creatures, ranging from vampires, demented madmen, devils, unfriendly ghosts, monsters, mad scientists, “Frankenstein’s”,

“Jekyll/Hyde” dualities, demons, zombies, evil spirits, and arch-fiends, satanic villains, the “possessed” werewolves and freaks to even the unseen, diabolical presence of evil.

The development of horror films is traceable to a number of sources: folktales with devil characters, witchcraft, fables, myths, ghost stories, etc. George Milies’ “Le Manior Du Diable” (1896) (aka “The Devils Castle”) was the first horror movie, which was only about three minutes long. Some early examples of the horror film genre include: “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari” (1919, German), “Dracula” (1931), “The Island of Lost Souls” (1932), “Dead Night” (1945, UK), “Curse of the Demon” (aka “Night of the Demons”, 1957), “The Village of the Damned” (1960), “The Exorcist” (1973), “Jaws” (1975), etc. Some recent productions include: “The American Werewolf in London” (1981), “The Evil Dead” (1983), “Fatal Attraction” (1987), “The Witches of Eastwick” (1987), “Army of Darkness” (1992), “Wolf” (1994), “Dawn of the Dead” (2004), “Van Helsing” (2004), etc.

Crime and Gangster Films

Gangster films date back to the early days of film during the silent era. One of the pioneers of this genre was David Griffith with his movie “The Musketeers of Pig Alley” (1912), which was developed around organized crime. Crime and gangster flicks are stories woven round the evil and dangerous actions of criminals or gangsters, especially bank robbers and ruthless hoodlums who operate outside the law, stealing, maiming and violently murdering their way through life. Crime stories, which are often sourced from headline-grabbing situations, real-life gangsters, or crime reports, often glorify, or highlight the rise and fall of (a) certain criminal, gang, bank robber, murderer or lawbreaker, engaged in some sort of personal power tussle or conflict with the law and other figures, a competitive colleague, or a rival

gang. Gangster characters are often portrayed as victims of circumstance, because they are often from poor immigrant families who are made criminals and gangsters by repressive social conditions in the environment. They employ tough and cruel means as the only route to success, wealth, status and material possessions (clothes and cars), in an environment where all other “normal”, “moral”, “legitimate”, avenues to the top are unavailable to them. Crime plots do not fail to portray the failure and death (usually violent) of the criminals, usually in the hands of the police, private eyes, special agents or other lawful authorities.

Crime and gangster films are often set in large, crowded cities, which usually portray the secret world of the criminals, and the following are its accompanying and recognizable elements: dark nightclubs or street with lurid neon signs, fast cars, and piles of cash, sleazy bars, contraband, seedy living quarters, or rooming houses. Sometimes exotic locales for criminals are provided to add an element of adventure and wealth. Among the early crime and gangster films of the silent era, are: Edwin S. Porter’s silent short Western, “The Great Train Robbery” (1903), a classic hold-up story, Raoul Walsh’s first feature film, “The Regeneration” (1915), Josef Von Sternberg’s gangland melodrama, “Underworld” (1927), and Lewis Milestone’s “The Racket” (1928). And in the talkies era, we have: “The Lights of New York” (1929), believed to be the *first* “100% all-talking” picture and, of course, the *first* sound gangster film, “City Streets” (1931), “Bad Company” (1931), etc. Some recent crime and gangster films include: “Point Blank” (1967). “The French Connection” (1971), “The Godfather” (1972), “Death Wish” (1974), “Scarface” (1983), “Q&A” (1990), “Out of Sight” (1998), “The Departed” (2006), etc.

Drama Films

Dramatic films are usually serious presentations which contain settings or life situations that portray realistic characters in conflict with either themselves, others, or forces of nature.

Drama films show us human beings in action at two extremes – their best and their worst, and everything in-between. The themes of dramatic films often centre on current issues, societal ills and problems, concerns or injuries, such as racial prejudice, religious intolerance (such as anti-Semitism), drug addiction, poverty, sexual inequality, mental illness, corrupt societal institutions, violence towards women, or other explosive issues of the moment. These films are often successful in drawing attention to the issues by taking advantage of the topical interest of the subject. Some categories of dramatic films are: *Social Problem Dramas*, also known as “Message films”, which express powerful lessons over and about harsh, friendly, and generally unacceptable conditions in the social system or institutions-prison systems, the justice systems, family systems, etc; *Mental Illness Dramas*, which often deal with the problems of the mentally ill and conditions in mental institutions; *Alcoholism Dramas*: These take a hard look at the issue or problem of alcoholism with the individual, and its possible consequence(s) on the family and the society at large; *Political Dramas*: These emphasize war against all forms of political corruption; and *Journalism / the Press and Media-Related Dramas*, which often centre around the theme of journalism, the world of reporters and news. Others include *Race Relations and Civil Rights Dramas*, *Courtroom Dramas*, *WWI Home Front Dramas*, etc. Some great early dramas include: “Broken Blossoms” (1919), “The Champ” (1931), “Great Expectation”(1935), “Dead End” (1937), “Gentleman’s Agreement” (1974), “All the King’s Men” (1948), “East of

Eden" (1955), "Inherit the Wind" (1960), etc. Great recent dramas include: "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" (1967), "Rocky" (1976), "Crimes and Misdemeanors" (1989), "JFK" (1991), "Titanic" (1997), "Traffic" (2000), etc. Some local examples are: "Making of the King", "X Five", "Vengeance of a Woman", "World Apart", "Honourable Gateman", etc.

Musical/Dance Films

Musical/dance films were the last of the major films genres. The reason is obvious; they were dependent on sound captured on film, and there could have been no "all-saying", all-dancing" movie, without sound. Musical films are described as cinematic forms that highlight and display total, complete song and dance routines in a significant way. A musical or dance performance is usually made a part of the film narrative or infused as an unrealistic "eruption" within the film. They can also be described as films that combine the elements, of music, dance, song or choreography. One obvious feature in musicals is its conscious emphasis on various musical artists or dancing stars, with lyrics that align with the story line, and alternatively, an escapist vision of reality, such as a search for love, success, wealth, and popularity. However, the musical/dance film genre has been acclaimed the most escapist of all major film genres.

Musicals are often dubbed as Broadway on film, although many other forms of musicals - rock "n" roll movies and disco/dance films - have been made. Notably too, especially in recent times, animated films have incorporated musical soundtracks, which have made them one of the major musical forms. "Beauty and the Beast" (1991), "The Lion King" (1994), and "Aladdin" (1992), are a few examples of such animated films with musical soundtracks.

Early musicals/dance films include: "The Jazz Singer" (1927), "Show of Shows" (1929), "42nd Street" (1933), "Fantasia" (1940), "Girl Crazy" (1943), "An American in Paris" (1951) and "South Pacific" (1958). And in recent years, we have: "Sound of Music" (1965), "Hello, Dolly!" (1969), "Saturday Night Fever" (1977), "Flash Dance" (1983), "Evita" (1996), "Chicago" (2002), etc.

From the above discussions on film genre, what is discernible is the somewhat nebulous nature of the term, with no clear-cut, identifiable, and definable boundaries. Each film genre tends to flow or cross into multiple genres. In other words, the elements of one genre can be found in several other genres. Be that as it may, each genre has its unique features which set it apart from the rest. However, some subsets, otherwise known as sub-genres, of the major film genres can also be identified. These are: Thriller – suspense, supernatural, sports, romance, melodrama, disaster, fantasy, detective/mystery, biographical (or "biopics") films, etc.

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