

# **RE-FRAMING CINEMATOGRAPHY**

## **Should We Re-Define Our Practice**

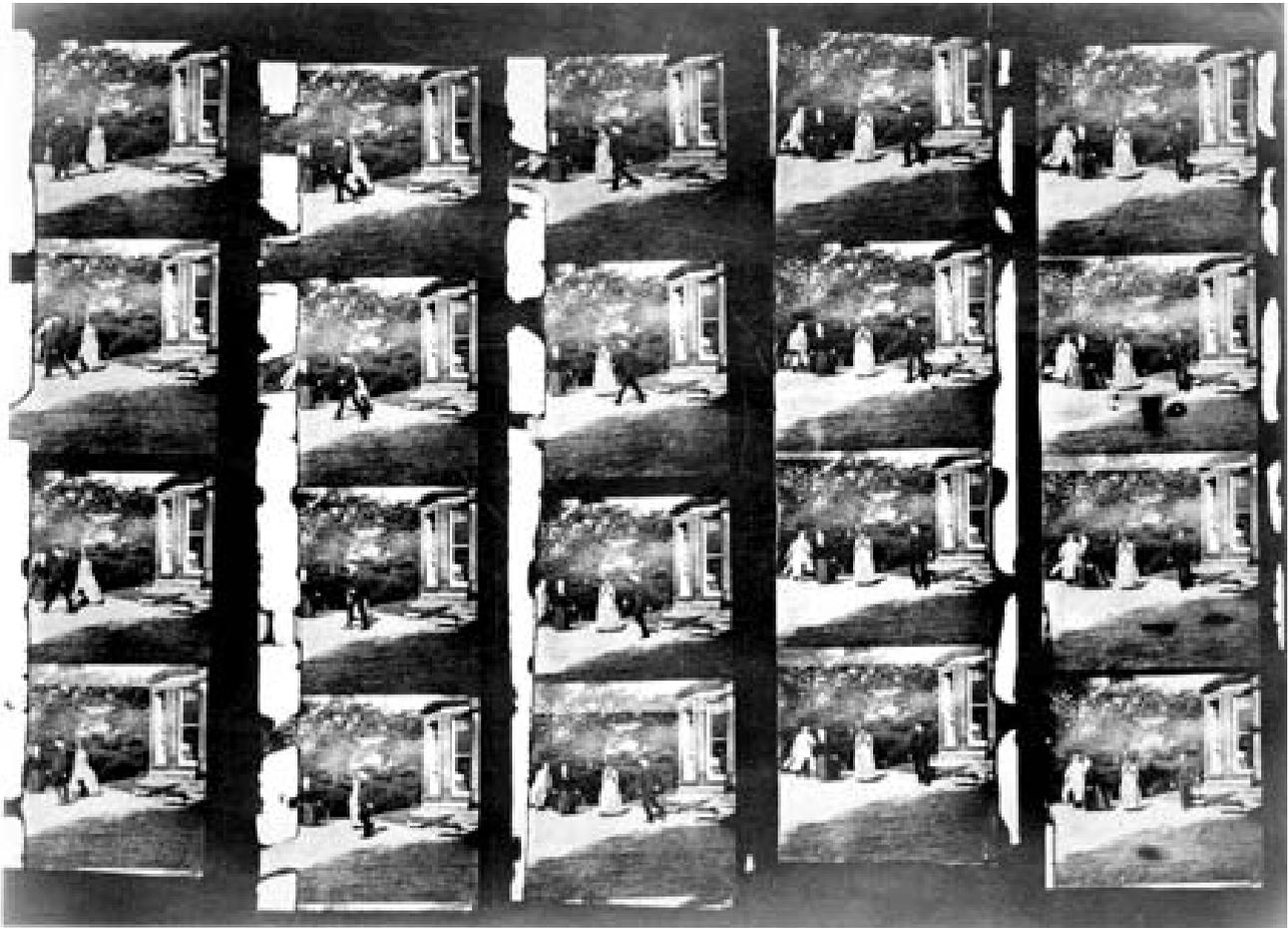
Australian Cinematographer Article

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This year (2018) marks one-hundred and thirty years since Frenchman Louis Le Prince recorded his family walking around in a garden at the back of his house in Leeds, England. Le Prince was the first inventor to produce a recording of a believable motion-effect using a single camera and a single strip of film in 1888.



*The original twenty frames still in existence of the Roundhay Garden Scene shot by Le Prince in 1888 kept at the National Science Museum in London since 1931.*

During the next two decades of cinema almost every possible variation of cinematography practice was produced for the first time. The first animated film (*Pauvre Pierrot*; English - *Poor Pierrot*, Emile Reynaud, 1889), the first cinema screening (*La Sortie de L'usine Lumiere*; English - *Workers Leaving The Lumiere Factory*, Auguste & Louis Lumiere, 1895), the first female filmmaker (*La Fee Au Choux*; English - *The Cabbage Fairy*, Alice Guy, 1896), the first use of miniatures (*A Railway Collision*, Robert Paul, 1900), the first use of a double exposure and superimposition (*Scrooge*, Walter Booth, 1901), the first use of special effects (*Le Voyage Dans La Lune*; English - *A Trip To The Moon*, Georges Méliès, 1902), the first example of a studio (*Rescued By Rover*, Cecil Hepworth, 1905), the first use of glass plate painting or virtual imagery (*Missions of California*, Norman Dawn, 1907), and the first use of the word cinematographer (*Afgrunden*; English - *The Abyss*, director - Urban Gad, cinematographer - Axel Graatkjaer, 1908). In the following few

decades preceding the invention and application of sound recording in feature-film production (first used in 1928 for *Lights of New York*, though applied much more successfully the following year for Alfred Hitchcock's *Blackmail*) different aspect ratios including a widescreen format (Abel Gance pioneered a 4:1 aspect ratio using three cameras for *Napoleon* in 1928), camera movement through use of a dolly, handheld operating, swinging the camera off ropes et cetera, force perspective effects such as the Schufftan Process, impressionistic lighting as well as naturalism (cinematographer Eugene Schufftan first used many realist techniques for the film *Menschen am Sonntag*; English - *People on Sunday*, 1930, far before the French New Wave would be credited with pioneering Cinéma Vérité in the late fifties and early sixties), split-screen, fast and slow-motion effects, montage, and many other techniques were also used for the first time. In fact, it could be argued that most any practice in cinematography, or cinema imaging, used today has a similar, even if only conceptually so, example from the first forty-years of cinema (1888-1928).

Since the introduction of computers to the filmmaking process there has been much upheaval to the industry, especially to cinematographers. The perceived loss of control and authorship over the images has been widely discussed especially in reply to the outcome of awards such as the Oscars. Many have debated the role of the cinematographer as technology has introduced new possibilities such as digital-colour-grading, high-dynamic-range imagery, and greater degrees of computer-generated-imagery. The question of who is now responsible, or, authors the images of a film where many hands are changing those pictures or creating entirely new pictures have been present for a while in the literature and the dialogue. With Oscar wins in the Best Cinematography category for the feature films *Avatar* (dir: James Cameron, d.p: Mauro Fiore ASC, 2019) and *Life of Pi* (dir: Ang Lee, d.p: Claudio Miranda ASC, 2012) the contention of a seemingly simple question, 'what is cinematography,' came to the fore. As an industry our worries are misplaced in technological advancement. In the first decades of cinema Norman Dawn would add to or obscure the imagery captured by his camera using the glass-plate-painting shot he brought to cinema. To put it simply, the team that created the most recent example of our changing practice, *The Jungle Book* (dir: Jon Favreau, d.p: Bill Pope ASC, 2016), has done very much the same thing but instead of taking a photograph and integrating computer-generated-imagery (or analogue matte-painting) into that photograph the team starts with the CGI and the photograph is the smallest part of the final image.

*The film features a sole live-action actor, 13-year-old Neel Sethi, who portrays the human boy Mowgli. Only those pieces of the sets that Sethi directly interacted with are real; beyond them, all environments, and the entire cast of supporting animal characters, are CG constructs. ('Welcome to the Jungle,' Michael Goldman, American Cinematographer, 2016, p. 32.)*



*Physical lighting is used on the blue-screen stage. The physical lighting matches the design first created virtually for the CG image by the cinematographer Bill Pope, ASC. (2016. 'Jungle Capture.' Definition Magazine, 06/2016, 22-28)*



*The final image is a composite of a digital environment, lit and lensed by the cinematographer, and a physical actor and partial physical environment also lit and lensed by the cinematographer. (2016. 'Jungle Capture.' Definition Magazine, 06/2016, 22-28)*

The ACS currently defines a cinematographer as...

*...a person with technical expertise who manipulates light to transfer visual information by the use of a camera into aesthetic moving images on motion picture film or electronic recording systems. (Australian Cinematographers Society, 2016).*

The ACS along with other society's around the world now offer awards for 'virtual-cinematography.' As with other society's (including the Society of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences - Oscars) the awards categories and processes evolve with the industry (at one time there were awards for both black and white cinematography and colour cinematography). However, most definitions of the cinematographer or cinematography state that it is practiced with the use of a camera and lighting. The definitions now relate the camera as an object that carries celluloid film or electronic systems in order to record motion; but, they do not yet describe the use of virtual imagery for this process despite awarding it. The same reluctance is present in many film-schools worldwide.

In November, 2014, the Institut des Arts de Diffusion (IAD) hosted an international conference in collaboration with the Belgian Society of Cinematographers (SBC) and IMAGO: The Federation of European Cinematographers, about the influence of technology on the methods of teaching cinematography. This conference was covered by cinematographer Ashley Barron for AC Magazine.

*Of all the topics discussed, however, 'Cinematography for VFX' seemed the most controversial with many unable to answer the few questions about its education. Most seemed to be of the belief that only green and blue screen work should be taught briefly but anything further should be an elective... ('Cinematography in Progress,' Ashley Barron, Australian Cinematographer, 2015, Issue 65, p.11)*

There are schools that offer education to emerging cinematographers in areas such as virtual cinematography, pre-visualisation, digital lighting and so on; the Global Cinematography Institute being one of them. However, the vast majority are stuck in a mire of 'traditional cinematographic techniques.' This shows a great lack of understanding of the history of art and practice. As mentioned in the beginning of this article the 'virtual' production of imagery for cinema, especially where it is made to be integrated seamlessly with live-action cinematography has been around in one form or another since the very beginning of cinema and therefore is traditional. The ACS has offered awards for the practice of virtual cinematography. It would now be an important move to include this practice, in some way, in the definition of cinematography itself. For, with this re-

framing of cinematography, to include what has always been present, the ACS will drive change in the film-schools in this country. This is important for our art, it's education and our artists. The cinematographer needs to have authorial say not only in the colour-grade but in the creation of computer-generated-imagery where it relates to cinematographic process (such as lighting, colour, movement, composition and so on). We are authors of the cinematic image for the purpose of story-telling however the image is created or captured.

**END.** 1299 words.

*Daniel Maddock is an Australian Cinematographer, Photographer and Academic who is also completing his PhD on the subject of re-defining cinematography due to advances in the virtual production of films.*