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DAVID THORBURN: I want to begin by asking what seems an obvious question, what is film? I used to sometimes present it by saying, film as, dot, dot, dot. Film as what? And it may be surprising to you, but one way we could think about film is as chemistry. Now how could that make sense? Why would it make sense to think of film as a form of chemistry? What this film got to do with chemistry? In fact it's a very fundamental relation. This is also true of still photography, as well as movies. But what's the process by which they're made? Yes.

AUDIENCE: Film really comes together from a--

DAVID THORBURN: Speak loudly so everybody can.

THORBURN:

AUDIENCE: Film is made up of a lot of different components. You have your lighting, your scene, your character. And that all has to come together to make film. Without even one component of it, you're losing part of the experience.

DAVID THORBURN: You're right about that. But that's a more general answer than I wanted. There's something much more dramatically fundamental about the way, about the connection between chemistry and movies. What is it?

AUDIENCE: The interaction between the audience and.

DAVID THORBURN: It doesn't have to do with the experience of movies. Come on. It's technical.

THORBURN:

AUDIENCE: Chemistry had to be developed before you could have it.

DAVID THORBURN: It depends on chemistry. Film is a form of applied chemistry. Why? Of course you're right.

THORBURN:

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE].

DAVID

THORBURN:

Yes. What is a film? There are certain emulsions that are put on piece of celluloid. Light actually has to normally-- it can be any light, but sunlight is best-- act, interacting with those emulsions, causes the image to appear. The actual, fundamental process by which film is physically created is a chemical process. And if you reflect on for a moment, one of the things this suggests is that then when we think about film in a much larger sense, in the film as we experience in theaters, film, as an engine of economic development, as a provider of jobs, and careers, and so forth.

What we could say is that it is a form of applied chemistry that is among the most profound uses of chemistry that humankind has ever found. Because if you think about the impact of movies on human life, it is now a global phenomenon. Is there any culture that is free of movies? Maybe there are Taliban cultures that dream of being free of movies. But to my knowledge there's no culture in the world now that's completely oblivious to film. It's become a global phenomenon. And it's more than a century old. It is the distinctive, narrative form of the 20th century, the signature form of storytelling for the 20th century.

All of it derives from this chemical reaction, when the emulsions are subjected to light, the image appears on the celluloid. There are even theoreticians of movies who have suggested that there's a fundamental break of a kind that is subliminal, unless obvious to many people. But it's fundamental to our experience of text when we moved from real film to digital forms of filmmaking. Because nature is eliminated in digital form. There's something natural, and in fact slow, about the way when light works on those emulsions to bring the images up. And those of you who are amateur photographers will know that you can control the clarity or the blurriness of the image, the darkest of the lightness of the image, by how long you leave the film paper in the emulsions. You can control it, and still photographers and creative movie directors actually use those use that chemical principle in order to create certain kinds of effects.

So one way to think about movies is to think of it as a form of applied chemistry. And one of the most profound uses of chemistry that we could imagine in terms of its impact on society, in terms of the vast number of people who have been affected, and continue to be affected by this invention. So film is a form of chemistry. What I'm suggesting, these different framings of what film is, these different frameworks for understanding film. One thing I'm trying to do is to suggest some of the ways in which we might understand film apart from what we're going to be doing in this course. Now I don't know if one could justify persuading a professor of chemistry to teach a course in film. That might be going too far. But certain broad principles of

photography, and how they are linked to other photochemical processes, might very well make a quite exciting and complicated course in the chemistry department.

One can also think of film simply in a historical sense, certainly, as a kind of novelty. When film first appeared in the world, and especially in the United States, it was seen as a novelty that caused its first appearance to take place in places like penny arcades. Where people went to experience other kinds of public novelties as well. There would be machines in these penny arcades that would guess your weight. And you put a penny in, if the machine was right it kept your penny, if the machine was wrong would give your penny back. There were fortune telling machines in these penny arcades. In some of the more sleazy ones there were live peep shows. Strip shows of various moderate kinds. And of course, even at the very early stages, film began to replicate those live performances. There were very trivial forms of burlesque began to-- women stripping-- I don't think there were any male strippers in this late Victorian era-- began to appear in the penny arcades as well.

So one could say that film in its earliest stages was also just a kind of novelty item, like a PEZ dispenser or some equivalent kind of silly thing, or baseball cards, or football cards, that kind of thing. More profoundly of course, we could think of film from another [INAUDIBLE], a manufactured object. And this identity of film is incredibly important. It's again, easy for us to forget, because when we go to the movies today, we see these complex and overwhelming-- we have these complex and overwhelming audiovisual experiences.

And we might tend to forget what in fact is the sort of industrial base on which movies were made at a relatively early stage. Part of what we want at least to be aware of in our course, even though we won't study it systematically, is the fact that the movie, the film, is one of the first significant commodities to become a mass-produced item. And in fact, the same principles that led to another manufacturing miracle that we associate with the late 19th and early 20th century-- the automobile-- the same principles that went to the production of the automobile also worked in the production of film. And in fact, both film and the automobile could be seen as prototypical instances of this fundamentally defining industrial capitalist behavior, capitalist activity, which is mass production. And especially, what does mass production depend upon? The specialization of labor. The rationalizing of the production process into smaller, and smaller units. So that particular people can do it quickly, and you can create essentially an assembly line production. You can create mass production.

I still find it very inspiring and important, significant, the notion that film was created on an

assembly line, just like toasters or automobiles. Seems a shocking and important insight. Because they're still in some fundamental way produced like this. I don't mean that the same movie studios are churning out 500 movies a year, which is what was churned out during the great era of the Hollywood Studios, from around 1930 through the end of the 1940s.

But the fact is the production of movies, the manufacture of movies still depends on these principles of the specialization of labor. And I'm not simply talking about the way in which we have actors, and directors, and cinematographers, and grips, and best boys, and set dressers, and makeup people, and script writers, and so forth. All are relevant to this. But I'm also talking about the way in which movies, still to this day, are divided in their production principles in three stages, a pre-production phase, a production phase, and a post-production phase. And there are specialists at each level, on each phase. And a vast army of specialist is hired to handle the problems that are connected to the production of every single film.

So we can think of films as a really distinctive, signature, instance of what mass production is capable of. OK. So we can say that the film is a manufactured object. And not just a manufactured object, but a product of mass production, a product of essentially, assembly line principles. And what makes this so remarkable to me, still an idea that I have trouble fully absorbing is that the mass-produced item that we're talking about, unlike a toaster or even an automobile, managed so fully to permeate our society and our world, that it's infiltrated ourselves even into our dreams and our fantasy life.

And finally, another way to think about film, and I'm going to sort of enlarge in that. And this is a way we'll be talking about quite a lot in the course of our discussions in this semester. We can say that film, after it's elaborated, and established itself in culture, it becomes a fundamental social form, a fundamental social formation. And experienced, widely practiced, widely indulged in by a vast number of people in the society. So that one could say for example, toasters are important, but they don't generate the kind of social rituals that are involved in going to the movies, and of identifying with movie stars, and of generating fans surround movies, and ancillary, complex activities that we associate with movie going.

And in fact, one might say that the great era of movie going is already gone. That it was really in the era of the Hollywood Studios when they were before the internet and before television. So we could also think of the film as a social form. Not when it first appears, when it's just a novelty, but after it goes through various phases. When it embeds itself into the society the way the movies did, it becomes a kind of social form. And one might almost argue that it

becomes one of the most important social forms in the society because it's so widely shared. Most social activities in the society are relatively limited in the circle of people they involve. Even the number of automobile drivers is controlled in a way that is contained or demarcated in a way that's less true.

Movies appeal to children as well as adults. And from there very beginning this has been true of movies, especially in the United States. They've appealed across lines of social stratification, across differences of gender, across differences of age, across differences of race. There's one book on the film, a rather overly optimistic one that simplifies the pernicious or sinister aspect of movies called *"Film -- The Democratic Art"*. And you can understand, even though I think it's a simplification, why that's an interesting way to think about movies. Because it reached so widely across so many social barriers. In that sense, film was the narrative form that reached a wider audience than any other narrative system that had been invented by human beings before it. What's one explanation for why film would be so appealing, be even more appealing than printed narrative? It also is connected to why the movies grew so quickly in their infancy. Why they went from being a novelty to being an embedded social form so quickly. You probably know what the answer is.

AUDIENCE: That more people could see than could read.

DAVID THORBURN: Yes, that's the real answer, isn't it. That it's mostly a visual medium. It doesn't depend on language to the same degree. And especially silent film, which did not depend-- which it did depend on language, it used intertitles and things, but it depended on language minimally. Why was this important? Because when the film was in its infancy, there was also-- and this was a fundamental, enabling condition for the development of movies-- there was also in the United States a vast and growing immigrant population in all the major cities, but especially Chicago, New York, some of the other larger, industrial cities. And this new immigrant population, which many of them didn't know English at all, had only a little bit of money, disposable income, but they needed entertainment. And the silent film was the perfect answer to this.

The film, relatively quickly becomes a profoundly embedded social form. To give you some sense of how monumental, and how central, how important this was in American society, what I can just simply remind you of is that for most of the period in which the Hollywood Studios were operating at full power, roughly the period from the advent of sound film in the late '20s, until the late '40s when television intervened, even though there's a period when television is

around when the movie studios retain something of their old character, but they begin to decline without fully realizing it, that occurs in the mid '50s sometime.

So in the period from roughly 1930 to say, 1955, to be crude about it. In this period, the vast majority of Americans went to the movies every single week. Think about that, every single week. This was before television, which supplanted that quality of movies. In 1947 or 1948, 80 million Americans went to the movies every week, every week. That was like 2/3 of the population at that time. So it was near to being a universal experience. And not just the universal experience that occurred occasionally, but a routine experience. An experience that families, and individuals, and young, and old, had regularly, as a fundamental part of their life, as a part of their ordinary experience. That's what I mean by an embedded social form. That's an immensely important fact about the movies, and especially about the classic movies.

And when that feature, the idea of the movies as something routine in people's lives, something they did regularly, not occasionally. When that feature disappears, it disappears in part because of the impact of television on society. Television's in the house, so it's a lot easier to retain, to establish an habitual relation to television than it is to the movie. So the advent of this new technology changed movies relation to its audience. And this is the fact that to which again we will return again, and again.

So we could also frame movies in other ways. But these framings I think, are helpful to us in part to remind us of some things that I'm not going to do. One could certainly imagine a course in the Department of Economics that looks simply at the film as an economic engine, at the number of jobs created by movies. Not just the immediate jobs, the people who are actually producing the film, but another kind of an accounting that would take account of all the ancillary jobs. The theater owners, the popcorn sellers, the people who create the publicity for movies. The whole entourage of hangers-on-- you're thinking of the TV show, aren't you? The whole entourage of hangers-on that follow the movie stars around.

It's an unbelievable engine of economic development and economic growth. And it is arguable, given the fact that the movies had been a dominant industry in the Western world, and especially in the United States, since the early 20th century, one could make an argument that it's one of the most productive and central engines of economic growth that capitalism has ever developed. And one could teach a course in the movies that simply emphasized its economic aspects, its power as an employer, its role as a generator of wealth, as a generator of resources.

And I mention this partly to clarify the extent to which, in our course, we're focusing on only aspects of what film might be. But also, in order to remind you that we need to be aware of this as a backdrop to the more cultural and aesthetic concerns about the content of movies, and about the way they developed, the way they evolved, that will be the central energies we will be committed to in our course.

Well, one thing you need to do in order to experience these first weeks of this course in a really effective way is to try to in a certain sense, get outside of your own head, get outside of your own skin. We live in such a visually saturated environment. In which audio/visual messages are beamed at us constantly. Some of us are connected to apparatus all the time. We're connected to our cell phones. We're connected to our computers. It's almost as if we have audio visual signals bombarding us 24/7. It's almost as if you were entering a cave, imagine that you're entering a cave.

What I want to do is think away your iPods. Think away your cell phone. Literally, think them away. Imagine a world without them. Imagine a world without movies, a world without television, a world without radio. I want you to imaginatively put yourself back into the era when the first films began to appear. And try to recover some of the excitement and wonder that those earliest audiences must have felt when they saw some of these images. The most important thing in some sense would be that they were immensely amazed, they were taken aback by the simple, shocking, wonder of movement captured on film. It was if movement itself, something they associate with reality, could suddenly be recaptured in film. Can we show some examples of this, Greg?

Some of you have seen one example of this. Remember in the recitation section, when you saw *The Great Train Robbery*. Do you remember the moment in *The Great Train Robbery*-- which seems unconnected to the story-- in some prints of the film it comes at the end. In some prints it came at the beginning. In some prints it didn't occur at all. Where was it in the film you saw?

AUDIENCE: Is it the guy?

DAVID Yes, yes. When was that?

THORBURN:

AUDIENCE: It was at the very end.

DAVID

THORBURN:

That was at the very end. It's the moment where the guy pulls out his gun, and points it at the camera and shoots him. Did any of you find that odd? I mean, I think you should have. One reason is that it had nothing to do with the narrative. This is important film. It used to be thought to be the very first story film, the very first systematic narrative on film. It's not that, there are earlier examples. But it's one of the very first, and that's why I wanted you see it. It's one of the earliest story films. It's one of the earliest film to tell a sequential story. Although it seems very primitive to you guys, it's actually a very sophisticated item. And there has been a lot of filmmaking going on before this film was made 1902. We'll talk a little bit about that in a moment.

So this moment where he shoots the gun at the camera, why is that disturbing to us or strange to us? I'll answer my own question. One, it's disturbing to us because it breaks the narrative. It seems unconnected to the narrative. Why would they do it? And then second, what's going on there? Why is he doing it? Does the filmmaker not like his audience? What's the reason for it? Why do you think it's there? Who has an idea? Why would be there? Again enter the cave. Think yourself back to an era before movie. When people had never seen movies before. What's the answer?

AUDIENCE:

He couldn't engage the audience in the film.

DAVID

THORBURN:

Well, he does engage them, but what else what does it do? What does it call attention to?

AUDIENCE:

It puts him into a situation that they normally would not encounter, and probably would not survive.

DAVID

THORBURN:

OK, that's right. Yes, a way that's right. And in fact, there are a lot of accounts of early films playing these kinds of tricks, and audiences not yet sure of what films were, reacting as if they were looking at something real. So there are at least reports of people seeing this film when the guy shot the gun, people screaming and ducking down under their seats. And there are many stories like this about early films where people would come to the-- and that's why they showed it. They showed it because it's a very dramatic way of dramatizing, of crystallizing the difference between reality and movies. And also, how realistic movies can be.

The movie's name's the most fundamental feature of the movies. It's a dead metaphor for us. We don't even think about it when we say movie. But think what it means, it means movement.

Films capture movement. What don't you just show this in sequence while I talk, Greg, OK. These are a sequence of early films. And you can see that all of them have in common is a fascination with motion. In other words, the novelty of motion was so great in the beginning that the earliest film simply did this.

There's an important principle here about the way all media developed. In their infancy, the first thing that happens is that no one really much knows how a particular medium we should be or could be developed. And part of the reason for these early weeks in the film for the first two or three weeks in this course is to put you back into that situation. To try to in a very crystallized and distilled way, because there are thousands of films made in this era, but in a very distilled and crystallized way, I'm trying to recapture some of that excitement for you. And in the case of both Chaplin and Keaton, what I've done is choose some short films they made earlier, and then show you a feature film. So if you watch the Chaplain, Keaton films in sequence, two shorts and then a feature film, you'll see enacted in a kind of small compass within the terms of a single director's career this larger process that I'm saying was also enacted by movies themselves.

It was this period of the silent era, was a period in which the movies discovered their identity, or such identity as they have. And I want to talk a bit more about that. While all of these early, relatively primitive films show us is a kind of-- this is one of the earliest-- some people call this the first comedy film. The first joke in the movies. The simplicity of it seems to us weird. But if you think yourself back, if you go into the cave, try to imagine a universe without audio/visual stimuli, you could begin to understand why some of this stuff was so interesting.

Motion itself captivated early audiences and filmmakers. Waves on the shore for example. There are a number of films that just show waves lapping on the shore. Many films of trains coming into stations, and of course, this *Fred Ott Sneeze*. Have we shown the kiss, or the electrocute? Can we do that? There were also risqué or anarchic elements that showed up in early film that I want you see. Here is one of the most famous and scandalous of early films, something called *The Kiss*. And it was an unbelievable scandal when it came out. It films a scene from a stage play. Look how short it was. It was banned in many cities. It was thought to be scandalous. Do you have the electrocute? Many people would call this the first snuff film. And this is a film called *The Electrocution of an Elephant*. And think again what's going on here. Part of it has to do with this wonder that the film can capture actuality, in a way. There's something bizarre and gross about this in some way. This was a rogue elephant that was

about to be put to death.

AUDIENCE: She had apparently stepped on a couple of handlers and killed them.

DAVID THORBURN: So they were going to electrocute the elephant, and they brought a camera there to witness the electrocution. And of course it's so dark, because this fragment of film survives from over 100 years ago, more than 100 years. He's supposed to collapse not to stand up, isn't he? So there it is.

[AUDIENCE GASPS]

Grotesque, isn't it? But also a part of early film. This idea that film could capture reality was itself so-- the novelty of this was so powerful, that in the early stages this was enough to cause great excitement for audiences. One way to think about this problem, and to think about-- the way I have for encapsulating, or dramatizing in a kind of a distilled way, all the elaborate processes that went into the development or the evolution of film is by-- the way I do this in part is by reference to old Fred. This film used to be thought to be the very first film, it's not actually. But it is one of the earliest films made and patented in Edison's movie studio, the very first movie studio in the United States in East Orange, New Jersey. Probably, this made in 1894, at least the copyright I think is of *Fred Ott's Sneeze* is in 1894.

And think of how simple it is, how ridiculous it is. A camera sets up, they were still working on the technology of the motion picture camera at this stage, and they were testing it out. And Fred Ott was an employee of the Edison Company. And they said different, OK, Fred, stand in front of the camera and take snuff. And that's what he's doing. We might think of *Fred Ott's Sneeze* as, theoretically, symbolically, the first film, even though there are earlier films.

Well, think of how unbelievably simple it is. Shown it once more, Greg. Can you freeze it?

GREG: Oh, yeah. Hold on. I'll get it.

DAVID THORBURN: So that Fred stays on the screen while we're talking about this. Look how short it is. What is it? It's two seconds long. Think of this. So this film is made in whatever it is, 1894, 1895, this two-second long film was made in 1894, 1895, by the 1920s, astonishingly complex narrative films are being made, great works of art are being made. What I call the Fred Ott principle is this whole complex, social, and technical, and technological, and artistic process, the swirling of all of these energies going together. Including the demographic fact of so many immigrants audiences creating an environment that made early film a very profitable activity, despite how

crude it was.

What happens in this period between 1900 and the end of the '20s is that film goes from being a novelty separated off, sharing a space in the penny arcades with other forms of novelty, to being one of the dominant industries, and one of the dominant social experiences of the American population. This principle is replicated in some other European societies as well, but not in all. It's an advanced capitalist event. And it occurs in other societies less fully industrialized at later stages. But there is an equivalent history in some of the European cultures. So in this period of fewer than 30 years, film goes from being the most trivial and simplified kind of novelty, to being one of the most complex narrative forms human beings have ever devised.

What I mean by the Fred Ott principle is that whole complex process that we can go from something so simple to something so complex, from something so marginal in society to something so central in society in such a short time. And I want to at least remind you of what that principle involves. I'm talking about all the technological, cultural, demographic, and economic currents that swirl together to create the movie industry that emerges-- really by the mid teens the movie industry essentially is in place. Variations will occur, new studios will appear, but by 1915/1916 American movies have been established on an assembly line basis. Have been established on an assembly line basis, and millions and millions of people are now making it a regular habit to go to the movies. And the movies are elaborating themselves in a complex way that has to do with the way in which they were industrialized.

There are three phases, I think, to what we might call-- let's go back to the outline, Greg. There are three phases to what we might call media evolution. And this is another way of sort of dramatizing what I mean by the Fred Ott principle. The first phase is a phase of imitation and patent warfare. A new technology appears. Nobody yet knows how it would be applied. How people will want to do. Everything about the new technologies up for grabs. So there are competitors who want to sort of claim patents on the technology. Questions about how long should films be? Where she feels be shown? How should films be distributed? All of that's up for grabs. All of that is rationalized and decided-- I put "decided" in quotes because no one sits down and makes a decision. It's really a function of the marketplace, and of certain economic opportunities.

There's no question, for example, that the movies would never have developed as they did were not for those immigrant populations in cities like Chicago, and New York, and Los

Angeles. And many other cities on the East Coast especially, where they were very large immigrant populations who needed. And it was that financial infusion that caused the immense amount of experimentation and development to take place so quickly.

So in this first phase of imitation and patent warfare many of these questions are not-- even such simple questions as how long a film should be? Some of the question of the length of the film are technological, the very first films had to be only 10 minutes long, because that was as long as the film cartridges in which they put in the cameras were capable of doing. Later they were able to make two reelers, and three reelers. That happens over a relatively short space of time.

So in this phase of imitation, one the most important things that happens, and this is the part I want you to become attentive to, is that all of the ancestor systems that lie behind the new technology are potential influences on the new technology. And in new films that you've seen already, the silent films you saw in recitation, you saw some examples of this. For example, do you remember-- maybe we could show this, Greg. The deaths in *The Great Train Robbery*. Remember the deaths of *The Great Train Robbery*? Why are you smiling?

AUDIENCE: Because there was a dummy.

DAVID THORBURN: Because they were still noticeably what, false, fake? Where do they come from? The guy shoots, and the guy goes "ooh." And he staggers around, and then he falls. What's going on there? Where does that tradition of performance come from?

AUDIENCE: Theater.

DAVID THORBURN: Yes, yes. I'll let it play behind me. Yes, it comes from theater. Makes sense that one of the deep influences on early film would be theater. But now in the Fred Ott principle, the most important sub idea in this theory, and this label, the Fred Ott principle is the fact that this process of development involves, among other things, the capacity of filmmakers to discover those features of the new medium that are unique or special to the medium. What makes the medium different from its ancestors? Clearly, what was appropriate for books, or newspapers, or theater, won't be perfectly appropriate for the new medium. But nobody knows what the new medium's capable of until things have been tried out. So that's why I call it a phase of imitation. And what one can say here especially is that certain theatrical styles of acting are dominant. Why our theatrical styles of acting so broad? So unbelievable. Why are they like

that?

AUDIENCE: Because you're far away.

DAVID

THORBURN:

Yes, in the theater you're far away, and you're in a fixed space. But what's one genius of the movies? One way the medium of the movies is different from theater is that the camera can achieve a lover's closeness to the action. Or it can achieve a long view that's much longer and further away than what. Well, it's going to take time before this kind of thing is figured out. And one of the most decisive things we see in early films is first, an acting style that seems derived from theater. But some of you may have noticed that this begins to change relatively quickly.

Can we show the fragment from *A Beast at Bay*? Remember that silly film, *A Beast at Bay*, that I had to watch it along with *The Great Train Robbery*? Remember the ending of *A Beast at Bay*? Something odd happens in this ending. There's the monstrous, drooling, rapist-like figure. He's always a convict or a low-life. There are all kinds of social hierarchies and established social prejudices that get imported into early films. And now we're going to have the rescue. And so far it seems a conventional sort of sleazy melodrama, in which there is at least a hint of something morally disturbing in the imminence of the rape. It's as if the film makes a kind of sleazy appeal to its audiences. Here's a perfect example of such a moment. It's interesting in fact, how one of the recurring subjects of films always seems to be not just rape, but violence against women. It tells you something about the patriarchal societies in which films emerge that those mythologies are replicated in movies.

So he's going to be rescued here. And what I want you to notice is what happens at the very end of this sequence. And can some of you remember what it is? None of you remember? It was so fast. But it actually is very significant. I think it shows us the emergence, the beginnings of the emergence of a new style of acting more appropriate to movies. And also, something else, the development of a total complexity that had not been in movies before. Now the date of this film is early, 1907, 1908, something like that. You're going to see one other silent film by D.W. Griffith tonight, *The Lonedale Operator*, made in 1912. And I hope you'll be attentive to how much more complex that film is. I'll say a few words about that tonight.

I wish we were really just at the end, Greg. I didn't really want to show the whole film. OK, so here we're at the conclusion. Now this is the part I wanted you to notice. Look at this. What's happening here? The film has shifted over into a kind of silly comedy, a kind of gentle comedy. The woman said, kiss me hear, kiss me hear. And in fact, if you notice she's not she's not

saying, kiss me here! In other words, her gestures are more modulated to the nature of movies.

What's beginning to happen there is two important things. First, total complexity is entering in. A melodrama has turned comic. And acting style's beginning to. Can we do the very end of *Musketeers*? Here is the very end of a film by D.W. Griffith called *The Musketeers of Pig Alley*. Some people see it as one of the first urban crime films. But what I want you to watch is this small actor here. Watch his performance. This is the emergence of a new kind of acting, a non-theatrical kind of acting. And it's happening very early, this film appeared in 1912.

That's Lillian Gish, the famous silent film star. This gangster is socked that this woman would choose his rival over him. He says, you're nuts, lady. I can't get it, but OK. Look at this strutting peacock of a man. Watch this. He's a gangster, he's about to be arrested, but the good guys will save him. Oh, we lost it.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

DAVID THORBURN: One good turn deserves another. But you see how much more restrained the performances are here? I mean, Lillian Gish became one of the great silent-screen stars. But I think it's this strutting peacock of an actor who really begins to show what you can do on film. And there are many film critics who have seen this as a precursor of Edward G. Robinson's performances. He's also a diminutive actor, often plays gangsters. But what you see, I think, in this moment, and in this man's performance is the emergence, the beginnings of an acting style that's more modulated, that's appropriate to the nature of the film. So that kind of thing that's happening is not just with acting, it has to do with all kinds of things. It has to do with where you place the camera, and such matters.

So what I mean then, by the Fred Ott principle is this process of evolution that I want you to be aware of. And really, in a certain sense experience in distilled form in the short films I've asked you to watch in this first week of classes. The first phase is a phase of imitation and patent warfare. In which all kinds of questions are up in the air. How will the film be distributed? How will it be exhibited? How will it be produced? There's nothing inherent in the nature of the technology that requires the economic arrangements that developed in the United States, and then we're replicated elsewhere, for the distribution of movies. In fact, Thomas Edison had a different idea for how movies would be developed. When he first conceived the apparatus, he actually thought that movie projectors would be owned by each individual. In fact, what he was

imagining was the camcorder that occurs in a much later generation. And there's nothing inherent in the technology that would not permit that.

So one of the things we need to be aware of-- and I'll return to this matter either tonight or in a later lecture. We need to be aware of fact that the shape the technology takes is not the only shape it might take. It's not the technology itself that drives its development so much as economic, and social, and demographic factors. And that's dramatically the case with the system of distribution and access that was developed for the movies. It's certainly theoretically possible for the apparatus to be developed in a way that would be sold to every individual. What instead happened was a system in which a professional elite becomes the production arm. And these productions become very expensive, and they are pumped out into the society for screening at public theaters, which people will pay money to attend. That economic structure, and that basic industrial structure is not necessary to the technology. It's not required by the technology. The shape of film is at least as much cultural as it is technological. A very important point.

So the second phase after the phase of imitation is the phase I call technical advance. This phase occurs after some of the warfare is concluded. Limited monopolies are established. Some companies are more powerful than others, or come up with a more successful product than others. And they begin to dominate the marketplace. They drive competitors out. And what essentially happens is a kind of stability is introduced in which the basic system is put in place. Here's how we'll manufacture the item. Here's how we'll distribute it. Here's how long it will be. That sort of thing.

And in this period of technical advance what then happens once the stability sets in, the particular, unique features of the medium begin to be explored. And these early films that I'm asking you to look at, what I hope you'll watch for are moments like the ones I was just pointing out this afternoon. In which you see the emergence of a recognition of something that is distinct or special in the nature of movie making. I'll return to some of these matters again tonight. But I want you to be aware of them.

So in the second phase, the phase of technical advance, the system begins to learn what is unique about it. How are movies different from their ancestors? What does it mean that the camera can move close to the object is photographing, or very far away from it? What does it mean that the camera itself doesn't have to be stable, that it can move? You can see some of the early Griffith films really experiment with a camera that's mounted on something that's

moving.

And then the final phase is the phase I call maturity. And that's the phase that occurs really in silent film, in the 1920s. When the technical advances that are accomplished in phase two are married to a serious subject matter. The phase I call maturity is the phase in which feature films are made, and in which some films become works of art. And all films become more complex forms of narrative. In which particular genre forms begin to emerge. And audiences begin to choose particular kinds of films that matter to them. In other words, the system really elaborates itself in a way that suggests an immense variety of appeal to a range of audience. That's the phase of maturity.

Why doesn't it go on forever? What explains why the process doesn't continue? What stopped this process? So the Fred Ott principle encapsulate means going from *Fred Ott's Sneeze* to going to Chaplin's *Modern Times*. This immensely rich, complex narrative film that we'll be looking at next week. What explains why that moment of maturity doesn't extend forever? Why is this system not stable forever? The simplest answer is capitalism never allows for stability. But the more exact answer is new inventions, new technologies subvert the stability. What happens at the end of the '20s to subvert the confidence and stability of the system?

AUDIENCE: The introduction of sound.

DAVID THORBURN: The advent of sound. Yes. And the sound film doesn't completely revolutionize movies, but it profoundly alters them. It changes the nature of film. And it changes the nature of the kinds of performers that you need in film. It profoundly enlarges and complicates what film is. And then, something of the same principles that I've talked about before happen in the sound era. I'm sorry I'm running a little over, but I promise you I'm almost done. And normally, I will never run over even by a minute. I promise. I'll work for this. Why doesn't the final phase continue? Because of new technologies. Because of new possibilities. What happens at the end of the studio system? The advent of television overturns the stabilities that had been created and the old studio era. And the intimate routine connection to movies that had been established in the studio era is finally obliterated by the presence of television. And movies change their character after television comes in. We will return to this. We will return to this matter.

, Well one way I can suggest for you to capture this imaginative linkage, this imaginative connection to the world of early film is by reminding you of a wonderful passage from the Pulitzer Prize winning novel by the great film critic James Agee, which appeared posthumously

in 1957. And it distills for me what I mean-- and I hope for you-- what I mean in part by film as a social form, film as a socially embedded formation. It helps to explain in less abstract terms what I mean when I say that film permeated American life. Listen to the beginning of, this is from the first chapter. And we're finished after this is over. From the first chapter of *A Death in the Family*.

"At supper that night as many times before, his father said, well, suppose we go to the picture show. Oh, J, his mother said, that horrid, little man. What's wrong with him? His father asked. Not because he didn't know what she would say, but so she would say it. He's so nasty, she said as she always did, so vulgar. With his nasty little cane hooking up skirts and things, and that nasty little walk."

Who is he talking about? Chaplin, Charlie Chaplin, of course. And this story takes place before Chaplin was making feature films. So the story takes place probably around 1915. When comedy was still being made as shorts. Comedies didn't become feature length until sometime late in the '20s.

"His father laughed as he always did. And Rufus felt that he had become rather an empty joke. But as always, the laughter also cheered him. He felt that the laughter enclosed him with his father. They walked downtown in the light of mother of pearl to the majestic," nice name for a theater-- "and found their seats by the light of the screen in the exhilarating smell of tobacco, rank sweat, perfume, and dirty drawers. While the piano played fast music," right, because violent films were never silent. There was always music accompanying them. "And galloping horses raised a grandiose flag of dust. And there was William S. Hart--" the passage then goes on to describe a western film with William S. Hart, a silent film.

"And then the screen was filled with the city, and with the sidewalk of a side street of a city, and a long line of palms, and there was Charlie. Everyone laughed the minute they saw him squatly walking with his toes out and his knees apart as if he were chafed. Rufus's father laughed, and Rufus laughed, too. This time Charlie stole a whole bag--" this time. What does that imply about the audience? And intimate familiarity with previous adventures of this character, an ongoing routine connection.

"This time Charlie stole a whole bag of eggs. And when a cop came along, he hid them in the seat of his pants. Then, he caught sight of a pretty woman, and he began to squat and twirl his cane, and make silly faces." I'm going to skip it. It's magnificent prose that captures the

essence of the film very wonderfully. But I don't want to keep you longer than I already have. And it shows Charlie sort of flirting with the girl. And then finally, he flirts with her so much that she pushes him and he falls back down.

"Then he walked back and forth behind her, laughing and squatting a little. And while he walked very quietly, everybody laughed again. Then, he flicked hold of the straight end of his cane, and with the crooked end hooked up her skirt at the knee in exactly the way that disgusted momma. Looking very eagerly at her legs, and everybody laughed very loudly. And she pretended she had not noticed. And then she pushes him over. And there was Charlie, flat on his bottom on the sidewalk. And the way he looked, kind of sickly and disgusted, you could see that he suddenly remembered those eggs. And suddenly you remembered them, too. The way his face looked with his lip wrinkled off the teeth and a little sickly smile, it made you feel just the way those broken eggs must feel against your seat, as queer and awful as that time in the white PK suit."

He's also dramatizing how personal our relation to film can be. "When it ran down out of the pants' legs, and showed all over your stockings, and you had to walk home that way with everyone looking. And Rufus's father nearly tore his head off laughing, and so did everybody else. But Rufus was sorry for Charlie, having so recently been in a similar predicament. But the contagion of laughter was too much for him, and he laughed, too."

And the passage goes on to describe the intimacy and the complexity of the relations between audiences in 1915 and one of the iconic figures of the movies. In this idea, that Charlie mobilizes this anarchic, liberating laughter, and mobilizes this father-son relationship. In that idea we recapture something of what I mean by the notion that film was an embedded social experience, an embedded social form. I'll see you tonight.