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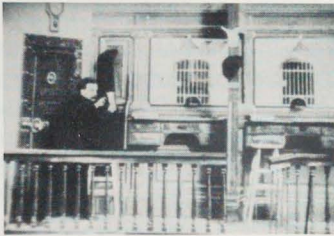
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Visual Communication



Vitagraph before Griffith



The "Chaser Theory"



The Other Worlds of Joe Steinmetz

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The Redemption of Leisure: The National Board of Censorship and the Rise of Motion Pictures in New York City, 1900–1920

Daniel Czitrom

Recent work by film scholars and historians has given us a much more detailed and subtle understanding of the movies' impact on American culture. There has been exciting work, too, in analyzing early film audiences as historical subjects—how women and immigrants, in particular, attached meaning to the process of moviegoing and the images on the screen.¹ In these early years, the National Board of Censorship, (N.B.C.) based in New York City, the first center of film production and distribution, emerged as the most important regulatory body for the young industry. Extensive digging into the manuscript archives of the N.B.C. and its parent organization, the People's Institute, proved fruitful in helping to flesh out the rich political, ethnic, and cultural context surrounding early film censorship.

This article focuses on the close connection between the desire of Progressives to redeem what they termed "commercialized leisure" and the business needs of the nascent movie moguls. As John Kasson has suggested in his wonderful book on Coney Island, genteel reformers and amusement entrepreneurs both "wished to manipulate the responses of the multitude—one in the service of social progress, the other in the service of profit."² The aim here is to get deeper into the cultural politics surrounding movie censorship, thereby making a small contribution to our growing knowledge of early film development.

"Moral" Reaction to Movies

By 1908 the enormous and unprecedented popularity of "nickelodeon" theaters all over the United States made movies the most spectacular single feature of the commercial amusement world. No longer the exclusive province of the peep show and penny arcade, movies were now being profitably projected before seated, mixed audiences in thousands of makeshift theaters across the country. Especially popular in the tenement and immigrant districts of the big cities,

heavily patronized by blue-collar men and women and their children, the movies seemed overnight to have become America's most popular form of cheap entertainment. Nickels and dimes collected in the rude and crowded storefronts and lofts began adding up to small fortunes for movie exhibitors, a "Klondike" in a common analogy of the day. Adventurous entrepreneurs scrambled to convert almost any available space into movie theaters. In 1911 the Motion Picture Patents Company, the first "trust" of movie producers, reported 11,500 theaters across America devoted solely to showing motion pictures; daily attendance that year probably reached five million.³

This sudden and staggering boom in movie attendance evoked strenuous and nervous reactions from the nation's guardians of genteel culture. For those who talked seriously about "the moral influence of play" and preferred the literal meaning of the term "recreation," the flood of commercial amusements posed a grave cultural threat. "Why has the love of spontaneous play," wondered Rev. Richard H. Edwards, "given way so largely to the love of being merely amused?" Frederick C. Howe spoke for many as he worried in 1914 that "commercialized leisure is moulding our civilization—not as it should be moulded but as commerce dictates . . . and leisure must be controlled by the community, if it is to become an agency of civilization rather than the reverse." A scientific assessment of the situation, as attempted by the myriad of recreation and amusement surveys of the early twentieth century, seemed a logical first step. Beyond this, the drive for municipal supervision of public recreation and commercial amusements fit comfortably into the Progressive ethos of philanthropists, settlement workers, and urban reformers all over the country. "In a word," asserted Michael M. Davis of the Russell Sage Foundation in 1911, "recreation within the modern city has become a matter of public concern; laissez faire, in recreation as in industry, can no longer be the policy of the state."⁴

Motion pictures inhabited the physical and psychic space of urban street life, in close proximity to dance halls, vaudeville and burlesque houses, pool rooms, and amusement arcades. But they were somehow different—and the attempts of both reformers and the movie industry to accentuate the difference, to split off movies from the seamier side of commercial amusements, began early on. A struggle over the licensing of nickelodeon theaters in New York City during 1908 both illustrated and furthered this movement. It also resulted in the creation of the National Board of Censorship.

At a stormy public hearing in City Hall on December 23, 1908, prominent clergy and laymen urged Mayor George McClellan to close New York's movie houses. Representatives of children's aid soci-

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eties denounced "the darkened rooms" which "have given opportunities for a new form of degeneracy." "Is a man at liberty," demanded Rev. J. M. Foster, "to make money from the morals of people? Is he to profit from the corruption of the minds of children?" Violations of Sunday blue laws (the busiest day for the nickelodeon trade) and safety hazards found in many theaters also brought protests. The mayor responded by revoking the licenses of every movie show in the city, some 550 in all. Exhibitors successfully fought the order with injunctions, but for the following two weeks reports of the Mayor's campaign filled the New York press.⁵

Bubbling just below the surface was the Christian clergy's concern over the widely acknowledged fact that the movie exhibitors were primarily immigrants and Jews. The Interdenominational Committee of the Clergy of Greater New York congratulated the mayor, urging "the hearty, earnest, and determined support of all moral, upright, and Christian people." On Christmas Day the showmen met to form the Moving Picture Exhibitors Association. The *New York Tribune* reported: "Chubby faced Irishmen, with clay pipes between their teeth were there, as well as Hungarians, Italians, Greeks, and just a handful of Germans, but the greater portion of the assembly were Jewish-Americans, who practically control the enterprise."⁶ William Fox and Marcus Loew, who had both parlayed cheap penny arcades into lucrative theater chains by this time, emerged as leaders of the group. They typified the exhibitors—a swarm of clothing merchants, fur dealers, junk traders, jewelers, and shoe salesmen, all with a gift for successfully judging the fickle whims of public taste. The shrewdest of them would soon dominate an industry that at first seemed beneath the dignity of traditional sources of capital. Years later, in Hollywood, the moguls would be held up as exemplars of the American Dream. Their own success story provided the key raw material for the Hollywood dream factory. But in these early days the more common view of them was as "dull, ignorant, or vicious men, hungry for money and unscrupulous in the getting of it."⁷

The People's Institute

Although the exhibitors beat Mayor McClellan in court, they realized their victory might prove Pyrrhic. Stories continued to appear linking movie houses to child abuse and prostitution. The mayor released police reports which he said showed "that the rapid growth of the picture business and the reckless disregard of the law by some of the proprietors had developed a class of disorderly women who confine their activities to the moving picture shows, which, operat-

ing with darkened rooms, afford unusual facilities for a traffic of scandalous proportions."⁸ Cheap vaudeville acts, often accompanying films in the nickelodeons, also brought strong protests. "Peculiarly vicious," complained *Survey* magazine, "is the Yiddish vaudeville given in many lower East Side picture shows." The movie men clearly needed to counter public criticism of their business. Thus, in March 1909 the movie exhibitors, organized now, requested the People's Institute, a civic and educational foundation, to organize some form of censorship. Two months later the movie producers, the Motion Picture Patents Company, joined the effort too. Footing the bill for a "voluntary" censorship, one that promised respectability and more middle-class patronage, seemed a small price to pay.⁹

The desire of the movie men to rationalize their industry, upgrade it, and guarantee their investment meshed neatly with the aims of the People's Institute. Founded in 1897 by Columbia professor Charles Sprague Smith, the institute put forth cultural and educational programs as solvents for the paramount political issue of the day—the "social question," or class conflict. Smith, in his public circulars and in his private correspondence seeking support from leading philanthropists and reformers, consistently set the main goal of the P.I.: "We are seeking to remove misunderstandings now existing between different classes of our society, to place the lessons of history within the reach of the laboring classes." Smith found many supporters such as the industrialist Abram S. Hewitt, who agreed that "unless the wage earning class can be better instructed in the principles of government and economics, the outlook for the future is not very encouraging. I want to do all I can for the diffusion of sound knowledge among the working classes of this city and elsewhere." Toward that end Hewitt arranged for use of the huge Cooper Union hall, rent free, and the People's Institute soon attracted large numbers of working people to its public lectures and adult education classes.¹⁰

Indeed, the crowds at Cooper Union sometimes proved too rowdy for Smith's taste, "a natural outcome," he wrote, "of the increasing unrest and the ceaseless activity of the revolutionary group of socialists." In the spring of 1908 Smith thought the "unruly turbulent element" was getting out of hand. After a series of heated public gatherings at Cooper Union, some of which required a police presence to maintain order, Smith confided nervously:

I have never experienced in the ten years of my work with the people anything approaching the unrest, the ferment that there is today, the bitterness. These are an outgrowth, a natural one, of a situation where armies of men are out of employment. We estimate that the numbers must run up toward 200,000 in this city. Practically my entire audience there consists either of the unemployed

(a small number) or those whose friends and acquaintances are unemployed (almost all the rest). . . . This condition of things furnishes a favorable medium for the development of radical doctrines, for the cultivation of class hatred, and that kind of noxious weed is taking root and growing.¹¹

It was at this time, too, that the institute, working with the Woman's Municipal League, made a special investigation of "cheap amusement shows" in New York City. The study divided these into three classes: cheap theaters (offering melodrama, vaudeville, and burlesque), penny arcades, and moving picture variety shows. "The last group," noted the report, "is by far the most important numerically, and the most interesting sociologically." This and other reports argued that movies offered a potential for reform intervention in the cheap amusement field. "We are interested in motion pictures as a moral force because we want more joy in American life, and because we want the joy in American life to be more constructive, more useful. We are not interested in motion pictures as a thing in themselves, but as a means to an end." The P.I. and its allies grasped the true difference between motion pictures and other forms of cheap theater: unlike vaudeville and burlesque the movies were a mass-produced and distributed product, and therefore more easily subject to centralized control. Like Jane Addams at Chicago's Hull House, the P.I. quickly abandoned plans to establish a model nickelodeon — such a flimsy dike could not possibly contain the tide of new theaters in a city's neighborhoods.¹²

The National Board of Censorship

Thus in March 1909 John Collier of the People's Institute, in correspondence with Gustavus Rogers, an attorney representing the beleaguered Motion Picture Exhibitors Association, worked out a plan whereby a censorship board administered by the P.I. and funded by the movie exhibitors would pass on all movies shown in New York City. For its part, the Motion Picture Patents Company, the producers' "trust," saw a possibility for strengthening its efforts at economic monopoly by gaining the cultural imprimatur of the new board. The producers encouraged the N.B.C. to go beyond merely stopping the obviously immoral film: "Our Licensees recommend that your basis of criticism be extended so as to condemn pictures that are unusually vulgar and offensive to good taste, and in the opinion of your committee, generally detrimental to motion picture interests, although such pictures may not be indecent, immoral, nor injurious to public morals."¹³

The censorship quickly achieved national clout. By

1914 the N.B.C. claimed to be reviewing 95 percent of the total film output of the country: it either passed a film, suggested changes, or condemned a movie entirely. Mayors, police chiefs, civic groups, and local censoring committees from all over the country subscribed to the board's weekly bulletin. The actual censors, a revolving group of prominent doctors, lawyers, clergymen, and activist women, postulated a very simple psychology at the core of the moviegoer's experience: "Those who are educated by the movies are educated through their hearts and their sense impressions and that sort of education sticks. Every person in an audience has paid admission and for that reason gives his attention willingly. . . . Therefore he gives it his confidence and opens the window of his mind. And what the movie says sinks in."¹⁴

The reform ideology behind the People's Institute and the National Board of Censorship steadfastly emphasized the importance of leisure-time activities, both for providing moral uplift and for preventing political breakdown. "Commercialized leisure" was merely the flip side of the extraordinary industrial progress made in the nineteenth century. And failure to redeem leisure for the working classes would have disastrous political consequences in the eyes of these reformers. "It is incontrovertible," wrote Maurice Wertheim in a 1910 plea for the reform of New York movie shows,

that recreation forms part of a normal life, and hence it is true that the absence of recreation has much to do with an abnormal outlook on life, and in the case of the working man has probably as much to do with his ever growing Socialism and his occasional show of force as the conditions under which he works. . . . If we want these people to be normal, content, cheerful workers, we must provide them with ordinary opportunities for recreation, and if we do not we can expect nothing more than an abnormal class, exaggerating their grievances and constantly dissatisfied. Hence, it is just as important to make the workingman satisfied with his lot as to make his lot satisfactory.¹⁵

In a similar vein Frederic C. Howe wondered rhetorically in 1914, "What shall we do about the motion picture show?" Howe, new director of the People's Institute, was also disturbed over ominous political implications. The question, he suggested, "will be raised again when the movie begins to portray labor struggles, conditions in mine and factory; when it becomes the daily press of industrial groups or classes, of Socialism, syndicalism, and radical opinion." This fascinating projection revealed a kind of fear closely connected to the censorship impulse. The spheres of leisure and politics are seen here again as inextricably intertwined.¹⁶

The work of the N.B.C., its leaders thought, would pave the way toward uplift of all commercial amusements. "The motion picture," argued N.B.C. director

Orrin Cocks in 1915, "stands out as the one which is helping in a modest way to conserve the home." Families could be found nightly wending their way to the local picture show, and later sitting around the dinner table discussing ideas presented in the neighborhood theaters. The N.B.C., thought Cocks, "appears to express democracy at its best. Here is cooperation between Business and Society, not only for the elimination of the bad but for the development, in wholesome ways, of that which is good in a vast and growing art."¹⁷

But business seemed to need that cooperation less and less. The Board's last hurrah was a broad campaign against the various legal censorship proposals being pushed on the state and national levels. There is evidence that the film producers bankrolled this anticensorship drive, donating \$25,000 in 1914 alone. In 1915 the board changed its name to the National Board of Review, a shift accompanied by ringing defenses of the First Amendment rights of movie makers.¹⁸

More importantly, the establishment of Hollywood as production center of the industry made the National Board of Review an irrelevant institution by the end of World War I. But the immigrant Jewish exhibitors who led the revolt against the Patents Company "trust" and took over the production end of the business—Fox, Loew, Zukor, Mayer, Laemmle, Schenck, Goldwyn, the Warner brothers—had learned their lesson well. When the newly formed Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America hired Will Hays as their president in 1922, the Hollywood moguls no longer needed a National Board of Censorship. Hays, former Postmaster General and the essence of Republican, Protestant, Midwestern respectability, would provide in a more centralized and internally coherent fashion what the New York reformers had offered in the early days.

The Hollywood public relations machine neatly internalized the N.B.C. experience, regularly soothing the country during the censorship campaigns and sensational scandals of the 1920s. "The old careless, helter-skelter days are over," Will Hays assured America in 1929. "The chieftains of the motion picture now realize their responsibilities as custodians of not only one of the greatest industries in the world but of possibly the most potent instrument in the world for moral influence and education."¹⁹ They realized, too, the intimate ties binding the redemption of leisure and the salvation of profit.

Notes

- 1 See Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford, 1980), especially chap. 3; Robert Sklar, *Movie Made America* (New York: Random House, 1975); Garth Jowett, *Film: The Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976); Robert Fisher, "Film Censorship and Progressive Reform: The National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures, 1909–1922," *Journal of Popular Film* 4:2 (1975):143–156; John L. Fell, *Film and the Narrative Tradition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974). On audiences as historical subjects see Kathy Peiss, "Cheap Amusements: Gender Relations and the Use of Leisure Time in New York City, 1880–1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1982), especially Chapter 5; Elizabeth Ewen, "City Lights: Immigrant Women and the Rise of the Movies," *Signs* 5:3, Supplement (Spring 1980):545–565. For my own work on early movies, see Daniel J. Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), Chapter 2, "American Motion Pictures and the New Popular Culture, 1893–1918." Mention should be made, too, of Charles Musser's documentary film, *Before the Nickelodeon: The Early Cinema of Edwin Porter* (1982).
- 2 John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), p. 105.
- 3 Ralph Casady, Jr., "Monopoly in Motion Picture Production and Distribution: 1908–1915," *Southern California Law Review* 32 (Summer 1959):363. For other contemporary estimates in the early years see sources cited in Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*.
- 4 Richard H. Edwards, *Popular Amusements* (New York: Associated Press, 1915), pp. 20–21; Frederic C. Howe, "Leisure," *Survey* 31 (January 3, 1914):415–416; Michael M. Davis, *The Exploitation of Pleasure* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1911), p. 5. A recent and useful summary of contemporary commercial amusement surveys can be found in Alan Havig, "The Commercial Amusement Audience in Early 20th Century American Cities," *Journal of American Culture* (Spring 1982):1–19.
- 5 *The New York Times*, December 24 and 25, 1908.
- 6 *The New York Tribune*, December 26, 1908.
- 7 William Inglis, "Morals and Moving Pictures," *Harper's Weekly* 54 (July 30, 1910):12.
- 8 *The New York Tribune*, December 29, 1908.
- 9 "Censorship for Moving Pictures," *Survey* 22 (April 3, 1909):9. See also "The Decay of Vaudeville," *American Magazine* 69 (April 1910):840–848; Raymond Fosdick, *A Report on the Condition of Moving Picture Shows in New York* (New York: n.p., 1911), pp. 10–11. The trade press also began to advise against vaudeville of any kind in movie houses, arguing as early as 1909 that "a properly managed exclusive picture show is in a higher class than a show comprised partly of vaudeville." "Vaudeville or Not?" *The Nickelodeon* 1 (November 1909):134. On the early efforts to attract middle-class patrons see Russell Merritt, "Nickelodeon Theaters 1905–1914: Building an Audience for the Movies," in Tino Balio, ed., *The American Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), pp. 59–79.
- 10 Charles Sprague Smith, Circular letter to the press, April 8, 1898, Box 5, Cooper Union Activities; Abram S. Hewitt to Charles Sprague Smith, February 20, 1902, Box 1, Correspondence of the Directors, The Papers of the People's Institute, 1883–1932, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library. Hereafter cited as P.I. Papers. Similar sentiments can be found in Smith's correspondence with Felix Adler, Jacob Riis, Lyman Abbott, and others. See also Charles Sprague Smith, *Working with the People* (New York: A. Wessels, 1904), and Robert Fisher, "The People's Institute of New York City, 1897–1934: Culture, Progressive Democracy, and the People" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1974).

- 11 Charles Sprague Smith to John E. Parsons, May 23, 1908, Box 2, Correspondence of the Directors, and to William A. Armstrong, May 21, 1908, Box 4, General Correspondence, P.I. Papers.
- 12 [John Collier], "Cheap Amusement Shows in Manhattan: Preliminary Report of Investigation," January 31, 1908, p. 1; "Morality and Motion Pictures," p. 19, both in Subjects Papers, Papers Relating to the History up to 1926 of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, The Records of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library. Hereafter cited as NBR Records. On Jane Addams' experience with movies at Hull House, see *Twenty Years at Hull House* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), p. 386.
- 13 John Collier to Gustavus A. Rogers, March 1, 1909, Subjects Papers, Papers Relating to the History up to 1926 of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures; Motion Picture Patents Company (H.N.M.) to National Board of Censorship, November 16, 1911, Box 6, Correspondence with Film Companies, NBR Records. Interestingly, the P.I. had recent experience with operating a voluntary censorship of live theater in New York. In 1907 it organized a dramatic department which viewed current plays and reported on their suitability for various audiences—"an indispensable condition for acceptance was that the play should possess educational and artistic features and be without moral blemish." According to *Theatre Magazine*, tens of thousands of people went to plays at reduced rates through P.I.-sponsored tickets. The economic boon was not lost on theater managers: "The managers were prompt to recognize the business value of such a powerful ally. If a play is accepted by the Institute the manager knows that he can count on selling several thousand tickets to school teachers, labor unionists, etc. The fact that managers have begun to submit manuscripts of plays to the Institute for its approval before making the production is significant enough." Even the printed evaluation forms filled out by P.I. censors closely resembled those later used for movies. See "New York City's Censorship of Plays," Box 28, Clippings, 1908–1909, P.I. Papers.
- 14 *Report of The National Board of Censorship* (New York: National Board of Censorship, 1913), pp. 3–4. See also *The Standards of the National Board of Censorship* (New York: National Board of Censorship, 1914?). For sources on the board's day-to-day operation see Fisher, "Film Censorship and Progressive Reform," and Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind*.
- 15 Maurice Wertheim, "Suggestions for Legislation for the Improvement of the Condition of Moving Picture Shows in the City of New York," September 19, 1910, pp. 1–2, Subjects Papers, Papers Relating to the History up to 1926 of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, NBR Records.
- 16 Frederic C. Howe, "What to Do With the Motion Picture Show: Shall It Be Censored?" *Outlook* 107 (June 20, 1914):412. See also [John Collier], "The Redemption of Leisure" (1913), typescript, Box 7, Community Center Work and Committee on Recreation, P.I. Papers.
- 17 Orrin G. Cocks, "Public Amusements Safe Guarded for Moral Health," May 1915, pp. 5, 14, in Subjects Papers, Papers Relating to the History up to 1926 of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, NBR Records.
- 18 On the financial support from producers see 1914 correspondence with Mutual Film Corporation and others in Correspondence with Film Companies, Box 6-7, NBR Records. On the various proposals for legal censorship see Edward De Grazia and Roger K. Newman, *Banned Films: Movies, Censors, and the First Amendment* (New York: Bowker, 1982); Jowett, *Film*, pp. 109–138; Federal Motion Picture Commission, Hearings, 2 parts, 63rd Congress, 2nd Session, 1914 (Washington, D.C.).
- 19 Will H. Hays, *See and Hear: A Brief History of the Motion Picture and the Development of Sound* (Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America: Hollywood?, 1929), p. 25. In 1917, the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry, precursor to the MPPDA, voted "that the standards of the National Board be adopted officially by the National Association." See Memo from W. D. McGuire, February 2, 1917, in Box 6, Correspondence with Film Companies, NBR Records. This correspondence also reveals the irrelevance of the Board to Hollywood by about 1918.

Vitagraph before Griffith: Forging Ahead in the Nickelodeon Era

Jon Gartenberg

Researching Vitagraph

Although we now have a greater understanding of the state of film narrative before D. W. Griffith began directing films in 1908,¹ little is known about the Vitagraph Company of America, an important film company during the rise of the nickelodeon era, 1905–1907. Much of the research on early American film companies has centered on Edison and Biograph and on the films of Edwin Porter and Griffith, rather than on Vitagraph. Primary Biograph and Edison films and written records are readily available, whereas Vitagraph documents and films are scarcer. For Biograph and Edison, these materials include the paper print collection at the Library of Congress and the prints preserved from original negatives in The Museum of Modern Art film archives; Biograph Bulletins from 1896–1913 reproduced in two volumes; microfilm of the original Biograph production records (indicating such details as production numbers, titles, photographers, dates and places photographed, and lengths of films); depositions of the Edison company at the Edison National Historic Site and in courts in New York and New Jersey; and written copyright deposit records at the Library of Congress. These resources make possible a systematic and chronological study of the films produced by Biograph and Edison and the documents relating to their making, as well as of the battles between the two companies to establish control over the industry. There are thus many publications about Biograph and Edison, and Griffith and Porter.²

The research situation differs greatly for Vitagraph. Whereas relatively complete production information exists for Biograph and Edison in Washington, New York, and New Jersey, important Vitagraph records are scattered among New York City, Rochester, Washington, Los Angeles, London, and Paris. More significant than the wide geographical distribution of the Vitagraph materials is the fact that many Vitagraph company documents are missing. A fire in the summer of 1910 destroyed many of the company's negatives and papers. Only a few Vitagraph Bulletins prior to November 1, 1909, exist. Where personal and corporate papers, letters, and like material exist, they frequently conflict. Only sixteen of the 121

Vitagraph productions (13 percent) released between September 1905 and December 31, 1907, survive. A number of these prints are missing key scenes. The copy of *The Green Goods Men* (January 1906) lacks the ending of the film, which shows the ingenious resolution of the chase in which "the Green Goods Men crawl down the wrong chimney and land in a police station."³ In *Liquid Electricity* (September 1907), the inventor's galvanic fluid, when sprayed on people, moves them to quick action, resulting in many comic scenes. The surviving prints are missing the final shot(s) in which the professor "returns to laboratory disgusted, smashes bottle which explodes, blowing the inventor into bits",⁴ a scene that links it to the explosion genre films of earlier years, such as *The Finish of Bridget McKean* (1901). Paper prints of Vitagraph productions are now being copied, but they are only fragmentary records of the films. Unlike the Biograph and Edison paper prints, which are complete, Vitagraph deposited only about thirty frames for each different scene of a film.

For all these reasons, Vitagraph's importance has been pieced together from scattered documents, analysis of the existing films, comparison with productions from other companies, the work of other scholars in early cinema, and the study of trade papers and newspapers, such as the *New York Clipper*, *Views and Film Index*, *Moving Picture World*, and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. What emerges is a picture of a company that was in the forefront of the rapid changes in the industry during the rise of the nickelodeon era, 1905–1907. Vitagraph developed an alternative model for the manufacture of films that contrasted with Biograph's. The company's building of a new studio in 1905 enabled Vitagraph to become a leader in the method, quantity, kinds, and style of films made. By 1907 at Vitagraph, there was a shift to a new way of telling dramatic stories through the full use of the space in interior shooting and through the emergence of parallel editing.

Vitagraph Studio Production

On June 19, 1905, the first storefront Nickelodeon Theatre opened in Pittsburgh (Allen 1979:2). In the ensuing years, the number of sites showing films exclusively rose dramatically: "The wonderful growth in number of so-called 'storeshows' and 'Nickelodeons' in the past twelve months has been due to a great extent to the patronage accorded this class of amusement by the women and children."⁵ The explosion of the nickelodeons brought about a great increase in the number of films produced and a change in the kinds of films made. The quality of the films improved as well. In August 1905, just two

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months after the Pittsburgh nickelodeon opened, Vitagraph broke ground for a studio at East Fifteenth Street and Locust Avenue in Brooklyn, which was completed in August 1906.⁶ Vitagraph built "several stages for the taking of special photographic effects."⁷ This use of the studio was enormously significant because it enabled the Vitagraph Company to establish much greater artistic control over the production of its films.

Shooting in the studio greatly improved control over the *mise-en-scène*. In *The 100 to 1 Shot or, a Run of Luck*, released just before the studio's completion, scenes of the farmer and his family in their house in shots 2, 23, and 25 are photographed in a full-length view that reveals floorboards in the foreground and sparse furniture and a few characters in front of a painted background. The protagonists and furniture cast distinct shadows onto the ground. In *The Green Goods Men*, a comedy chase released earlier in 1906, deep shadows intrude upon similarly composed "interior" scenes. With the opening of the studio came "a complete outfit of Cooper Hewitt lights. . . . The entire roof and upper part of the building is covered with a specially designed prismatic glass. This construction of glass diffuses and intensifies the rays of light so that shadows are not perceptible."⁸ The production and release of *A Midwinter Night's Dream or Little Joe's Luck* (December 1906) just a few months after the studio began operation shows the marked improvement in lighting made possible by the studio. The interior scenes of the dining room, livingroom, and bedroom betray no shadows. Similarly, in the interior scenes of *Foul Play or, a False Friend* (January 1907), no shadows are cast. In *Liquid Electricity* (September 1907), when the inventor sprays the galvanic fluid on himself, his laboratory becomes more brightly illuminated.⁹

During the next decade, Vitagraph's rapid studio expansion continued, a good indication of its success. By the end of 1908 its facilities covered "two full blocks, where three studios are in operation and two more are being erected."¹⁰ Meanwhile, Biograph was restricted to a small studio on Fourteenth Street in Manhattan until the summer of 1913. By 1916, Vitagraph's assets included two acres of studios and factories in Brooklyn, studios in Bay Shore, Long Island, eighteen acres of plants in Los Angeles and Paris, and a business office and rental department in London.¹¹

While Biograph was shifting from a cameraman to director-cameraman model of film production, Vitagraph was developing a system with a central producer.¹² Biograph employed four cameramen in 1905 and three in 1906 (Spehr 1980:419–420); from early 1908 through 1909 at Biograph, Griffith was the sole director and Billy Bitzer the only cameraman.

While the loss of D. W. Griffith to the [Biograph] company [in 1913] was a great one, [it was not] the only factor in the demise of Biograph. The company did not significantly increase the staff and the means for production while he was still there, and after he left the much increased staff did not approach his productivity. (Bowser 1981:8)

In contrast, Vitagraph, with its new studio, was moving toward a system of increased production of films through a central producer, J. Stuart Blackton, with individual directors working under him. Before the studio was built, Blackton was for the most part the sole Vitagraph filmmaker.¹³ When the company's facilities expanded, others were brought in to direct, and the company's founders were increasingly involved in administration. From 1906 to 1910, the number of directors increased to at least half a dozen, including William Ranous, Van Dyke Brooke, Charles Kent, Larry Trimble, and others.¹⁴ Vitagraph's, more than Biograph's, method of operating a film company became the model for increased production of films for other studios. In the words of Georges Sadoul, "The system of organization at Vitagraph where the artistic director supervised several directors perhaps emanated from Pathé-Zecca's method, but it was [Vitagraph's] model which Thomas Ince and many others imitated after 1912" (1951:65, au.'s transl.).

Early on, Vitagraph also established a model of production wherein the process of making the film was divided among various individuals. By September 1906 at Vitagraph, the functions of the writer, "stage manager," scenery painters, and actors were differentiated, although the scope of their responsibilities was wide and partially overlapping (Glover 1906). By the end of 1908, "About two hundred people in various capacities [were] constantly employed."¹⁵ Labor was separated more clearly into specific functions, and chains of command were more firmly established, as the release of Vitagraph's *Making Moving Pictures* (December 1908) demonstrates. The film

opens in the private office of the Vitagraph Company, where the manuscript is being carefully considered. The studio directors enter, receive their instructions, proceed to the studio, get out the cameras, give orders about scenery, props, etc. Then we get a view of the Vitagraph actors and actresses making up for their different characters . . . the studio scenes are rehearsed and photographed, showing all the necessary paraphernalia for the different effects required, as well as the rapidity with which scenes are struck and made ready by the stage hands.¹⁶

By 1911, the production process, from the reading and editing of manuscripts through the developing and editing of the completed film, was organized into autonomously functioning in-house departments.¹⁷ This method enabled Vitagraph to further increase its

annual output of films.

In 1905 Biograph was producing more than ten times the number of films as Vitagraph and in 1906 more than three times as many.¹⁸ But in 1907, the year in which Vitagraph's studio was in full operation, the tables were turned. Vitagraph produced more than twice as many motion pictures as Biograph. In 1907 Vitagraph released an average of six films per month; by the end of 1908, the number had increased to about four films each week. While Biograph's output between 1908 and 1913 fluctuated, Vitagraph continued to increase production steadily. In 1908 the Vitagraph Company of America "enjoy[ed] the distinction of turning out more new subjects each week than any other American concern."¹⁹ By the time Griffith departed Biograph in 1913, Vitagraph was producing nearly twice as many films as this competitor (389 versus 198).

Exhibition Practices

By the beginning of the nickelodeon era, Vitagraph had already established an extensive exhibition network through which to show its increasing output of films. From 1897–1901, Vitagraph had a licensee relationship with the Edison Company. Uneasy as it was, it enabled Vitagraph to capitalize upon exhibition activities (Musser 1983). In 1902, the reversal of a court decision against Biograph in the preceding year removed Edison's monopoly on production. This freed Vitagraph from its licensee role, enabling the company to produce autonomously as well as to exhibit its own films. In 1904, theaters became more independent from exhibitors when they began operating their own motion picture equipment (Musser 1982). These changes in production and exhibition conditions reopened the marketplace for more competition. To meet the increased demand for product, Vitagraph needed to strengthen its hand in film production. In August 1905, the company began building the new studio.

In September, Vitagraph's first release under its more autonomous status was *Raffles the Amateur Cracksman*. Exploiting its previously developed network of exhibition sites, the film was immediately shown in "Hammerstein's Victoria, Pastor's, Colonial, Alhambra, Orpheum and Gotham, Chase's (Washington, D.C.), Atlantic City Steeplechase and Arcade (Toledo, Ohio) and other houses."²⁰ To better market its product, Vitagraph set up distribution offices. By February 1907, it had engaged selling agents in San Francisco for the Pacific Coast (Miles Brothers) and in Chicago (Kleine Optical Co.) and had its own offices, not only in New York and Chicago, but also in London and Paris. By October 1907, Ambrosio Film was releasing several Vitagraph films, including *The Haunted Hotel*, in Italy.²¹

The Vitagraph founders combined the opening of the Paris office with an aggressive marketing scheme for *The Haunted Hotel* (February 1907). At a time when "French films were still announced only by title, genre and length," "Vitagraph launched the film with a flourish of hyperbolic advertising" (Crafton 1982:16). By creating fascination with the mystery of how the trick effects were achieved, Vitagraph generated an audience for its product and consolidated its position as a leading American film producer in Europe.

Communication between the New York and Paris offices gave Vitagraph an advantage in determining the kinds of films to produce and where to exhibit them. For example, by observing the lighting effects in Italian films shown in Paris,²² Vitagraph was able to anticipate the use of such techniques when making its own films. Also, Vitagraph could decide more effectively how best to exploit its films in Europe and could anticipate problems, such as the need to avoid sending films with "murders, burglaries, thefts, or anything demoralizing" to Germany because of censor restrictions.²³

Vitagraph announced the opening of a factory near its sales office in Paris, not to produce new films, but to print from Vitagraph's American negatives.²⁴ Ostensibly to avoid a three-week delay in waiting for prints to arrive from America, this strategic move thwarted efforts by other companies to imitate Vitagraph's films before they were released in foreign markets. It also increased European sales. "There are in Paris a large number of negatives which have been used in New York and are now to be printed [for] European sales."²⁵ During the nickelodeon era, I believe Biograph lacked its own Paris office. Vitagraphs were more popular in France than Biographs in part because the Vitagraph Company was in a much stronger position to promote its own product. In March 1913, Vitagraph was releasing more footage per month (1,060 meters in Paris) than each of the eleven other American film companies whose films were also exhibited in Paris.²⁶

Film Genres

What kinds of films was Vitagraph making that were so popular? Like other film producers around the turn of the century, Blackton and Albert E. Smith made both one-shot trick and mischief films and actualities.²⁷ Typical of the style of the period, *The Burglar on the Roof* (1898), shot on the roof of the Morse building, shows a thief who is beaten with brooms by several women. The film is photographed against a flat background containing painted backdrops and at a subject-to-camera distance revealing floorboards in

the foreground. In 1900 Blackton and Smith went to Galveston and photographed eight films of the aftermath of the hurricane and floods,²⁸ including *Panorama of East Galveston*; *Bird's Eye View of Dock Front, Galveston*; and *Panoramic View of Tremont Hotel, Galveston*. These films are striking to watch, although the scenes are photographed in typical fashion for actualities of the period. The images show incredible devastation and ruin over a desolate landscape through slow panning to the right and left. Some pans continue for as much as 180 degrees, and all end at random points.

During this early period, Vitagraph also duplicated and exhibited films of other competitors. Vitagraph's Bulletin from 1903 to 1904 offered diverse genres of films, including spectacles and fairytales such as *Aladdin and the Lamp of the Genii* and *The Passion Play*, travel and actuality subjects like *Cairo and the Ancient Pyramids* and *Queen Victoria's Funeral*, and dramas and comedies including *East Lynne* and *Foxy Grandpa*. Lacking its own large studio to meet the demand for films, Vitagraph imported foreign productions such as Lumière's *Passion Play* and "*The Life of Napoleon*," Vitagraphically shown for the first time in America."²⁹

From 1905 to 1907, with acreage and a studio in Brooklyn in which to make films, Vitagraph produced and advertised its own product almost entirely. It continued to offer a diverse fare, and the trade papers indicated that "the variety of subjects pleases the audiences greatly."³⁰ By 1907, the rise of the nickelodeon had produced a significant shift in the kinds of films that were made, away from actualities and toward narrative dramas. Vitagraph's production pattern anticipated this change (Vitagraph in addition made and marketed trick films for a longer period of time than many other American companies, probably to compete more effectively with the French companies in the European market). In comparison to Biograph, at least, Vitagraph made fewer actualities while producing more noncomic dramas. For example, Biograph's actuality production was about one-third of its output in 1905 and almost half of its output in 1906, while only 5 percent of Vitagraph's films released from the fall of 1905 to the end of 1907 were actualities.³¹

Although "by far the largest number of [films in 1907] were comedies" (Bowser 1983), they comprised only a bit more than half of Vitagraph's oeuvre during that year. In 1907, Biograph made only three noncomic dramas (10 percent of its yearly output), whereas Vitagraph made twenty-nine, or 41 percent of the annual production. The following study of the surviving Vitagraph films contrasts the different ways in which the company was handling the means of expression for each genre.

Actualities

The new studio enabled Vitagraph to concentrate on the internal production of films without having to rely on external events. Vitagraph released only seven actuality films from September 1905 to December 1907. These were: the annual Vanderbilt auto races (October 1905 and 1906), a travel special for Hale's Tours (June 1906), an Elk's convention in Philadelphia (July 1907), appearances of politicians (a naval review by President Roosevelt [September 1906] and a visit to the Battery by William Jennings Bryan [September 1906]), and scenes from the San Francisco earthquake (May 1906). None of these films survived, so they cannot be studied in detail and compared with the style of other actuality films.

The release of these films reveals much about Vitagraph's aggressive publicity schemes and is consistent with its hyperbolic advertising of *The Haunted Hotel* in Paris (see above, page 9). Vitagraph's publicity stressed the company's ability to take privileged views of the action. The *Great Naval Review at Oyster Bay* contained "a splendid series of views obtained through special permission of the naval authorities,"³² and the scenes of William Jennings Bryan were made in "an intimate close range portrait."³³ Vitagraph reported that

Our special photographer who was in the Far West at the time of the great disaster at San Francisco, wires us that he has secured a marvelous series of pictures of this terrible event. . . . Absolutely genuine, clear, sharp, and distinct. . . . We didn't "fake" it. We didn't get there several weeks after. We didn't "spoil our negatives."³⁴

There is no evidence that Vitagraph employees traveled much outside New York City in order to make films during the entire 1905–1907 period. More likely, Vitagraph showed the authentic record of the disaster which was filmed by Harry Miles, because six months thereafter, distribution of Vitagraph films in the West was handled by the Miles Bros. exchange.³⁵

Vitagraph filmmakers were more concerned with weaving documentary footage into their narratives when making dramas out of doors than in making actuality films. *The 100 to 1 Shot or, a Run of Luck* (August 1906) is the story of a young man who saves his sweetheart's family from foreclosure on its farm by winning money at the horse races. He is shown at the actual location of the races, his actions integrated into authentic backgrounds of the betting window, race-track, stands, and lawns. *A Race for a Wife!* (October 1906) is an adventure film incorporating scenes from the Vanderbilt auto race in which "a pretty American girl promises to marry her sweetheart if he wins the Cup Race."³⁶ Like Chaplin's *Kids Auto Races at Venice* (1914), the fictional story was composed around the actual event. The release of Vitagraph's

actuality film *The Vanderbilt Cup Race* (October 1906) was promoted in contrast to its dramatic fiction film: "None of the above scenes shown in the 'Race for a Wife' are included in the straight racing pictures."³⁷ During the nickelodeon era, the taking of actualities at Vitagraph appears to have been influenced primarily by what newsworthy items were happening nearby the studio and offices rather than the expression of an ongoing commitment to this form of filmmaking. Yet even when a given genre of filmmaking was not the mainstay of Vitagraph's output, the company was adept at creating interest in the films being seen.

Comedy Chases

Chase films were very popular by the beginning of the nickelodeon era. They inherited the model of action from actuality filmmaking of earlier years. In order to exploit depth in exterior shooting, characters traverse the image, moving from the background toward the foreground, diagonally across the field of vision. Examples of this kind of movement in actuality production occur in Lumière films such as *The Photography Congress at Lyon* (1895) and in a series of films recreating the Boer War made by Edison in 1900. In a similar manner in the multiple-shot chase films, the characters run diagonally from the background to the foreground. The characters traverse manmade and natural obstacles in their paths such as fences, bodies of water, and steep inclines. A cut occurs after all the characters leave the frame.

The chase film format shifted during the nickelodeon era. The protagonist became more prominent, manipulating the actions of his pursuers. More narrative variety was introduced into the films. For example, in Vitagraph's *The Jail Bird and How He "Flew,"* the convict dresses himself as a scarecrow as the authorities pass him by; later he tricks a man into sitting on a bench with wet paint, and when the man stands up, he gains the convict's stripes, and the police chase after him.

Four Vitagraph chase films from this period survive: *The Green Goods Men* (January 1906), *The Jail Bird and How He "Flew"* (July 1906), *"And the Villain Still Pursued Her;" or, the Author's Dream* (December 1906), and *The Stolen Pig* (May 1907). In these films, Vitagraph varied greatly the direction of movement in the separate chase shots, using more fully the foreground and background, and the edges and the middle spaces of the frame. Characters frequently move against walls in exteriors instead of through open spaces.

In shot 9 of *The Green Goods Men*, the chased man arcs from the right rear into the center of the image, then hides off to the right midground in a door-

way while the pursuers run by him toward the foreground, close to the camera. He then arcs out and back around to the left of the frame, then back the way he came, and the others give pursuit from the left center of the image toward the right rear-ground. In shot 4 of *The Stolen Pig*, the man runs parallel to the wall of the building behind him, which is at a diagonal to the axial plane. In this way, the viewer's eye is drawn on the diagonal toward the center of the image. In contemporary Vitagraph noncomic dramas photographed in interiors, such as *Foul Play or, a False Friend* (January 1907), this kind of centering was more fully exploited in interior spaces as well.

An inventive variation in the chase film genre was Vitagraph's construction of the chase along vertical rather than horizontal lines. *The Green Goods Men* contains part of the chase up a fire escape, over roofs, and down a chimney into the police station. *"And the Villain Still Pursued Her,"* made after completion of the new studio, contains a chase that moves through the interior of a building, up stairs, onto the roof, and into a hot-air balloon in the sky, until the protagonists let go and fall back to earth, the artist crashing into his garret and awakening from the dream.

In these comedy chases, the variations in movement further broke up the diagonal line of action present in the prototypical chases. Although the space of the frame was more fully utilized, a less-clear articulation of the temporal and spatial relationship between one shot and the next resulted. Only when Vitagraph began linking shots in dramatic narratives did these juxtapositions become more clearly defined.

Trick Films

Blackton's precinematic career was as a cartoonist and Smith's as a magician, so both were interested in exploring the uses of animation and trick effects in films. In early cinema, as Eileen Bowser observed in "Preparation for Brighton—The American Contribution," "Trick films were popular at first, up to the end of 1903" (National Film Archives 1982:6) and most frequently involved the stop-action substitutions made famous by Méliès. They also utilized dissolves and double exposures, cutouts and wires, and accelerated/slow motion by under/overcranking the camera. After the new studio was built in 1905–1906, Vitagraph continued to produce trick films into the nickelodeon era.

Vitagraph's first trick films in this period were pro-filmic, involving the creation or resolution of plots pivoting around trick furniture, such as "The escape of Raffles through a trick cupboard"³⁸ in *Raffles the Amateur Cracksman*. In *The Green Goods Men*, a

bag containing the life savings of a country couple is switched with another bag by the confidence men through a false bottom in a trick table.

In stop-motion substitution films, a person, animal, or object is shown, the camera is stopped, and a substitution is made. When the film is projected continuously, it gives the impression of transmutation. Vitagraph advanced this effect through the technique of object animation. In this process, inanimate objects are slightly moved with each revolution of the crank of the camera. These single-frame exposures create the illusion of the independent movement of objects without having to resort to wires or cables and without the intervention in the image of live protagonists. The release of *The Haunted Hotel* in Paris made this technique, "Le Mouvement Américain," famous (Sadoul 1951:65; Crafton 1982:16). In this film, many animations occur. In one sequence,

The traveler enters and is terror stricken at the weird incidents that follow. After many frights he finally seats himself at a table and to his surprise the dishes are placed and shifted by invisible hands. A large knife mysteriously raises itself in the air and slowly cuts slice after slice from a large bologna. The napkin then unfolds itself and wipes the blade of the knife. A demijohn walks around the table to a wine glass and the wine is poured out. The knife then cuts slices of bread from a loaf, the teapot steams and pours tea out into the cup. Phantom sugar tongs drop lumps of sugar into the tea, and then the milk pitcher tries hard to pour out milk but fails.³⁹

The Haunted Hotel was not the only film to use object animation. At about the same time, Edison made *The Teddy Bears* (February 1907), and Biograph released *A Tired Tailor's Dream* (August 1907). Two months earlier than *The Haunted Hotel*, Vitagraph released *A Midwinter Night's Dream* or *Little Joe's Luck* (December 1906), which also contained an object animation sequence. A child's stuffed animals and his wooden toys perform elaborate movements, including one clown climbing a miniature ladder. What made *The Haunted Hotel*, and not *A Midwinter Night's Dream*, such an influential film, however, was the coinciding of its release with the opening of Vitagraph's Paris office.

Vitagraph, capitalizing on the success of *The Haunted Hotel*, perpetuated the genre of object animation films. Other Vitagraph films, not extant, that probably used object animation include *The Disintegrated Convict* (September 1907), in which "Prisoner's body drops to floor in pieces—Fragments fly together and quickly become whole and sound";⁴⁰ *The Kitchen Maid's Dream* (November 1907), in which "In mysterious manner [tired servant's] hands become detached—Remove rug from floor and sweep room—Dishes wash themselves—Knives and forks do likewise, and unaided, climb into knife box—Basket is

woven and taken away with no apparent assistance";⁴¹ and *A Crazy Quilt* (November 1907), in which "Huge boots play around—Trousers move around mysteriously."⁴²

The Vitagraph directors also used the principle of object animation in cartoon drawings recorded on film in *Humorous Phases of Funny Faces* (April 1906) and *Lightning Sketches* (July 1907). These films show the artist (Blackton), his drawing board, and the objects and characters that undergo various movements and transformations, such as sketches of a Jewish man from the word "Cohen" and a black man from "Coon," a dog jumping through a hoop, and a drink spritzed into a glass.

Vitagraph's object animation films were seen by numerous filmmakers, especially in Europe, including Gaumont employees Segundo de Chomón, Walter Booth, Emile Cohl, and Winsor McKay (Crafton 1982: chap. 1). Once they discovered Vitagraph's method, the technique was imitated, and improvements followed. Vitagraph's object animation films were the bridge between the stop-motion substitution films of Méliès and his contemporaries and the cartoons (animated drawing films) of later years.

Vitagraph also made imitations of object animation using different trick effects, primarily in films involving the mixup of dummies with real people. In *The Thieving Hand* (February 1908), a one-armed man obtains an artificial limb. The man cannot control his new arm, which steals from passersby. Stop-motion substitutions are used to interchange a dummy hand with a real one, and wires are used to pull the arm when it is detached from the rest of the body. In *The Window Demonstration* (July 1907), the mannequins in the window are played by real people, who imitate staccato movements of mechanical dummies.

Trick effects were associated at first with magic and in the context of characters' dreams. Around 1907, they became linked to technology. In Vitagraph films such as *Work Made Easy* (December 1907) and *Liquid Electricity; or, the Inventor's Galvanic Fluid* (September 1907), trick effects are the result of inventions. In these films, illusionism is linked with science. In *Work Made Easy*, "A professor of dynamics invents wonderful machine, by aid of which he performs most difficult and arduous labors by merely turning the handle and sending waves of magnetic force into objects either animate or inanimate."⁴³ In *Liquid Electricity*, through undercranking the camera, the chemist's "wonderful invigorating fluid"⁴⁴ causes streetcleaners, clerks, ditch diggers, and other laborers to become extremely active. The mise-en-scène for the laboratory is detailed and shows instruments, cables, and revolving gears as well as smoke, light, and explosion effects.

In trick films, the primary concern was the process of transforming a person or object within a scene

rather than the manner of switching from scene to scene. An example is the object animation that occurs in *A Midwinter Night's Dream*. In shot 3, the children are put in bed by their mother, the action represented in full-length view. Shot 4 cuts to a closer view, showing the girls in bed. Shot 5 returns to the setup in shot 3, and then the camera pans to the boy's side of the room. There is a cut to a closer view of the boy in bed, matching the distance established in shot 4, in order to show that the animation of stuffed animals and wooden toys is achieved without the use of wires. In shot 6, a series of left-right camera pans occurs. When the camera pans left to remove the child from the field of vision, object animation of the stuffed animals and wooden toys occurs.

Showing objects moving in a convincing fashion without wires required a closer view of the action, however, at a time when close views were seen by filmmakers "as interruptive to the narrative rather than contributing to it" (Bowser 1983:5). Vitagraph trick films during the nickelodeon era perpetuated early methods of visual expression instead of providing the transition to a new mode of representing space and time within and across shots.

Contemporary Vitagraph Dramas

During the nickelodeon era, Vitagraph produced a wide variety of dramatic films. They involved western settings and miners (*The Prospectors* [June 1906] and *"The Bad Man" a Tale of the West* [February 1907]), the Civil War and slavery (*The Spy, A Romantic Story of the Civil War* [March 1907], *The Slave* [June 1907], and *The Despatch Bearer or, through the Enemy's Lines* [November 1907]), the sea (*Cast Up by the Sea* [September 1907] and *A Tale of the Sea* [December 1907]), contemporary issues involving crime, chases, and detectives (*The Escape from Sing Sing* [November 1905], *Secret Service or, the Diamond Smuggler* [August 1906], and *The Automobile Thieves!* [November 1906]), moral lessons about old age and youth (*The Fountain of Youth* [September 1907]), miserliness (*Retribution or the Brand of Cain* [March 1907]), and reformation (*The Burglar and the Baby* [November 1907]).

The company also made adaptations from literary works, openly acknowledging its sources. *Raffles the Amateur Cracksman* (September 1905) was based on the Raffles stories by E. W. Hornung, by special arrangement with the publisher, Mr. Kyrle Bellow and Liebler & Co.; *Sherlock Holmes or Held for Ransom* (October 1905) and *Monsieur Beaucaire* (December 1905) were made with the cooperation of McClure, Phillips & Co. Vitagraph's business practices could

be contrasted to those of the Kalem Company, which made *Ben-Hur* (1907) "without consulting the author of the novel or the producers of the play and ultimately paid \$25,000 for its carelessness" (Macgowan 1965:180).

Vitagraph's trick films illustrated the method of transforming a person or object within a scene. In the Vitagraph chase comedies, successive shots were treated as distinct entities, united by a common character or theme. Three surviving contemporary Vitagraph dramas from this period, however—*The 100 to 1 Shot or, a Run of Luck* (August 1906), *Foul Play or, a False Friend* (January 1907), and *The Mill Girl—A Story of Factory Life* (September 1907)—demonstrate the importance of shooting in the new studio in terms of composition in depth and in the emergence of parallel editing. These three contemporary Vitagraph dramas describe a movement from actuality-like exterior shooting (*The 100 to 1 Shot*) to full use of the interior space (*Foul Play*) to a smooth integration of interiors and exteriors (*The Mill Girl*). *The 100 to 1 Shot*, released before completion of the studio, contains twenty-five shots, six of them "interior" scenes, sixteen on location, and three insert shots. *Foul Play* is the story of a wife who proves her husband's innocence by exposing his business associate as the real thief. This film of seventeen shots is constructed entirely in the studio except for one shot in which the wife trails the thief from his house to the stock brokerage firm. *The Mill Girl* is the story of a female factory worker who is saved from a fire by her boyfriend after she repulses the advances of her boss. This drama of thirty-one shots (and one intertitle) is divided nearly equally between exteriors (fourteen shots) and interiors (seventeen shots). *Foul Play* best demonstrates in one film the ways in which new means of representing space and time were replacing earlier ones.

Foul Play or, Shifting the Means of Cinematic Expression

Foul Play is listed in Vitagraph publicity as "a story of high finance."⁴⁵ This publicity fails to indicate the visual appeal of the film. It is an especially complex narrative for early 1907, at least in the American cinema. The print is 320 feet long in 16mm, or 800 feet in 35mm, as against an original length of 875 feet. About one minute of the film is missing, which may be the original title and part of the first shot. Otherwise the film is probably complete. A brief shot description follows:⁴⁶

1. Interior, cashier's office. Full-length view. A cashier removes money from colleague's drawer, enters safe, rushes when colleague arrives. Thief exits, colleague works.
2. Interior, stock brokerage firm. Full-length view. Thief enters.
3. Interior, stock brokerage firm. Cut in to shot of thief from waist up. Thief looks at tickertape, worried.
4. As 2, thief exits stock brokerage firm.
5. As 1, thief reenters cashier's office. Then boss enters, calls innocent colleague away from his desk.
6. Interior, boss's office. Full-length view. Boss, innocent colleague, and another employee argue about the recordkeeping books.
7. As 1, thief listening in cashier's office. Then he goes to safe, removes documents, and places them in colleague's coat. Colleague returns, discusses books with thief. Colleague leaves. Boss enters safe, discovers documents missing. Thief indicates colleague left in a hurry. Police arrive. Everyone exits.
8. Interior, home, full-length view. Innocent colleague arrives home, greets his wife and two daughters. Boss, thief, and police arrive, discover documents in husband's coat. Husband is handcuffed and taken away. Wife cries with children.
9. Interior, courtroom. Full-length view. Boss testifies, thief accuses husband. Attorneys argue. Jury returns guilty verdict. Wife faints.
10. As 8, interior, home, but camera is positioned closer to wife with children. She resolves upon action, dresses, applies makeup, and leaves.
11. Exterior, street, full-length view. Wife moves down street, hides. Thief exits house, moves up street, wife follows.
12. As 2, interior, stock brokerage firm, full-length view. Thief checks tickertape, cheerful. Wife meets him at tickertape, he follows her out.
13. Interior, restaurant. Full-length view. Wife and thief enter restaurant. She drugs his drink, he sleeps. She steals documents from his pocket and exits. He wakes and exits.
14. Interior, hallway and thief's home. Full-length view. Thief climbs stairs, enters home, discovers documents missing from his coat.
15. As 6, boss's office. Full-length view. Wife arrives, shows boss documents. Police arrive, everyone exits.
16. As 14, thief's domain. Full-length view. Wife climbs stairs, peers through keyhole, sees thief packing and looking behind painting into a safe where documents and money are hidden. Wife enters and police arrest thief.

17. As 6, boss's office. Full-length view. Family reunited, boss shakes husband's hand.

This film is more tightly constructed than the comedy chases, in part because it is shot in interiors and also because of the demands of the story. The seventeen shots comprise only nine different locations, some of which are shown once, others twice, and still others, three times. By returning to an earlier location to build emotional intensity or to resolve conflict, this Vitagraph film contains the seeds of an approach that Griffith was to make so famous in his Biograph films.

Composition in Depth

The first, fifth, and seventh shots of *Foul Play* show the two employees at work. On the right is the thief's workspace and on the left, the husband's. To the far left is the safe. The scenes are photographed in full-length view. The men are working with their backs to the camera, against the rear wall. A railing and gate in the midground divide the movement toward the safe in the left rearground from movement to and from the boss's office off the right foreground. This mise-en-scène exploits the depth of the interior space and sets up planes of action in the area of the frame (Figure 1). It allows a spatial logic between shots as well. In each instance, the movement of characters to particular areas of the frame motivates the cuts, whether to the boss's office in shot 6 or to exteriors screen right (the stock exchange in shot 2 and the falsely accused man's home in shot 8).

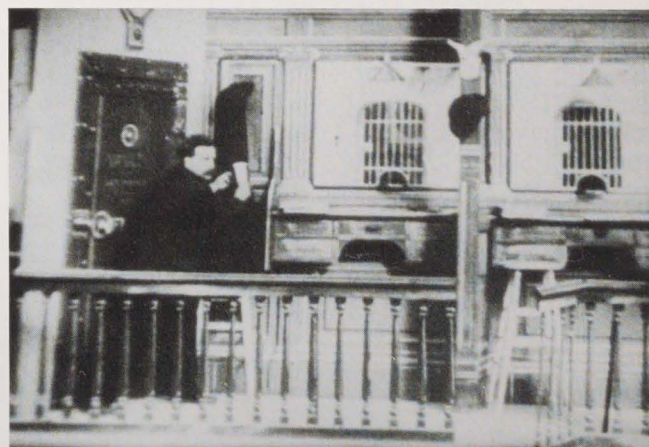


Figure 1 Thief, in office, planting documents in husband's coat (shot 7).

A similar shot occurs in *The Mill Girl*, in which the female workers are weaving in the background, facing away from the camera, while the main action centers around the table in the midground. (In *The 100 to 1 Shot*, released before the completion of the studio, the family at the beginning of the film faces the camera. This scene lacks the complexity of planes of action evident in similar full-length shots made in the studio interior in *Foul Play* and *The Mill Girl*.)

These shots in *Foul Play* and in *The Mill Girl* also demonstrate Vitagraph's understanding of the use of staged scenes to represent a larger actuality—a part to signify the whole. In *The Mill Girl*, five weavers are shown against the background, representing labor. An actuality film from 1904, *Westinghouse Works*, documents industrial working conditions. A camera records row upon row of female laborers in cramped quarters, whereas in *The Mill Girl* the workers are evenly spaced across the background of the frame. In *Westinghouse Works*, the workers are dwarfed by the tall ceilings; light seeps in through the windows, but the workers are shrouded in almost total darkness. The shots in *The Mill Girl* (and *Foul Play*) demonstrate selection from reality in order to structure the narrative and to create a fiction more dramatic than the actuality material.

This pattern of composing in depth in interiors is present throughout *Foul Play*. In the second shot at the stock brokerage firm, the background activity shows the workers writing against the wall at the rear of the image. Customers sit with their backs to the camera at both sides of the frame. The thief enters close to the camera in the foreground and walks down the aisle between the two groups, toward the rear (Figure 2). His exit in shot 4 brings him toward the foreground and close to the camera, and the characters' movements in the stock brokerage firm in shot 12 repeat the pattern established in these earlier shots. This composition and movement in interiors control the path of observation of the viewer down the center of the image toward the rearground, a change in concept from earlier films wherein "the significant action may take place at the side of the frame, with so many other actions going on in other parts of the frame as to make it difficult for the modern spectator to 'read' the scene" (Bowser 1983:5).

In *The 100 to 1 Shot*, control over the mise-en-scène is greatly compromised because it is dictated by exterior shooting conditions. Many of the exterior shots contain actuality backgrounds. For example, shot 3 shows the boyfriend at Grand Central Station. To thrust himself into the viewer's consciousness, he walks from the background to the center foreground of the image and turns his back to the camera in order to show the audience the newspaper headline. In contrast, the viewer's eye in *Foul Play* is more carefully led to the significant action.

Centering

Other shots in *Foul Play* contain more subtle centering strategies. Much of the actuality filmmaking and comedy chases of earlier years was constructed around movement across the diagonal of the frame. Cinematic conventions led the viewer's eye from the background of the image, through its center, toward the foreground. Such a diagonal movement pervades numerous outdoor scenes of *The 100 to 1 Shot*. But in interior scenes of the latter film, action was played still largely parallel to the flat background.



Figure 2 Thief enters the stock brokerage firm (shot 2).



Figure 3 Boss, thief, and police arrive in husband's home and find documents (shot 8).

In *Foul Play*, shots 8 and 10 are in the husband's home, and shot 9 is in the courtroom (Figures 3, 4, 5). These three successive shots are photographed not against a flat background, but instead against two corners of the room that converge in the middle rear of the image, in front of which transpires the significant action. This makes possible a greater sense of depth in the image. In the courtroom scene, multiple planes of action make full use of the interior space: the judge, witness stand, and jury in the background; the lawyers and table in the midground area; and the wife and banister in the foreground space. The camera, placed at an oblique angle, exploits the perception of a receding space. The careful positioning of the furniture in the frame allows more characters to face the camera.



Figure 4 Thief falsely accuses husband in courtroom (shot 9).



Figure 5 Wife, at home, resolves to take action (shot 10).

In Griffith's *What Shall We Do with Our Old?* (February 1911), the courtroom scene is photographed head on. The action is centered around the judge. He faces the camera, with the police standing on one side of the bench and the old man on the other. Major characters are shown from the side or the back, so that much of the significant action of the man's plea is lost to the viewer.⁴⁷

In the courtroom shot in *Foul Play*, use of space is geared toward the clear presentation of the drama. This combination of visual strategies—background receding into a corner, oblique camera angle, multiplanar areas, and careful positioning of the furniture—skillfully draws the viewer's eye into the heart of the drama at the center of the image where the protagonists interact most fully with each other. This approach is evidence of Vitagraph's attempt to create a more flowing narrative by relying on centering strategies instead of interrupting the action by resorting to a direct cut-in to a close view. This attempt had succeeded by the time of *The Mill Girl*, in part by establishing a pattern of bringing the camera a bit closer to the action "as the narrative advances to its climactic stages" (Bowser 1983:5).

The similarity of backgrounds in shots 8, 9, and 10 of *Foul Play* also binds the scenes together dramatically. Like Griffith's films, which are structured around the threat of disintegration of the family structure, so too do these shots emphasize that tension. In shot 8, the husband returns home to his family. The camera is placed at a full-length view and records the arrival of the police to arrest the falsely accused man. At the end of shot 9 in the courtroom, the wife faints in the center mid-foreground of the image. Then there is a cut back to the home. The camera is placed in the same relationship to the background as in shot 8 but is positioned closer to the protagonists. The courtroom shot divides the film's drama (and number of shots) in half. Like many Griffith films, it also shifts the resolution of the drama to the resourcefulness of the female. In the preceding shots, the husband supported the family integrity and unity. An outside force (the thief) threatens the idyll. In the courtroom, the husband's guilty sentence causes the wife to collapse. From this moment on, she moves from inaction to action and is the catalyst for resolving the drama in the remaining shots. The cut-in to shot 10 is significant in that it is separated from the earlier shot at home by the courtroom scene, thereby modifying the earlier filmmaking style of moving into closer views in a direct cut.

Direct cut-ins to closeups, however, occur elsewhere in *Foul Play*. In shot 2, the thief enters the stock brokerage firm. In order to show the action more clearly, shot 3 is a close view of the thief (Figure 6). Similarly, Vitagraph's *The 100 to 1 Shot* also contains several cut-ins to a closer view. Insert shots



Figure 6 Thief checking tickertape at stock brokerage firm (shot 3).

show a card listing the racing odds and a telegram indicating the horse on which to bet. These close-ups are necessary to establish the ensuing action. The opening of *The 100 to 1 Shot* depicts a hand clutching money. Like numerous films in the prenickelodeon era, this shot functions as an allegorical tableau outside the flow of the narrative.

In *Foul Play*, the cut-in to a closer view in shot 10 functions differently. First of all, suspense about the effect of the husband's arrest on home life is drawn across several shots. Shot 10 also works as the inverse of the wife's collapse in the preceding shot in the courtroom; in shot 10 she resolves to action. And, because of the restrained acting, the closer placement of the camera brings the viewer into the wife's *emotional* reactions. Her thought processes are projected. She gestures her hand and places her fingers on her mouth, not knowing what to do. Momentarily she stops. Her eyes move and reveal her resolving upon a decision.

In Griffith's *Brutality* (December 1912), a husband and wife attend the performance of a play, and the camera cuts between showing the couple in the audience and the action on the stage in full-length view. At the moment when the husband identifies with the drama emotionally, Griffith cuts to a closer view of the action on the stage, showing the actors from the waist up. Although the editing in *Foul Play* lacks the back-and-forth cutting strategy of *Brutality*, which shifts to the protagonist's point of view, it is an earlier example of moving the camera closer to involve the spectator more intimately in the reactions of the characters.

Simultaneous Action

Making films in the new Vitagraph studio made more composition in depth in interiors possible, but at the same time it posed new problems in representing simultaneous action in contiguous spaces. In *Foul Play*, Vitagraph employed conflicting strategies to establish temporally parallel events: through staging within the mise-en-scène and through separate shots. The staging methods used to establish temporally parallel actions were indebted to earlier filmmaking styles and still earlier theatrical traditions, while the technique of showing simultaneous action in separate shots anticipated the newly emerging form of parallel editing.

Using staging techniques inherited from the theater,⁴⁸ filmmakers denoted simultaneity through the use of multiple playing areas within the frame, especially when the separate spaces were delineated by the use of a split set. Shot 7 of *Foul Play* shows in full-length view the work space of the two employees. On the right is the thief's area and on the left, the husband's. To the far left, after characters pass through the safe's door, action is shown within the space of the safe. This space within the safe is ambiguously represented. We can view the characters in the safe both through the area of the office and from just behind the wall separating the safe from the office (Figure 7). Is this area within the safe to be understood as part of the space of the employees' room, as a cutaway set, or as careless framing in making the film?

In shot 16, the wife climbs up the stairs with the police, peers through a keyhole, and observes the thief in his apartment. The stairs are on the right, the door is in the center of the image, perpendicular to the flat background, and the thief's room is on the left. As the

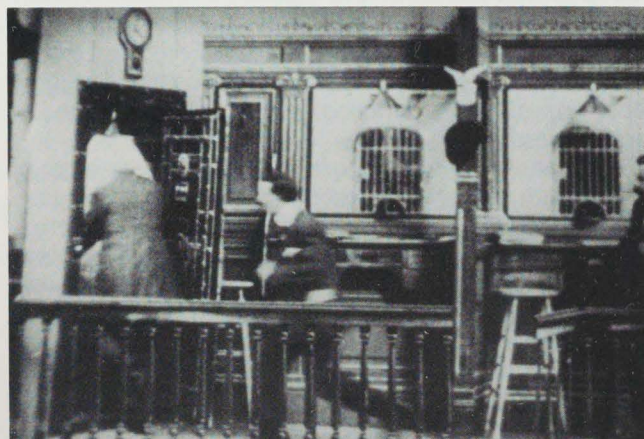


Figure 7 Boss enters safe, discovers documents missing (shot 7).

wife kneels down to look through the keyhole, the camera pans and shows more of the man's room. He is packing his bags and reveals his document hiding place to be in a safe behind a picture on the wall. Two simultaneous actions—the wife peering through the keyhole and the man packing his bags—are shown in the same shot (Figure 8).



Figure 8 Wife peers through keyhole and sees thief looking in safe at his home (shot 16).

In the immediately preceding Vitagraph release, *A Midwinter Night's Dream* (December 1906), this panning strategy also occurs. In shot 2, a camera pan takes place from the family gathered around the dinner table, across a door perpendicular to the flat background, to the adjacent living room. This camera movement leads to another line of action, that of the children opening presents. As the camera pans, the father leaves the table and crosses through the door. He dresses as Santa and climbs up the fireplace. As the camera pans further to show the Christmas tree, the children and the female adults pass through the door and arrive in the living room as the father descends as Santa.

Camera movement occurs with regularity in exterior shooting during this period but is extremely unusual for interior shooting.⁴⁹ Because of the larger playing area within the new studio, Vitagraph was also able to pan in interior studio shooting in order to link simultaneous actions in adjacent spaces in both *A Midwinter Night's Dream* and *Foul Play*.

Showing simultaneous action in *separate* shots is firmly established in shots 14 and 15 of *Foul Play*, although it is not as fully developed as the classic ABAB pattern of parallel editing of later years. After the wife resolves upon action in shot 10, she leaves her house. In shot 11, an exterior, she trails the thief.

He enters the brokerage firm (shot 12), where she allows him to meet her, and in the next shot (13) they enter a restaurant. She drugs his drink (Figure 9), steals the documents from his pocket, and exits. He wakes up, realizes she has left, and also leaves. In the next shot (14) the thief arrives home (Figure 10). As the thief discovers the documents missing, the wife goes for help at the boss's office. Although the wife had left the restaurant before the thief, we only now return to her actions. In shot 15, she enters the boss's office and shows him the stolen documents (Figure 11). The action across the edits from the restaurant to the thief's house and then to the boss's office sets up a clear instance of two actions occurring simultaneously in successive shots. In contrast to the point of view that the early instances of parallel editing are across adjacent spaces (Bowser 1983:11), this editing pattern occurs across distant ones. The sequence of shots 13 through 16 of the wife's producing evidence to arrest the thief contains an extraordinary collision between the early means of expression and the new—representing simultaneous action within the same shot on the one hand, and in successive shots on the other.



Figure 9 Wife drugs thief's drink in restaurant (shot 13).

Vitagraph Forged Ahead

By the end of 1907, Vitagraph was in the forefront of composing sophisticated contemporary dramas. Making dramas in the new studio had challenged Vitagraph to find new ways of representing space and time in a continuous narrative flow. Vitagraph was meeting the demands of more complex narratives by integrating composition in depth with simultaneous action in successive shots.



Figure 10 Thief discovers documents missing from his coat (shot 14).



Figure 11 Wife arrives and shows boss documents (shot 15).

The 100 to 1 Shot or, a Run of Luck was made just before completion of the studio. It contains a good integration of actuality-like exterior action recorded across the diagonal of the frame but at the same time continues early means of representing action played against flat backgrounds in "interiors." While a temporal linear narrative progresses in successive shots throughout most of the film, simultaneous action in successive shots is incorporated at the end of the film. In shot 21, the boyfriend, having won money at the races, hires a car to return home. The vehicle moves away from the camera. In shot 22, in a reverse angle (but in a different location), the car careens down the road toward the camera. Shot 23 returns to

the camera setup in the second shot of the film, with the family about to be evicted from its home. In shot 24, the car pulls up in front of the house. The boyfriend enters the home in shot 25 just in time to save the family.

Foul Play or, a False Friend, made several months after completion of the studio, is significant for centering the action, composing in depth, and articulating temporal simultaneity in successive shots. By the time of *The Mill Girl—A Story of Factory Life* nine months later, composition in depth and parallel editing were fully integrated into exterior and interior filming.

In *The Mill Girl*, the smooth flow of action across shots suggests patterns of simultaneity over the entire film rather than over only a few shots. The scenes of the boss hiring thugs in a dive and readying them for ambush near the beginning of the film (shots 7 and 8) are embedded within similar shots of the lovers outside the gate of the girl's home in shots 6 and 9. Near the end of *The Mill Girl*, shots 28 of the boss escaping down stairs in the interior and 29 of the boyfriend climbing up the building in an exterior are embedded within similar shots of the girlfriend being overcome by fumes in shots 27 and 30.

By the end of 1907, interior/exterior cutting was becoming an established convention—a change from the earlier practice of showing all the exterior action and then the interior action, as in *The Life of an American Fireman* (1902). In the middle of *The Mill Girl* is a nine-shot editing pattern (shots 11–19) that contrasts the boyfriend in his bedroom with the thieves climbing up outside his window. Immediately thereafter, shots 21–27 cut back and forth between the mill worker's space and the boss's office. The sequence begins with the boyfriend describing to the mill girl his beating up the thugs, thereby linking this simultaneous-action sequence with the prior one. In this latter simultaneous-action sequence, while the employees work, the boss fires the boyfriend and makes advances upon the heroine.

In these contemporary dramas, Vitagraph developed temporal simultaneity into an ABAB editing pattern. In later years, Griffith would exploit more complex montage strategies, at least at the level of permuting ABC patterns, in his cutting between the attacker, the attacked, and the rescuer. But already many months before Griffith began directing at Biograph, Vitagraph had established the elements of a newer filmmaking style, as well as the studio production, distribution, and publicity methods to anticipate the rapid changes in the industry and to compete more effectively with its product in the marketplace.

Filmography

The following is a filmography of Vitagraph releases between September 1905 and December 1907. It is the basis for the statistical comparisons with other companies that are discussed in the body of this article. The *New York Clipper* is the source of information for this filmography. It is the only periodical to track fully the Vitagraph releases beginning in September 1905.

Titles given are those used in the *Clipper*. A given title frequently varied in phrasing and punctuation when announced from week to week. In listing titles in the filmography, I have usually chosen the title for the first announcement of the film's release. Vitagraph frequently favored two-part titles, such as *The Mill Girl—A Story of Factory Life and Liquid Electricity*; or, *the Inventor's Galvanic Fluid*. Dates listed are those when the *Clipper* advertised the films as being ready for purchase. Rarely is a precise release date given. Actual releases were within a few days of the weekly issue of the newspaper. Lengths are those supplied in the *Clipper* ads. Surviving prints are frequently shorter, missing one or more shots. Genres are divided into comedy, drama, and actuality. I have used my best judgment for genre when the *Clipper* description was unclear as to comic or dramatic. Reissues are noted as separate releases when they are so treated by Vitagraph, such as *Raffles the Amateur Cracksman* and *The Flat Dwellers*.

Also listed are places where copies are available, according to the following code: MOMA (The Museum of Modern Art), LOC (The Library of Congress), GEH (International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House), and NFA (National Film Archive, London). Where no notation is included, the film is not known to exist. Incomplete paper prints in the process of being copied are not included in these designations.

1905 Releases

1. *Raffles the Amateur Cracksman*, September 23, 1905, 1,050 ft., drama.
2. *The Servant Girl Problem*, September 30, 1905, 800 ft., comedy.
3. *License No. 13, or the Hoodoo Automobile*, October 7, 1905, 750 ft., comedy.
4. *Sherlock Holmes or Held for Ransom*, October 7, 1905, 725 ft., drama.
5. *Vanderbilt Auto Race*, October 21, 1905, 200-, 300-, 400-, or 500-foot lengths, actuality.
6. *Black and White*, October 28, 1905, 470 ft., comedy.
7. *The Escape from Sing Sing*, November 4, 1905, 775 ft., drama.
8. *Burglar Bill*, November 18, 1905, 210 ft., comedy.
9. *Moving Day or, No Children Allowed*, November 25, 1905, 790 ft., comedy.
10. *Oh! You Dirty Boy!*, December 2, 1905, 90 ft., comedy.
11. *The Newsboy*, December 23, 1905, 785 ft., comedy.
12. *Monsieur Beaucaire*, December 23, 1905, 615 ft., drama.
13. *Man Wanted*, December 30, 1905, 300 ft., comedy.

1906 Releases

1. *The Green Goods Men*, January 6, 1906, 730 ft., comedy, LOC.
2. *Flags and Faces of All Races*, January 13, 1906, 365 ft., comedy.
3. *Post No Bills or, Advertising Up-to-Date*, January 27, 1906, 485 ft., comedy.
4. *The Flat Dwellers*, February 3, 1906, 450 ft., comedy.
5. *The Man with the Ladder and the Hose*, February 17, 1906, 475 ft., drama.
6. *The Modern Oliver Twist or, the Life of a Pickpocket*, March 3, 1906, 800 ft., drama.
7. *Please Help the Blind or a Game of Graft*, March 10, 1906, 475 ft., comedy.
8. *The Lost Collar Button or, a Strenuous Search*, March 24, 1906, 430 ft., comedy.
9. *A Strenuous Wedding, or Matrimony a la Mode*, March 31, 1906, 410 ft., comedy.
10. *Stop Thief*, March 31, 1906, 277 ft., comedy.
11. *Juvenile Chicken Thieves*, March 31, 1906, 220 ft., comedy.
12. *Troubles of a Hobo, or No Rest for Weary Willie*, March 31, 1906, 245 ft., comedy.
13. *Humerous Phases of Funny Faces*, April 7, 1906, 230 ft., comedy, LOC, NFA.
14. *Nobody Works Like Father*, April 14, 1906, 690 ft., comedy.
15. *Oh! That Limburger!*, April 28, 1906, 600 ft., comedy.
16. *The San Francisco Earthquake!*, May 5 (ca. 800 ft., 4 items); May 12 (ca. 1,200 ft., 6 items); May 19 (ca. 1,500 ft., 8 items), actuality.
17. *Raffles—The Amateur Cracksman*, May 5, 1906, 1,070 ft., drama. Note: This is a rerelease of a 1905 film, because of "the great demand for this film in shorter lengths"; reissued in 2 parts, 20 feet longer than the original release.
18. *Love versus Title or, an Up-to-Date Elopement*, May 26, 1906, 720 ft., drama.
19. *The Prospectors*, June 9, 1906, 770 ft., drama.
20. *Special! For Hale's Tours*, June 9, 1906, 800 ft. (sold in 200-, 400-, 600-, and 800-foot lengths), actuality.
21. *All Aboard! Or Funny Episodes in a Street*

- Car*, June 23, 1906, 485 ft., comedy.
22. *The Jail Bird and How He "Flew,"* July 7, 1906, 610 ft., comedy, LOC, NFA.
 23. *The Snap-Shot Fiend, or Willie's New Camera*, July 21, 1906, 610 ft., comedy.
 24. *The Acrobatic Burglars*, August 4, 1906, 660 ft., comedy.
 25. *The 100 to 1 Shot or, a Run of Luck*, August 11, 1906, 640 ft., drama, MOMA, LOC, GEH.
 26. *The Hand of the Artist*, August 11, 1906, 200 ft., comedy.
 27. *Funny Fish and Their Captors*, August 11, 1906, 200 ft., comedy.
 28. *Secret Service or, the Diamond Smuggler*, August 25, 1906, 655 ft., drama.
 29. *Pals or My Friend, the Dummy*, September 8, 1906, 670 ft., comedy.
 30. *William Jennings Bryan*, September 8, 1906, 150 ft., actuality.
 31. *Great Naval Review at Oyster Bay*, September 8, 1906, 500 ft., actuality.
 32. *The Indian's Revenge; or, Osceola, the Last of the Seminoles*, September 22, 1906, 795 ft., drama.
 33. *A Race for a Wife!*, October 13, 1906, 850 ft., drama.
 34. *The Vanderbilt Cup Race*, October 13, 1906, 500 ft., actuality.
 35. *Mother-in-Law*, October 27, 1906, 620 ft., comedy.
 36. *The Automobile Thieves!*, November 10, 1906, 985 ft., drama.
 37. *"And the Villain Still Pursued Her;" or, the Author's Dream*, December 1, 1906 (ready for delivery December 5), 800 ft., comedy, GEH, NFA.
 38. *A Midwinter Night's Dream or Little Joe's Luck*, December 15, 1906, 600 ft., drama, GEH, MOMA (excerpt).
 9. *The Belle of the Ball*, March 30, 1907, 475 ft., comedy.
 10. *The Hero*, April 6, 1907, 250 ft., drama.
 11. *Amateur Night; or, "Get the Hook,"* April 13, 1907, 500 ft., comedy, GEH (excerpt).
 12. *On the Stage*, April 27, 1907, 715 ft., drama.
 13. *The Flat Dwellers*, April 27, 1907, 400 ft., comedy. Note: this film was released and copyrighted in 1906, then recopyrighted and rereleased in 1907 at a length 50 feet shorter than the 1906 release.
 14. *The Pirate's Treasure a Sailor's Love Story*, May 4, 1907, 800 ft., drama.
 15. *The Stolen Pig*, May 18, 1907, 450 ft., comedy, LOC.
 16. *A Square Deal or, the End of the "Bad Men,"* May 25, 1907, 425 ft., drama.
 17. *A Horse of Another Color*, May 25, 1907, 425 ft., comedy.
 18. *"Forty Winks;" or, a Strenuous Dream*, June 1, 1907, 270 ft., comedy.
 19. *One Man Baseball*, June 1, 1907, 280 ft., comedy.
 20. *The Bunco Steerers and How They Were Caught*, June 8, 1907, 425 ft., comedy.
 21. *How to Cure a Cold*, June 8, 1907, 550 ft., comedy.
 22. *The Slave*, June 15, 1907, 550 ft., drama.
 23. *The Awkward Man or, Oh! So Clumsy*, June 22, 1907, 300 ft., comedy.
 24. *The Bandits or, an Adventure in Italy*, June 29, 1907, 550 ft., drama.
 25. *The Wrong Flat or a Comedy of Errors*, July 6, 1907, 625 ft., comedy.
 26. *Lost in an Arizona Desert*, July 13, 1907, 600 ft., drama.
 27. *The Window Demonstration*, July 13, 1907, 275 ft., comedy, GEH.
 28. *Lightning Sketches*, July 27, 1907, 600 ft., comedy, NFA.
 29. *Father's Quiet Sunday*, July 20, 1907, 625 ft., comedy.
 30. *Elks' Convention*, July 27, 1907, including parade and grandstand, sold in lengths 400–1,000 ft., actuality.
 31. *The Athletic American Girls*, August 3, 1907, 400 ft., comedy.
 32. *The Boy, the Bust and the Bath*, August 3, 1907, 425 ft., comedy, MOMA, NFA, GEH.
 33. *The Bargain Fiend; or, Shopping à-la-Mode*, August 10, 1907, 500 ft., comedy.
 34. *The White Man's First Smoke; or, Puritan Days in America*, August 10, 1907, 500 ft., comedy.
 35. *A Double-Barreled Suicide*, August 10, 1907, 280 ft., comedy.
 36. *The Easterner a Tale of the West*, August 17, 1907, 475 ft., drama, NFA.

1907 Releases

1. *Foul Play or, a False Friend*, January 5, 1907, 875 ft., drama, GEH.
2. *The Mechanical Statue and the Ingenious Servant*, January 19, 1907, 450 ft., comedy.
3. *"The Bad Man" a Tale of the West*, February 2, 1907, 660 ft., drama.
4. *Fun in a Fotograf Gallery*, February 16, 1907, 785 ft., comedy.
5. *The Haunted Hotel*, February 23, 1907, 500 ft., comedy, GEH.
6. *The Spy, a Romantic Story of the Civil War*, March 9, 1907, 600 ft., drama.
7. *A Curious Dream*, March 16, 1907, 300 ft., comedy.
8. *Retribution or the Brand of Cain*, March 30, 1907, 770 ft., drama.

37. *The Starving Artist or Realism in Art*, August 17, 1907, 650 ft., comedy.
38. *2,000 Miles without a Dollar*, August 24, 1907, 430 ft., drama.
39. *Man, Hat and Cocktail*, August 24, 1907, 400 ft., comedy.
40. *Bathing under Difficulties*, August 31, 1907, 500 ft., comedy.
41. *The Baby Elephant*, August 31, 1907, 425 ft., comedy.
42. *The Fountain of Youth*, September 7, 1907, 375 ft., drama.
43. *Liquid Electricity; or, the Inventor's Galvanic Fluid*, September 7, 1907, 470 ft., comedy, MOMA, NFA.
44. *The Ghost Story*, September 14, 1907, 230 ft., drama.
45. *Cast Up by the Sea*, September 14, 1907, 435 ft., drama.
46. *The Disintegrated Convict*, September 21, 1907, 425 ft., comedy.
47. *The Burglar, or a Midnight Surprise*, September 28, 1907, 440 ft., comedy.
48. *The Mill Girl—A Story of Factory Life*, September 28, 1907, 700 ft., drama, MOMA, NFA.
49. *Purchasing an Automobile*, October 5, 1907, 700 ft., comedy.
50. *The Gypsy's Warning*, October 5, 1907, 285 ft., drama.
51. *The Piker's Dream a Race Track Fantasy*, October 12, 1907, 700 ft., drama.
52. *The Masquerade Party*, October 19, 1907, 530 ft., drama.
53. *The Inquisitive Boy, or Uncle's Present*, October 26, 1907, 500 ft., comedy.
54. *The Veiled Beauty or, Anticipation and Realization*, October 26, 1907, 600 ft., comedy.
55. *The Kitchen Maid's Dream*, November 2, 1907, 400 ft., comedy.
56. *The Soldier's Dream*, November 2, 1907, 300 ft., drama.
57. *The Twin Brother's Joke*, November 9, 1907, 600 ft., comedy.
58. *A Little Hero*, November 9, 1907, 300 ft., drama.
59. *A Fish Story*, November 16, 1907, 450 ft., comedy.
60. *A Crazy Quilt*, November 16, 1907, 400 ft., comedy.
61. *The Despatch Bearer or, through the Enemy's Lines*, November 23, 1907, 725 ft., drama.
62. *Under False Colors*, November 30, 1907, 575 ft., comedy.
63. *The Burglar and the Baby*, November 30, 1907, 375 ft., drama.

64. *The Need of Gold*, December 7, 1907, 475 ft., drama.
65. *Laughing Gas*, December 7, 1907, 400 ft., comedy.
66. *A Tale of the Sea*, December 14, 1907, 750 ft., drama.
67. *A Night in Dreamland a Fairy Fantasy*, December 21, 1907, 500 ft., drama.
68. *A Clown's Love Story*, December 21, 1907, 325 ft., drama.
69. *The Miser's Hoard*, December 28, 1907, 350 ft., drama.
70. *Work Made Easy*, December 28, 1907, 500 ft., comedy.

Acknowledgments

This article would not have been possible without the support and guidance of Jay Leyda and George Pratt. Allan Bobey of George Eastman House and Emily Sieger of the Library of Congress facilitated my viewing of Vitagraph films held by their respective institutions. Pat Loughney of the Library of Congress generously shared his insights regarding paper print materials. Tom Gunning and Eileen Bowser gave helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article and Dan Leab was a source of encouragement for my presentation of this paper at a scholarly seminar.

Notes

- 1 See especially National Film Archives, London 1982.
- 2 The two books written on Vitagraph fall short of providing a significant analysis of the company. Smith 1952 (a founder of Vitagraph) contains incorrect dates and inaccurate recollections. Slide 1976 relies on written documents and memories of the company's survivors and dependents but is concerned more with the personalities involved than with Vitagraph's creative importance or economic position in the industry. Musser 1983 focuses on the company's uneasy relationship with the Edison Manufacturing Company in the 1890s.
- 3 *New York Clipper*, January 6, 1906, p. 1188.
- 4 *Ibid.*, September 7, 1907, p. 796.
- 5 *Views and Film Index*, April 20(?) or 27(?), 1907 (pages out of order in unbound volume).
- 6 *Ibid.*, August 25, 1906. Prior to this, Vitagraph had a small studio with a skylight in the Morse Building at 140 Nassau Street in Manhattan and then in the Morton building, 110–116 Nassau Street.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 In later years, Vitagraph used studio lighting to great dramatic effect. In *Proving His Love or, the Ruse of a Beautiful Woman* (June 1911), an actress tests the affections of her suitors by pretending to disfigure her face. The confrontations take place in her living room. The window is on the left, the midground has flowers on a table, and the actress is sitting in a chair on the right. Two suitors successively approach her; as she exposes her disfigurement, they recoil in horror. Her true love, the newspaper reporter Stanwood, approaches. He bends down, shadows falling across his face. She blindfolds him and takes off her makeup to show her disfigurement was only a ploy. Thinking he is rejected, Stanwood retreats into the background, into the darkness of the doorway. Slowly the actress pulls him back into the frame, into the light, and they embrace. The darkness and light function as dramatic protagonists that add visual intensity to the emotional relationships.
- 10 *New York Dramatic Mirror*, November 14, 1908, p. 10.
- 11 Letter from Benjamin Hampton to Albert Smith, March 3, 1916, discussing Vitagraph's international importance, in Box 4, Albert Smith papers, University of California, Los Angeles. It is possible by this time that Vitagraph had reached the height of its growth in produc-

tion facilities. Around this time a series of agreements changed ownership of Vitagraph, affected its distribution network, and caused Blackton to leave the company. These factors may have contributed to the peaking of Vitagraph's growth, even though the company survived for ten more years.

- 12 For discussion of models of film production, see also Janet Staiger's publications.
- 13 G. M. "Broncho Billy" Anderson may have directed some Vitagraph films in 1902, and Smith worked with Blackton taking trick and actuality films. Other cameramen did take other films, but under their supervision. See Musser 1983.
- 14 Vitagraph directors were not regularly publicized until June 1912, so it is difficult to attribute specific films to given directors before that time.
- 15 *New York Dramatic Mirror*, November 14, 1908, p. 10.
- 16 *Moving Picture World*, December 12, 1908, p. 487.
- 17 "How Motion Pictures Are Made in Great Flatbush Plant," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 30, 1911, p. 7.
- 18 These statistics are arrived at by comparing the figures in Paul Spehr's and Eileen Bowser's articles on Biograph productions with my own statistics compiled for the 1905–1909 Vitagraph period together with the 1910–1915 Vitagraph filmography listed in Slide 1976.
- 19 *New York Dramatic Mirror*, November 14, 1908, p. 10.
- 20 *New York Clipper*, September 23, 1905, p. 795. The first four theaters were in Manhattan and the following two in Brooklyn.
- 21 Aldo Bernardini, Italian film historian, in letter to me, July 31, 1980.
- 22 Letter from Ronald Reader, Paris, to Albert Smith, February 2, 1909, in Box 2, Albert Smith papers, University of California, Los Angeles.
- 23 Letter from George (Vitagraph Company manager) to Albert Smith, New York, February 3, 1909, in Box 2, Albert Smith papers, University of California, Los Angeles.
- 24 *Moving Picture World*, March 7, 1908, pp. 186–187, and February 1908 correspondence in Box 2, Albert Smith papers, University of California, Los Angeles.
- 25 Price Waterhouse accounts report for five years to 1913, Box 2, Albert Smith papers, University of California, Los Angeles. Also, in letters between "Vic" in New York and Albert Smith in Paris, February 11 and 18, 1908, the international shipping, printing, and safekeeping of negatives, such as *The Last Cartridge*, are discussed.
- 26 Donald Crafton, in letter to me, 1982.
- 27 See also Musser 1983.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 38. These films survive in the Library of Congress paper print collection.
- 29 *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 6, 1903, p. 8.
- 30 *Moving Picture World*, April 6, 1907, p. 71.
- 31 These statistics are based on Spehr's and Bowser's articles on production at Biograph and on my analysis of the production at Vitagraph during the corresponding period.
- 32 *New York Clipper*, September 8, 1906, p. 784.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*, May 5, 1906, p. 324; May 12, 1906, p. 352; May 19, 1906, p. 380.
- 35 For accounts of the authentic and fake films of the San Francisco earthquake, see Fielding 1972:23, 24, 42, 49, 50.
- 36 *New York Clipper*, October 13, 1906, p. 920.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Ibid.*, October 14, 1905, p. 880.
- 39 *Views and Film Index*, May(?) 11, 1907 (pages out of order in unbound volume).
- 40 *New York Clipper*, September 21, 1907, p. 856.
- 41 *Ibid.*, November 2, 1907, p. 1040.
- 42 *Ibid.*, November 16, 1907, p. 1096.
- 43 *Ibid.*, December 28, 1907, p. 1256.
- 44 *Ibid.*, September 7, 1907, p. 796.
- 45 *Ibid.*, January 5, 1907, p. 224.
- 46 Full-length view is defined as a character appearing within the full extent of the set, with space above the character's head, and a foreground area showing in front of his feet.
- 47 Tom Gunning has pointed out that Griffith avoided theatrical posing

to achieve naturalism even if it meant losing some of the characters' facial and frontal body expressions.

- 48 See Vardac 1968, especially chap. 2, "The Melodrama: Cinematic Conceptions and Screen Techniques," pp. 20–22 and 46–48 ["The device of the dual box set was an old one. . . . Two rooms were . . . simultaneously placed upon the stage. . . ."]; Fell 1974, especially chap. 2, "Dissolves by Gaslight," pp. 20–23; and Hagan 1982:240.
- 49 For a detailed discussion of camera movement in early cinema, see Gartenberg 1980:1–16, 1982:169–180.

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THE "CHASER THEORY"

I. Another Look at the "Chaser Theory"

Charles Musser

My film, *Before the Nickelodeon*, is an hour-long documentary about Edwin S. Porter, the maker of *The Great Train Robbery*, and the pre-Griffith (1895–1908) American cinema. In many ways the documentary takes a new approach to early cinema, concentrating on the dialectical relations between production methods and approaches to representation. I have also dealt with these issues in a number of articles (Musser 1979, 1981, 1983b).

In one area, *Before the Nickelodeon* appears to take an outdated position that has fallen into disfavor with some film scholars, such as Robert C. Allen (Allen 1977a, 1977b, 1979a). It presents, in the course of its historical narrative, the traditional argument that American cinema declined in popularity during the early 1900s and was "rescued" by the story film. The following article presents my research and analyses on this issue in a more elaborate and closely argued manner than a film could possibly allow.

Historical Accounts

The historical study of American cinema is in a state of exciting disarray. In many cases, accepted pronouncements by several generations of film historians have been called into question and often superseded by new analyses. Issues once considered of little importance are being reexamined and reformulated. One such issue is the shift to story films during the 1896–1907 period. According to many standard histories, a "chaser period" existed during the late 1890s and/or early 1900s, during which cinema's popularity was at a low point.¹ At a time when vaudeville was probably the single most important outlet for films, pictures generally were shown at the end of vaudeville programs as "chasers." In many instances, substantial portions of the audience left before or during the concluding turn of films; in other cases, theaters abandoned moving pictures entirely. This decline in films' popularity generally has been attributed to

the limited variety of motion picture subjects—mostly travel films, news topicals, and short comedies. The resolution of this crisis is supposed to be the rise of the story film, particularly one film, *The Great Train Robbery* (December 1903). Such story films renewed audience interest in moving pictures and so encouraged the nickelodeon boom of storefront theaters (see Jacobs 1939).

One scholar who has challenged this account is Robert C. Allen. He argues that the chaser period is a myth perpetuated by historians in a self-referential, self-validating system that lacks primary research necessary to prove or invalidate their claims. Based on his research, Allen argues that the chaser period is really a "chaser theory" without any basis in historical reality. As Allen concludes, "From the primary source material I have been able to locate and examine, it does not appear that motion pictures in vaudeville sank to the low level of popularity suggested by most film historians" (1979a:10). Citing a significant number of instances when motion pictures received kudos from the press and trade papers, Allen argues that film programs were never consistently bad enough to chase vaudeville audiences away. According to Allen,

If the chaser theory is undefensible, then why do we find it in so many histories of early American cinema? The reason is a simple, though distressing one: little original scholarship into the exhibition situation existing prior to the nickelodeon has been conducted, and film historians like Sklar, Jowett, Jacobs, etc., concerned with the historical development of the American cinema over a forty or seventy year period, have seen fit to rely entirely upon secondary sources for their information in this area. In fact, Jowett, Sklar, Jacobs and North are heavily reliant upon a single early writer on motion picture history: Robert Grau. . . . His *Theatre of Science* (1914) is the key source for information on the chaser period used by many historians. While it is true that Grau "was there" during the period in question, his account of events fifteen or more years in the past is peppered with inaccuracies, entirely undocumented and contradictory with aspects of his account of the same events contained in his other writings. [ibid:10–11]

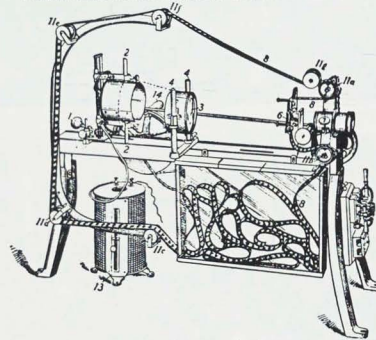
While Allen acknowledges that some vacillation occurred based on the newsworthiness of topical films, he argues that producers and exhibitors generally were able to keep their audiences entertained.

Allen's rejection of the chaser period is part of a larger argument. If, as he argues, cinema's popularity did not decline, then the rise of the story film was not a precondition of the nickelodeon boom, nor was it necessarily due to consumer demand. In making his argument, Allen does not locate the shift to story films at the end of the chaser period (ca. 1903). He argues

Charles Musser makes films in New York City. He also works as a film historian for the Thomas Edison Papers at Rutgers University. This fall the Papers is publishing a six-reel microfilm edition: Motion Picture Catalogs by American Producers and Distributors, 1894–1908.



Great Reduction, Owing to Enlargement of Factory.
THE NEW IMPROVED PORTABLE
CINEOGRAPH
THE LIGHTEST, CHEAPEST AND MOST PERFECT PROJECTING MACHINE ON
THE MARKET, ESPECIALLY ADAPTED FOR TRAVELING PURPOSES.



All lenses used for the Cineograph are ground under my own personal supervision; that is one of the secrets of the clear pictures shown by the Cineograph. Edison's or any other make of film can be used. Weight of CINEOGRAPH, eleven pounds; weight of Adjustable Cast Iron Stand, thirty-one pounds. You see that it is constructed to weigh as little as possible. It can be set up or removed in less than ten minutes. It is almost noiseless. Two 75 watt, written guarantees given with each machine. The CINEOGRAPH complete, with an Adjustable Cast Iron Stand, Lamp, Condenser, Objective Lens and Mount, also Cinema Light Lamp in complete running order, \$80. Large discounts given on all films. Testimonials, Catalogue and list of new latest subjects of films can be had on application. "Inauguration" films on hand. Write for films of "Corbett Fight." The CINEOGRAPH can be seen in operation at any time at the factory and salesroom.
S. LUBIN, MANUFACTURING OPTICIAN,
21 South Eighth Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

ATTORNEYS WANTED

Lubin's Cineograph from early 1897. It still shows a continuous band of film. From the *New York Clipper*. Photograph by Suzanne Williamson.

◀ Searchlight Theater, Tacoma, Washington, 1900–1902. The only pr nickelodeon theater for which there is detailed box office information (see p. 35). From the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

MURRAY & CO.
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CHICAGO
LUBIN'S

CIRCUS CANVASES,
Poles and Nicks, 25 Yds. Stage, etc.
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SECOND-HAND (LAMP, SEAT, ETC.) FOR SALE.
HERE WE ARE AGAIN.
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CIRCUS TRUNKS.
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Kingling Bros., 400 East Second,
Pierpough-Sells Bros., 25 East Second.
See our list of goods in the
C. A. TAYLOR TRUNK WORKS,
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UP-TO-DATE
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SHOW PRINTERS
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First WALL TRUNK
Second Canvas Coy'd, Steel Horned
Two Trunks
30 in. 18 in. 12 in. 10 in. 8 in. 6 in.
15 BROADWAY ST. CHICAGO

IF YOU DON'T USE A
"Central Circus Trunk"

that fictional "features" of approximately 500 to 1000 feet began to dominate U.S. filmmaking around 1907 and views it as a *reponse* to (not a cause of) the rise of the nickelodeons. For Allen, the nickelodeon era increased demand for film product and hence required a steady rate of production. Making story films was more predictable and efficient: film companies could easily mass-produce them, maximizing their profits. The switch to fictional films was thus the studios' choice, even though audiences, in fact, continued to find actualities attractive (Allen 1977a:9–17, 1977b:217).

Allen's point of view has found considerable acceptance among a new generation of film historians. Thus, I find myself in an unusual historiographic position: my research leads me to defend the "undefensible" by offering qualified support to some of those historians Allen has somewhat casually dismissed. While questioning historical research and documentation is crucial in assessing the value of any analysis, Allen's criticism of previous research methodologies may be too sweeping and dismissive. For instance, Jacobs did do a significant amount of original re-

search for *The Rise of the American Film*. Although Jacobs's footnotes are too meager, his bibliography does include sources that Allen does not use (e.g., *Views and Film Index*) as well as sources that neither Allen nor I have yet consulted (*Leslie's Weekly*, *Film Reports*, etc.). From his research, Jacobs proposed a time frame for the chaser period—1900–1903—that is different than Grau's—1898–1901 (Jacobs 1939:5, 584).

Allen's attribution of the "chaser theory" to Grau alone is incorrect, since comments about cinema's earlier difficulties appear with some frequency between 1903 and 1910. In fact, such observations appear both prior to Grau's *Theatre of Science* (1914) and in a variety of sources. One source used by Jacobs was Gaston Méliès's American 1903 catalogue, which claimed that his brother Georges "is the originator of the class of cinematograph films which are made from artificially arranged scenes, the creation of which has given new life to the trade at a time when it was dying out (Méliès 1903:5; cited in Jacobs 1939:29–30).

Other remarks bearing on the chaser period appeared in trade journals from the early nickelodeon



An audience at New York's Proctor's Pleasure Palace, 1899. From *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*.

era. The Miles Brothers, one of the first firms to rent films in the United States, remarked in March 1906:

What a change has come over the Moving Picture Turn in Vaudeville and everywhere! Three or four years ago, when the moving pictures came on in the vaudeville theatres, you would see over half the audience [put] on their wraps and take their departure. Notice the present day vaudeville audience. They all stay now until the last "good night" slide is thrown. The answer is: Some of the best brains of the country are now devoted to turning out the finest things in moving pictures.²

Less than two months later, *Views and Film Index* made similar observations:

When the pictures were first shown in the vaudeville houses more than one-half the audience left the theatre when this part of the programme was announced. Such is not now the case. At present very few leave when the pictures are reached, proving conclusively that the people are interested in it.³

Chaser conditions existed at Denver's Orpheum Theatre from about 1901–1902 to about 1903–1904, until a new manager took over:

[Carson] found the audiences standing up, putting on wraps and leaving the house the instant the pictures were put on the screen. This did not suit him. "If we have an act on this bill that the people don't want we will either take it off or we will make it popular," was his remark, and he at once began investigating. He found the usual state of affairs. Suddenly there was a change. The orchestra started up and the stage hands got busy with the effects. People who stood up and started to put on wraps from force of habit paused, sat down and looked at the pictures. There was a "big hand" at the finish. At the next performance the same thing happened and within a week not a soul left the theatre before the close of the pictures.

Then Mr. Carson took a new step. A bill was sent on from the booking agency and there were two awkward waits for stage setting between the numbers. It was impossible to arrange the programme to avoid these. That same week the "Robbery of the Leadville Stage" came on the market and Carson had it. He put it on in one of the waits and had a full equipment of effects. The result was like a flash of powder. The audience stood up and applauded with unprecedented vigor. It was the same thing week after week and Max Fabish, who handles the box office, soon went upstairs and told that a large number of people had bought seats for other performances—repeaters—to see a certain picture a second or third time. This was actual cash picked up that would not have been secured for the house.⁴

UBIN, LARGEST MANUFACTURER 21 S. Eighth St., Philadelphia, Pa.

URE LINES. EDISON FILMS

THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY

Patented and Copyrighted.

Replete with Thrilling and Exciting Incidents in Fourteen Scenes.

Was shown to enthusiastic houses during Xmas week in New York at the following theatres:

Hurtig & Seamon's Circle Theatre
Proctor's 125th St.

Keith's 14th St.
Harlem Opera House
Tony Pastor's Eden Musee
Huber's Museum
Orpheum, Brooklyn
Comedy Theatre
Orpheum Music Hall

SEND FOR FULLY ILLUSTRATED AND DESCRIPTIVE PAMPHLET.

Edison Exhibition Kinetoscope, \$115.00. Edison Universal Kinetoscope, \$75.00.

MAIN OFFICE AND FACTORY, Orange, N. J.
EDISON MANUFACTURING CO., NEW YORK OFFICE: 83 Chambers St.
OFFICE FOR UNITED KINGDOM: 25 Gray's Inn Road, Holborn, London, W.C. England
EUROPEAN OFFICE: 22 Rempart Saint Georges, Antwerp, Belg.

OPERA CHAIRS

Why not up you by putting Opera Chairs like chairs have been exchange, and allow a in H. D. WARNER 63 Fifth Avenue, cor. 13th Street.

From the *New York Clipper*, January 1904. Photograph by Suzanne Williamson.

In 1908 *Film Index* again recalled:

For years [pictures] were used as "house cleaners"—at the end or during intermissions of programmes—and as far back as five years ago managers were declaring that the pictures were being used as "fillers-ins," "emergencies," etc., and the audiences would not stand for them more than a season or two more.⁵

In January 1910, *Moving Picture World* commented:

We who write this, first made the acquaintance of the moving picture in its public aspect in a vaudeville house. This was just after the Lumières made their wonderful success in the year 1896. The moving pictures then became part of the public entertainment shown in the great European cities. For a time it was received with wonderment but ere long it fell in public esteem.

It became what is known in this country as a "chaser." It occasionally preceded the star act of the evening, or it ended the entertainment. The result was apparent and it continued apparent for a long time. People walked around the promenade or went and indulged in liquid refreshment or they left the theatre altogether. The moving picture was tolerated by some, bored others, pleased and interested only a very few.⁶

In short, many pre-Grau references to the chaser period can be found in trade journals and catalogs. They usually place moving pictures at the bottom of the bill where they concluded a vaudeville entertainment. This position in the program traditionally served a chaser function. Such acts were not purposefully bad acts, but they were weak. Many different kinds of acts (not just dumb acts, as Allen suggests [1977b:48–50]) were placed in this position. Some people always left the theater during the last act as

people now leave a football or baseball game before it is over.

The distinction between a weak act and a bad act could be a fine one, which Carl Laemmle, future president of Universal, exploited in an advertisement for the Laemmle Film Service in early 1907:

Do you know what chasers are?

Some of the vaudeville houses about the country are using their moving pictures as "chasers." In other words to chase the people out of the theatre and let them know the show is over.

Now just think of that!

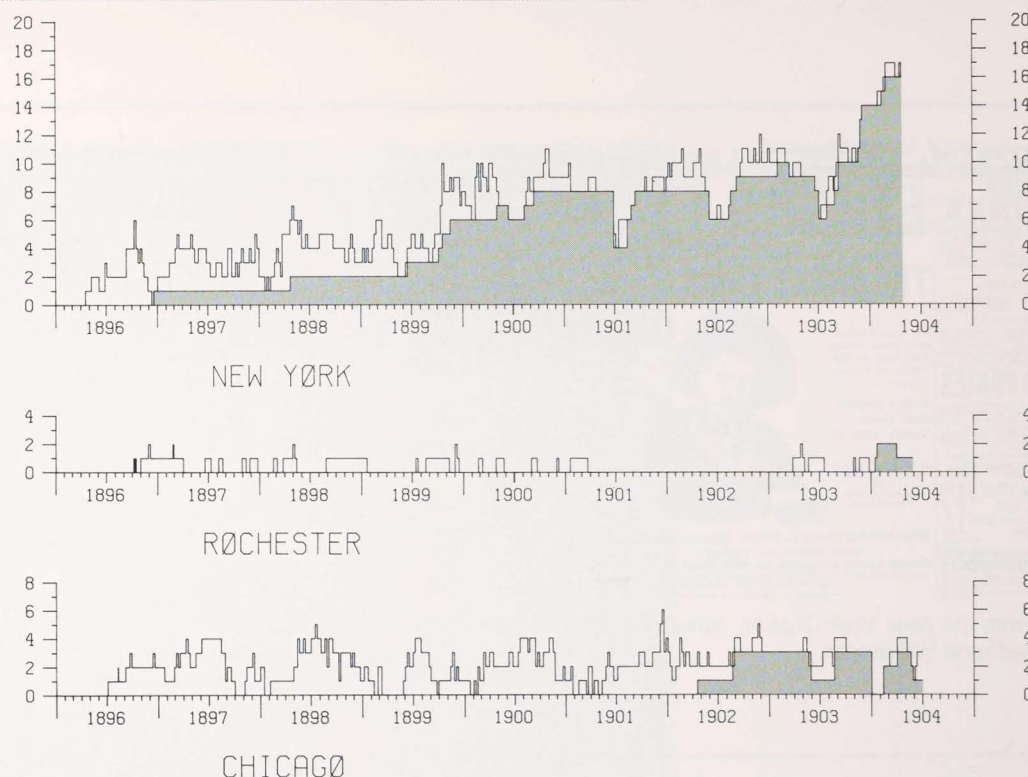
Their films are so dead and dull and uninteresting that they use them as "chasers."⁷

While Laemmle's ad was indirectly criticized in the trades for referring to conditions that no longer existed, his usage of the term was not disputed.⁸ This last act, however, was often a chaser in another sense—like beer chasing a shot of whisky. Headline attractions near the end of the bill were followed by an act with less "kick." Although vaudeville managers put films at the end of the bill because they were a weak act,⁹ the above evidence does not indicate that moving pictures were actually removed from the bill—an apparent contradiction that will be explored later. In Denver, the manager moved films out of the chaser position once their popularity was reestablished. Given the frequency of such references, it is significant that no one, to my knowledge at least, took issue with these statements when they were made.

Writing a survey history like *The Rise of the American Film* imposes certain constraints on the depth of one's research into any given topic. While references like those cited above seem to be a sufficient basis for Jacobs's basic assertion, they are recollections of a personal, retrospective nature that need to be illuminated by documentation from the period. Detailed primary source research can help us understand the breadth and depth of this crisis as well as its underlying causes and the specific ways in which it was resolved. Although Allen has researched the 1896–1907 period and offers useful counterexamples to statements by Gilbert Seldes and others whose analyses are hopelessly reductive, his research is too selective. There are many times when film programs were barely mentioned ("and the biography" or "the vitagraph continued" frequently appear in the sources Allen cites) or apparently considered entirely unworthy of notice. Nor does he place this evidence in relation to information of another order—for instance, financial records.

Motion Picture Exhibition Sites Located in Selected Cities: 1896–1904

■ Theaters which showed films for more than one year. Such permanent exhibition sites often closed for the summer months accounting for periodic dips in the number of theaters.



Exhibition Patterns

Although theaters did not, as a rule, drop films from their bill according to the evidence cited above, one potentially significant indication of cinema's commercial status and its popularity can be found by tracing the number of theaters showing films. While the raw material for such a statistical analysis is fragmentary, scattered, and vast, the gathering of such data can and should be done. I have compiled figures for Manhattan and Chicago between April 1896 and March 1904. These data are important for several reasons. New York City was the largest market for films in the United States and the center of the American motion picture, theater, and vaudeville industries. A decline in New York City would be witnessed firsthand by film companies like Edison, Biograph, and Vitagraph. Furthermore, since the national trade journals such as the *New York Clipper* and the *New York Dramatic Mirror* foregrounded industry trends occurring in New York, such developments would be noted by theater managers in other parts of the country. Chicago is another useful example because it served as the urban cultural center for much of the Midwest and was the second-largest production center for films in the United States. Its vaudeville managers operated outside the commercial sphere of the East Coast circuits (e.g., Proctor's, Keith's, Percy Williams's). Their opposition to eastern domination also gave the midwestern exhibitors some room in which to operate.

While this study is the first of its kind for these two key urban centers, George Pratt had done a similar study for Rochester, New York, and both Douglas Gomery and Allen's students have done local studies. Pratt has generously made his research available for this article.¹⁰ Such research is only a beginning, but it is a systematic beginning that can be built on in the future.

Figure 1, "Known Exhibition Sites in Manhattan, Chicago, and Rochester," presents two types of statistical information. The charts show the number of places known to be exhibiting films on a week-by-week basis for 1896–1904. They also make an important distinction between sites where films were shown for short-run engagements and those where they had indefinite runs and became permanent features. Since these charts depend on ads and trade notices, they have certain obvious limitations.¹¹ Many exhibitions occurred that are not included on these charts. The lyceum circuit, burlesque houses, penny arcades relying exclusively on street trade, and summer parks do not show up or are underrepresented. Clearly these charts—like this entire article—do not deal with cinema in rural areas, where traveling showmen relied on quite different forms of exhibition. Since vaudeville houses provided crucial urban outlets for exhibition in the prenickelodeon era, this bias does not undermine the charts' utility for some kinds of analysis.

The purpose of this article is not simply to reestablish the existence of a chaser period but to explore some of the contours of film practice in the prenickelodeon era. While Allen tends to treat the postnovelty/prenickelodeon period between 1897 and 1905 as an undifferentiated period in cinema's history, the data for the chart of "Known Exhibition Sites in Manhattan," in combination with other information, point toward five more or less distinct phases of change and development within New York-based film exhibition.

1 April 1896 to late 1896: Cinema's novelty era: Moving pictures are a new form of screen entertainment. The popularity of films is very high.

2 Late 1896 to mid-June 1899: Cinema is integrated into the mainstream of screen entertainment (the practices of lantern shows and stereopticon programming). The exhibitor functions as a co-creator. Moving pictures generally are treated like other acts by vaudeville managers—short runs, with a corresponding lack of commercial stability.

3 Mid-1899 to late 1900: There is a major expansion of theaters showing moving pictures. Competition forces vaudeville houses to schedule film programs for indefinite runs, making them permanent features.

4 Late 1900 to early 1903: Films generally remain a permanent feature, but their popularity declines as a result of fewer new subjects and audience restlessness with the concept of cinema as a visual newspaper. The industry undergoes a series of commercial disruptions. Meanwhile, tentative steps are taken toward centralizing creative functions inside the production companies.

5 Mid-1903 to 1905: There is rapid expansion of traditional exhibition outlets to a saturation point. Such developments coincide with the rapid ascendancy of the story film. Certain structural changes occur within the industry, setting the stage for the nickelodeon era.

Since my research indicates that the New York-based film industry dominated the nation's film industry in the prenickelodeon era, even though it did not achieve absolute hegemony, such periodization is not as simple for Chicago or Rochester, where advances were made in some areas of film practice but not in others. While detailed comparisons will be made below, Chicago's and Rochester's novelty periods started later and merged into the second period. Moving pictures did not become a permanent feature in Chicago's vaudeville houses until the summer of 1902, almost three years after New York. In Rochester, films became a permanent feature only after the rise of the story film. While the shift to story films occurred during 1903 in all three cities, it did not lead to an expansion in exhibition outlets in Chicago as it did in New York or Rochester. This inability to expand within traditional outlets is one reason that nickelodeon theaters appeared in Chicago many months before they did in New York or Rochester.

Cinema's Novelty Period

From the opening of the Vitascope at Koster and Bial's in New York City on April 23, 1896, moving pictures proved extremely popular with vaudeville-going audiences. Rival motion picture exhibitors rapidly appeared to sell their services to other theater managers. The Latham's Eidoloscope opened at Hammerstein's Olympia in New York on May 11, 1896, and had a successful five-week run. The Lumière Cinématographe first appeared at Keith's Union Square Theatre on June 29, 1896.¹² The *New York Clipper* reported that "nothing has ever before taken so strong and seeming lasting hold upon the patrons of this house as the cinematographe."¹³ At Proctor's 23rd Street Theatre in September, there was still plenty of applause for the Vitascope, and many of the new colored views had to be repeated.¹⁴ The high point of Manhattan's novelty period came during the week of October 12, when the Biograph was at the Olympia, the Vitascope at Proctor's 23rd Street Theatre and Proctor's Pleasure Palace, the Kineopticon at Pastor's, the Lumière Cinématographe at Keith's, and "moving pictures" at Miner's Bowery Theatre. The successful diffusion of moving pictures precipitated their demise by undermining their novelty value. Success led to audience saturation and familiarity followed by a rapid decline in theaters showing "animated photographs." As the week of December 14 began, not a single theater in New York City was showing motion pictures.

In Manhattan, the extensive nature of film exhibition rapidly exhausted the novelty value of moving pictures. Such extensive proliferation did not occur in Chicago, where competition among theaters was apparently less intense—and the New York-based exhibition services were farther away. Chicago's Vitascope premiere also came two months after its New York debut—on July 5, 1896, at Hopkins South Side Theater. The program was well received. The *Chicago Tribune* reported that "it is difficult to obtain standing room at Hopkins South Side Theater these afternoon and evenings and the popularity is due in great measure to the exhibition of Edison's Vitascope."¹⁵ Manager Hopkins, who secured the Vitascope rights for Chicago and Illinois, claimed that moving pictures were "drawing scores of hundreds of people who never before attended this popular form of entertainment."¹⁶ This theater had a virtual monopoly for two months. In mid-September the Lumière Cinématographe opened at Chicago's Schiller Theater, where it remained until mid-March 1897. Except for the Phantascope, which ran for one unsuccessful day in August, and the Animatographe, which had a week run in September, the Vitascope and Lumière Cinématographe were the only services showing films in Chicago through the end of

November. By the end of November, after the Vitascope Company had been clearly undermined, Hopkins abandoned his stake in the exhibition service and hired alternative exhibition services. It was not until the summer of 1897 that as many as four Chicago theaters were showing films. By October 1897, films were no longer being shown in Chicago theaters.

Cinema's novelty period should not be described simply in terms of this initial burst of enthusiasm for moving pictures. This period also had its characteristic methods of representation and production as well as a common industrial structure. These elements and their interrelationship have to be explored. Representational techniques of the novelty period were epitomized by the Vitascope: "lifelike motion" in conjunction with "lifelike" photography and a life-sized image provided the new level of verisimilitude that occasionally compelled theater patrons in the first row to run from their seats when *The Wave* was shown crashing onto the beach or when *The Empire State Express* came charging toward them.¹⁷ At its most effective, the Vitascope exploited this new dimension of projected moving images as a thrill, while other screen strategies were secondary or went unexplored. The comparative lack of complex structures of cinematic meaning that is seen by some historians as proof of the screen's primitive qualities effectively emphasized what was novel in the new invention.

Like Edison's peep-show kinetoscope, the Vitascope showed a twenty-second loop of film spliced end-to-end and threaded on a bank of rollers. Raff and Gammon (1896) suggested that each film could be shown "for ten or fifteen minutes if desired, although four or five minutes is better." When, as in most cases, one projector was used, a two-minute wait occurred between films. At Koster and Bial's in New York and at Keith's Theatre in Boston, where two projectors were used, there was no wait. However, films still had to be projected for at least two minutes while a new film was threaded on to the other projector. Thus, each film subject was shown at least six times. As a Boston newspaper noted, "The scene is repeated several times, then the click click stops and the screen is blank. A moment's interval, then a pretty blonde serpentine dancer appears."¹⁸ Although two projectors eliminated waiting time between films, they did not reduce the number of times a film was projected at one showing. Such repetition effectively foregrounded the novel qualities of moving pictures. Little room for or concern with editorial techniques existed in these first exhibitions. Films were shown separately, treated as discrete series of images. Later the problem of the pause sometimes was solved by alternating film subjects with musical selections.¹⁹

Film companies, for all their apparent differences, had many fundamental similarities in the novelty era. Each company not only exhibited films but generally produced or secured its own exclusive supply of films—a characteristic of the Vitascope Company, the Lumière Agency, the American Mutoscope Company with its Biograph, the Eidoloscope and Kineopticon. The heavy booking of New York venues with moving picture exhibitions not only exhausted cinema's novelty value but occurred as many of these companies were losing their exclusive supply of film subjects. By October 1896, the International Film Company and the Columbia Phonograph Company were duplicating Edison films and selling them to independent exhibitors.²⁰ The Edison Company then started to sell its own productions through Maguire and Baucus, undercutting Raff and Gammon. Thus, just as it became possible for exhibitors to function effectively without producing their own films, it became increasingly problematic for these same exhibitors to rely only on cinema's new level of verisimilitude to entertain their audiences. In New York City at least, different aspects of the novelty era unraveled at the same time.²¹

Cinema Lacks Commercial Stability

Although the Lumière Cinématographe reopened at the Eden Musée on December 18, 1896, moving pictures did not return to New York's vaudeville theaters until mid-January 1897. Between mid-December 1896 and early February 1898, at least one and as many as five theaters simultaneously had films on their bills. Vaudeville managers thought of moving pictures as a popular turn that had to be replaced more or less frequently to keep the bill fresh and lively: they were not considered a permanent attraction. During this sixty-week period, Tony Pastor had motion pictures on his bill for twelve weeks during seven different runs. At the other extreme, Keith's hired the Biograph for one run that lasted fifty weeks. The Proctor theaters and Huber's Museum (with its vaudeville theater) fell somewhere in-between.

Only one theater, the Eden Musée, organized its entertainments on principles other than vaudeville. It did not offer its patrons a variety format but took several different media, such as orchestra music and waxworks, and varied these from week to week. Different music and a constantly new supply of waxworks based on contemporary developments in the news supplied the variety. Films were added as a third element in the Musée's programming, easily fitting into this presentational strategy and quickly becoming a permanent feature.

By the beginning of this second period, film loops and the Vitascope virtually had disappeared from major New York theaters. Although exhibition companies like Biograph and the Lumière Agency, which did not use loops, survived and even thrived, the celebration of "lifelike movement" was no longer the basis for cinema's popularity. Topicality of subject matter became an important criterion for spectators and reviewers. Interest was also rekindled as exhibitors began to combine several different views into a sequence to form a "headliner." During the week of March 14, 1897, the Biograph at Keith's Union Square showed "Wonderful Views of McKinley's Inauguration," including *71st Regiment of New York, Troop A of Cleveland* (President McKinley's Escort), *McKinley and Cleveland in the Carriage of Honor*, and *The Crowds at the Capitol*.²² In June the Biograph showed "Three Marvelously Accurate and Thrilling Views of the *Brooklyn Handicap* on Opening Day": *The Crowds on the Track*, *The Parade of Thoroughbreds Going to the Post*, and *The Exciting Finish*.²³ Such editorial practices had been used by earlier exhibitors who juxtaposed lantern slides to create a more complex, integrated program. Although the collapse of cinema as a novelty in New York encouraged the development of these new (for cinema) practices, they were applied elsewhere, too. Biograph's McKinley views were shown in both Chicago and Rochester, where they extended people's initial fascination with cinema by adding new elements.

As the second phase of this second period began in early 1898, the exhibitor's ability to structure images into more complex programs was enhanced by new technology. The commercialization of a combination magic lantern/moving picture machine allowed the exhibitor to cut quickly back and forth between slides and films.²⁴ Such techniques were used for the Eden Musee/Salmi Morse *Passion Play*, which opened at the Eden Musee on January 31, 1898.²⁵ The Cuban crisis and subsequent Spanish-American War also provided a subject around which entire programs could be built. In the first phase of this period, the unit of higher organization generally had been the sequence (fight films being the single obvious exception); during this second phase, exhibitors edited their short films more and more into unified programs.

The Spanish-American War was the dominant feature of this second phase, further propelling moving pictures into the role of a visual newspaper. With the sinking of the *Maine* on February 15, 1898, interest in "war films" increased sharply and by the end of the month films of "the battleship Maine, U.S. Marines and U.S. Cavalry were timely presentations and cheered to the echo"²⁶ at Proctor's Pleasure Palace in New York, where the Biograph had started a new run. Biograph was the first film producer to exploit the war, quickly sending cameraman Billy Bitzer to Cuba.

The sinking of the *Maine* left Keith's Union Square Theatre in an awkward situation: Keith's, which had placed the most emphasis on moving pictures as a vaudeville attraction, had to do without these motion picture headline attractions until April 25, the day war was declared on Spain. For several weeks Keith showed "The Electorama" instead. It was "an ingenious mechanical device illustrating with moving figures, boats, etc. all incidents connected with the blowing up of the battleship Maine."²⁷ By the time Keith's reacquired Biograph's services, the Edison Company had its own films from Cuba on the market. Advertising themselves as "Edison's Wargraph," exhibitors moved into Proctor's 23rd Street Theatre and the Pleasure Palace, while Biograph returned to Keith's. B. F. Keith would not be placed in the same situation again. He made the moving pictures a permanent feature. Since the Biograph, with its large-format film, offered the best technical quality, had access to European subjects taken by its sister companies, and had management that aggressively filmed local subjects, it was the logical choice. Keith also put the Biograph in his Boston and Philadelphia theaters on a permanent basis, giving the Biograph Company an exhibition circuit that was the envy of every other exhibition company in the United States.

Other vaudeville managers, however, did not immediately share Keith's conclusions. Although seven theaters were showing films in New York City two weeks after the war began, by October only four theaters still had films on their bill. When Vitagraph's run at Proctor's Pleasure Palace ended on November 7, 1898, the *New York Dramatic Mirror* reported that "the wargraph was omitted much to the relief of the regular patrons."²⁸ Five weeks later, Vitagraph's run at Proctor's 23rd Street Theatre ended as well. In both cases, Vitagraph tried to broaden its programming to maintain the favor of Proctor's customers. Although Blackton and Smith showed films like *The Vanishing Lady* and *Burglar on the Roof* during September 1898 at both theaters, the Vitagraph lost its place on the bill. Throughout the first half of 1899, moving pictures continued to make brief appearances on the bill of a number of different theaters, including Hurtig and Seamon's Music Hall, Huber's Museum, Dewey Theatre, Star Theatre, Pastor's, Sam T. Jack's, and Miner's Bowery Theatre.

Moving pictures in Chicago, after enjoying a year of continuous popularity and corresponding commercial success, fell from favor in the fall of 1897. By October, no Chicago theater was showing films. As in

New York's theaters, films later reappeared on vaudeville bills, but for brief runs. Although Biograph war films aroused patriotic responses when they were shown at Hopkins Theater in February, March, and April, rival houses did not compete by adding their own film programs for several months. While four or five theaters and summer parks were advertising and showing films (mostly of the war) between May and September 1898, the Kohl and Castle vaudeville houses (the Olympic, Haymarket, and Chicago Opera House) showed films only for one week in one theater. The rash of Chicago film exhibitions receded by October 1898; by February 1899, once again there were no films shown (or at least advertised) in this midwestern center. While the war did increase the number of Chicago venues showing films temporarily, it had no long-term consequences on the commercial relations between film exhibition and vaudeville in that city.

Although war films were very popular in Rochester, they did not seem to impact significantly on exhibition patterns even while the war was going on. The Biograph played for four weeks in March and April 1898, then returned after the war was over for a longer run that began by featuring war films. In New York City, however, the competition between rival vaudeville houses had been intense, with the value of war films leading to a lasting association between the most prominent producer (Biograph) and the most important chain of vaudeville theaters (Keith's). Such a permanent association was a key innovation, which became more generalized during the third period.

Moving Pictures Become a Permanent Attraction

In mid-1899, American Vitagraph was hired to show films at Pastor's Theater in Manhattan and proved to be a permanent feature, running without interruption until Tony Pastor closed its door in 1908 (see Musser 1983a). This initiated a third period, in which the number of theaters showing motion pictures markedly increased and, perhaps more important, major exhibitors of films established long-term, stable relationships with vaudeville theaters and circuits. Pastor's decision to hire the Vitagraph for an indefinite run soon paid rich dividends. When Admiral Dewey arrived in New York City to celebrate his victory over the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay, the *New York Clipper* reported:

The American Vitagraph has been excelling in enterprise during the past week. Several views were taken of the Olympia [the Admiral's flagship] and projected here the

evening of the same day, and the Dewey land parade was seen on Saturday evening, five hours after the views were taken. The Vitagraph is a popular fixture here and continually gains in favor.²⁹

Proctor's theaters did not show films but celebrated Dewey's arrival by exhibiting a cycloramic oil painting of the Manila bombardment. While Proctor's also projected photographic slides of Dewey's reception, moving pictures received much more favorable comment in the press. Proctor's was outdone again the following week. While the American Vitagraph was receiving applause for its enterprise by showing pictures of the yacht races at Pastor's and Koster and Bial's Music Hall only a few hours after their occurrence, Proctor's kept in touch with the sporting event in a cumbersome and ultimately less interesting, less flexible manner. The positions of the boats on the race course were reported to the theater by Marconi's wireless and their progress charted on an immense map between the acts. Such a map was useless during the evenings when most patrons attended the theater and on off days. Manager J. Austin Fynes and owner F. F. Proctor saw the error of their ways and quickly formalized a relationship with William Paley, famed for his films of the Spanish-American War. His Kalatechnoscope opened on October 9 at Proctor's 23rd Street Theatre and two weeks later at the Pleasure Palace on 58th Street, where Paley also had an office and lab facilities that enabled him to put film subjects on to the screen with maximum speed. During the first week, *The Burning of the Nutmeg* was shown on the very day of the disaster. In the trade papers, Fynes announced that he had booked the Kalatechnoscope for an indefinite run,³⁰ and it remained at Proctor houses into the nickelodeon era.

In early November 1899, Percival Waters's newly formed Kinetograph Company began to show films at Manhattan's Huber's Museum, beginning a relationship that would endure for many years. Once the Proctor Circuit expanded to four New York houses during 1900—opening its 5th Avenue Theatre on May 7 and its 125th Street Theatre on August 20—eight Gotham theaters were exhibiting films on a permanent basis. Managers now conceived of films in very different terms than other vaudeville turns. They were permanent fixtures, not acts booked for a few weeks or months at a time. (The diffusion of a reframing device was a minor technical innovation that improved exhibitions and made a permanent service more attractive.³¹) Vaudeville managers apparently recognized that film companies were organizations that needed steady commercial outlets if they were to retain the necessary staff and resources to cover important news events. Vaudeville theaters helped to provide a steady commercial base from which the major exhibi-

tion companies could operate during the 1899–1905 period.

The stability of reliable exhibition outlets had a profound effect on the New York–based American film industry. Thomas Edison's decision to invest in a film studio on 21st Street in New York City was encouraged by the resulting demand for film subjects. Before 1899, the Edison Company had found it expedient to let its licensees take many—if not most—of the films it distributed. By 1900, the company was seeking to centralize production under its direct control. The Edison and Lubin companies began to make and sell multishot films—an indication that producers were asserting their authority more actively in the editorial process.³² The more permanent nature of exhibition sites was an influential factor in enabling producers to begin centralizing creative control in their companies.

The situation in Chicago was very different than New York: No vaudeville managers made films a permanent attraction during 1899 or 1900 (although the Chutes, a summer park, did have a moving picture theater). During the period from early 1899 to mid-1901, the average number of exhibition sites per week declined from an average of 2.4 during Chicago's novelty era to 1.7. Films were shown less frequently in Rochester as well.

How can we account for the discrepancies between New York on one hand and Chicago and Rochester on the other? Competition and past experiences colored the outlook of New York vaudeville managers, who established strong ties with specific exhibition companies. Chicago managers were never under the same pressures to develop such ties. Because New York managers and eastern vaudeville circuits worked closely with film services, the services could initiate film productions that would have been impossible on a speculative basis. Furthermore, cinema as a visual newspaper worked particularly well in the nation's news center—New York. Big events like the America's Cup races and the Dewey parade could be thrown on the screen the night they occurred, a turnaround that rivaled the New York newspapers. In Rochester, it took a week to ten days before films of a news event arrived. The timeliness of such events had faded by the time such films reached Chicago as well. Chicago not only chose to deemphasize New York–oriented news but avoided New York–based exhibitors (with the single exception of the Biograph). Since Kohl and Castle chose not to support Chicago filmmakers in a fashion remotely comparable to their New York counterparts, a large discrepancy in the success and popularity of cinema as visual newspaper was inevitable. Thus, the rivalry between Chicago and New York, which was particularly strong in the areas of culture and entertainment,

had an adverse effect on Chicago cinema in the 1890s. The differences between these cities' relations to cinema continued in the post-1900 period but took on new aspects.

Crisis and Disruption in the New York Film Industry

Although competition had helped to produce rapid expansion in East Coast film exhibition during 1898–1900, its effect during the early 1900s was much less beneficial. By the beginning of 1901, the New York–based film industry had entered a period of serious disruption, contraction, and reorganization. This fourth period had its bright, profitable (and popular) moments, but overall it was a difficult time for those working in the industry. Although eleven theaters are known to have shown films in Manhattan during October 1900, this number would not be exceeded (and only briefly equaled) during the following two years. Space in the New York newspapers devoted to advertising films declined. Thus, by early May 1901, the Proctor Circuit stopped advertising moving pictures, although trade notices indicate that they remained on the bill. It was not until February of 1904 that Proctor's believed that moving pictures had again become a notable attraction and listed them in their ads. During this same period there were also many weeks when Keith's did not bother to list the Biograph in its ads.³³ Enthusiastic reports for moving pictures also became less and less frequent in the trades after 1900. Most important, once moving pictures became permanent features, they moved to the bottom of vaudeville bills to which film programs had not usually been assigned previously.³⁴ This was an open invitation to patrons to leave if they had already seen the films, disliked the subject matter, wished to avoid the still-persistent flicker effect, or wanted to get home before the hour became too late.

The primary sources that I have been able to locate and examine suggest that from late 1900 to mid-1903 the popularity of cinema in urban settings was generally low and the film industry as a whole was in a state of disruption, even chaos. While this decline was not international in nature, a series of specific legal and technological problems hamstrung the American industry, temporarily eliminating or at least curtailing the activities of most American producers.

By 1900, as Thomas Edison was seeking control of the American industry through patent litigation, many companies retired from the arena of commercial and legal strife. Others persisted in the face of great difficulties: the New York exhibitor Eberhard Schneider was fined and his non-Edison films destroyed in

January 1900.³⁵ Vitagraph operated in legal jeopardy throughout most of 1900, and after a three-month truce ending in mid-January 1901, Edison forced the Vitagraph partners to stop making their own productions.³⁶ Biograph's deteriorating finances during 1900–1901 are documented in surviving records.³⁷

Monthly Earnings of American Mutoscope & Biograph Company from January 1, 1900, to January 1, 1901

January	\$23,501.04
February	12,783.88
March	9,315.08
April	10,986.23
May	14,025.66
June	14,822.29
July	5,832.90
August	8,817.93
September	14,361.42
October	5,070.68
November	9,094.96
December	6,220.25
TOTAL	\$134,892.02

January 1, 1901, to July 1, 1901

	Biograph Earnings	Net Earnings
January	\$1,788.54	\$5,372.10
February	3,007.06	5,189.63
March	2,278.62	4,130.62
April	1,953.82	4,954.41
May	(loss) 926.41	(loss) 499.31
June	(loss) 1,261.27	98.44
TOTAL	\$6,840.36	\$19,245.69

Biograph's moving picture service was becoming less profitable (and popular) in part because the company was limited by its large-format projectors. While exhibitors like Vitagraph or Spoor's Kinodrome Service in Chicago were able to show European imports like Méliès' *Cinderella* or G. A. Smith's *Grandma's Looking Glass* on their 35mm projector, Biograph could not do so. In some cases Biograph copied the most successful European subjects, producing *Grandpa's Reading Glass* to compete with Smith's elaborate subject.³⁸ The company could not justify the expense in other instances—even assuming they were capable of making a film as elaborate as Méliès' fairytale films. The logical move for Biograph might have been to switch to a 35mm format, but its executives dared not do so since the different-sized films might have proved a decisive distinction between the Edison and Biograph systems from a legal standpoint.

The key court case from this period, *Thomas A. Edison v. American Mutoscope and Biograph*, reached its initial conclusion in mid-July 1901. On July 15, Judge Hoyt Wheeler handed down a decision that recognized Edison's patent claims and allowed him effectively to control the industry. While Biograph appealed to a higher court, it was allowed to continue production, subject to certain restrictions. Production records at the Museum of Modern Art indicate that Biograph ceased making acted films on its rooftop studio and concentrated exclusively on actualities.³⁹ Likewise, the company made monthly financial reports to the courts in event of later attachment. Until February 1902, these records were filed giving Biograph's gross income for the Biograph and the cost of negatives and prints.⁴⁰

	Gross Income	Film Costs
August	\$4,565.66	\$710.00
September	4,357.78	1621.73
October	5,110.13	1402.04
November	4,173.50	792.22
December	4,824.00	1594.10
January	4,074.79	954.87
February	4,373.25	818.98

Biograph's defeat also had adverse effects on the few remaining American film producers. Sigmund Lubin was forced to suspend operations and flee to Europe on the recommendation of his lawyer.⁴¹ Rather than increasing production to maintain an adequate level of new film subjects, the Edison Company acted conservatively and made few acted films. Although Edison film sales increased significantly during the 1901–1902 period relative to the previous year, this increase did not come close to equaling the drop in earnings of only the Biograph Company during the same period.⁴²

The Edison Company: Film Sales and Profits

	Film Sales	Film Profits
March 1900–February 1901	\$49,559.89	\$20,278.26
March 1901–February 1902	\$82,107.82	\$37,433.90
March 1902–February 1903	\$75,695.02	\$28,538.07

The disruption of the industry and the shortage of interesting subjects had adverse effects outside New York City. As Pratt (1979:45) reports, "between March 1901 and January 1903 motion pictures vanished from Rochester theater programs."⁴³ In Tacoma, Washington, the Searchlight Theatre closed its doors in June 1902 due to poor and still-decreasing box office receipts. Ticket sales for the last month and a half of 1900 fluctuated between \$110.10 and \$156.10 a week. Ticket sales for the first nine months of 1901

were somewhat lower on the average. The account books show a declining gate after the McKinley films finished their first run in the fall and early winter of 1901. The following is a weekly breakdown from October 1901 until the theater closed on June 1, 1902:⁴⁴

	Featured Subject	Gate
October 13-19	McKinley Funeral	\$99.25
October 20-26	McKinley Funeral	99.10
October 27-November 2	_____	80.85
November 3-9	_____	81.60
November 10-16	Transformations/Egypt	75.40
November 17-23	Corbett and Fitzsimmons	89.00
November 24-30	Bullfight	88.35
December 1-7	War Scenes	70.15
December 8-14	McKinley Funeral	83.85
December 15-21	Tarrant Fire	82.45
December 22-28	Execution of Czolgosz	148.95
December 29-January 4	Carnival Program	109.80
January 5-11	Carnival Program	61.10
January 12-18	Bulldog Tramp	73.10
January 19-25	Bulldog Tramp	56.40
January 26-February 1	Eiffel Tower	30.90
February 2-8	Eiffel Tower	57.85
February 9-15	McKinley Speech	58.50
February 16-22	Czolgosz Execution	80.35
February 23-March 1	Red Riding Hood	70.35
March 2-8	Cinderella	75.05
March 9-15	Trip Through Egypt	62.50
March 16-22	Rough Riders	71.90
March 23-29	??????	86.00
March 30-April 5	??????	86.30
April 6-13	_____	57.05
April 14-20	Boer War	59.70
April 21-27	Bullfight	60.25
April 28-May 4	Carnival Program	48.00
May 5-11	NY Police Parade	40.40
May 12-18	Queen's Funeral	35.80
May 19-25	Red Riding Hood	35.70
May 26-June 1	_____	29.55

Not only did the box office decline in general, but repeated programs almost always drew less the second and third time around: *Execution of Czolgosz* (December 22-28 vs. February 16-22), *Bullfight* (November 24-30 vs. April 21-27), and *Carnival Program* (December 29-January 4 vs. January 5-11 vs. April 28-May 4). Lacking new and exciting subjects, the Searchlight Theatre closed its doors. Only a few exhibitors, like Lyman Howe, who purchased most of his films abroad and visited a given town once or twice a year, were unaffected.⁴⁵ Predictably, Kodak sales of cinematograph films declined during this period:⁴⁶

1897	\$129,383
1898	72,546
1899	134,654
1900	104,425
1901	85,317
1902	89,153

Judge Wheeler's decision favoring Edison's patent claims was reversed on March 10, 1902, by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Biograph announced its victory in the trade papers and quickly revived its business, even as it altered many of its competitive strategies. With the court case behind it, Biograph began to merchandise Warwick films, duped Méliès subjects, and 35mm reduction prints of its own large-format films.⁴⁷ The transition to 35mm was not easy for Biograph and took more than a year to complete—and only then under much commercial prodding. Company executives initially straddled the problem of different-sized films by offering two services—the old Biograph service at \$105 per week and the new "Biographet" service (35mm) at \$65 a week.⁴⁸ The large gauge continued to be used at Keith's theaters, restricting Biograph's selection of films to its own productions. The 35mm service was able to use imported films but did not receive the level of attention that might have made it fully competitive with Vitagraph or the Kinetograph Company. Biograph was hampered by the incompatibility of its two exhibition services. Legal harassment did not end its problems.

Revived competition in 1902 forced the Edison Company to make greater investments in film subjects. Less than two months after Biograph's successful appeal, Edwin Porter began to produce a series of story films: *Appointment by Telephone*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *How They Do Things on the Bowery*, and *Life of an American Fireman*. Porter's move into dramatic story films was abruptly curtailed, however, by the activities of Sigmund Lubin. Lubin had begun to duplicate and openly sell copyrighted Edison films by March 1902. Edison responded with a lawsuit.⁴⁹ The release of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, advertised as completed and ready for sale in late May, was postponed while Edison's lawyers tried to secure a temporary restraining order against their Philadelphia-based competitor.⁵⁰ When they failed, Edison's Kinetograph Department was forced to release the fairytale film without any legal protection for its ownership. William Gilmore, general manager of the Edison Manufacturing Company, directed the company's lawyers to press ahead in a letter filled with frustration:

I do not want to give up the fight if there is a possible way of getting around it, as this man Lubin is continuing to duplicate films that cost us a great many hundreds of dollars to obtain and one particular film that has cost us pretty near a thousand dollars to get the negative, and he simply goes ahead and copies same, making a negative and issuing positive from same indiscriminately so you can see that he is doing our business a great deal of harm and we, apparently have no redress.⁵¹

During the summer and fall of 1902, Edison ceased copyrighting all but a handful of subjects. Judge Dallas then reached a decision in the lower courts on January 22, 1903—one day after *Life of an American Fireman* had been copyrighted—that rejected Edison's method of copyrighting films. As a result, Edison's production all but ceased. Porter's experimentation with dramatic forms was abruptly curtailed and would not resume for six months. Only when Judge Dallas's decision was overruled on April 21, 1903, did Edison's Kinetograph Department resume production.

Allen argues that "to assume the chaser era emerges as a result of the diminishing success of primitive motion pictures to satisfy vaudeville audiences also assumes that American film companies either did not recognize the problem or did nothing to try and solve it" (1979a:6). Yet between roughly January 1901 and early 1903 there was a series of specific incidents that disrupted the activities of all major American producers and most exhibition companies. These incidents did much to prevent them from responding effectively, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to audience expectations. When the dominant, New York-based film industry is considered, Lewis Jacobs's time frame (late 1900–1903) for the chaser period seems quite adequate.

The Situation in Chicago, 1901–1902

In July 1901—at the very moment Edison won his patent victory in the Federal Circuit court—a group of western vaudeville managers that included Kohl and Castle, J. D. Hopkins, and the Orpheum Theatre Company formed a "vaudeville trust" to oppose eastern vaudeville interests then threatening to enter the Chicago market.⁵² As Kohl and Castle prepared for a possible commercial confrontation, the managers began to build a relationship with George Spoor's Kinodrome exhibition service. The Kinodrome Service was in one of their three theaters after July 21, 1901. From October 1901, Kohl and Castle rotated two projectors among their three theaters. The appearance of films related to McKinley's assassination may have encouraged this expansion and underscored the value of having a film service. In May 1902, when the Olympic and Haymarket closed for the summer, the Kinodrome remained as a permanent feature at the Chicago Opera House. When the two houses reopened in late August 1902, the Kinodrome had a permanent position on all three bills. Significantly, moving pictures moved to the chaser position at the bottom of the bill in all these theaters as films became a regular feature. Until this time a turn of films usually appeared in the top half of the bill: in Chicago, once

again, films as an occasional feature apparently received wider approval than they had as a constant presence. The circumstances under which films functioned as "chasers" in the 1901–1903 period should now be apparent. By 1900 (two years later in Chicago), many vaudeville managers had accepted the need to keep motion pictures on the bill. They had built up relationships with a number of different, competing exhibition services: such relationships could not be lightly dismissed. Another unexpected war, hurricane, or presidential assassination could quickly transform the twenty-minute bill of films into a headline attraction. When moving pictures became tedious in the pre-1899 era, managers simply removed them from the bill until audiences were ready to renew their interest—or some noteworthy event demanded their return. By 1900, this was no longer an option many managers felt they could exercise. Yet, given the disruption of the industry, there was an overall shortage of product. Not only was there insufficient investment in new, exciting subjects, but those subjects that were initially popular often ran for many weeks in a single house and were running simultaneously in other houses as well. Avid vaudeville goers might easily have the opportunity to see a single subject many times. By placing films at the end of the bill, such patrons could leave without missing the main acts. The exodus when films were thrown on the screen, however, involved a large part of the audience. Many people never stayed to see the films. Thus, when a Keith manager moved a program of stale films up near the top of his program, patrons enjoyed them because they had not seen them before.⁵³ This suggests that few people indeed stayed for the film programs at the end. Certainly the percentage of the audience that left was high enough to distress those who recalled these conditions in the trade papers of the early nickelodeon era.

If Lewis Jacobs correctly locates the chaser period in 1900–1903, evidence from Chicago allows us to understand why the 1890s were remembered by some as years when the industry was also in a depressed state. In fact, on the basis of quantitative analysis, Chicago conforms to the depression years incorrectly labeled by Robert Grau "the chaser period" (1898–1901). A revival in exhibition sites did occur in Chicago after 1901:

	Weeks	Known Exhibition Sites	Average per Week
February 12, 1899–July 21, 1901	127	214	1.7
July 21, 1901–August 17, 1902	57	132	2.3
August 17, 1902–December 31, 1903	69	221	3.2

A comparison between New York and Chicago reveals that the early commercial history of moving pictures had significant geographical variation. Experiences in one part of the country were different from experiences in another. Although geographical diversity may not be the only reason for the apparently contradictory dates associated with the chaser period by different historians (Allen's criticism of their research is sometimes valid), it certainly is an attractive one. As Janet Staiger observed in relation to the star system, "the more I study U.S. film history, the more I realize that the older histories are less wrong than I used to believe they were. Often, the problems I have with them are not so much in fact but in emphasis, or more precisely in the theoretical assumptions that have determined their choice and arrangement of those facts" (Staiger 1983:10). This appears to be the case with the issue of a chaser period as well. What we need is a systematic research of exhibition patterns in other cities that might illuminate this possibility more clearly.

Allen argues that, because individual films or film programs were sometimes very popular, a chaser period did not exist. My argument is almost the reverse: that the high points for moving pictures in the urban theaters were the hook that made the chaser period possible. Both Allen and I disagree with Gilbert Seldes's assertion that "nothing whatever of interest" occurred in American cinema before 1903 (Seldes 1929:20). My starting point is the many references to the chaser period that Allen either did not locate or dismisses. Allen's position is part of a larger reordering of events in the pre-Griffith cinema that also focuses on the moment when story films became the dominant product of the American industry.

Revival: The Rise of the Story Film

When given the opportunity (or faced with the necessity) of responding to the low popularity of programs or competition from rival companies, film producers generally moved in the direction of fictional narratives after 1901. Edwin Porter's experiments with story films in 1902 are one example. Another is the Biograph Company, which suffered another major setback in April 1903. At this time the company was still using its old-style, large-format film service in Keith theaters—a key source of income. These Biograph films continued to be principally travel and news topicals presented in a variety format, with a few trick films and comedies thrown in for relief. The following is a typical moving picture turn from Keith's Union Square Theatre:⁵⁴

THE AMERICAN BIOGRAPH

The Most Perfect of all Picture-Moving Machines

THE FOUR MADCAPS. (New.) Acrobatic dance by a famous troupe from the Winter Garden, Berlin.	"TWO'S COMPANY." An animated reproduction of the famous painting by Vergilio Tojetti.
A QUIET HOOKAH. (New.) A vivid and characteristic bit of local color from Constantinople.	THE GRAND FOUNTAIN. Longchamps Palace, Marseilles, France.
AN OCEAN FLYER. S.S. St. Paul of the American Line, at full speed in the Narrows, New York Harbor, as she appears on her way to Southampton.	IN THE REDWOODS OF CALIFORNIA (New.) A tourist coaching party on the road to the Yosemite.
AN ATTACK BY TORPEDO BOAT. Splendid work by a German flotilla in their famous wedge formation. Taken at Kiel.	THE BLACK SEA. (New.) A beautiful panorama.
A LITTLE RAY OF SUNSHINE. Comedy scene.	DIVERSE DIVES. Bathing scene at Bath Beach, L.I.
THE GALETEA BRIDGE. (New.) The only bridge to Stamboul. A remarkable picture of Turkish life.	A MODERN MIRACLE. The law of gravitation overcome by the expert swimmers at Bath Beach L.I. Backward leaps from the water to the pier.

Biograph scattered travel views of Turkey throughout its program, rather than consolidating them into a single headline attraction as Vitagraph was then doing. Excepting the relationship between the last two subjects, the organization of the program appears completely random.

Keith's managers were becoming increasingly frustrated by the Biograph programs. In January 1903, Samuel Hodgdon, manager of Keith's Union Square Theatre, put films early in his program. He then reported that "being put on at an early hour in the afternoon, it seemed to catch a class of people to whom it was comparatively new. . . . The views were not particularly brilliant, still . . . it proved to be an excellent attraction at that end of the bill."⁵⁵ Although Hodgdon's solution was temporarily successful and imitated in other Keith theaters,⁶⁴ audiences who came early to Keith's five-hour programs soon became disenchanted, too. If anything, it made the weakness of the Biograph views more apparent and forced the Keith organization to take action.

By early 1903, Vitagraph had realized the popularity and importance of "headline attractions all of which are long subjects lasting from 10 to 20 minutes each." The company claimed to have "The Greatest Exhibition List on Earth."⁵⁶ Almost all the films were purchased from European producers. During the first week of April, Vitagraph took over the Keith Circuit from Biograph.⁵⁷ Afterward, one trade journal observed that the program was "the best series of films seen here in many weeks."⁵⁸ Vitagraph featured such films as Pathé's *Sleeping Beauty* or Edison's *Life of an American Fireman* in many of its programs. Many were held over for two or three weeks because of their immense popularity (Allen 1977b:150).

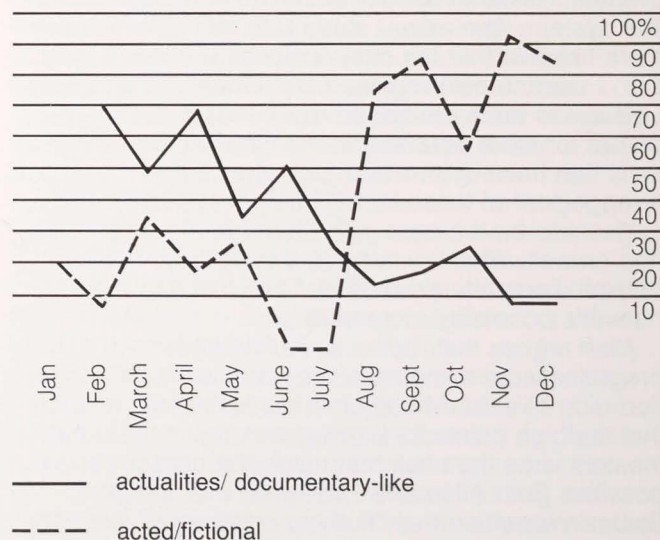
The loss of the Keith theaters as an exhibition outlet in March 1903 forced the Biograph Company to rethink its business strategies, abandon its large-gauge film, and consider the tactics of its competitors. Such a change is evident in the building of a new indoor film studio with electric lighting at Biograph's newly

acquired offices on 14th Street. The studio's completion was announced in a *Biograph Bulletin* dated June 1, 1903.⁵⁹ In the months immediately after the new studio's completion, Bitzer filmed several fictional subjects of more than one shot. *The Haymarket* "depicts in six lively scenes, six lively hours at New York City's famous Tenderloin dance hall 'The Haymarket.'" ⁶⁰ *A Discordant Note* utilized the overlapping action found in earlier Méliès and Edison films like *A Trip to the Moon* (August 1902), *How They Do Things on the Bowery* (October 1902), and *Life of an American Fireman* (November 1902–January 1903). While *The Divorce* (photographed by Bitzer in June 1903), *The Unfaithful Wife* (Bitzer in July 1903), *The Kidnapper* (Bitzer in July 1903), and *Wages of Sin* (Bitzer in August 1903) consisted of several scenes of approximately fifty feet each, each scene was still sold separately—deferring to the exhibitor's traditional editorial role. *The American Soldier in Love and War* (July 1903) consisted of three scenes "to be used in connection with two war views to make a complete story in one film projection."⁶¹ Such cinematic strategies were not new in themselves, but their increasing frequency indicates that the Biograph Company was considering the product appeal of fictional narratives of more than one shot. In August 1903, A. E. Weed, another Biograph cameraman, photographed two comedies "in two continuous scenes"⁶²—*The Burglar* and *Alphonse and Gaston*. Wallace McCutcheon filmed two early "westerns," both using Kit Carson as their principal hero, in the Adirondacks during September: *Kit Carson* (ten scenes and 1,184 feet) and *The Pioneers* (six scenes and 610 feet). These were not offered for sale immediately but used as exclusive headliners for Biograph's revived exhibition service. This service had returned to Keith's Union Square Theatre on August 3, 1903. Biograph's shift to a 35mm format and to multishot comedies and dramas, along with its newly acquired capacity to show European imports by Méliès and Pathé, revived the company's fortunes.

With the increasing number of story films, the motion pictures began to revive. Some minor improvement is apparent in late 1902–early 1903. During December 1902, films were being shown in twelve Manhattan theaters for the first time in a given week. By late 1903–early 1904, the number of New York theaters showing motion pictures began to grow rapidly. In March 1904, seventeen different theaters were showing motion pictures in Manhattan.

By the second half of 1903, fictional films were being produced with increasing frequency. European dramas like *Tracked by Bloodhounds* and *Daring Daylight Burglary* introduced the chase film to American audiences. The Edison and Biograph companies responded in November 1903 by making *The Great Train Robbery* and *The Escaped Lunatic*. Such

story films were not yet the dominant product for American producers, but by late 1903 they were the kind of cinema emphasized at urban theaters. In their Sunday newspaper advertising, Kohl and Castle announced the featured subject of moving pictures for their three Chicago theaters. If this material is broken down into actuality/documentary-like subjects and acted/fictional narrative categories, the following chart is generated:



Note: In some cases the title of the film(s) was not given or its category was not apparent. The two percentages, therefore, often do not add up to 100%.

In Rochester, moving picture shows reappeared in March 1903 on a sporadic basis. The increasing frequency of moving picture exhibitions in late 1903 coincided with the appearance of story films on the bill. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Jean D'Arc* were among those featured in Rochester houses that fall. The exhibition of *The Great Train Robbery* in late January 1904 created tumultuous excitement. The Kinetograph Company's exhibition of the film at Cook's Opera House "scored the biggest moving picture hit ever made in Rochester."⁶³ The following Sunday it was shown at another theater where crowds packed the house from gallery to orchestra. No standing room was sold and a great many were turned away. Two weeks later, "in response to many requests, a return engagement [was] arranged."⁶⁴ As a result of *The Great Train Robbery*, the Kinetograph Company continued to show films at Cook's Opera House during the regular vaudeville season. Sunday film shows were also put on at another local theater.

Further improvements in projection technology, appearing around 1903, must have added to cinema's popularity. A Rochester critic in November 1903 found the Biograph showing films at Cook's Opera House to be "an exceptionally good machine, the views being unusually clear and steady."⁶⁵ The Biograph undoubtedly had a multiple-blade shutter, which reduced flicker. This innovation first appeared in the United States on the Bioscope Projectors of the Warwick Trading Company, London⁶⁶; Biograph, which used the Bioscope for projecting 35mm films, apparently patented the device on May 19, 1903.⁶⁷ Other companies gradually adopted it as well. Such technical improvements increased the level of visual pleasure as the doldrums of the early 1900s were ending.

By late summer or early fall 1904, story films were the dominant product of the American industry. They were made with increasing frequency because they sold so well: that is, because they were so much more popular than actualities, they justified the added expense of production. Biograph was the first American company to make them the keystone of its business policy. With Wallace McCutcheon acting as director, Biograph's staff made *Personal* in June, *The Moonshiners* in July, *The Widow and the Only Man* in August, *The Hero of Liao Yang* in September, and *The Lost Child* and *The Suburbanite* in October 1904. Biograph's success with this policy—as well as Pathé's entrance into the American market—put considerable pressure on the Edison Company to respond in kind.

A survey of Edison film sales for the 1904–1906 period can be used to analyze the composition of Edison negative and print production, confirming this shift.⁶⁸ For the March–July 1904 period, the data can be represented in the following table:

Subject Type	Number in Category	Negative Feet	Print Feet	Print to Negative Ratio
Actualities	40 (82%)	5,045 (68%)	42,915 (38%)	8.5
Staged/fiction	9 (18%)	2,335 (32%)	69,560 (62%)	29.8
Total	49	7,380	112,475	15.2

By the second half of Edison's 1904 business year (August 1904–February 1905), a clear shift had occurred:

Actualities	8 (38%)	1,525 (16%)	7,610 (3%)	5.0
Staged/fiction	13 (62%)	7,790 (84%)	214,705 (97%)	27.6
Total	21	9,315	222,315	23.9

In this second chart the commercial importance of staged/acted films is obvious (even exaggerated, since there were no major filmable news events to boost actuality sales). Feature-acted films had become the principal source of income for the Kinetograph Department. A statistical analysis for the 1904–1906 period shows a steady relationship between actuality and fictional films in terms of negative production and prints sold:

March 1904–February 1905				
Subject Type	Number in Category	Negative Feet	Print Feet	Print to Negative Ratio
Actualities	48 (69%)	6,570 (39%)	50,525 (15%)	7.7
Staged/acted	22 (31%)	10,125 (61%)	284,265 (85%)	28.1
Total	70	16,695	334,790	20.0

March 1905–February 1906				
Actualities	21 (48%)	6,940 (36%)	60,580 (14%)	8.7
Staged/acted	22 (52%)	12,382 (64%)	365,060 (86%)	29.5
Total	43	19,322	425,640	22.0

March 1906–February 1907				
Actualities	49 (80%)	7,715 (47%)	118,438 (14%)	15.4
Staged/acted	12 (20%)	8,750 (53%)	741,490 (86%)	84.7
Total	61	16,465	859,928	52.2

Furthermore, the bulk of print sales for actualities in 1905 and 1906 came from three major news events: Roosevelt's inauguration, the Russo-Japanese Peace Conference, and the San Francisco earthquake. In many instances, no prints of an actuality subject were sold. Except for a few specific and comparatively rare instances, the public had lost interest in actuality subjects.

In arguing that the shift to narrative film production occurred after the rise of the nickelodeon around 1907, Allen (like others before him) relied on the number of titles copyrighted to reach his conclusion. This approach has a methodological weakness, as the above chart makes clear. Quantification of subject by titles offers little insight into the type of film that sustained the company financially. Since producers sold film prints to exhibitors and exchanges on a per foot basis, five-sixths of the Edison Company's gross income in film production came from staged/acted films, almost all of which were story films. An example demonstrates the skewing of information that results from basing an analysis on copyrighted titles. Thomas Edison copyrighted forty films in 1906; twenty-nine of these were actualities taken by R. K. Bonine in Hawaii. Bonine's films were from 75 to 770 feet in length, totaling 3,700 feet of negative. In contrast, ten fictional films by Porter were copyrighted during the 1906 calendar year. These varied in length from 60 to 1,000 feet and totaled 6,815 feet (all but one was a story film). One film in 1906, *Dreams of a Rarebit*

Fiend (470 feet) sold 192 copies or 90,240 feet, while all of Bonine's Hawaii films combined sold only 29,060 feet. Although we do not know exactly how much time Bonine spent on his Hawaii trip, it almost certainly did not exceed the two months Porter spent working on *Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend*. Bonnie, who was only a part-time cameraman and spent much of his time working at the Edison lab in West Orange, was paid \$35 a week while Porter was paid \$40. Porter, however, tied up a studio, employing actors and a production staff that included Wallace McCutcheon (\$40 per week), William Gilroy (\$15 per week), and several others.⁶⁹ The cost of *Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend* was therefore much higher than the cost of Bonnie's Hawaii films but was easily justified by the sale of prints.

From the summer of 1904 onward, story films were made in substantial quantities and consistently outsold the actualities that companies like Edison continued to produce, although with decreasing frequency. This decline was a response to slumping sales for most actuality subjects and increasing sales for most longer fictional films. Excepting occasional hits like films of the San Francisco earthquake, actuality material continued to be manufactured primarily because (1) local actuality footage was desired by vaudeville houses renting films from the Kinetograph Company (Percival Waters's Edison-associated exhibition company) and it was considered expedient to accommodate them, and (2) such films were so inexpensive to make that a small profit could be gained on a local subject if two or more prints were sold. This shift to acted features was not, as Allen argues, a result of the nickelodeon era, but rather one of the things that made it possible.

The shift from actualities to fictional narratives is also reflected in the construction of many films from the 1903–1904 period that contain elements of both. Two promotional descriptions of *Life of an American Fireman* alternately emphasized the documentary-like depiction of American firemen and the story of a fire-chief. Porter's *Romance of the Rail* and even *The Great Train Robbery* grow out of the train subgenre of travel films, as did Biograph's somewhat later *Hold-up of the Rocky Mountain Express* (April 1906). Porter's comedy *European Rest Cure* spoofed the travel genre even as it incorporated many of its conventions into a fictional form. This transition from actuality to fiction was happening on many different levels simultaneously (Musser 1984).

The increased production of story films further heightened the popularity of moving pictures by offering more variation (less repetition) in programs. As *Variety* noted late in 1905, shortage of product had been an important cause of the chaser period:

As a matter of fact the picture machine is one of the most valuable things about a variety house. There is a certain portion in any audience that will cut the last act no matter what it will be. If the picture machine is the last, they stay in for the specialty immediately preceding it, and instead of losing the value of some three hundred dollar headliner the manager gets credit for that and it is the fifty or seventy-five dollar pictures that the next to the last patron cuts. In the present day when a special train is hired and a branch railroad tied up for a set of train robbing or wrecking pictures, the offerings are really excellent and those who remain and watch them get sometimes what is really the best act on a bill. The picture machine is here to stay as long as a change of film may be had each week.⁷⁰

Film's low cost when compared to other acts with equivalent entertainment value and its increased popularity are commercial factors that pointed toward the specialized moving picture show, with lower costs and lower admission prices. And by late 1904–early 1905, enough story films also were being made to keep nickelodeons supplied with a changing program of films.

Other changes in the film industry also made the nickelodeon era possible. Until 1904, exhibition services rented a projector, operator, and reel of film to the theaters. Later in the year, however, Percival Waters—whose Kinetograph film service was in heavy competition with Biograph, Vitagraph, and the Kalatechnoscope—began to train theater electricians to run the films and simply rented a reel of moving pictures—a commodity, not a service—to the theaters at a lower price. Vitagraph and other old-line services were soon forced to follow his example.⁷¹ Such rationalization helped to inaugurate cinema as a form of mass entertainment with the nickelodeon era.

Although New York City was the center of the American film industry, had a broad exhibition base, and was the site of many innovative commercial and industrial practices, nickelodeons did not first appear there but in the urban, industrial cities of the Midwest like Pittsburgh and Chicago. (According to at least one source, Eugene Cline's Chicago storefront film theater was the second of its kind in the United States, after Harry Davis's theater in Pittsburgh.)⁷² As *Views and Film Index* remarked in May 1906, "These enterprises are practically new to this city, but are now springing up in all the boroughs. Smaller places could boast of these moving picture shows long before it was ever thought that New York would ever have one."⁷³ Why Chicago and not New York? The different structures of the entertainment industries in both cities offer one key explanation. If, as George Kleine asserted, every vaudeville house in the country had moving pictures on its bill,⁷⁴ films were being shown at only four vaudeville theaters in Kleine's hometown of Chicago in 1905. Because of Sunday blue laws, New York theaters had to have special

Sunday shows that did not allow for singing, dancing, etc. Moving pictures were an effective way to circumvent these laws and "to evade any contact with the authorities"⁷⁵ in New York, Rochester, and other cities where blue laws were in effect. Since Sunday was the working classes' only day of rest and recreation, traditional entertainment venues could accommodate the growing popularity of moving pictures. In Chicago there were no Sunday blue laws, and vaudeville, burlesque, and other theaters showed the same programs all week long. As a result, traditional structures were much less accommodating to moving pictures and alternative exhibition practices such as storefront theaters appeared earlier.

The nickelodeon boom did not alter the established popularity of moving pictures as the closing turn of a vaudeville program. At the beginning of 1907, a *Billboard* representative reported that "moving pictures are making a good impression in Boston Town and all the houses employ them as features instead of as 'chasers' as formerly."⁷⁶ Two months later, *Moving Picture World* was happy to report:

The continued popularity of moving pictures, which are a feature of almost every vaudeville bill in the country, is illustrated by a story which Manager Percy Williams, of the Orpheum Theatre, New York, tells on himself. One week, when Mr. Williams had fairly outdone himself in preparing the Orpheum bill, and every act was a big headliner, many of the salaries running into four figures, he met a friend on the street. The friend greeted the manager and said: "I was over to see your show the other night, Mr. Williams, and I think that it was about the best show I ever saw." Mr. Williams thanked him and as a matter of curiosity asked him what act he liked best. The friend answered, "I think those moving pictures were about the best I ever saw."⁷⁷

During the same year, the New York Theatre gave a vaudeville program that did not include moving pictures. *Variety* reported that "the audience expected them, remaining seated after the curtain. This happened on Sunday night and moving pictures will probably be installed."⁷⁸ Although moving pictures closed the program, their popularity was well established.

Conclusions

Is my disagreement with Allen's revisionist history only concerned with the sequencing of specific events, or are there larger implications in the different models we propose? Our methodological approaches to the issues differ in significant ways. Allen's initial work in cinema was informed by the perception that exhibition was being ignored by many film historians. While Allen has usefully refocused attention on this neglected area, his work has been hampered by a disinterest in production. Exploration of the dynamic interaction between production and exhibition would lead, for example, to the conclusion that commercial disruptions in production were adversely affecting the entire industry.

Our analyses have different ideological implications, too. Allen's denial of the chaser period ignores, in some respects, the inadequacies of motion picture capitalists and American capitalism at the turn of the century. From Allen's point of view, these entrepreneurs appear to be in control of their destinies. In fact, the chaser period helps to explain why American cinema was dominated by European productions, since disruptions comparable to those that plagued the American industry did not occur in England or France. Likewise, the assertion that producers were able to impose story films on an American public that still preferred actualities denies the contradictions inherent in the competitive capitalism of the 1900s (other producers and exhibitors would have appeared to fill this void). Allen suggests that film industry leaders were able to dictate the terms of change, offering a conspiracy theory of big business that might be applicable to the motion picture industry of the 1930s but is misleading when applied to 1903–1907.⁷⁹ The historical reality was quite different: In shifting to story films, the industry's entrepreneurs were responding to the demands of a situation—the needs of exhibitors and the preferences of their patrons—they only partially understood and certainly did not control.

Renewed interest in film history, which mushroomed in the 1970s, challenged the work of elder historians in a manner that was necessary and generally beneficial to the discipline. Like many young historians, Allen argued that panoramic histories of American cinema too often endowed statements with the appearance of reliability as they repeated each other's conclusions. Soon, however, many believed that the panoramic histories of American cinema were not only capable of mistakes but that they were so unreliable that their analyses carried little weight. The pendulum swung too far in this direction. Specialization and an impressive array of footnotes became enough to privilege the work of a new generation—particularly since few people had done the same or equivalent research. We cannot afford to underrate what previous generations of historians have accomplished.

Although we should not stop questioning the conclusions of historians like Lewis Jacobs, Garth Jowett, and Robert Sklar, we must be careful not to dismiss their work too quickly. We also must be careful not to set up a new, premature orthodoxy. The one-way, intergenerational criticisms of the 1970s need to become the bilateral, intragenerational debates of the 1980s. It is to be hoped that this can be conducted with commitment and passion—as well as good humor and mutual respect.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

- 1 As Joseph North has demonstrated, these historians did not always agree on the duration of this "chaser period." Some suggested it lasted from approximately 1897 to 1903. Others, like Robert Grau, indicated it lasted from 1898 to 1901. Lewis Jacobs asserted that it went from late 1900 to approximately 1903. Although troubled by these discrepancies, North did not question the existence of a "chaser period" (1973:184–185).
- 2 *New York Clipper*, March 24, 1906, p. 134.
- 3 *Views and Film Index*, May 12, 1906, p. 4.
- 4 *Ibid.*, September 29, 1906, p. 4.
- 5 *Ibid.*, September 5, 1908, p. 3.
- 6 *Moving Picture World*, January 22, 1910, p. 81.
- 7 *Billboard*, January 5, 1907, p. 30.
- 8 See discussion below, particularly the refutation appearing in *Billboard*, January 26, 1907, p. 18.
- 9 Allen cites evidence to this effect in his dissertation (1977b). M. J. Keating, manager of Keith's Theatre in Boston, felt it was best to close a show "with a medium act, as not more than half the audience will remain to see a good one, no matter what it is." Manager Report, Keith Theatre, Boston, November 24, 1902, Keith/Albee Collection cited in Allen 1977b:150.
- 10 Pratt 1979 was the result of Pratt's extensive research in this area.
- 11 The chart for New York was compiled using the *New York Clipper*, *New York Dramatic Mirror*, and *New York World*. Comparisons between the *World* and the *New York Herald* and *New York Journal* indicated that these other two newspapers did not offer additional information as to exhibition sites. For Chicago, the chart was constructed entirely from the *Chicago Tribune*. There were many problems with this task and both charts could benefit from further research and refinement. In Chicago, for instance, "Living Pictures" clearly referred to moving pictures, not the *tableaux vivants* to which "Living Pictures" referred in New York. In Chicago these *tableaux vivants* were usually called "art studies" or "classical living pictures." When films were on an extended run, theaters did not always advertise them as being on the bill each week. A certain amount of second-guessing is involved. I did my best to be consistent throughout.

"SEARCHLIGHT"

CONTINUOUS ENTERTAINMENT

EDISON'S MOVING

PICTURES

1 to 5, 6:30 to 10

744 Pacific Ave.

DONNELLY HOTEL.

THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM.

CINDERELLA

and the little

Glass Slipper. A great Spectacular Production. Illustrating every scene of the Fairy Tale.

DISOLVING SCENIC Effects

Grand Ballets

Marvelous Tricks in which dozens of real living people take part enjoyed by both young and old.

President McKinley

N. B.—These highly valuable, educational and historical scenes reproduce the following:

McKinley Funeral at Buffalo, arrival at City Hall.

The cortege at Washington, D. C.

President Roosevelt at Canton.

Arrival of McKinley's body at Canton.

Leaving the McKinley home.

Funeral at Westlawn Cemetery, and other scenes of interest.

744 PACIFIC AVE.

(DONNELLY HOTEL)

1 to 5, 6:30 to 10.

ADMISSION, 10 CENTS

CROWNELL PRINTING CO. 774 Commerce St., Tacoma.

Searchlight Theater, Tacoma, Washington, 1900–1902. The only prenickelodeon theater for which there is detailed box office information (see p. 35). From the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

- 12 *New York World*, May 10, 1896, p. 3, and *New York Clipper*, July 4, 1896, p. 280.
- 13 *New York Clipper*, July 11, 1896, p. 296.
- 14 *New York Dramatic Mirror*, October 3, 1896.
- 15 *Chicago Tribune*, July 19, 1896, p. 31.
- 16 *Ibid.*, July 26, 1896, p. 34.
- 17 *New York Telegram*, October 16, 1896, and *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 21, 1896, p. 8.
- 18 *Boston Herald*, May 19, 1896.
- 19 Sangerfest Hall, program, August 30, 1896. Clippings, vol. 5, Raff and Gammon Collection, Harvard Business School Library.
- 20 *The Phonoscope*, July 26, 1896, p. 34.
- 21 The systematic nature of my research for this novelty period again contradicts many of the assessments offered by Allen (1979b). The loss of exclusive control of Edison films, not the states' rights structure that Allen indicates, caused the demise of the Vitascope as a commercial force. Raff and Gammon were also extremely capable of getting the Vitascope into New York theaters (where they controlled the territory), contrary to Allen's assertions (pp. 15, 17). During 1896, the Vitascope projected films for more than 32 weeks in Manhattan vaudeville theaters, the Lumière Cinématographe for 23 weeks, the Biograph for 8 weeks, the Kineopticon for 8 weeks, the Eidoloscope for 5 weeks, and a "Cinographoscope" for one week. The Vitascope was also showing films at Coney Island during the summer of 1896. It was the most frequently used service by vaudeville theaters during 1896 even though the Lumière Cinématographe was considered the better machine: availability and being first in the field were important reasons for its continued success. When the novelty era collapsed, the Biograph Company was the only firm to retain an exclusive supply of films.
- 22 *New York World*, March 14, 1897, p. 158.
- 23 *Ibid.*, June 6, 1897, p. 14B.
- 24 *New York Clipper*, November 1897, p. 617.
- 25 *The Phonoscope*, March 1898, p. 6.
- 26 *New York Clipper*, March 5, 1898, p. 6.
- 27 *New York World*, April 17, 1898.
- 28 *New York Dramatic Mirror*, November 19, 1898.
- 29 *New York Clipper*, October 7, 1899, p. 652.
- 30 *New York Dramatic Mirror*, October 14, 1899, p. 18.
- 31 During the 1890s, films often jumped their sprockets while being projected, so the picture did not register correctly on the screen. At first the projector had to be stopped and the film realigned before the exhibition could continue. In May 1898, Albert Smith developed a movable gate that allowed the film to be realigned during the projection. This invention was incorporated into Edison's 1899 Projecting Kinetoscope and must have been quickly adopted by competitors.
- 32 Edison films included *The Astor Tramp* (1899) and *Love and War* (1899), which survive in the paper print collection at the Library of Congress. Lubin's *The Tramp's Dream* (September 1899) is at the George Eastman House.
- 33 See *New York World*, August 24, 31, 1902; September 7, 21, 28, 1902; October 5, 19, 26, 1902.
- 34 Moving pictures usually moved to the bottom of the bill after playing many weeks at the same theater. At Proctor's 23rd Street Theatre, the Lumière Cinématographe was eleventh of fifteen acts (a good position) during the week of March 8, 1897. Two weeks later it had moved to the bottom of the bill. At the same theater, the Wargraph was eleventh of fifteen for the week of May 9, 1898, thirteenth of fourteen for the following week, and then at the bottom of the bill the following week. The Biograph and then the Wargraph were in favorable slots at Proctor's Pleasure Palace throughout almost all of the Spanish-American War and only later moved to the bottom of the bill. At Tony Pastor's during the week of May 17, 1897, Menchen's Kineopticon was fifth of fourteen, and during the week of August 8, 1898, it was eighth of fourteen. By the week of August 21, 1899, the Vitagraph, a permanent feature, had moved to the bottom of the bill.
- 35 See Equity Nos. 6795 and 6796, *Thomas Edison v. Webster and Kuhn*; Equity Nos. 6882 and 6883, *Thomas Edison v. Walter Issacs*; Equity Nos. 6852 and 6853, *Thomas Edison v. Marc Klaw and Abraham L. Erlanger*; Equity No. 7124 and 7125, *Thomas Edison v. Eberhard Schneider*; and Equity Nos. 7649 and 7650, *Thomas Edison v. "Farmer Dunn" Moving Picture Company*, all in the Circuit Court for the Southern District of New York, Federal Archive and Record Center for the Southern District of New York.
- 36 J. Stuart Blackton to William Gilmore, January 12, 1901, Defendants' Exhibit No. 116, J. Stuart Blackton, testimony, Equity No. 889, September sessions, 1912, *U.S. v. Motion Picture Patents Company*, U.S. District Court, District of Eastern Pennsylvania, Printed Record, p. 1879.
- 37 H. J. Collins, deposition, August 2, 1901, *Thomas A. Edison v. American Mutoscope and Benjamin F. Keith*, U.S. Circuit Court, Southern District of New York. Net earnings include earnings for both the Mutoscope and Biograph parts of the business. The earnings for 1900 are clearly net earnings rather than gross income. These earnings were then subdivided to show net earnings for the Biograph or projected moving picture part of the business.
- 38 This film is in the Library of Congress Paperprint Collection and was copyrighted on October 3, 1902.
- 39 American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, production records, Museum of Modern Art.
- 40 H. J. Collins, deposition, monthly income reports, September 16, 1901, to March 1902, Equity No. 6928. Gross income minus film costs would not yield "net earnings," however, since other costs are not listed. These figures would suggest that the Biograph Company continued to lose money on its projection services during late 1901 and early 1902.
- 41 Sigmund Lubin, testimony, March 11, 1914, *United States of America v. Motion Picture Patents Company*, U.S. District Court, Eastern Pennsylvania, Printed Record, p. 3046.
- 42 Edison Manufacturing Company, Profit and Loss Statements, March 1900 to February 1902, Edison National Historic Site.
- 43 Pratt's explanation for this absence is the traditional one of a chaser period. No one can question that Pratt has done extensive primary source research in this area.
- 44 Searchlight Theatre, Account book, 1900 to 1902, Library of Congress Division of Motion Pictures, Television and Recorded Sound. I appreciate Paul Spehr's bringing this collection to my attention.
- 45 Lyman H. Howe Moving Picture Company, promotional material, 1904, Wyoming Geological and Historical Society. Box office figures indicate no noticeable drop during the period in question. The chaser period was primarily an urban phenomenon. The quantity of product needed to give permanent sites a change of program each week was far greater than what was needed by traveling exhibitors who visited a town two or three times a year.
- 46 Jenkins 1975:279. Unfortunately, figures are not available for the 1903–1905 period. A further check at the Kodak Company Archive proved unproductive: apparently the company has a policy of destroying virtually all records after five years.
- 47 *New York Clipper*, March 22, 1902, p. 92.
- 48 *Ibid.*, March 29, 1902, p. 110.
- 49 Equity No. 36, April Sessions 1902, *Thomas A. Edison v. Siegmund Lubin*, U.S. Circuit Court, Eastern District of Pennsylvania.
- 50 *New York Clipper*, July 12, 1902, p. 444.
- 51 William Gilmore to William Pelzer, July 29, 1902, document file, Edison National Historic Site.
- 52 *Chicago Tribune*, July 15, 1901, p. 2.
- 53 Manager's report, Keith's Union Square Theatre, January 5 and 12, 1903, Keith/Albee Collection, cited in Allen 1977b:150.
- 54 Keith's Union Square Theatre, program, March 23, 1902, Theater Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.
- 55 Manager's report, Keith's Union Square Theatre, January 5, 1903, cited in Allen 1977b:150.
- 56 *New York Clipper*, March 21 and 28, 1903, pp. 108, 132.

- 57 *New York Herald*, April 5, 1903, p. 10F, and *Boston Herald*, April 5, 1903, pp. 14–15. Initially these were billed simply as "Keith's Moving Pictures," but the "new machine" mentioned in the *Boston Herald* description was subsequently identified as the Vitagraph on April 19, 1903 (pp. 14–15). I have yet to establish whether the Vitagraph took over all or merely part of the Keith circuit.
- 58 *New York Clipper*, April 11, 1903, p. 168. The *Boston Herald* felt that "the new motion picture device far excels its predecessor and is being favorably commented on" (April 12, 1903, pp. 14–15).
- 59 *Biograph Bulletin* No. 6, June 1, 1903, reproduced in Niver 1971:83.
- 60 *Biograph Bulletin* No. 9, August 29, 1903, reproduced in Niver 1971:88.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- 62 *Biograph Bulletin* No. 14, September 21, 1903, reproduced in Niver 1971:104.
- 63 *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, February 14, 1904.
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 *Ibid.*, November 15, 1903.
- 66 Edwin S. Porter, deposition, June 20, 1907, *Armat Moving Picture Company v. Edison Manufacturing Company*, Equity No. 8303, U.S. Circuit Court, Southern District of New York.
- 67 "Important Motion Picture Patents," *The Nickelodeon*, October 1909, p. 114, cited in Thompson and Bordwell 1979:7.
- 68 Edison Manufacturing Company, Film Sales, 1904–February 1907, Document Files, Edison National Historic Site. Print-to-negative ratio is the number of projection prints sold per corresponding negative. Thus, by 1904, film companies were selling many more prints of a given acted film than of an actuality.
- 69 Edison Manufacturing Company, payroll books, 1906, Edison National Historic Site.
- 70 *Variety*, December 23, 1905, p. 3.
- 71 Albert E. Smith, testimony, November 14, 1913, *U.S. v. Motion Picture Patents Company*, Equity No. 889, September sessions, 1912, U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Pennsylvania.
- 72 *Moving Picture World*, January 11, 1913, p. 163.
- 73 *Views and Film Index*, May 5, 1906, p. 10.
- 74 *New York Clipper*, September 30, 1905, p. 824.
- 75 *Variety*, December 30, 1905.
- 76 *Billboard*, January 26, 1907, p. 18.
- 77 *Moving Picture World*, March 30, 1907, p. 58.
- 78 *Variety*, August 31, 1907, p. 16.
- 79 Allen's ideological stance is reminiscent of the thesis of corporate liberalism proposed by James Wienstein (1968) and Gabriel Kolko. The basic argument of corporate liberalism is that businessmen running large-scale industry had the necessary power and understanding to control the nature of political, social, and economic change. Such an analysis tends to devalue the impact of working-class and other plebian agitation and organization on American life. In a somewhat different way, Allen's rewriting of the pre-Griffith cinema does the same thing, only on a commercial level.

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II. Looking at "Another Look at the 'Chaser Theory' "

Robert C. Allen

Charles Musser's "Another Look at the 'Chaser Theory' " should be regarded as a companion piece to his recent *Cinema Journal* article. In both articles Musser reports on his recent research on early American film history, casting this research as an alternative or response to the position of a film historian whom Musser identifies as a member of the "new generation": in the case of the first article, Douglas Gomery, and in the present case, myself. Leaving aside the merits of this rhetorical strategy as a vehicle for the presentation of his own, quite important historical investigations, it is significant that in both articles the position Musser takes issue with must be either wrenched out of context or inflated beyond recognition if the "alternative" to it is to be made clear.

Musser applies Gomery's argument regarding economic decision making involved in the coming of sound to the early development of the Vitagraph Company—something Gomery himself has not done. Musser then finds Gomery's "model" not "a sufficient basis for constructing the history of American Vitagraph, nor does it adequately account for the company's success." But, of course, that "model" was never presented as such. That "dispute" is between Musser and Gomery, and the latter is more than capable of speaking for himself (see Gomery 1983).

In my case Musser takes what is a very modest reinterpretation of the account of the early years of commercial film exhibition contained in survey film histories, exaggerates it well beyond its original explanatory dimensions, and presents it as a "new, premature orthodoxy." Let me make clear at this point that I have the highest regard for Charles Musser's contributions to the study of early film history. Those contributions are, however, "alternative" to my own work only when the latter is made into a straw man. Presented accurately, my own interpretations and those of Musser bear more points of similarity than of historiographic difference.

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Musser's elaborately constructed argument against my work rests upon what I have called the "chaser theory" and the alternative explanation I have put forward to counter it. Musser's argument collapses, however, when my views on both the chaser theory and a possible alternative to it are set forth accurately.¹ In my dissertation (1977a) and in the article in *Wide Angle* derived from it (1979a), I am careful to delineate exactly what I mean by the chaser theory:

At the heart of this theory is a two-fold assumption: 1) that motion pictures were universally unpopular during this period [roughly 1897–1901, as I say twice on the first page of the article] and 2) that the cause of this public disfavor was probably the repetition of the same types of films—according to Jowett, "scenic shots or fake reproductions of current and historical events."

Even the reader unfamiliar with early American film history might find this "theory" implausibly simplistic (as, indeed, it is); yet it is not unfair to say that it summarizes the treatment of film exhibition during this period in many film histories from 1914 to the present. Gilbert Seldes (1929) observed that "nothing whatever of interest" occurred in the American cinema prior to 1903 (p. 20). Summarizing the prevailing view among film historians at the time, Joseph North wrote in his 1949 dissertation:

While many people had viewed the showings in 1896 and 1897 with enthusiasm, it does seem that a good number of them lost interest in the medium shortly thereafter. . . . Their [the films'] success . . . was only temporary, for in a little more than a year they were relegated to 'the position of "chaser." In the latter state the appearance of the pictures on the screen signaled the audience that the show was over, and that it was time to clear the house for the next performance. *This condition prevailed in all vaudeville houses which exhibited the motion pictures.* [North 1973:184–186, emphasis added]

More recently, Garth Jowett (1975) drawing directly upon North, claimed that "the exploitation of the movies by the vaudeville houses was the lowest point in motion picture history, and almost succeeded in killing off the young medium before it had completely matured and attained its full commercial potential" (p. 29). The reason for the movies' lack of success during this period, Jowett maintained, was "primarily due to the rather dull nature of the films then being turned out. These consisted mainly of scenic shots or fake reproductions of current and historical events, and

audiences soon grew tired of having to watch the same type over and over again" (see also Grau 1914:11–12; Ramsaye 1926:407).

In my article I set about demonstrating that the leveling of the use of films in vaudeville during the period 1897–1901 to the *ubiquitous* status of "chaser"—whether that term is used to signify an act so bad that it literally cleared the house, or an act so poorly received that it served only to signal the end of the bill—is unsupportable on the basis of historical evidence. All I need do to make my quite modest case is to find ample evidence of the successful use of film in vaudeville theaters during this period. And such evidence is abundant in newspaper accounts, theatrical trade papers, and vaudeville managers' report books. Musser himself points out in his essay on Vitagraph that the popularity of films dealing with the Spanish-American War "gave exhibitors like American Vitagraph new opportunities to move up to big-time showmanship" (1983:12)—echoing a conclusion I had reached in a nine-page discussion of the subject in my dissertation six years earlier: "The Spanish-American War was probably the most propitious event in the early history of the American cinema" (1977a:135).

Perhaps the problem lies in my dignifying the accounts of this period in many standard film histories with the term "theory," when "grossly oversimplified generalization" would have been more precise. I engaged in the all-too-easy task of deflating this generalization primarily for two reasons: first, because this blanket generalization (or some slightly qualified version of it) serves far too frequently as the only account of film exhibition between 1897 and 1901 in survey histories and textbooks; and second, because it is supported only by the thinnest layer of historical evidence. But in both my dissertation and in the *Wide Angle* article I go beyond merely pricking the "grossly oversimplified chaser generalization" and attempt to specify some of the functions movies served for vaudeville audiences and the range of film types produced during this early period designed to address audience interests and desires. It is clear (and clearly stated in both dissertation and *Wide Angle* article) that the novelty value of the motion picture soon wore off and that the period following the 1896–1897 vaudeville season and lasting for at least the next six years was one during which producers experimented with various types of films, exhibition venues, and marketing strategies, and, concomitantly, were subject to forces beyond their immediate control: the already established system of popular entertainment into which they inserted themselves, cultural norms, audience expectations, among others.

Musser's summary of my position—"While Allen acknowledges that some vacillation occurred based on

the newsworthiness of topical films, he argues that producers and exhibitors generally were able to keep their audiences entertained"—is simply inaccurate. During the course of a 75-page discussion of the use of film in vaudeville (Allen 1977a), I point out any number of factors that, in specific instances, might have led to audience dissatisfaction with movie programs between 1896 and 1901, among them technical problems (pp. 97–98, 134, 173), unskilled operators (pp. 98–99), obtaining a regular supply of new subjects (pp. 99, 127), print quality (p. 100), diminution of the initial novelty effect of seeing objects in motion (pp. 125, 180), infrequent change of program (p. 133), unimaginative subjects (p. 134), and poor positioning on the vaudeville bill (pp. 149–151). Having surveyed the types of films made during the 1896–1901 period, I conclude (as does Musser) that the most successful function movies served in vaudeville was that of visual newspaper: the depiction of news events of interest to a national audience. My assessment of the consequences of this strategy can hardly be summarized accurately as "acknowledging that some vacillation occurred based on the newsworthiness of topical films":

The heavy reliance of the film producers on topical films naturally meant that the popularity of individual motion picture acts would vary considerably from week to week, since public response was dependent in large measure upon the impact of the news events depicted. The problem was articulated by Thomas Armat in a letter to Thomas Edison in November 1901:

The problem with the motion picture business was that as things are now business runs by spurts. If there happens to be a yacht race or the assassination of a president there is a good run on films for a few months. Then it drops down to a demand that keeps the large force busy about one-fourth of the time while much money is wasted in experimenting with costly subjects that the public will not buy.

It is my contention that the unpredictability of the success of topical films might well have been responsible first for the increased proportion of comic vignettes and finally for the ascension of the dramatic narrative film—these two forms not being dependent for their popularity upon exigencies external to the immediate production situation. The above factors might well have been responsible for some audience dissatisfaction with motion pictures in vaudeville, but there is sufficient evidence to indicate that they did not drag down the motion picture into the "abyss" of chaser ignominy, to use Mast's term. [1979a:10; see also 1977a:147–148]

In short, Musser reduces what I have called the "chaser theory" from the generalization that films were ubiquitously disdained during the period 1897–1901 because they were boring to the innocu-

ous assertion that sometime between 1897 and 1903 films declined in popularity, while, conversely, he stretches my argument from negation of the "chaser theory" narrowly defined to its obverse—that the popularity of films did not decline at any time between 1896 and 1903! His keystone paragraph begins as follows:

Allen's rejection of the chaser period is part of a larger argument. If, as he argues, cinema's popularity did not decline, then the rise of the story film was not a precondition of the nickelodeon boom, nor was it necessarily due to consumer demand. In making his argument, Allen does not locate the shift to story films at the end of the chaser period (ca. 1903). He argues that fictional "features" of approximately 500 to 1,000 feet began to dominate U.S. filmmaking around 1907 and views it as a response to (not as a cause of) the rise of the nickelodeons. [emphasis in original]

If I argued what Musser claims, then the rest of his article might logically follow. But I do not. In my dissertation I state:

Obviously, the motion picture, constantly exposed to vaudeville audiences, could maintain its status as the primary "drawing card" or chief attraction of vaudeville bills only for so many weeks, even with a regular change of individual films. As early as August 3, 1896, the Vitascope had moved from fourth position on the bill at Koster and Bial's (generally regarded as the spot for the second most important act, and the position in which the Vitascope first appeared on April 23) to the closing spot. The closing spot was not the most desirable, as it often came after the position reserved for the "star" of the bill. Performers whose acts were scheduled for the final spot often had to perform over the noise of some departing patrons. . . . More times than not, the motion picture concluded vaudeville performances after 1897. [1977a:125–126]

My suggestion in the *Wide Angle* article that the rise of the narrative film (particularly the comedy) after 1901 helped to solve the inherent instability of a movie industry dependent upon the unpredictability of topical films has already been noted. This suggestion is also contained in my dissertation, so there is no doubt that I locate the beginning of the "switch" to narrative films precisely at the time Musser claims I do not. I wish to quote a portion of that argument in the dissertation so that my position can be seen clearly.

The fact that by 1903 comedy films comprised at least thirty percent of American film output is, I think, best interpreted not as a sign that documentary films were failures in appealing to vaudeville audiences, but that they could not be expected to maintain a high level of appeal week after week, month after month. They were, after all,

dependent to some extent upon eventualities totally outside of the control of filmmakers; presidential assassinations, hurricanes, and wars did not occur every week—at least not in places easily accessible to motion picture cameras. As Armat's letter to Edison points out, some remedy was needed for the irregular-supply problem which afflicted the motion picture industry. Comedy and trick films were certainly popular with vaudeville audiences and were especially useful in attracting juvenile patrons. . . . No longer was it necessary to rely entirely upon news events or exotic locales for motion picture subject matter. The scenic and narrative requirements of the comedy film could be made to conform to the limitations of the studio and its environs. . . . While my sources are silent on the matter, a hypothesis might be generated to the effect that, in part at least, the need to regain control of the production situation provided the impetus for the development of the dramatic narrative film, examples of which began to appear on vaudeville programs in increasing numbers in 1903. The dramatic narrative, like its comic cousin, by creating its own fictional world obviated the need to tie a production to the outside world. [1977a:157–158]

What I have claimed regarding the period ca. 1907 and the rise of the nickelodeon is that the sudden spurt in demand for movies caused by the nickelodeon "boom" of 1906–1908 might have been responsible for the near elimination of non-narrative films as producers were pressed to turn out films quickly and on a regular and predictable basis. I certainly agree with Musser that some of the data I used in suggesting this hypothesis were incomplete—namely the Paper Prints Catalogue—but the suggestion that the nickelodeon explosion and the embracing of the narrative film were, as I put it, not "entirely coincidental" came within the context of a speculative essay in the *Film Studies Annual* (1977b) and was prefaced by this disclaimer: "I have only begun my inquiry into the rise of the narrative cinema, and thus cannot pretend to offer an alternative explanation for its rise satisfying to either the reader or myself." My point, as is clear from the article as a whole, was merely to offer an example of how alternative historical explanations might be generated if certain ontological assumptions about the nature of the cinema were changed.

Musser's claim that I attribute the chaser theory solely to Robert Grau is inaccurate, as his own citation of my comments earlier in his essay reveals. Grau is the historian ultimately relied upon in many survey histories—directly or indirectly—for their discussion of the early years of cinema exhibition. But what of Musser's contention that I overlooked or dismissed any number of comments made between 1903 and 1910 which "suggest that films, in fact, declined in popularity." As it has never been my view that films did *not* "decline in popularity" following their

initial exhibition in vaudeville theaters, these references can hardly be marshaled in refutation of my position. Citation of a thousand references to "the cinema's earlier difficulties" does not alter the irrefutable fact that films were not universally despised between 1897 and 1901. But since Musser has brought them into the argument, let us examine the quality of this counterfactual evidence.

The comments of Gaston Méliès, the Miles Brothers, and Carl Laemmle—made between 1903 and 1907—are all obviously self-serving. The comments of Gaston Méliès, Georges Méliès's brother and American agent, are taken from a 1903 advertising catalog whose purpose was to make Méliès's films appear to be as innovative and important as possible relative to the American product of the time.

The citation from a 1906 article in *Views and Film Index* claims that films were unpopular "when the pictures were first shown in the vaudeville houses." That is demonstrably untrue. The point Musser wishes to make from that article's report on a change in management at Denver's Orpheum Theater is unclear. If it is merely that showmanship could make the difference between a successful film program and an unsuccessful one (which the first-quoted paragraph seems to imply), then that is hardly a startling revelation. In discussing the position of film programs on vaudeville bills at the Keith-Albee theaters in 1902 I conclude: "There is evidence that acts appearing at or near the end of the continuous program [as opposed to the two-a-day system then in use at some other theaters], no matter how good they might have been, often went unnoticed by a good portion of the audience, which did not sit through the entire lengthy bill" (1977a:151).

The editorial Musser cites from the January 22, 1910, issue of *Moving Picture World* is problematic for a different reason. Internal evidence suggests the editorial was written not by an American but by a European and that his references are to British or European variety halls. He refers to people who "walked around the promenade or went and indulged in liquid refreshment." Promenades and bars were common features of English music halls but not of American vaudeville. The author talks of movies being shown in "the great European cities," and, in a paragraph not quoted by Musser, compares the success of films in New York vaudeville in 1910 to his memory of their lack of success in London: "We wondered if the people would rise from their seats and leave the house as they used to do in London." It is fairly obvious that this front-page editorial was written by Thomas Bedding, co-editor of *Moving Picture World*, a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society, and a Briton. I cannot vouch for his whereabouts during the

period 1897–1901, but as late as December 1908 he was in London, where he addressed the London and Provincial Photographic Association (see *Bioscope*, December 31, 1908, p. 5).

Musser seems to prefer Jacobs's interpretation of the events of 1900 to 1903 to my own. He is certainly free to do so. I invite the reader, if he or she has not done so already, to read carefully the scant two pages Jacobs devotes to vaudeville exhibition of movies between 1896 and 1903. Please note that Jacobs recognizes no difficulties in the use of film as a vaudeville turn until 1901. (The White Rats strike he refers to occurred in 1901, not 1900, as he claims.) According to Jacobs, the use of films during the strike "sharply revealed the strong popular appeal and commercial value of movies." Why, then, if the strike proved film to be so popular in vaudeville, was it immediately "either abandoned . . . or presented . . . at end of their programs, so that the people who did not care to see it could leave"? Jacobs attributes this amazing turn of events to unimaginative vaudeville managers and to the fact that "most movies had hardly advanced beyond their first attempts and continued to show similar subjects with the same reproductive technique." Remember, we're talking 1901 here, not 1897. That, in a nutshell, is Jacobs's interpretation of the chaser phenomenon (Jacobs 1967:4–5).

Musser's next contention is that "Allen tends to treat the postnovelty/prenickelodeon period between 1897 and 1905 as an undifferentiated period in cinema's history." Within the 67-page chapter I devote to this "undifferentiated period" in my dissertation, I discuss not only the effects of the Spanish-American War and subsequent news events upon the use of film in vaudeville, but also the difficulties with the topical film in the 1900–1902 period, the origins of the comic film, the considerable success of Méliès's films in vaudeville, and the initial use of dramatic narratives. It is hard for me to see how it could be said that I treat what is obviously an era of change and experimentation as "undifferentiated."

Before discussing the "alternative" interpretation of this period that forms the bulk of Musser's essay, let me say that I am not at all surprised that scholars should disagree with, alter, modify, revise, or dismiss my work on early film history, most of which came out of the experience of writing a dissertation on the relationship between vaudeville and film in 1977. Film history would be a moribund field, indeed, if historical interpretations were not challenged and changed in the light of new research. Indeed, I have long maintained that if my work had any value at all, it was not in establishing a new "orthodoxy," but as a tentative and unsure foray into what is still largely uncharted

terrain. When I allowed Arno Press to publish my dissertation in 1979, I did so on the condition that I could add a new preface, part of which reads, "I would now maintain that research into this period is not at an end, but at a beginning, and that the principal value of my study lies not in the answers it gives but in the questions it raises and in the as yet unformulated questions its gaps and lapses will, I hope, give rise to." Thus I find the work of Charles Musser, Patrick Loughney, Janet Staiger, David Levy, Tom Gunning, Jon Gartenberg, Marshall Deutelbaum, and others investigating this period to be extremely important in specifying the forces at work in the development of early American cinema—whether the specifics of their findings support or refute my own.

But just how "alternative" is Musser's response to my revisionist interpretation of early film history? For the most part his five stages in the prenickelodeon history of American cinema are hardly radical departures from my findings, except for the fifth, for which the least evidence is cited and which Musser himself admits is the most problematic. Musser notes that by 1897 "topicality of subject matter became an important criterion for spectators and reviewers." In my dissertation I note that "by the beginning of the 1897–98 season, motion picture acts based their appeal less on the cinema's ability to render highly iconic representations and more on the subject matter which was represented" (1977a:127). A page or two later we learn that "the Spanish-American War was the dominant feature of this second phase, further propelling moving pictures into the role of a visual newspaper"—a conclusion hardly at odds with that contained in my discussion of the war in both the dissertation and *Wide Angle* article. On page 140 of the dissertation I point out, "Much of the popular appeal of the motion picture in vaudeville during the years following the Spanish-American War was due to its continued use as news vehicle." My contention that "The immediate effect of the use of motion pictures as vaudeville acts was to provide the infant film industry with a stable marketing outlet during its early years" (1977a:318) is directly echoed by Musser: "Vaudeville theaters helped to provide a steady commercial base from which these major exhibition companies could operate during the 1899–1905 period." And finally, Musser claims, "When given the opportunity (or faced with the necessity) of responding to the low popularity of programs or competition from rival companies, film producers generally moved in the direction of fictional narratives after 1901." I hope I will be excused for not finding this an "alternative" explanation.

In short, we wind up not too far away from the interpretation Musser used as his point of departure—at

least the version of that interpretation to be found in my work, rather than that as presented by Musser at the beginning of his essay. Certainly there are some differences: Musser's periodization is more concrete; he quite rightly reasserts the impact of the 1901–1902 patent litigations on the film industry; he corrects my use of incomplete data in computing the number of narrative films made during a given period. For these and other emendations to my work he deserves my thanks. But what impresses me most about his "alternative" interpretation of this period is not its radical departure from my own and other contemporary historians' findings (it does not make such a departure), but rather its confirmation of the conclusion I reached after attempting to survey the exhibition situation in Manhattan between 1906 and 1912:

The extent to which the findings of this study can be generalized beyond Manhattan is a moot question. New York might well turn out to be typical only of New York: factors quite alien to the situation there might prove to be decisive elsewhere. What is needed are studies of exhibition in other cities—large and small, polyglot and homogeneous, in all parts of the country. Only when this task has been accomplished can we safely make generalizations about the nickelodeon. [1979b]

Musser finds the exhibition situation in Chicago during the prenickelodeon years to have been considerably different from that obtaining in New York. How different might each of them be from the situations to be found in St. Louis, Seattle, or New Orleans? And how different still might these urban exhibition situations be from those in smaller cities and towns? In Durham, N.C., for example, the first year-round exhibition site for movies was not established until 1907, and exhibitors in Durham immediately went after a middle-class audience and particularly sought women and children. The same pattern seems to hold for Greensboro, N.C., as well (Allen and Gomery: forthcoming, chap. 8).

The study of early film history is not in "disarray" but rather in an embryonic stage in which there is plenty of room for any serious film historian with patience and a high tolerance for microfilm-induced eyestrain. I plead entirely guilty to foregrounding exhibition concerns in my own work but hardly to the exclusion of production. Had I written what purported to be a comprehensive account of early American film history, then Musser's comment that my work "has been hampered by a disinterest in production" would be an apt criticism, but in a dissertation on *vaudeville* and film, it is difficult *not* to emphasize exhibition over other aspects of early cinema practice. I believe that film history advances not linearly and unproblematically or by the total "victory" of one historian's inter-

pretation over another, but slowly, haltingly, and by virtue of what philosopher Roy Bhaskar (1975) and others have called the "principle of noncontradiction": where two investigators of differing philosophical orientations and methods investigate the same phenomenon and *do not* disagree, we have an empirically grounded basis upon which to build our theories.

Try as he might, Musser cannot argue away those points of noncontradiction. As to his concluding charges that I contend that early film entrepreneurs were "in control of their destinies" or that I embrace a "conspiracy theory of big business," this is nonsense, as anyone who knows my work will immediately see. When Musser devises a theoretically informed interpretation of early American film history that can deal with "the contradictions inherent in the capitalist system," I will look forward to reading it.

Note

- 1 All references to Charles Musser's work are to the essay in this issue unless otherwise noted.

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III. Musser's Reply to Allen

In "Contra the Chaser Period," Allen clearly states his case: "I disagree with the designation of this era as a chaser period. It is my contention that at the very least the chaser period is a misnomer, at the most a complete misrepresentation of the exhibition situation at that time" (Allen 1979:4). Yet as new information comes to light, the widespread existence of something we can profitably call the "chaser period" becomes more and more apparent. For instance, a 1908 issue of *Billboard* described the prenickelodeon period in Cincinnati in the following terms:

When [pictures] first came out people said it was only a craze—that it would not last—that the people would soon tire of it and after a few years it did seem that the public was really getting tired of moving pictures. One illustration of this seeming indifference was the habit that people got into of walking out of the vaudeville theatre as soon as the moving pictures, which closed the show, would be put on . . . It did seem for a while that the moving pictures would go out of fashion but there was a revival. [June 27, p. 8]

Or as the Manchester (N.H.) *Mirror* reported in 1907: "It was only a short time ago, within two years, that the public having a good show that closed with pictures would leave when the show was over and not wait for the pictures. Now the pictures have driven the shows out."¹ More recently I have found contemporaneous (rather than retrospective) evidence from Pittsburgh newspapers. Describing a 1903 film exhibition at Pittsburgh's only vaudeville house, Harry Davis's Avenue Theater, the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* described conditions as the projection booth burst into flames:

When the film exploded a great portion of the audience was leaving the theater. The cinematographe is used as a sort of interval between the feature acts on the programme and what is termed the "supper show." At the conclusion of the regular acts many of the people in the house leave, and it is the late comers, those who drop in for a few minutes, who stay. The audience was wending its way leisurely to the exits when the explosion occurred. [November 26, p. 1]

The supper show, significantly, was sometimes called "the hour of the chasers" and included the weakest acts on the bill. Less than a year later, conditions at the Avenue Theater had changed. Although moving pictures still closed the bill made up of fifteen acts, "very few people left their seats until it [the film *The Capture of the Yegg Bank Burglars*] was concluded. Such evidence points toward one crucial reason for this revival, even though it was not the only one: the

rapid proliferation of story films, particularly from 1903 onward.

When Allen accuses a group of historians of having made "a complete misrepresentation," one does not suppose he is offering "a modest reinterpretation of their work." When my article suggests that competition between vaudeville theaters, rather than the White Rats strike as Jacobs indicates, resulted in the installation of moving pictures as a permanent feature, this might be considered a modest reinterpretation. Nor would I rule out the possibility that theatrical entrepreneurs perceived general White Rat militancy as a threat that could be reduced by replacing a live vaudeville act with moving pictures. This could have been a contributing factor, although I have no evidence either way. Why Jacobs was so attracted to this explanation is worth considering. As a leftist historian, Jacobs was interested in the way vaudeville capitalists seized on moving pictures to break a union. And for the entertainment industry this served as an early use of machines to displace human workers. Such a process did take place, although not precisely in the way Jacobs suggests. His assessment, nonetheless, remains provocative and has been recast in more sophisticated terms by contemporary historians.

Although reductive comments about the chaser period are unsatisfactory, they do contain a kernel of truth: the film industry was in a state of crisis. "Contra the Chaser Period" rejects this notion of crisis. While Allen admits that exhibitors faced problems "in specific instances," my purpose is to suggest that these problems were far more general. Given the enthusiastic reception generated by Allen's article, it became important to reemphasize the underlying difficulties that plagued the film industry during the early 1900s. Allen's article does present some excellent research; if it had foregrounded cinema's use as a visual newspaper or the exhibition of local actuality subjects rather than dismissing the chaser "myth," my response would be much more positive. The issue is not simply one of facts but how these facts are structured, interpreted, and related to a larger framework.

If Allen qualifies his assertions in "Film History: The Narrow Discourse" (1977), other historians have accepted them with less reservation. One historian uses Allen's "speculation" to place the shift from actualities to fictional narrative in 1906–1907.³ Following Allen's lead, she finds this shift to be a result of, rather than a precondition for, the nickelodeon era. Another historian, after surveying Allen's work, concludes that virtually all films were shown in vaudeville theaters.⁴

Such misperceptions need to be corrected if these historians are to continue their valuable work. If vaudeville provided an important exhibition venue, so did summer parks and traveling exhibitors. One of the weaknesses of Allen's dissertation is its failure to situate vaudeville in relation to other exhibition outlets. Many areas of disagreement between Allen and myself are implicit in my article. While Allen argues that films were sometimes sold to vaudeville theaters (1979:10), I find no evidence for this. All vaudeville houses apparently hired exhibition services or rented films. Allen asserts that actuality films cost more to make than acted narratives in the pre-1907 period, since travel costs were high (1977:13–15). Yet building and maintaining a studio, hiring actors, constructing sets, and keeping studio personnel on staff involved larger, longer-term outlays. Such costs made fictional filmmaking more expensive, even in the early 1900s. If this was not the case, the shift to acted films would have occurred even earlier. Furthermore, some evidence indicates that cameramen's travels (and perhaps even their salaries) were often subsidized by railroad companies.⁵

Allen's work on early cinema often presents new, important information for our consideration. His work, however, has a tendency to push conclusions farther than his evidence comfortably allows. For instance, he notes that on New York's Lower East Side, poor Italian neighborhoods lacked nickelodeons, while Jewish neighborhoods did have such theaters. Allen also points out that these Italian communities were composed primarily of single men who tended to repatriate, while Jewish neighborhoods had a preponderance of families. This valuable information leaves one unprepared for Allen's conclusion—that Italian men “were unlikely to spend part of their paltry earnings on something so frivolous as the movies” (Allen 1983:169). Given the many references to Italians going to movies, another explanation seems more likely: Single Italian males preferred to go to films in nearby entertainment districts like 14th Street while people with families preferred to stay closer to home.

Although I find myself in disagreement with many of Allen's interpretations and aspects of Douglas Gomery's theoretical framework, this does not mean that I see myself as an “alternative.” In disciplines more firmly established than cinema studies, historical work proceeds through a dialectical process with previous evidence and interpretation. As new information is unearthed and as our theoretical and ideological frameworks shift, historians bring new perspectives to their field. I not only see my work as greatly indebted to a wide range of scholars who are comparatively new to the field, but also to earlier scholarship. Allen's eagerness to reject past scholarship for deficiencies

of research or ideological correctness not only prevents him from seeing what is valuable in their work, but also invites scrutiny of his own work for its deficiencies and ideological preconceptions. Yet Allen, with the self-assurance of a man who considers himself *the* authority, dismisses my attempt to examine our respective philosophical and political assumptions.

Allen seems most ready to engage my typos and grammar. Re: “disinterest.” *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (1971) offers three meanings of the word. One is “absence of interest, unconcern”—exactly the meaning I had intended. Puzzled, I searched other dictionaries and discovered they generally do not list the word. Hard evidence is lacking, but I suspect that Allen after not finding the word in his dictionary, once again jumped to a hasty conclusion based on incomplete research.

Notes

- 1 *Manchester Mirror*, cited in *Moving Picture World*, October 26, 1907.
- 2 *Pittsburgh Post*, October 11, 1903.
- 3 See, for example, Staiger 1981.
- 4 See, for example, Thompson 1982.
- 5 In the case of Bonine's Hawaiian films taken in 1906 for Edison, see *Honolulu Bulletin* (cited in *Views and Film Index*, September 15, 1906, p. 4).

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Hollywood Addresses Indian Reform: "The Vanishing American"

Angela Aleiss

The Vanishing American represents one of Hollywood's earlier films to address federal Indian policies. Released at a time when Indian supporters and social reformers were attacking inadequate government programs and futile missionary efforts, *The Vanishing American* was sharply critical of the reservation system. Unlike other silent feature pictures that concentrated upon Native Americans, George Seitz's film faulted White agents for the Indian's plight.

Despite its lavish production, *The Vanishing American* looked seriously at the deterioration of Indian reservations and the failure of various presumed "friends of the Indians" to protect their vital interests. *The Vanishing American's* stand against White injustice thereby demonstrated the film industry's response to Indian reform: Hollywood was delayed but not insensitive. Hollywood was a long way from accepting Indians as cultural equals, but it did respond to emerging issues by focusing on a major social problem. Kevin Brownlow (1978:345) concluded that "the problem of the Indian and his betrayal by the government was more clearly etched in this picture than in any other silent film."

Zane Grey's Novel

The Vanishing American's release in late 1925 coincided with much widespread agitation over Native American policies. While reformers were assailing government agencies, obscurantists were defending both the administration's and the missionaries' efforts to "civilize" the American Indian. Heated debates revolved around issues such as land titles, citizenship rights, and reservation conditions. The Indian's plight attracted scholars, writers, and artists as well as social reformers. American writers, disturbed by the Indian's condition, drew poignant and stark portraits of reservations (see Jackson 1973:78). One writer was Zane Grey, a sympathizer with American Indians who often depicted them as victims of White greed and abuse. In Grey's first novel, *Betty Zane* (1903), he argued that White betrayal was responsible for turning peaceful Indians into hostile forces. *Betty Zane* was partly biographical, based upon Grey's great-grandfather and his defense of Fort Henry against Indian attacks during the American Revolution. Grey portrayed Indians sympathetically and noted their neglect in the postrevolutionary years

(ibid.:22-25). Later, in *Desert Gold* (1913), Grey supported the Yaquis and their struggle against the Mexicans, and in *The Rainbow Trail* (1915) he further developed his theme of White injustice against Indians. Not until *The Vanishing American*, however, did Grey write a novel specifically about American Indians and their plight.

The idea for *The Vanishing American* was conceived in 1922 when Jesse Lasky and Lucien Hubbard (editorial supervisor for Zane Grey Productions for Paramount) received an invitation from Grey to visit Navajo Mountain and Rainbow Bridge. The group spent two months in Northern Arizona, where the desert's scenery captivated Lasky; he ultimately suggested it as a background for a motion picture. Grey, who for years had wanted to write a tribute to the American Indian, provided the theme for Lasky's epic and immediately began his task.¹ *The Vanishing American* seemed long overdue, for Grey pondered the topic before actually writing:

I am writing my Indian story, the material for which I have been seeking for ten years and more. It is well started now and has tremendously gripped me. . . . The Indian story has never been written. Maybe I am the man to do it.²

Grey worked from May 5 to June 18, 1922, and the story first appeared in November 1922 as a serial in *Ladies Home Journal*. Harper and Brothers planned the book's publication to coincide with the film's release, but this intensified missionary fears of public criticism. Harper editors responded by suggesting changes in *The Vanishing American*, a move that caused Grey to consider withdrawing his manuscript (Jackson:80-81). Grey defended his novel after the third revision:

I have studied the Navajo Indians for twelve years. I know their wrongs. The missionaries sent out there are almost everyone mean, vicious, weak, immoral useless men . . . and some of them are crooks. They cheat and rob the Indian and more heinously they seduce every Indian girl they can get hold of.¹³

Grey later stated that his purpose was to expose this "terrible condition," and any ensuing controversy would only point to existing tensions among religious factions (Jackson:81).

The Story

Grey's story of *The Vanishing American* begins on the Nopah reservation prior to World War I.⁴ Nophaie, a young Indian boy, is kidnapped by a group of White women and sent to a special Indian boarding school

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in the East. Eventually, he earns a college degree and a reputation as an athlete. While in college, Nophaie meets a young woman, Marion Warner, for whom he develops a romantic attachment. Nophaie returns to the reservation, where Marion later visits him and works for a time as a teacher among the Indians.

The reservation system, however, has severe problems. The head agent, Blucher, shows his sympathy for Germans during World War I by discouraging Indians from volunteering. Morgan, the head of the missionaries, hides his corruption behind the Bible and commits crimes in its name. When the Indians refuse to comply with Morgan's insistence that they attend church, he punishes them. The Indians are thus caught in a conflict between the inept Indian Bureau and the misguided missionary efforts. As Grey put it:

The agent of the government and the missionary of the church were but little and miserable destroyers, vermin of the devil, with all their twisted and deformed mentality centered upon self. [Grey 1925:225]

Nophaie, too, faces a dilemma: his White education and religious training are incompatible with his desire to retain Indian customs and spirituality. While Nophaie questions his people's indolence, unsanitary ways, and reverence toward medicine men, he faults Whites for their obsession with material pleasures and selfish indulgence (ibid.:113–114). Nophaie emerges as the "marginal man," caught between two cultures and at home in neither society.

Throughout the novel, Grey provides a romanticized yet paternalistic and ultimately pessimistic picture of the American Indian. Indians possess "noble hearts and beautiful minds" and are as "simple as little children" (ibid.:38). The Indian's simplicity and innocence, his respect for nature, and his faith in the supernatural placed him "nearer the perfection for which nature worked so inscrutably" (ibid.:136). Compared to Whites, however, Indians were far behind in their evolutionary progress and "merely closer to the original animal progenitor of human beings" (ibid.:113). In a sweeping echo of social Darwinism, Grey declares that the individual must perish so the species might survive (ibid.:136).

Grey's evolutionary theme extends throughout the novel. As the Indians encounter one disaster after another, their race suffers and slowly vanishes. Morgan attacks a young Indian girl who later falls ill with influenza and dies. During the war, Nophaie enlists in the army and returns from France with many honors; the Nopah reservation, however, begins to crumble as Indians die of starvation and influenza. Nophaie too is stricken and eventually dies. The novel ends on a symbolic note as Shoie, a wounded Indian war veteran, rides against the sunset—diminishing, fading, and vanishing (ibid.:308).

The novel's conclusion was only one of three versions that Grey had written. In *Ladies Home Journal* Nophaie dies of influenza—as a White man: "Nophaie! His eyes were those of an Indian, but his face seemed that of a white man. . . ." In another unpublished version, however, the romance between Marion and Nophaie leads to an interracial marriage, with Nophaie admitting that within time his people will symbolically vanish. This conclusion conveyed Grey's ideal of uniting both races so that their strengths would be combined (Wheeler 1975:181–183).

Background

Grey's assertion of the Indian as noble savage lagging in evolutionary progress was not uncommon, but his exposé of reservations was bold. *The Vanishing American* restated the post-World War I Indian problem: its title alluded to the Indians' declining population since the colonial period.⁵ During the twentieth century the population again rose, but even the Navajo, the largest tribe, suffered greatly. Their growing numbers, however, were offset by poor and overcrowded living conditions: during cold winters a dozen or more crowded into single hogans in which whole families perished. One of Grey's subplots was the flu epidemic that swept through the southwestern Indian reservations, killing thousands. From 1918 to 1919, the mortality rate in Arizona alone rose from 743 to 2,254.⁶

The theme of *The Vanishing American* extends far beyond population figures and mortality rates. Grey faulted Whites for the destruction of Indian culture and failure to provide workable solutions. Agents and missionaries not only robbed Indians of their possessions but stripped them of their heritage. The Indian's plight was part of a grand, inscrutable design of man's struggle for existence; ultimately Whites would eradicate Indians, if not by war and disease then by cultural deprivation.⁷ Grey's application of Darwinism was not an attempt to solve social problems but to expose them.

Grey's concept of an Indian-White marriage and his attacks on missionaries were more than what many Christian establishments could accept (although Nophaie does convert to Christianity in the original version). Combined pressures from both religious and social groups convinced Harper editors to alter the story before publication. While the novel lost some of its original impact, it accurately portrayed Indians as victims of White injustice. *The Vanishing American* was written during an era of extensive muckraking over Native American policies; both sides resorted to public accusations and intense campaigning. Most of the debate began in the early 1920s, when Secretary of the Interior Albert B. Fall, advocate of private ac-



From *The Vanishing American*. This scene was most likely taken from the lengthy prologue. It does give an indication of the large production effort by Paramount to attract the audience and to capture the realism of the terrain. The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.

cess to mineral and petroleum resources on Indian lands, ruled that executive-order reservations were available to developers. (Fall's order consequently opened 22 million acres of reservation land to drillers.) In 1922, Fall's support of the Bursum Pueblo Land Bill launched bitter criticism when Senator Holm O. Bursum, of New Mexico, introduced a bill confirming squatters' rights to Pueblo lands, requiring Indians to produce proof of title. The bill attracted widespread interest, and reformers made public appearances across the nation appealing for preservation of Pueblo life. One petition supporting the Indians' cause contained signatures of many scholars and writers, including Zane Grey (see Downes 1945:331–354; Gibson 1980:532–535).

The question of land titles was only one problem Indians faced. Crucial to *The Vanishing American's* theme were the ineffective reservations, which, according to Grey, destroyed the Indians' integrity and fostered an unhealthy dependence. Intense debates revolved around reservation conditions, and from 1922 to 1924 countless articles brought the Indians' plight to the public's attention. *Survey*, *Current History Magazine*, *Collier's*, *The New Republic*, and other publications carried exposés denouncing federal Indian policy; the titles themselves resembled accusations: "Deplorable State of Our Indians," "Sad Case of the American Indian," "Let My People Go," "He Carries the White Man's Burden," and "Tragedy of the American Indian."⁸ In one article, John Collier (Executive Secretary of the newly formed American Indian Defense Association) called the Administration of

Indian Affairs a national disgrace: he accused it of constructing a policy designed to rob Indians of their property, destroy their culture, and eventually exterminate them (see Collier 1923:771). Collier's attack was not unlike Grey's denunciation.

Indian commissioners and administrators, eager to defend their government jobs, heightened the controversy. Moralists charged that Indian cultural practices (especially dancing) were lewd and destructive. Hubert Work, who succeeded Fall in 1923, claimed that the Indian Bureau was not attempting to prohibit dances, but he suggested that Indians would eventually be reasoned away from practices that destroyed higher instincts (see Work 1924:92). Others attacked Indian religion, especially missionary groups, whose goal was to Christianize every pagan tribe so that "newborn infant souls may enter Christian instead of Pagan environments."⁹ The National Indian Association defended missionary efforts to civilize and Christianize the Indian and charged that critics "would prefer to see him remain in his primitive, backward condition." The association claimed that the title *The Vanishing American* was misleading: it failed to account for the educated and civilized Indian who had replaced the Indian of paint and feathers.¹⁰ The debate culminated in the spring of 1924, when Indian Commissioner Flora Seymour declared that the government adequately provided for Indians, while author Mary Austin argued that government education only lowered the Indians' social and economic status.¹¹

Reform efforts failed to bring about any noticeable changes. Interior Secretary Work, responding to growing public pressure, invited a committee of one hundred leaders of Indian welfare to assemble in Washington in December 1923. John Collier deemed the committee's resolutions innocuous, and nothing was accomplished. In 1925, Work called upon the Board of Indian Commissioners, an advisory board, to investigate further the Indian problem; the board's unpublished report, however, was a whitewash and offered no solutions (see Downes 1945:340–341; Gibson 1980:535). Even the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, which provided that all noncitizen Indians born within the nation's territorial limits were citizens of the United States, did little to improve Native American conditions (see Stein 1972:269).

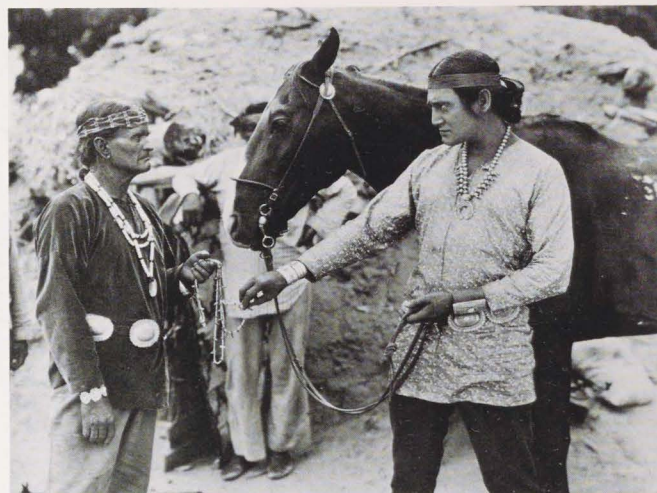
The Film

Grey's theme of social Darwinism seemed to serve as a warning: White greed and power would determine the Indians' fate. Like the numerous exposés and other reform activities, *The Vanishing American* brought the Indians' plight to the fore. Lasky's epic was more than a grandiose production; it attempted to convey a significant social theme to a larger and wider audience.

In preparing *The Vanishing American* for the screen, Paramount made several major changes in Grey's plot and characterizations and somewhat tempered his indictment. The theme of social Darwinism, in particular, troubled the story department:

The story is one of heart-rending distress, in which injustice, greed, and the baser passions are invariably triumphant and *remain unpunished*. . . . Every character (without exception) that earns the respect of the reader is either dead or left in a pitiable plight at the end of the story; and the miscreants who are the authors of this misery and death, are smugly hale, hearty, and prosperous. . . . It is difficult to see how, in view of the harrowing character of the story, it could be made available for pictures without radical revision.¹²

The studio's solution was to preserve the idea of Darwinism but eliminate the key villain in the story's conclusion. In fact, the producers chose to accentuate the Darwinian theme by removing the initial reference to Nophaie's Eastern education and replacing it with a half-hour prologue illustrating man's evolutionary history. The opening quote from Herbert Spencer sets the tone: "We have unmistakable proof that throughout all past time there has been a ceaseless devouring of the weak by the strong . . . a survival of the fittest."^{13a} The film then traces the history of human life, beginning with cavemen, followed by basket makers, slab house people, and cliff dwellers.



From *The Vanishing American*, with Richard Dix (right). The film questioned government reservation policies, and in doing so brought the Indian problem to the fore. The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.

Invaders from the north drive the cliff dwellers from their lands and claim they are mightier than any other people in the world. Fate, then, takes a turn: the Spaniard's arrival in the sixteenth century marks the gradual decline of Indian power and conquest. Three hundred years later, Kit Carson tells the Indians not to oppose the government and to live on reservations, but those who follow his advice are left with meager, unfertile lands. The story continues to the present—the period just prior to World War I.

The remainder of the film dramatizes the Indians' struggle for survival. The story's villains emerge as ruthless characters who enjoy humiliating Indians. The most corrupt is Booker (Noah Beery), assistant to Indian agent Amos Halliday (Charles Crockett). Halliday represents the epitome of bureaucracy: he is too obsessed with documenting and filing ("efficiency is his motto") to notice his assistant's cheating. Booker fits Grey's description of White agents: he kicks elderly Indians aside when they block the door; he cheats the Indians out of their horses; he shoves children away; he sexually attacks Marion; and he starves the Indians and relocates them to poor lands. Paradoxically, Booker is promoted to head agent when Halliday is transferred, but in keeping with the story department's request he is ultimately killed by an arrow.

In contrast to Grey's novel, no missionary appears in the film; Booker instead embodies all that is evil. When Nophaie returns from the war in France, he discovers a degenerate reservation with Booker as its new head agent. Booker relocates the Indians to poor lands so he can profit from the fertile soil, and the Nopahs fall ill and some die. In one scene, an Indian veteran envisions a family homecoming but returns to find an empty hogan and a deceased wife. The major crime is that the federal government allows men like Booker to thrive.

The relationship between Nophaie (Richard Dix) and Marion (Lois Wilson) becomes in the film more condensed and restrained. Because all references to the East were removed, the romance begins on the reservation where Marion is employed as a school-teacher. Unlike the novel, the film stresses Nophaie's cultural "lag"; Marion, for example, must teach him to read the Bible. Nophaie's lack of White education eliminates deeply rooted conflicts, and he does not truly encounter White culture until he enlists in the army.

The film's conclusion examines the Indians' fate in White civilization. Particularly significant is Nophaie's death from a gunshot wound. In this scene, the Indians gather en masse to put an end to Booker's cheating; Booker and his men open fire with a machine gun, and the Indians retaliate. Nophaie, who believes that violence will solve nothing, tries to stop the fighting but is accidentally shot by a shell-shocked Indian soldier (the Shoie character in Grey's novel). Presumably the idea of Nophaie succumbing to the flu lacked the spectacle and grandeur movie audiences expected; moreover, death by disease as a sign of cultural weakness seemed to justify White supremacy. The hero, instead, is killed by his own people when an Indian soldier suffering from hallucinations unknowingly fires into the crowd.

Nophaie's death represents a new era for the Nopahs. As soon as Nophaie is shot the fighting ceases, and as Marion holds him, he sees a vision of his people returning to their homelands. Marion reads from the Bible that he who loses life will receive it—a symbolic reminder that Nophaie's death will save the Nopahs from mass extermination. As Nophaie's body is carried through town, the closing titles appear: "For races of men come and go . . . but the mighty stage remains."

Paramount's conclusion is romanticized and idealistic: as Grey indicated, one individual's death saves the entire race. Nophaie is, in a sense, sacrificed for his people. *The Vanishing American* offers a Christian-like solution to Native American problems while avoiding a pragmatic explanation. If this appears too contrived, it is not due to the film's weakness, for *The Vanishing American* hardly purports to solve anything; rather, it exposes a problem and forewarns the audience. By informing the public of the Indians' predicament, the film accomplished its initial task.

Production

The Vanishing American was Paramount's potential successor to James Cruze's 1923 epic *The Covered Wagon*; the studio employed thousands of Indians and engaged in extensive location work. The film's prologue and conclusion called for a large-scale ef-

fort to capture Native American life on the screen. Believing that its labor would affect box-office attendance, Paramount plunged into massive production work. A clause in Zane Grey's contract stipulated that his stories be shot on location, so Paramount transported approximately 500 people to Arizona (see Brownlow 1978:344). *The Vanishing American* was six months in production, and every scene (except the modern war sequence) was filmed on location in northern Arizona and Utah. In addition to its large crew, Paramount employed 10,000 Indians and established major camps at 200-mile intervals across the Navajo Reservation.^{13b}

Producing *The Vanishing American* involved several phases. The Government Post of Mesa was built at Moenavi, and materials for the site's twenty-six buildings were hauled from Flagstaff. The production's largest phase was Sagi Canyon, where cliff dwellings were built for the film's prologue. Lasky recalled that the crew brought 24,000 feet of lumber by truck from Kayenta and an additional 28 miles by mule pack to the canyon. The last phase required the transportation of fourteen cars and ten truckloads of Indian extras and their families to Monument Valley. The crew spent four months in Arizona, battling obstacles such as 135° temperatures, blinding sandstorms, quicksand traps, and a dam break that sent costumes and props a half mile into the desert.¹⁴ If the environment was not bad enough, Lois Wilson remembered that water was rationed and several meals were missed because there was nothing to eat.¹⁵

Promotion

Paramount capitalized on its extensive production efforts to lure the public to its American Indian epic. Program notes boasted of the location shooting: "Filmed two hundred miles from civilization amid the wild and majestic Arizona canyons," and the souvenir book contained five pages of production information.¹⁶ The major advertising theme was the film's tribute to the American Indian, which Paramount pushed to the hilt. The *Exhibitor's Trade Review* advised theaters to "stress the Indian stuff," and local ads glorified the Indians' struggle against White civilization (see Cruikshank 1925:35). The film's original ad, an illustration of "The Story of the Red Man's Stand Against Civilization," showed Nophaie standing in the foreground waving his hand toward the city's horizon.¹⁷

Paramount's campaign conveyed a plea to sympathize with the Indians' fate. The cover of one program showed Nophaie kneeling with his hands outstretched toward the sky, while another portrayed a slumped warrior on a horse, adapted from Fraser's famous statue *The End of the Trail*. An essay by A. P. Waxman depicted the Indian's noble departure as he saluted civilization and bequeathed his country to the

Whites.¹⁸ The studio, in keeping with its Indian theme, planned an intensive campaign for *The Vanishing American's* world premiere in Charlotte, North Carolina. The town's Imperial theater served as a "trial horse" for important Famous Player pictures, and the film was booked for a week during a "Made in Carolinas" exposition. Prior to the film's opening, a streetcar covered with twenty-four publicity sheets toured the city, men in Indian costumes distributed rotos and readers, and a 40-foot banner hung across the town's main street. The film's first showing—on Sunday, September 20, 1925, at exactly one minute past midnight—was supplemented by Lois Wilson's appearance and a young woman (in Indian costume) singing "The Indian Love Call."¹⁹ The publicity proved effective: the film grossed \$9,000 the first week, and the *Charlotte Observer* declared it "greater than *The Covered Wagon*."²⁰

Audience Response to the Film

The initial success in Charlotte encouraged Paramount to continue planning road shows for *The Vanishing American*. The studio booked the film at one theater in each city, beginning with the Criterion in New York and later openings across the country.²¹ The New York premiere, on October 15, included an elaborate display of Navajo rugs, Hopi pottery, and Zuni baskets in the Criterion's lobby.²² The publicity was of little avail; several days later, *Variety* warned exhibitors that the film "failed to live up to advance work done for it." While the trade journal believed the picture would bring money, it was far from a box-office winner.²³ *Variety's* prediction appeared accurate: after a week's showing at the Criterion, *The Vanishing American* peaked at \$10,735 on October 24, and by December 12 the weekly gross fell to \$6,000.²⁴ Box-office records indicate other films in New York pulled in larger weekly audiences: for example, *Phantom of the Opera* (Astor) grossed \$14,000 on September 12; *The Merry Widow* (Embassy) reached \$10,600 on November 7; and *Stella Dallas* (Apollo) brought in almost \$15,000 the week ending November 28.²⁵

One can only speculate why *The Vanishing American* lagged. Perhaps its content lacked the excitement and inspiration movie audiences expected in early Westerns. Several critics chided the film's melodramatic story line, faulting Zane Grey's overwrought theme. John Grierson, the controversial English publicist, accused Paramount of failing to turn a second-rate story into a first-rate picture. Grierson was especially critical of the film's "cheap and trivial" love story and of Marion's treating Nophaie "like an imbecile" (Grierson 1926:1755–1756). Others cited the film's

poor editing and endless subtitles and recommended reconstructing the narrative.²⁶ A few critics even reproached the film for failing to expose the other side of the story—the Oklahoma Indians living in luxurious squalor on huge oil royalties.²⁷

Indian educators criticized the film as unfair to both Native Americans and government agents. One reservation teacher was annoyed that Nophaie was uneducated and sought out the schoolteacher for religious instruction. Presumably the critic believed that adult Indians were well educated and familiar with Christianity. The film's presentation of a pagan Indian who retained his heritage was offensive to some reservation employees; furthermore, the critic also claimed that the picture's title was a misnomer because the Indian population was steadily increasing (see Hannon 1926). In their enthusiastic effort to convert, few teachers and missionaries could understand White exploitation of Indian acculturation.

Attacks against *The Vanishing American* were minimal. Most reviewers grasped the film's social theme and praised Hollywood for a bold effort. Newspapers lauded the film's departure from the Indian's image as the antagonist: the *Chicago Herald and Examiner* observed that the film was rather unusual and gave Indians a "lucky break"; the *Los Angeles Times* explained that the Indian was no longer a heavy menace but the story's protagonist; and the *Newark Star Eagle* commended Paramount's frank depiction of the White man's inhumanity to the Red man.²⁸ Local advertisements attempted to sell the theme of the Indians' plight while blaming White aggression against the "first Lords of the Western continent."²⁹ One paper warned Whites that the film would reveal unpleasant things about themselves.³⁰

Several reviewers who endorsed the film hinted that the story would appeal only to a certain group—those interested in Native American history and policies.³¹ Paramount's audience may have been limited: the fact that some people sympathized with Indians hardly indicates an entire nation's concern. Perhaps the studio's effort to publicize the Indian's plight failed to reach Americans unfamiliar with Native American conditions. Viewers who expected another "Western spectacle" were probably disappointed. Following its long prologue, *The Vanishing American* lapsed into a dramatic tale of individual relations that was tedious to the average audience. While Indian reform was a significant issue, many Americans were unprepared to accept the Indians' predicament as entertainment. The lack of attendance may have indicated that Paramount had overestimated the public's interest; yet this assumption does not belie the studio's attempt to illustrate the destruction of a people's heritage.

Consequences

The mild reception accorded *The Vanishing American* prompted Paramount's release of *Redskin* four years later. Unlike *The Vanishing American*, *Redskin* avoided a melodramatic tale and concentrated on clashes of cultures against hostile environments. The main character—a Navajo Indian—is rejected from both White and Indian societies but defends his people in a battle over oil claims. The hero wins the land title and allocates the wealth to Navajos and Pueblos, thereby avoiding an intertribal war. *Redskin* offered what *The Vanishing American* lacked: action and excitement accompanying the portrayal of Indians in a positive light.

Other silent feature films presented sympathetic portrayals of Indians. Many, like Helen Hunt Jackson's story *Ramona* (remade in 1928), dealt with half-breeds and their struggle for identity within antagonistic societies. Films such as *The Great Alone* (1922) and *The Half Breed* (1922) portrayed educated half-breeds battling White prejudices. *The Golden Strain* (1925) and *The Flaming Frontier* (1926) depicted White agents who cheated Indians out of food and other supplies. In *Drums of the Desert* (1927), the U.S. cavalry arrests a White who seeks to swindle Indian land for its oil.

The standard "marginal man" theme emerged in several films. In *The Scarlet West* (1926) an educated Indian returns to his reservation where he is scorned by his own people. The Indian becomes an army captain and falls in love with a White woman but gives up both to return to his native homeland. Alan Hale's *Braveheart* (1925) best illustrated the educated Indian's dilemma, with the main character defending his tribe's fishing territories while averting hostilities against his White background. The Indian's love for a White woman was thwarted by his skin color; ultimately, she returns to her own people and he becomes the tribe's chief. In *Braveheart*, the Indian is the hero, settling racial disputes and relinquishing White civilization.³² *Braveheart* showed that the Indian as noble savage seldom adapted to White culture.

The Vanishing American's power lay in its ability to isolate the Indian problem; while White injustice was a common theme, other silent features avoided dealing with it as a major issue.³³ Paramount chose a controversial topic in the midst of reformer's discontent and gambled with its public appeal. The film's social statement accurately described the Indians' situation: in 1928, the federal government confirmed what reformers had been protesting for years. After seven months of extensive fieldwork, the Institute of Government Research released the "Meriam Report," which stated that the majority of Indians were extremely poor and not adjusted to the economic and social system of White civilization. The report cited several major problems: poor health among Indians

as compared to Whites; living conditions that were conducive to the spread of disease; the destruction of the economic basis of Indian culture by White civilization; and too much suffering and discontent among Indians to believe they were reasonably satisfied. In addition, the report criticized the Indian Service for its lack of adequate personnel and absence of trained superintendents (see Meriam et al. 1928:3–14). The Meriam Report called for the government to alter its stance and thereby laid the foundation for eventual social and economic improvements within Indian reservations.

The Vanishing American represents Hollywood's response to the reform issue. The film required its audience to examine Native American conditions and to consider the Indians' predicament. While the film portrayed Whites as the dominant race and Christianity as an alternative solution, it addressed a controversial issue in an outspoken manner. *The Vanishing American* epitomized Hollywood's early ambivalence toward American Indian policy, revealing an industry grappling with racial attitudes while attempting to re-define Native American images.

Acknowledgment

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Notes

- 1 "Producing Indian Film Was a Stupendous Task," *New York Times*, 20 September 1925 and *The Vanishing American Souvenir Program*, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, New York City.
- 2 Frank Gruber, *Zane Grey* (Cleveland, Ohio: The World Publishing Company, 1970; 2nd printing), p. 176. Gruber quoted this passage from Grey's diary of 7 June 1922.
- 3 Jackson quotes Grey from his letter to William H. Briggs, 23 May 1924, p. 81.
- 4 Nopah is a fictitious name, referring to the Navajo tribe.
- 5 For a survey of Native American population since the colonial period, see Henry F. Dobyns, *Native American Historical Demography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).
- 6 Edward Everett Dale, *The Indians of the Southwest: A Century of Development under the United States* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), pp. 207–208. Dale quotes his statistics from "Tuberculosis Among the North American Indians," 65–69, Senate Committee Print, 67 Cong., 4 sess., Washington, D.C., 1923.
- 7 Jackson argues that Grey was a close student of Darwin and incorporated many evolutionary themes into his novels. See *Zane Grey*, pp. 58–62.

- 8 See, for example, the following issues: *Current History Magazine* (July 1923), pp. 630–636; *Review of Reviews* (April 1926), pp. 435–436; *Outlook* (18 November 1925), pp. 441–444; *Collier's* (12 May 1923), p. 13; and *Scientific American* (January 1926), pp. 5–7.
- 9 Mrs. Otto Heinigke, "Address of the President," The National Board of Young Women's Christian Associations, Proceedings from the meeting held 4 December 1925 in New York, pp. 28–29, Huntington Free Library, Museum of the American Indian/Heye Foundation, New York.
- 10 John W. Clark (Executive Secretary), *Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the National Indian Association*, Published by the Executive Board, December 1925, pp. 5–6, Huntington Free Library.
- 11 Flora Warren Seymour, "Our Indian Problem I—The Delusion of the Sentimentalists," *The Forum* 50, No. 3 (March 1924), pp. 274–280 and Mary Austin, "II—The Folly of the Officials," pp. 281–288.
- 12 Lathrop, M.C., "Story Synopsis and Comment," 8 April 1923, Paramount Collection, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, CA. Correspondence from the Paramount Collection is the courtesy of John E. O'Connor of the New Jersey Institute of Technology.
- 13 a. George Seitz, dir., *The Vanishing American*, with Richard Dix and Lois Wilson, Paramount, 1925. This 16mm print is the courtesy of Paul Killiam of New York.
b. Production information was taken from Lucien Hubbard, "How *The Vanishing American* Was Made," in *The Vanishing American Souvenir Program*, 1925, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, and *New York Times*, 20 September 1925.
- 14 Hubbard, "How *The Vanishing American* Was Made," and *New York Times*, 20 September 1925.
- 15 *Picture Play*, January 1926, p. 91.
- 16 *Program Note for Accadia Theater*, 1925 and *The Vanishing American Souvenir Program*, 1925, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
- 17 "Clippings from *The Vanishing American*," original 1926 ad for the film, Museum of Modern Art Film Studies Center, New York City.
- 18 *Program Notes for the Accadia and Criterion Theaters*, 1925, and *The Vanishing American Souvenir Program*, 1925, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
- 19 The early morning Monday screening was due to Sunday closing laws in Charlotte.
- 20 "Indian Picture Has Premiere in Charlotte," *Exhibitor's Trade Review*, 3 October 1925, p. 19; "Vanishing Gross \$9,000," *Variety*, 7 October 1925, p. 35; and "Vanishing American Stunts Pulled on Big Scale," *Exhibitor's Trade Review*, 24 October 1925, p. 32.
- 21 "Dix's *Vanishing American* to be Famous Player Road Show," *Variety*, 30 September 1925, p. 31.
- 22 "Criterion Turns Indian Lodge for *Vanishing American*," *Exhibitor's Herald*, 24 October 1925, p. 30.
- 23 Rev. of *The Vanishing American*, *Variety*, 21 October 1925, p. 34.
- 24 "Variety's First Run Box Office Records," *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1926, p. 253.
- 25 *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1926, pp. 249, 253. Admission prices for the New York theaters ranged from \$1.65 to \$2.20. The Astor and Apollo had a seating capacity greater than 1,100; the Criterion and Embassy could seat only 600.
- 26 *Mirror*, 16 October 1925 and *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 2 March 1926 from "The Richard Dix Scrapbook": *The Chamberlain & Lyman Brown Theatrical Agency Collection of Dramatic Scrapbooks*, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center. All local newspaper reviews were taken from "The Richard Dix Scrapbook" unless otherwise indicated. Due to partial deterioration, portions of newspaper titles and dates were illegible.
- 27 *Variety*, 21 October 1925, p. 34 and *The Boston Traveler*, 1 December 1925.
- 28 *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, 2 March 1926; *Los Angeles Times*, 13 March 1926; and *Newark Star Eagle*, 16 January 1926.
- 29 See, for example, the following advertisements: *Washington Times*, 12 December 1925; *Providence News*, 2 December 1925; *Canton Repository*, 26 December 1925; *Akron Times Press*, 11 January 1926; and *Atlanta American*, 31 January 1926.
- 30 *Graphic*, 16 October 1925.
- 31 The following newspaper reviews promoted the film's historical and social value: *Washington Post*, 14 December 1925; *Sun*, 21 November 1925; *Telegram*, 16 October 1925; *Detroit Times*, 23 January 1926; and *Graphic*, 19 January 1926.
- 32 Alan Hale, dir., *Braveheart*, with Rod La Rocque and Lillian Rich, Pathé, 1925. Courtesy of Yale University Film Study Center.
- 33 It was not until 1933 that Hollywood again dealt with corrupt agents in Alan Crosland's *Massacre*, a story of White exploitation of Native Americans during the Depression.

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The Other Worlds of Joe Steinmetz

Jay Ruby

For more than fifty years Joseph Steinmetz made his living shooting candid wedding albums, portraits, and commissions from clients such as *Life*, *Look*, *Country Life*, *Colliers*, *Holiday*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*. He is a native of Philadelphia, a graduate of Princeton, and the inventor of the candid wedding album. Since 1940 he has resided in Sarasota, Florida, where he continued his work as a photographer, taking publicity pictures for various Florida chambers of commerce, Ringling Brothers circus, and other clients.

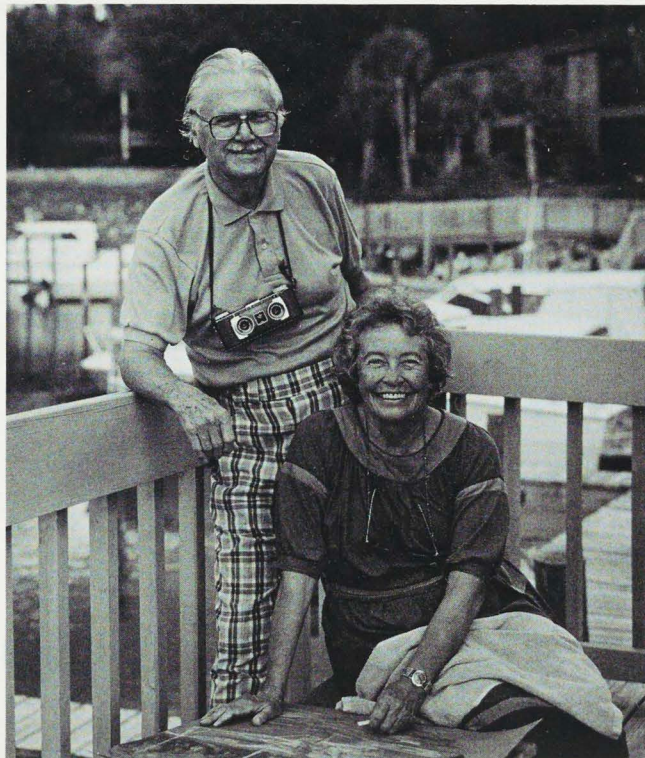
Studio and other commercial photographers are often ignored, at times even ridiculed, by those wishing to create a particular orthodoxy within photography. Photographers who take pictures for a commission instead of satisfaction of their "inner urges" as creative artists are not worthy of serious consideration, displays in art galleries, or a mention in "official" histories of photography unless, like Richard Avedon or Irving Penn, they happen to reside within privileged New York circles. Consequently, Steinmetz's photographs were known only to his clients.

Fortunately, there is a growing recognition that a variety of histories of photography can coexist. Approaching photography as art alone is as limiting as confining the appreciation and study of writing to poetry. Photography is a medium of communication capable of being used in a number of ways that are not only interesting to contemplate but rewarding to study.

Barbara Norfleet is a pioneer in bringing the studio photographer to our attention. She created an archive at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard. From the collection Norfleet produced an exhibition and book, *The Champion Pig* (1979), featuring some of Steinmetz's images and a second show and catalog, *Killing Time* (1982), devoted exclusively to Steinmetz. Norfleet's work initiated discussion among scholars and critics about the importance of studio photographers in the history of photography and their images as data for understanding society.

This article continues the dialogue, through Steinmetz's photographs. Although some remarks may be critical of Norfleet's ideas, they are possible only because of the stimulation created by her work and Steinmetz's photographs. Three issues will be addressed here: (1) Steinmetz's assumed innocence; (2) the importance of intention and context in the understanding of photographs; and (3) the value of these images as data.

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Joe Steinmetz, with Stereo Realist on his chest, and his wife, Louise Palmer Steinmetz, an artist who works with oils, acrylics, and pastels. She is also a good photographer and helps Joe with arrangements of people and props for his photographs. (Taken October 7, 1983, on Joe's 78th birthday, at their home in Pelican Cove, Sarasota, Florida.)

Innocence

Norfleet was drawn to Steinmetz's work because "He combines the innocence of a child with a sophisticated eye. Like a good portrait painter he takes what he sees with no idea what he is capturing" (Norfleet 1982:5). This assumed quality attracted many critics. Gene Thornton of the *New York Times* entitled his review of *Killing Time* "Unwitting Pioneer of the Candid Style" (August 22, 1982). Edward J. Sozanski, art critic of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, wrote on August 1, 1983: "Although he didn't aspire to high art, he was gifted with an artist's intuition and irrepressibly impish sense of humor." And Rebecca Sinkler, also of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, stated (September 11, 1983): "Joe Steinmetz didn't think that he was making art back in the 30's and 40's when he was shooting Philadelphia preppies at play. . . . Norfleet has accused him of 'artistic perfection' and 'understanding the ideology of the society' he was recording. 'That sounds mighty fancy,' Steinmetz says . . . 'I was shooting as fast as I could—and having fun.'"

Norfleet's quote and the critics' response to *Killing Time* raise two questions: (1) Is Steinmetz a "naive" artist—an innocent who made art without knowing it? and (2) Was Steinmetz recording social customs and history and did he realize it?

1. "Naive"?

I believe that Steinmetz's "innocence" is simply the reflection of a general lack of concern among most commercial photographers for the canons of fine arts photography, where one's motivation is thought to be the satisfaction of self and not the client and where a devotion to a particular style is thought to be a sign of integrity. Steinmetz is a sophisticated and professional commercial photographer, technically competent, craft conscious, and able to deliver the type of image his clients expect. To do so, he has employed whatever style has suited the situation. It is a pragmatic world, in which getting the job done well must dominate other considerations.

His portraits (Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4) display a clear mastery of the conventions of Western portraiture. Other images in this essay indicate a stylistic range not previously seen in either of Norfleet's books. Many are indistinguishable from photographs taken by documentary artists (Figures 5, 6, and 7), such as Cartier-Bresson (Figures 8, 9, 10, and 11), or some FSA photographers (Figures 12 and 13). The similarities do not suggest that Steinmetz is directly derivative of any of these people. To stay in the business of taking photographs for a living, one adapts whatever look or style is deemed appropriate at the time. An argument could be made that being well known or obscure in the history of photography has to do with many factors unrelated to the quality of one's work.

2. "Social Recorder"?

Modern art photography has been influenced by two "non-art" styles: the snapshot, or candid, and the so-called vernacular, or commercial, image. Norfleet suggests that Steinmetz, or at least photographers like him, may be an important source for the art photographer. "The modernity of Steinmetz's vision makes us admire this vernacular photograph (e.g., Burger Queen, Sarasota, Florida, 1959); it is possible that the origins of much contemporary art photography can be traced to such sources, usually ignored in photographic history. Clearly, studio photographers know that good form makes a subject more accessible" (Norfleet 1979:75).

Gene Thornton of the *New York Times* says:

The style of Steinmetz's photographs is a style made famous by the party photographs of Lee Friedlander . . . and Garry Winogrand. . . . The roving photographer armed with a hand-held camera and a flash looks for pictures at a party, a political rally or an art show and, when he sees one, shoots from the hip. . . . As John Szarkowski of the Museum of Modern Art pointed out . . . such accidental effects are peculiarly characteristic of the photographic medium . . . all three photographers (that is, Steinmetz, Friedlander, and Winogrand) are working in the same style, and the fact that Steinmetz, a heretofore obscure studio photographer mastered it several decades before the stars of the Museum of Modern Art made it famous, is a fact worth pondering. [August 22, 1983]

Steinmetz's candid wedding shots and Florida tourism shots displayed in the *Killing Time* exhibit and catalog (1982) are not the "accidents" John Szarkowski and others wish them to be. They are shots taken by someone whose job depends upon understanding the events to be recorded well enough to predict those elements that clients wished to have photographed. The wedding photographer who presents the happy couple with "accidents" does not stay in business very long. They want their candid to look exactly like the candid they have seen in everyone else's wedding album. The "informality" of wedding candid is as formulaic as the formal studio portrait; it simply operates under a different set of conventions. Steinmetz may have pioneered the style, but very quickly other photographers copied it and participants in weddings learned how to perform their "candid" and "caught-off-guard" poses just as they learned to perform their formal studio portrait stances.

There is an important difference between the work of professional photographers like Steinmetz and art photographers like Friedlander and Winogrand. Steinmetz is commissioned to record a coherent description of an event for a very specific purpose. The need for content has to dictate the "look" of the pictures. Steinmetz's personal vision or desire for self-expression or stylistic consistency is not relevant. Friedlander and others like him regard the content of their images as deliberately banal and important only if it allows them to explore the formal qualities of the picture. They are interested in the syntactics of the images, not in conveying information about content. They are not interested in using style to reveal content; instead they use content to explore style. It is only by ignoring the purpose and intent of Steinmetz's pictures that we can attach his work to this tradition.

Intentionality and Context

The conundrum about whether an image contains its own meaning or whether one must know the maker's intention, the original context, and the intended audience will probably be debated as long as there are images. It seems reasonable if you wish to comprehend an image to begin with an understanding of the maker's intention, the context in which the picture was displayed, and the original audience. The issue is made more complex when editors and other "gatekeepers" use pictures for secondary purposes in new contexts for audiences never imagined by the photographer. The meaning of a photograph is never fixed but is determined by a combination of factors. This article is an example of the latter point of view. I am using Steinmetz's photographs to discuss issues and ideas that were simply not relevant at the time of the production of the images nor were they of any consequence to the people who commissioned or initially saw them. If we propose to use Steinmetz's photographs for data about social customs, it is critical to understand the differences between the maker's intended meaning and our transformations and recreations.

Norfleet's attitude toward these issues is at best unclear:

Photographs are better at raising questions than at answering them; they can reveal what you do not understand, and also what you take for granted. It is possible to analyze a photograph as a work of art or for its information on material culture because all the information you need is in the photograph, but to interpret the picture's meaning requires information outside the photograph. Like the historian, who edits raw material, the photographer chooses his subject, frames it to include and exclude, and at the moment he sees fit, clicks his shutter. The result of this interaction between a person with a camera and a subject at a particular time and place is then seen by the viewer, who also edits the photograph as he filters it—unconsciously—through his frame of reference. Most of us, of course, do not think about what we are bringing to a photograph when we look at it, but rather respond to it as a simple copy of nature. I have chosen four photographs that demonstrate, each in its own way, how difficult it is to unriddle what we see . . . [Norfleet 1979:5]

It is perplexing that she calls photographs without this information a puzzle and yet supplies the information for only four images in *Champion Pig* (1979).

Four of Steinmetz's photographs reproduced here serve as excellent illustrations of the problem. Figure 14 appears in *Killing Time* labeled simply, "Figure 13 Pennsylvania, 1937." It would appear to be some sort of formal dining occasion among the Philadelphia elite. Given other images in this section of the book, it is not unreasonable to assume that you are looking at a dinner held after the dress rehearsal for a society

wedding. It could be examined as a record of social custom in America. It is an advertisement for the Campbell Soup Company posed by Steinmetz's friends. These data help us to demystify the picture and make the task of gaining a critical understanding of photography more likely.

Figure 15 is a panel from an essay, "Life Goes to a Head Dress Ball"—a somewhat bizarre annual event for the wealthy of Philadelphia. *Life* magazine delighted in regularly presenting its readers with an essay called "Life Goes to a . . .," which invariably poked fun in a lighthearted manner at human foibles. To reproduce one image from the essay (as was done in *Killing Time*, Figure 23) and neglect to explain the original context is misleading.

Figures 16 and 17 are reproduced as further support for our position. Contemplate them with and without the captions. The exercise is in fact rewarding for all of Steinmetz's photographs found here.

Steinmetz as a Social Historian

Steinmetz's pictures present us with a vast amount of information that seems to have the potential of yielding analyzable data about human behavior. Some writers apparently believe that Steinmetz actually made the photographs for these purposes. "He has taken 140,000 or so photographs during his life, most of them studies of how people spend the money they earned or were born with" (Cookie Mueller, *Art Forum*, December 1983). To restate the obvious, Steinmetz is not a historian or social scientist, and his pictures were not taken in order to make a research record. If these images are analyzable data, it is because some analyst is able to ask a researchable question that can transform the pictures into data and then into evidence.

Norfleet states:

A local studio photographer like Steinmetz must respond to the culture and character of his clients if he is going to please them. To succeed he must know the ideology and iconography of the society he is visually preserving. His record of time and place may be a more honest one than that of the art of documentary photographers who has [sic] no need to reflect the self-definitions and thoughts of the people he photographs. [Norfleet 1982:4]

While I am less certain than Norfleet about how one determines the honesty of a photograph or a style, the sentiment expressed in her quote clearly states the potential. She has paved the way by creating an archive, two exhibitions, and a catalog. It is an excellent beginning. Now starts the scholarly task of unraveling the information contained in these documents.

A photograph is a record of a complex set of assumptions, culturally normative behaviors, and expectations. What kind of data do they contain? How do we reveal it?—questions not so easy to answer as they might appear. We can only hope that the photographs and accompanying materials collected at Harvard will be a continuing resource for those scholars interested in the problems involved in studying photographs as social documents.

Norfleet commented that "Joe Steinmetz thinks everything has beauty and all people are nice. I never heard him say anything bad about anyone, including tourists, during the long and many days I spent with him in his studio" (1982). My much briefer contact with Joe Steinmetz has been just as pleasant. His photographs offer us a chance to contemplate ourselves—a serious undertaking. In the process we should not lose sight of the fact that Steinmetz had fun making these pictures. We should try to do the same while reflecting upon them.



Figure 1 The P. Blair Lee family, Chestnut Hill, Pa., 1942. Taken for a Christmas card . . . There is nothing unusual about this picture; a rather routine family group.

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- Norfleet, Barbara
1979 *Champion Pig*. Boston: David Godine.
1982 *Killing Time*. Boston: David Godine.

Note: The italicized quotations in each legend are Steinmetz's comments.



Figure 2 Joseph Lippincott, The Joseph Wharton Estate, Batso, N.J., 1940. An assignment for *Country Life* magazine. The writer for this article in *Country Life* was Sophie Yarnall (Mrs. Reginald Jacobs, prominent Philadelphia socialite who wrote of fine houses and estates and society people).

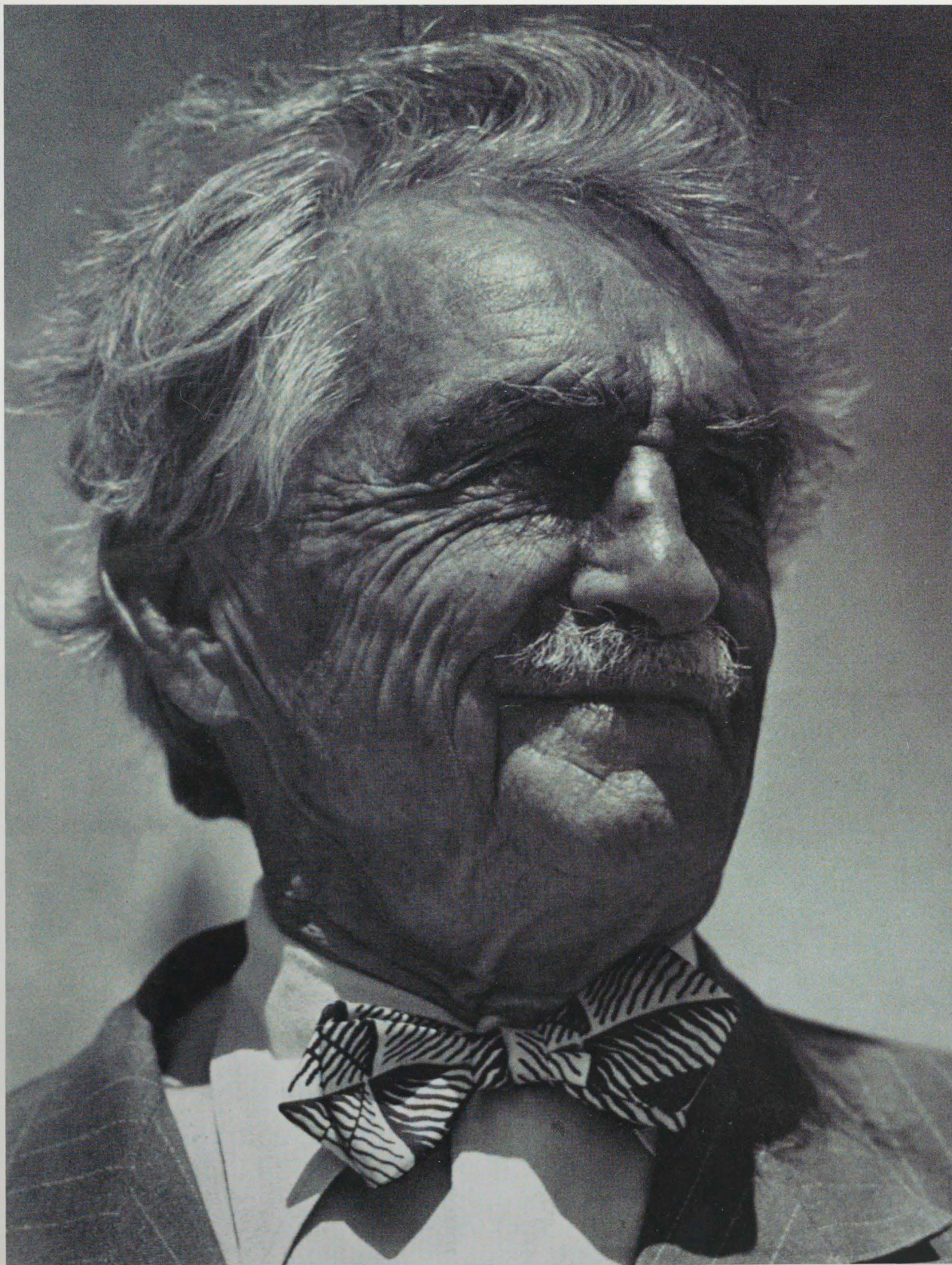


Figure 3 Bernard McFadden at the Orange Blossom Hotel, Sarasota, Florida, 1968. He had flown into Sarasota with his new and much younger wife. I had already photographed his Olympic-sized pool at his Deauville McFadden Hotel on Miami Beach and just wanted a shot of his rugged face for my files and displays.

Figure 4 Ben Stahl, illustrator and founder of The Famous Artist's Course, 1966. Here he is seen working on some paintings of Ben Hur races as promotional artwork for C. B. De Mille's movie epic *Ben Hur*. . . . I consider this shot of Stahl with his paints one of my best portraits.

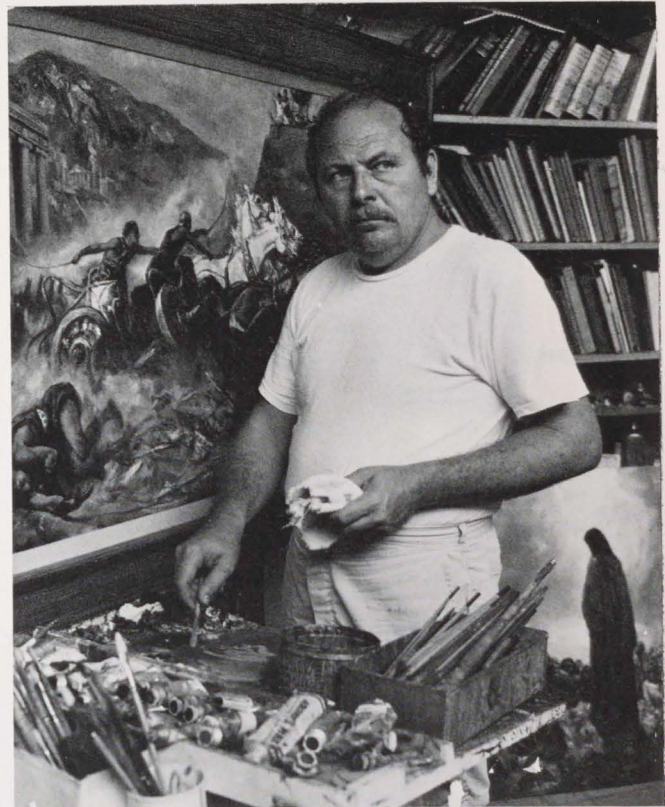


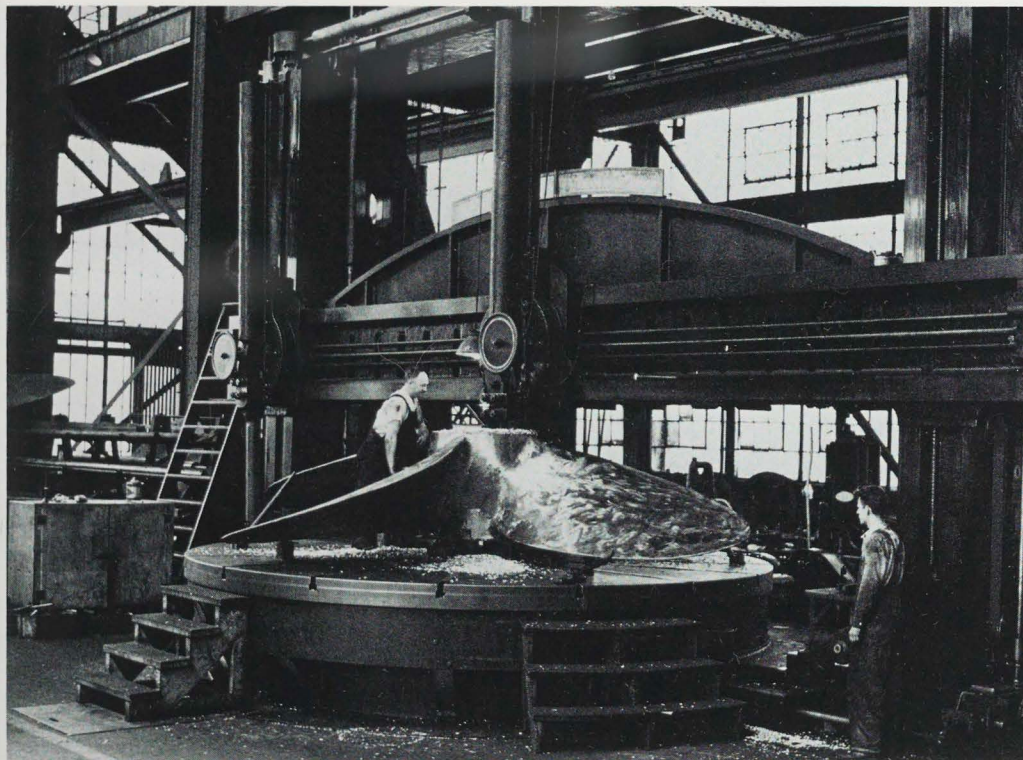
Figure 5 In the Highlands of Guatemala, 1939. I was traveling on vacation with my wife and another couple through the highlands when we passed some Indians coming home from market. I consider this one of my favorite shots and had it enlarged to a 4 foot by 5 foot mural on my livingroom wall above the fireplace

Figure 6 Commercial Fisherman, Crescent Beach, Florida, 1949. Photo taken for Saturday Evening Post article by John Maloney entitled *Late Date With a Mackerel*.

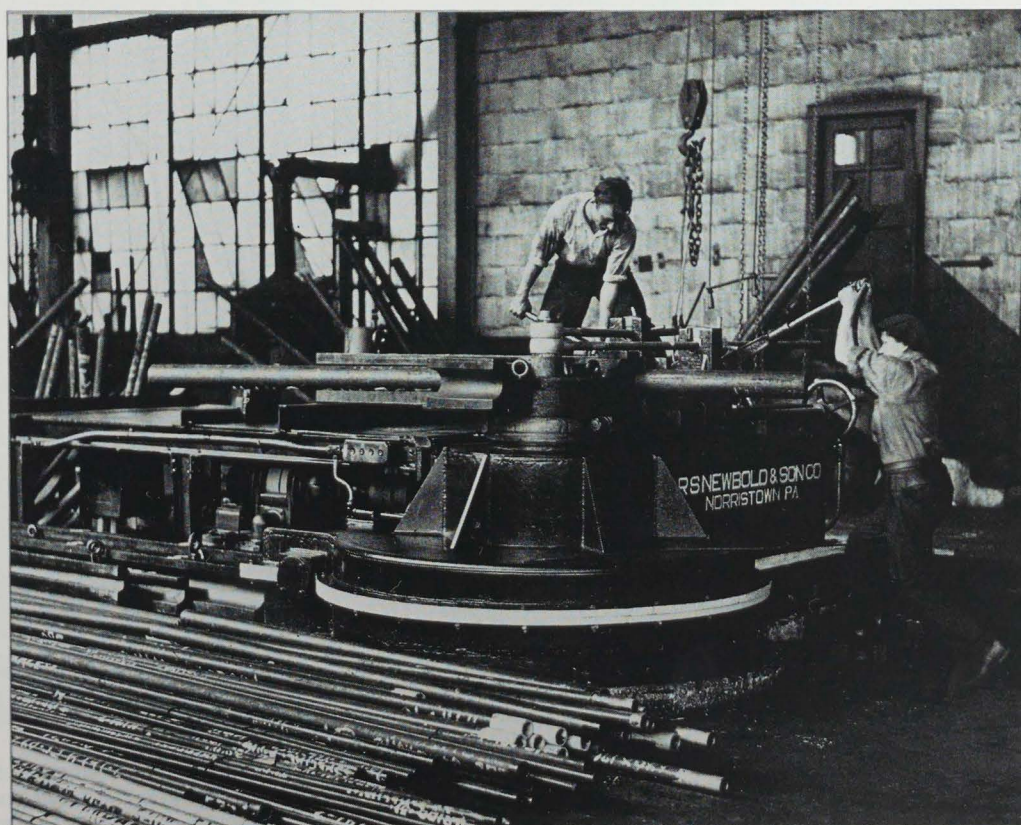




Figure 7 Seminole Woman and Child, Along the Tamiami Trail, 1949. *I had recently photographed a cattle roundup by the Seminoles and wanted to increase my negative files on them. I saw this scene as I motored across the Everglades. I stopped and took it. I've used it in some photo shows and probably had it published in some local papers.*



Figures 8 and 9 At the Federal Shipbuilding Yards, Kearney, N.J., 1935. These are two photos in a series on how a ship is built taken for Lynn Korndorf, president of Federal Shipbuilding. Leather-bound albums of this shipbuilding sequence were made and given to the captain of the ship, to the lady who broke the champagne bottle over the ship's prow at the launching, to President Korndorf, and to the Navy.



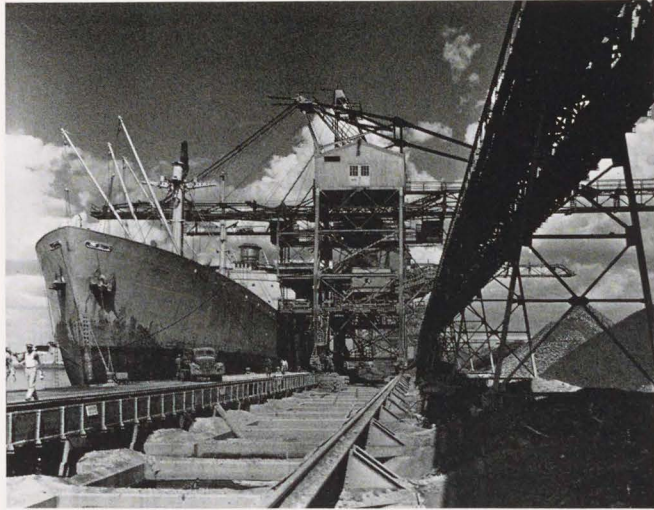


Figure 10 Bauxite being loaded at Mobile, Alabama, 1950. This was one photo of a series for an article on Mobile in *Holiday* magazine.

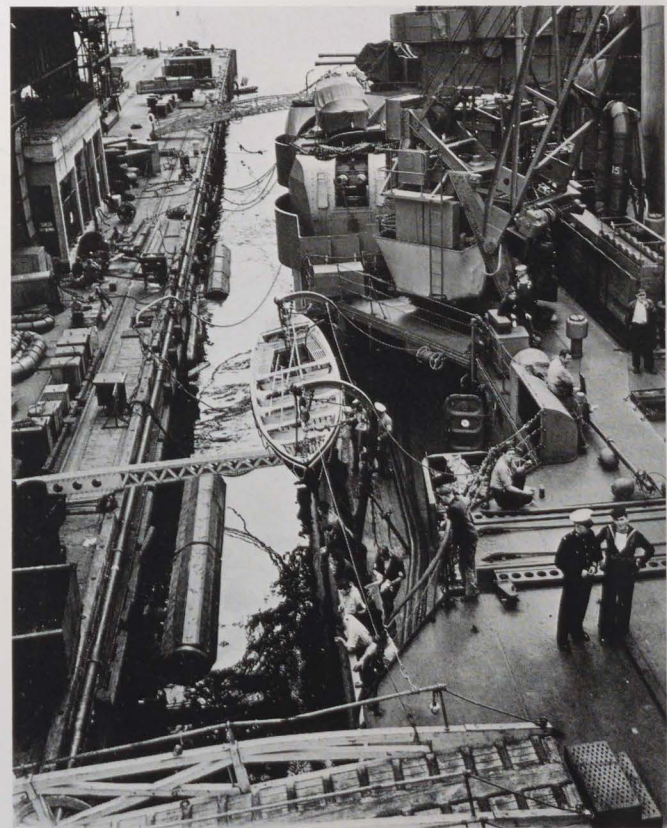


Figure 11 H.M.S. Manchester, British cruiser being repaired in the Philadelphia Navy Yard, 1941. Taken for *Life* magazine. All photos had to be submitted to the British censor before *Life* could use them.



Figure 12 "A Patch in Time Saves Nine But Will They Last?" 1938. This was one of a series of photos for an advertisement in a textile magazine for the Textile Machine Works, Reading, Pa. The theme of all the ads was: If you have old inadequate or broken-down equipment in your textile plant you will not be in the profits.



Figure 13 Circus Roustabout, in the bunks on the Circus Train going to Madison Square Garden, 1941. Taken for Life but not used. On the Circus Train as it rode from Sarasota, Florida, to the opening at Madison Square Garden . . . A circus official begged me not to release this photo for publication thinking the crowded drab conditions would give bad publicity for the show. I held it out at that time.

Figure 14 Campbell Soup Advertisement, 1937. This was made for a Campbell Soup advertisement, per layout prepared by art director (perhaps the F. Wallis Armstrong agency). Models were younger friends of mine.





Figure 15 Excerpt from “Life Goes to a Head Dress Ball,” 1940. A spread in *Life* magazine on Philadelphia’s annual Head Dress Ball, organized by Mrs. Edward J. MacMillan, who ran most of Philadelphia’s parties. I wore a broad-brimmed black Amish hat while shooting the party.



Figure 16 Three Employees of the Davies Artificial Limb Co., Philadelphia, 1938. *For Life magazine I spent the whole day photographing the process of manufacturing aluminum legs and arms. . . . All the workers in the Davies plant are without one or more of their original limbs. . . . One worker asked me "Would you like a truly dramatic photo?" I said yes, what do you have in mind? "We'll take you outdoors and three of us will jump over a hedge!" And so they did. . . . This shot shows the three handicapped men in a footrace in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.*



Figure 17 Interior of warehouse at John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida, 1968. *I was the official photographer shooting exhibits, paintings, special events for twenty years for their files, brochures, and publicity. Lady on right was with Publicity Department of museum and posed in photo to give scale to the many objects.*

Reviews and Discussion

Jacques Bertin *Semiology of Graphs: Diagrams, Networks, Maps*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984. xi + 415 pp., unnumbered illustrations. \$75.00.

Edward R. Tufte. *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Graphics Press, Box 430, Cheshire, CT 06410. 1983. 197 pp., unnumbered illustrations. \$34.00.

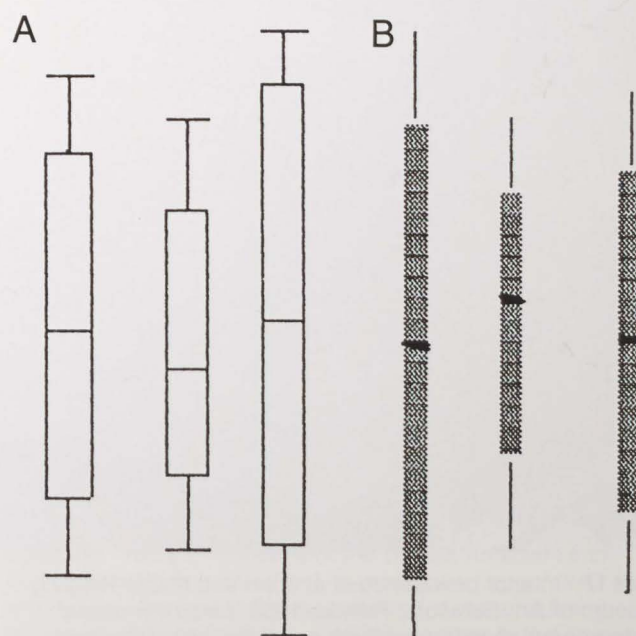
Reviewed by Howard S. Becker
Northwestern University

Academicians are inveterate word and number freaks. If it's worth saying, you can say it in words and numbers. To speak of "saying something visually" is regarded as a low-grade metaphor, and visual materials are thought not to have a language or, if they do, one so primitive and imprecise that it does not merit the name. They do not trust visual presentations, regarding them as somehow more open to abuse and lying than other formats. Puritanically, they often think of visual materials as decorations, used to get readers' attention or interest illegitimately, but essentially distractions from the "real" verbal or numerical message. In fact, social scientists use the language of visual display so much (to store information, to communicate results and conclusions, and to analyze data) that they cannot do without it. They therefore need to understand how that language works, how it is used and misused, and what its appropriate uses are.

Statistical graphics microcomputer programs show another feature of contemporary practice. They invariably focus on the bar chart, the pie chart, and the line graph (sometimes the scattergram as well) as the major graphic devices with which to display data. These were all invented around 1800 and have been little improved since then. Ingenious statisticians and researchers have invented many other devices, but none have "caught on" enough so that you can use them with the assurance that they will be understood as intended. Common practice is extremely conservative and conventional in this regard.

Edward Tufte, an American political scientist with a longstanding interest in statistical graphics, is more irritated than enlightening. He likes graphics that use practically all their ink to convey complex ideas and data concisely, clearly, and efficiently. He doesn't like graphics that mislead by mismatching numbers and areas and quoting data out of context, and especially

despises "data decorators," the artists he believes have wrestled control of the production of graphics from the scientists and scholars who ought to be running things. His interesting ideas for new graphic devices, however, show up the weaknesses of his book. They rest on no systematic analysis of the problem of visual display and mostly derive instead from ad hoc notions and appeals to the authority of past users he admires. That leads to some eccentric opinions (e.g., the sans serif type *Studies in Visual Communication* is set in is bad, apparently because Josef Albers said so) as well as to some designs that so reduce the amount of ink that I found it hard to see what was being conveyed. He thinks, for instance, that Turkey's well-known but little-used box-and-whisker distribution plots (A), which contain information on quartiles as well as the mean and range, would work better if they were redesigned like B:

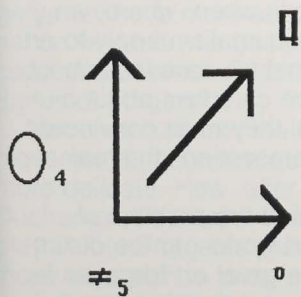


Still, he shows people who need to be convinced what a wonderful communicative job graphics can do and opens your mind up to things beyond bars and pies. That can't be bad.

Jacques Bertin, Director of the Laboratoire de Graphique of the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, offers a much deeper analysis of the problems of graphic display. It also requires a lot more study. I read Tufte in a short afternoon; Bertin took me the best part of three days. His dauntingly systematic book is a cross between a treatise and a reference work. You read it once to get the

idea and then refer to it to solve particular problems as they arise. He defines the graphic problem as how to choose between the available possibilities for conveying information visually in such a way as to be *monosemic*, that is, capable of being understood in only the one way the maker of the graphic intended. He catalogs the possible ways the two "planar" variables of length and width plus the six retinal variables of size, shape, color, texture, orientation, and value can be combined to express the relations between variables, depending on whether the variables are "reorderable," ordered, quantitative, or geographic and on whether you want to produce a *diagram* (correspondences on the plane between all the divisions of two components), a *network* (correspondences on the plane between all the divisions of one component), or a *map* (correspondence on the plane among divisions of one component arranged according to a geographic order). Those definitions give you an idea of the level of abstraction in the analytic prose.

Fortunately, Bertin uses his mastery of visual materials to give telling examples of what he is talking about (the way the retinal variables can represent variation in a component, for instance, or the one hundred different representations of the same information he uses to pose the problem of which graphic to choose on pp. 100–137) and to develop a visual language to summarize his theory. He represents the two components of the data (we could probably call them variables) by orthogonal arrows and the third variable by a diagonal arrow rising above the plane:



The combinations can be used to express combinations succinctly, but you must learn the language to know that the above arrows stand for the number of people in the cells defined by cross-classifying an unordered qualitative variable with five categories (e.g., five reasons for going to a café) and an ordered quantitative variable (e.g., age classes).

Most importantly, Bertin emphasizes how to know when we have solved the graphic problem: when we have created an image that allows a reader to grasp at one look (or some minimum number of looks) the

answer to the question he has posed of the data displayed. All this is at a level of theoretical generality that lets you reason out the answers to questions as yet unposed. His book is hard work but worth it; it gives you a systematic way to think about these problems.

Denis Dutton, ed. *The Forger's Art: Forgery and the Philosophy of Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. 276 pp. \$22.50.

Reviewed by Gary Alan Fine
University of Minnesota

A forgery can be distinguished from an original because it looks more genuine.

Ernst Bloch

A forgery is one of those paradoxes of existence that brings the rest of the world into question. Should forgery be a crime? Or should we be grateful to the unappreciated forger for increasing our stock of Old Masters? If we can't tell the difference between a forgery and an original, aren't the two of equal value? Questions of the nature of art, these among them, make forgery into the Rubik's Cube of aestheticians—except that the Cube can, eventually, be solved.

Denis Dutton, editor of *The Forger's Art*, has done those of us who love a good puzzle an invaluable service by bringing together a dozen articles, some written exclusively for this volume, others previously published, on the philosophy of forgery. One emerges from the reading dazed by the contortions into which logic can be shaped and by the power of one's definition over the question one asks. Forgery is no easy topic, but it is further complicated when each theorist, like the blind men describing an elephant, "sees" the issue differently. To help the reader recognize this pachyderm, Dutton wisely opens the book with a biographical chapter on the greatest of modern forgers, Han Van Meegeren, the Dutch forger of Vermeer. Hope Werness ("Han Van Meegeren fecit") presents the historical and personal events of Van Meegeren's life in a lively, readable fashion. Although the chapter does not contribute directly to the philosophy of forgery, it does provide a grounding for other chapters. Since Van Meegeren is the primary example used throughout the volume, this base of knowledge is essential to understand the rest. From here the plot thickens.

A number of fundamental questions cut through the remaining chapters. Most obvious is the question of whether a forgery can ever be *aesthetically* equal to the original on which it is based. This question was classically stated by Aline B. Saarinen:

... the most tantalizing question of all: If a fake is so expert that even after the most thorough and trustworthy examination its authenticity is still open to doubt, is it or is it not as satisfactory a work of art as if it were unequivocally genuine? (p. 92)

The question, particularly as posed by Nelson Goodman ("Art and Authenticity"), focuses on exact copies. That is, if one has two "versions" of a picture cheek-to-jowl and one cannot tell them apart, can we ascribe two different values to them? Goodman's answer to the question is that the two works of art can and should be differentiated. Even if we are not able to see the difference now, at some later time such a differentiation may be possible. Anyone who has spent time with "identical" twins should see the relevance of this belief. The heart of this approach is that aesthetics is not based simply on the paint molecules on canvas but on the *interpretation* of those molecules.

Such a solution, as proposed by Goodman, does not solve the problem as cleanly as one might like. First, it does not address the problem of what differentiates the pictures *until* we can see a difference (unless it is to goad others to see that difference—creating expectations of them). Second, it does not answer whether the difference is truly an *aesthetic* difference or some other kind of difference. This latter view is proposed by Alfred Lessing ("What Is Wrong with a Forgery?"), who sees the problems with "perfect" forgeries as historical, economic, and legal, but not aesthetic.

This question focuses on the artwork, but there is another approach to forgery (typically leading to its derogation) which focuses on the original creator. Every work of art has a *history of production* (see Goodman; and Wreen, "Is Madam? Nay, It Seems!"). The forgery is dishonest in misrepresenting this history. It was produced using "real" paints, canvases, and the like, but its "meaning" as art is not honest. One of the aesthetic meanings of any work is that it was done in a particular period, by a particular hand. Vermeer's works are fascinating in part because they were painted in Holland during the seventeenth century, and were significantly different from any painting that had been done previously—although, of course, they were influenced by others. Judgments of aesthetics can, from this perspective, be grounded on the historical situation of the creator. Someone who

creates a treatise on psychoanalysis would receive much less attention if it were created in the 1980s than if it had been created at the turn of the century; Freud has come before. This might explain why France produced so many notable impressionists in the nineteenth century but so few in the twentieth. If one viewed aesthetic qualities as absolutes, separated from the historical circumstances of their creation, one might imagine that a great, new impressionist working in the tradition of Monet is a possibility, instead of being immediately classified as a quaintly naive Sunday painter. As one who occasionally dabs and daubs in that style, I await, though do not expect, such a revival. My works of paint might have had some credibility a century previous but now are firmly unnotable.

The reason for this passage of style has much to do with the devaluation of forgery. Forgery deliberately misrepresents its history. However, even if fraud were not involved, the history of production of a duplication is of less aesthetic significance than that of the original. Sociologists of art, notably Howard S. Becker (1982), argue that artists are deeply affected by the aesthetic conventions of their age. Major artists are those who transcend these unstated limits of what constitutes "great art" and can convince enough of their contemporaries or those who follow that their innovations are worthy of the label "art." The forger has a much easier job; after all, the conventions which he uses have been accepted through the pioneering of others. His creativity has become mimicry. As Dutton ("Artistic Crimes") notes, the history of occidental art is based on who created a work: when, where, why, and how. The canons of good journalism apply to art history. For the same reason that we care less about the second heart transplant, we care less about a "new" Vermeer, so forgers feel they must convince their audiences that they are presenting "the real thing."

This approach takes us behind the problem of identity (that is, whether two art works can be distinguished). The problem with the great art forgeries is not that they mimic a particular painting but that they do not. If we are deceived when we find two works that appear the same, the deception has little social impact, although it dramatically affects those who now have works judged "genuine" or "fake." This situation can be contrasted to that which is involved in works that are termed "original forgeries" (Harris 1961). Han Van Meegeren's *Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus* is such a work. It is not similar to anything Vermeer painted; therefore, by accepting it into Vermeer's oeuvre, we have substantially altered our understanding of Vermeer. Thus, some art critics con-

sider forgery an example of "cheating history" (Fine 1983). Besides making critics look ridiculous, which forgeries surely do, they also change our relation to the past in some small way.

Original forgeries raise Van Meegeren's question about his own work: if he can fool the critics with his Vermeer, doesn't that make him as good an artist as Vermeer? It is a question that haunts critics. Although few of our esteemed critics would grant him this exalted status, the question is not easy to answer. From the view that appearance is the key value in art (Jack W. Meiland, "Originals, Copies and Aesthetic Value") it would seem that one would have to give the Dutch devil his due. Yet most people (including most contributors to this volume) accept the relational, interactional qualities of art. As Leonard Meyer ("Forgery and the Anthropology of Art") notes, in practice we never judge objects on their intrinsic attributes alone. Meyer's claim is that it is foolish to attempt to make a watertight separation between aesthetic and other criteria. Meyer suggests that to pretend to admire a forgery or to think it is no different from an original is reverse snobbery, which ignores our feelings. This perspective is congruent with those interpretive sociologies, such as symbolic interactionism, which suggests that the meaning of an object can be understood only in the light of its context and not through any intrinsic qualities. Such an approach can accept the changed meaning and value of a forgery after its unmasking because of the change in its social context. Indeed, such a perspective might go further in asserting that there may be occasions in which a forgery may have more aesthetic interest than the original on which it was based, such as a Rembrandt copy of a Lastman (Mark Sagoff, "The Aesthetic Status of Forgery").

As we venture into the heady world of new art movements, the entire question of forgeries becomes more delicate. How, after all, can one forge Duchamp's *Fountain*—a real ceramic urinal? The display of found objects presents the same problem to those who wish to draw a firm line between creator and deceiver. Where are the boundaries of art? As long as we object to forgery because of its "fraud" we have little real difficulty, but if we choose to consider work done by the hand of one person which happens to be passed off as that of another as forgery, how can we protect the art restorer? The argument that most sociologists of art make is that we know as *participants* in the "art world" what really constitutes original art and what constitutes forgery, and from this institutional view we are unlikely to confuse the two.

One final question is raised in several of the chapters: what kind of works can be forged? Nelson

Goodman makes an influential distinction between autographic works, in which performance and individual style are crucial, and so can be forged, and allographic works, in which the style of *creating* the work is not important. Paintings can be forged, but can the score of a symphony be forged in the same way? Goodman, Joseph Margolis ("Art, Forgery, and Authenticity"), and Monroe Beardsley ("Notes on Forgery") attempt to deal with this dichotomy, but to less effect than with some of the other issues in the volume. To divide works of art into two classes seems naive to begin with, and although there are some differences worth exploring here in terms of the social uses of "copying," this approach does not sufficiently consider the nature of the economic market and the options of "discovering" aesthetics in all parts of the art world.

With all these philosophical gremlins lurking around corners, *The Forger's Art* provides endless fascination. Understanding forgery involves the skill of asking absurd questions and answering them only slightly less absurdly and with considerable bravado. One feature lacking from this admirable collection is that we learn about forgery only from the standpoint of the artist, the critic, and the general public, but where is the voice of the forger? Forgers have been quite capable as self-publicists, and several (David Stein, Elmyr de Hory, Tom Keating) have written or contributed to their own autobiographies. Each has a justification for his actions, which generally can be described as "blaming the victim." Each artist sees himself as having been betrayed by the art establishment, and each makes a forceful case for the "appearance theory of aesthetics," demonstrating how their self-esteem can be insulated from the implications of their crimes. They *did* make many people happy until they were discovered: a perverse use of the phrase "doing well by doing good." Unfortunately, Dutton's collection presents a world in which there is forgery without forgers. As a collection of writings by philosophers it sometimes appears that there are only hypothetical crimes: "imagine a forgery. . . ." If for no other reason, we should be grateful for Han Van Meegeren; he would surely have had to be invented had he never lived.

Some readers will miss any discussion of the history and extent of forgery beyond the confines of Van Meegeren. Is forgery a major social problem? How is it dealt with? Although this book does not pretend to be anything other than a collection of papers on the philosophy of art, those who wish entree to the subject could legitimately ask for a longer and more empirical introduction that would place the problem of forgery in social, historical, and legal perspectives.

These qualms aside, Denis Dutton's volume is admirably suited for any scholar interested in issues of what makes art "art." The issues that forgery raises are significant precisely because they are potentially subversive of all art and artistic theories. Criminals sometimes make the best teachers—and the most troubling ones. We should never forget the words of Theodore Rousseau, Jr., Curator of Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York:

We should all realize that we can only talk about the bad forgeries, the ones that have been detected; the good ones are still hanging on the walls. [Goodrich 1973:224]

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Reviewed by Miles Orvell
Temple University

Only in the last ten or fifteen years, picking up where Robert Taft left off in the thirties, have we begun to connect photography with the larger cultural and social history of which it is necessarily a part. One such connection—between photography and the city—seems now, in the light of Peter Hales's *Silver Cities*, to have been long overdue for detailed consideration. (It has been equally neglected by urban specialists: in his otherwise inclusive and multidisciplinary *Images of the American City* [1976], Anselm Strauss has remarkably little to say about photography.) Yet the connection is a natural one, for the noisy growth of the American city in the nineteenth century coincided with the advent of photography, and the camera was inevitably an adjunct to the process of urbanization,

directing the eye, and the mind's eye, according to the interests of the image-maker. Hales is interested in the whole spectrum of urban photography from its beginnings to World War I, encompassing the early daguerreotypists, commercial studios, amateurs, and reformers; and he articulates a range of types and purposes that gives order to the inchoate and boundless mass of city scenes. Though not without certain problems, *Silver Cities* is a brilliant synthesis of social, cultural, and technological history, a handsomely produced, lavishly illustrated survey—over two hundred images—of a previously neglected, richly fertile field of research.

Hales discerns several distinct phases in the history of urban photography, reflecting changes in the way people saw cities and in the nature of photographic technology. Chapter one, which covers the period from 1839 to 1870, outlines the development of a standardized style that pictured the city as a place of civic order, architectural monuments, and growing prosperity—whatever the reality of depressions and disorder might have been. When the wet-plate collodion process, with its easy multiple copies, replaced the more limited daguerreotype, the market for urban views increased dramatically, and both single plates and complete books became available, based on the precedent of the daguerreotype's quiet celebration of the city. The San Franciscan G. R. Fardon, for example, produced an album in 1856 that taught both "what to see [and] how to see it," featuring categories of "history, culture, fire protection, trade, business, and geography," and feeding the city's ambition to promote itself commercially, despite its economic depression, and feast the eyes of the armchair traveler. Fardon had invented, as Hales says, "the photographic booster book" (p. 50). These early scenes were devoid of human presence, but in 1859 Edward Anthony of New York significantly advanced the art in a set of stereo card views that took advantage of the instantaneous capabilities of the developing technology, showing a populous city that delighted Oliver Wendell Holmes with its "multitudinous complexity of movement" (p. 59).

The decades following the Civil War were marked by a continuation of the earlier booster tendencies, with photographers capitalizing on the increasing speed of film and on the growing reproductive technologies of the medium to reach an even wider audience of book and magazine readers. Hales calls this movement the "Grand Style," and in his second chapter, covering the years from 1870 to 1893, he surveys the depiction of the city as a "place of monumental scale and inexorable progress, where laissez-faire capitalism was successfully converting urban entropy into a new civilization—an environment of order, grandeur, and permanence" (p. 119). Hales demon-

strates his point through repeated instances (Boston, Chicago, New York, and San Francisco), showing how, by the 1880s, the "medium of fact" had "transformed itself into the medium of myth" (p. 130). Editing out the undesirable elements, the photographer presented images of urban health—government buildings, recreational spaces, parks, promenades, hotels, business buildings, and railroad stations. New types and genres evolved: during the late 1870s the panoramic photograph reached its apogee in the San Francisco work of Eadweard Muybridge especially; while during the 1880s and 1890s the subprofession of architectural photography took on great importance, with high-angle street views giving the photographer more control over the image than the less discriminating panorama.



Jacob Riis. "Minding Baby—Cherry Hill." Courtesy of Museum of the City of New York (Riis-187). From *Silver Cities*, p. 196.

The City Beautiful that the photographer was striving to capture in his images of the actual city was embodied to perfection in the fairgrounds of the 1893 Chicago Exposition; whereas in the real city he might have to eliminate undesirable human figures or move in close to his architectural subject in order to avoid surrounding unpleasantness, at the Fair the photographer could survey the entire scene, which had already been controlled by the team of architects and planners. In fact, the Fair administration went even farther in their effort to control the Chicago image, granting a temporary photographic monopoly to Charles Dudley Arnold. (It was protested by, among

others, Alfred Stieglitz, and the Fair eventually replaced Arnold with William Henry Jackson.) Concentrating on Arnold, Hales explores in depth the political and aesthetic issues at stake in creating scenes of urban harmony and splendor which the masses were to witness but not inhabit.

In his final two chapters Hales examines the groundswell of reform photography that began with Jacob Riis in the late 1880s and flourished into the twentieth century. Contemporaneous with the continuing grand style photographers, the reformers presented an aspect of the city that has been excluded from most earlier photography—a view of "the other half." Where the purpose of the grand style photographers was to celebrate a vision of urban order, the reformers sought to expose the misery, disease, poverty, ill-housing, crime, and degradation that lay just around the corner. Yet, as Hales rightly observes, the reformer's assumption and that of the City Beautiful booster were not unlike at bottom: both believed in progress and the American way, and both believed in the importance of the environment.

Riis was the great revolutionary, for Hales, and a whole chapter is devoted to defining his opposition to both social and aesthetic conventions, his breaking of the "cordon sanitaire," as Hales calls it, of permissible urban subjects. Hales's final chapter examines the mutations that followed Riis's work, in which photographers capitalized on the interest in lowlife to present amusingly picturesque—and often condescending and racist—images of urban street scenes. Hales is most acute in dealing with Sigmund Krausz's, *Street Types of Chicago*; but other transformations also receive attention, such as Helen Campbell's *Darkness and Daylight*, a mixture of the urban pathos and urban horror genres, as well as the more appealing studies of the gifted E. Alice Austen. It is a fascinating chapter, in which the ideological assumptions behind the conventions of "reform" photography are expertly unraveled and placed within the context of the developing reform and settlement house movements.

By 1910, Hales argues, with the bureaucratization of reform, photography had been converted into a "fund-raising tool for professional social work organizations" (p. 255) and its persuasive power had been undermined by the repetition of types and codes; meanwhile, picture agencies were marketing images to the magazines and newspapers in such familiar categories as "personalities, performing artists, sports events, . . . lower-class urban life, . . . strikes, riots, or celebrated murders" (p. 271).

Hales's argument is as a whole coherent and convincing and provides a most useful framework for studying urban photography. If there is a weak point, from my own perspective, it is the chapter on Riis,

where we hold fundamentally different views of the great reformer. Where, for example, Hales sees Riis as a revolutionary moral humanist, I see him more as a great activist who did not escape many of the ethical confusions of his time. Hales celebrates Riis's vision, but nowhere does he refer to the conspicuous instances of racism, of outrageous ethnic stereotypes and caricaturing, that fill *How the Other Half Lives*. And many of the accusations Hales levels against Riis's followers—that they paid their subjects, used horror stories, appealed to voyeuristic, xenophobic, and nativist sentiment—could as well, I think, be leveled against Riis.

We also disagree on how artfully conscious a craftsman Riis was. Where Hales sees Riis as merely affecting the persona of the bumbling photographer, the better to gain credibility for his images, I see him as a relatively unselfconscious journalist with a camera, who succeeded in his photographic mission by the rude strength of his determination, and I mean rude. Hales is right in seeing the use of the flash as a revolutionary device that shaped the image in Riis—giving his indoor subjects a blank or startled expression; but I read these images more as records of the photographer's careless intrusion on his subjects' privacy rather than as a humanistic rendering of their plight. And much of what Hales sees as intentional artistry I see as happenstance.

Take, for example, Hales's reading of "Minding Baby—Cherry Hill," a picture of two children, one holding the other, with a dresser and a washtub on each side of them; it is a photograph Hales calls one of Riis's "most successful, most energetic, and most artful" (pp. 195–196). And the key element in the photographer's artistry, Hales says, is the tilted frame, which he sees as an effort to "emphasize the casualness of the photographer's eye and thereby denigrate his ability to manipulate his subject for his own purposes" (p. 195), thus dissociating himself from earlier, more controlled technique. The frame is indeed tilted in this image, but what Hales hasn't apparently noticed is that the photo was taken on a sloping sidewalk, and that the tilt results inevitably from Riis's standing slightly downhill from his subjects; what Hales sees as cracks in a wall, I see as cracks in a fence, and that fence, if you look closely, would meet the sidewalk paving stones on an angle, thus indicating the sloping hill. Hales implies that the scene is indoors, and that the dresser with a folded mattress on it, and the covered washtub, are signs of "poverty, ill-housing, menial work, and overcrowding." But given the outdoor setting (the kids are wearing overcoats), it looks more like moving day than the more typical squalor shot Riis favored. In fact, this particular image

has always seemed to me one of Riis's more cheerful shots, what with the one child hugging the other. In general, Hales has an acutely observant eye and supplies ingenious readings of the images under discussion, but every now and then his interpretive genius reads into the image rather more than seems warranted.

A more general problem I have with *Silver Cities* is Hales's rhetoric, which suffers at times from a propensity for talismanic words that serve the purposes of decoration, invocation, and magnification, but not exactly of clarification; these are words like "Romantic" (used in a variety of ways), "dynamic," "entropy," "encode," etc. At times even the word "photography" itself will escape the careful social context Hales usually provides and take wing as a self-empowered abstraction: speaking in his epilogue of the "new myths" that were needed in the agrarian United States of the early nineteenth century, if "America was to accept and control the realities of urban growth" (who is "America"?), Hales writes, epically, "Photography took up the challenge; after the early years of experimentation had revealed its ability to define and control its subject, the medium became the most powerful spokesman for the possibility of urban health, urban civilization in America" (p. 280). This sort of thing belies the complexity of the book's argument. Or again, Hales has let things stand that he should have caught, as in a paragraph toward the end of the Riis chapter in which he speaks of the photos as "unmediated reality" and then, a few lines later, as embodying a "clear and recognizable symbolic language" (p. 215). You might make a case that they are in some sense both unmediated and coded, but you've got to first acknowledge that there is a difference.

In closing out his narrative, Hales brings us briefly into the early twentieth century, when, he says, photography's central role as mediator between the masses and the city had been replaced by cinema and radio, while urban photography—under the influence of modernists like Stieglitz and Strand—was catering to a visually cultivated minority who favored a personalized approach to the image. (Winogrand and Friedlander become the heirs of this line.) This may be true as far as it goes, but it surely oversimplifies the complexity of twentieth-century urban photography, and indeed its connections with the nineteenth century, by leaving unmentioned the work of Berenice Abbott and the WPA city guidebooks (listed in the note on sources but never discussed), as well as quasi-documentary urban photographers like Bruce Davidson, Danny Lyon, Nicholas Nixon, etc. *Silver Cities* may have been polished a little too roundly at the end.

But let me restate, in concluding, the very real strengths of the book: Hales has identified a subject that has long needed systematic study, and he has given it the coherent and sweeping treatment it deserves, organizing a bewildering mass of images into a useful framework; along the way, he has provided a wealth of ingenious observations about specific photographs that are most convincing when most anchored in the social and artistic contexts of the time. In short, Hales has broken new ground and drawn some basic and indispensable maps that other scholars will want to examine (and perhaps argue with) in more detail.

Anita J. Glaze. *Art and Death in a Senufo Village.* Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, 1981. xvi + 267 pp.; map, plates, appendix, notes, bibliography, glossary, index. \$25.00.

Reviewed by Leon Siroto
New York City

This review will attempt to go beyond appraisal of the book's content into questions posed by the author's choice of that material and the ways of explaining it. The intensive study of African art has gone into its fourth decade; we should begin to assess its means and ends in terms of its explanation of the long-standing questions it has posed. Investigators have resorted to diverse disciplines, often in combination, and numerous styles in studying the art of traditional African societies. Their findings sometimes lead us to reflect on the definition of art and the extent to which they would agree with one another on the limits of the phenomenon.

The book under review brings these questions to mind; indeed, its high quality brings them into sharper perspective. Beyond its substantive contribution, it strikes a note of "where are we going" that should resound into Africanists' consideration of disciplinary outlooks and stratagems in the study of traditional art.

A brief introduction to the society under consideration may be helpful to less specialized readers. The Senufo people form a large ethnic block that has been long settled in a wide belt of West African parkland extending through contiguous parts of Mali, Ivory Coast, and Upper Volta. They live in large, cohesive villages that have tended to be autonomous and democratic in their political life. As the farthest western outlier of the Voltaic(Gur)-speaking peoples, the

Senufo entity, relatively peaceful and altogether open to the armies and nonbelligerent migrations from the more sophisticated Manding-speaking societies, has acquired—in at least its material culture—a substantial Manding veneer.

In the hope of gaining some control over the unseen forces governing their lives, the Senufo organized cults distinguished by ritual of considerable complexity and by imagery famous for its withdrawn-seeming elegance. The best-known cult has been Poro, a paramount association that encompasses most village men. Poro teaches knowledge of the world and deals with the supernatural power thought necessary to harness its forces. It initiates its members and marks its hierarchical structure largely by means of images and costumes.

The cult images include both statues and masks. These objects make up the universe of Senufo art as we have become accustomed to think of it. They can commemorate group and lineage founders, while others represent spirits of the wild.

We are most familiar with Senufo images made of wood and brass. Senufo style in wooden images has been known widely in the West ever since the beginning of its interest in African sculpture. Its gracile refinement, striking schematization, and dark luster always seemed quintessentially African. We have believed such images to be fashioned exclusively by groups of foreign origin who became integrated into Senufo society over varying lengths of time. These artisans have remained socially distinct from their farmer-patrons. We were inclined to think that only they were involved in the production of Senufo art, since we were also inclined to believe that all imagery was made for secret use in the Poro cult.

For the better part of our acquaintance with Senufo art we have not gone much beyond admiration and mystification. Before the appearance of this book our access to Senufo society—and especially its Poro—had been minimal. Dr. Glaze's wide scope and special insights greatly extend our comprehension of this people and their art. As is inevitable in studies of traditional African art, simplicity gives way to complexity, and mystery must retreat.

Although trained as an art historian, the author here shows a major interest in the contemporary social contexts of imagery. Long familiar with the Senufo at first hand, she was in a position to exploit both advantages: Senufo traditional art seems to be flourishing in the sector that she studied.

Dr. Glaze introduces us to the population, society, and culture of a narrowly circumscribed region in the southwest of central Senufoland. (She claims that the central area is the most productive of art.) The region, around the town of Dikodougou, is populated by the Kufolo and Fodonon farmers and their attendant artisan groups. (Dr. Glaze uses the marked contrasts between these ethnic units to make important points about style.)

In order to set a realistic balance in our perspective on Senufo art, she provides us with an overview of "art and the women's sphere." Women's associations of different kinds play crucial roles in the conceptualization and use of certain wooden and brass images.

In the following chapter—"art and the men's sphere"—we are guided through the Poro by way of a detailed description of its initiation cycle. In these contexts, mainly public ones, we become acquainted with the forms and ritual uses of images—preponderantly masks—associated with Poro. We are told considerably less about kinds of images, mainly large wooden statues, that we might also infer, from the elimination of other possibilities, to play a role in that cult. From this disproportion in treatment, we might conclude that such figures are kept and used in less public circumstances. (Dr. Glaze does not acquaint us with the mode and extent of her entry into Poro, although her coverage seems to surpass all others published.)

The title of the book is fully realized in the fourth chapter: "The Funeral As Synthesis." In this connection, the funeral relates to death in its liveliest sense, not so much concerned with grief and memorialization as with the celebration of the status of the deceased, of his kin and peers, and, ultimately, of his village. The idea of synthesis here operates on many levels: the "spheres" of men and women, the objects that reflect these interdependent worlds, and the patterns of actions and sounds that give these objects their importance in ritual.

Within this frame Dr. Glaze presents a vivid account of traditional art in its context. Unlike most previous studies of the Senufo, hers is admirably focused. Her terms are precise; her observations are all first hand, detailed, and integrated with one another.

In particular, we are indebted to this study for a new view into the inventory and social background of the material that we choose to deal with as Senufo art. Several major points shape this change in our perspective.

1. Women play crucial roles in the ritual and social background of Senufo art. This participation seems to be limited only by their exclusion from the manufacture of ritual images.
2. Strong and complex aesthetic values and rationales are explicit in the diverse ritual techniques of Senufo society.

3. Differences between the art styles of Senufo subgroups are quite apparent. The processes of separation, migration, and re-encounter have served to introduce different ideas to subgroups and subsequently to diffuse them to other subgroups.
4. Disguising costumes of cloth, string, and shredded fiber are of great ritual and aesthetic importance in Poro. These cover the wearer without recourse to carved or cast elements representing head and/or face. Types and variants of such "soft" disguises correspond closely with farmer subgroups and localities.

While this study is a major contribution and quite defensible within its frame, it does pose larger questions about the fields of art that investigators select, define, and explain. Dr. Glaze does not intend to tell us here about what makes Senufo art distinctive and why it should be. A reviewer cannot fault a book for not answering questions that it never proposed to deal with. Yet, the kind of perspective that Dr. Glaze has chosen can lead us to wonder about the future for our knowledge of the past of African traditional imagery and for the prospects of resolution of the problems that this awareness of the past has indicated.

Traditional African sculpture first engaged Western thought by its distinctive approach to form. The background for the African choice of the shapes making up an image proved largely enigmatic and still remains so. The initial appeal of the first-known carved figures and masks should grant them some priority in efforts at explaining the nature of African art, which we may take to mean African views of form. In being realized, these forms assuredly went through sequences of development. Such sequences should enter into the subject matter of art history dealing with African art, even if their reconstruction cannot go far beyond speculation. The most valuable speculation in this regard would come from those who have investigated the questions in the field.

Coming to the end of Dr. Glaze's book, specialized readers will feel that they have been allowed a valuable insight into a moment in time, into what Senufo art has become in one region. However, to our surprise, the wooden forms that intrigued us before we read the book do not take precedence in the Senufo scheme of imagery. We find that they are of coordinate, and sometimes subordinate, importance in relation to disguises made entirely of cloth, string and shredded fibers. These "soft" masks appear to be more numerous—in both type and quantity—and to play more roles in ritual than do the wooden forms carved by artisan groups.

From the Senufo point of view, these "soft" masks are as much art as are the wooden ones. Dr. Glaze would agree—as would most anthropologists—and thus treats all ritual disguises evenhandedly. Within the narrow confines of this work, her choice greatly reduces her engagement with the questions of iconography long posed by the carved images that we have thought of as central to Senufo art. Indeed, Dr. Glaze indicates that the local variation in these farmer-conceived (i.e., truly Senufo) "soft" disguises provides a more suitable field for the study of style than does that made up by the works of ironworkers and woodcarvers (p. 136).

Dr. Glaze's envisioning of a new balance in the study of substyles of Senufo art might be reflected in some disquieting inconsistencies in her remarks on features serving to identify types and styles of carved images. We are told that figures carved by blacksmith groups—as opposed to those carved by the group of artisans that work exclusively with wood—are distinguished by a very schematic rendering of the hand and by the complete merging of the feet into a base (p. 14). These features and this style, she claims, are exemplified in the spectacular and seemingly unique Senufo figures used to pound time in certain ceremonies.

We find a range of such figures in Goldwater's monograph on Senufo sculpture (1964); Dr. Glaze's illustrations of the type are also found in this source. In the series shown by Goldwater three of the figures clearly have their feet brought out of the base: Plates 89 and 91. Moreover, the figure in Plate 89 seems to have been made by the same hand that made the one in Plate 90, an example that has no feet. Two other examples—Plates 94 and 95—seem to have their hands reasonably well worked out. (Apropos of these rhythm-pounders, they are mentioned only in this discussion of style, although we are told elsewhere that they play an important role in funerary ceremonies [Glaze 1981:46–47].) We are not told whether they are used in the region under consideration.

An instance of ambiguity in the assignment of diagnostic features seems to occur in the discussion of the *kunugbaha* mask, a long-jawed animal type used by the Fono ironworkers. Dr. Glaze claims that this image lacks the antelope-horn motif (p. 213). On the other hand, she illustrates an example of this mask which seems to have curving horns that seem comparable to those of other versions of the long-jawed animal mask—e.g., *gbon* and *kponyungo*—used by other groups in this region (p. 20, but seen much more clearly in the same photograph on the book jacket). If the process arising from the back of the pictured mask's head does not represent a horn, Dr. Glaze should have told us how it is to be interpreted.

Granted that our evaluation of carved objects as a higher order of art than fiber and cloth costumes is ethnocentric, deriving more from our museum experience than a concern with art in its context and the affect that it produces in such situations. Indeed, our emotional response to carved images may depend considerably upon our inevitable detachment from that original context, a separation that leads to a state in which we can experience the surprise of radical transformations and recombinations of natural forms. While "soft" disguises can partake of this quality, their nature limits the full range of play: they can either take simple abstract shapes or follow the human form as they change its texture and color.

Dr. Glaze's approach to Senufo art, while it may disappoint those who had hoped for a resolution of older questions through an engagement with first things first, does serve an important end in leading us to perceive an ever-growing dilemma in the study of African traditional art: Whose art are we to study in the field? Ours (i.e., the art that affects us for our reasons) or theirs? The question is not to be pursued in this space, but it may bear importantly on future studies.

Considering Dr. Glaze's approach in the light of these questions of levels of art and priority of perspective reveals two tendencies that might limit the wider relevance of her contribution. These tendencies suggest the risk inherent in getting very close to one's subject in field investigation.

In the first instance, she tends to assign primacy to the Senufo in the conception and development of their art. Her point of view is, so to speak, "Senufo-centric." The rigid delimitation of a field of historical study may work well in the case of an island society or a similarly isolated group. The Senufo, however, have long found themselves at the easily accessible center of currents of culture change that swept over both the western Sudan and the Guinea Coast. True, the book does offer some comparisons between certain Senufo ideas and forms and those of other Voltaic-speaking peoples. While the backgrounds for these correspondences are not explored, one senses the implication that the feature concerned is either of Senufo origin or at least of very long duration in that culture. These assumptions of priority or great antiquity may be difficult to sustain.

From what we find in the literature, the Voltaic-speaking peoples that had masking institutions originally used disguises of fibers, stalks, and leaves almost exclusively. Wooden masks seem to have been a later introduction, as is suggested both by skeuomorphic correspondences between Manding carved forms and Voltaic composite ones (i.e., reeds, leaves,

basketry elements) and by the separate identities and histories of carving groups that have become integrated into Voltaic societies.

Dr. Glaze evinces a disinclination to consider this dynamic in her suggestion that the similarity of certain Senufo wooden masks to those of the Manding groups that Bravmann studied in the Bondoukou region (1974: chap. 7) should lead us to consider the Senufo origin of the latter (p. 243, note 10). This notion vaults high over the complex background of Western Sudanic art. Senufo art is no more ancient or hermetic than any other in a wide region. The collaboration of artisans and farmers in the fixing of types and styles of imagery offers a rich field for art-historical investigation; the question of origins cannot be otherwise addressed. The marked contrasts between the styles of larger ethnic groups suggest that farmers may have played a coordinate role in the conceptualization of the images that they used, but this remains to be seen.

Dr. Glaze should remain open to the possibility that, in certain aspects of their art, the Senufo have been receivers rather than donors, in which case the more crucial area of study would not be so much local variation as ethnic reinterpretation. In this connection, one might note that some authors, including Dr. Glaze (p. 38), tell of a cult, *Lo*, practiced by the Dyula groups (Manding-speakers) living among the Senufo. *Lo* seems to be quite similar to the Senufo Poro. Indeed, an important author, G. Bochet, who was based in Central Senufo country for some time, claims that *Lo* greatly influenced the development of Poro (1965:671–672). This does not imply that Poro is not of Senufo origin, but it does suggest caution in the acceptance of a monolithic view of Senufo—or any other Western Sudanic—culture.

This point can lead into consideration of another self-limiting quality that I find implicit in Dr. Glaze's approach. Despite occasional forays into questions of origin—more that of ethnic groups than of art forms—she deals essentially with a relatively short interval of time, i.e., a number of "multimedia events" that took place during her visits to the Senufo in the 1960s and 1970s. To our great profit we learn about the network of social relationships that frames Senufo art in use; we are given an interpretation of what the use of art does for the Senufo community; but we are told less than we would expect about how and when the art came to be.

The rich narrative and illustrations pose a number of art-historical questions. Would Dr. Glaze's picture of the art that she would have us assume to be traditional be true for 1920? 1900? 1880? Is all the elaborate and diversified pageantry of contemporary Poro disguise a faithful reproduction of what prevailed before the Pax Gallica and its stimulating effect upon

communication between peoples formerly separated by distance, suspicion, and hostility? Did Senufo communities in the troubled times before the turn of the century enjoy the affluence and security that would allow them to undertake such displays of conspicuous consumption?

Bochet mentions an ongoing proliferation of disguise and ritual categories generated by the rivalry for prestige between different villages' Poro groups (1965:661). Dr. Glaze's rather fleeting treatment of this aspect of Senufo art (pp. 135–136) appears to confirm her concern with the total phenomenon at its synchronic level. However, if the art-historically motivated reader is here given little insight into the societal and technical dynamics that played upon the development of the forms and activities so impressively described, then the anthropologically motivated one might expect to follow this description into the particular effects of the use of images upon the society before and well after the performance. Here again, synchronic limits intervene; action and effect become encapsulated in the brief moment and explain each other circularly.

In the area of interpretation, Dr. Glaze's enthusiasm for her subject seems to lead her to deal with her material on two different levels of explanation and to seek causal primacy on the nonempirical one. Thus:

The Senufo funeral is a multimedia event designed to protect the living and ensure the continuing integration of social groups and the village as a whole with the spiritual world of the Deity, the ancestors, and the bush spirits. Secondary gains, such as the reinforcement of social values, group integration within the village, the stimulation of the creative arts, and the pleasures of pure aesthetic enjoyment are contingent upon the first and central purpose of the funeral. [p. 149]

This casual weighting on behalf of the Senufo religious view is at variance with anthropological priorities, which would take the first two of Dr. Glaze's secondary gains to be the primary ones and her primary ones to be Senufo views, very important at their level of raw information but lying far beyond the possibility of proof.

In this light, some of the space given over to the description of events—a fair number of them not closely connected with the materialization and use of tangible art—could have been devoted to a discussion of the religious rationale for the many cloth, string, and shredded fiber disguises—in effect, personages—with which this book acquaints us. Dr. Glaze deals carefully with these images in an admirable appendix that presents them in terms of their ethnic contexts, relation to Poro structure and ritual,

material composition, accompaniment, and performance. Beyond one particular type, however, we are not told of the individual identities of such disguises. The types are named and sometimes appear in numbers. Do they represent individuals with personal names and distinctive behavioral characteristics or are they standard theatrical/ritual accessories, as some types of Dogon mask seem to be? The information would be interesting to compare with the data that Le Moal collected among the Bobo (Upper Volta), to whom each fiber mask has a distinct personality and identity (1980:209, 210, 257).

Certain aspects of personal viewpoint and style might detract from this book's authority. One notes an inclination toward fashionable notions and gratuitous innovation. This tendency seems explicit both in part of the overall rationale and in the terminology employed in many instances. For example, dealing with traditional African societies, field investigators have, sometimes in oversight of the circumstances, tended to minimize or neglect the role of women in the conception, commission, and use of major art forms. The Central Senufo case provides a striking caution against this tendency. Dr. Glaze instructs us convincingly in the coordinate and sometimes superordinate importance of women in Senufo religious and artistic life. This is one of the salient contributions of her book, and it should serve to open our eyes to the possibility of analogous conditions in many of the art-producing societies that we have come to take for granted. (This is not to imply that they will always be found.)

A sort of neophilia seems apparent in the intensity with which this question of female importance is pursued through most of the book. This thrust seems to resound of the feminist political movement current—and altogether justified—in Western life and thought. My reservations concern, first, a degree of emphasis and repetition that might approach excess and, second, a skewing of the material to establish primacy in a very complex situation.

This objective seems implicit in the claim that the woman founder of a local lineage or her direct descendant must be, ideologically speaking, the "true head" of the local Poro cult representing that lineage (pp. 51, 53). The claim would hinge on the precise meaning of the term "true head," which is not sufficiently explained. Even ideologically speaking, a position corresponding to this term would involve a considerable amount of decision and policy making. Dr. Glaze does not deal with this aspect of female participation in Poro matters. Accounts of the inner working of the Poro at the administrative level have not yet been offered, and, in their absence, we are free to wonder whether the cult, as a reflection of Senufo society, really provides for any office that would fulfill our expectations of a "true head."

A fascination with the new for its own sake comes through in a number of neologisms which seem neither necessary nor felicitous. I find nothing gained by "micromigration" (p. 25), "protoinitiate" (p. 117), and "autocensored" (p. 235). Other constructions, while put together of familiar terms, might confuse the reader by suggesting meanings that lie beyond redundancy: e.g., "a host of animate spirits" (p. 12), and an "object assemblage" (p. 153).

That meaningless but indestructible horror, "craft" taken as a verb, challenges us when we learn that the women of the woodcarving artisan group are, with no further explanation, "calabash crafters" (p. 5). How does one craft a calabash? The terms "masker" and "masquerader" seem to be used interchangeably (p. 105, *passim*); I could infer no contrast from their contexts. One must try to forestall these ambiguities at some point; they are quick to enter discourse, and a prevailing inertia can keep them forever in use, as in the case of the needless and patronizing term "bush cow" for the African buffalo.

One wonders whether more painstaking and specialized editing might not have eliminated a number of the lapses in this important book. Most investigators involved with humanistic studies in sub-Saharan Africa have not engaged with the study of details of natural habitat; one can readily understand that their concern with the intricacies of human behavior would assign such matters to a level of lesser importance. Nevertheless, in terms of the finished product, error in this sector can stand out boldly and cast doubt upon precision, and even credibility, in other sectors. One regrets that Dr. Glaze's account contains such shortcomings.

We are told how, in the old days, Senufo hunters "braved . . . wildcats (e.g., genet, civet cat) with their weapons of arrows and stabbing spears used at close range" (p. 43). The Senufo are said to be a tall people, while the genet and civet are quite small carnivores, annoying through their depredations upon small domestic animals but not much more dangerous than a nonrabid fox or skunk.

The horns of the roan antelope are said to be elements in the composition of certain long-jawed animal masks (p. 137). The arching horns of this antelope in their natural alignment seem never to appear in such images.

The fiber used in certain disguises is said to be raffia (p. 109, *passim*), although the relevant photographs strongly suggest another source, possibly the bark of a species of *Hibiscus*. The tight-fitting string costumes of some of the types of disguise are said to be knit (p. 109, *passim*), when it is more likely that they were fashioned by other techniques. The point that I wish to make in engaging with these details is that such matters may be just as important as spell-

ing and punctuation. The editorial function should include the sending of worthwhile manuscripts to readers who are informed in the natural backgrounds and technical inventories of the societies, or at least the regions, concerned.

The publishers of this book should have treated its resources with greater appreciation and care. Dr. Glaze's photographs, which she took herself, are technically and didactically excellent. The color photographs are reproduced well in special sections. The black-and-white photographs, however, are printed on unsized text pages, a process which results in considerable darkening. In the field subjects this quality can obscure significant detail.

The publisher's transcription of Senufo words uses umlauts to distinguish vowels usually designated by standard phonetic symbols. This convention is carefully explained, but my attention could never pass easily through the plethora of marks usually associated with other, and quite different, sounds.

Africanists know of the much simpler and clearer system used in Nigeria, where a dot under a conventional letter assigns it a different phonetic meaning.

I bring these criticisms up only in the interest of maintaining precision in discourse concerned with African traditional art. Dr. Glaze's book brings these questions to mind only incidentally. Its merits place it far above any serious criticism. It should be entirely welcome as a source and a promise.

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Reviewed by David Carrier
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A feminist man enjoys, to his surprise, looking at the naked woman photographed in the centerfold; a monk is distracted from prayer by carved arabesques; a Marxist admires the elegance of a TV advertisement for a stockbroker. What we thus enjoy visually is only partly determined by our acknowledged beliefs, and the study of pleasure in visual imagery cuts across distinctions between popular and serious art, revealing how complex the connections between belief and vision are. A picture is true or false according to whether it shows the world as it is; and if that sort of truth is difficult enough to judge, true or false pleasures in imagery are still more complex. In one sense, a pleasure, as a sensation, simply *is* and so cannot be true or false. Psychosomatic headaches differ from "true" ones not in being less painful but in having the wrong sorts of causes. Somewhat analogously, false pleasures are those I would not have if I had the right sorts of beliefs. My feminist, monk, and Marxist enjoy guiltily what they believe they should, given their beliefs, disdain. More complex are cases where some observer tells a person what he should not enjoy, as when, for example, some feminists argue that no one ought to enjoy pornography. Were a man's beliefs different, he would not enjoy pornography; but so, too, were I repelled by Christianity, Giotto might disgust me. So the notion of false pleasures can be defined in a noncircular way only if we have some convincing theory of human nature, some explanation of why some visual pleasures ought to be sought.

These writers, critics of the false visual pleasures of late capitalism, point to the ways in which our culture encourages us to treat as natural what is a product of our visual ideologies. Artworks like Kruger's collages critique these prevailing mythologies, her practice thus a parallel to the theory presented by Jameson, Owens, and the other writers. The key reference

names here are Barthes, both for his early *Mythologies* (1957) and for the late *The Pleasure of the Text*, and Lacan, for his discussion of desire and looking (scopophilia) and its relation to the constitution of the self. In English-speaking countries, this very French synthesis of Marxism and psychoanalysis has had the greatest influence in film studies (see Duncan 1983), a new field, thus lacking an established ideology. When Craig Owens, Jean Clay (see Clay 1981), or Norman Bryson (see Carrier 1983) apply these approaches to painting, they meet resistance, whether because art historians are determined to reject innovation or because such new approaches only provide new bottles for old wines. But this work is highly imaginative and so deserves sympathetic and critical consideration. Barthes's texts are relatively accessible; his gift for providing apt examples and his clear writing make his work a valuable influence. Lacan is another story; his playful and self-conscious obscurantism supports, even if it is not entirely justified, the view that he is just a clown. Still, just as Wittgenstein is so deeply imbedded in an Anglo-Austrian culture as to make an explanation of his most obvious points necessary to outsiders, so the same is no doubt true of Lacan. But since English-language aesthetics is in great need of stimulus, making that effort is surely worthwhile.

What does it mean to assert that the very process of looking is grounded in ideology? The claim made famous by John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* that old-master nudes function in part like pinups would, I suppose, now be generally taken seriously. Lacan's more radical point, popularized in a well-known essay by Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), is more elusive. Pleasure in looking draws on internalized beliefs about gender:

Desire (is) born with language . . . but its point of reference continually returns to the traumatic moment of its birth: the castration complex. Hence the look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening in context, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallises this paradox.

Pleasure in looking at images always depends in treating that representation as-if of such a desired-and-threatening woman.

Such an account raises difficult problems. Even if this reconstruction of the origins of visual pleasure is accepted, it would not necessarily follow that all picture viewing is explained. That would be like asserting that the failures of 1980s Communism are due to lacunae in Marx's texts, as if the origins of Marxism could explain its entire history. Mulvey moves from a discussion of voyeurism in some Hitchcock films

(*Rear Window*, *Vertigo*) to a more general conclusion: "Cinema builds the way she is looked at into the spectacle itself." Films with female protagonists or with only male characters are treated as not real counterexamples to this thesis, which cannot, I think, even explain the full significance of Hitchcock's procedures. Like any attempt to offer a general account, this analysis is vulnerable to the obvious objection that it explains too much too easily. *Rear Window* or an Ingres *Odalisque* may be atypical visual artworks; at least, it is not obvious that a theory explaining why we enjoy them would apply to other, different films or paintings.

To follow through the complex political implications of such an analysis we need to turn from Lacan's account of desire to Barthes's study of visual myths. For while the very generality of Lacan's link between visual pleasure and castration anxiety makes the discussion of individual images difficult, the focus on culturally determined visual myths points to specific ways in which sexism functions visually. As Jameson and also Colin Mercer point out in *Formations of Pleasure*, the political position of such critics is complex. It is easy to oppose the mindless sexism of magazine centerfolds to the sophistication of intellectuals who use Lacan and Barthes to analyze such images. What is false in that opposition, Barthes thought when he looked back critically on his *Mythologies* (see Barthes 1971), was the failure to recognize how "demystification . . . has itself become discourse, stock of phrases, catechismic declaration." Marxism, he earlier said, was not a myth because it sought to transform, not just represent, the world. But once the revolution too becomes a myth, such criticism becomes, as here, the subject of academic discourse. This problem seemingly recurs once any critical work, literary or visual, achieves success. An advocate of Kruger's art confesses:

Certainly I did not expect this work simply to function instrumentally or even didactically. . . . (But now these works) allow themselves simply to enter that discourse . . . on a par with the very objects they had once appeared ready to displace. [Crimp 1982]

To achieve the success measured by such publications as this exhibition catalog means that her work is already compromised, and so other critics compare her unfavorably to other less well known and so perhaps more radical artists (see Kelly 1983). So understood, radical artists are in an inescapable bind: either they remain safely obscure or else they become part of the system they criticize. Kruger's photographs are commodities, and so if they become

well known, they will become valuable. But how could such artworks change the practices of an entire society? That left-wing critics have failed to think through these questions poses a major problem for their analysis.

One starting point is to note the complexity of the relation between an artist's beliefs and our pleasure in his or her work. As Terry Eagleton points out in his wonderful essay in *Formations of Pleasure* on Yeats's line, "A terrible beauty is born," many people who dislike the poet's politics still admire his poetry. Building on Barthes's discussion in *Sade/Fourier/Loyola* we might contrast disinterest in an artist's "message" with pleasure in the technique. In *Formations* Victor Burgin has a picture essay, "Gradiva," about Freud's analysis of a novel. What I enjoy is not the slightly pretentious choice of that subject but the way the photographer juxtaposes a fountain pen and a photograph of an antique sculpture reproduced, I am reminded, in the images of Freud's consulting room. Another, somewhat similar text, Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, aggressively refuses to sentimentalize skid row (Rosler 1981). She juxtaposes unpeopled scenes of storefronts with word lists describing alcoholics: "up to the gills, under the table, slopped over, limp, melted," for example. Like the student who doodles during the most serious part of my class, I find myself thinking not of these real issues but of Mallarmé's poetry or of other texts with commentaries, Nabokov's dotty *Pale Fire*, for example. I enjoy these images perhaps because their almost precious elegance makes it easy to avoid thinking about the people whose life they describe.

Similarly, when Kruger wants to tell me something about capitalism and power, I look at the man in "Your comfort is my silence" and find his hidden face mysterious, or read the black parallels in "We construct the chorus of missing persons" as rather beautiful quotations of minimalist art, notwithstanding the ominous title. For just as I may appreciate tribal war masks or baroque martyrdoms without reference, almost, to their content, what I perversely enjoy in Kruger is less the message than her skill at composition. Compared with a political text, which demands close attention to its words if it is to be understood at all, such artistically sophisticated images are not easily adapted to conveying messages. Kruger of course recognizes this point. Unlike artistically naive protest artists, she aims to present not so much images of protest as representations whose perception challenges our visual habits. Owens has some interesting remarks about her use of shifters, such pronouns as "I" or "you," which address the viewer. We might thus

contrast passive contemplation, the use of known codes, with such active readings required by works that challenge those conventions. The claim that only politically conscious works require such active reading is worth investigation (see Foster 1982). My state license plates read, "You have a friend in Pennsylvania"; and the meaning of that phrase is not transparent. Of course I have friends in Pennsylvania, for I live here. But what about visitors who read the slogan? What I think the words *mean* is that the state encourages investment and tourism; checking that interpretation would take research, but what is interesting is that I have never until now found them problematic. Similarly, perhaps, when Kruger places the words "We are being made spectacles of" across a romantic couple, we are to infer that these depicted people are speaking. The visual message is undercut by these words, and so we become more self-critical. But here, of course, that reading is prepared for by our awareness of the work's context.

It is interesting to note how this analysis was anticipated by earlier critics. Greenberg's justly famous analysis of kitsch says that socialist realism, which "predigests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a short cut to the pleasure of art that detours what is necessarily difficult in genuine art" (Greenberg 1939). The viewer of serious art must work. Gombrich, similarly, proposes that sophisticated viewers are frustrated artists and so want "at least to project"; hence academically perfect drawing has become taboo (see Gombrich 1953). "One could learn a lot," he adds, "in studying such prohibitions." Written before the widespread use within serious art of images from mass culture, these accounts propose a schema found in more recent discussions. The popular is the effortlessly pleasurable; the serious is that which denies easy enjoyment. Excluded from the realm of mindless pleasures, the serious observer can feel exalted, placed above the masses. And viewed from this Nietzschean perspective, the patronizing attitude implicit in Jameson's question—"How do you distinguish . . . between real pleasure and mere diversion?" (p. 3)—is, as he recognizes, a product of the intellectual's inability to enjoy in an unreflective way such pleasures. There is a certain highly sublimated pleasure (and aggression) in thus denying oneself access to "common" pleasures.

The worst aspect of mass culture, Richard Wollheim proposed in a remarkably prescient essay,

is its tendency to encourage and to reinforce a highly relativistic attitude. . . . People come to tell not what they like, but what other people will like. [Wollheim 1962]

To uncritically enjoy mass culture, an individual must cease to think of him or herself as having peculiarly individual desires; for many postmodernist critics that notion of the self itself has become problematic. But whether this is a new result of mass culture is unclear. Reynolds' contemporaries on the Grand Tour were perhaps relativists in Wollheim's sense of the word also, their judgments reflecting what they believed others of the elite would like. To put this point in a more general way, studies such as these would benefit greatly from the introduction of a historical perspective. Certainly the distinction between serious and popular art is a relatively recent creation, as is the development of that genre used by figures like Kruger, protest art. But comparing and contrasting her with baroque artists, who were also interested in visual rhetoric, might be highly illuminating. And then the gap between the art historian and these critics who borrow from Barthes and Lacan might be narrowed, to the benefit of both art history and the study of popular imagery.

These no doubt are utopian hopes. What meanwhile is ironic in these texts, as Jameson notes, is that Marxists play the role of Platonic philosopher kings, prepared to tell everyone what they ought to enjoy. The most trenchant comment I have heard on this practice comes from Howard Becker, who effectively halted one discussion by asking a question nobody could answer: "how do *you* know what mass audiences think?" Plato at least had reason to prefer the rule of philosophers, since he believed that only men and women who knew the difference between appearance and reality could lead society. But though the tools provided by Barthes, Lacan, and the other writers referred to in these volumes are fascinating, only a great optimist would claim that such speculations, which have almost no foundation in empirical research, explain popular culture. The gap between the analysis of high culture, where literary critics and art historians can claim to have specialized knowledge, and these discussions of mass media and art playing with mass media images remains very broad, and this clever synthesis of feminism, psychoanalysis, and Marxism remains a curiously academic affair, a strange fate given the political aspirations of these authors and artists.

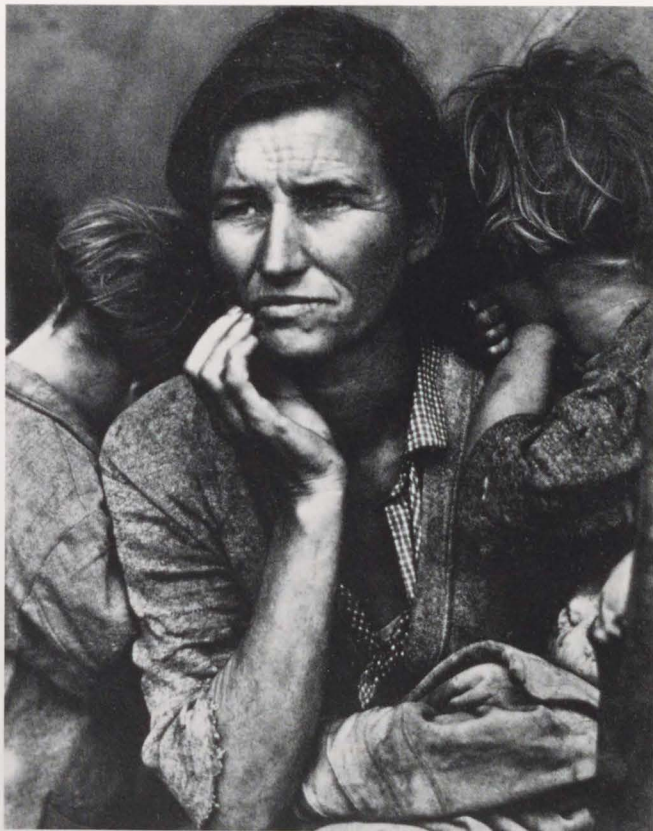
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Briefly Noted

Bill Ganzel. *Dustbowl Descent*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. 130 pp. \$29.95.

In the rising tide of books about the FSA photographers and their work, this book stands out as unusually attuned to the spirit of the original project. Ganzel spent seven years roaming the Dust Bowl, carrying copies of the FSA photos, locating and photographing many of the same people and places forty years later. The changes—or lack of changes—are discussed in the words of the subjects as well as shown in Ganzel's excellent photographs. The beautifully produced book also contains introductory and technical sections by Ganzel, who clearly feels a responsibility to live up to the standards established by the FSA group. He has succeeded to an impressive degree.



Dorothea Lange. Migrant Mother [Florence Thompson with her daughters: Norma, in her arms; Katherine, left; and Ruby]. Nipomo, California, March 1936. From *Dust Bowl Descent*, p. 30 (no. 31).

Todd Webb. *Georgia O'Keeffe: The Artist's Landscape*. Pasadena, CA: Twelvvetrees Press, 1984. 104 pp. \$45.00.

Todd Webb has been photographing Georgia O'Keeffe and her New Mexico surroundings for thirty years. Forty of his photographs are included in this beautiful volume, portraying the artist and her world in a fashion which evokes the images and the landscape so familiar from O'Keeffe's own work. The picture of O'Keeffe in Juan Hamilton's starkly geometric studio, silhouetted against a stunning mountain view, is, as they say, worth the price of admission.



Bill Ganzel. Florence Thompson and her daughters Norma Rydlewski (in front), Katherine McIntosh, and Ruby Sprague, at Norma's house. Modesto, California, June 1979. From *Dust Bowl Descent*, p. 31 (no. 32).

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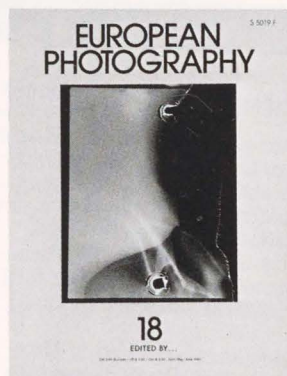
Errata:

Marta Braun, "Muybridge's Scientific Fictions," 10(3):2–21.

1. In note 4 I have misleadingly telescoped together two separate inventions of Emile Reynaud. Reynaud's projecting praxinoscope (1877) was an elaborated zooetrope with which he projected images drawn on strips, but not on perforated strips as I have written. The perforated strips belong to an invention of 1888 called the Théâtre Optique. Reynaud gave public showings with both instruments, using the Théâtre Optique at the Musée Grévin from 1892 until 1900, when he was put out of business by motion pictures.

2. A consistent typo caused the inversion of two letters in Anita Ventura Mozley's last name: it is Mozley, not Mozely. I would like to apologize to her for overlooking this mistake.

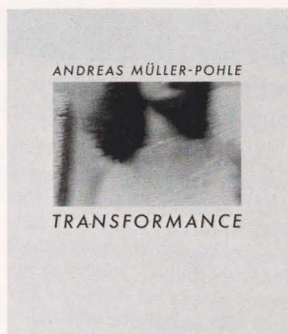
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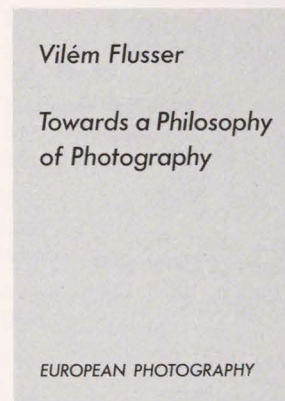
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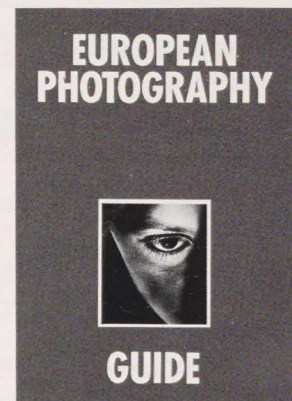
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