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FROM MOTION PICTURES TO CINEMA: A CHRONICLE

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Abstract

The American cinema needs no introduction, it is the most popular cinema of the world (Rosal, 2022). Its innovation throughout history- through acting, technology, and strategy- made it reach unprecedented heights at which it is today. History has seen so many developments in American cinema evolving into its modern avatar. Furthermore, France is regarded as the birthplace of cinema. The Lumière brothers, Pathé and Gaumont were the first to release some movies with the current format; thus, they are officially the first makers of cinema as we understand it today. During the 19th century, they innovated and produced a technique in the form of today's cinema. In this paper, we will debate the origin of the cinema and trace the facts as to the place and date of genesis of cinema by decoding the various theories and myths pertaining to its growth.

Key words: French cinema, American cinema, birthplace, technology, innovation.

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1. Introduction

The French cinema is claimed to have the oldest film theatres as well as the innovators of the film today (Barthelemy, 2015). They are also the first to gather people in a hall to show the movie in “Salon Indien du Grand Café” in Paris (Hidalgo, n.d.). Since then, there were many developments, and the French cinema industry became one of the most popular cinema industries in early 20th century (Jeancolas & Marie, n.d.). The American cinema including major film studios also known as Hollywood has had a big impact on the global film industry since the early 20th century. The American cinema developed its typical Hollywoodian style between 1913 and 1969 and is continuing with the same to this day, albeit

other types of movies are added to its repertoire. While Frenchmen Auguste and Louis Lumière are generally credited with the birth of modern cinema, American cinema soon came to be a dominant force in the emerging industry. The article would like to explore whether the French cinematographers played a role in shaping the cinema industry of the world that we see today.[1] The researcher seeks to understand the growth of American and French cinema by reading primary as well as secondary sources. This paper will talk in detail about the origin of cinema especially with reference to the French cinematographers of the time. Throughout the world, the Lumière brothers were evidently credited with the development of cinema as we know it. They were known to purchase the famous “cinématographe” (Cinema of the United States (Hollywood), n.d.) of that time and make further adjustments before using it to produce their own films and showcasing them in various theatres at that time, when this concept of cinema was relatively unknown to the world, and thus, gaining the popularity and credit as the first people to invent cinema in the world. Was it then that cinema originated? [2] The objective of the study is

to decode how cinema came into existence through the efforts of the Lumière brothers. The other research question is what led France to take the credit as the “birthplace of cinema”? [3] In addition to this, how much was the American and French contribution in the origin of the world cinema. Also, which were the prominent French cinematographers during the genesis of this visual media and what were their contribution to the development of cinema. [4] So, this study aims to analyze the impact and contribution of French cinematographers in the world and how has it impacted today’s cinema.

This study will review literature available in the area bringing into light the many pronged evolution of this entertainment media in France and America through empirical research.

2. Review of Literature

According to Wikipedia (*Cinema of the United States (Hollywood)*, n.d.) the history of American cinema can go back to Fort Lee in New Jersey, where the first motion-picture was shot. The actual start of American cinema was near the end of the 19th century, when Edison created a device, he called “Black Maria”. This was the first motion picture studio he installed in New Jersey. The reason being the availability of land at cheap rates around Hudson River and Hudson Palisades as compared to New York City. This in turn helped in the 20th century expansion of the film industry. Hollywood is the most popular cinema in the world, which has unbeatable dominance around the ground even today. Talking about the recent date, till the mid 2022 (Rosal, 2022), the American films have gathered around \$6 billion. The French cinema, on the other hand, were able to get around €9.74 million (French Films at the International Box Office, 2022). But the Lumiere brothers were the accepted point of origin of cinema, this is the reason behind France’s claim to be the “birthplace of cinema”. They were the most important

cinematographers during the late 1830s, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre found a way to effectively use the photography skills to use it in a better way which he called “daguerreotype” (Guégan, 1995). The French psychologist named Étienne-Jules Marey used the same technique in 1882 to make a moving image by using only one camera. He was credited to invent a “chronophotographic gun” (Sharman Russell, n.d.), which was a camera with a rifle like shape. He used that camera to capture the movement of the birds and recorded that movement in 12 continuous images and imprinted these on a glass type rotating plate (Sharman Russell, n.d.). Hence, when the tape rolled, the speed of rolling tape was faster than the movement of the naked eye that gave the viewers an impression of flying birds in the sky. Later, around 1880s, a French inventor by the name Louis Le Prince made a similar device namely “kinetograph” (A Very Short History of Cinema, n.d.), although his contribution was less known to the world. The roots of cinema in America date back to the mid-19th century. The concept of “frames per second” is as old as the invention of cameras. In the beginning, the cinema was made with the combination of some twirling disks to give them a sense of motion while flipping through the photos. They discovered that to make a silent video, they needed 16 frames per second, and to make it with sound, they needed 24 frames per second (Sklar Robert, 2021). They used to draw images on these discs to portray a sense of motion, which was then called the “phenakistoscope”. In the 1870s, one of the American photographers named Eadweard Muybridge tried to make history by putting together an idea to create a motion picture with moving images. He was tasked to put all the four legs of a horse above the ground at that time. During that time, it was almost impossible to do that with just photography as videography was a much latter invention. But Muybridge found a way to do that. He made a setup across a racing stadium and covered it with wires which would work as

his stutters. Furthermore, he used 12 cameras with batteries to give an impression of a moving picture by using all the cameras at once. He was able to give it a shape with constant movement of the images giving an impression to the onlooker that the horse was moving, and his feet were constantly touching the ground as if jumping. In 1887, a minister named Hannibal Goodwin came up with the idea of using celluloid for the photography (Guégan, 1995). This was further developed into a role. People now had a way to record more and more photographs and could make a video of a longer duration than before, recording even the most complicated shots. Muybridge and Marey at this point provided a technology for mixing. Thus, in 1877, Thomas Edison invented “phonograph” (Sharman Russell, n.d.) and gave charge to William Kennedy Laurie Dickson to make a camera with capacities that we know today by the name of motion pictures. Dickson was a brilliant scientist working as an assistant to Thomas Edison. He gathered all the previous works, and combined the concepts made by Muybridge and Marey, along with the celluloid technology and came up with the “Kinetograph” (A Very Short History of Cinema, n.d.) which was powered by celluloid cells, and which could print the photographs for 40 frames per second, more than anybody before him had ever accomplished. Even after all these hard efforts, his invention was not commissioned by Edison, and the latter asked him to decommission the device and to make another device called “Kinetoscope” for him (Sharman Russell, n.d.). It was a device that we still see in some old movies where only one person can look through the mirror and watch a reel or a short movie at a time. It was very popular at that time as it was the only one of its kind. Even after this groundbreaking invention, Edison did not think about getting an international patent, as a result this technology was widely copied around the world. Thus, the Lumière brothers, took

the technology, improved it manifold, patented it, and used it under their name “cinématographe” (Sklar Robert, 2021). So, we can say that the cinématographe was an improved version of the “kinetograph”. From that moment, it was a race to the peak and the French cinema took off as it got a wider coverage establishing itself as a standard film industry. There was an intense competition in which American and French cinema continued their developments for numerous years, projecting movies from the Kinetograph or Cinématograph. As a result of this evolution around 1897 cinema started to expand its boundaries. Thus, we saw the introduction of small movies, with motion, sound, and music too. After Dickson, Edwin S. Porter joined Edison, and worked as his main director of movies, as well as he performed as cameraman. He went on to further incorporate his “time-lapse photography” (Sharman Russell, n.d.) and succeeded in creating a long shot by mixing many separate short films, which resulted in a different movie. Before him, only one type of shot was taken in a reel to make a continuous shot. He also had some narratives in his films (Sharman Russell, n.d.). Thus began the era of movement in cinema, which in turn, was the commercial form of cinema. At this point, cinema was industrialized. In the beginning of the 20th century, there evolved a trend that of middlemen, who used to mediate between the producers, and the exhibitionists, who were at the time showing the movies in the theatres around the world (Sharman Russell, n.d.). This business turned out to be very profitable for them. This also led the cinema to an unimaginable height. The popularity can be imagined by the fact that by 1908, in United-States alone, there were more than 20 companies who were constantly fighting for their motion-picture production rights. This war led the most powerful companies of that time, 16 in total, create a new company called MPPC (Motion Picture Patent Company), which teamed up with Eastman Kodak Company

in 1908 to put an end to the war and established a new era of the production companies (Mahadevan, 2010). They had a total control over all of Europe and American cinema industry, as went on to create a licensing criterion as well as giving royalties, laying down some rules and regulations for all the firms to function. The licenses were given to manufacturers of equipment, producers, importers, distributors, exhibitors. This chain was so complicated that all the materials, tools, etc. could only be used by the licensed members. It helped them to exercise full control and reduce the competition and foreign domination over American soil. In 1910, they also created a “General Film Company” which was short lived. As the MPPC dominance grew, so did the distrust and revolt against them. Eventually different organizations formed their own individual groups.

As the Lumiere brothers showed their new technology around the world, it was the dawn of the new era in the cinema industry of the world. The Lumiere brothers have well established their “cinématographe” till 1895 (Guégan, 1995). Thereafter, there have been so many minor changes in the world of French cinema, with talented film makers trying their hands on different tools and inventing new forms of cinema. With the passage of time, in France too cinema became industrialized, just as the American cinema. It was then owned by Pathé-Frère company (Sklar Robert, 2021) who purchased the most innovative technologies and the rights, including the patents of Lumiere brothers in 1902, and made their own improvements in the phonograph and other technological instruments. The rise of Pathé company was so exponential that more than half of the films across the European and American soil were shot by Pathé at that period. Like Pathé, there was one more industrialist, by the name of Leon Gaumont. In comparison to Pathé, he was not very influential, but he developed himself and his company by following in the footsteps of Pathé. As a result, prior to

the First World War, the world had two most influential commercial film industrialists, Pathé and Gaumont. So remarkable was their rise that they went on to purchase the Melies and his British filmmaking (Sklar Robert, 2021). Hence, the rise of cinema in France was nothing more than a miracle. The whole Europe was dominated by the French companies at that time, which underscored the role that French cinematographers played in the development and diffusion of cinema throughout the world.

3. Ambiguity regarding “Birthplace of Cinema”

The Lumière brothers had developed and advanced the instruments which were meant to be used for producing films. Regarding this, Charles Musser has done a very insightful study where he put an end to the ambiguity regarding why the Lumière brothers should be credited with the innovation of cinema. It is true that as already there had been some small video clips made before they could officially project their first movie back on 28th December 1895, the controversy reigned. However, Charles points out that the basic definition of cinema, even to this day, is, projection of moving pictures onto the screen using a projector onto a place which can be a theatre, and the audience should have paid for that. Thus, as history proves, nobody before the Lumiere brothers had done that, and so, they were the rightful innovators of cinema, as we know of today (Hidalgo, n.d.). Also, he goes on to describe what cinema is, and what is not cinema. The notions mentioned show a ‘motion picture’, in a ‘commercial setting’, thus, implying charges one must pay to watch the film. It also excludes Edison’s Kinetoscope from the purview of ‘cinema’ as there was no commercial aspect to it.

4. Conclusion

As we have seen from the above discussion, every good thing was once an idea, it took centuries for the cinema to reach every home, every screen, every country in the world and to get the form it has today. The latest cinema is a result of all the developments that have been happening for nearly one and half centuries. The beginning of the cinema was when the Lumière brothers showed a film in a room full of people, using a projector, through the technology they developed and called “cinématographe” at that time. Since that date, there was no turning back and the rest is history.

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