Early Cinema and the Technological Imaginary
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Through the years of research and writing for this project, this has been the section I most looked forward to. Not because it would mean that the work would be over, but that I would, at last, have a chance to publicly thank all those people who helped me along the way. Now the moment has arrived, however, this final task has become the most difficult of the whole book. Knowing who to thank is easy but, with such little space, it is who to leave out that is painful. If that last phrase sounds familiar I am not surprised. It resonates with a line I read in 1990 in Thomas Elsaesser’s book Early Cinema: Space–Frame–Narrative. Writing of the collection of essays he says: “...the choice of what to include was easy, what to finally exclude a painful one.” It was through his work on early cinema, and that line in particular, that I became more than fascinated by very early films and, anxious to find out what the limitations of space had forced him to exclude from his book, I put away my movie camera and read all I could. I was doubly fortunate in meeting Thomas, for just as his wit and intellectual generosity has steered this project, so I was also to benefit from both his and Karen Pehla’s personal support during the time that I lived and worked in Amsterdam; their kindness has touched me irrevocably.

The topic of film history offers many of the fascinations and pleasures that are familiar to all scholars. But one that must be unique is sitting in the dark with up to a thousand other like-minded people for days – even weeks – on end looking at “silent” films. This research would not have been possible without the generosity of those who organise the various film festivals which serve as a focus and a resource for international scholarship in the field. Particular thanks go to Le Giornate del Cinema Muto at Pordenone for the rigour and accessibility of their annual celebration of early cinema. Thanks are also due to the city of Bologna for their film festival which confirms that early cinema is still public property by combining the opportunity to see rare films with spectacular open-air screenings. In the hurried meals between programmes at these events, I discovered a community of people whose interest in early cinema was, for the most part, combined with a generosity and warmth that added dimensions of pleasure to the research that I could not have anticipated. Listing this host of contributors to the project would tax the reader, and it is here that the exclusion of detailed thanks is painful. As a teacher I am well aware that in the informal academy of social interaction the spontaneous discussion and the passing observation can stimulate a new direction for enquiry which can change the course of one’s thoughts; I have had the good fortune to share many such occasions – thank you all.

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As Patricia points out in the “Words of Thanks” in her own thesis, books are created and
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Michael Punt
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