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BETWEEN ATTRACTION AND NARRATION: Early Film Adaptations of Fairy Tales

Adaptations of fairy tales were particularly popular in the years of early cinema. In the period preceding the year 1903 films consisted of a series of animated tableaux since filmmakers had difficulties in telling a coherent story. Allusions to a well-known tale could then function as a guide for the spectator. At the same time, filmmakers were fond of experimenting with cinematic tricks, such as stop-motion techniques and superimpositions. The fairy tale offers a legitimate backdrop for these tricks and these film adaptations even display an excess of the marvelous at the cost of the actual story itself.

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Fairy tales have been a source of inspiration for a large variety of types of film. They have been made as Disney animations – *Snow White* (1937), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and many others – or as the superbly crafted, colorful fantasy *The Red Shoes* (1948) by directors Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, as the lyrical black-and-white picture *La Belle et la Bête* by Jean Cocteau in 1946, as the musical fantasy *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1952) by the comedy team Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, as Jacques Demy's extravagant *Peau d'Ane* (1970) whose lines are sung by the characters, or as the slightly surrealist Dutch film *Grimm* (Alex van Warmerdam, 2003). A film can also play with elements that are derived from fairy tales, such as the Cinderella-motif that is used in *Pretty Woman* (Gary Marshall, 1991) or in *Kinky Boots* (Julian Jarrold, 2005). What seems to be missing, however, is a specific period in which fairy tales took up a dominant position within film history. Screwball comedies can be associated with the second half of the 1930s; film noir came to prominence in the 1940s and Westerns were produced in large numbers during several decades, with a peak between 1940 and 1970. If there is a time during which the fairy-tale film seems to prosper, then

the very early years of cinema might be the best candidate. This article delves into the background of this relative popularity in the beginning of the twentieth century. In this period, the quite new medium of cinema was still in search of a 'destination,' and, as I will claim, the format of fairy tales turned out to be helpful in trying out a narrative road.

From Theater to Literature

The film historian André Gaudreault disagrees with the common wisdom – or Wikipedia-wisdom, if you like – that cinema was born on that famous evening in December 1895 when the brothers Lumière projected several shorts on a screen. To Gaudreault, 1895 only marks the invention of the cinematograph, and this invention is no more than just a gradual shift in relation to its predecessors like the magic lantern show, Eadweard Muybridge's chronophotography, and Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope. In his study *From Plato to Lumière*, Gaudreault claims that a fundamental continuity break takes place somewhere in the early 1910s. Before this decade, cinema had a fairly low profile and the medium was taken as cheap amusement, in the vein of fairground attractions or vaudeville. Only from the 1910s onwards, Gaudreault argues, did cinema become institutionalized, since some sort of 'film language' started to emerge (2009, 157). According to him, the transition to institutionalization implied the shift from a range of random practices to a specific set of conventions that would develop into the vantage point for classical cinema.

There is no better entry to reflect upon the pre-institutional practices of cinema than the two court cases that took place in the years after the turn of the century. Gaudreault discusses these cases in order to explain the origins of the filmic narrator (2009, 101-12). At the time, cinema was basically regarded as a recording device that could not lay any claim to the status of being an art form. Hence the widespread practice of duping was considered improper, but not illegal. A production company duped the film of another production company and marketed it as one of its own, keeping all the profits for itself. In 1902 Edison took Lubin to court for this practice in the case of a one-shot film. To defend Lubin against the charge, the company's lawyer raised two questions that he thought should be addressed in the verdict. First, how can the uninterrupted film shoot of an actual event be considered artistic? And secondly, under what conditions is a film

sufficiently protected by copyright? Lubin's lawyer stated that Edison might think it had dutifully protected the film from piracy, since it had paid the required 50 cents to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. It had paid this sum, however, for only a single still photograph of the one-shot film. Should the company not pay 50 cents for each photogram of the picture? Lubin asked. The lower court decided in favor of Lubin by pronouncing that every photogram indeed had to be separately registered. Edison appealed the case, however, and then the judge overruled the decision. According to the judge's opinion, a series of photograms is practically one picture, and hence a single still photograph suffices for copyright protection.

The second court case offers an additional complication to the dispute between Edison and Lubin. In this case, Edison was the charged party, because it had made an exact remake of the Biograph multi-shot chase film *Personal* (1904). The pivot of the argument did not concern the apparent imitation of the shots, but the presumed theft of the script, including the editing pattern. Biograph had copyrighted the film according to the regular custom of one single still photograph, that at this stage was taken as the copyrighting of one shot. Since the film consisted of a multiplicity of shots, Edison argued that these other shots were not protected. Edison acknowledged the continuity of photograms, a stance the company had advocated in the dispute with Lubin, but Edison argued against the idea that the linking of shots could be continuous, since editing cut up the continuity in time and space. Therefore, according to Edison, Biograph's *Personal* was 'merely a disjointed assemblage of discontinuous scenes' (Gaudreault 2009, 108) that could not be covered by a single copyright. In his verdict, Judge Lanning took the side of Biograph. In his view, the series of pictures of moving objects told a single story, and should be treated as a unique entity.

According to Gaudreault, the verdict has the important side-effect that it came to associate the cinema with literature rather than with theater. Edison attempted to win the case by resorting to the idea that cinema only presents a disconnected series of tableau-type shots – a fragmentary collection of theatrically staged sketches. The verdict implicitly replaced the theatrical model with a literary one, judging from the words of Judge Lanning: The camera was placed at different points, and therefore, 'it is true, there are different scenes. But no one has ever suggested that a story told in written words may not be

copyrighted merely because, in unfolding its incidents, the reader is carried from one scene to another' (cited in Gaudreault 2009, 112).

Gaudreault qualifies the verdict as a landmark text, signaling the birth of the film narrator. Whereas the very early cinema consisted of the explicit showing of scenes, cinema was entering the realm of telling in the spirit of literature. The arrival on the scene of an explicitly acknowledged narrative agent in cinema brought films theoretically closer to novels than to plays. In this article I aim first to locate the film adaptations of fairy tales within the context of a tension between theatrical staging and literary story-telling. Second, I will address how and why cinema, as the 'new kid in town,' emphasized the marvelous aspects of fairy tales to sheer excess.

A Solution to the Unreadability of Film Images

Gaudreault's argument about the shift from theater to literature as the closest ally to cinema accords with the best known thesis on early cinema, and perhaps the most cited text in film studies, Tom Gunning's essay 'The Cinema of Attractions', originally from 1986. Thanks to a wider availability in film archives of cinema in the earliest period, Gunning came to discern an ignored tendency in films until about 1906-07.¹ He judged that early cinema was not dominated by the narrative impulses that were to characterize later classical studio productions. The classical cinema would come to create a diegetic world of its own and specifically condemn the spectator to the position of a voyeur in the dark auditorium. But in the films predating the classical period, there were usually actors who looked straight into the camera and explicitly addressed the audience. Hence, early cinema involved an 'exhibitionistic confrontation' with the viewer, with the actor attempting to solicit the attention of the spectator: look at me performing my tricks (Gunning, 58). Browsing through old collections, Gunning concluded that early films were predominantly a display case for a series of circus acts. In the vein of vaudeville theater, early cinema revolved around unrelated acts that lacked any dramatic unity.

It is important to note that enlargement in early cinema was not used for narrative punctuation. When the lady lifts her skirt hem in *The Gay Shoe Clerk* (Edwin S. Porter, 1903), she exposes her ankle 'for all of us to see.' According to Gunning, the 'principal motive' behind the close-up of the ankle in this early film by Porter is 'pure exhibitionism'

(58). This example from *The Gay Shoe Clerk* indicates that film was not yet designed for narrative purposes. The spectator could read the film from a narrative perspective, but devices such as the aforementioned close-up were not yet used to serve the story. At this stage, the status of the medium film may still seem to be marked by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's influential dictum in his 'Laocoön' essay from 1766 that the arts of time should be separated from the arts of space. A temporal art such as poetry was perfectly fit for telling a story, but a spatial art such as painting should represent a scene in a single glance. Until the arrival of film, media were conventionally classified according to either the arts of time or the arts of space. Rather than fully acknowledging film as a medium that transcends this distinction, in these early years the temporal potential was downplayed to favor film as a spatial medium.² Showing rather than telling was the seminal quality of early films and this quality cinema shared with painting; therefore, editing in early cinema is often only a 'matter of the simple juxtaposition of animated tableaux' (Doane, 190). Any connections between a first and a second shot were coincidental.

The debates among historians of early cinema explicitly focus on the tension between attraction and narration – a debate that was also at issue in the aforementioned court cases about the duping of films. Charles Musser's insightful *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* shows not only that the scales would tip in favor of storytelling, but he also implies that cinema ultimately owes its popularity to its narrative potential. In the years in which a preliminary transition to story films took place – according to Musser this development started in the mid-to-late 1903s – prominent companies like Biograph and Edison produced mainly all types of comedies, chase films and crime fiction. With the turn to narrativity, the films increased in length, they became more ambitious and, not to be underestimated, moving pictures were 'assuming more and more clearly the role of commercial amusement' (1994, 368). Even though these films at times still suffer from 'compositional naiveté' and from an indistinctness of action when compared to later films by D.W. Griffith, they were nevertheless more coherent than preceding movies. In a year like 1902 when the status of cinema was still so inarticulate that moving pictures were not popular, there was an important role for the exhibitor. It was common practice for an exhibitor to give on-the-spot commentary to turn the fairly loose ends into a more or less consistent plot. Title slides

for further clarification of the picture were often available, but it was the responsibility of the exhibitor to insert them or not. Only with the transition to story films did titles become part of the pictures themselves so that the producer assumed control over the titles (Musser 1994, 350).

The reason for the attractiveness of story films may be related to the problem of readability, as it is discussed by Mary Ann Doane. In its nascent years, cinema was perceived as an opaque medium, since it recorded spontaneously what was in front of its lens, both what was intended and what was coincidental. But if everything could be recorded, that is, if the camera had the capacity to record indiscriminately, could the precise content of the images then still be termed relevant? Did it matter what you observed or was the act of registration in itself the only thing that really counted? In order to grasp to what extent it was problematic for the early spectator to read the film image, I propose a comparison between a painting and a movie picture. If one imagines a viewer looking at a painting that portrays daily life with an abundance of details, the viewer assumes that the artist has thought it over. The connotation of even the tiniest details therefore becomes 'telling' or 'typical'. On the film screen one might similarly see a scene with a huge variety of details, but these accidentally shot details were so overspecific that they seemed meaningless. In the words of Doane: 'Any moment is as "exemplary" as any other and hence none provides that privileged "flash" or spark of knowledge' (66). By contrast, a painter who portrayed a dog probably wanted to reflect upon the idea of loyalty, but what about the dog in a film scene: did the animal just happen to pass by? Confronted with a new medium that could record scenes haphazardly and that therefore had the ability to represent both the planned and the unforeseen, film spectators hardly knew on which pro-filmic elements they should focus. Meaning is created when the spectator recognizes the typical, the particular, but due to the spontaneity and the fullness of the image the typical could hardly come to the fore. One might therefore say that storytelling in cinema is partly a response to the confusion about where or why to look. Once again, it is relevant to quote from Doane: 'If everything is recordable, nothing matters except the act of recording itself.' This overwhelming effect of the recording process constitutes a threat, according to Doane. Constructing a narrative framework would be one

of the means to tame and secure the instability of the cinematic image (Doane, 159).

When one used a well-known fairy tale as a framework for a film in these early years, the literary background story could work as a palimpsest. Let me refer to *Cinderella* (Georges Méliès, 1899, original title *Cendrillon*), a six-minute film that consists of four shots without title cards. Because the film is wordless and only displays a series of successive images, *Cinderella* suggests on a superficial level that the medium itself was solely designed to show a variety of attractive pictures, which confirms Gaudreault's thesis about the theatricality of cinema in this period. For a spectator unfamiliar with the fairy tale, the film might have been peculiar and might be qualified as a bizarre array of strange transformations. In the very first shot a fairy appears on the screen out of the blue. With her magic wand she conjures up mice that in the blink of an eye are transformed into a cabman and two valets. A huge pumpkin changes into a coach. These peculiar tricks only make sense because the title is an indication for the plot. The *Cinderella* tale was so well-known among the audience that practically any spectator could understand the reason for the sudden transformations and could discern a story in the rather random selection of tableaux. After the first shot with the mice and the coach, the film dissolves, without any further announcement, into a dance party being celebrated in high society. Moreover, the strategy of adapting a story with popular antecedents was a clever solution to counter the problem of the unreadability of film images. The story could function as a reader's guide: when the girl disappears from the party in a rush after the appearance of the fairy at twelve o'clock, the prince picks up something from the ground, and we already know that this lost slipper, even though it is not punctuated with a close-up, will play a seminal role in the remainder of the film.

The importance of adapting a story with popular antecedents is proved by the case of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This picture was produced by Edison in 1903, and it was met with enthusiasm by an American audience, but was less successful among European spectators who were not that familiar with this specifically American story (Musser 1994, 351). The split reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* indicates that it is an advantage when a film supplements its spatial and pictorial quality with references to a story that rings a bell for its audiences.

The desired readability of the moving pictures was not only enhanced by the use of a familiar plot, but John Frazer mentions in his study *Artificially Arranged Scenes* that the meticulous drawings by masterful illustrator Gustav Doré seemed to be a direct inspiration for Méliès' version of *Cinderella* (16). The first three shots of the film focus upon a scene similar to that in the three drawings Doré made for the Hetzel edition of *Les Contes de Charles Perrault* from 1867. On the first drawing we see the godmother who shows the pumpkin to Cinderella, on the second she is transformed into a princess at the party and admired by all the guests, and on the third, the prince slides the glass slipper onto her little foot without any trouble. The composition of the second shot especially looks as if it is a copy of Doré's party scene. Since the drawings by Doré are so well-known, the spectator of Méliès' film might deduce that the film shots were not accidental recordings, but the result of an artificially arranged *mise-en-scène*. It seems legitimate to claim that the more the film shots were drafted after the illustrations, the more the impression of coincidence was foreclosed. As a consequence, the spectator might consider the film shot not as a spontaneous, but as a deliberately staged image that was to be read, as one might read a painting or a fine illustration.

Editing at a 'Preparatory' Stage

I have tried to suggest that film adaptations of fairy tales were so popular in the beginning of the twentieth century (see Musser 1994, 393) because their well-known background story injected these films with a narrative dimension, in a period when filmmakers still had difficulties in coping with the narrativity of cinema. I do not mean to state that early films are not narrative, because in my opinion they are. Already the very first one-shot shorts by the Lumière brothers can be seen as a representation of a temporal development: a door is opened, workers leave the factory, the door is closed. In my own study *Film Narratology*, I referred to Gaudreault in order to explain that this type of film has a first level of narrativity in which showing is the exclusive form of telling. The narrator on this first level – termed 'monstrator' by Gaudreault – is an agent that simply projects images onto the screen in a number of frames per second from an unchanging position. Here, cinema is literally no more than a moving picture. In its naked essence, cinema always encompasses monstration: film is like a continuous showing of photographic frames that usually (except for remarkable

experiments) connect in a fluent rhythm. Editing can be seen as the second level of narrativity. Editing concerns the joining of separate shots, recorded from different angles, and this makes it possible to depart from spatial and temporal continuity. This possibility was only explored to a limited extent in the early years of the twentieth century out of fear of creating an incoherent storyline.

This fear of a confusing representation of events is perfectly illustrated by the case of Edwin S. Porter's *Life of an American Fireman* (1902). Gaudreault has observed that there actually are two versions of this film, one that he calls the Copyright version and another one that he terms the Cross-Cut version. Crucial for his argument is the transition from shot 8 to 9 in the Copyright version. In shot 8 we see, from inside the bedroom of a house in flames, a fireman entering the room through the window from a ladder. He has come to save a woman and immediately thereafter a child. In shot 9 we get a long shot from the exterior of the house. The very same woman that was rescued in shot 8 already now appears at the window and calls for help. We then see how a ladder is placed against a window and how a fireman finally climbs down, carrying the woman to safety. Hence, this so-called Copyright version shows an overlap of action – the rescue is shown twice, both from inside and from outside the house. The Cross-Cut version has no such overlap, but Gaudreault hypothesizes that this film is a counterfeit, adjusted to the principles of continuity editing that were only to develop near the end of the decade (Gaudreault 1990, 141). Gaudreault goes on to suggest that Porter's landmark chase film *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), retroactively labeled as the first western film, could have benefited if he had applied the storytelling technique of cross-cutting, that is, suggesting that the action taking place in shot A happens simultaneously with the action shown in shot B. The reason why Porter did not employ this technique that is the equivalent of the term 'meanwhile, somewhere else,' is perhaps due to the simple fact that cross-cutting did not exist at the time he made his film (Gaudreault 1990, 141). Hence, these films by Porter suggest that editing as the key principle of storytelling in cinema was only at a 'preparatory' stage around 1902-03.

It may therefore give little wonder that Porter turned to a fairy tale as a source of inspiration for one of his films, *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1902). This ten-shot narrative was more than twice the length of any previous studio-made film (Musser 1991, 200). By drawing inspiration

from a famous story, Porter's adaptation had the additional advantage that the running commentary of an exhibitor could be limited, since he could presume that the plot was familiar to the spectators. Nevertheless, as Musser observes, an exhibitor could offer clarifying comments on the basis of a document provided by Edison Films itself. This document contained information that is apparently based upon the first printed version of the story by Benjamin Tabart in 1807. In this version, a fairy explains that the giant has killed and robbed Jack's father. Hence, the tragic downfall of the giant is morally justified in Tabart's story as well as in the Edison document that was sent to the exhibitor as an accompanying guide to the film. Such a legitimization is, however, lacking in Porter's film. We do see that a fairy encourages Jack to go to a giant's castle, but there is no (visual) reference to his father. So, whereas the document corresponds with Tabart's version, the film is to be seen in the light of a well-known rewriting of the tale by Joseph Jacobs in 1890, which gives no other justification for Jack's theft from the giant than his poverty. In other words, the discrepancy between the printed tales by Tabart and Jacobs is similar to a discrepancy between the Edison document and the actual film. The document is a textual supplement to the film and offers extra information to clarify what could not yet be told appropriately.

At least as important is the fact that *Jack and the Beanstalk* 'lacks an adequate cinematic language if the film is expected to act as a self-sufficient narrative' (Musser 1990, 205). Not every transition from one shot to the next one is logical in terms of a temporal abridgement, at least it is not logical from the retrospective perspective of continuity editing: Jack wakes up from a dream in his nightgown and walks towards the window. In the next shot, an exterior one, we see him fully clothed while he stands before the window, looking outside. The absence of a clear-cut (temporal) logic, however, could be covered over, if not neutralized by 'filling-in' the gaps with knowledge of the fairy tale.³

Excess of the Marvelous

The assumption that spectators could fall back upon an existing plot created a certain latitude among filmmakers to experiment with innovative and spectacular effects. Storytelling was not totally irrelevant, but of secondary importance in comparison to the idea that the primary function of cinema was to produce a spectacle. From its

first screening in the United States during the 1899 Christmas holidays, Méliès' *Cinderella* was greeted as an 'unprecedented spectacle [...] that exceeded any American accomplishment for some time. Over the next few years the film was a featured attraction wherever it played [...]' (Musser 1994, 277).

This 1899 version of *Cinderella* with its extravagant sets put great emphasis on a pictorial quality. I already referred to Frazer, who claimed that the romantic visual style of Méliès' adaptation of *Cinderella* was greatly influenced by Doré's meticulous illustrations (16). Moreover, Méliès' films were especially admired for the way he used the story material as a showcase for his typical tricks. As already mentioned, the first shot only consisted of the performance of sudden transformations by a fairy with a magic wand. In a next shot when the girl is dancing, a jester shows up and suddenly he holds above his head a giant clock with its pointers at twelve o'clock. The girl's beautiful dress is immediately altered into her shabby clothing of the beginning of the film.

Just as the jester in *Cinderella* seems to particularly enjoy the sad departure of the princess, there is a jester jumping around in another one of Méliès' film fairy tales from around this period, *Bluebeard* (1901, original title *Barbe bleue*). He shows up at the very moment that the wife of the title hero is curious about the forbidden chamber, and thinks of opening the door. The happy gestures of the jester seem to imply that he enjoys the terrible discovery that will await her. Shocked by what she sees and unable to remove the blood of the key she has used, we see a number of dancing keys around her head which prevent her from getting to sleep. This scene has a structural similarity to a scene in *Cinderella*: After the heroine has returned back home after midnight, a number of clocks are dancing around her. One way to interpret the dancing objects – clocks in *Cinderella*, keys in *Bluebeard* – is to regard them as haunting props. The chiming of the bells has brusquely ended *Cinderella*'s happy evening, whereas *Bluebeard*'s wife is frightened that the blood on the key reveals to her husband that she has opened the forbidden room. The clocks and keys have the status of mental images that are incessantly on the mind of the female characters, in both cases to the jester's delight.

Next to this symbolic function of the superimposed objects, the clocks and the keys also suggest a specific cinematographic function. In this cinema of pre-institutionalized practices, the conventional rules of

transition between shots were only implied in a most rudimentary fashion, but a sort of editing *within* the frame was eagerly adopted. A legendary anecdote about Méliès, who originated from a background as a magician, explains how he accidentally discovered the stop-motion technique. One day, while he was recording a bus driving by, his camera broke down. When it was fixed, a hearse happened to pass by just as he was rolling the camera again. When he watched the footage, it seemed as if the bus had transformed into the hearse. Méliès was absolutely delighted with the possibility of a magical change of scene. One just had to stop filming, replace some of the attributes and continue shooting the scene with the camera at exactly the same spot.

Méliès may have been so intrigued with the fairy tale format because the genre offered him a perfect occasion for experimenting with endless trickery and numerous special effects. If it is a common notion that fairy tales are set in an unreal world without definite locality and that this never-never land is filled with the marvelous (Thompson, 8), then this genre is the ideal backdrop for trying out all kinds of marvel. It is not only that characters with witchcraft are responsible for sudden appearances and disappearances, but the early film fairy tales also excel in dreamlike sequences that stretch the imagination. If one watches a series of these early films in a row, like Méliès' *Cinderella*, his *Bluebeard*, Porter's *Jack and the Beanstalk*, Ferdinand Zecca's *Ali Baba et les quarante voleurs* (1901, re-issue in 1905) and *Aladdin ou la lampe merveilleuse* (1906), then one tends to observe that the fairy tale offers an ideal justification for cinematic tricks. Although one dominant idea about the medium dictates that film outdoes other art forms as to its effects of 'realism', these early film fairy tales suggest a close analogy with magic, which is not that far removed from cinema's association with fairground attractions and vaudeville theater. The parallel with magic is so paramount that one gets the impression that the tricks are employed for the sake of trickery itself. Fairy tales deal with matters of the marvelous, naturally, but these films display an excess of the marvelous at the cost of the actual story itself. Two examples may illustrate this emphasis on the marvelous trickery over the narrative.

First, Méliès seemed eager to show all kinds of possible transformations in his fairy tales. In terms of efficiency as well as fidelity to the original text, the scenes with the dancing objects in both *Cinderella* and *Bluebeard* are a superfluous supplement to the story. Hence, these sequences are to be taken as typical 'attractions': in no way

do they move the story forward. Second, the acts of death and brutal killing are robbed of their associations with horror and are so utterly unrealistic as to evoke laughter. At the end of *Bluebeard*, a sword is stabbed through the belly of the villain, while he continues to gesticulate wildly, with his feet up in the air. I might also refer to a scene in Zecca's 1905 re-issue of *Ali Baba et le quarante voleurs* when the robber headman discovers the hero's brother in his alcove. He unscrupulously beheads the poor guy, but this so obviously comes across as once again an impressive trick that it seems played for comic effect rather than to provoke a feeling of disgust among the audience.

If the fairy tale is ideally suited for showcasing an excess of marvelous tricks, this excess is also emphasized formally. Mme Thuillier had a studio in France that specialized in hand-tinting films frame by frame. In these years of early cinema, this practice of coloring (parts of) film frames was quite expensive, but it was deemed appropriate in the case of spectacular films, particularly those of an exotic nature, such as the Pathé Frères productions of *Ali Baba* and *Aladdin*. Hence, we can note a split trajectory in the film adaptations of fairy tales of this period. On the one hand, as I have argued, early films confronted their spectators with a disturbing meaninglessness. Since the camera could record indiscriminately, film shots were not coded to distinguish the significant elements from the random ones. On the other hand, filmmakers were fascinated with the possible manipulation of the recording process – fast motion, dissolves, superimposition, freeze frames and other distortions like hand-tinting. These devices were all instances of heavily coded moments in early cinema (Doane, 189). Because of their fanciful nature, fairy tales therefore provided a playground for a motivated use of explicit filmic codes in the yet general uncodedness of early cinema. This coding was predominantly endorsed at the level of the shot itself, but when filmmakers became interested in creating new kinds of editing from 1904 onwards, their focus upon fairy tales gave way to an increased attention to other genres, such as the chase films. Fairy tales were even further marginalized in the year 1908 and after when attempts were made to turn cinema into a respectable art form, fit for a middle-class audience. The 'once upon a time ...' format of princes, dwarves and godmothers was then replaced with stories from classical antiquity and adaptations of plays by William Shakespeare. The mixture of animated tableaux and a rough impression of a plot that had characterized the early film fairy

tales was repressed in favor of an institutionalization of cinema, on its road to a classical style.

Conclusion

In the early years of cinema, film fairy tales had a transitional function in helping film shed its dependency on theater in favor of an affiliation with narrative literature. In the case of adaptations of well-known fairy tales, the spectator could fill in the gaps and construct a chain of cause-and-effect relations out of the consecutive static tableaux. Sometimes, as the example of *Jack and the Beanstalk* proved, the document that was sent to the exhibitor to instruct the audience about the story could be based upon a specific version of the tale, whereas the film itself seemed to be inspired by another, less elaborate, version. After 1905, fairy tales were less often used as a source text for film adaptations, for the more editing principles became refined, the less a story that was based upon a widely known pattern was required.

In the early years of cinema, fairy tales helped to articulate a function for film that was not necessarily realistic, but that allowed artificial staging as one of its prerogatives as well. Fairy tales offered a legitimate format to employ all kinds of cinematic tricks, such as superimpositions, colorful effects, and stop-motion techniques to show sudden transformations. Some of these tricks were used to suggest the mental preoccupations of characters, but the overall beneficial side-effect of these tricks was to give the impression that cinema was a medium of magic possibilities.

Notes

1. 'By seeking only predecessors of the present and ignoring the rest of early cinema, older historians had overlooked idiosyncratic norms informing cinema before 1915.' (Bordwell, 121).
2. The idea that film has a hybrid nature as both an art of time and an art of space has throughout the history of the medium imbued critics with the anxiety that film can not be valorized as a true Art. According to this 'conservative point of view cinema can never be an art because it is a mongrel medium that will never rest comfortably within the philosophical history of the aesthetic' (Rodowick, 13).
3. 'In the earliest years of the cinema, [the] requirement of external spectatorial knowledge was not atypical but, rather, constituted something of a norm. the spectator was often expected to have knowledge of another text (for example, newspaper accounts of a current event or a familiar story such as the Passion

plays or *Jack and the Beanstalk*, which the films alluded to or illustrated but did not fully develop).' (Doane, 160)

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