



HISTORY

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A flip book is a collection of combined pictures intended to be flipped over to give the illusion of movement and create an animated sequence from a simple small book without machine.

Very popular at the end of 19 th century and the beginning of 20 th century, but still produced today, flip book (from the verb to flip over or to flip through) is the American name even used in France, more often than its French name *folioscope* (sometimes called *Kineograph*, *Feuilletoscope* or *Cinéma de poche*). British people call it flick book or flicker book; in Germany *Abblätterbuch* (books to be flipped through) in the 19 th century and then *Daumenkino* : "thumb cinema", name that we also find sometimes in the US at the beginning of 20 th century (also called thumb book) as well as less usual names such as flip movie, fingertip movie, riffle book, living picture book or hand cinema.

Some authors compared the flip book to the Magic Book or Blow Book, a fashionable kind of books in 19 th century that allowed animations or optical illusions. Actually, the only common point is that they both use the principle of animation. The actor and historian of magic, Ricky Jay, is the author of a great work devoted to these small books ¹



The flip book looks like a small notebook – originally stapled, mostly bound today- that you hold in one hand while you flip over the pages with the thumb of the other hand, either from front to back or from back to front. Pictures (See [animation](#)) or drawings give the illusion of motion, slower or faster depending on the speed. A long time mentioned as pocket cinema (or *Taschenkinematograph* in German, *cinéma de poche* in French), it is the link between the book, the series of drawing (prefiguration of cartoons) and the animated picture, ancestor of the cinematograph. " *True cinema without camera or spotlight, its principle makes from any kind of notebook a potential film in kit form,* " wrote G.Dupeyrot in an article about commercial flip books ², one of the seldom article about flip books.



If we mostly use the flip book like a small book, it may have several forms: stapled note book, bound like any other books, leaves with cut out pictures that you attach together, and stickers' plate, (stickers that you stick on the margin of the pages of a booklet or a notebook). You can flip it over both ways when printed on both sides. Some of them, but rarely, are printed per two back to back.



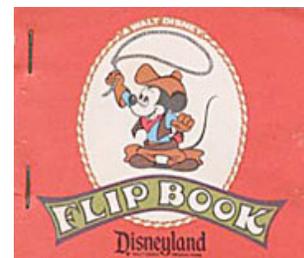
From a few pages to more than a hundred, in order to flip them over easily and give the right place to the shown sequence, about 30 pages is ideal. Some books also use the technique to create animation by setting a series of pictures on the outer margin of pages or by using the flip book to support a demonstration, especially regarding sport.

Its short-lived nature explains its fragility. Never meant to be kept, mostly manipulated by children, it is very hard to find flip books in good conditions and to archive them. Therefore, the recollection is difficult. Libraries rarely keep copies because a lot of them are not marketed in a traditional way. However, since some of them are using the ISBN (International Standard Book Number), they consider and register them as books.



The magic of flip book touches everybody, no matter the age or nationality. As you do not need peculiar knowledge to use it, it has a universal characteristic. Those who enter the world of flip books are more often interested in the funny aspect rather than the content itself. As a testimony about the beginning of motion picture, the use of illustration or photography, or the artists' flip books realized since the 50's, it is a combination that like any other collection of books can provide a lot of surprises.

We saw flip books in movies such as the musical *Footlight Parade* (Lloyd Bacon and Busby Berkeley 1933) in which James Cagney animated a boat reaching the open sea with playing cards. An episode of the TV series "CSI: Miami" entitled " Stalkerazzi " shows a flip book made after the burst shots of the murdered photographer's camera, reconstructing the scene of his own murder. We also find flip books in novels such as *Ragtime* written by E.L. Doctorow in which one of the characters, an outline cartoonist, invents the flip book before he becomes a movie producer in the United States of the early 20 th century ³. We also find flip books in commercials such as the one of UGC Ciné Cité in France at the beginning of the 21 st century.



If histories of book are lacking in flip book, we can however link them to the animated books, even if movable books' lovers do not consider them as such. However, we sometimes consider them as book as object or an artist's book, and they can appear in that capacity in some publications (books and magazines) devoted to that type of books. Johanna Drucker explains in *The Century of Artists' Books* ⁴ that flip book is a kind of book in itself, but she gives just one example and does not relate its history. The magazine *Book Unbound. The*

Journal of Artists' Books sometimes points out artists' flip books such as those of Stephanie [Ognar](#)⁵.

It is actually in works about the beginning of cinema that we can find information –even if they often are contradictory and incomplete– about this unknown genre. It is most of the time considered as a children toy, or as a strange object looking like a book, but which is more like a comic book; a genre already bad considered, even if it gets the attention of some book lovers.



Between the invention of photography and the first public show of the Lumière cinematograph in December 1895, photography of movements in successive pictures inspired many scientists. The illusion due to pictures' retinal persistency led them to the invention of several optical toys, described as "pre-cinema", ancestors of today's cinema: Thaumatrope, Phenakistiscope, Zoetrope,

Praxinoscope ⁶. The flip book (See [animation](#)) is the most simple of optical toys since its use does not need specific equipments. It is generally present in museum devoted to the history of cinema ⁷ as a stage between image and cinema. It is, after all, the only medium the looker-on controls the way he (or she) receives it : slow, fast, backwards, repeating repeatedly the operation. When regarding the other techniques (cinema or animations), the looker-on is a passive receiver.



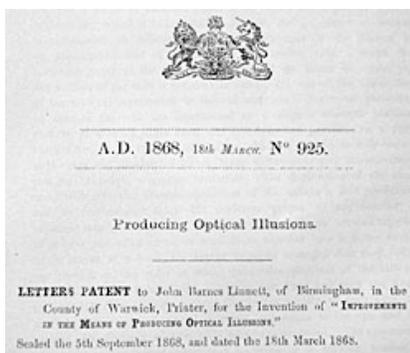
We cannot precisely date the appearance of the flip book (See [animation](#)), but we may think that before the advent of cinema lot of creators were fascinated by the image. Artists always drew series of pictures that we could leaf over. An illuminate manuscript in Heidelberg contains pages with a succession of pictures differing in details from one another and relating in a way a story (see digitized copy : <http://diqi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/sammlung1/cpg/cpg67.xml?docname=cpg67&pageid=PAGE0001>). We cannot know if it can be used as a flip book, but the principle exists ⁸.

It is very difficult to date handmade or printed flip books. In a documentary directed in Germany in 1986 about the prehistory of cinema and entitled *Was geschah wirklich zwischen den Bildern?* ⁹ Werner Wekes talks about the flip book and credits its invention to a painter named Lautenburg in 1760; no further explanation about it. Once questioned, Werner Wekes agreed that he got the information from the book of Adolf Hübl *51 Jahres Film* ¹⁰ published in 1947. A. Hübl wrote in his book that the painter was German because born in Fulda. Actually, it is the French painter Philip James de Loutherbourg (1740-1812), also named Lutherbourg or Lauterbourg -he was indeed born in Fulda and died in England- , who realized what he called an "Eidophusikon", animated panorama made from successively presented paintings according to the principle of the Camera Obscura. Works about pre-cinema mention him but do not link him to the flip book.



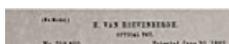
Works about prehistory of cinema place the birth of the flip book in 19th century, linked to the transition from photography to cinema. We know for example that Germany was quickly a land of predilection for that kind of things, like in the United States where they sometimes called it Penny Book. [Thomas Edison](#) directed films to go with the soundtrack from which he also made flip books. We know all the inventions intended to animate pictures: John Paris and his Thaumatrope in 1825, Joseph Plateau and his Phenakistiscope in 1832, Coleman Sellers and his Kinematoscope in 1861, Charles-Emile Reynaud and his Praxinoscope in 1877, Thomas Edison and his Kinetoscope in 1891.

The works of Eadweard Muybridge (the zoogyroscope) and Etienne-Jules Marey (Chronophotography) in the 1870's and the 1880's to study motion in photography by using a succession of snapshots to decompose and recompose the movements of human beings and animals are in the spirit very close to what will be the flip book. The flip books often use [Muybridge](#) and [Marey's](#) wonderful pictures. Nevertheless, the Mutoscope of Hermann Casler and the Kinora of Louis and Auguste Lumière from 1897, and the Filoscope of Henry Short in 1898 are the closest form of the flip book; indeed one person at a time can leaf through the pictures, which is also the case for flip books. These are kinds of mechanical flip books; Kinora is also called "Flicker Reel Picture Viewers". The *Cinématographe de poche* , a French toy produced at the early beginning of the 20th century works the same way, but it is a bit later that real "flip over machines" for flip books were developed as children toys (See [Viewers](#)).



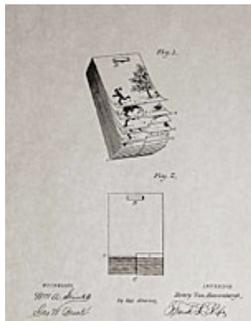
The idea of the folioscope appeared around 1860 and was attributed to the French Pierre-Hubert Desvignes because he animated some pictures, a bit like a Zoetrope. However, it was the English John Barnes Linnett, printer in Birmingham, who was the first to patent the flip book under the name of "The Kineograph a new optical illusion" on 18th March 1868 ([British Patent , n°925](#)). Under the object "Improvements in the means of producing optical illusions", he described his invention: « *producing optical illusions by presenting to the eye in rapid succession a series of pictures of objects representing the objects in the several successive positions they occupy when in motion, and thereby producing the impression of moving objects* ». He also foresaw the possibility to use the flip book both ways: « *The opposite sides of the leaves may have different pictures on them, so that one book or series of leaves will present one moving picture when the leaves are looked at on one side and another moving picture when the leaves are looked at on the other side* ». On 14th September, he added diagrams and following explanations: « *Although I have only described the turning over of the leaves, sheets, or cards as effected by hand, yet I do not limit myself thereto, as the said leaves, or cards may be turned over by mechanical means with the same effect* ». He already thought about the

mechanical viewers, we do not know how he foresaw them, as he left no drawings. The [two diagrams](#) of the patent show how he wanted to bind the flip book with eyelets and how hold the item to leaf through properly. It appears that the object he created is always the same today.



The first American patents were attributed to Henry Van Hoebenbergh on 16 th June 1882 (U.S. Patent , n°258,164) et 20 juin 1882 (n°259,960). The difference between Linnett and



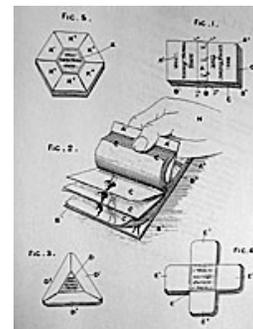


him is that he qualified his invention of "Optical Toy" using the phenomenon of "persistence of vision". He obviously took advantage of Muybridge's works. Another difference is that he used leaves of another length to ease the handling. In the patent of 20th June he foresaw that several series of leaves might be combined in the same flip book in order to, when you flip over on the right side or left side, you do not see the same animation. It is a rule used a hundred years later by the French illustrator **Lécroart** (See [animation](#)) who, in one single flip book, shows six stories (three on each side): on slightly cutting the corners of one page out of two, when we flip through in the middle, we have all the pictures, when we flip through on the right or left side of the flip book, we see other stories.

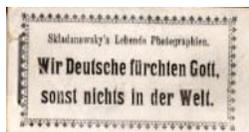


In the 1880's, the idea of using in different ways several pictures to show a series of events grows. For example, in 1882, a company called **Sammis & Latham** realized a succession of five drawings showing a man learning he has just been father and whose face changes when it appears that it is not one, but five babies!

On 17th November 1886, another Englishman, Arthur Andrew Melville, registered a patent ([British Patent, n°14917](#)) almost similar to Linnett's but in which under the name of "The Living Picture Book", two flip books are head-to-tail. He also imagined three flip books linked together in a triangle, four and even six flip books in a hexagon. We do not know if he



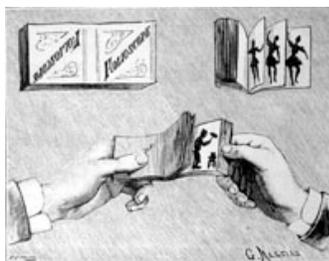
realized such flip books. Ten years later, he also pictured a first viewer (See [Viewers](#)).



In Germany, Maximilian Skladanowsky, -who, with his brother Emil organized a movie show in November 1895 in Berlin, a few weeks before Louis Lumière- had the idea, in order to make money for his business, to cut the pictures of his films and bind them together in booklets. According to historians of cinema, these flip books would be dated 1892 or 1894. In France, Léon Gaumont did the same with his first films to copy the motion.

It is a toy manufacturer, Charles Auguste Watilliaux, 110 rue Vieille-du-Temple in Paris, France, who realized in 1896 what he called a *folioscope* that looked like the one Melville imagined 10 years earlier. Its description came to us thanks to Gaston Tissandier who wrote in its science magazine *La Nature* on 21st March 1896: «Scientific recreations – The folioscope

Everybody knows the zootrope, [...] but another machine just appears, even simpler than this ingenious device, the zootrope toy, and giving the same result. We have here a double album which two copies bound together back to back are shown in the print published here. The pages of this double album are 5 cm high and each give diverse reproductions of a dancer with arms and legs up and down, a blacksmith beating red iron, or a gymnast performing on a trapeze.



The working of the album is very simple and easy to execute; just hold the album vertically with the fingers of the left hand, and, with the right hand, you bend the end of the leaves so that you can rest your thumb on the edge while your forefinger and middle finger lift it from underneath.

Let slide your right thumb along the edge, not too slow, nor too fast, so that there is no breaks in the run of the successive pictures, nor unseen leaves.

After a few trials, it is very easy to make it work and one page of picture turning over one after the other you see the blacksmith beating the iron and the dancer dancing.

The two albums bound together work both sides. If you turn over the album head-to-tail, you have two other series to see; the top and the bottom of the leaves have each series of figures in motion playing two shows for each book, so there are four series of pictures in the small double album» ¹¹. »

On 1st May 1896, Charles Auguste Watilliaux and Siméon Claparède patented with the following description: «*Device giving the illusion of motion thanks to the quick succession of pictures or drawings*». *La Nature* echoed it in its issue of 9th January 1897: C.A. Watilliaux after his *folioscope* of hand drawn pictures agreed with George Demeny to use his pictures and «*instead of making notebooks, he built them around a horizontal axle in a cardboard box and a handle*» ¹². It is probably the first viewer presented as a toy. A few months later they registered a second patent for a device with the same principle but using a mirror (about this toy, see [Viewers](#)).

On 3rd April 1897, once again two Englishmen, John O'Neill and Robert McNally patented ([British Patent, n°8572](#)) flip books now realized with photographs: «*The figures may illustrate a prize fight, a cock fight, a wrestling match, a skirt dance, skipping, a drinking bout, or the like, the subjects in this respect being practically unlimited. The respective movements of the figures are represented or imitated to a nicety by the rapid slipping of the leaves through the fingers, which has the effect of producing an optical illusion as perfect as it is amusing and interesting*».



The flip book spread at the end of 19th century, especially under the form of small booklets in the United States under the name of «[Living Pictures](#)» or «[Living](#)



Photograph », , in Germany under the name of « *Lebenden Photographien* » or in France under the name « *Cinématographe de Poche* ». They sometimes were the occasion to look at naughty scenes. Easy to manufacture and made of photographs or lithographs, toyshops or joke shops sold them. Thanks to their low cost prices, they were easily offered promotional gifts for brands (cigarettes, department stores...). The Bon Marché in Paris realized about 20 flip books at the beginning of the 20th century under the name « *Cinématographe de Poche* ». Camille Sohet, « *Imprimeur*



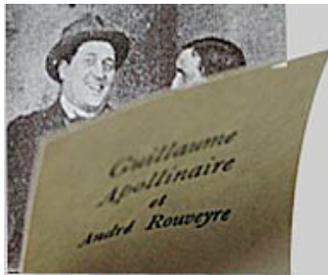
d'Art " ¹³ printed the pictures.

During the International Congress of Meteorology of 1900, the French scientist Paul Garrigou-Lagrange used the pocket cinematograph to show meteorological maps in motion he had drawn ¹⁴.



Just before the World War I, the photo laboratory Biofix ([see animation](#)), in London (56 Strand), Bruxelles (53 rue de la Madeleine) and Paris (23 bd Poissonnière ¹⁵), proposed to its customers an original flip book made in their shops with the pictures of those who wanted to. Most of them are stapled, but some are bound thanks to an imitation metal book with the name of Biofix on it. The most famous shows Guillaume Apollinaire and André Rouveyre. He related the circumstances of the photo shot made on 1 st August 1914 ; they were walking on the boulevard on their way to the office of the newspaper *Comoedia*, 27 bd Poissonnière:

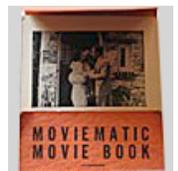
« *Our eyes met at the same time an improvised stall in a small shop without tenant, and the same idea crossed our minds: we were about to leave each other in a serious situation...it might be pleasant to have such an animated picture of us both...*



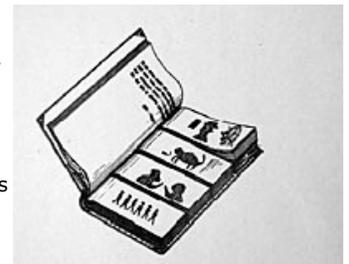
We entered and, once paid, we stepped into a kind of wooden hut covered half of silvery cardboard, half zinc, with the back behind us made of corrugated iron, we hardly had enough room to move, squeezed up; doubting, in the heat, if we could breath...Everything already amused us greatly and well-disposed us. In front of us, the massive and short-legged camera pointed at us with its big lens. On the left, directed right toward us, close, a cardboard cone painted in a light colour lighted us with a rather bright lamplight. We looked with curiosity to our strange cubby-hole, but we weren't here to be electrocuted, innocent as we were he and I, when a voice said: "Let's start" and knock, a click, and all a lugging about, a mechanical break down inside the device, a funny rail concert, little regular knocks that made our scaffold tremble, while at the same time we were lighted with a whiter and starker light.

First petrified -but it wasn't the moment to run away-, quick, we understood that we couldn't stay motionless. I had the presence of mind to turn to Apollinaire and said: "We must move, say anything, or we will look like two bloody idiots!" It makes him laugh. Moving and accompanying his words with gestures that we see on the pictures, he stammered a few words I didn't hear. All of a sudden, it's over» ¹⁶ ».

Other photographic lab used the same technique. We found nine different: the Kinophot (See [Viewers](#)), the « Photo Cinema-Magic », without a photographer's name; the « Ciné Souvenir » realized by "Procédés Wassner de photo animée, 14 place du Havre, Paris 9e"; another with no name, nor cover and its first owner dated at the back: "Paris, 1932"; a « Moviematic Movie Book » (See [animation](#)) Moviematic laboratories in New York; another without references and of a bigger size; a deutsch photograph from Stuttgart, Adolf Haecker, under the name Ima-Film ; an american from San Francisco by Jim Anderson Picture Co. « Made with the new Nunlike Motion Picture Plate Camera », and the last one with the quotation: « Films Jacques Haik¹⁷ la production qui donne le ton ».



In April 1911, a German, Rudolf Schulze patented in Paris a "Book containing cinematographic views" which proposed, as you can see on the illustration (click on it to visualize the whole patent), to include animated scenes in a book «*that we can flip over with the purpose of producing cinematographic images obtained by he way that the whole book, or some parts of the book are cut in strips adhering together*». The principle will be often used (notably by Disney) as you can see in the section [Book of the Typology](#).



From 7 th May to 21 st August 2005 took place in Düsseldorf Kunsthalle the first major exhibition devoted to flip books. Entitled "Daumenkino. The Flip Book Show", the exhibition showed a few flip books and historical viewers (some from our collection) and a great number of artists' flip books. An illustrated catalogue ¹⁸ has been published on the occasion of the exhibition. A DVD goes with it; we can see the oldest flip books of, f.e., Linnett or Skladanowsky, or artists' flip books, f.e. Robert Breer, Andy Wharol, George Griffin, Gilbert & George...

1 : Ricky Jay, *The Magic Magic Book. An inquiry into the Venerable History & Operations of the Oldest Trick Conjuring Volumes designated « Blow Books »*, New York , The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994.

2 :Gérald Dupeyrot, « Flip Story », *BàT*, Mars 1981, pp.32-35.

3 : French edition : E.L. Doctorow, *Ragtime*, Laffont, 1976 (reedited in the collection « J'ai Lu », n°825).

4 : Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, Granary Books, 1995.

5 : *Book Unbound*, Spring 2001, page 16.

- 6 : About optical toys, see the remarkable series of articles of Pascal Pontremoli published under the title « De l'animoscope au zootrope » in *Le Vieux Papier*, fascicules 338 (Octobre 1995), 340 (Avril 1996), 342 (Octobre 1996) et 344 (Avril 1997). Republished in brochure the same year.
- 7 : At the American Museum of the Moving Image, you can even realize your own flip book, you are filmed in front of a camera recording 40 images which printed and bound make a totally new and original flip book.
- 8 : Thanks to Christin Müller for the information.
- 9 : Werner Nekes, *Was geschah wirklich zwischen den Bildern?* Gurtrug-Film, 1986 (entitled in the US *Film Before Film, Kino on Video*, 1999).
- 10 : Adolf Hübl, *51 Jahre Film*, Wien, Eberle Verlag, 1947.
- 11 : Gaston Tissandier, « Récréations scientifiques – Le folioscope », *La Nature*, n°1190, 21 Mars 1896.
- 12 : « Le folioscope mécanique », *La Nature*, supplément au n°1232 du 9 Janvier 1897.
- 13 : See description in: Georges Naudet, « Les Folioscopes du Bon Marché », in Pascal Pontremoli, *op.cit.*, pp. 16-17.
- 14 : *La Nature*, n°2358, 25 Mai 1919.
- 15 : Le Bottin du commerce from Paris mentions the existence of Biofix until 1921.
- 16 : « Apollinaire filmé en 1914 », *Le Point*, Juin 1944.
- 17 : Jacques Haïk opens The Olympia in 1930. He then builds Le Grand Rex in 1932 and Le Français boulevard des Italiens in 1939. The Olympia staid in the societies of the Jacques Haïk group until 1987.
- 18 : Co published by Kunsthalle of Düsseldorf and Snoeck, publisher in Cologne.

[Up](#)