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ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CINEMA: 8*

THE NICKELODEON ERA BEGINS: ESTABLISHING THE FRAMEWORK FOR HOLLYWOOD'S MODE OF REPRESENTATION

Waiting at the Church: **Vesta Victoria singing the title song, Porter/Edison Jan 1907**

The year 1907 was pivotal for the institution of American cinema. While crises and fundamental changes occurred at almost every level of the industry, perhaps the most important transformations involved the inter-related modes of production and representation. In effect, this article attempts to establish how and why cinema moved from *Life of an American Fireman* to *The Lonely Villa*.

A pertinent historical model is based on dialectical materialism and focuses on the interaction between cinema's modes of production and representation. In cinema, the mode of production involves three essential practices or groups: film production, exhibition and reception (the production companies, the showmen and the spectators). While this mode is responsible for the films, these can only be understood within a changing framework involving additional elements: the mode of exhibition , concerned with the showman's method of presentation and his relation to the films made by the production companies, and the mode of appreciation, concerned with the audience's strategies for understanding/enjoying, and with their relationship to, the exhibited films. Although this mode of cinema production, modified by other socio-economic and cultural factors, determines the framework for possible representational strategies, it is, of course, also determined by them.

A brief overview of the first ten years of American cinema is perhaps useful. During the late 1890s, after a short novelty period, exhibitors usually purchased one-shot films from producers and arranged/edited these into sequences and programmes — often accompanying them with narration, music and sound effects. During the early 1900s, editorial control shifted increasingly to the production companies, coinciding to some degree with the rising popularity of story films.[1] By the end of 1904, two further developments had taken place. First, 'features', usually acted films of one-half to one reel in length, had become the industry's dominant product. This does not mean that more acted films were made than actualities, but the production companies' profits were based principally on the sales of longer fictional films.[2] Secondly, the reel of film became the basic industry commodity. Previously, exhibitors like Biograph, American Vitagraph, and Percival Waters' Kinetograph Company rented an exhibition service to vaudeville theatres, which included a projector, a motion picture operator and a reel of film. In the Fall of 1904, Waters, recognizing that the exhibition process had become quite simple, trained theatre electricians to operate a projector and rented a reel of film to these vaudeville houses for a lower price.[3] This was one reason why he was able to win the Keith Circuit from Biograph in the Fall of 1904. Exhibitors now became renters or film exchanges, while the theatres became the actual exhibitors. Vitagraph and other services followed suit, and by the beginning of 1905, the necessary preconditions for the nickelodeon era had been met.

The nickelodeon era required a certain number of exhibition outlets devoted primarily to moving pictures (store-front theatres) plus an essentially interchangeable commodity (the reel of film) plus sufficient variety in its supply (a certain number of new fictional 'headliners'). The onset of this era, however, had little immediate impact on the rate of film production and the mode of representation — at least at the Edison, Biograph and Lubin companies. At Edison, the number of fictional features actually declined during 1906 and the first six months of 1907 relative to 1905. The Edison films which Edwin Porter made in 1906-07 became more elaborate and sophisticated within the representational system constructed in previous years. Only Vitagraph and Pathé quickly recognised the implications of the nickelodeon era to any degree. Vitagraph moved into production and film sales in the fall of 1905 and both companies rapidly increased the number of films they produced. A gap soon developed between the modes of production and representation on one hand, and the mode of exhibition and the system of distribution on the other. Film-making remained a cottage industry while exhibition had become a form of mass production. This contradiction was masked at first by the success and rapid expansion of the nickel theatres. If the Edison Company sold 71 prints of *How a French Nobleman Got a Wife Through the New York Herald 'Personal' Columns* in 1904, it sold 182 copies of *Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend* in 1906. Such growth at first appeared to affirm the existing methods of making films, a situation which continued until approximately mid-1907.

Prior to mid-1907, the early or 'pre-Griffith' mode of representation dominated the film industry. The films of this period were non-linear. The narrative construction of *Life of an American Fireman* or *The Great Train Robbery*, with their overlapping actions and returnings to earlier points in time, continued to be used although rarely in such extreme forms (See Biograph's *Wanted: a Dog* or Edison's *Lost in the Alps* (1907)). The tensions between scenes perceived as self-contained wholes on the one hand and their potential as part of a more complex sequence on the other is a partial explanation for these narrative structures. While early cinema generally moved from the first extreme to the second, it

* *We have changed the title of this section to avoid the invidious distinction between film theory and practice*

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The Devil, **Porter/Edison Sept 1908**

was not until the foundations for Hollywood's mode of represenation had been laid that this contradiction was superceded.

The mode of appreciation (reception) remained fundamentally unchanged between 1898 and mid-1907. Strategies for making film narratives comprehensible to audiences fell into three basic complementary and often inter-dependent categories, centred with in the spectator, the exhibitor or the film.

When films were based on well-known stories, comic strips or popular songs, this meant a diffreent relationship between audience and cultural object than in most contemporaneous literature and theatre, where it was assumed that audiences had no fore-knowledge of the narrative's plot, characters, etc. Porter's *Night Before Christmas* (December 1905) "closely follows the time honored Christmas legend by Clement Clarke Moore, and is sure to appeal to everyone young and old".[4] Biograph and Edison both made films based on the hit song "Everybody Works But Father" popularized by Lew Dockstader in 1905. Porter's *Waiting at the Church* (July 1906) assumed spectator familiarity with the lyrics of the hit song "Waiting at the Church", written by Fred W. Leigh and popularized by Vesta Victoria. Porter did not simply illustrate the song: a discrepancy between the lyrics and the film narrative is an essential element of the film's humour.

The "Teddy" Bears (February 1907), one of Porter's personal favourites, manipulated audience familiarity in particularly sophisticated ways and demonstrated Porter's mastery of a mode of representation about to be fragmented. The juxtaposition of two different referents was an important element of its humour and success. The film begins as an adaptation of *Goldielocks and the Three Bears* and functions for the first two-thirds as a fairy-tale film for children, with the life-sized Teddy Bears as the subject. Suddenly the film moves outside the studio, changing moods and referents. The bears chase Goldielocks across a snowy landscape until a hunter, Teddy Roosevelt, intervenes, kills the two full-grown pursuers and captures the baby bear. The sudden appearance of "Teddy" was based on a well-known incident when President Roosevelt, on a hunting expedition in Mississippi, refused to shoot a bear cub. This was in November 1902. Shortly thereafter, Morris Michtom, a Russian immigrant who ran a small toy store and would eventually start the Ideal Toy Corporation, began to make and sell "Teddy's Bear" — a stuffed version of the spared cub. The novelty became a craze by 1906-07, when thousands of toy bears were being sold each week and music like "The Teddy Bear March" (copyrighted 1907) was popular.[5] Unless audiences appreciated this shift in referents, the killing of the two endearing bears would seem bizarre and at odds with the earlier part of the film. Simi somewhat wilfully missed the point in his *Variety* review when he wrote:

> The closing pictures showing the pursuit of the *child* by the bear family is spoiled through a hunter appearing on the scene and shooting two. Children will rebel against this position. Considerable comedy is had through a chase in the snow, but the live bears seemed so domesticated that the deliberate murder in an obviously "faked" series left a wrong taste of the picture as a whole.[6]

It is the shift in referents which reveals to the audience that *The "Teddy "Bears* is not simply a children's film but was aimed at adults under the guise of a children's story. By judging the film from the viewpoint of a child who could not be expected to grasp a range of contemporary adult references, Simi postulated a relationship between viewer and cultural object that would be applicable to later cinema. In fact, Simi's review indicates that criteria for assessing films were changing and that films relying on a prescient audience were received with less sympathy.

The extent to which the antecedents of American films can be found in newspapers from this period suggests that most films worked within a highly specific, well-known cultural framework. Biograph's *Love Microbes* (September 1907), in which Professor Cupido isolates the love microbe and injects it into unsuspecting victims, was inspired by Ella Wheeler Wilcox's headline pronouncement that "The Love Microbe Did It". This precursor to Dear Abby asserted that "I am thoroughly convinced that love is composed of microbes, good and bad, 'benign' and 'pernicious' ". Her amused colleagues followed her editorial with cartoons that literalized and burlesqued it.[7] The Biograph Company soon picked up the idea and knowledge of the antecedent enhanced, but was not essential to, an understanding of the film.

A second group of strategies for facilitating audience understanding involved the production company. During the 1890s, a few simple gag films and the magical films of producers like Georges Méliès were among the few kinds of 'self-sufficient' films. After 1903, two common structuring principles using narrative redundancy proved efficacious in creating readily accessible subjects: the accumulation of discrete scenes built around a unifying theme, character or gag, and its corollary — the chase. Redun-

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dancy of situation, which Porter had used in *The Buster Brown Series* (February 1904) and *The Seven Ages* (February 1905), continued to provide structuring principles for comedies like *Nine Lives of a Cat* (July 1907), which showed nine attempts to dispose of an un-cooperative feline, and *The Rivals* (August 1907), which like many films of this type, was based on a comic strip by T.E.Powers which ran in the *New York American*. The film and the comic strip show two rivals fighting over the desirable woman. In each scene, the rival escorting the girl is outwitted by his opponent, who then takes possession of the beloved object. The situation is then repeated with the characters reversed. When Porter had enough scenes and wanted to achieve closure, he had the woman leave both rivals for a third. This structuring principle of repetition with slight variation was deeply indebted to the repetitive structures of daily and weekly strips and was used in most films where a humourous effect was desired. Biograph's *Mr.Butt-In* (released February 1906), based on a cartoon series in the *New York World*, uses a similar structure. After the requisite number of incidents in which Mr. Butt-In interferes with other people's business, he is taken to an insane asylum, ending the succession of disruptions and the film. Other surviving films utilising this structure include Biograph's *If You Had a Wife Like This* (February 1907), Hepworth's *That Fatal Sneeze* (June 1907), Urban's *Diablo Nightmare* (October 1907), Eclipse's *Short-Sighted Cyclist* and Gaumont's *Une Femme vraiment bien* (1908).

While the chase also utilized a repetitive structure, it achieved new levels of clarity through a simple opposition between pursuers and pursued which could be expressed compositionally, by foregrounding first one group then the next, and through movement, as the pursued and pursuers came toward and past the camera. Biograph's *Personal* (1904), *The Escaped Lunatic* (1903) and *The Lost Child* (1904) are pure chase films. By 1906-07 chase sequences were often integrated into longer narratives: Biograph's *The Elopement* (released December 1907) and Edison's *Kathleen Mavourneen* (May 1906) are two examples. Porter, like many of his contemporaries, combined the chase with other forms of narrative redundancy in comedies like *The Terrible Kids* (April 1906) and *Getting Evidence* (September 1906). *The Terrible Kids* begins with a series of scenes in which two unsocialised boys and their dog harass various adults, until society (the local police and the victims of the pranksters) responds by chasing and eventally catching the culprits. In *Getting Evidence*, a detective is beaten each time he tries to photograph a young couple kissing. When he succeeds, the private eye is "pursued by a crowd, caught and ducked thoroughly in the surf".[8] This method of narrative construction was simple, effective and allowed for the production of one-reel features without complex stories.

Severe limitations were placed on other kinds of self-sufficient narratives in the pre-1907 period. If a story was unfamiliar and complicated, how was the spectator to know if the succeeding shot was backwards or forwards in time? The temporal/spatial and narrative relationships between different characters and lines of action were often vague, or worse — confusing. Visual cues like repeated action were helpful, but often not possible. The producer occasionally used intertitles but this practice was not universally accepted. Generally the film-maker had to tell a relatively simple story or count on the exhibitor's intervention to clarify the narrative.

A third group of representational strategies was used by the exhibitor to clarify screen narratives. One way to facilitate audience comprehension, as *Views and Film Index* pointed out with regard to *Kathleen Mavourneen*, was through sound effects:

> Recently a film was seen in which a young couple were coming across a field. They stopped and stood with bowed heads for a few seconds, then proceeded on their way, much to the mystification of the audience. But when the same picture was shown at another theatre, the mystery was solved; for a second before they stopped a church bell tolled; as they seemed to hear it they stood with lowered heads. The realism was pretty and very touching — it made a hit and occasioned comment among the audience.[9]

Sound effects alone could not solve the problem of narrative clarity in most instances. *Kathleen Mavourneen* and other ambitious Edison projects challenge Nicholas Vardac's assertion in *Stage and Screen* that stage melodrama could be readily adapted to silent film because dialogue was a non-essential part of the play. The standard version of the script for the play *Kathleen Mavourneen* is wordy, relying on dialogue for essential information and the story line: the absence of words was strongly felt by producers, exhibitors and viewers.

The lecture accompanying a film continued to be an option used by many travelling exhibitors. At least one such exhibitor considered the lecture to be essential for Porter's *Daniel Boone* (December 1906), a 1000ft dramatic film starring Florence Lawrence.[10] This form of assistance, however, was not offered in all theatres. Perhaps Porter assumed audience familiarity with these plots since *Kathleen Mavourneen* and *Daniel Boone* were both based on well-known stage plays. Whether Porter misjudged this, wanted the film to be shown with a commentary or failed to achieve the level of self-sufficient clarity he originally intended is difficult to determine. This problem (faced by many film-makers) was underscored by a writer for *Views and Film Index* in September 1906:

> MOVING PICTURES — FOR AUDIENCES, NOT FOR MAKERS
>
> Regardless of the fact that there are a number of good moving pictures brought out, it is true that there are some which, although photographically good, are poor because the manufacturer, being familiar with the picture and the plot, does not take into consideration that the film was not made for him, but for the audience. A subject recently seen was very good photographically, and the plot also seemed to be good, but could not be understood by the audience.
>
> If there were a number of headings on the film it would have made the story more tangible. The effect of the picture was that some people in the audience tired of following a picture which they did not understand, and left their seats. Although the picture which followed was fairly good, the people did not wait to see it.
>
> Manufacturers should produce films which can be easily understood by the public. It is not sufficient that the makers understand the plot — the pictures are made for the public.[11]

The need to respond to such criticism, however, was not strongly felt by production companies, which were then experiencing unprecedented prosperity. This soon changed.

By mid-1907 the nickelodeon frontier was disappearing, as almost every town and city had its local movie theatre. In many areas the number of movie houses had reached saturation point as competition for patrons intensified. Heady optimism and seemingly unlimited growth were giving way to new insecurities. For the producers, the contradictions between the established modes of representation and the new system of mass entertainment were becoming inescapable. New production companies were created each month to profit from the demand for story films. Production had to expand at companies like Edison, Biograph and Lubin if they were to maintain their standing in the industry. Here production efficiency and maximum profits were directly and indirectly related to the problem of narrative efficiency and cinematic strategies.

The repertoire of cinematic strategies in use at the beginning of the nickelodeon era proved inadequate. Narrative redundancy did not provide enough diversity to generate sufficient stories without boring audiences. While companies continued to use simple stories and variations on a single gag as the basis for film narratives during 1908-09, producers had to turn to more complex stories.

The explosion in film production and the rapidly expanding audience, however, meant that reliance on prescient spectators was becoming outmoded. When Kalem produced *The Merry Widow* in late 1907, it presented a condensed, silent version of the Broadway hit. *Variety* observed that

> The film is photographically excellent, but the *Merry Widow* would seem to have its greatest value in the advertising opportunities it affords, in cities where the vogue of the Savage productions, in New York and Chicago, is a matter of general knowledge; but it is a question whether it would be of any value whatever to an exhibitor in the average city or town.[12]

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Getting Evidence, Porter/Edison Sept 1906

Subsequent Kalem films were provided to the exhibitor with lectures which eventually ran in *The Moving Picture World*. These were not always used, however, and the *New York Dramatic Mirror* continued to criticize films like Kalem's *Lady Audley's Secret* (June 1908) because "unless one has read the book and knows the plot he finds it difficult to understand". Such criticism was also levelled at Pathé's *Dreyfus Affair*.[13] While there was a general rejection of precognition as a mode of appreciation by 1908, a few directors continued to rely on audience foreknowledge in some circumstances. A textbook demonstration of consequent problems was offered by Arthur Honig who analysed the viewer's reaction to Porter's *The Devil* (September 1908). Honig had seen the play on which the film was based and was able to follow the film's narrative, imagining the spoken lines and judging the acting and sets in relation to the play which for five cents he was able to re-experience. While Honig was very pleased with the film, he was accompanied by an "intelligent friend" who had never seen the play and who started asking Honig questions about the storyline, forcing him into the role of personal narrator. Without the necessary frame of reference the friend's enjoyment of the film was spoiled.[14]

Reliance on audience foreknowledge was doomed in two respects. First, there was a limited number of specific stories, hit songs, successful plays and crazes familiar to most Americans and these had in most instances already been used. Secondly, these items usually had a more limited audience than the films which were inspired by them. This created problems for renters and exhibitors who served a mass audience. This gap between what the film-maker expected the audience to know and what the audience actually knew was either filled by the exhibitor or led to confusion. There were two possible solutions. First, narrative clarity could be facilitated by the exhibitor introducing live sound through a lecture or behind the screen dialogue. Secondly, the producer could employ cinematic strategies which made the narrative more accessible without involving the exhibitor.

The lecture, always an important strategy in the exhibitor's repertoire, was the focus of renewed interest by early 1908. This was encouraged by the breakdown of the strategies relying on a prescient audience and facilitated by the theatre's new role as exhibitor. The manager or someone else connected with the theatre could interpret the film without necessarily adding to the overhead. In fact the competition between small theatres encouraged up-to-date showmen to clarify inaccessible films. It was a way to personalize their theatres and turn grateful patrons into steady customers. W. Stephen Bush, former travelling exhibitor and frequent contributor of articles and reviews to *Moving Picture World*, considered the lecture "a creative aid to the moving picture entertainment". Often lecturing at church functions, his approach to cinema was that of the traditionalist who wanted to instruct as well as entertain. Bush condemned the uneducated exhibitor who showed a Shakespeare play on film without a lecture and "bewildered his patrons who might have been thrilled and delighted with a proper presentation of the work". To combat these and similar failings, Bush prepared and offered to sell "special lectures with suggestions as to music and effects for every feature turned out by the Edison Licensees".[15]

Beginning with *Evangeline* (released in February 1908), the Kalem Company, an Edison licensee, began to issue lectures to be read with its films. Referring to *Evangeline*, *Show World* observed that "Shown as a straight picture this film is certain to be of interest; but it presents excellent opportunities for a lecturer of ability to further increase its interest by the recitation of those portions of the poem (which naturally accompany the scene depicted)".[16] Porter's *Colonial Virginia* (made in May 1907 but not released by Edison until November 1908) was gently praised by the *Dramatic Mirror* as "an interesting and instructive representation of early Colonial life in Virginia". A more critical review in *Moving Picture World* felt the film needed "to be presented with a lecture for the spectator to fully understand and appreciate the scenes that are presented".[17]

Stephen Bush argued that a skilled lecturer would more than offset the cost of his salary by increasing patronage and turnover. He asked exhibitors, "Why do many people remain in the moving picture theatre and look at the same pictures two or even three times? Simply because they do not understand it the first time; and this is by no means a reflection of their intelligence. Once it is made plain to them, their curiosity is gratified and they are pleased to go".[18] In another article on "The Value of the Lecture", Van C. Lee claimed surprise that "the managers are just awakening to the fact that a lecture adds much to the realism of a moving picture".

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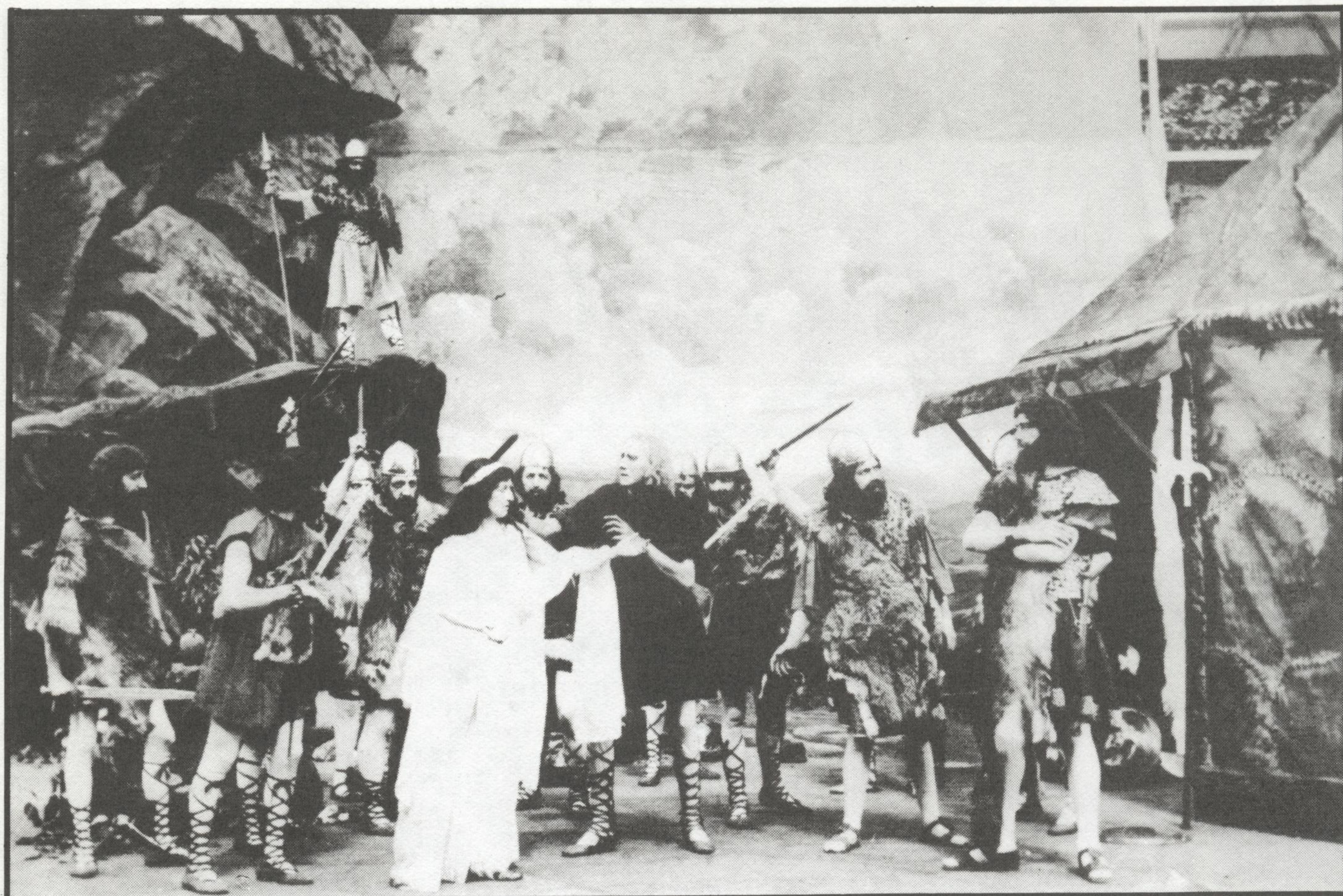

Ingomar, Porter/Edison Sept 1908

filmic elements to a preoccupation with the pro-filmic, from a conception of cinema as a special kind of magic lantern to cinema as a special kind of theatre.

Talking pictures combined a notion of film as a transparent medium with pro-filmic theatrical elements to highlight cinema's potential similarities with the stage. Illusionism and theatricality were thus parallel currents in cinema which converged in this particular mode of exhibition. As one enthusiast wrote, "The illusion of life which it is the mission of moving pictures to present to the best of its ability, must always be incomplete, but there is no reason why the complete illusion should not be sought after, to a much greater degree than at present, by the means of stage effects".[34] This rise of talking pictures reveals much about the changes occurring within the institution of the screen during this period. It coincided with an initial influx of theatre-trained directors like J. Searle Dawley, D.W. Griffith and Sidney Olcott. It occurred as cinema was taking over legitimate theatres for exhibitions and as a theatrical newspaper like the *Dramatic Mirror* began to review films. In 1907-09 these elements defined cinema as a kind of theatre — superior to the traditional stage in some respects (diversity of locale) though deficient in others (sound, colour, and three-dimensional space).

The move toward increased naturalism in cinema, however, remained subservient to the narrative requirements of entertainment and the need for an efficient mode of film production and exhibition. Strategies to achieve a super-realism were abandoned or remained a speciality service because they limited the film-maker's freedom to tell a story or increased admission prices — or both. Intertitles were the most artificial representational strategy but because they were an inexpensive and extremely effective way to clarify a narrative, they quickly became standard.

Titles were placed originally on lantern slides and were often made by the exhibitor to announce the titles of individual films. While Edwin Porter, following the lead of European producers, integrated titles into his films between 1903 and 1905, he virtually abandoned this practice in 1906-07. Biograph's *A Kentucky Feud* (October 1905) used intertitles to introduce scenes, outlining their action: without them the film would have been incomprehensible. Pathé appears to have relied on intertitles more than other companies during 1906-07. Since Pathé films were sold throughout the world, the company supplied intertitles in many different languages. Although intertitles were urged on film producers as a standard procedure by the *Film Index* in September 1906, these urgings became more frequent and insistent by 1908.

The Edison Company began to use brief intertitles on a consistent basis with *Fireside Reminiscences* (January 1908). The *Dramatic Mirror,* however, demanded even more elaborate titles if they were deemed necessary. The Edison film *Romance of a War Nurse* (July 1908) was strongly criticised because it "is not as clearly told in the pictures as we would like to see ... love wins in the end and all are reconciled though how they do it and what was at the bottom of the story we must confess our inability to discover". It was suggested that "The Edison Company would do well in producing complicated dramatic stories of this kind if it would insert descriptive paragraphs at the proper points in the films so the spectators might gain a knowledge of what the actors are about".[35] The *Mirror* actually represented the most advanced trends in the industry. More traditional critics like Stephen Bush often praised a film like *Romance of a War Nurse.* What the *Mirror* found confusing, others might praise for the opportunities they offered exhibitors to intervene. Thus the *Mirror* faulted Porter's *The Devil* for inadequate titling: "In producing this film an attempt is made to make it intelligible by inserting descriptive paragraphs, but these are not numerous enough to be of much assistance".[36] Edison's *Ingomar* and Vitagraph's *Richard III* (both September 1908) were criticised along similar lines.[37] Although Griffith's effective use of titles was rarely singled out for specific praise, it was an important factor which contributed to the clarity of his films. His *Barbarian Ingomar* (September 1908) was praised because it "reads to the spectator like a printed book".[38]

The motion picture industry was moving toward a relationship between film production and exhibition in which the showman was acting as a businessman/programmer who simply presented the already complete works of the production companies. To the extent that Porter's films resisted this trend, he had come to represent the industry's old guard. His continued reliance on the exhibitor and a mode of representation associated with the pre-nickelodeon era is perhaps most apparent in his refusal to abandon a conception of temporality which was being jettisoned by his contemporaries.

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Like Bush he asked his readers, "Of what interest is a picture at all if it is not understood?"[19] Bush and Van C. Lee's arguments, at least on a financial level, were overly facile given the rapid turnover of subject matter, the exhibitor's narrow profit margin and the substantial number of films which were intelligible without such aid. Their position was an attempt to expand those traditional strategies of screen presentation which had been frequently used among travelling lecturers, to this new form of mass exhibition.

'Talking pictures', the technique of endowing screen characters with live dialogue went back, at least, to stereoption "picture plays" like *Miss Jerry*, for which Alexander Black changed his voice as he assumed different parts. As far back as 1897, Lyman Howe's success was "largely due to his well-trained assistants who presented dialogue behind the screen".[20] Porter, who had become familiar with this procedure at the Eden Musée while projecting the *Opera of Martha* (1899), photographed a minstrel performance for Havez and Youngson's show, *Spook Minstrels*. The resulting film was never copyrighted but recently turned up at the Museum of Modern Art as part of its collection. Havez and Youngson's act opened in Pittsburg on June 9, 1905 at the Grand Opera House and reach New York City's Circle Theatre on February 13, 1906 where it was reviewed:

> A distinct novelty on the bill was the first appearence here of Havez and Youngson's *Spooks Minstrels*, in which moving pictures are used in a novel way. The pictures show a minstrel company going through a performance, and as the various numbers are presented the songs, jokes and dances are given by men who stand behind the screen and follow the motions of the men in the picture very accurately. The act is original and novel and was highly appreciated.[21]

The same principle was used in January 1907 when Porter filmed another version of *Waiting at the Church* for the Novelty Song Company. Vesta Victoria was photographed singing "Waiting at the Church" in a wedding gown that was part of her vaudeville act. Afterwards she sang "Poor John". The song was used in the novelty company's theatres, where a singer would stand behind the screen and sing synchronously with the picture, giving audiences the impression of witnessing an amazingly life-like performance by Vesta Victoria.[22]

Talking pictures, however, did not become a 'craze' in new York until the Spring of 1908. Advocates felt that "the dialogue helps the less intelligent to fully understand the plot, for no matter how skillfully worked out, there are always passages which require something more than mere pantomime to fully explain the situation".[23] By July 1908, at least three businesses were supplying behind the screen actors and films to theatres. Len Spenser, a 'pioneer' in supplying slides, singers and operators to moving picture managers on a systematic basis could now also furnish trained competent screen actors to do the talking behind the screen.[24]

The Humanovo Producing Company, run by Will H. Stevens and owned by Adolph Zukor, had as many as 22 companies on the road.[25] One of the groups Stevens hired included J. Frank Mackey and Theressa Rollins. Before they moved into talking pictures, the two had often travelled with road shows doing theatrical comedies like *Raffles the Burglar*. Mackey had also done vaudeville routines as part of Mackey and Clark and also Quigg, Mackey and Nickerson — in both cases as comedy musical artists. Starting off with Zukor's Humanovo Company, Mackey broke off and formed his own "original" Humanuva Company with a stock of old films, including either Porter's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or the Lubin imitation. A programme in one theatre[26] included:

1. Bennett's Orchestra
2. Silent Pictures
3. Illustrated Songs
4. Silent Pictures
5. Talking Pictures
   Intermission — 5 minutes
6. Silent Pictures
7. Illustrated Songs
8. Talking Pictures
9. Bennett's Orchestra

The third major company, the Actologue Company, was owned by the National Film Company of Detroit and the Lake Shore Film and Supply Company of Cleveland. Edison films, particularly *College Chums* (November 1907) and *Gentlemanly Burglar* (May 1908), were among the most commonly used.[27] Porter's film of Molnar's *The Devil* was particularly suited for this exhibition strategy which avoided the need for prescient audiences.[28]

Talking pictures had several limitations. There was a lack of standardization: quality and effectiveness varied from theatre to theatre. The *Dramatic Mirror* felt that "The possibilities of this sort of thing with trained actors and painstaking rehearsals are admitted, but the manner in which the idea was carried out in the houses visited by *The Mirror* representative were grotesque and a drawback to the pictures themselves. The odd effect of the voice of a barker trying to represent several voices, some of them women and children, and in one case a dog, may be amusing as a freak exhibition, but can hardly add to the drawing power of the house".[29] If trained actors and lecturers were expensive and their aid was not always necessary or even desirable, the customary daily change of programmes prevented the local exhibitor from becoming sufficiently familiar with his material. Nor were many people up to performing 12 to 16 times a day. High-class talking picture companies and many of the more experienced lecturers worked outside the renting system set up by the exchanges. They provided a speciality service that toured different towns with films, as the travelling exhibitor had done. While additional expenses may have been recouped by higher admission prices, as middle-class audiences were drawn to a more customized and "refined" entertainment, these talking pictures were never a realistic option for most storefront nickel theatres.

Another kind of talking pictures relied exclusively on the mechanical reproduction of image and sound. This reached new levels of technical sophistication and commercial success in the nickelodeon era, beginning with Gaumont's Chronophone, first advertised in the *New York Clipper* on September 18, 1907.[30] The National Cameraphone Company, based in Bridgeport, Connecticut with a studio at 43rd Street and 11th Avenue in New York, was a domestic competitor which became active in the Spring of 1908. By July they were showing films in 45 first-class houses and claimed to have contracts for 140 more. Subject matter generally consisted of vaudeville acts and bits of dramatic plays. Creative control was fully centralised in the production companies.[31]

Vaudeville houses often showed pre-recorded talking pictures as a commercial response to competition from small nickelodeons. In 1908, they gave a higher tone to larger moving picture theatres like the Unique, which had once shown vaudeville and theatrical dramas. Mechanised talking pictures were an attempt to differentiate the large first-class houses from the local store-front theatres just as in the early 1950s, CinemaScope was intended to widen the gap between commercial movie theatres and television.

The diffusion of the Cameraphone and other recorded sound systems was inhibited by cost and technical limitations. The quality of reproduction often undercut the illusion of reality which synchronous sound was supposed to push to new heights (painfully apparent when a film was projected out of sync, a relatively frequent occurrence). Technical considerations also restricted producers to relatively simple, short situations at the very moment when mainstream "silent" cinema was beginning to make frequent use of more complex narratives. Finally, the cost of materials and resulting limitations on the market meant that mechanised talking pictures were never integrated into the system of production, distribution and exhibition established by the Edison and Biograph licensees.[32]

Both types of talking pictures were part of an emphasis on heightened naturalism which was particularly intense during 1906-08. Hale's Tours, which suddenly became successful early in 1906, placed the viewer in a mock railway car with simulated train rocking and appropriate sound effects. (Adolph Zukor's capitalisation on talking pictures was perhaps not so coincidental given his initial involvement in cinema through Hale's Tours.) Pathé's hand colouring process using stencils and the slightly later Smith/Urban Kinemacolor, with its first public showing in May 1908, achieved startlingly naturalistic effects — in contrast to earlier uses of hand-tinting which heightened the fantastic elements of films like *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* and *Voyage à travers l'impossible*.[33] These attempts to expand the range of perception to include sound, colour and bodily sensation further heightened the illusion of film as a transparent medium. The popular perception of film was shifting from an emphasis on the

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An exhaustive retrospective of films made in 1907 and early 1908 by a full range of production companies (organised by Eileen Bowser at the Museum of Modern Art) revealed a remarkable shift in the conception of temporality during this period. At the beginning of 1907, Porter's *The "Teddy" Bears* or *Lost in the Alps* reflected the state of cinematic storytelling. Shots were still discrete units, overlapping action was frequent, temporal repetition common, and the narrative often loosely constructed. By mid-1907 the most advanced production companies began to observe a strict linear time frame. This involved two phases. First, there was an elimination of retrogressive elements like overlapping action. In Vitagraph's *The boy, the Bust and the Bath* (July 1907) or Pathé's *Doings of a Poodle* (1907) there is rapid cutting between proximate spaces and, in many instances, a strong suggestion of a seamless linear temporality across shots. This, however, is not made explicit by strategies like a match cut on action. In these films the inevitable forward movement of time, often in conjunction with intertitles, meant that viewers no longer had to wonder if action shown in a given scene occurred before or after a previously shown action. This is the foundation on which the mode of representation associated with Hollywood would be constructed.

A second phase employed new representational strategies based on this new form of temporality. Pathé's *The Runaway Horse* (*Chevale embralle*), made in late 1907, explicitly acknowledged a linear temporality through its use of parallel editing. At this stage, however, the procedure served as the basis for a series of tricks:

shot 1 exterior-man with horse cart arrives outside city apartment bldg.
shot 2 man goes up the stairs
shot 3 a very scrawny horse begins to eat from a bag of oats
shot 4 man goes up the stairs
shot 5 man goes into family dining room and makes a delivery
shot 6 horse eating — less oats in bag
shot 7 delivery man talks to man and woman (same as shot 5) and leaves
shot 8 delivery man goes down the stairs
shot 9 delivery man stops to talk to concierge
shot 10 horse eating — much less grain in bag
shot 11 man says good-bye to concierge
shot 12 delivery man comes outside — horse attached to cart is stong, healthy and well-fed — the delivery man and cart quickly leaves as owner comes out and chases them away.

By cutting back and forth between two lines of action, the French director was able to manipulate the size of the bag of oats and substitute a dashing steed for a scrawny nag without having to resort to stop action. There is a rigorous advancement in time and a rapid alternation between activities in two spaces, which provided the basis for effective comedy. Nothing so extensive happens in other available films made in late 1907 or early 1908 but Biograph's *Old Issacs, the Pawnbroker* (written by Griffith, directed by McCutcheon in March 1908) cuts away from activities in the pawnshop, where a girl is trying to sell a few miserable belongings, to her sick mother at home — and then back again to the pawnshop. McCutcheon (and Griffith) conveyed a strong sense of linear temporality as simultaneous actions are shown in a parallel rather than successive manner. *Old Issacs* stops short, however, of the rigorous A-B-A-B structures which is the paradigm for parallel editing.

The limited selection of surviving films from late 1907 and early 1908 nonetheless suggests that *The Runaway Horse* and *Old Issacs* anticipate the period when strategies of parallel editing or matching action could be executed readily by film-makers and accepted by spectators. This moment seems to have come in the summer of 1908 around the time Griffith was making *The Fatal Hour* (July 1908). *The Fatal Hour* involves a last-minute rescue where the forward march of time becomes the subject of the film, as a pistol is mounted on a clock that will shoot the heroine when the minute hand reaches twelve. The *Mirror* described *The Fatal Hour* as "a wholly impossible story, with a series of inconsistent situations, and yet the wild drive to the rescue while the clock slowly approaches the hour of twelve, brings a thrill that redeems the picture".[39] The emotional intensity here is much greater than *Lost in the Alps* which has a similar rescue but lacked a narrative structure based on cross-cutting and the pressure of time moving inevitably forward.

In films like *Life of an American Fireman* and *Lost in the Alps*, time was primarily manipulated pro-filmically, through the contraction of action occuring off-screen. In *The Fatal Hour* time was accelerated by filmic manipulation through cross-cutting. Griffith was able to move the clock forward whenever he cut to the rescue party (just as Zecca greatly reduced the sack of oats whenever he cut to the driver in the apartment house). While both strategies for condensation (filmic and pro-filmic) appear frequently in Griffith's films of 1908 — as one might expect of this transitional period — Griffith increasingly elaborated on the former and gradually eliminated the latter.

Griffith's films from the Summer and Fall of 1908, particularly *Betrayed by a Handprint* (August 1908) and *The Guerilla* (October 1908) give an increasingly strong impression of matching action between contiguous spaces.[40] By *The Lonely Villa* (April-May 1909), Griffith was matching action in most situations with comparative ease. His use of such procedures specified a rigorous linear temporality. In such films, the shot ceased to act as a discrete unit on any level. The shot is completely subservient to the one reel feature, to the narrative and linear flow of events. Action moves across shots, not within them.

The use of linear temporality, parallel editing and matching action both demanded and created a more efficient narrative structure. The dances, rodeo tricks and peripheral incidents common to so many films of the pre-1907 period were disappearing or being pushed into the background. In the terminology of Sergei Eisenstein, film-makers were editing on the *dominant* (orthodox montage), making editorial choices that emphasised the drama of the narrative. From late 1907 onward, directors at Pathé, Vitagraph, Biograph and elsewhere were developing strategies which would provide the basic framework for classic narrative cinema. Porter, however, barely participated in this shift toward a seamless, self-sufficient, linear narrative structure.

Parallel editing and match cuts were not incompatible with the lecture or behind the screen dialogue. As these editorial strategies were elaborated by producers, however, the exhibitor's intervention was less essential. Given the economic and cultural system in which American and European cinema were operating, the decline of these exhibitor initiated strategies was gradual but inevitable. As a result, the reel of film came much closer to being a pure commodity — a goal which would be achieved only when all exhibition procedures (music, projection speed) were completely standardised and dictated by the production companies. This final event, of course, only happened at the beginning of the sound era.

A few observations can be made from this historical framework. First, Hollywood cinema has its basis in the nickelodeon era, in cinema's rapid emergence after 1905 as a form of mass entertainment. I must disagree with my colleague Tom Gunning in certain important details.[41] He tends to see the transformation from pre-1907 to post-1907 representational strategies as principally influenced by the desire for respectability and the wooing of potential middle class patrons. Gunning, like Noel Burch,[42] sees a shift toward a bourgeois cinema as fundamental to this period. Without wanting to dismiss the influence exerted by reformers insisting on respectability and producers hoping to attract a better class of spectators, I feel their influence was not nearly as important as Gunning suggests. The desire and need for respectability can not account for the increasing popularity of complex narrative, although such pressures did affect the types and treatment of subject matter, encouraging the adaptation of plays, poetry and high culture. Nor can these pressures account for the cinematic strategies exploited most effectively by Griffith. The lecture, for instance, had the support of critics and reformers: it gave the exhibitor opportunities to underline a clear moral lesson. In fact, film-makers in 1908 were exploring many different ways of making cinema. While the approach associated with Griffith won out for many reasons, standardisation, narrative efficiency and the maximisation of profits were among the most crucial determinants.

In my analysis, the transformation in the mode of representation was dialectically related to the changing mode of production inaugurated by the rise of the nickelodeon. There was a shift from an industrial (petit bourgeois) mode to one based on mass production. Before and after 1907, the values expressed in cinema are

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The Terrible Kids, Porter/Edison April 1906

primarily those of the middle-class: what Harry Braverman calls the old middle class for the pre-1907 period and the new middle class in the post-1907 period. At the risk of being somewhat reductive, this is the major difference between the films of Porter and those of Griffith, between their respective methods of work and their distinctive representational strategies.

Charles Musser

Footnotes

1 Charles Musser, 'The Early Cinema of Edwin Porter', *Cinema Journal*, Fall 1979, p. 1-38; Charles Musser, 'The Edwin Musee in 1898: The Exhibitor as Creator', *Film and History*, December 1981, pp. 73-83+. These developments are also explored in Charles Musser's film *Before the Nickelodeon*.
2 In 1904 the Edison Company sold two prints of *Inter-Collegiate Regatta* (750ft), 34 prints of *Elephants Shooting the Chutes No. 2* (75ft), 29 prints of *Fire and Flames, Luna Park* (165ft), one print of *Parade, N.Y. Fire Department* (290ft), 6 Prints of *Opening Ceremonies, New York Subway* (300ft) but 71 prints of *How a French Nobleman Got a Wife Through the New York Herald "Personal" Columns* (675ft). Using Robert Allen's method of analysis, actuality subjects dominated Edison's production (Robert C. Allen, 'Film History: the Narrow Discourse', *Film Studies Annual*, Part 2, 1977, pp. 9-17). In fact the company sold 47,925 feet of *French Nobleman* and only 10,925 feet of the other five films.
3 Albert E. Smith, Testimony, 14 November 1913, Equity No. 5-167, U.S. Circuit Court, Southern District of New York, Printed Record, p. 1702.
4 *Edison Films* (Edison Manfuacturing Company: Orange, N.J., July 1906), p. 70.
5 Peter Bull, *The Teddy Bear Book* (New York: Random House, 1970).
6 *Variety*, 9 March 1907, p. 8.
7 *New York Evening Journal*, 3, 4, and 13 May 1907.
8 *Views and Film Index*, 10 November 1906, p. 3.
9 *Film Index*, 13 October 1906, p. 3.
10 Van C. Lee, 'The Value of a Lecture', *Moving Picture World*, 8 February 1908, p. 9.
11 *Film Index*, 1 September 1906, p. 10.
13 *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 4 and 11 July 1908.
14 *Film Index*, 3 October 1908, p. 4.
15 Stephen Bush, 'Lecture on Moving Pictures', *Moving Picture World*, 22 August 1908, p. 136-137; and Stephen Bush, Advertisement, *Dramatic Mirror*, 9 January 1909.
16 *Show World*, 8 February 1908, p. 12.
17 *Dramatic Mirror*, 28 November 1908; *Moving Picture World*, December 1908, p. 398.
18 Bush, *Moving Picture World*, 27 August 1908, p. 137.
19 Van C. Lee, *Moving Picture World*, 8 February 1908, p. 93.
20 *Moving Picture World*, 16 May 1908, p. 431; and *Dramatic Mirror*, 14 November 1908, p. 11.
21 *Dramatic Mirror*, 25 February 1906, p. 18.
22 *New York Clipper*, 20 August 1907, p. 246.
23 *Moving Picture World*, 16 May 1908.
24 *Dramatic Mirror*, 13 June 1908, p. 10.
25 *Dramatic Mirror*, 18 July 1908, p. 10.
26 Bennett Theatre, Program, 1 March 1909 (?), Mackey and Rollins Collection, Harvard Theatre Collection.
27 *Moving Picture World*, 4 July 1908, p. 9. See also 'Motion Picture Notes' in the *Dramatic Mirror* for this period.
28 *Dramatic Mirror*, 19 September 1908.
29 *Dramatic Mirror*, 6 June 1908.
30 *Clipper*, 18 September 1907, p. 808.
31 *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 4 July 1908.
32 *Dramatic Mirror*, 26 December 1908, p.8.
33 "Clippings", Charles Urban Papers, Vol. 1, Science Museum Library, Imperial College.
34 *Film Index*, 1 August 1907, p.3.
35 *Dramatic Mirror*, 5 September 1908, p. 8.
36 *Dramatic Mirror*, 19 September 1908.
37 *Dramatic Mirror*, 26 September and 10 October 1908.
38 *Dramatic Mirror*, 24 October 1908.
39 *Dramatic Mirror*, 29 August 1908.
40 From about 1903, film-makers occasionally employed match cuts in highly specialised situations (cut-ins, changing camera angle, etc.). Such early instances of linear temporality coexisted with many other examples of non-liner narrative construction.
41 Tom Gunning, 'Weaving a Narrative: Style and Economic Background in Griffith's Biograph Films', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, Winter 1981, pp. 11-25.
42 Noël Burch, 'Porter or Ambivalence', *Screen*, Winter 1978/79, pp. 11-15.

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