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**A Space and Time Machine:  
Actuality Cinema in New York City,  
1890s to c. 1905**

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Abstract**

Urban actuality films are short, single shot views of street scenes, skyscrapers or construction sites, or views from moving vehicles. They are, typically, regarded as simple filmic snap-shots. Conversely, early cinema is conventionally thought to be a complex hybrid medium, a crucible for the idea and representation of the modern. Through close, contextualised analysis of a series of New York films, this study addresses the discrepancy between the putative insubstantiality of actuality films and the evident complexity of early cinema. A hitherto overlooked historical coincidence of actuality cinema, the modernisation of New York and its intermedial culture is shown to provide both a subject and setting for filmmakers.

Actuality cinema is a technology of the present; accordingly, temporality is pivotal for this study. Tom Gunning's 'cinema of attractions' thesis and a neurological conception of modernity posit a familiar shocks-and-jolts axis of the relations between cinema and modernity. In contrast, I argue for an alternative axis, founded in periods, rather than moments, of time and seek to demonstrate cinema's role as a technology of an expanded present time. Fifteen films of transport systems, skyscraper building sites and ways of seeing New York's streets, make up the primary source material. In these films, time provides a space for the representation and negotiation of the modern.

An expanded present fosters a thickened visuality. Within New York's intermedial culture, the adoption of stereoscopic visual practices was key to constructing a coherent filmic present, and a place for the spectator within a cinematic world. As a functioning space and time machine, a cinema of simultaneity, the complexity of actuality filmmaking practices increasingly

moved actualities towards, and enabled their interrelation with, an emerging narrative cinema. Rather than a failed experiment, New York actuality cinema is here demonstrated to be an example of cinema working.

## Preface

Actuality films: registrations of momentary actuality or expansive representations of simultaneity? The wager of this study is that New York actuality cinema is a complex, sophisticated technology of an expanded present time. In tackling what is a hitherto neglected sub-field of cinema's history, this intermedial subject asks for an interdisciplinary approach.

Parts of this thesis are based on a published essay, 'The Attraction of the Flatiron Building: Construction Processes' (Walsh, 2000), itself a product of working alongside a major AHRB funded project at Nottingham and Birmingham: the 3Cities collaborative research project, a study of the visual cultures of three American cities, including New York. James Elkins cites both Nottingham and Birmingham in his account of the field of Visual Studies (Elkins, 2003: 9). Nottingham reading groups, allied to 3Cities, one on Visual Culture and another on Urban Culture, provided an impetus for this study and were noteworthy primers in this burgeoning field. Research should inform teaching and I, at least, have found it helpful to try out some of the readings of the films in upper-level Visual Culture seminars in the School of American and Canadian Studies. More unusually, perhaps, this PhD also emanates from my time as the University's Humanities Technology Officer, working collaboratively across a number of fields and also internationally, in Brazil, in efforts to combine technology and Humanities research.

This visual study is based in visual, historical materials. The research involved studying over 800 films; researching the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and *New York Times* newspaper archives of the period; and closely inspecting some 800 stereographs and photographs, and over 100 panoramic drawings, lithographs

and illustrations. From this resource base, 79 films, 59 newspaper reports and 49 stereographs, photographs, panoramic drawings, lithographs and illustrations are cited. Presented within the following chapters are 106 film frames, carefully selected and digitally copied from the 15 actuality films that form the core of this study's evidential base. These films are available for viewing via the CD-Rom attached inside the back cover. As a product of working with researchers to interrelate technology and research, the films, the frame stills within the text and the Plates (pp293-309) are not intended to be mere illustrations. They are provided, as "points of entry" to, and integral to, the following arguments, a rationale offered by John Kasson that expresses my own position quite well (Kasson, 1998: 95).

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Seeing More and Disavowing Less



Fig. 1.1 Frame from *Lower Broadway* (AM&B, 1902)

*Lower Broadway* (AM&B, 1902) is an animated photograph about ways of seeing New York City, a living picture of a thickened present. It is an example of cinema working, a demonstration of the spatial and temporal capabilities of the moving picture machine. Stereo photographer, Robert Kates Bonine, positions his camera facing northward, at a busy junction on Broadway opposite Trinity Church, so that streetcar traffic intersects with the lower left corner of the frame, and travels to and fro. The filming is precisely timed to coincide with a group of cars which travel into the depth of the frame. Street depth and streetcar time correspond in this representation of the new relations of space and time in a distinctly new urban environment.

Bonine's film is a knowing depiction of the urban, visual issues brought about by modernisation. For example, the view of the relative size of the streetcars, as they recede into the distance, is a device for enhancing apparent depth, for creating a world on screen which corresponds with the experience of Manhattan's streets. Bonine's footage is a form of actuality, or non-fiction, film which is from a side of early cinema that can usefully be thought to have

operated as a visual newspaper. If there were a latter day equivalent, *Lower Broadway* could be envisaged as part of a Saturday broadsheet section on visual modernity, one of a series of pull-out visual supplements, intended to educate as much as amuse. Included in these supplements would be views of new transportation systems and new skyscraper building projects, and guides to vantage points from which to see the city: themes which would be encompassed by a common issue of coming to terms with the visual experience of modernisation in New York City. This study will identify three groups of actuality films from cinema's first decade which feature these themes and are encompassed by this issue.

In Chapter 2, a stereoscopic view of a three minute ride over the then newly electrified Brooklyn Bridge, *New Brooklyn to New York Via Brooklyn Bridge, no. 2* (Edison, 1899), is positioned within a group of films which, I argue, represent the experience of being part of transportation systems.<sup>1</sup> Chapter 3 continues this theme with *Broadway at 14th Street* (Edison, 1896) and in so doing examines the beginnings of cinema in New York, arguing that actuality cinema is the site of a congruence between the world on screen and the world as experienced. In Chapter 4, *Excavating for a New York Foundation* (AM&B, 1903) is one example of the second group of films, on the theme of building sites. My claim is that such films represent ways of visualising urban space in Manhattan. In conclusion, Chapter 5, *Panorama from Times Building* (AM&B, 1905), filmed from a rooftop vantage point and comprised of a tilt then pan of the area around 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, is interpreted as an example of films which, like *Lower Broadway*, function to present new ways of seeing the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this study, wherever possible the date photographed is used for the dating of films, rather than the date copyrighted. Given that many films were not copyrighted or that copyrighting was often delayed to prevent infringement action, date photographed is a more accurate representation of the dating of actuality films.

The rooftop panorama is also one example of actuality cinema's role in the wider turn to narrative filmmaking. By providing a point of view on the city, a coherent spatial and temporal world on screen, actualities—by far the dominant form across cinema's first decade—are, I claim, where cinema is seen to work and thus should be considered as integral to the emergence of cinema more widely. Rather than a sole focus on *what* actualities represent, however, this study is also concerned with *how* actuality cinema functions. My central thesis claim is that by re-presenting space and producing time—the two fundamental coordinates of cinematic representation—actuality films are where cinema fulfils the cinematic aim of producing a space and time machine.

My thesis is based on a straightforward logic. In the field, the visual understanding of actuality films and filmmaking can be thought unhistorical. This misunderstanding is based in a misconception of the temporality of actuality cinema. A reconception of actuality cinema as a technology of simultaneity, rather than a technology of instants, brings to light a visuality, a way of seeing, which redresses the visually unhistorical understanding of this form of cinema. Thus reconceptualised, actuality cinema's roles, such as the representation of space and time then become evident.

In a very literal sense, however, this is rarely how actuality films are *seen* from a century later, and as a consequence, I will argue, neither is it how they are considered in a theoretical sense. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to argue for a reassessment of the conventional visual understanding of actuality films and filmmaking, in order that a revised visual conception can be employed in the chapters that follow. Within the field, actuality cinema as a whole has come to be positioned within what amounts to a recently rediscovered turn-of-

the-twentieth-century media culture, with early cinema a focal point.<sup>2</sup> I will argue that this positioning is based on an understanding of actuality films and filmmaking that is visually unhistorical.

The steps I will take, in this chapter, to formulate a revised visual conception are as follows. Having, firstly, considered the conventional, generic account of actuality cinema I will propose that ‘local actualities’ both foreground the heterogeneity of early cinema and stress the importance of considering the context in which actuality films are produced. New York City—the locus of American cinema in this period—provides a uniquely intermedial context for actuality cinema. In section two, another Bonine film, *Beginning of a Skyscraper* (AM&B, 1902), will then serve as an example of a significant incongruity. The mismatch between the obstinate visual crudity of *Beginning of a Skyscraper* and the efforts involved in making the film will provide a springboard for identifying ways of seeing, or, rather, what was expected to be seen in actuality films. Two frames from *Star Theatre* (AM&B, 1901), another New York building site film, will help formulate a visual question to apply to actuality films: essentially, how do we find ways of seeing more and disavowing less? The influence of stereoscopic photography to actuality filmmaking practices, in terms of the representation of depth over time will introduce the temporal aspects of actuality cinema. In section three, a discussion of the temporality of actuality cinema, two films, *Black Diamond Express* (Edison, 1896) and *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* (Edison, 1901) will provide examples of actuality cinema’s thickened present, and with it a thickened visuality<sup>3</sup>. In a concluding

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<sup>2</sup> In adopting the term ‘media culture’ I am intentionally avoiding the increasingly tired, and for actuality films and filmmaking, ultimately unproductive, terms ‘popular culture’ or ‘mass culture’. As we shall later see, for turn-of-the-twentieth-century New York City—American actuality cinema’s primary context—the term I adopt can be finessed to ‘intermedial culture’.

<sup>3</sup> Although visuality here, as in its standard usage, refers to sight as a cultural and social construct, I do not mean to infer that vision is merely a physical operation. Rather, both can be



section on methodology I will discuss the implications of my claims that actuality films produced time in relation to models of modernity and *what* happens in that time and for whom. Finally, I will defend my selection of films in the context of a corpus of early films of New York City. Actuality films are, however, relatively neglected as is their function, certainly in a thesis-length study. Accordingly, I now want to summarise the conventional critical reception of actuality cinema.

### **A ‘Cinema of Attractions’**

Actuality—“the state of being real; reality, existing objective fact” (according to one definition in the OED)—is, on the face of it, a curious label for a type of cinema. A cursory look at actuality films provides, however, the beginnings of an explanation. Select almost any of the thousands upon thousands of actualities of street scenes, parades, scenic views, factories, local views, leisure activities and so on produced across Europe, America and elsewhere in the period from the mid-1890s to around 1905 and we find a motley array of very short, often single-shot and static-camera registrations of, seemingly, whatever was in front of the camera. This could easily be considered a relentlessly insipid cinema where, for filmmakers, the “only common denominator” is that the films’ subjects are “filmable”, according to one recent account (Doane, 2002: 22). For British historian David Mayer, the “over-familiar devices of pre-1907 cinema”, constitute a “myriad stultifying banalities”, with the onset of narrative cinema providing “relief from more of the tedium of actualités” (Mayer, 2003). Given the visual evidence which actuality films present, Mayer’s remarks are understandable, especially when considered alongside what Martin Jay has productively termed a ‘denigration of vision’ (Jay, 1993). Jay’s principle concern

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understood as cultural and social constructs. See Foster (1988), where understanding vision and visuality is taken as being part of a project to “thicken modern vision” (ix).

is an “antivisual discourse” which, he argues, “is a pervasive but generally ignored phenomenon of twentieth-century Western thought” (14). An inference of this study’s thesis is that this “denigration” encompasses actuality cinema. Mayer’s comments (although from a relatively minor source: a book review in an on-line journal) can thus be thought symptomatic of a wider denigration of actualities, a denigration which, as with Jay’s subject, is visually based. It is, then, perhaps not surprising that actuality films are hardly a main feature within accounts of cinema’s history.

To be sure, early cinema in general is a subject which, over the last two decades, has attracted a great deal of attention. The medium has come to be seen as a complex, multifaceted site of the emergence of the modern, an emblem of the period of modernity in which cinema emerges. According to one much quoted account, as cinema emerged in the 1890s it became “the fullest expression and combination of modernity’s attributes” (Charney & Schwartz, 1995: 1). In a recent anthology which explores the use of sound in cinema’s early years, *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (2001), co-editors Richard Abel and Rick Altman argue that, during its period of emergence, cinema became “an unusually complex hybrid medium” (xiii). Such accounts have contributed to a new formulation of the term intermedial: provisionally, an imbrication of media practices, rather than (as in the more familiar term multi-media) a juxtaposition of media forms. Here, the development of conceptions of early cinema as a medium are synonymous with the development of the notion of intermediality. Even so, actuality films remain marginalised within the field. Writing in a 1997 essay which surveyed the field of early non-fiction cinema research, historian Tom Gunning declared that actuality films “constitute a neglected and, indeed, repressed aspect of film history” (1997a: 24). The vast majority of extant actuality films have still to receive any critical attention, yet the state of actuality film research does not

appear to trouble critics. According to Roberta E. Pearson, “most of the interesting things about one and two shot films have already been said” (1999: 388). Given the visual appearance of actuality films, this would seem a reasonable assumption.

It would be tempting to interpret this apparent anomaly—between extensive research into the medium of early cinema and neglect of actuality films—as a gap, a research opportunity to be seized. However, Pearson’s comments above do have a firm grounding. For, although research on individual films is a rarity within the field, actualities as a whole are commonly thought to be securely accounted for within what is the dominant, in fact the only cohesive, account of the films. Paradoxically (given the above comments on neglect), it is Tom Gunning’s ‘cinema of attractions’ thesis, first aired in the mid-1980s and revised and updated over a series of essays, which provides the foundation for this account<sup>4</sup>.

Gunning’s thesis relates formal aspects of actuality films to their role for audiences within, importantly, an account of the experience of modernity. Briefly put, actuality films are thought to function as a form of analogue for the shocks and jolts experienced in modern, especially urban, life. For example, a thirty-second long film of an approaching train, where the train rushes past in front of the camera, serves to offer a fleeting attraction for the viewer, re-enacting the experience of a streetcar passing in a busy city street. It is a cinema which, instead of inviting the viewer into a cinematic world (as with later narrative cinema), “solicits a highly conscious awareness of the film image engaging the viewer’s curiosity”, according to Gunning (1994a: 121). Through

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<sup>4</sup> Henceforth, the ‘cinema of attractions’ thesis will be abbreviated to the ‘attractions’ thesis.

various formal means, such as the train rushing past the camera in the above example or when actors gesture to the camera, the “images of the cinema of attractions rush forward to meet their viewers”, to then deliver a “brief dose of scopopic pleasure” (121). Gunning’s thesis is itself an attractive account in that it coheres with the apparent visual simplicity of actuality films. Moreover, the need for close formal analysis of the films is obviated, beyond identifying the formal devices which ‘rush forward’ to meet the viewer / researcher.

The ‘attractions’ thesis has continued to be influential. For example, Mary Ann Doane offers an updating of Gunning’s thesis in her account of the representability of time, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (2002). According to Doane’s account, the apparent insipidity of actualities serves a purpose. In the first place, actualities are evidence of a drive to “fix and make repeatable the ephemeral” (22). However, rather than inciting ‘curiosity’, as in Gunning’s account, actualities “presuppose” an “evacuation of meaning”, in order to then offer the viewer the “production of meaning *out of contingency*” (181. Doane’s italics). In effect, actualities are ‘stultifyingly banal’ (to paraphrase Mayer) for a purpose: in order to enhance the effect of chance occurrences.

This, then, is the common ground in which this study is based. The ‘attractions’ thesis provides an account of actuality films which appears to correspond with the visual evidence that the films present. In the same way that, for early audiences, attention was focussed on the technology of moving pictures, on the ability to represent movement on screen, rather than on the content of the films, we too can focus on cinema as a medium, rather than on the seemingly simplistic films from cinema’s first decade. Cinema is, after all, a medium with which we have become so familiar more than a century later. Consequently, is it perverse,

an affront to our media sensibilities, to suggest that actuality films and filmmaking hold far more than their apparent simplicity demonstrates?

Writing in 1994, Gunning held that the cinema of attractions “express[es] an essential element of early cinema as a whole” (1994a: 121). However, across more than a decade of research output Gunning provides—as we shall see in later chapters—significant revisions to his original thesis. The above account presents the ‘attractions’ thesis in its commonly used form, where the heterogeneity of actuality cinema, the many different types of actuality films, is subsumed within a generic explanation of the films’ spectatorial role. The question thus becomes, can a generic explanation of the films persist, given a conception of the medium increasingly in terms of its intermediality, its complexity as a hybrid medium? Different film types and different approaches to filmmaking can point to weaknesses in a generic application of the ‘attractions’ thesis. Local actualities, or local views, are one film type which suggests a far more complex relation between early cinema and its context than the ‘attractions’ thesis suggests, one which can serve to question its wide-ranging applicability.

For this introductory chapter, the above account of the ‘attractions’ thesis could be taken to describe a form a cinema which functions as a space and time machine. The ‘attractions’ thesis is oriented towards describing how actuality cinema functions, spectatorially, rather than to what cinema represents. Moreover, by enacting the experience of a streetcar in an urban setting, for example, actuality films can be understood to re-present both space and time. As such, at this stage, this study might be thought to be proposing a difference in degree to how actuality cinema functions as a space and time machine. With regard to local actualities, identifying a more complex relationship between

cinema and its context could be seen as a symptom of this. However, as will become apparent when addressing the question of the temporality of actuality cinema (later in this chapter), this study is proposing a more substantial difference; a difference in kind, rather than degree, to which actualities function and re-present space and time. To coin a phrase used by Miriam Hansen to differentiate early cinema as a whole from later cinema, the form of actuality cinema I am describing is a “different *kind* of cinema” from that which the ‘attractions’ thesis describes (Hansen, 1995: 362. Hansen’s italics). An examination of local actualities is one step towards identifying this difference in kind.

One of the first scholarly uses of the term local actualities appeared in ‘Contra the Chaser Theory’, a 1979 article where Robert C. Allen engages in a long-running debate concerning whether or not early films were used in the vaudeville exhibition context as ‘chasers’, as a device in a programme of acts employed to clear a theatre for a new group of patrons (Allen, 1979). According to Allen, rather than functioning as a disincentive for vaudeville audiences, the popularity of cinema from its inception in 1896 was underpinned by a range of devices used by exhibitors and producers to address specific audience needs. Among these devices, Allen cites early cinema’s ‘visual newspaper’ role, including the shooting, processing and exhibiting of films of local events on the same day, and local actualities, where a producer filmed street scenes outside of a theatre in the lead-up to the exhibition of motion pictures. As Allen notes, a “powerful, though frequently overlooked, appeal of some early motion pictures was narcissism: seeing oneself, neighbours, town, firetruck, even vaudeville manager on screen” (7). According to Charles Musser, during 1904 and 1905 the American Vitagraph Company’s promotional efforts were aimed at heightening this appeal. In preparation for film exhibitions for local communities American Vitagraph

advertised in local newspapers urging townspeople to suggest which subjects to film. As Musser notes, this effectively meant that, “the entire community was encouraged to participate in the process of making as well as seeing films” (1990: 405).

When viewing local actualities—without any surrounding context and from a later cinema perspective—they are films which might seem to involve a random filming process. However, local actualities involve sophisticated production techniques which sought to establish local interest subjects. Several studies since Allen’s article have focussed on local views, particularly with regard to the role of travelling exhibitors.<sup>5</sup> However, the recent rediscovery of an English collection of local actualities has served to reenergise research interest into this potentially important sub-set of actualities. The Mitchell and Kenyon collection consists of around eight hundred local actualities commissioned by travelling fairground operators in the period from 1900 to 1911. Rather than consisting of films of activities whose ‘only common denominator’ is that they are ‘filmable’, the collection demonstrates how the commissioning of films affected the types of films produced. Initial research by Vanessa Toulmin indicates that dynamic forms of interaction and participation constituted “a network and mode of operation which for a short period of time was as complex and market driven as the production of fiction titles during the period” (2001: 119). Furthermore, within a “typology and development” of local actualities, Toulmin identifies a number of sub-types including films of factory gates, sporting events, calendar events and tram rides, the latter type involving sophisticated product placement techniques (125-131). Toulmin concludes that the collection “demonstrates a model of commission, exhibition and production that has been completely

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<sup>5</sup> See for example, Musser and Nelson (1991) and Fuller (1994).

overlooked” (133)<sup>6</sup>. The Mitchell and Kenyon films also indicate a specific commercial logic which underpins the production of the films. Across a significant proportion of the Mitchell and Kenyon films we see crowds of people either leaving their place of work, attending local events or simply gathering together in response to film company operatives advertising filming and the subsequent local exhibition of the films. What Mitchell and Kenyon had identified was a successful commercial logic: finding locations that maximised the number of potential paying customers, who were then filmed and who then paid to see themselves on screen. As Musser notes above, this logic was also used by American filmmakers. There were, of course, other ways in which filmmakers pursued commercial success. New York City filmmakers provide an example which, importantly, suggests a dynamic relation between early cinema and its context, in this case an intermedial context.

As the American centre for media industries in the late nineteenth century, such as print publishing, photographic publishing, lithography, or newspaper and journal publishing, New York City also became the locus for cinema production in its early years. Until the move out west to Hollywood in the 1910s, partly a move to a year-round filming environment, the two main American production companies, the Edison Company and AM&B, were based in Manhattan. In hundreds of filmic views of Manhattan’s streets, buildings under construction, completed skyscrapers, views of the city from boat or railroad train mounted cameras, views of Municipal works and so on, the urban environment became both setting and subject for filmmakers. New York City is also, of course, a significant context in the emergence of the modern.

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<sup>6</sup> A selection of Mitchell and Kenyon local views of Sheffield were exhibited at the ‘Visual Delights’ conference, University of Sheffield, July 12-14, 2002.



There is a by now familiar litany of the transformation of New York City in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century where the modernisation of the city with regard to, for example, the building of skyscrapers and the resultant skyline, the construction of new transportation systems and the electrification of streets and buildings combines with, for example, the amalgamation of the five boroughs and New York's emerging status as the centre of American commerce and gateway for immigration into what was becoming the world's largest economy. The list could continue, but the point is that the transformations are such that New York emerges as a metropolis and a locus of the modern in a period when conceptions are emerging of what a metropolis, or the modern, could or should look like. For David Ward and Oliver Zunz, in their editorial introduction to *The Landscape Of Modernity: Essays on New York City, 1900-1940* (1992), New York was "the original setting in which the modern urban landscape was first imagined and elaborated" (13). As the locus for America's media culture, New York provides the means to picture and visualise itself: what emerges is, as Rebecca Zurier argues, a 'picturing industry', consisting of photographers, filmmakers, lithographers and so on (Zurier et al, 1995: 85-189). For intermediality, cinema's imbrication within an array of media forms, New York thus provides a unique setting.

In example after example through this study we will see a commercial filmmaking logic which embraces New York's intermedial culture, where film subjects and pictorial practices are adapted from existing media forms. Here is, then, a significant gap in the field of early cinema research, one which I will pursue in this study. Cinema as a medium is widely recognised as an intermedial form and New York provides an intermedial context in which to demonstrate that intermediality. However, to date, there are no studies of this potentially

significant relationship<sup>7</sup>. In turning now to a New York film we will find, however, that our starting point, the apparent visual simplicity of actuality films, provides one explanation for this omission in the field.

### ***Beginning of a Skyscraper (AM&B, 1902)***

*Beginning of a Skyscraper* (AM&B, 1902) is a twenty-five seconds long, single-shot and static-camera actuality filmed from within the dig for the under-construction Macy's department store, in a block of land between 34<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> Street which fronted onto Broadway, Manhattan. The film shows the below-ground works, workmen milling around digging and shovelling spoil into carts, and horse-drawn carts entering the site from street-level. The film appears, as might be expected, jarringly simplistic [Fig. 1.2]. There are no identifiable moments of 'attraction', no obvious beginning or end, no obvious focus of action and no clear point of action, which the film could be construed as being about. Of course, the film could simply enact an 'evacuation of meaning' so that, for example, the 'brief dose of scopic pleasure' offered by a subsequent actuality (in an exhibition of a sequence of films), could be enhanced. Or, perhaps the film is about the representation of movement. The film could be thought of as a form of 'animated photograph' (to coin an often used label at the time for moving pictures), which for audiences served to display the wonders of the new moving picture machine.



Fig. 1.2 Three frames from *Beginning of a Skyscraper* (AM&B, 1902)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The exception to this is James Sanders' brief overview of New York early cinema in *Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies* (2001).

Cited above are the standard interpretations of this film which we might *expect* to find (given that, to date, there are no identifiable interpretations of this film). What I want to argue is that the visual evidence the film presents—what we see—is incongruous when considered against the expected saleability of the film and the filmmaking process involved in producing the film. Proposing a universally shared viewing position for this film—‘what *we* see’—is, of course, problematic, as is the notion of a ‘later cinema perspective’. I will, shortly, discuss the problem of constructing a historical viewing position. For now, the shared position I wish to propose is that from the context of more than one hundred years of film history; the film looks simplistic in terms of what it shows and, ostensibly, how it was made.

I first want to consider this film from a commercial perspective. *Beginning of a Skyscraper* was photographed on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1902, lodged for copyright at the Library of Congress on April 18<sup>th</sup> and appeared in Spring 1902 film catalogues under the titles *Beginning of a Skyscraper* and *Starting a Skyscraper*. The film catalogue entries are significant, given that AM&B had won a landmark court ruling in March 1902 which allowed the company to sell 35mm prints of films to exhibitors for the first time, rather than offering a film and projector service using their proprietary 68mm film format<sup>9</sup>. In addition to selling new films, AM&B undertook the re-processing of films from their 68mm back-catalogue into the 35mm format. Competition for advertising space would therefore have been at a premium at this time. *Beginning of a Skyscraper* was evidently thought a saleable enough commodity to warrant inclusion in the catalogues.

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<sup>8</sup> Where used, numbers below film frames denote time into the film in minutes and seconds.

<sup>9</sup> Musser, 1990: 306.

From a filmmaking perspective, the photographic expertise involved in producing the film sits uneasily with the apparent simplicity of the film. The cameraman, Robert Kates Bonine, was a highly successful photographer whose career spans the period from the 1880s to the early 1910s. Early examples of his work include sets of stereographs of the Johnstown, Pennsylvania flood in 1889 and the results of his time as an official photographer at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Having then moved to France and the moving picture format in 1896, Bonine worked for Gaumont and Pathé producing news films. Following stints, firstly for the Edison company, then as principle cameraman for American Mutosope and Biograph in the early 1900s, Bonine returned to Edison in 1905 specialising in actuality film production. With the downturn in actuality business, Bonine moved to Hawaii in 1907 producing films, and also photographs using a panoramic camera<sup>10</sup>. Situated within his photographic career, the moving picture camera was but one format in which Bonine pursued his profession. Filming *Beginning of a Skyscraper* could hardly be thought a particularly taxing exercise for Bonine, and yet it is an example of a practice of filming one actuality in one day. Copyright records show that Bonine shot five films in the Yosemite Valley, California, on November 15<sup>th</sup> 1901, then a panorama of the Golden Gate Bridge on November 19<sup>th</sup>. *Beginning of a Skyscraper* was photographed on January 18<sup>th</sup> 1902, Bonine then shot four films of ice scenes on the Shrewsbury River, New Jersey on January 20<sup>th</sup> and then toured Quebec, Canada in early February, filming two winter scenes on February 1<sup>st</sup> and three on the 14<sup>th</sup>. To return to the film company's commercial imperative, given Bonine's photographic expertise, filming just one twenty-five second seemingly simplistic actuality on January 18<sup>th</sup> is not consistent with his 'principle cameraman' role. To return to possible interpretations of the film, the notion that

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<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 4 for an extended account of Bonine's photographic career.

Bonine's film resulted in, for example, an 'evacuation of meaning' for audiences (to quote Doane), is, this thesis argues, implausible.

The mismatch between, on the one hand, available explanations for, and the visual evidence provided by, films such as *Beginning of a Skyscraper* and, on the other hand, the efforts involved in filming, processing or selling such films, prompts this thesis. The methodology I have adopted is based in Visual Studies, which enables a historicising of the visual and helps me to argue that the conventional conception of actuality films and filmmaking is visually unhistorical. However, beyond the rather weak explanations for actuality films outlined above, the meaning and role of Bonine's film and others like it might, conventionally, be thought to be lost within an unrecoverable, historical way of seeing, which informed both the production and reception of the films. Nevertheless, there are ways forward<sup>11</sup>.

The close visual analysis of actuality films and related media provides a central plank of my approach. Historian John Kasson summarises the potential of this approach as follows:

The question "What do you see?" can lead to new understandings of the importance of visual evidence, visual thinking, and visual experience in comprehending the life of a culture. Think only how different the whole field of history would be if visual texts were used, not as mere illustrations, selected to confirm what has been previously determined through written sources, but instead as points of entry and springboards for speculation. (Kasson, 1998: 95)

Although the question 'what do you see?' will be, as with *Beginning of a Skyscraper*, a 'springboard for speculation' in this study it is, thus posed,

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<sup>11</sup> It could be argued, from an art historical perspective, that a focus on the visual is an example of visual essentialism, that to separate off the visual for analysis is an essentially tautological move. For an example of this perspective and arguments against it, See Mieke Bal's 'Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture' (2003), and the ensuing debate in the *Journal of Visual Culture* vol. 2: 2 (2003).

problematically unhistorical. One way of repositioning the question is proposed by Gunning in a 1997 survey of early non-fiction film, cited earlier. According to Gunning, the “recent re-evaluation of early cinema” emanates from:

a determination to approach the films of cinema’s first decades on their own terms. While recognising that a historiographic project which attempts to fully reproduce the past ‘as it really was’ is doomed to a naïve historicism, nonetheless, a responsible historian must try to recreate the original horizon of expectation in which films were produced and received. (1997a: 9)

Whereas Gunning’s is a wider re-evaluation project, recreating the ‘horizon of expectation in which films were produced and received’ applies also to the problematic notion of ‘what was seen’. In effect, rather than pursuing ‘what was seen?’ the question can be finessed to ‘what was expected to be seen?’. Examining early cinema’s intermedial culture ought to provide evidence of the ‘horizon of expectation’ in which Bonine and other filmmakers were working. Before examining this culture, and, in particular, stereographic photography, there is a further dimension of historicising vision which Bonine’s film raises. A dissatisfaction with conventional explanations of, for example, *Beginning of a Skyscraper*, includes an inference that there is *more* to be seen if one adopts a historical perspective.

Martin Jay has provided an important intervention to the tension between ‘what was expected to be seen’ and ‘how’ we see with the notion of a twentieth century ‘denigration of vision’, mentioned earlier (Jay, 1993). Briefly, Jay’s position is that although we live in a culture marked by an increasing proliferation of images and image technologies and, as W. J. T. Mitchell has argued (1994), we have witnessed what amounts to a ‘pictorial turn’ in the study of culture, this emphasis on the visual has been accompanied by a distinct distrust of vision within Western, and especially French, intellectual and philosophical cultures. In a conclusion to an anthology which Teresa Brennan co-edited with Jay, *Vision in*

*Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight* (1996), Brennan summarises Jay's intervention as follows:

[a]s Jay shows us, the denigration of vision means that other perspectives on sight have faded. But the paradox may be that the denigrated vision of twentieth-century thought is no metaphor but a reflection of a physical, historical reality in which we see less and disavow more. (Brennan, 1996: 220)

We will uncover numerous actuality cinema examples in this study which suggest that our later cinema 'historical reality' may be a time when we 'see less and disavow more'<sup>12</sup>. A method for teasing out such examples is to pose visual questions. In this regard, I want to employ a visual question used in the published essay, on which Chapter 4 is based, 'The Attraction of the Flatiron Building: Construction Processes' (Walsh, 2000).

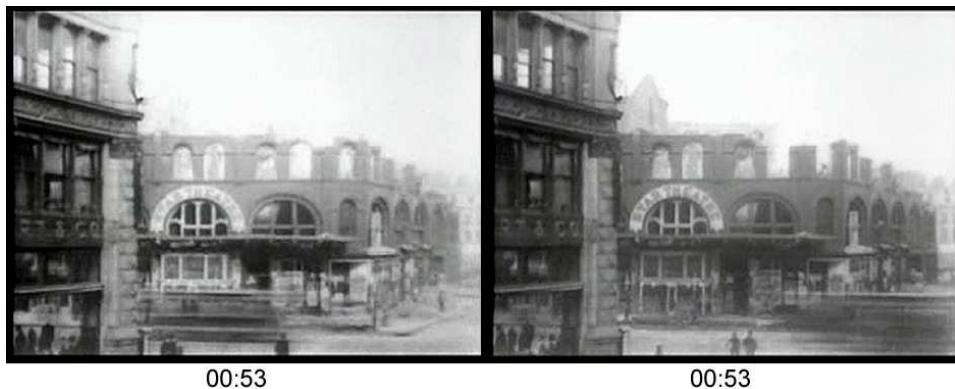


Fig. 1.3 Two frames from *Star Theatre* (AM&B, 1901)

Fig. 1.3 shows two frames from *Star Theatre* (AM&B, 1901), another New York construction site film, this time of the demolition of a theatre in preparation for new office building, at the northeast corner of Broadway and 13<sup>th</sup> Street, one block south from Union Square. The main part of this one minute and fifty-five second film consists of a time-lapse sequence, filmed over a thirty day period, and comprising up to three thousand separate exposures<sup>13</sup>. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the photographing of what is ostensibly a 'trick film' can be more

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<sup>12</sup> The title of this chapter can be taken as a plea to historicise vision and thereby to "see more and disavow less".

<sup>13</sup> The 2000 essay incorrectly states the frame count as fourteen hundred.

productively considered as an important example of a ‘watching construction’ filmmaking logic. Here, I want to focus on two consecutive frames at fifty seconds into the film [Fig. 1.3].

Rather than exposing the time-lapse sequence at regular intervals over the period of the building’s demolition, Frederick S. Armitage (the AM&B cameraman) selected key events to photograph, including the passing of streetcars along Broadway<sup>14</sup>. In the majority of frames which show streetcars, the cars are positioned at either the left or right of the frame, as in Fig. 1.3. The streetcar shown in the two frames is not the same streetcar, as a comparison of the progress of the demolition of Star Theatre (in the centre of each frame) demonstrates. The effect of this selection of points of action is to enhance the illusion of the motion of streetcars along Broadway, thereby enhancing the apparent dynamism of the film. What the two frames above can demonstrate is the way in which we perceive movement when watching a film and thus help frame a visual question that we can apply to this and other films.

Included on the CD-Rom attached to this study’s inside back cover is an animation consisting of the two frames in Fig 1.3. As the animation plays, the image changes from one frame to the other and back again. By focussing on the streetcar, however, what we see is apparent motion as the streetcar appears to *move* along Broadway, as the image alternates from one frame to the next. This apparent movement is entirely illusory; human vision interprets the difference between the position of the streetcar in frame one and frame two as having been caused by the streetcar moving, and thus we perceive that difference as movement. This perception of movement, where there is none, is the perceptual

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<sup>14</sup> The status of the Library of Congress Paper Print Collection as evidence is discussed in the Appendix.



mechanism on which the illusion of moving pictures—including cinema—is based<sup>15</sup>. The question then becomes: is the perception of apparent motion culturally, and therefore historically, variable? Psychologically, this is clearly possible and culturally it is the kind of question posed by a theorist such as Jonathan Crary.<sup>16</sup> For example, in his study *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (1999) Crary's central claim is that "the ways in which we intently listen to, or look at, or concentrate on anything have a deeply historical character" (1). Crary's argument is that, whereas analyses of modern subjectivity and perception are conventionally based on the notions of distraction, fragmentation and shock, the emergence of attentive norms and practices should also be considered alongside conceptions of modern distraction. Attention is, for Crary, part of the industrialisation of perception involving "a disciplinary regime of attentiveness" which, simply put, enables, for example, factory workers to pay attention (13). Crary's concerns are, however, primarily art historical; in particular, he addresses the relationship between attention and aesthetic contemplation, with early cinema firmly positioned (and denigrated) as a technology of distraction<sup>17</sup>. The 1999 study and Crary's earlier work are pertinent and will be discussed later in relation to stereoscopic photography and models of modernity. In short, and in Crary's terms, I will be arguing that actuality cinema functions as a technology of attention, where modes of enhanced attention are developed. For now, Crary's theorising of the historical and variable character of attention is useful for considering 'what was expected to be seen' in early films, and in Armitage's *Star Theatre* footage in particular.

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<sup>15</sup> See Bordwell & Thompson (1997, 33) for an explanation of "the illusion of movement in the cinema".

<sup>16</sup> See Sekuler & Blake (1994).

<sup>17</sup> Gunning's 'attractions' thesis is invoked; there is an absence of actuality film analysis and the denigration of actualities appears in the form of a likely comment from Cézanne that the "hodgepodge of effects associated with early cinema" should be "excoriate[d] as a 'hideous' sign of 'progress'" (Crary, 1999: 343).

In returning to the animation of the two frames from *Star Theatre*, the effect of an emphasis on the perception of apparent motion could include enhanced movement of the streetcars, the people in the street or of the demolition process. Although highly speculative at this stage, such effects could be an example of seeing *more*, an enhancing of the dynamism of the film. Within this study we will find numerous examples which do suggest that actuality filmmaking was based in an expectation that viewers would see far more than conventional accounts of actuality cinema allow.

Armitage's selection of frame exposures, which show streetcars in positions that work to enhance the effect of apparent motion, is one indication that filmmakers were knowing of the mechanism by which cinema works. Moreover, Armitage's close attention to detail—waiting for a streetcar to appear before exposing a frame—although incongruous with the supposed arbitrariness of actuality filming, is what we should expect to find in this period. As Jay argues, in what is a familiar formulation of visual modernity, “the extraordinary changes in our capacity to see wrought by technology”, coupled to the “impact of rapid urbanisation on the visual experience of everyday life”, resulted in a widespread “interrogation of sight” (1993: 113). The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a “frenzy of the visible”, in Jean-Louis Comolli's description (1985: 743). Working within such a visually acute environment, with a new technology of the visible, Armitage and other early filmmakers demonstrated an acute visual awareness and an awareness of the technology with which they were working. This interpretation of cinema's role within visual modernity returns us, however, to the visual evidence provided by the films. Despite the fallacy of teleological explanations for early cinema, where cinema's emergence is measured against later narrative cinema, the proposition that with actuality films we ‘see less and disavow more’ remains problematic. It is almost an affront to our latter day

visual sensibilities to claim that actuality cinema's neglect can largely be explained by a lessening of visual acuity. There is, however, a companion technology to early cinema—the stereoscope—which is similarly neglected and which can help bolster this claim. In turning now to an account of stereoscopic photography we will find more evidence of 'what was expected to be seen' in early films, as well as a temporal aspect to ways of seeing.

The stereoscope originated as a bulky table-mounted apparatus, invented in 1838 by Charles Wheatstone and later redesigned in a light-weight hand-held format in the 1860s by Oliver Wendell Holmes. The Holmes Stereoscope consisted of little more than two lenses and a mount for viewing stereograph cards. A dual lens camera was used to produce stereographs which, without the aid of a stereoscope, appear to be two almost identical photographs side-by-side (for an example see Plate 5). The stereoscope merely recreates for the viewer the dual view of the stereo camera and in so doing produces the effect of apparent depth. For actuality filmmakers, employing stereoscopic photographic practices held the promise of combining apparent depth and apparent motion. The stereoscope is distinguished from the array of nineteenth century optical devices by its ubiquity. Stereographs were by far the most dominant format for producing photographs through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Although precise figures are difficult to come by, one researcher estimates that in America by 1900 "one-half of 16 million households possessed a stereoscope holder" (Fowles, 1994: 89). As for the production of stereographs, by 1900 there were some 12,000 manufacturers in America, with the New York based company Underwood and Underwood, for example, producing 10 million stereographs each year (90). Stereography represents, however, a largely invisible component of the history of American photography. Arguably, one reason for this invisibility simply relates to the extent to which ways of seeing change

historically; when viewing stereographs through late twentieth century eyes the stereograph's depth effect can be difficult to see<sup>18</sup>. In his *Techniques of the Observer* Jonathan Crary provides a rare analysis of the stereograph phenomenon which can serve to foreground the difficulty of seeing stereographic depth (Crary, 1990).

Crary situates stereography within the mass dissemination, standardisation and commodification of images. As a device, the stereoscope ranks in importance alongside the camera obscura in that both are identified as “points of intersection where philosophical, scientific and aesthetic discourses overlap with mechanical techniques, institutional requirements and socio-economic forces” (Crary, 1990: 8). For example, whereas the camera obscura provides a monocular model for the dominant status of the observer in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the stereoscope provides an equivalent nineteenth century model, for Crary, given that modern vision is increasingly conceived of as a binocular, bodily operation. When viewing stereographs, a form of commodification of “the real” is enacted, with the observer “set to work ... transforming dreary parallel images of flat stereo cards into a tantalising apparition of depth” (132). Crary does attempt to describe the process of viewing stereographs, in particular the need to selectively focus on areas of the image. Yet, when viewing a number of stereograph cards the process became an “inexhaustible routine of moving from one card to the next and producing the same effect, repeatedly, mechanically” (Crary, 1990: 132).

Attempts to situate stereoscopy, and actuality cinema, within a commodification model of culture and within the spectacularisation of everyday life, is a theme I

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<sup>18</sup> When attempting to demonstrate stereoscopic depth in undergraduate or research seminars, with the aid of a replica stereoscope, the difficulty of seeing stereoscopic depth through latter day eyes becomes clear. On average, less than half of participants are able to see the depth effect.

will return to in later chapters. Of relevance here, is the similarity of Crary's analysis of viewing stereographs and accounts of actuality cinema based in Gunning's 'attractions' thesis. For example, the notion of an 'inexhaustible routine ... producing the same effect, repeatedly, mechanically' brings to mind Doane's account, cited earlier, of cinema audiences, who "witness the ceaseless production of meaning out of contingency" (2002: 181). This similarity is based in a failure to adequately historicise the visual, a shortcoming which goes some way to accounting for the neglect of both stereoscopy and actuality films. However, there are a number of clues which counter Crary's account of stereographs and which thus counter, as Brennan has it, the idea of 'seeing less and disavowing more'.

In an essay entitled 'Photography's Discursive Space: Landscape / View' (1982) art historian Rosalind Krauss provides another rare, if now over two decades old, account of viewing stereographs. Krauss' purpose was to delineate a 'coherent discourse' concerning the production, authorship and exhibition of photography which could update accounts of viewing photographs that were based in archival or gallery viewing practices. Krauss' agenda aside, her account of viewing stereographs does contrast with Crary's. According to Krauss, "stereoscopic space" is "perspectival space raised to a higher power" where, importantly, the stereographic image introduces, if not demands, a temporal dimension to viewing photographs (1982: 314). For example, whereas Crary describes the 'routine' of 'mechanically' viewing stereographs, Krauss presents contemporary accounts which "all dilate on the length of time spent examining the contents of the image" (314). Moreover, in addition to a temporal dimension and in contrast to what Crary terms an 'apparition of depth', Krauss goes on to quote Oliver Wendell Holmes' account of viewing a stereograph of Broadway where "the mind feels its way into the very depths of the picture" (314). Furthermore, and as

a counterpart to the depth dimension, Krauss notes a “scanning” dimension, “a minute-by-minute examining of every inch of the ground” involved in viewing stereographs (314). Similarly, film historian John L. Fell provides an example of the need for close scrutiny of stereographic images in an account of stereograph story cards where elements of the cards’ narrative can be seen only through detailed inspection of the images (Fell, 1974: 130-139). Krauss thus identifies three related dimensions of stereograph viewing: temporal, depth and lateral dimensions.

Krauss continues her analysis by comparing the stereoscope and cinema.

According to Krauss:

[t]he phenomenology of the stereoscope produces a situation that is not unlike that of looking at cinema. Both involve the isolation of the viewer with an image from which surrounding interference is masked out. ... In both, the pleasure derives from the experience of the simulacrum ... (1982: 314).

Whilst invoking the notion of the simulacrum turns Krauss’ analysis back to Crary’s commodification model of the stereoscope and a “spectacularisation of the everyday” conception of early cinema, suggesting a relationship between stereoscopy and cinema is apposite. Krauss goes on to claim that cinema had ‘a certain proto-history in the institution of stereography’: early film catalogue entries advertising actualities bear this out.

According to British film historian Gerry Turvey, film producers’ catalogues often noted “the particular visual ‘effect’ being sought by filmmakers” (2004: 9). Turvey, in an account of the aesthetics of actuality filmmaking which thus eschews conventional explanations of actuality cinema, relates various visual effects to actuality filmmaking practices, including the use of a mobile camera to produce the effect of both depth and “dynamism” (19-21). For example, a

Warwick Company panoramic view, shot from the front of a tram, was described in the company's film catalogue as a view "in which the stereoscopic effect, so famous in our panoramic pictures, is seen to exceptional advantage" (20). Another Warwick catalogue entry, for a film photographed from a boat while approaching a pier, proclaimed that "as the vessel approaches closer, the piles and superstructure on which the pier is built give splendid stereoscopic effects" (20). Turvey goes on to discuss the visual effect of movement for the camera and the effects which unfold over time, and concludes that, "even at its moment of birth, actuality cinema was operating with a unique and sophisticated aesthetic system" (25). This system, including the adoption of stereographic techniques, was also much in evidence in the American early cinema context.

There are numerous instances of the relationship between stereoscopy and actuality filmmaking. For example, films which are based on stereographs; filmmakers, such as Bonine, who apply stereoscopy expertise to actuality production; and, of course, film catalogue entries which echo the Warwick company's efforts to stress the stereoscopic effects of their films. A panorama of Lower Manhattan from a boat-mounted camera, *Skyscrapers of New York City, from the North River* (1903), where the camera was panned when approaching piers on the North River to emphasise the visual effect of depth, was described by an Edison advertisement as a:

view of lower New York from Barclay Street to Battery Park, showing a beautiful stereoscopic effect of the sky-scrapers in the business section of the city. . . . One of the finest panoramic pictures of New York ever taken. (American Memory)

We do, of course, have to be careful when interpreting advertisements, given the inevitable presence of hyperbole. Nevertheless, Edison's claim that the film produced a 'stereoscopic effect' suggests that the expectation of such effects would not have been nonsensical for film audiences.

In returning, now, to the question of ‘what was expected to be seen’ in actuality films, we can begin to apply two of the dimensions of stereograph viewing identified by Krauss: depth and lateral dimensions. Moreover, the third temporal dimension, the ‘minute-by-minute examining’ of stereographs provides a ‘how’; that is, a close attention to detail, which Armitage evinced when photographing *Star Theatre*. With Bonine’s film, *Beginning of a Skyscraper*, we can identify a visual logic based in stereographic practices. By scanning the frame we can see layers of depth, and the framing of these layers as a compositional logic. An AM&B catalogue described the film as “[a]n excellent study of modern American push and enterprise” (American Memory). Hyperbole apart, the word ‘study’ is consistent with Bonine’s one-film-per-day filmmaking practice. In Chapter 4, I will provide an analysis of Bonine’s film which utilises the above components of stereograph viewing. As might be expected, it is the film’s visual complexity which then provides an explanation for the efforts involved in producing the film.

Stereo photographic practices do provide a convincing visual logic for actuality films which otherwise appear visually crude. There is, moreover, a seemingly straightforward photographic lineage which runs from photography, to stereography and to cinema, which underpins this logic. In an essay entitled ‘Ways of Seeing: The New Vision of Early Nonfiction Film’ (1997), William Uricchio provides a succinct account of this lineage:

cinema drew upon the traditions of realist depiction consolidated by photography earlier in the nineteenth century (traditions derived from the rules of Albertian perspective, and in turn pushed into an apparent third dimension by the stereograph), and extended them into an illusory fourth dimension of duration and movement. (122)<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> In formulating the introduction to this study, as will become clear in the final section of this chapter, Uricchio’s essay has been a primary influence.



The temporal aspect of what Uricchio terms the ‘fourth dimension’ is an aspect of stereography. It is the time involved in the detailed inspection of the images, the ‘minute-by-minute’ scanning of stereographs. The temporality of actuality cinema is also a basis for the ‘attractions’ thesis, itself rooted in the reconfiguration of time wrought by modernity and modernisation. For this study, a claim that actualities represented urban space through the use of stereoscopic conventions is an outcome of identifying such conventions through close visual analysis of actuality films. The claim that actuality films produced time, is more contentious but two accounts of early cinema’s temporality are helpful: Gunning’s influential 1993 essay “‘Now You See It, Now You Don’t’: The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions’ and Doane’s acclaimed monograph (previously introduced), *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (2002).

### **The Temporality of Actuality Cinema**

In Gunning’s essay “‘Now You See It, Now You Don’t’: The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions’, one of a series which elaborates upon the original mid-1980s formulation of the ‘attractions’ thesis, he underscores the unique temporal relations within early cinema. A specific kind of temporality provides the defining aspect of spectatorial relations in cinema’s early years:

attractions have one basic temporality, that of the alternation of presence/absence which is embodied in the act of display. In this intense form of present tense the attraction is displayed with the immediacy of “Here it is! Look at it” (1993: 6)

His essay is prefaced by an historiography of three phases of pre-1978 conceptions of early cinema—evolutionary, cinematic and narrative—which Gunning labels under an umbrella term, the “continuity model” (3). Common to each phase is a conception of early cinema as an elementary period which prepares the way for later cinema. The narrative phase, where telling stories is

thought to be the goal of cinema proper, is the historiographic context against which Gunning defines early cinema as “a place of rupture, a period that showed more dissimilarity than continuity with later film style” (3). Accordingly, Gunning distinguishes the cinema of attractions from narrative cinema by outlining three pairs of opposites: curiosity/enigma, surprise/suspense and irruption/development. Whereas narrative cinema operates through “posing an enigma” and then creating suspense, the cinema of attractions invites curiosity which is “satisfied by surprise rather than narrative suspense” (6). The third pairing is, for Gunning, the most productive temporal distinction and thus becomes the focus of his essay.

As noted earlier, Gunning’s thesis tends to obviate the need for the close analysis of early films, other than for the purposes of identifying moments of ‘irruption’. Consequently, close film analysis is rarely included in Gunning’s ‘attractions’ essays. However, Gunning does state that films of onrushing trains provide “early cinema’s most enduring example” of the “attraction confront[ing] audiences” (5). He provides an image of a train with the caption “*The Black Diamond Express* – ‘a temporal irruption rather than a temporal development’” (1993, 8)<sup>20</sup>. Through an analysis of this film I will provide an illustration of Gunning’s thesis.



Fig. 1.4 Three frames from *Black Diamond Express* (Edison, 1896)

<sup>20</sup> The image in Gunning’s essay is not a frame from the film; it includes the moving picture camera with which the film was made. Rather, it would appear to be one of a set of what would now be termed ‘production stills’. Musser (1991: 96-97) reproduces the still Gunning uses and another showing the film’s production crew.

Within conventional accounts, *Black Diamond Express* (Edison, 1896) could be presented as an example of the primitivity of early cinema. Produced seven months after the commercial premiere of moving pictures in America, the film simply shows, in one static-camera shot, a train approaching in the distance in the opening twenty-three seconds, and then passing in front of the camera in the final four seconds. At just twenty-seven seconds long, the footage hardly seems to qualify as a ‘film’. Fig. 1.4 and Fig 1.5 can, however, illustrate the ‘basic temporality’ of the cinema of attractions, the ‘alternation’ of ‘absence’ (over the opening twenty-three seconds), then ‘presence’—‘Here it is! Look at it!’—the temporal ‘irruption’ in the final four seconds of the film.



Fig. 1.5 Three frames from *Black Diamond Express* (Edison, 1896)

Gunning accepts that there may be elements of ‘temporal unfolding’, where an exhibitor attempts to heighten expectations for viewers, or where a film involves ‘an action with a clear trajectory’, such as the train approaching in *Black Diamond Express* (7-8). However, such temporal developments are, for Gunning, “secondary to the sudden appearance and then disappearance of the view itself” (8). Gunning concludes that attractions are based on the “cinematic smack of the instant, the flicker of presence and absence” (11). In addition to this emblematic example of an attraction, Gunning provides examples of where attractions and narrative “interact”, either by “dominating” narratives, or by “assuming circumscribed roles within a narrative logic” (10). Moreover, the “disjunctions” of attractions may not be as “shocking” as in the train example; attractions could also produce an “erotic” effect (8). Gunning’s example of an erotic attraction, *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* (Edison,

1901), is something of a rarity among actuality films in that it has been analysed by a number of researchers, including Doane in her cinematic time monograph<sup>21</sup>. We will return to Gunning's essay shortly, for now I want to examine Doane's explanation of the temporality of attractions, and her account of this film.

Doane's primary concern—the representability of time at the turn-of-the-twentieth-century—is framed by an account of the rationalisation of time in modernity (through standardisation and Taylorization), with new technologies such as the cinema being “crucial to modernity's reconceptualisation of time and its representability” (2002: 4). The epistemology of time witnessed “a sea change in thinking about contingency, indexicality, temporality and chance” in this period (4). Cinema embodies the “atomising” or “rupturing” of “the sense of time as an exemplary continuum”, according to Doane (9). Moreover, cinema emerges as a technology which is “capable of *representing* the contingent, of providing the ephemeral with a durable record” (169, Doane's italics). In a chapter entitled ‘Zeno's Paradox: The Emergence of Cinematic Time’ Doane considers actuality cinema alongside the writings of Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze, thus within a philosophy of time and movement. For example, instantaneous photography is cited as the “true technological ancestor of the cinema” and the “quintessential apparatus of modernity”, in Doane's paraphrasing of (respectively) Deleuze and Bergson (179-180). Whereas Gunning avoids close film analysis, Doane then goes on to provide a relatively detailed analysis of the representation of time in an actuality film.

*What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* is a one minute seventeen second film of a busy street scene in Manhattan. At around one minute into the

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<sup>21</sup> See Mayne (1990), Balides (1993), Rabinovitz (1998).

film, we see a man and a woman walking towards the camera. They pause while standing over a grate on the pavement as an air current lifts the woman's dress, after which they walk off past the camera as the film ends<sup>22</sup>. For Doane, the film "confirms" Deleuze's conception of cinema, that "'any-instant-whatever' becomes cinema's proper topic" (180). It is a form of cinema which is based in a "fascination ... with the camera's ability to 'catch' moments, to, itself, be surprised by meaning", where "significance is not predetermined ... but emerges out of the accident", according to Doane (180-181). The couple in the film emerge from "an almost unreadable frame", but from the "mass of detail" they walk towards the grate, and as the gush of air lifts the woman's dress the audience witness the "production of meaning *out* of contingency" (181. Doane's italics). "Hence", Doane concludes, "the early cinema is very much about instants" (181). The temporality of actuality cinema is, according to Doane, very much mono-temporal. Along with Gunning's assertion that 'attractions have one basic temporality'—that of the 'cinematic smack of the instant'—this is a steadfastly "instantaneous" actuality cinema (as Bergson or Deleuze would have it). Doane introduces her analysis of *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* by noting that actualities are an "attempt to seize the moment that flees" and then by claiming "[t]his approach to cinematic movement and time was historically short-lived, semiotically insufficient ... soon extinct" (178). In short, actuality cinema is, for Doane, a failed experiment because, "the primitive cinema could not realise the full potential of the cinematic representation of time" (179).

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<sup>22</sup> A similar scene was, of course, famously staged by Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven Year Itch* (1955).

It is telling, however, that both Gunning's and Doane's interpretations of *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* are founded on the alleged simplicity of the film. According to Gunning, "attention" is:

diffused across the shot, solicited by many little events, none of which seem to have any narrative purpose. Rather, we are simply absorbed in the act of viewing ... . . . a couple emerge from the background of street life detail ... . (1993: 8)

In an introductory chapter Doane argues that "[t]he significance of cinema ... lies in its apparent capacity to perfectly *represent* the contingent, to provide the purest record of time" (22. Doane's italics). Accordingly, in Doane's analysis of the New York actuality:

People and carriages pass by in no particular order, ... and the film at this point resembles the "purest" of actualities, in which the camera is simply aimed at a street scene and allowed to record whatever happens. (181, Doane's emphasis)

From this study's perspective, however, a response to Gunning's and Doane's accounts of the temporality of actuality cinema might adapt Gunning's title: 'No, you don't see it'<sup>23</sup>. For the above accounts are, I will argue, representative of visually unhistorical interpretations of actuality cinema. By now providing additional historical context to the above two films, the New York and train actualities, we will find a different temporality emerging, one which includes a different conception of 'what was expected to be seen' in the films. Firstly: *Black Diamond Express*.

Photographed by Edison cameramen William Heise and produced by James White on December 1<sup>st</sup> 1896 at Lake Cayuga, New York, *Black Diamond Express* was shot in close collaboration with a New York railroad company. The

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<sup>23</sup> I want to stress here that Gunning's subsequent research output offers a far more sophisticated take on actuality cinema and its context. For example, in a 1997 essay Gunning concludes a description of the visual complexity of urban streets (and by implication urban actuality films) by stating that the "street is filled with endless attractions" (1997a: 36). I take this statement as being an attempt by Gunning to signal that the original model of the cinema of attractions should be considered inadequate. However, Gunning's former essays remain in wide circulation (for example see *The Silent Cinema Reader*, Grievson & Krämer, 2004).

prominently placed ‘Lehigh Valley Railroad’ advertising hoarding, at middle-foreground [Fig. 1.4], indicates the producer’s intended purpose for the film, that of an advertisement for the railroad’s high speed services<sup>24</sup>. On the part of the railroad company, collaboration included transport to the location, providing railroad workers (seen staging track maintenance in Fig. 1.4) and providing employees who wave at the camera as the train passes [Fig. 1.5]<sup>25</sup>. This collaboration was mutually beneficial in that the railroad company was helping to produce what was a highly successful subject for early filmmakers. *Black Diamond Express* was, in fact, an imitation of a popular Biograph film, *Empire State Express* (1896), which was then re-made several times by Edison filmmakers between 1896 and at least 1903<sup>26</sup>. Importantly, the success of the *Express* films can be seen to have a spatial and temporal dimension: a variant of the *Express* films, *Receding View, Black Diamond Express* (Edison, 1897), provides an example.

According to cinema historian Charles Musser, Edison’s White and Heise filmmaking crew returned to the Lehigh Valley Railroad in April 1897 to shoot a group of railroad films, including two more versions of *Black Diamond Express*, another film shot from the rear of a moving train, and *Receding View, Black Diamond Express* which, as the title suggests, provided a view of the Express disappearing into the distance<sup>27</sup>. Edison’s sales literature urged exhibitors to show *Receding View* “immediately after the approaching view of the same train”

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<sup>24</sup> Although the hoarding is barely legible in both the frame captures (Fig. 1.1 and 1.2) and the CD-Rom copy of the film, it is reasonable to assume that with projected copies of the film at the time, the hoarding would have been legible.

<sup>25</sup> See what amount to very early production stills for this film, showing the various forms of collaboration, in Musser, 1991; 96-97.

<sup>26</sup> See Musser, 1990: 150-153 for an account of the Biograph versions of this film. See Musser, 1997 for details of the four Edison versions of *Black Diamond Express*. Chapter 4 will refer to a 1903 version of the *Express* films.

<sup>27</sup> The account of *Receding View, Black Diamond Express* is indebted to Musser, 1991: 98-100.

(Cited from Musser, 1991: 99). As Musser argues, this instruction to juxtapose the two views of the train is significant, in that:

by early 1897 editing – the arrangement of selected shots – was already becoming crucial, not simply for the construction of narrative but for the creation of spatial and temporal worlds. (Musser, 1991: 100)

In effect, by projecting first the view of the oncoming train, then the view of the train disappearing into the distance, the two films become shots and in so doing create a ‘spatial and temporal world’. The ‘world’ created on screen by the juxtaposition of shots can be thought to have three aspects.

Firstly, rather than serving, as Gunning argues, to ‘incite visual curiosity’, the view of the oncoming (then receding) train is that of a train journey. Moreover, it is a journey which, by implication, extends beyond that which is represented on screen. The spatial world of the train journey, which suggests a point of departure and arrival, becomes part of the events on screen. Secondly, instead of denying the spectator a position within this spatial world, the position of the camera provides, for the spectator, a point of view or position from which to view the train journey. Thirdly, rather than serving to provide an ‘instant’, a ‘brief dose of scopic pleasure’, the view of the train journey clearly involves a more complex temporality. The train’s movement towards and away from the viewer’s point of view unfolds over time, albeit just the one minute or so of screen time. The viewer is, however, also positioned within the implied temporal world of the complete train journey, from departure to arrival.

Importantly, then, whereas Gunning’s account of spectatorial relations sidelines spatial, and limits temporal, dimensions of the *Express* films, Musser’s production oriented account reveals complex spatial and temporal relations. They are, furthermore, relations which serve to fulfil the railroad’s purpose and thus



partly explain the collaboration between Edison and the Lehigh railroad company. Whereas the view of the oncoming train in *Black Diamond Express* demonstrates the speed of the train, the spatial and temporal world created by the juxtaposition of the films serves to position the speed of the train within a longer journey. For advertising purposes, the positioned, but stationary, viewer witnesses a journey which they are invited to take. Musser's production oriented approach to early cinema significantly alters our analysis of the filmmaking logic and purpose of the *Express* films. By now applying close visual analysis to one of the films, the 1896 version of *Black Diamond Express*—in particular by paying close attention to the composition and framing of the film—we can identify a spatial and temporal world, within which the viewer is positioned.

An Edison film catalogue describes the film as “the only one in existence showing an express train making seventy miles an hour” (Musser, 1997). Ostensibly, if the film's purpose is to demonstrate the speed of Lehigh express trains any number of trackside locations, for example where there is a section of straight track, would suffice. There are, however, several aspects to the selection of the location which contribute to demonstrating the train's speed, particularly by emphasising the train's movement through space over time. Firstly, the section of track within the frame, a form of shallow ‘S’ shape, emphasises the distance the train travels. In the opening seven seconds, we see the train travelling almost parallel to the base of the frame, at centre frame left [Fig. 1.4]. From ten to twenty-two seconds the train travels along a straight section of track almost in the centre of the frame, before then, in the final four seconds, veering to the right and exiting the frame at bottom right [Fig. 1.5]. Secondly, the train's movement along the straight section of track emphasises a change of scale over time. Over twelve seconds, the train increase in size as it approaches the final bend in the track. Thirdly, by selecting a section of track where a hillside, rather

than the sky, provides a backdrop the train's movement through space is emphasised by ensuring that the smoke and steam exhaust from the engine is visible. In his 1993 essay Gunning describes an exhibition practice for this film which served to emphasise the visual cues evident in the film.

Filmmaker, exhibitor and lecturer John Stuart Blackton devised, according to Gunning, a practice which involved projecting the first frame of the film as a still image. Blackton would then announce:

Ladies and gentlemen, you are now gazing upon a photograph of the famous Black Diamond Express. In just a moment ... you will see this train take life in a marvellous and astounding manner. It will rush toward you, belching fire and smoke from its monstrous iron throat. (quoted in Gunning, 1993: 7)

In Gunning's essay, Blackton's exhibition practice serves to "develop expectations" which involve a temporal development, but this development is "secondary" to the sudden appearance of the train, later in the film (8). An alternative interpretation is that Blackton's practice of projecting a still image enabled audiences to see the visual cues by which the filmmaker had organised the frame. For example, the tracks veering off to bottom, frame right is one signal that the frame involves stereoscopic visual cues [Fig. 1.4]. By then scanning across the frame we find four depth cues; the workmen in the foreground, the sign in the near foreground, the receding tracks at centre left and the train in the distance. Edison's later title prefix for the Express film *Receding View* is an indicator of the importance of visual cues for this type of film<sup>28</sup>. Such cues could also serve to emphasise the speed of the train, and thus serve the railroad company's purposes. The train would then 'take life in a marvellous and astounding manner', and 'rush toward you' over the twelve seconds of its travel along the tracks as, visually, depth cues enhanced the perception of distance

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<sup>28</sup> "Receding" is, in fact, a highly unusual word to use in a film title. To date, this film provides the only occurrence (IMDB accessed February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005).

travelled. In effect, the train would travel faster, be more animated, because of the visual cues in the opening twenty-three seconds of the film. Rather than being a period which is 'evacuated' of meaning, as Doane might have it, this section of the film contributes to the meaning of the film: providing a point of view from which to witness a journey that viewers are invited to take. In the examples in this study, we will identify the use of visual cues which are integral to the meaning and role of actuality films. *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* provides one such example to which we can now return.

As already noted, this actuality film is unusual in that it has been the subject of much critical analysis, especially in relation to the representation of urban space. To a large extent, the attraction of this film for historians is the apparently complex relationship the film sets up between public and everyday space, and sexualised spaces of display. For example, Constance Balides argues that *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* "produce[s] everyday space as something other [than] a location for the practice of everyday life" (1993: 25). Balides then delineates a conception of urban space which combines Stephen Heath's and Michel de Certeau's theorisations of space and place, especially in relation to how space takes place. Broadly, Balides goes on to make a distinction between masculine space as voyeuristic and feminine space as the place of everyday activities. In another critical interpretation of *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* Lauren Rabinovitz argues that the film "opens a space for women's appearances that sets the real city street as a *stage* for the purpose of female spectacle" (1998: 28. Rabinovitz's italics). Briefly, the street becomes a stage with a "central space", through the "formal placement" of the air grate, for Rabinovitz (30) [see Plate 1]. The film is thus about how to interpret female sexuality in public spaces, and it thus 'authorises the potential' that by entering the 'emptied out central space' the woman in the film is a

prostitute, in Rabinovitz's argument. While not the concern of this study, the arguments outlined above are useful for introducing the conception of urban space used in this study. My concern is how urban space is constructed in actuality films as a visually coherent space through the use of visual cues adopted from, for example, stereographic practices. In the rapidly modernising New York urban environment, constructing coherent urban space—in effect, achieving a point of view—is an acute issue for filmmakers. *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* provides an example of how that is achieved through an expectation of what audiences would see: the question of 'what was expected to be seen'.

In the same way that *Black Diamond Express* employs the perspectival convention of positioning a line of sight at the base of the frame, with *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* the intersection of pavement and road, at bottom right, signals this convention [Plate 1]. This is important, as with the train film, in that organising, or staging, layers of depth along this line of sight emphasises movement with the frame, with the coordination of movement within what becomes deep space serving as a marker of visual coherence. In the opening frames of this street scene, visual depth cues include, from the base of the frame, the air grate, a sign by the roadside with a white-shirted boy adjacent, a telegraph pole in the far-middle distance and, finally, an elevated train station in the far distance [Plate 1]. The space around the air grate is, as Rabinovitz identifies, tightly regulated during the film, with movement largely confined to streetcar traffic and pedestrians in the middle distance in the opening frames of the film. Of the many depth cues, some are a product of location selection, such as the El station, others are placed, such as the white-shirted boy. The boy is significant in that his role for the filmmaker could be described as middle-distance stereo depth enhancer. Accordingly, he remains

static throughout the film, except in the closing frames when he moves towards the road, in order to remain visible as the depth enhancer, when pedestrians (or rather, extras), walk within the demarcated air grate space [Plate 1]. It is worth noting that of the couple, the man is played by Alfred C. Abadie, an actuality filmmaker who worked with James White (the producer for the 1896 *Black Diamond Express* film). It should not therefore be surprising that space and movement are tightly regulated throughout the film<sup>29</sup>.

Contextually, the air grate was a burlesque device perhaps best known at this time (for New York audiences) as a Coney Island attraction. As John Kasson notes, George Tilyou's Steeplechase Park, opened in 1897, featured among its attractions the "Blowhole Theater", where concealed compressed-air jets sent hats flying and skirts shooting upward" (1978: 61). Consequently, the meaning of the air grate in *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* would likely have registered early on, given its prominent position within the depth cues. At thirty-five seconds, half-way through the film, a man approaches the grate then quickly veers away, acting as another signal that the air grate is important to the film [Plate 1]. Then, at fifty seconds, a well-dressed, portly, middle-aged woman walks towards the grate but then (perhaps to invoke relief for the audience), veers away. At this point, the couple emerge from the middle distance, walk over the grate and pause while the woman's dress is lifted by a rush of air. To complete the film, the couple then walk towards the camera and veer off to frame left. The ending is, however, also carefully staged in that the couple's height exceeds the frame height as they veer to the left and off frame, after which a short man and a boy walk diagonally across the demarcated air grate space, with their height easily contained within the height of the frame. In

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<sup>29</sup> Although facts remain uncertain, the main cameraman for *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* is likely to have been Edwin S. Porter (see Musser, 1991: 176-179).

effect, the couple re-enact the view of the train in *Black Diamond Express*, and as with the train, the pay-off from watching their increase in relative size, as they pass depth cues, is the final attraction of the oversized couple (or train) moving past the camera. The implications arising from a close visual analysis of the film are as follows.

According to Doane, in the first section of the film, before the couple “emerge from the mass of detail” (at around fifty-five seconds, out of a running time of seventy-seven seconds<sup>30</sup>), the film “resembles the ‘purest’ of actualities”, given that the camera is “simply aimed at a street scene and allowed to record whatever happens” (2002: 181). Clearly, Doane’s claim concerning the arbitrariness of the filming and her conclusion that, up to this point, the film is ‘evacuated of meaning’, is incorrect. Moreover, the point Doane identifies as that at which the film changes from actuality to an erotic narrative is, I believe, also incorrect. Rather, I will argue the film has three sections, linked by the theme of coming-to-the-city. I do think that, in a sense, however, Doane is correct to identify the first section of the film as the ‘purest’ of actualities: not in its arbitrariness, but in being an example of cinema functioning as a space and time machine.

The first section of the film can be identified from the beginning, up to a point when a man begins to emerge from a crowd of pedestrians and approaches (to then veer from) the air grate, at around thirty-five seconds [Plate 1]. In this section, the careful construction of space, through location selection, the framing of the scene, depth cues and so on, is expected to be carefully viewed over the time of the section. In the opening four seconds, two men walk from frame right, away from the camera and into the street scene that we are invited to view. In this section, the film is an example of the visual coherence—where cinema

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<sup>30</sup> Doane includes frames from the film in her monograph, including one frame to indicate the point when the couple emerge, which can be identified as around the fifty-five second point (see 182, Fig. 6.2).

constructs a point of view over time—which we will find in the following chapters. By providing a convincing depiction of a city street, this section of the film establishes the coming-to-the-city theme. The second section then runs up to the point when the portly woman exits to the right of the frame, at around fifty-five seconds, the point that Doane identifies as the switch from actuality to erotic narrative [Plate 1]. Over this twenty second sequence three figures enter the demarcated space just beyond the air grate. As the first man veers from the grate, a stationary horse and cart pulls away and turns in the road. A second man then emerges from the pavement and pauses, until the portly woman emerges, who then veers from the grate. Each carefully planned event cuts across the coherent world in section one and thus serves as a transition to the third, air grate incident section. In providing a transition, this section stages the later transition from actuality to narrative cinema, which I will examine in Chapter 5.

The third section runs from the point where the couple emerge, to the end of the film. Whereas accounts of this film usually focus on the eroticism of the dress-lifting scene, I believe that within its context this scene can more properly be considered to function within a coming-to-the-city theme. Firstly, although the film is based on a Coney Island attraction, postcards and photographs available in Coney Island at the time suggest that the film is a highly toned down, de-eroticised version of this type of attraction<sup>31</sup>. Also, there are two ellipses in the film at the point where the dress is raised, suggesting that there is an attempt to restrict the exposure of the woman to acceptable limits<sup>32</sup>. Those limits are themselves suggested by the advertising of the film, by Edison, within a mainstream ‘humorous’ category, whereas explicit films made at the time were produced solely for burlesque houses and ‘smokers’, films exclusively for male

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<sup>31</sup> See for example John Kasson’s *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (1978), in particular the front cover image.

<sup>32</sup> Given that available filmic evidence is derived from Paper Prints, caution has to be raised here.

spectators<sup>33</sup>. Secondly, the dress which the woman (played by actress Florence Georgie) is wearing bears a strong resemblance to the clothing worn by ‘rube’ characters in films. For example, in *Rube and Mandy at Coney Island* (Edison, 1903), Mandy’s attire—a white dress, tied at the waist—is easily distinguishable from what other women are wearing at Coney Island, rather it is closer to what we see children wearing. In effect, the dress signifies immaturity; it is inappropriate for a woman and thus supports the ‘rube’ theme of inappropriate behaviour in an urban setting. Similarly, Georgie’s dress signifies immaturity; it is inappropriate for an adult and her behaviour is also inappropriate given that, by this point in the film, we all know the consequences of walking over the air grate. Except, of course, Georgie’s character, who afterwards laughs inappropriately, just as Mandy does at Coney Island [Fig. 1.6].



Fig. 1.6 Frame from *Rube and Mandy at Coney Island* (Edison, 1903)

*What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* can function as a coming-to-the-city film because of the convincing depiction of the city it provides. Evidently, the carefully staged space and movement is convincing to later cinema viewers, given it can still be considered as the ‘purest’ of actualities where the camera ‘record[s] whatever happens’. What is more important for this study’s purpose, however, is the way of seeing which is implicated in both this film and, as we have found, with *Black Diamond Express*. By adopting

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<sup>33</sup> See Musser, 1991: 180.



stereographic cues, filmmakers would have expected viewers to carefully scan the film frame, identify depth cues, to take in the scene over time. From a later perspective we have to work at identifying the visual construction of actuality films. With *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* the staging of movement to aid identification of depth cues, the men who walk into the depth of the frame, is evident only through repeated, concerted viewing of the film. How much easier was identifying these cues, at the time? To what extent is the difficulty we now have in seeing the construction of visual cues part of, as Jay argues, seeing less? Conversely, are not the two films we have analysed evidence of an expectation of a heightened visual awareness, a thickening of vision?

In this study, I will argue that ‘what was expected to be seen’ in actuality films can be identified within a thickened visual awareness, a ‘how’ to see which went hand-in-hand with a temporality of actuality cinema. Rather than consisting of moments of attraction, each of the films we have considered have been comprised of the development of action over a period of time. The railway journey in *Black Diamond Express* and the depth of the street scene in *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* depict a thickened present: a conception of the present as expanded, rather than atomised. What I propose is that, rather than being a technology of instants, the actuality cinema considered in this study should be thought a technology of a thickened present, a technology of simultaneity.

Cinema has, of course, long been recognised as a technology of simultaneity. For example, in his 1983 study of the reconfiguration of time and space in modernity, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918*, Stephen Kern argues that cinema was one among many technologies which “concretely manifested” simultaneity (68). In one sense, considerations of the reconfiguration of time and

space echo the theme of coming-to-the-city, but on a much wider timescale. Through the nineteenth century a raft of technologies, such as the railroad, wire then wireless telegraph, the telephone and cinema, altered ways of thinking about and experiencing time and space. Travel became measured in hours rather than days, time became universal rather than local, the telegraph and the telephone transgressed space and cinema held out the potential to represent time and space. Kern's central claim is that thinking about space and time in this period splintered from a homogenous single space and time to a heterogeneous world of multiple spaces and times. One theme Kern focuses on is thinking about the present, which, he argues, became divided over two issues:

whether the present is a sequence of single local events or a simultaneity of multiple distant events, and whether the present is an infinitesimal slice of time between past and future or of more extended duration. (68)

For Kern, cinema became a technology of simultaneity in that it was able to “bring together an unprecedented variety of visual images and arrange them coherently in a unified whole” (88). Cinema was, in Kern's words, responsible for a “thickened present” (88). Of course, cinema's role in the reconfiguration of space and time became far more wide-ranging, especially in relation to representing the past and the future. Moreover, Kern does not cite *early* cinema as a technology of simultaneity, rather, his argument concerning cinema relates to the medium's role across the period he covers, as a whole. Nevertheless, there are pointers to early cinema's role in the thickening of the present.

Whereas the term actuality is commonly thought of as a synonym for ‘documentary’ or ‘non-fiction’, its meaning at the time referred to a somewhat different conception of cinema. According to early cinema historian Richard Crangle, “[a]ctuality’, in the 1890s, implied a degree of immediacy, of belonging to the present moment” (1999: 96). Similarly, for Lynne Kirby

*actualités* translated at the time as “things happening now” (1997: 19).<sup>34</sup> Kirby’s concern is the relationship between early cinema and the railroad. In relation to time, Kirby notes that the standardisation of time, including the division of the United States into four time zones, was established by the railroad’s introduction of uniform time in 1883<sup>35</sup>. In addition to being a rationalising impulse, however, standardised time also altered a sense of the present, from being a singular, local phenomena, to that of a simultaneous present consisting of multiple, distant events. As Kirby argues, “cinema owes much of its temporal sense to this train-infected consciousness” (Kirby, 1997: 53). In relation to simultaneity, cinema was one of a group of technologies which “stimulated the simultaneist mode of thought, with cinema continuing and deepening the kind of temporal consciousness introduced by the railroad”, according to Kirby (53). As a ‘happening now’ cinema, actuality cinema clearly held the potential to be a technology of simultaneity. Although Kirby does not develop this conception of cinema in her study, it is a theme which William Uricchio explores.

In a section of the above mentioned ‘Ways of Seeing’ essay entitled ‘Sensation and Simultaneity’, Uricchio’s concern is that simultaneity is not part of our understanding of early cinema and, “concomitantly, we can find certain patterns of film production which remain difficult to understand”, that seem “outside of most reasonable explanatory paradigms” (1997: 128). Clearly, this is also a concern of this study. Uricchio identifies a type of naturalistic actuality film, which he labels “rocks and waves” films (128). Such film functioned as a form of “living postcard” and can be situated within a late nineteenth-century concern for “liveness, and a specific variant thereof, simultaneity” (129). According to

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<sup>34</sup> In its modern day media setting on the front page of French newspaper web sites, *actualités* has become a synonym for ‘current events’. For example, see <http://www.lemonde.fr/> (accessed February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005).

<sup>35</sup> See Kirby, 1997: 50-51.

Uricchio, 'rocks and waves' films came as close as early cinema could to "simulating" the simultaneous, providing screen images of an experience essentially identical to coincident profilmic reality" (130). I will, in this study, develop Uricchio's conception of actuality cinema in relation to New York films and filmmaking, especially the extent to which a visually coherent spatial world could constitute a 'coincident profilmic reality'.

Uricchio's, and this study's, central concern is that we are no longer able fully to experience the power of turn-of-the-twentieth-century images, especially the images of actuality cinema. In an attempt to revivify such images, Uricchio's aim is to "reactivate susceptibility to dimensions of the modern, of the cinema, which over the intervening hundred yeas have been neglected" (1997: 120). In this regard, the notion of simultaneity offers a "shared sensation", if not a "share[d] utility" (122). Uricchio cites twenty-four hour television channels, the "vicarious participation in World Cup finals and the latest large-scale disaster", as examples of our "engagement with simultaneity" (122). I would add to this list, technologies such as Internet chat rooms, third generation mobile phones or satellite video-phones as examples of a fascination with, an almost inordinate enthusiasm for, technologies of simultaneity. Although the notion of simultaneity offers a shared 'sensation', Uricchio is right to signal a difference in 'utility'. Our contemporary fascination with present time can be characterised by a fascination for synchronous simultaneity, for multiple coexisting present times. Whereas the former fascination with simultaneity, of which actuality cinema is arguably part, is concerned with a thickening of the present, that there are multiple existing times, the contemporary fascination is with synchronously communicating within coexisting time. This is important, not least in that simultaneity implies a way of seeing, a visuality of time if you will.

The examples thus far presented, the use of stereo depth cues, the possibility of enhancing the perception of apparent motion and the time-dependent scanning of images, demonstrate a fascination with thickening vision and with it the thickening of time. Although technically descended from instantaneous photography, the actuality cinema uncovered in this study is not a cinema of instants which attempts to provide instantaneous access, rather it is a cinema of simultaneity which demonstrates for its audiences the existence of multiple present times. This alternative way of conceptualising actuality cinema is a core element of my thesis. The predominant, visually unhistorical conception of actuality cinema is, for this study, a product of a misconception of the temporality and thus visuality of actuality cinema. As a technology of a thickened present time, rather than being a failed experiment, actuality cinema could become a coherent space and time machine. In the chapters that follow, I will provide examples of where actuality cinema fulfils the appetite for simultaneity. In the final section of this chapter I want to consider three themes relevant to this reconception of actuality cinema. Firstly, the implication for models of modernity; secondly, the question of *what* is the role of, and *who* experiences this expanded present; and thirdly, what counts as evidence of a cinema of simultaneity.

## **Methodology**

Jonathan Crary's study of modern modes of attention begins by questioning the dominance of accounts of modern subjectivity based on the idea of "reception in a state of distraction", as articulated by Walter Benjamin and others" (1999: 1). This is also a concern for Uricchio, who introduces his essay by questioning what is omitted by an overemphasis on "modernity's complicity with distraction" (1997: 120). In an effort to reorientate accounts of modernity, Uricchio stresses the need both to note:

the long reign of a basic way of understanding the medium (embedded in our current understanding of modernity as abstraction, alienation, and distraction), and especially to emphasise the very different and perhaps now lost perceptual sentiment of the preceding years (stimulation, simultaneity, the relativization of time and space). (121)

For the study of actuality cinema, the ‘long rein’ of a conception of the medium is, however, tightly wedded to a distraction oriented model of modernity. The temporality of actuality cinema, which Gunning and others posit, presents an almost intuitive relationship between cinema and modernity, a combining of the ‘attractions’ thesis and what can be thought of as a neurological conception of modernity in terms of ‘shocks and jolts’<sup>36</sup>. An initial issue I take with the apparently intuitive, conventional model is that the heterogeneity of early cinema cannot be contained within one dominant account. For Crary, attention and distraction are in a “reciprocal” relationship, where understanding one demands an understanding of the other (1999: 1). Similarly, I will argue that the ‘attractions’ thesis demonstrates just one axis of the relations between cinema and the modern. In Chapter 2, I will identify an alternative axis which is based, not on momentary shocks and jolts, but on an expanded present time, the notion of simultaneity.

Essentially, in identifying an alternative temporality, this study uncovers a cinema which is founded on periods of time, rather than instants. The question then becomes: what happens in that time and for whom? Potentially, this study has wide implications for conceptions of early cinema spectatorial relations, implications which go far beyond its limits. As argued at the outset, the neglect of actuality cinema is such that an achievable remit of this study is primarily to identify how actuality cinema functions rather than address what is represented and, by extension, for whom. Nevertheless, as already alluded to in claiming that *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* functioned as a form of

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<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the neurological conception of modernity.

coming-to-the-city film, the study will attempt to provide ‘meaningful correlations’ between actuality cinema and its role and context<sup>37</sup>.

Within conventional interpretation, the ‘attractions’ thesis accounts for both the role of actuality cinema and its spectator. The ‘founding myth’ of cinema, where audiences are characterised as expressing wonder, surprise or fear when confronted with the sight of moving pictures, continues to hold purchase in the absence of reliable accounts of spectator reactions to early cinema. However, both the notion of early cinema’s heterogeneity and expansive conceptions of modernity, especially visual modernity, and even modernism, have opened out a space for expansive conceptions of early cinema film-viewer relations. The field of Visual Culture Studies has been productive in this respect. For just one example, in an introductory text Nicholas Mirzoeff has argued that, “the new media from panorama to cinema were one means of negotiating the unsettling transformations of everyday life and society created by mass industrialism” (1999: 95). Although the term ‘negotiation’ is by itself insufficient, Mirzoeff’s underlying point is that new media were not simply a means to impose regimes of commodification, or as Crary has it modes of attention. Rather, new media, including cinema, could also function to mediate the ‘transformations of everyday life’. I now want to propose a way of narrowing down this putative mediation role within early cinema’s locus, New York City.

Firstly, by considering actuality cinema as a cinema of simultaneity, the wider ‘transformations’ wrought by modernity and modernisation can be narrowed down to the reconfiguration of space and time. As already noted, such reconfigurations can be further focussed through the theme of coming-to-the-

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<sup>37</sup> The term ‘meaningful correlations’ and its usage is indebted to Michael L. Wilson’s critique of Visual Culture approaches, “Visual Culture: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis?”. See Wilson, 2004: 32.

city. This latter theme has a resonance at the time of cinema's emergence for New York City in relation to the influx of immigrants, and also had a specific resonance for inhabitants of America's fourth largest city in the 1890s, Brooklyn. In addition to New York, with its richly intermedial culture, constituting for cinema historians at least, a fortuitous locus for American early cinema, Brooklyn provides a richly productive context for the coming-to-the-city theme. As a distillation of this theme, for the tens of thousands of Brooklynites who travelled daily from Brooklyn to Manhattan, to their place of work, their journey was one of city-to-metropolis. In Chapter 2, I will examine the meaning of that journey as mediated through a series of 1899 films of a ride across the Brooklyn Bridge.

By 1898 the city of Brooklyn had become consolidated with four other New York Boroughs, including Manhattan, into Greater New York. However, Brooklyn's main daily newspaper, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*—at this time, America's most widely read afternoon daily—maintained a critical distance from Manhattan.<sup>38</sup> In the following chapters, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reports of modernisation in Manhattan usefully contextualise films and filmmaking in New York. If this study could be thought to have a specific spectatorial subject, Brooklynites who view the transformation of New York from Brooklyn Heights,

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<sup>38</sup> With regard to the newspaper's context, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* was at this time a major metropolitan daily newspaper. In the 1890s Brooklyn was America's fourth largest industrial city and its main newspaper claimed to be the nation's most widely read afternoon daily (Jackson, 1995: 156). In his study of the newspaper *The Eagle and Brooklyn: a Community Newspaper, 1841-1955* (1974) Raymond A. Schroth argues that, under the editorship of St. Clair McKelway in the 1890s and early 1900s, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reached "the peak of its influence", with its editorials "quoted all over the country and in Europe" (3). Although a local daily newspaper, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* attained a "national and even international reputation", according to Schroth (3). Importantly, the Brooklyn newspaper also adopted a critical, often antagonistic, relation to Manhattan. For example, as a main source of opposition to the 1898 consolidation of New York's five boroughs (Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island), the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* bannered an editorial leader lauding Brooklyn as "a city of homes and churches" and dismissing New York as "a city of Tammany Hall and crime government". However, despite a tendency to disassociate itself from Manhattan's political and economic mechanisms, the newspaper adopted a positive stance towards the City's material growth in the construction of skyscrapers and the emerging skyline.



work in Manhattan and read the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* is that imaginary subject. The thickened temporality of actuality cinema—the time which this cinema produces—is, then, a period in which the transformations of New York are mediated. I will return to actuality cinema’s cultural role in relation to the reconfiguration of space and time and the city-to-metropolis theme in later chapters. To conclude this chapter, we can now turn to the evidential criteria for the films analysed in this study.

The above analysis of the films *Black Diamond Express* and *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* provide an alternative account to that found in conventional explanations, thereby demonstrating the wider applicability and usefulness of my approach. Arguably, eschewing the conventional visual understanding of the films, identifying ‘what was expected to be seen’ and considering actuality cinema as a technology of simultaneity has considerable use value within the field. In essence, the remainder of this study will be concerned with consolidating my approach through examples from New York actuality cinema. I now want to propose a coherent corpus of actuality films which can serve this purpose.

New York is not only a fecund context for intermedial approaches to early cinema, but also a unique context for extant films from cinema’s first decade. Around fifteen thousand films were lodged for copyright at the Library of Congress in the period from the mid-1890s to 1915. Of these, around three thousand remain extant in Paper Print format: rolls of prints of the original negatives, rather than the negatives themselves. For the period under consideration in this study, the mid-1890s to around 1905, around two thousand three hundred films are extant, of which two hundred and twenty (9.5%) are New York actuality films or films which include actuality-like content. In films of

street scenes, skyscrapers or construction sites, or views from moving vehicles, New York City became both setting and subject for early filmmakers, the “first consistent subject” for American cinema, as James Sanders notes (2001: 28). From more than two hundred New York films, two themes provide a logic for selecting films for analysis: the conception of actuality cinema as a visual newspaper and Uricchio’s aforementioned notion of ‘rocks and waves’ films. This logic has one overriding aim: to identify simultaneity films and thus support my thesis claims that actuality cinema can be thought of as a technology of simultaneity.

The heterogeneity of early cinema is evident in the many types of films, exhibition venues and practices, and, perhaps not surprisingly, the many different roles for early cinema. The visual newspaper role, first mooted by Robert C. Allen in 1979, is useful for demonstrating one aspect of early cinema’s heterogeneity. Allen cited early cinema’s relationship with newspapers as part of the coverage of the 1898 Spanish-American war, as a role which “escalated the motion picture into new prominence” (1979: 7). Subsequently, major news stories such as the Galveston hurricane in October 1900 and events surrounding President McKinley’s assassination and funeral in September 1901 were featured by filmmakers. Cinema’s newspaper role also extended to covering local stories which were often shot and exhibited on the same day<sup>39</sup>. According to Biograph’s vice-president Harry Marvin, by 1901 “the public demanded of us the prompt and reliable service of the daily newspaper” (court record cited in Musser, 1991: 163). In addition to this clear role, the visual newspaper as a *conception* can help identify early cinema’s surprisingly broad range of cultural roles. As Musser argues, in this period newspapers offered a spectrum of modes of representation,

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<sup>39</sup> See Musser, 1991: 162-167.

from the “objectivity” of the *New York Times* to the “variety format” of the Hearst papers, such as the *New York Journal* (1991: 163). Moreover, advances in technology, resulting in a proliferation of newspaper titles, and the onset of Progressivism and with it the ‘muckraking era’ of journalism, meant that the newspaper industry was in flux at the time cinema emerged<sup>40</sup>. In tracking the newspaper industry’s widening scope, early filmmakers sought a range of news subject matter, and in so doing extended the cultural role of early cinema. Musser notes that, “as with the newspapers, the purpose of cinema at the turn of the century was to inform as much as entertain” (1991: 10). This ‘informing’ role was soon manifest in widespread claims that early cinema could perform an educational role. As early as 1902, quasi-educational films began to be part of the filmmakers’ repertoire<sup>41</sup>. Rhetoric and hyperbole aside, given, as Lee Grieveson argues, the industry’s later need to link cinema with “discourses of sobriety”, the association of cinema with education happens surprisingly early (2004a: 30). Perhaps this is not surprisingly early, though, when we consider New York actuality cinema’s visual modernity role.

As the centre for news gathering and dissemination in America, New York is an especially apt context for the visual newspaper conception of early cinema<sup>42</sup>. For film selection, my strategy has been to identify three modernisation themes that relate to the reconfiguration of space and time, which are covered by both newspapers and actuality filmmakers<sup>43</sup>. Firstly, the building and usage of new transportation systems, such as electric streetcars, elevated railways and bridges

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<sup>40</sup> See Stephens (1999) and Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen (1998).

<sup>41</sup> See Saettler, 1990, 96.

<sup>42</sup> According to Musser, the concept of cinema as a visual newspaper was less well developed in cities such as Chicago, in part because they lacked New York’s concentration of news organisations (Musser, 1990, 287-288).

<sup>43</sup> Two newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, were used for this selection process. The Brooklyn paper is, as noted above, an obvious choice and the *New York Times* provides a Manhattan-based counterpart.

between Manhattan and Brooklyn, is a common theme. For example, the electrification of the Brooklyn Bridge from 1897 through to 1899, largely prompted by congestion, became the subject of both newspaper stories and a series of highly successful films of a ride over bridge. Secondly, the increasing number of new buildings and especially the building of skyscrapers is another common theme. For early cinema, it is also a theme where, as we might expect, New York is the pre-eminent location; of the fourteen building site actuality films from the period, nine are shot in New York. The third common theme, ways of seeing the city, is selected in an attempt to draw out the visuality of the reconfiguration of space and time in New York. A newspaper report of the view of Manhattan's skyscrapers from Brooklyn and a film of the newly completed Flatiron Building are examples of this theme. Across all three themes, I have applied a further selection criterion adapted from Uricchio's notion of 'rocks and waves' films.

The overriding aim with film selection is to identify films which can foreground actuality cinema's putative simultaneity role. As such, by selecting news themes shared by journalists and filmmakers I do not intend to provide a comparative analysis. Rather, the purpose is to identify common issues which can thus be considered apposite to the experience of the reconfiguration of space and time in New York. The curiously labelled 'rocks and waves' films notion is a device which can support the identification of simultaneity films. Uricchio attempts to identify films which are outside of 'explanatory paradigms' and as such films that may offer the potential to explain the power of images at the time. In a brief and, he admits, speculative account, Uricchio describes 'rocks and waves' films as those showing ocean waves crashing on rocks, and views of waterfalls and sunsets (1997: 128). Such films are formally simple, seemingly lacking in intervention and of ordinary locations, films where "the expositional outweighs

the analytic” (129). As such, they are films which do not bear identifiable traces of the cinema of attractions. He claims that the films are “living” yet “timeless” images, and could be an attempt to “introduce a simultaneity effect”, that the films came as close as early cinema could to “‘simulating’ the simultaneous” (130). While filmed in an entirely different context, Manhattan, and (with the aid of close analysis) clearly showing the marks of intervention, Bonine’s *Beginning of a Skyscraper* and the film from the beginning of this chapter, *Lower Broadway*, provide examples which resemble the ‘rocks and waves’ films described by Uricchio.

There are very few actuality films, at least of those produced by the New York filmmakers featured in this study, which do not bear the marks of intervention, especially with regard to the use of visual conventions. However, such attention to the details of filmmaking may, in this case, work to obscure an important aspect of Bonine’s, and others’, films. The ‘expositional’ could outweigh the ‘analytic’ if the ‘coincident profilmic reality’ and the visually coherent spatial world on screen correspond to the extent that the medium is overtaken by what is represented. In effect the ‘realism’ of Bonine’s films, for example, could become their subject. This is not to say that audiences of such films were duped by the indexical realism of the films. Rather, I will argue in this study, it is their subject—simultaneity, a thickened present—presented by a machine which held out the promise of re-presenting space and created time, which produces their realism. Uricchio concludes by arguing that ‘rocks and waves’ films were from a side of early cinema which functioned as a “cinema *as* attraction” (1997, 131, Uricchio’s italics). With the New York actuality films selected for this study, I will demonstrate a side of early cinema which operated as a cinema *as* simultaneity.

Fifteen films form the core of the filmic evidential corpus in this study. The two main films analysed in this chapter, *Black Diamond Express* (Edison, 1896) and *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* (Edison, 1901), were used to introduce the study's main themes. With the three New York modernisation themes, films selected are as follows: for the transportation theme, *Broadway at 14th Street* (Edison, 1896), *New Brooklyn to New York, via Brooklyn Bridge, no. 2* (Edison, 1899) and *104<sup>th</sup> Street Curve, New York, Elevated Railway* (Edison, 1899); for the construction theme *Star Theatre* (AM&B, 1901), *Beginning of a Skyscraper* (AM&B, 1902) and *Excavating for a New York Foundation* (AM&B, 1903); and for the ways of seeing New York theme *Lower Broadway* (AM&B, 1902) and *Panorama of Flatiron Building* (AM&B, 1902). Three films are selected to demonstrate actuality cinema's transitional period, *At The Foot of the Flatiron* (AM&B, 1903), *Panorama from Times Building, NY* (AM&B, 1905) and *Pennsylvania Tunnel Excavation* (AM&B, 1905). Two films are selected in an analysis of the interrelation of actuality and narrative modes of filmmaking, *Execution of Czolgosz, with Panorama of Auburn Prison* (Edison, 1901) and *Interior N. Y. Subway, 14<sup>th</sup> St. to 42<sup>nd</sup> St.* (AM&B, 1905). Additionally, in Chapter 4, a series of eleven films produced over a two week period in April and May 1903 are used to demonstrate films which do not cohere with the cinema of simultaneity conception employed in this study.

To conclude, I want briefly to consider the status of visual evidence more widely. In addition to being a section topic, the title of this chapter is also meant as a plea to the reader to attempt to see more and disavow less. Such a plea is, however, not easily made, or likely to be well taken, as it clearly implies an accusation of a lack of visual acuity. However, taken as a wider (visual) cultural issue, I believe Jay is right to question our modern day visual acuity. The hard

evidence, from this study's perspective, of the denigration of vision is the 'neglect, indeed repression' of actuality films (to paraphrase Gunning). However, the difficulty with any attempt to uncover the initial visual power of actuality films is the need to use visual evidence. And, ultimately, arguments based in visual analysis can only go so far without engagement with the visual. The downside is that without such an engagement, actuality films and filmmaking may remain in a backwater, rather than as at the time, the mainstream form in cinema's first decade.

## Chapter 2

### Research Context: Modernity

This thesis studies the emergence of cinema in the cultural context of modernity. In an essay entitled ‘Early American Film’ in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, Tom Gunning describes such efforts as, “[p]erhaps the most far-reaching (and possibly most controversial) extension of the study of early cinema” (1998: 266). As an example of the ‘extension’ of the field, he cites research that relates the cinema of attractions to transformations in experience wrought by urbanisation and modernisation. Railroad films provide, for Gunning, a “powerful intersection” of the “aggressive address” of this side of early cinema and the “shock of the rapidly changing experience of the urban environment” (266). As we saw in Chapter 1, however, such ‘intersections’ do not account for the gamut of relations between early cinema and the modern, even with railroad films. Indeed, Gunning concedes that, “[t]he relations between modernity and early film need not be limited to the cinema of attractions” (268). I want to extend Gunning’s concession by identifying not only a different cinema, but also a different conception of the modern; the purpose of this chapter is to identify an alternative axis of the relations between early cinema and the modern.

In the first section, I will examine a series of railroad actualities shot from the front of a train crossing the Brooklyn Bridge. I will use evidence such as newspaper reports of the films, film company catalogue entries, stereographs and films which are produced in response to the commercial success of the bridge films to support the model of actuality cinema where temporality is based on periods of time, rather than instants. In the second section I will consider the controversy (to which Gunning refers) over the ‘modernity thesis’, the attempt to link film style to modernity. This analysis will signal the need to pursue a wider



account of the modern by considering not just modernity, but three constituent parts of the modern: modernisation, modernity and modernism. In section three I will situate the bridge films within New York modernisation, specifically a concern with systematisation, evident in New York newspapers. The bridge films provide clear evidence of spectatorial relations based in sustained, studying of the films over a three minute period, rather than relations based in moments of attraction. For the question of ‘what happens in that time?’, I will propose that the cultural role of the bridge films is in the representation of transportation systems. Lastly, in section four, I will examine approaches to early cinema that enable actuality films, such as the bridge films, to be considered a response to—rather than an analogue of—modernisation and modernity, in effect a form of vernacular modernism.

### **A ‘Full View’ of Brooklyn Bridge**

The building of skyscrapers and the emergence of the Manhattan skyline defines New York as a modern twentieth century metropolis, with the skyline usually cited as the pre-eminent symbol of the modern.<sup>1</sup> In the period up to the early 1900s, however, Brooklyn Bridge can be thought the pre-eminent site of the modern in New York.<sup>2</sup> Upon its opening in May 1883, the longest suspension bridge in the world was, according to Kenneth T. Jackson, widely acclaimed as “the ‘new eighth wonder of the world’” (1995: 154). Among the Brooklyn Bridge’s ‘firsts’ are the use of steel cables for suspending the structure and a new type of caisson foundation for the bridge’s towers. However, in contrast to the fate of tall buildings which, in this period and beyond, were soon overtaken by

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<sup>1</sup> According to John A. Kouwenhoven the first use of the word ‘skyline’ in relation to pictures of Manhattan skyscrapers was in Hearst’s *New York Journal*, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1896 (1972: 394).

<sup>2</sup> Of the many accounts of the bridge, examples include Alan Trachtenberg’s historical study of representations of the bridge, *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (1965) and Margaret Latimer et al (1984) *Bridge to the Future: A Centennial Celebration of the Brooklyn Bridge*, an anthology of papers from a New York Academy of Sciences symposium, held in May 1983.

larger structures, development of the bridge continued after its completion. This development was driven by rapidly increasing usage and efforts to maintain the bridge's status as the fulcrum of transportation between Brooklyn and the business district at the southern end of Manhattan. Up until the amalgamation of the five boroughs in 1898 into Greater New York, the bridge was managed by a Board of Trustees who reported annually—and in great detail—to Brooklynites via the main Brooklyn newspaper, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. The reports of bridge traffic and the development of the bridge provide a useful reminder of the growth of New York in this period.

In their December 1895 report, the trustees proudly claimed that since its opening on September 24<sup>th</sup> 1883 the bridge railway—a shuttle service between terminals at the Brooklyn and Manhattan ends of the bridge—had carried 391,153,850 passengers<sup>3</sup>, a total:

equal to a fraction more than 27 per cent of the entire population of the world, about 1 1/5 times the population of Europe, or 5 3/4 times that of the United States. (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 7<sup>th</sup> 1895: 4)

In the twelve months to December 1895, the bridge railway had carried over 44 million passengers or an average of 120,000 per day, a number the Trustees compared to the population of Brooklyn and New York:

[i]f Brooklyn alone had furnished this number of passengers it would be equal to the passing over once in every nine days of its entire population. If New York had supplied this number of passengers it would be equal to its entire population passing over once in fifteen days. (4)

Bridge traffic had, however, reached saturation point, with total railway passengers per year remaining static at around 44 million in 1896 and 1897

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<sup>3</sup> In this period Manhattan island is referred to as the 'City of New York', or shortened to 'New York'. After consolidation, although 'New York City' is comprised of all five boroughs, Manhattan remained 'New York' for Brooklynites.

(*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 29<sup>th</sup> 1897: 9). In response to congestion, the bridge witnessed a new phase of development, beginning in 1898, including the installation of an electric street trolley car system. Electric cable motors replaced a steam driven system thereby increasing the speed of bridge trains, and electric lighting replaced oil lamps in the train cars. In addition, for a short period, the Board of Trustees experimented with the use of the railway track by through trains, which ran on elevated lines on either side of the bridge. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* carried a full-page December 1898 article entitled ‘The Bridge’s Growth during the Year 1898’ which featured three woodcut images and a commentary on the pictures [Plate 2].<sup>4</sup> The article was extracted from the 1898 Annual Report of the bridge by the then new, post-consolidation, Department of Bridges and was clearly intended to demonstrate the smooth functioning of bridge traffic, given the then recent introduction of through trains and trolley cars on the bridge. A Bridge Commissioner then took over reporting and noted that in 1900 total passengers had risen to 100 million, a number which “exceeds by 30 per cent the whole population of the United States at this time” (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 10<sup>th</sup> 1901: 8). By comparison, the report noted that Grand Central Station handled 14 million passengers in 1899. The Commissioner went on to note that daily bridge traffic during October 1901 could be “conservatively estimated” at 300,000, which corresponded during the rush hours to 260 railway cars and 240 trolley cars per hour, or one railway car and one trolley car every 25 seconds (8). In confirming the bridge’s continued ‘world’ status, the Commissioner then asserted that, “no other bridge or railroad terminal in the world handles half as many people daily or yearly as does the Brooklyn Bridge” (8). Rather than being completed when opened in 1883, the electrification phase

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<sup>4</sup> Woodcut plates copied from photographs were used at this time for reproducing photographic images in mass circulation newspapers. As such, the images from the article are likely to have been made from photographs. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* introduced the limited use of photographic images in 1901. The images and the newspaper report will be discussed later in this chapter.

of the development of the bridge in the 1898-1901 period almost tripled the bridge's passenger carrying capacity and in the process re-energized the bridge's status as the pre-eminent site of the modern in New York. For New York actuality filmmakers, the bridge was in this period perhaps an obvious subject.

The years 1898 to 1901 were a period of relative stability for the emerging cinema industry<sup>5</sup>. Following the commercial success of Spanish-American War films in early 1898, exhibitors established permanent venues, mostly in vaudeville houses, and thus created a regular demand for films to exhibit. It was also a period when cinema entrepreneurs emerged, the main players who would dominate cinema until the Nickelodeon era and beyond. For example, John Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith formed the American Vitagraph company in 1897 (initially the Edison Vitagraph) which became, along with Biograph, a pre-eminent American film company by the early 1910s. Blackton had been a cartoonist and Smith a mechanical expert and also a magician. Together they developed an exhibition service, including the still-then-roll projection technique used for *Black Diamond Express*, and by mid-1898 they began producing films as Edison Licensees.<sup>6</sup> During January 1899 Blackton and Smith produced four films for Edison. Two were filmed at Vitagraph's rooftop studio: *Raising Old Glory Over Morro Castle* and *Willie's First Smoke*, the latter, as the title suggests, a film of a boy lighting a cigarette. The other two films were actualities: *Astor Battery on Parade*, which showed mounted police on parade in Union Square, and a film shot from the front of a train crossing Brooklyn Bridge.<sup>7</sup> While the first three films were relatively minor productions, the bridge

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<sup>5</sup> Early cinema's heterogeneity is such that the notion of relative stability has to be taken with caution. For example, although Biograph projectors became established in vaudeville houses early in this period, 35mm exhibitors did not achieve similar success until mid-1899. See Musser, 1990: 263-293 for an account of this period.

<sup>6</sup> See Musser, 1990: 253-254.

<sup>7</sup> See Musser, 1997: 482-483.

train film became a major attraction for both audiences and filmmakers. Of course, we could simply pigeon-hole the bridge film under the heading ‘phantom rides’—films shot from the front, or rear, of a train which produce an exaggerated thrill of movement on screen. However, as we shall see, the film is about far more than movement.<sup>8</sup>

Blackton and Smith’s train film was variously listed in catalogues as *Panoramic View of Brooklyn Bridge*, *Brooklyn to New York via the Bridge* and *From Brooklyn to New York over the Bridge*. It was described in a *New York Clipper* advertisement as “[t]aken from moving cable car leaving Brooklyn train yard, crossing entire span and arriving at New York terminus in City Hall station” (Musser, 1997: 482). Photographed a matter of weeks after the publication of the 1898 Brooklyn Bridge Annual Report, for the filmmakers the bridge film could function within early cinema’s visual newspaper mode, and for the Department of Bridges the film could serve to advertise the new electrified bridge rail service. Subsequent film production of the bridge train suggests that the films were successful on both counts. In March 1899, the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company produced their own version of the bridge train journey film, with titles such as *New York to Brooklyn Over the Brooklyn Bridge* and *Brooklyn Bridge* (Niver, 1971: 426).<sup>9</sup> Seven months later, in September, an Edison film crew returned to the bridge train and shot two films, *New Brooklyn to New York, via Brooklyn Bridge, no. 1* and *New Brooklyn to New York, via Brooklyn Bridge, no. 2* (Musser, 1997: 524). In mid-October, the Philadelphia based Lubin Manufacturing Company remade the train journey film again, this time with the

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<sup>8</sup> See Fielding (1983) for an account of ‘phantom rides’.

<sup>9</sup> In reflecting the success of the Biograph projector, the American Mutoscope Company changed their name to the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company (henceforth AM&B) in 1899, and subsequently to the Biograph Company in 1909 (Niver, 1971: 4). Niver lists the ‘Date Photographed’ for this film as April 1899, although reprints of press reports date from early March. For example, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* report is dated March 7<sup>th</sup>.

title *Full View of Brooklyn Bridge* (Lubin film catalogue, AFI). The remaking of saleable films by competitor film companies was a widely used business practice at the time, although a risky one, given how litigious the industry had become, especially on the part of the Edison Company.

It is quite likely that, in an attempt to avoid dispute, AM&B's remake of Blackton and Smiths' film was not copyrighted, and the title suggests that the film was an exact remake of the January film in every respect, except that the journey was filmed on a train going in the opposite direction. Charles Musser argues that the Edison Company's remaking of their own film in September, twice, was highly unusual and was likely to be due to the film's popularity. For example, the negatives for the January version may have worn out due to overuse. Moreover, Edison staff remaking the film would avoid the need to pay excessive royalties to the licensees of the January 1999 version, Blackton and Smith (1997: 524). Lubin's film catalogue entry for October's *Full View of Brooklyn Bridge* announced that the "picture shows the entire Brooklyn Bridge from end to end", and that "[t]he car from which the picture was taken started from the Brooklyn end and lands in the depot in New York" (Lubin film catalogue, AFI). Producing an identical remake of an Edison subject, which by this time had been copyrighted three times, was a high risk venture for Lubin but one which points to the popularity of the bridge train journey films. Their popularity was not short lived either. The second version of the September Edison films was still being advertised for sale in mid-1901. According to Musser's Edison filmography, the 'no. 2' suffix had been omitted from the Edison film catalogue by this time. The AM&B film was still being advertised in a 1906 film catalogue alongside text proclaiming that the film "shows all the details of the big structure, the passing trains, pedestrians, carriage traffic, etc." (Niver, 1971: 250). Although the production of five almost identical films by

three film companies over a nine month period and the continued popularity of the films over a seven year period points to a highly successful subject, the film is, as with Bonine's building site film, seemingly unremarkable from a later perspective.

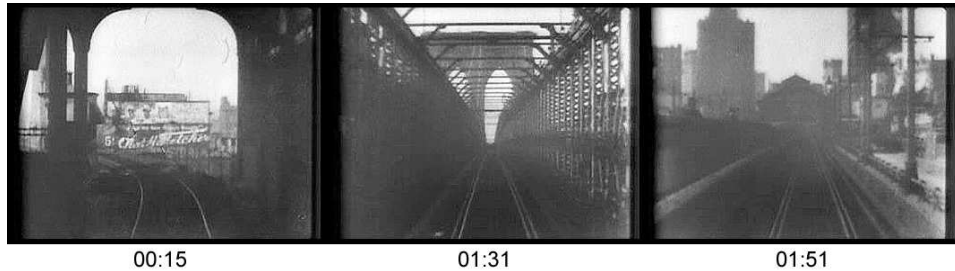


Fig. 2.1 Three frames from *New Brooklyn to New York, via Brooklyn Bridge, no. 2* (Edison, 1899).

The Paper Print version of *New Brooklyn to New York, via Brooklyn Bridge, no. 2* is shot from the front of a cable driven bridge train and is two minutes and ten seconds long. The film begins with the train moving out of the Brooklyn terminal, we then see advertising hoardings oriented to the track as the train moves round a bend and then faces the bridge [Fig. 2.1]. After climbing the incline to the bridge the train enters an enclosed framework at forty one seconds into the film, and proceeds through the framework for sixty three seconds, before running down to the New York side terminal in the final twenty six seconds. The film was probably shot in one continuous take, although the Paper Print version has a cut after one minute twenty six seconds, where the train 'jumps' forward to a position beyond the New York side tower, but within the enclosed framework. This cut is likely to be due to either the whole film not being processed for copyright or frames having become lost over time. In the complete version, given the train journey took three minutes, the view of the train passing through the enclosed framework shown in Fig. 2.1 would have lasted for one minute fifty three seconds. What is remarkable about the film, is that an almost two minute view of a metal framework should have been so popular. What is more puzzling

is the reaction to the films at the time; the title of the Lubin version—*Full View of Brooklyn Bridge*—speaks to the reaction.

From its inception in the mid-1890s, cinema commonly evoked enthusiastic newspaper reporting. Not surprisingly, such reporting was immediately recognised as a potential boon to the promotional efforts of the emerging cinema production companies. Soon after the September 1896 debut of the Biograph cinema projector in New York, the American Mutoscope Company's initial sales promotion materials took the form of a twelve page pamphlet of press comments containing over fifty reprints from a wide range of publications.<sup>10</sup> Under the title of *Press Opinions*, the second issue was published in late 1897 and provided over one hundred reprints of American and English press reports of the Biograph in action. In 1899 the Company introduced broadsheet-size single-sheet advertisements which included illustrations in the form of photographic prints from film frame negatives. The use of photographic rather than lithographic illustrations was novel at the time and, for example, preceded the use of this image format in newspapers.<sup>11</sup>

The broadsheet pamphlet reproduces a variety of reports of actuality films. Featured on the left-hand side of the four column sheet are four photographic prints from the March version of the Brooklyn Bridge film, underneath each frame print American Mutoscope provide a commentary on the position of the train [Plate 3]. The first frame print shows a cage like structure ahead of the camera position and over the railroad track [Fig. 2.2]. The structure is described

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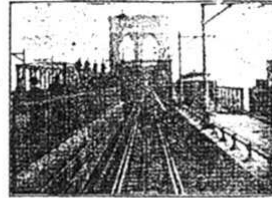
<sup>10</sup> Facsimile and reformatted copies of the American Mutoscope Company's sales literature are reproduced in Niver, 1971. In reflecting the success of the Biograph projector, the American Mutoscope Company changed their name to the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company (abbreviated to AM&B in this study) in 1899, and subsequently to the Biograph Company in 1909 (Niver, 1971: 4).

<sup>11</sup> The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* introduced the limited use of photographic images in 1901.



in the commentary as a “covered way” and featured in the third and fourth frame prints and captioned “the inclosed [sic] passage”.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, the view of the enclosed passage, which provides a geometric tunnel effect, was important to AM&B. Evenly spaced between the four frame prints are the reprints of press reports of the film, which also highlight the effect of viewing the train travelling through the ‘inclosed passage’.

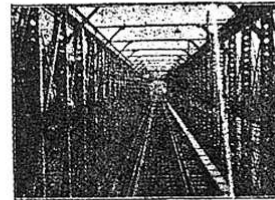
**ENTRANCE TO COVERED WAY ON NEW YORK SIDE.**



**APPROACHING THE BROOKLYN TERMINAL.**



**RUNNING THROUGH THE INCLOSED PASSAGE.**



**THE INCLOSED PASSAGE—BROOKLYN TOWER IN THE DISTANCE.**

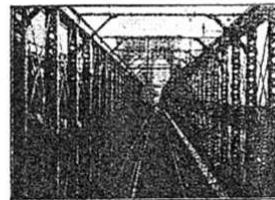


Fig. 2.2 The Brooklyn Bridge film frames and captions.

According to a reprint of a report of the film in the *New Haven Leader*:

The machine that took the pictures was placed on the front of a trolley car and as the car whizzed from Brooklyn to New York every bit of the bridge, the traffic, the crowds and the great rush of life on

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<sup>12</sup> By clearly showing in the topmost frame print that the film began on the New York side of the bridge and that, in the second print the film ends by ‘approaching the Brooklyn terminal’ the reprint sheet could serve to reduce the chances of copyright action from Edison.

this thoroughfare were taken. (March 28<sup>th</sup> 1899, reprinted in Niver, 1971: 42)

Similarly, a *New York Mail and Express* report stressed the section of the film where the train “takes a plunge in the iron archway which covers the electric line for about two-thirds of the distance”, and noted that “[t]he girders go whizzing by with extreme rapidity” (March 11<sup>th</sup> 1899, reprinted in Niver, 1971: 42). For the *Philadelphia Inquirer*:

This picture bewildered the spectators last week, for people who have crossed the bridge one hundred times have never hitherto realized the immensity of the structure. (March 19<sup>th</sup> 1899, reprinted in Niver, 1971: 42)

AM&B’s selection of press reports for the pamphlet which stress the view of the metal framework of the bridge is curious. What is more intriguing is the coupling of the Company’s ‘inclosed passage’ picture captions and the press reports of the film showing ‘every bit of the bridge’, and that the view of the metal framework ‘bewildered spectators’ in that they had ‘never hitherto realized the immensity of the structure’. The reports suggest a way of looking at the film that focuses on the structure, thereby enabling a visualising of the ‘immensity’ of the bridge. The pamphlet also includes a report from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. The full press report from the Brooklyn newspaper, rather than AM&B’s selected extract, reveals the temporal aspects of the reported film viewing experience.

The ‘Plays, Operas, Vaudeville’ section of the Tuesday March 7<sup>th</sup> 1899 *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* provides reports of acts starring that week at venues such as the ‘Grand Opera House’, ‘The Bijou’ and the ‘Brooklyn Music Hall’ (March 7<sup>th</sup> 1899: 5). Under the sub-heading of ‘Hyde & Behman’s’ (a Brooklyn venue) the report begins with an account of top-of-the-bill Jones and Dressler, described as “cake walkers, tumblesault artists, jesters and warblers” (5). For the audience, this was an act where “the patrons of the variety were hanging on to the back aisles by their eye brows ... .”, according to the report (5). The report continues

by acclaiming the “hearty approval” of various vaudeville acts, repeat performers at the venue. The tone of the report then changes somewhat, to a sober account of the Biograph (AM&B’s projector):

part in the entertainment received its share of applause. The biograph was more than ordinarily interesting to Brooklyn people, for it represented what is the best thing yet seen here in that line, a complete representation of a trip across the bridge from New York to Brooklyn. The view is from the front end of a fast bridge car and every pillar and joist and trolley car on the trip is faithfully shown. The picture occupies just the length of time in presentation that it occupied in being taken, three minutes.

Fig. 2.3 ‘Cutting’ from *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 7th 1899: 5.

The report is written for a knowing readership. The film was ‘more than ordinarily interesting to Brooklyn people’, given that travelling on the bridge train was a daily experience for many Brooklynites. As such, the claim that the film provided ‘a complete representation of a trip across the bridge’ is significant and not what we might expect from a film photographed in the manner of a phantom ride. Rather, we might expect the film to be described as, for example, a fairground ride which produces the thrill of speeding across the bridge. The tone of the reports of vaudeville acts, the ‘cake walkers, tumblesault artists’ and so on, provides just such a setting for an account of the film as a fairground ride. Instead, the report describes a careful studied viewing of the film, where ‘every pillar and joist and trolley car on the trip is faithfully shown’. The title of Lubin’s October version of the bridge train ride was hardly spurious; the film was thought to provide a ‘full view’ of the bridge, and, in so doing, a ‘complete’ representation of the train journey. Similarly, whereas we might have expected the film to be seen as a thrilling phantom ride, a ‘full view’ of Brooklyn Bridge might be expected to have involved a panoramic perspective, with the camera providing a sweeping panorama of the bridge.

There are numerous panoramic films from cinema's first decade. For example, there are eighty-two panorama titled films listed in Kemp Niver's catalogue of the Library of Congress Paper Print collection, with titles ranging from 'Panorama from ...' and 'Panorama of ...' to 'Panoramic View from ...', and so on (Niver, 1985: 236-244). Furthermore, in terms of broader aesthetic conventions this is a period where, in an urban context at least, a form of panoramic perception or panoramic sensibility is commonly thought to operate. A case in point is Christine Boyer's periodisation of aesthetic conventions in her study *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (1994). According to Boyer, a late nineteenth century modernistic "totalizing gaze ... became an accepted way of seeing, knowing, and representing the city" (33). As a reaction to what she calls the modern city's "anarchic visual arrangement", a panoramic viewpoint provided a form of "spatial order" (40-41). The numerous 'Bird's Eye' drawings from this period, which in their New York context commonly feature the Brooklyn Bridge, are evidence of this modern aesthetic convention [Plate 4]. As the pre-eminent site of the modern, Brooklyn Bridge was an important subject for New York's picturing industry. However, the bridge's sheer size and unusual steel structure brought with it the problem, for photographers in particular, of how to represent the bridge. I now want to turn to a discussion of ways of representing Brooklyn Bridge, to suggest *how* the bridge films could be seen as a 'full view'.

Whereas, for illustrators, 'Bird's Eye' perspective drawings allowed a distortion of perspective and scale, photographic conventions for representing the whole structure were not readily to hand or easily achieved. If the number of extant picture resources are any measure, it was, however, a problem that New York's journeymen photographers addressed with relish. The New York Public Library Picture Collection Online contains fifty-seven photographs, the Library of

Congress' Detroit Publishing Company collection has sixty and in the Robert N. Dennis Collection of stereoscopic views there are 171 stereographs of the bridge.<sup>13</sup> Across this snapshot, as it were, of resources there are examples of photographic conventions of how to represent the bridge as a whole.



Fig. 2.4 Three types of views of the Brooklyn Bridge.

The bridge's distinctive towers provide a focal point for three types of views of Brooklyn Bridge. In one type of view, photographed from either the New York or Brooklyn side of the bridge, we see one tower dominating the view, the roadway receding into the distance and the second tower visible in the background [Fig. 2.4, left photograph]. A second type of view is photographed from a distance which enables the whole span to be seen [Fig. 2.4, middle photograph]. Thirdly, a shoreline view, again photographed from the Brooklyn side, has one tower in view with its distinctive double arch dominating both the view and the Manhattan skyline in the background [Fig. 2.4, right photograph]. In all three types, however, different elements of the 'immensity of the structure' are omitted, such as the length of the span in the first and third views, bridge detail in the second and the roadway and second tower in the third view. Brooklyn Bridge provides one example of the difficulty of representing the modern in New York for photographers of the time. In the wider history of American urban photography, the difficulty presented by the bridge for attempts to capture the whole reflected the wider issue of how to represent the city through what Peter Bacon Hales terms "grand-style" urban photographic

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<sup>13</sup> The proportion of Brooklyn Bridge photographs in this format from the three collections surveyed—171 out of 288—reflects the dominance of stereographic photography at this time.

conventions (1984). Within the celebratory, monumental “grand-style” of photography, the “outer surface of the city became a metaphor for its inner strength and civilised grandeur” (163). By the 1890s, however, as exemplified by the work of Jacob Riis or the output from the Byron Company, enlarging the urban photographic vista involved moving in closer. Accordingly, in addition to the attempts to picture Brooklyn Bridge as a whole, within the almost three hundred photographs there are close-up views of pedestrians and traffic on the roadway, close-up views of the steel cable structure and, intriguingly, a stereograph of the railroad and cage-like framework which is featured in the Brooklyn Bridge films.

The Keystone View Company stereograph no. 2499, *Cable Road, Brooklyn Bridge*, is one of the 171 stereoscopic views of the bridge in the Robert N. Dennis Collection [Plate 5]. When viewing stereographs through a stereoscope, the effect of apparent depth varies enormously from one stereograph to another. *Cable Road, Brooklyn Bridge* is, however, a striking example of producing a depth effect. The receding lines of the railroad and the sides of the metal framework combine with a successive step effect produced by the receding overhead struts of the framework, themselves emphasised by the bridge tower in the background, to produce a sense of travelling through the bridge structure. In addition to being film-like in its effect, the 1897 copyright date for *Cable Road, Brooklyn Bridge* is suggestive [Fig. 2.5]. Is it possible that this stereograph, its startling depth effect and the potential it held to reproduce that effect in a film, provided the impetus for Blackton and Smith to film the first version of the bridge train film?

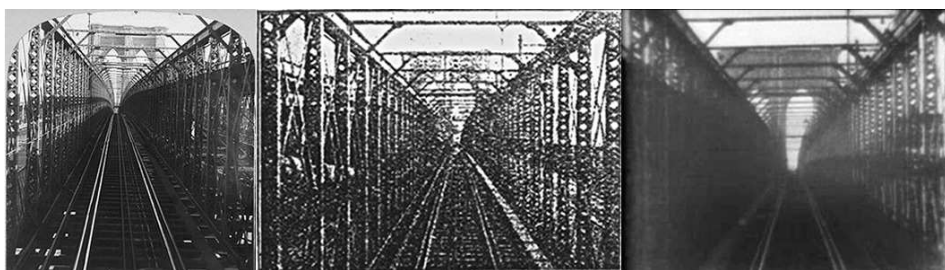


Fig. 2.5 The 'inclosed passage' shown, from left to right, by the Keystone View Company stereograph, an AM&B film frame from the reprints sheet and a frame from Edison's September 1899 Bridge film.

As we should expect within the intermedial culture described in the previous chapter, stereoscopy is an important influence on actuality filmmaking. Gary Turvey's research on British actuality cinema identifies film producers' claims of filmic stereoscopic effects. For example, a Warwick Trading Company catalogue entry for an 1899 film of a train ride over the Forth Bridge in Scotland claimed that:

[t]he stereoscopic effect of the girders and supports with the tunnel aspect through which the train is seen rapidly approaching, make this one of the most valuable and realistic pictures ever produced by means of the cinematograph camera. (Cited from Turvey, 2004: 20)

Whether or not the Warwick film was made in response to the Brooklyn Bridge films is not known. The similarities between the American and British accounts of the films are, however, striking. Moreover, such claims are hardly spurious. Across the American Mutoscope press reprints, themes found with the bridge films reports are evident throughout the reports as a whole.<sup>14</sup> With regard to considering a film photographically, for example, the *New York Mail and*

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<sup>14</sup> We do, of course, have to be careful with the validity of such resources. For example, we might expect some form of collusion between the nascent cinema industry owners and newspaper proprietors. The press 'reports' could have been written as 'adverts', specifically intended for re-use in the American Mutoscope pamphlets. However, the wide range of publications used from what was a highly competitive newspaper industry, the variety of types of articles from which the reprints are extracted, from local news items to snippets from vaudeville reports, and the extended period over which the reports appeared, are all factors which add weight to their validity as research resources. Not surprisingly, and especially given the paucity of first-hand accounts of cinema from its early years, the American Mutoscope reprints are a much used resource in the form of extracts from the reports. Tom Gunning's 'An Unseen Energy Swallows Space: The Space in Early Film and Its Relation to American Avant-Garde Film' (1983) is an early, for the field, example of the use of the American Mutoscope reprints. This is an important essay, in that it feeds into Gunning's later 'cinema of attractions' thesis. See Niver, 1971: 28-29 for the *New York Mail and Express* newspaper report from which the 'unseen energy swallows space' quote is extracted.

*Express* bridge film report stressed that the film consisted of “pictures” which were “taken at the rate of about thirty-two a second, or a complete total of 5,400 distinct pictures for the entire trip” (reprinted in Niver, 1971: 42).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, an 1897 *Boston Herald* film report began by noting that “the exposure lasted a full minute, and in that time 2400 separate pictures were taken” (30). Regarding the stereo effect, the *New York Mail and Express* claimed in an 1896 report that when seeing a film, “the picture thus shown is not flat - in fact, it can not be distinguished as a picture at all, even with the strongest opera glasses” (12). In terms of what was represented, the *New Haven Leader* bridge film report (above) claimed that the film showed the “great rush of life” on the bridge. Likewise, the *Boston Transcript* claimed in an 1897 report that the Biograph “illustrates new ideas of action and fresh phases of progress so naturally and completely” (30). In an account of an 1897 film of a railroad train going through a tunnel, the *Boston Herald* reported that “the [rail]road becomes alive ... . Through this noon-day so familiar to the railroad traveller one is propelled to invisible force” (29). According to a *New York Mail and Express* report of the same film, “half of New York has seen this view, but it is witnessed always with the fresh delight which the contemplation of vast and effective powers engenders” (29). The report then went on to note that there were films on the same vaudeville bill “which show life rather than force” (29). Such reports do have to be read cautiously. However, amid the inevitable rhetoric and hyperbole, the claims for early films must have a basis to have seemed worth printing.

That a detailed view of ‘every pillar and joist’ constituted a ‘full view’ of Brooklyn Bridge may be puzzling. However, the flurry of filmmaking on the

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<sup>15</sup> In newspaper advertisements for *The Jeffries-Sharkey Fight* (1899), a series of films of a boxing match, American Mutoscope and Biograph claimed that the series consisted of “7 ¼ miles of film ... 216,000 distinct pictures”, and as such, “these films are the largest ever made” (*The New York Clipper*, November 25<sup>th</sup> 1899. Reproduced in Musser, 1990: 206-207).



bridge in 1899 stands as evidence that Blackton and Smith had hit upon a highly successful film type. In the same way that the frame sequence from *Star Theatre* demonstrated the ways in which apparent motion could have been seen differently at the time, the bridge films point to a different way in which apparent depth was seen. Transposing the readily apparent depth when viewing *Cable Road, Brooklyn Bridge* through a stereoscope onto the view of *New Brooklyn to New York, via Brooklyn Bridge, no. 2* may be a way of understanding what Blackton and Smith expected to be seen with their film, and given the success of the films, what was seen by audiences at the time.

The bridge films provide another example of spectatorial relations based in periods of time, rather than instants. The report of the film show at 'Hyde & Behman's' concluded that "[t]he picture occupies just the length of time in presentation that it occupied in being taken, three minutes" (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1899: 5). What happens in those three minutes, *what* the bridge films represent and their cultural role will be the subject of section three. I will argue that the five bridge films, and other New York railroad films made in response to their success, should be considered part of a wider New York theme of congestion and transportation systems. Essentially, I will trace connections between actuality film production and cultural anxieties about how to be part of an emerging transport system, of which the Brooklyn Bridge is an integral part. The connections traced are thus between cinema and modernisation and modernity, with the films a response to the modern and thus a form of modernism. First, I will consider a substantial critique of attempts to trace connections between cinema and the modern: a critique which labels such attempts the 'modernity thesis'.

## Early Cinema's Modernity Thesis

The 'modernity thesis' is a largely pejorative term used to describe an approach to early cinema that explores cinema's emergence within, and relationship to, the sensory environment of urban modernity.<sup>16</sup> In *Melodrama & Modernity* Ben Singer identifies three salient and interrelated aspects to this approach. Firstly, early cinema is thought to be 'like' modernity, where "[b]oth are characterised by the prominence of fleeting, forceful visual attractions and contra-contemplative spectatorial distractions" (Singer, 2001: 102). Secondly, early cinema is understood as 'part' of modernity, "as a significant element of modernity in dynamic interaction with a range of adjacent similar phenomena", such as new technologies, new entertainments, new architectural forms, new visual displays, new types of social spaces and social practices and more abstract elements of modernity such as crowds and congestion (103). Thirdly, types of early cinema such as the cinema of attractions are considered to be a "consequence" of sensory modernity, in a "causal" relationship, where modernity "shapes" perception which then affects the making of films (103-104). The modernity thesis thus "posits a relationship of causality", according to Singer (103).

As Singer notes, the origins of the modernity thesis can be found in late 1980s film theory. This theory was influenced by Weimar critics such as Kracauer and Benjamin, whose work on cinema and modernity was in turn influenced by seminal figures for investigations of Western modernity, namely Charles Baudelaire and Georg Simmel. According to Singer, during the 1990s, "something akin to a school of thought coalesced" within early cinema studies (101-102). He tentatively labels this the New York School since most of the

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<sup>16</sup> For examples of the pejorative use of the term 'modernity thesis' see Bordwell, 1997: 141-147, and Keil, 1999: 133-147.

proponents of the modernity thesis lived and worked in New York during the 1990s. Among those cited by Singer are Giuliana Bruno, Leo Charney, Anne Friedberg, Tom Gunning, Miriam Hansen, Lynne Kirby and Vanessa Schwartz, all of whom are referred to in this study.<sup>17</sup> I will turn to critiques of the New York School shortly. Firstly, I want to consider the influence on the New York School of Tom Gunning's 'cinema of attractions' thesis. My concern is the extent to which a simplified, de-politicised application of Gunning's original formulation of the 'attractions' thesis has become integral to attempts to trace correlations between cinema and the modern. Whereas, in Chapter 1, I focussed on the temporal aspects of Gunning's thesis, I now want to consider the thesis' initial politics and subsequent diminished usage, and reasons for the prolonged currency of the notion of the cinema of attractions.

Gunning's 'attractions' thesis originates from an eight page 1986 essay, 'The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', first published in *Wide Angle*. Gunning demonstrated that a politically charged model of film-viewer relations dominated cinema in the period up to 1906. Rather than focussing on narrative cinema, he sought the "*potential*" of the new medium through a conception which united both the Lumière actuality and the Méliès 'trick' film traditions, a conception which "sees cinema less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience" (1986: 64. Gunning's italics). That conception is the "cinema of attractions", which, in contrast to the voyeuristic tendency of later cinema, is based on "its ability to *show* something", on an "exhibitionist" tendency in, for example, "the recurring look at the camera by actors" (64. Gunning's italics). By "establishing contact with the audience", this is a cinema which "displays its visibility, willing to

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<sup>17</sup> In a footnote Singer lists fifteen publications from the 'New York School' including one of its seminal works, the previously quoted 1995 anthology *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, edited by Charney and Schwartz (Singer, 2001: 307-308).

rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator” (64). Gunning then goes on to describe the exhibitionist tendency in erotic films, Méliès’ trick films and in Hale’s Tours, which used train ride films such as the Brooklyn Bridge films, and where, “viewing experiences relate more to the attractions of the fairground than to traditions of the legitimate theatre” (65).<sup>18</sup> Amusement parks such as New York’s Coney Island thus provide a “rich ground for rethinking the roots of cinema” (65). In the second section of the essay, Gunning locates the root of the term ‘attractions’ in its use by the Soviet theatre producer, filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein.

The term ‘attractions’ points to, for Gunning, the political potential of early cinema and thus an association with later avant-garde theatre and filmmaking. Gunning then quotes Eisenstein’s 1923 essay ‘Montage of Attractions’ and his efforts to create a theatre of “exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption” (66). Early cinema thus shares characteristics with later Soviet cinema through Eisenstein’s formulation of cinema as a fairground attraction such as a roller coaster ride. Avant-garde filmmakers were attracted to early cinema because of its connections with the emerging mass culture at the turn-of-the-twentieth-century and the “liberation popular entertainment offered” through “its freedom from the creation of diegesis, its accent on direct stimulation” (66). The link between potentially liberatory popular entertainments and early cinema is established through cinema exhibitions in vaudeville theatres where films were “surrounded by a mass of unrelated acts in a non-narrative and even illogical succession of performances” (66-67). Gunning quotes a 1911 Russell Sage Foundation sociological report that was critical of vaudeville stating that it

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<sup>18</sup> The 1906 AM&B advertisement, quoted in the introductory chapter, for their March 1899 Brooklyn Bridge film, *New York to Brooklyn over the Brooklyn Bridge*, is from a list of “Hale [sic] Tour Runs” films described as “Highly Successful With Tour Car Schemes” (reprinted in Niver, 1971: 250).

“depends upon an artificial rather than a natural human and developing interest” (68). A vaudeville evening was, in Gunning’s paraphrasing of the Russell Sage report, “like a ride on a streetcar or an active day in a crowded city”, and thus, entertainment which “stimulat[ed] an unhealthy nervousness” (68). It was, however, the type of stimulus sought by Eisenstein in order to “organiz[e] popular energy for radical purpose” (68).

Gunning traces the cinema of attractions in later filmmaking; he identifies the use of spectacle in, for example, later slapstick comedy films and asserts that the “primal power” of attractions can sometimes be seen “running beneath the armature of narrative regulation”. Despite this, he laments that attractions have become ‘effects’ in 1980s mainstream cinema and are therefore not the “source of energy that would need focussing and intensification to fulfil its revolutionary possibilities” (70). Nevertheless the earlier “carnival of the cinema” still provided “an unexhausted resource — a Coney Island of the avant-garde” (70). Looking back at the attractions thesis in its original form, it is surprising to see, in contrast to its conventional usage, the extent and forcefulness of the politics of Gunning’s argument; in part, the reason for providing a close reading of the thesis is to draw out its less well known political aspects. Over time, however, the politics of Gunning’s thesis have, in its application in the field, moderated.

One reason for this diminishing politics is the wider diminishing of simplistic binary oppositions. For example, whereas Gunning provides a “‘static,’ ‘stupid voyeur’” model of later audiences (through a paraphrasing of the *Futurist Manifestos*), for early audiences, cinema could operate as a potentially “liberatory” medium (1986: 66). Such binarisms now seem naïve. However, a more substantial reason for a diminishing politics can be located in a reversal of conceptions of the cultural role of montage over the last twenty years or so. The

association of early cinema and Eisenstein's 'Montage of Attractions' essay may have carried with it a political potential in the mid-1980s. Within a late-twentieth, early twenty-first century media culture, however, it is difficult to sustain claims for the 'liberatory' potential of a montage-like series of attractions. Whereas Eisenstein used montage to convey a radical politics in the 1920s, the contemporary use of montage in, for example, music videos or across the proliferation of satellite and cable television channels, demonstrates that montage is not a device of radical politics *per se*. As Nicholas Mirzoeff notes, there is "nothing *inherently* radical in [montage]" (1999: 15. Mirzoeff's italics). Gunning has updated the attractions thesis over time,<sup>19</sup> but his central claim that the attractions thesis "envisioned cinema as a series of visual shocks" remains (1994a: 116). With the 'series' bereft of political potential, what remains is a cinema of 'visual shocks'. This has been significant, however, in prolonging the currency of the 'attractions' thesis in three ways.

Firstly, a conception of actuality films involving a series of 'visual shocks', rather than formal development, can be seen to align with the apparent formal simplicity of early actuality films. As we saw in Chapter 1, this obviated the need for close formal analysis of actuality films. Secondly, the currency of a 'visual shocks' cinema of attractions thesis is strengthened by the wider turn to consumption oriented studies of culture. For example, as Roberta Pearson notes in a 1999 overview of cinema studies, cinema emerges in a period when, "consumption began to take priority over production and the image to take priority over direct experience" (391). Modernity, in this view, is thus "marked by a strong emphasis on spectacle", with cinema "an integral component of the 'spectacularisation' of everyday life" (392). In terms of cinema's cultural role,

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<sup>19</sup> Gunning's updated version of his attractions thesis will be considered in Chapter 5.

cinema provides both “visual pleasure” and a means to “impose social control on the ‘lower orders’” by “cultural elites” who “employ the medium for disciplinary and surveillance tactics” (392). From this perspective, the notion of the cinema of attractions provides an important way to conceptualise the commodification of a culture which operates for a voyeuristic audience. Moreover, the de-politicised attractions thesis is entirely compatible with a perspective that dismisses the notion of ideological potential in the new medium and instead asserts, as Pearson argues, that “previously existing social structures determine the deployment of any new technology” (392). Thirdly, the currency of a ‘visual shocks’ cinema of attractions thesis is strengthened by its alignment with a widely used approach to modernity which Ben Singer has usefully termed a “neurological conception of modernity” (1995: 72). In a genealogy of modernity conceptions that underpins the modernity thesis, one source is Charles Baudelaire’s 1859 essay ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, from which Baudelaire’s much quoted dictum is taken: “By modernity, I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent” (Baudelaire, 1995:12)<sup>20</sup>. Our next stopping off point would be Georg Simmel’s 1900 essay ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’. In reflecting Baudelaire’s dictum and, importantly, within the period when cinema emerges, Simmel describes the psychological conditions created by the metropolis in terms of, for example, “momentary impressions”, the “rapid crowding of changing images”, and the “unexpectedness of onrushing impressions” (essay reprinted in Warren and Lyon, 1983: 19). The modernity genealogy would then move on to Weimar social critics such as Kracauer and Benjamin. In this familiar genealogy, modernity can be read as being characterised by the subjective experience of physical and perceptual shocks in the urban environment; modernity can be “conceived”, as Singer notes, “as a barrage of stimuli” (1995: 73).

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<sup>20</sup> See Schwartz & Przyblyski (2004) for an example of the genealogy in a ‘Visual Culture Reader’ (35-70).

Of course, distilling the works of Baudelaire, Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin down to a single, monolithic conception of modernity amounts to a serious misreading of these authors, a misreading which is a significant factor in the overall neglect of actuality cinema. Reducing the output of the above authors to one monolithic conception of modernity is, for this study, paralleled in the reduction of the richness of actuality cinema to one monolithic ‘visual shocks’ attractions conception.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the correlation between Gunning’s claim in the attractions thesis that cinema consisted of a series of ‘visual shocks’ and the conception of modernity as a ‘barrage of stimuli’ is seemingly self-evident to the extent that actuality cinema appears to share an almost intuitive relation with modernity. The ‘brief dose of scopic pleasure’ administered by actuality cinema is thus a reflection of the experience of shocks and jolts in the urban environment or, to quote Gunning’s original attractions thesis essay again, a reflection which corresponds with ‘a ride on a streetcar or an active day in a crowded city’. Mary Ann Doane’s aforementioned study of cinematic time provides one example of combining the ‘visual shocks’ thesis with the ‘neurological’ conception of modernity. The attractions thesis demonstrates, for Doane, that “early films were above all a form of direct display to the spectator”, that early cinema functioned to emphasise “shock and surprise” (2002: 24). This use of the ‘attractions’ thesis tends to reduce actuality cinema to a homogenous mass, where subject matter is arbitrary and where film-viewer relations are reduced to a simplistic one-way, power over the audience model. As a result, however, this diminishes the

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<sup>21</sup> A corollary of this parallel is that a close reading of Baudelaire, Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin has the potential to provide a basis for an analysis of actuality cinema which attempts to move away from monolithic conceptions of early cinema. The work of these authors, in particular Kracauer and Benjamin, was a starting point for this study. However, finding meaningful correlations between the output of the above authors and, for example, the Brooklyn Bridge train ride filming episode has proved problematic. This is not to say that correlations could not be found, rather, it is to say that within the limits of a thesis-length study my initial findings have indicated a need to focus research efforts on local reactions to New York’s specifically modern context, such as newspaper reports and, of course, actuality films.



seeming validity of attempts to trace correlations between cinema and the modern. In effect, the simplified ‘visual shocks’ conception of the cinema of attractions opens up for critique the so-called ‘modernity thesis’.

In terms of critiques of the modernity thesis, and, in particular, critiques of Singer’s New York School, in a 1999 essay Charlie Keil regards the Charney and Schwartz anthology as “indicative of the general tendencies of the modernity thesis”, and then goes on to attempt to separate “early cinema scholars generally” from Charney and Schwartz’s “particular attempt at explaining cinema’s cultural status” (Keil, 1999: 146). Keil’s own standpoint is the investigation of the development of cinema in the later 1907-1913 ‘transitional’ period of cinema.<sup>22</sup> From this perspective Keil asks, “how does one reconcile the changed narrativity of transitional cinema to the model of cinema proposed by the modernity thesis?” (133). This is an important question in that, if sensory modernity affects the development of the first decade of cinema, why is sensory modernity seemingly absent from the narrative oriented development of cinema in the following decade? Or, as Keil has it, why is it that “cinema fails to fulfil the project the modernity thesis proposes for it, particularly during the transitional years”? (137). Keil’s response to this issue is to explore what he terms ‘visualised narratives’ in antecedents to cinema such as the magic lantern, and then to argue for the “importance of narrative to the changing status and function of cinema” (134). Keil therefore posits narrative, rather than a relationship with sensory modernity, as the driving force behind the development of early cinema. Whereas Singer emphasises cinema’s relationship with new technologies, new entertainments and so on, Keil emphasises the conception of “early cinema as a transitional form” (134).

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<sup>22</sup> See Keil’s 2001 monograph *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907-1913*.

Keil's question of how to identify sensory modernity within the development of cinema was first posed by David Bordwell in an extended critique of the modernity thesis in his *On the History of Film Style* (1997). Bordwell's critique is within a broader but very detailed survey of film style, which he defines as "the systematic and significant use of the techniques of the medium" and which is, therefore, central to both making and watching films (Bordwell, 1997: 4). Accordingly, for filmmaking, "[s]tyle is not simply window-dressing draped over a script; it is the very flesh of the work" (8). When watching films, according to Bordwell:

[h]owever much the spectator may be engaged by plot or genre, subject matter or thematic implication, the texture of the film experience depends centrally upon the moving images and the sound that accompanies them. (7)

Furthermore, and in pointing to the potential importance of a thesis which posits sensory influences as determining factors, Bordwell then asserts that, "[t]he audience gains access to story or theme only through that tissue of sensory materials" (7). Within an historiography, he claims that "the study of style has profoundly shaped the ways in which we understand the history of cinema" (6). A conception of modernity is, then, doubly important to Bordwell's approach to cinema.

Bordwell frames an analysis of the modernity thesis within what he terms the "'history of vision' approach" to early cinema (1997: 141). In setting the tone for his analysis, he claims the history of vision approach derives from a revisionist project, where "top-down arguments tended to skim off key films isolated by piecemeal historians" (141). In turn the influence of Cultural Studies provided—through the familiar Baudelaire, Simmel and Benjamin route—an approach to the history of vision which, in relation to style, posits that "culture affected

technique by way of influencing human perception” (141). Bordwell’s initial objection is that the large time-scale over which human perception changes is not consistent with the comparably small time-scale over which culture changes. Assertions that human vision adapts to changes in the urban environment over a short period of time amount to, for Bordwell, a much discredited Lamarckian model of evolution (142). Moreover, the attractiveness of Benjamin’s notion that, in Bordwell’s words, “film reflects modernity ... by being an art of abruptness”, is such that the history of vision approach leads to his second objection, namely that a causal relationship exists between the putative changes in human perception and changes in film style (143-144). In then focussing on Gunning’s work and the attractions thesis’ claims that cinema “reflects culturally determined modes of experience”, Bordwell lays the ground for Keil’s contention that the modernity thesis fails by not being able to explain stylistic changes in the period after 1906 when cinema becomes narrative oriented (144-145).

To a large extent, however, the failure of the modernity thesis to account for stylistic changes is a soft target for Bordwell and Keil. In Gunning’s attractions thesis, across the essays in Charney and Schwartz’s anthology and in Mary Ann Doane’s study of cinematic time, close film analysis and therefore accounting for stylistic changes is hardly a primary objective when applying the modernity thesis to early cinema research. As Keil admits, “what is important is the idea of cinema and what it represents” (1999: 134). In relation to Bordwell’s criticism of the idea that human perception could change over a short period of time, Ben Singer provides a detailed reply, which draws on recent scientific research, and concludes that “perception is reorganised in response to a new sensory environment” (Singer, 2001: 107). Singer also attempts to uphold the corollary that cultural change is causally related to changes in the sensory environment by

quoting sensationalist literature and magazine illustrations from the period which reflect the “complexity, speed, fragmentation and abruptness” of the urban environment (118-129).

To summarise, the modernity thesis controversy comes down to two questions. Can a specific form of human perception in modernity be identified?, and, if modernity influences cinema in the first decade, why is this influence not present in the 1907-1913 ‘transitional’ period of cinema? To an extent, concern over the first question has waned in the period since Bordwell’s ‘history of vision’ critique. For example, it is not a question Keil addresses in a 2004 essay on the modernity thesis, “‘To Here from Modernity’: Style, Historiography, and Transitional Cinema”. Whereas in 1997 Bordwell felt able to use the label ‘history of vision’ as a slight on modernity conceptions, research at that time and since in the field of Visual Studies has shown that vision does indeed have a history.<sup>23</sup> As this study demonstrates, attention to a history of vision can be a cornerstone for attempts to understand hitherto neglected sides to early cinema. The second modernity thesis question is potentially more difficult to respond to.

In his 2004 essay, Keil asserts that “cinema’s retreat from an attractions-based aesthetic, once storytelling becomes a more pressing concern, should create an obvious conundrum for advocates of the modernity thesis” (2004b: 53). Keil himself provides the basis of responses to his ‘conundrum’. For one, the attractions-based aesthetic should not be considered the sole axis of the relations between cinema and the modern. Within the heterogeneity of early cinema it should not be surprising to find different modes of filmmaking which respond in different ways to the modern. The axis considered in this study, where

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<sup>23</sup> To cite one recent example of this debate, see *Journal of Visual Culture* vol. 2:2 (2003).

filmmakers respond to both modernity and modernisation, is based in an aesthetic which is not—in important ways for narrative cinema—anti-diegetic and, as such, can contribute to cinema’s turn to narrative, as we will see in Chapter 5. The aesthetic at work in, for example, the Brooklyn Bridge films, is but one instance of a commercially successful mode of cinema which responds to the modern. In a 1998 response to critiques of the modernity thesis, Tom Gunning argues that “critics are not so much inventing” correlations between cinema and modern, as “rediscovering” them (Gunning, 1998: 268). In returning to the Brooklyn Bridge train ride films—and in an attempt to rediscover correlations—my aim is to situate the films in relation to a concern with systematisation evident in New York newspapers at the time. In so doing, rather than a focus on modernity’s ‘barrage of stimuli’, the modernisation of New York’s transportation systems will be at issue. Instead of a cinema which, as Doane has it, emphasises ‘shock and surprise’, spectatorial relations are considered in terms of a sustained, studying of the films over time.

### **Cinema and the Modern: Brooklyn Bridge**

A striking feature of the reports of the bridge train ride films is the sustained attention—over a three minute period—that the films seemed to have elicited. There are, of course, differing interpretations of this viewing experience. For instance, from an attractions perspective, the films could have incited visual curiosity, an anticipation of an attraction which fails to materialise. Gunning claims that with films of this type, the film frame becomes “a location of seemingly endless visual patterns” (1993: 6). The Warwick film catalogue’s emphasis on the stereoscopic effect of the Forth Bridge film might be an example of the promotion of the ‘visual patterns’ such films provided. Moreover, although such films do not involve constantly changing views, Gunning asserts that “they still possess the essential nonnarrative emphasis on display that

defines the cinema of attractions” (12: n. 15). In this scenario, the films become an example of the formation of regimes of attentiveness, in Crary’s schema (1999). In effect, the three minute viewing experience is an extended period of “empty moments” (to quote the title of Charney’s 1998 study of cinema and modernity), where spectators are in training for their later absorption into a filmic world. When considering one of the bridge films outside of its context, such interpretations are appealing. However, the filming of five bridge ride films over a nine month period is an extraordinary episode for New York actuality cinema, not least in terms of the necessary cooperation of the Department of Bridges. As a form of cinema involved in producing a visual newspaper, the impetus for the cooperation between the Bridge authorities and filmmakers can, not surprisingly, be found in newspaper reports of the Bridge.

The reports reveal an interest in how to be part of urban transportation systems, especially in terms of how to represent the abstract processes involved in such systems. As an issue of representation, this is an interest Robert Hughes identifies as central to the ‘shock of the new’<sup>24</sup>:

[t]he master image in painting was no longer landscape but the metropolis. In the country, things grow; but the essence of manufacture, of the city, is process, and this could only be expressed by metaphors of linkage, relativity, interconnectedness. (Hughes, 1991: 12)

Or, more practically:

how, by shoving sticky stuff like paint around on the surface of a canvas, could you produce a convincing record of process and transformation? (16)

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<sup>24</sup> In quoting Hughes I do not wish to imply that he can represent an art history perspective *per se*. For the specific issue of how to represent the modern in this period Hughes’ *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change* is an accessible, widely acclaimed study and the point Hughes is making in the above quotation is hardly controversial; it is, however, well put.

The uncertainty of the period's representational terrain was an issue not only for artists but also for filmmakers and newspaper reporters, and particularly within the context of mass transit.

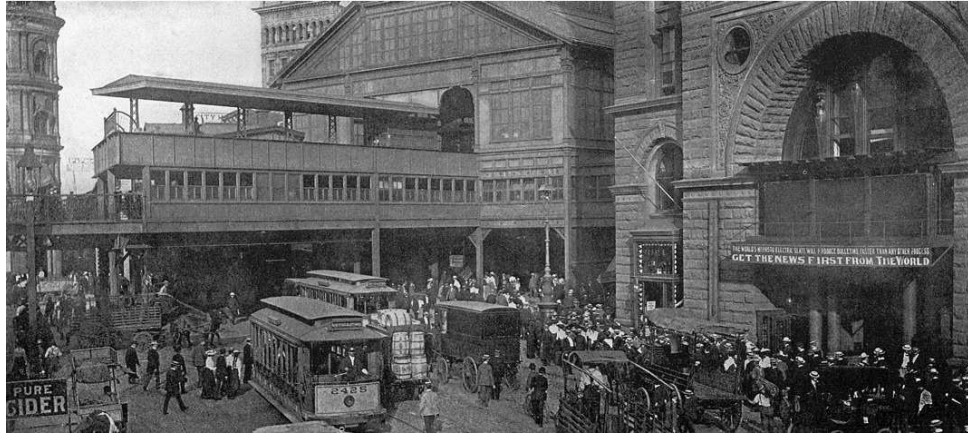


Fig. 2.6 Brooklyn Bridge Manhattan Terminus, Park Row, City Hall Square

By 1901, bridge railway passenger numbers had risen to 55 million per annum, or an average of 150,000 every day. It is difficult to comprehend the mass of passengers during rush hours, though the figures do go some way to illustrating the meaning of mass transportation at this time. Although, the above photograph [Fig. 2.6] is accompanied by the caption, “immense crowds pass this point morning and evening, coming from and returning to Brooklyn”, the photograph seems insufficient as a representation of the experience of the twice-daily boarding and alighting at the bridge railway termini (King, 1974, *King's View of Brooklyn, 1905* :53). Representing the bridge's mass of passengers was, however, attempted through local newspaper reports.

In a literal way, the morning and evening ‘crush’ (a term commonly used in newspaper reports) at the terminals and during the bridge railway journey itself was an everyday experience for many Brooklynites. With regard to the bridge's ‘world’ status, passengers were constantly reminded that they were part of the world's biggest rush hour crush by regular updates and analysis of passengers numbers in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. For example, a statement by the Brooklyn

Rapid Transit Company in November 1902 provided an update in which “some interesting figures are embodied”, where the count, “disproves the accepted theory that during the morning rush hours the congestion is not so great in any single hour as during the evening rush” (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1902: 2). The Company’s statement provided details of the proportion of passengers in each of the four modes of bridge crossing: bridge railway; through trains; trolley cars; and foot passengers. Although through trains were again operating at this time, the statement noted that only 6.1% of traffic was via this mode. Also listed were figures for the peak rush hour periods of 7:30 to 8:30 A.M. and 5:30 to 6:30 P.M. which showed passenger numbers were similar at around forty thousand for each hour (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1902: 2). The numbers are staggering and for travellers on the bridge shuttle simply getting by would have necessitated becoming part of a functioning system. Moreover, passengers were reminded they were part of a system, one that was under constant review, in the daily newspapers. During the period of electrification, for example, numerous articles presented plans to increase traffic by changing the number of through trains or shortening the spacing between each trolley car.<sup>25</sup> Bridge Commissioner John L. Shea presented a plan in June 1900 which detailed recent “experiments” with “methods” of transportation in the “operation” of the system (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1900: 11). Readers responded with their own detailed suggestions for increasing traffic on the bridge.<sup>26</sup> For passengers, being part of a bridge transportation system extended to forms of discussion about the functioning of the system.

In what can be interpreted as an attempt to represent the bridge transportation system through pictures, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* carried a December 1898

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<sup>25</sup> Increasing bridge traffic had to be balanced against the weight the bridge could safely carry. Consequently, trolley cars queued to cross the bridge, this was termed ‘banking’, before being allowed through with a set spacing between cars.

<sup>26</sup> For example, see *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1902: 20 and March 13<sup>th</sup> 1902: 9.



article entitled ‘The Bridge’s Growth during the Year 1898’ which I introduced at the beginning of this chapter. The article featured three woodcut images and a commentary on the pictures [Plate 2] and was extracted from the 1898 Annual Report of the bridge by the then new, post-consolidation, Department of Bridges. It was clearly intended to demonstrate the smooth functioning of bridge traffic, given the then recent introduction of through trains and trolley cars on the bridge. Alongside the expected bridge facts and figures, the report stated that the woodcut drawings “give a good idea of the physical condition on the bridge and also show the operation of the railroad cars on the structure” (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1898: 7). Moreover, the “cuts” of the bridge from the Manhattan and Brooklyn sides had been “pronounced by Chief Engineer Martin to be the best ever taken of the structure” (7). For example, the lower left woodcut, captioned ‘Manhattan Tower of the bridge’, was “especially interesting”, in that it showed “the net work [sic] of cables, stays and suspenders” which carry the weight of the bridge (7). In highlighting plans to introduce more traffic on the bridge, the commentary detailed the fabrication of the cables, their weight-carrying capacity and cable maintenance schedules. In reference to the lower right woodcut, captioned ‘Curve at the Brooklyn Terminal of the Bridge, Showing the Operation of the Elevated Railroad Trains and the Trolley Cars’, the report commented on the “success” of the introduction of the “operation of the trolleys and elevated cars on the bridge” (7). Lastly, the top-centre woodcut showed the then new elevated railroad loop which provided a connecting service between Brooklyn trains and bridge trains. The report concluded by noting that passenger numbers had almost doubled since the introduction of through trains and trolley cars on the bridge.

As for representing ‘transformation and process’, or other related abstract concepts such as systems, the woodcut images do cohere with the intended

purpose of the 1898 Annual Report's commentary. Interpreting the woodcut images has to relate, of course, to historical ways of seeing the pictures. This is a point which Douglas Tallack makes in relation to a "visual regime of rapid transit" (Tallack, 2000a: 115). Among Tallack's examples are two photographs of Brooklyn Bridge, one of which is taken from the same viewpoint as the Annual Report's lower right image. In an argument concerning the influence and representation of systematisation within the rapid transit visual regime, Tallack asserts that with the bridge photographs:

[f]or all the patent "thereness" of the famous bridge and the sheer detail of the end-of-bridge scenes, the subject matter of this sub-set of transit images is, arguably, a system ... (116)<sup>27</sup>

The woodcut images are representations of photographs rather than the photographs themselves. Accordingly, they do tend to foreground the elements of the system emphasised in the commentary. For example, the load-bearing capability of the steel cables in the lower left image, the dominance of the through train on the bridge in the lower right image and the circulation of the elevated trains in the top-centre image are all factors which are emphasised instead of excess detail in the woodcuts. Instead of a photographic, indexical realism, the woodcuts provide a form of mediation that emphasises abstract elements of the bridge's system.

The Annual Report's commentary and the woodcut images are, then, part of a wider concern with the operation and functioning of the bridge as the fulcrum of the transportation system between Brooklyn and New York. In Tallack's terms, it is a concern which is part of the wider systematisation, of which the everyday journey over the bridge is an integral part. Just a few weeks after the publication of the 1898 Annual Report of the bridge, in January 1899, the newspaper

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<sup>27</sup> See Tallack (2005 forthcoming) for a fuller explanation of this theme.

coverage of transportation system anxieties was supplemented by a new form of representation of a journey over the bridge: the first of the five bridge railway ride films. Situated alongside the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle's* coverage of the Annual Report, however, the reports of the films are even more surprising. From a later perspective, given a choice between the newspaper's pictorial account of the bridge or the films' almost two minute view of the 'inclosed passage', the former would surely seem to provide a fuller representation of the bridge and its workings. For cinema audiences, however, it was the films which provided a 'complete representation of a trip across the bridge'. The films 'bewildered' spectators, 'people who have crossed the bridge one hundred times have never hitherto realized the immensity of the structure'. It was the films which enabled a 'full view' of Brooklyn Bridge. Here, then, is an example of early cinema working, in a least expected way. Here is cinema functioning as a space and time machine for early audiences. Not surprisingly, the commercial success of the Brooklyn Bridge railway journey films ensured that other New York railway system films soon followed.

In late-March 1899 Edison cameraman James White produced *104<sup>th</sup> Street Curve, New York, Elevated Railway*, a film shot from the front of a train as it traversed the elevated 'S' curves in the track near to 104<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>28</sup> The film begins with a view of railroad tracks receding into the distance from the right of the frame, and a train entering at frame right which moves away from the camera [Fig. 2.7]. Over the opening thirty seven seconds, the train slowly travels into the distance, while a second train, going in the opposite direction, cuts across the frame and travels out of shot at frame right. The film then cuts to a shot from the front of a train as it negotiates the elevated "S" curves. Over the next one minute

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<sup>28</sup> According to Musser's Edison film catalogue, the film was produced sometime between late March and mid-April 1899 (1997: 497).

forty seconds (up to the end of the film), the train slowly turns to the right, then left and finally travels down a straight section of track to an El station.



Fig. 2.7 Frames from *104<sup>th</sup> Street Curve, New York, Elevated Railway* (Edison, 1899)

Ostensibly, the film is largely comprised of a ‘phantom ride’, where the camera could be thought to ‘visually assault’ the viewer, especially from such an elevated vantage point. Within the context of the bridge train ride films, however, the film is as much about the operation of the elevated railway as it is about a visual attraction. The opening section is timed to coincide with the movement of trains away from and towards the camera. Similarly, the shot from the front of a train shows four other trains to either side of the camera train’s central track. Rather than being filmed in one continuous shot there are two breaks in filming, at one minute thirty-seven seconds and another at two minutes, where filming is timed to resume when another train is in shot. In the same way that the bridge train films featured a view of the ‘inclosed passage’, bracketed by the two bridge termini stations, Edison’s ‘S’ curve film features a view of the elevated tracks, bracketed by, initially, a view of trains negotiating a junction, then, in the final twenty seconds, a view of an El station from the stationary camera train. The ‘S’ curve at 104<sup>th</sup> Street is described in an Edison catalogue as a “celebrated” location (cited in Musser, 1997: 497). As with Edison’s January bridge train film, the ‘S’ curve film was also soon copied by AM&B. *Elevated Railroad, New York* was filmed at the same location as the Edison film. It is shorter, with a running time of one minute seven seconds, and shows the view from the front of a train only as it negotiates the ‘S’ curves. Although this

AM&B version was not copyrighted until February 1903 it is highly likely, given the similarity of the buildings that appear in each film, that the film was shot in early 1899 and was thus a copy of the Edison film. Given the nearly identical view of the 'S' curves in the two films, the delayed copyrighting was likely due to AM&B's need to avoiding any infringement action from Edison.

On April 18<sup>th</sup> 1899, AM&B cameraman G. W. Bitzer filmed *Panorama from the Tower of Brooklyn Bridge*. It is highly likely this sixth Brooklyn Bridge film was part of the flurry of interest in filming the bridge, but in contrast to the 'S' curve films, the perspective adopted by Bitzer is that of a panorama filmed from the top of the Brooklyn side bridge tower. In a sweeping, almost 180 degree pan, Bitzer filmed the Manhattan shoreline from the southern tip of the island, with the Manhattan side bridge tower appearing half way through the pan. Filming from the top of one of the Brooklyn Bridge towers using an AM&B camera was a considerable logistical achievement at the time. The Biograph camera underwent numerous modifications in this period, including the introduction of a panning head in early 1899, and a lightweight hand-cranked version was developed and tested in early 1900 (Musser, 1990: 266-67). According to Bitzer, he first used the hand-cranked version in September 1900 and although the panning head was available for the April 1899 film, the camera in use at that time was hardly lightweight (Bitzer, 1973: 46). According to a publicity still for actuality filming, in 1899 the AM&B camera outfit comprised a camera and electric motor "weighing about 265 pounds, five storage batteries weighing 200 pounds each and a large trunk containing films, lenses, cable and other paraphernalia" (cited in Musser, 1990: 266). In comparison to mounting the AM&B camera and batteries on the front of a bridge cable car, the panorama from the top of the tower required, therefore, substantial effort. Despite this effort and the popularity of Brooklyn Bridge films at the time, Bitzer's film does

not appear in any of the AM&B press reprints or film catalogues that Kemp Niver has reproduced.<sup>29</sup>

In a rapid transit visual regime, the distinctiveness of the train ride films' viewpoint, when compared with still photographs of the bridge, signals the extent to which cinema was able to forge new ways of seeing and picturing. This is an issue which I will address in later chapters. The relative failure of Bitzer's bridge tower panorama film, when compared with the phantom ride perspective train films, can be seen as an example of where borrowing from established picturing conventions fails to engage with the anxieties about congestion and systematisation. In effect, Bitzer's elevated panning camera was demonstrating the extent to which such anxieties were below the radar, as it were, of established aesthetic conventions. Nevertheless, despite claims that the bridge ride films constituted a 'complete representation of a trip across the bridge', we do have to acknowledge what the films omit. For the masses of people who rode on the bridge railway on a daily basis, the 'crush' at the terminals would clearly have been part of the experience of systematisation. With the films, rather than beginning with views of passengers boarding the trains and ending with passengers alighting, the films start and end with the train in motion and thus ignore the congestion at the bridge terminals. The lack of congestion does, however, point to a rationale for producing the films.

Early cinema enjoyed a special relationship with the railroad, as shown by the number of railroad films from cinema's first decade listed in any film catalogue

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<sup>29</sup> To complete an account of Brooklyn Bridge films from cinema's first decade, perhaps as a rejoinder to the Edison Company's remaking of the Brooklyn Bridge film and its 'New Brooklyn' title, AM&B cameraman G. W. Bitzer filmed *New Brooklyn Bridge* (also titled *New Brooklyn Bridge Panorama*) in November 1902. According to Kemp Niver's description, Bitzer's camera overlooked the bridge, and "pans slowly taking in the first arch and cable supports. The pan stops, and the cameraman directs the camera from top to bottom" (1985: 220). As such, this version of a Brooklyn Bridge film does again seem to adopt the panoramic perspective we may have anticipated from the AM&B press reprints, albeit with the added twist of a pan then tilt.

from the period and the numerous types of railroad films from phantom rides to scenes of oncoming trains. This relationship often involved the commissioning of films to advertise newly opened routes which were then surreptitiously exhibited as 'scenic views'. As Lynne Kirby notes in a study of the film and railroad relationship, "if film was interested in the railroad, the railroad was just as interested in film" (1997: 21).<sup>30</sup> The bridge railway films could be interpreted as an example of this relationship, where the films function to advertise the newly modernised bridge railway and to bolster the Annual Report's claims for the success of the improvements to the bridge. In starting and ending with the trains in motion the films conveniently, as far as the Department of Bridges is concerned, ignore the problems of congestion at the terminals. For audiences viewing the bridge railway films, the lack of congestion points to the idea that early actualities functioned as a vicarious form of ersatz tourism. In this view, the films could be seen as providing a convincing picture of a train ride which is, however, removed from the experience of congestion. The films can therefore be cited as an example of the conflation of the real and the represented and thus an example of the 'spectacularisation' of everyday life. Early cinema's role in the conflation of the real and the represented is an issue I will address in later chapters. Here, I want to pursue a related vein of interpretation by analysing the bridge ride films alongside Wolfgang Schivelbusch's celebrated account of the experience of railroad travel.

Schivelbusch's monograph, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialisation of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, was a pioneering study of the relationship between the railroad passenger and modern modes of perception.<sup>31</sup> Essentially,

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<sup>30</sup> Indeed, in his autobiography Billy Bitzer claims that in return for filming railroad films, "[t]he camera operators received courtesy-free passage anywhere they wished to go". (Bitzer, 1973: 24).

<sup>31</sup> The 1986 study is an updated version of Schivelbusch (1979) *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. New York: Urizen Books.

Schivelbusch adopts a bottom-up conception of modernity, an approach followed by this study. Panoramic perception is, for Schivelbusch, a distinctly modern mode of perception which is mediated by the industrial technology of the railway.<sup>32</sup> When looking out of the railway carriage's compartment window "[t]he traveller perceived the landscape as it was filtered through the machine ensemble" (1986: 24). As the train sped to its destination, instead of a lingering Emersonian vista, for the railway passenger:

[t]he landscape that was seen in this way was no longer experienced intensively, discretely (as by Ruskin, the critic of rail travel), but evanescently, impressionistically - panoramically, in fact. (189)

In a concluding chapter on 'Circulation', Schivelbusch finds that panoramic perception "is perception based on a specific development stage of the circulation of commodities", where the traveller is a 'parcel' and the journey a 'commodity' (193). As such, in addition to providing an early example of an attempt to explore modernity in terms of everyday experience rather than through modernist commentators, Schivelbusch is also providing an early example of the now widely adopted commodification-of-culture approach to studies of this period.<sup>33</sup>

If we now apply Schivelbusch's approach to the Brooklyn Bridge railway example, the view from the bridge train compartment window and the bridge's cable and metal framework can be thought of as the 'machine ensemble' which 'filters' the view. With regard to Schivelbusch's idea of 'circulation', where the passenger is a 'parcel' and the journey a 'commodity', the three minute shuttle service over the Brooklyn Bridge seems to offer an exemplary model. As noted above, apart from experiments with through train services, the vast majority of

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<sup>32</sup> See Boyer, 1994: 41 and Kirby, 1997: 45 for examples of the use of Schivelbusch's study.

<sup>33</sup> Friedberg's 1993 study *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* provides an important example of this approach.



railway travel over the bridge in this period was in the form of the shuttle service, which involved boarding and alighting at the terminals at either end of the bridge. When considered as part of a longer journey, perhaps involving streetcars on either side of the bridge, the repetitive back and forth bridge train shuttle service exemplifies the idea of, if not literally circulation, the operation of a just one entity within the wider circulation of modes of transport. Moreover, the rush hour 'crush' involving long queues for tickets, queuing to board a train for a journey lasting just three minutes, then queuing to leave the destination terminal would seem to be an exaggerated example of the notion of the passenger being a 'parcel' and the journey a 'commodity'. In each example, then, the Brooklyn Bridge shuttle service can be thought of as an exemplary model for Schivelbusch's account of railway travel and modern modes of perception.

However, the 'view' that the bridge's 'machine ensemble' 'filters' relates to anxieties concerning transportation systems. Rather than the passenger constituting a commodified 'parcel', the journey to and from Manhattan and Brooklyn was, in a sense, negotiated both through accounts of and representations of the transportation system, and on a day-to-day basis by altering modes of transport. For example, in one of the many reports of passenger numbers, a May 1902 newspaper article entitled 'Bridge Passengers Counted' noted that the daily count was 295,000, and thus the bridge had reached a new capacity following electrification, and that more passengers crossed to Manhattan in the morning than returned to Brooklyn via the bridge in the evening (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1902: 2). The report concluded that passengers were choosing their mode of transport depending on congestion, "the inference being that they took the ferries in order to avoid the Park row crush" (2). In Schivelbusch's account the railway journey forms part of a mode of

modern perception where “[modern] vision no longer experienced evanescence: evanescent reality had become the new reality” (64). This mode of perception leads us back to the conception of modernity consisting of fleeting, ephemeral experience. In contrast, the Brooklyn Bridge railway journey and the films of the journey formed part of circulation, congestion and systematisation concerns. By taking place in a period of expanded time—the three minute duration of the films, or the journey—rather than an evanescent or fleeting time, transportation anxieties signal a need for a different conception of the experience of the modern, and a different conception of modernity.

In short, although Schivelbusch’s account of the railway journey begins by exploring everyday experience, he returns to, as Singer has it, a neurological conception of modernity by then interpreting the journey in relation to the commodification of culture. In the same way that applications of this conception of modernity to early cinema film-viewer relations tend to posit a rigid power over the audience model, Schivelbusch’s railway passenger is similarly held in a rigid power over the passenger model. It is a model where the passenger represents a ‘parcel’ and where the passenger’s view out of the compartment window is restricted to fleeting impressions. This is not a model which can account for either the Brooklyn Bridge train films or the bridge train journey. In Chapter 1, we noted Jonathan Crary’s concerns that ways of conceptualising modern subjectivity are dominated by the idea of “reception in a state of distraction”, and that, following this, perception tends to be characterised by the experiences of “fragmentation, shock and dispersal” (1999: 1). These are central concern for this study, given the evidence provided by the Brooklyn Bridge train films and journey. Crary’s response, to delineate regimes of attentive norms and practices, similarly fails to account for the cultural utility of the experience of the

bridge films for bridge train travellers coming to terms with new transportation systems.

The theme of systematisation will not, of course, provide an all encompassing explanation for the experience of the modern in New York. Clearly, the introduction of new modes of transport, or the building of skyscrapers (a theme for Chapter 4), could be positioned within a discussion of attitudes to progress.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, actuality cinema more generally could be considered alongside a modern appetite for reality, the preoccupation with realism across the fields of arts and sciences. For example, in Margaret Cohen's study of panoramic literature she explores a modern fascination with representing the everyday, using the work of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau as a touchstone (1995). For Cohen, early film audiences are "transported into [an] epistemological twilight of everyday genres", with cinema functioning to "unmoor the separation of reality from representation" (1995: 247). I will consider the relationship between reality and representation in the next chapter, especially how New York actuality films work to combine, rather than separate reality and representation. My point here is that, just as cinema operated within an "epistemological twilight" in its period of emergence, so actuality cinema remains in an epistemological twilight for modern day researchers.

For William Uricchio (as we saw in Chapter 1), there are "patterns" of early film production which are "outside of most reasonable explanatory paradigms" (1997: 128). The Brooklyn Bridge films provide a pattern of early film production, and

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<sup>34</sup> Implicitly, this study is about attitudes to progress expressed through filmmaking, newspaper reports and so on. As such, it could be argued there is a need to widen the study's coverage on this topic, to include examples of this richly contested topic. However, the underlying thesis concern—the neglect of actuality cinema—suggests otherwise. My strategy here, and elsewhere, is to locate actuality cinema within its (for want of a better term) vernacular domain, given that wider debates have hitherto not been productive in providing explanatory paradigms for this form of cinema.

a point of view on a system, which is largely outside of available explanatory paradigms. In essence, the forms of cultural interaction involved in coping with, or negotiating New York's transportation system through viewing the bridge ride films, defy explanation through available paradigms. Nevertheless, there is an emerging body of work which does hold the potential to provide a theory of cultural interaction applicable to actuality cinema. Across a number of fields, expansive conceptions of modernism acknowledge that responses to the modern are not confined to the domain of, for example, artists and writers but can also be usefully identified within popular, mass or media cultures. Shortly, in the final section of this chapter, I will discuss a 'vernacular' notion of modernism.

Expansive conceptions of modernism are allied to contextualised conceptions of modernity and modernisation. For example, in an introduction to *Cinema and Cultural Modernity* (2000), Gill Branston remarks that:

as several voices have suggested, the project of modernity in this area (cinema studies) is not 'completed' but needs to be rethought. It involves both 'within and against' moves: trying to think the aesthetic and formal lure of film in historical terms, and at the same time in relation to economics: trying to rethink terms which are devalued by overuse, but will not go away, such as realism. (5)

As the title of her monograph indicates, Branston questions the specificity of conventional conceptions of modernity; hence, the notion of 'cultural modernity'. A logical corollary of expansive notions of modernism is that the works of the familiar cannon of *modernist* cultural commentators—Baudelaire, Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin—may not provide the key sources for updated conceptions of modernity and modernisation. In effect, the 'project of modernity' to which Branston refers involves a rethinking of the terms modernisation, modernity and modernism and of the relationship between them. This project is implicit within what Singer terms early cinema's New York

School. In an overview of the School's concerns, which Keil adopts as a working definition of their work (Keil, 2004: 51-52), Singer identifies a shared interest in:

unearthing or rethinking cinema's emergence within the sensory environment of urban modernity, its relationship to late nineteenth century technologies of space and time, and its interactions with adjacent elements in the new visual culture of advanced capitalism. (2001: 102)

As such, Singer is alluding to a conception of the modern consisting of a relationship between modernity: a 'sensory', urban 'environment'; modernisation: 'technologies of space and time'; and modernism: 'interactions with adjacent elements in the new visual culture'. Of course, terms for describing or defining the modern are notoriously illusive or, as Singer has it, "inherently broad and ambiguous" (2001: 19). Nevertheless, with regard to the Brooklyn Bridge example, considering the modern in terms of modernity: systematisation; modernisation: the electrification of the bridge; and modernism: the filmic and newspaper coverage of the bridge, is a necessary step to understanding a side of actuality cinema which is largely outside of available explanatory paradigms. However reductive or causally simplistic such a formulation may seem, it is useful for this chapter's underlying purpose of identifying a conception of the modern which can accommodate the Brooklyn Bridge films and examples in the chapters that follow.

### **Cinema and the Modern: 'Reinventing Cinema'**

Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams' anthology, *Reinventing Film Studies* (2000), provides a source for attempts to delineate a vernacular form of modernism. The anthology is an ambitious attempt to 'open up' and animate the field of film studies by introducing "new questions and new knowledge" (1). In so doing, the anthology provides an array of interrelated approaches which intersect with this study's attempts to rethink the cultural role of early cinema

and its relationship with the modern. Thus, the approaches within the anthology provide a way of overcoming the dominance impasse which at each step—with regard to the attractions thesis; the neurological conception of modernity; early cinema’s modernity thesis; and Schivelbusch’s study—has worked to deny the cultural interaction posited by the Brooklyn Bridge railway films. The approaches cohere around five main themes identified by the anthology’s editors, Gledhill and Williams. Firstly, an overarching theme of the anthology’s essays is to relocate film within popular and mass culture, by acknowledging the location of film studies within an interdisciplinary setting which intersects with media studies, cultural studies and visual culture studies. In so doing, a central aim is to “produce a theory *for* the mass rather than *about* them” (Gledhill and Williams, 2000: 1. Authors’ italics). Secondly, by engaging with the ‘massness’ of modernity, many of the essays “confront the need to take account of movie-going as a concrete, physical experience with distinctive, and historically changing, sensory appeal”, and to “locate this physical-sensory appeal as the very hallmark of modernism” (2). Thirdly, whereas a suspicion of the massness of cinema produces a reliance on the notion of ‘dominance’ and associated binarisms of “progressive versus reactionary texts”, a ‘dialogical’ conception of cinema enables an approach which conceives of the medium as “constituting arenas of exchange and negotiation” (2). Moreover, this is an approach which can, “reinfuse aesthetic concepts such as realism ... with analytic purchase on the cinema’s location within mass culture”, and thus elaborate the ways in which cinema functions as a “public sphere” (2). Fourthly, through a ‘return to history’ and by integrating the above themes of massness and publicness, Gledhill and Williams argue that many of the essays in the anthology point to the need for a “reinvention of the very concept of cinema” (3). Fifthly, by acknowledging the different national contexts for modernisation and by adopting the dialogic

conception of cinema, the medium and its study can be rethought as a “site of international exchange” (3).

This is an impressive array of themes and clearly the anthology’s editors are serious in their use of the term ‘reinventing’. In the case of the Brooklyn Bridge films, Gledhill and Williams’ emphasis on the need to adopt a bottom up approach that takes account of the sensory aspects of cinema and, in consequence, address cinema’s dialogic role within an arena of negotiation, points to the potential usefulness of the anthology. The anthology editors’ underlying urge to rein back film analysis to the basic building blocks of cultural analysis such as the relationship between modernity, modernisation and modernism is, however, a measure of the task faced by such analyses. Miriam Bratu Hansen’s essay from the anthology, ‘The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism’, can provide an example. Initially, however, I want to trace the origins of Hansen’s essay in her earlier works.

Hansen’s research output since the late 1980s has been influential for this study, particularly for exploring early cinema’s cultural role. For example, in an *October* essay, ‘Reinventing the Nickelodeon: Notes on Kluge and Early Cinema’ (1988), Hansen outlined a case for investigating the view that early cinema functioned as a form of ‘public sphere’ for its audiences. Hansen’s concept of the public sphere involves the concept of ‘publicness’ and was developed from Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge’s reappropriation of Jürgen Habermas’ influential works on the history of public discourse.<sup>35</sup> Importantly, in Negt and Kluge’s usage, the German origin of the term public sphere,

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<sup>35</sup> Negt and Kluge (1993) *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*; Habermas (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*; Calhoun, ed. (1992) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*.

*öffentlichkeit*, involves a range of meanings which, according to Hansen in what became a foreword to Negt and Kluge's study, "elude its English rendering as 'public sphere'" (Hansen, 1993: 179). As a spatial concept, Hansen goes on to explain, *öffentlichkeit* implies "the social sites or arenas where meanings are articulated, distributed, and negotiated" (179). Furthermore, Hansen continues, the German term "also denotes an ideational substance or criterion – '*glasnost*' or openness", which is produced within the site of the public sphere (179). Hence, Hansen adopts the term publicness. Moreover, in a sense, publicness can be thought of as allied to the Soviet use of the term 'attractions' and the "liberation popular entertainment offered" within the political dimension of Gunning's original attraction thesis (Gunning, 1986: 66).

The context for Negt and Kluge's work was an emerging alternative film and new media culture in Germany in the 1960s and the potential that new uses of media could offer in providing new 'horizons' of social experience, in providing new public spheres. Hansen then applied the view that new media could offer new horizons of experience to early cinema in a book length study *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (1991). Accordingly, Hansen argues that:

I am interested in formations of spectatorship primarily in terms of their function as public horizons, as structural conditions for the articulation and reflection of experience. (1991: 24)

In what was essentially a study of film-viewer relations, Hansen goes on to stress a distinction between early audiences and the eventual cinema 'spectator' which, as a concept, "emerged along with the set of codes and conventions that has been analysed as the classical Hollywood cinema" (23). By contrast, in the first decade, cinema "provided the *formal* conditions for an alternative public sphere, a *structural* possibility of articulating experience in a communicative, relatively



autonomous form”, according to Hansen (90. Hansen’s italics). The emphasis is significant in that Hansen was delineating a theoretical conception of early film-viewer relations which was loosely tied to films from the period.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in a 1995 essay in the Charney and Schwartz anthology, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Hansen follows the overall trend in the anthology of not applying analysis to films. The essay’s timeframe is, however, different from Hansen’s earlier work.

In ‘America, Paris, the Alps: Kracauer (and Benjamin) on Cinema and Modernity’ (1995), Hansen shifts her attention to a study of cinema’s relation to a history of sense perception in the ‘mass’ modernity of the 1920s and 1930s. Importantly, Walter Benjamin is bracketed in the essay’s title to signal a move away from a “nineteenth century genealogy of modernity” (1995: 366). Hansen’s contention is that Benjamin’s take on Baudelaire’s Paris is often used to “elide the specifically twentieth-century dimensions of both cinema and modernity” (366). Instead, and by using Benjamin’s work as a contrast, Hansen attempts to delineate the “competing modernities” in Kracauer’s work (367). Moreover, in relation to the struggles over the meaning of modernity, cinema was, for Hansen, “the single most expansive discursive horizon in which the effects of modernity were reflected, rejected or denied, transmuted or negotiated” (365). Kracauer’s ambivalence towards American modernity aside, in employing the idea of cinema operating as a horizon of social experience, Hansen concludes that Kracauer’s hoped-for German modernity would have included a cinema which functioned as an “intersubjective horizon” in which a mass public “could negotiate and reflect upon the contradictions they were experiencing” (389). In Hansen’s contribution to the Gledhill and Williams anthology, the 1995 essay’s

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<sup>36</sup> Film analysis in Hansen’s study is largely confined to the later period and the emergence of the cinema spectator. For example, see section II of the study, ‘Babel and Babylon: D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916)’.

timeframe and the notion of cinema functioning as a 'horizon' for negotiation are maintained but the underlying subject shifts to a vernacular conception of modernism.

If considered outside of the context of Hansen's earlier work and the context of the Gledhill and Williams anthology, the vernacular modernism essay could be seen as somewhat speculative. In reassessing the 'juncture' of cinema and modernism, Hansen's purpose is to explore what "cinema studies can contribute to our understanding of modernism and modernity", and conversely, to look at how "the perspective of modernist aesthetics may help us elucidate and reframe the history and theory of cinema" (2000b: 332). Hansen's first move is to formulate an inclusive conception of modernism, one which can include all cultural practices. In this regard, Hansen's claim is that modernism involves a tendency to blur institutional boundaries, and, as a corollary, all cultural and artistic practices that "register, respond to, and reflect upon processes of modernisation and the experience of modernity" are within the remit of modernism (333). Secondly, in paraphrasing Benjamin, Hansen claims that a "history and economy of sensory perception" formed the "decisive battleground for the meaning and fate of modernity", and she argues for an expanded notion of modernist aesthetics which can "encompass cultural practices that both articulated and mediated the experience of modernity" (333). In then producing a list of practices, such as advertising, radio and cinema, Hansen adopts the term vernacular to combine "the dimension of the quotidian, of everyday usage, with connotations of discourse, idiom, and dialect, with circulation, promiscuity, and translatability" (333). In Hansen's schema, any cultural practice or medium which engages with modernity and modernisation can potentially be conceived as modernist.

An all inclusive conception of modernism runs the risk of diluting the concept beyond any meaningful usage. Moreover, the value of exploring vernacular forms could be thought to depend upon establishing their engagement with or influence over a wider sphere of culture. However, Hansen's underlying purpose of restoring 'historical specificity' to the concept of classic Hollywood cinema demonstrates the potential of the concept of vernacular modernism. By drawing on her earlier work on Kracauer and cinema's reflexive relation with modernity and modernisation, and Negt and Kluge and the formation of alternative public spheres, Hansen's claim is that slapstick comedy films provide but one example of where Hollywood cinema's cultural role was in providing a "global sensory vernacular" (344). Hansen is therefore claiming to account for American cinema's worldwide appeal in terms of a "transnational and translatable resonance", in that its role was in "mediating competing cultural discourses on modernity and modernisation, because it articulated, multiplied, and globalized a particular historical experience" (2000b: 340-341). In short, by operating at the level of the senses, classical Hollywood cinema could operate across national boundaries and be translated over time.

Slapstick comedy films are an extreme example and one aimed at a particular target, namely David Bordwell's long-held and often fervently defended claims that classical Hollywood cinema operated in terms of hard-wired cognitive structures and transhistorical aesthetic norms. Scholarly politics aside, however, the usefulness of Hansen's concept of vernacular modernism can be gauged by its integration within the field. Firstly, by considering cinema as a mass medium, by addressing cinema's sensory appeal with regard to issues of exchange and negotiation and by 'reinventing' classical Hollywood cinema in terms of international exchange, Hansen is combining all of the five main themes from the Gledhill and Williams anthology. Secondly, by reinvigorating the idea of

cinema's publicness through the concept of vernacular modernism, Hansen is building on her earlier influential work. Thirdly, by pursuing culture at the level of the vernacular and as a sensory medium, Hansen is engaging with a burgeoning nexus of research. Current research into vernacular visuality, vernacular modernity and work on historicising the vernacular provide, across a range of fields, an important context for Hansen's essay.<sup>37</sup> As a measure of the subsequent influence of Hansen's work, a conference was held in May 2002 which was organised solely to discuss and evaluate Hansen's concept of vernacular modernism. A conference report published in *Screen* noted that by providing an alternative to universalising theoretical paradigms, the conference "marks an important step in our ability to draw productive historical and theoretical correlations" between diverse contexts (Askari and Yumibe, 2002: 437). In short, the importance of Hansen's concept of vernacular modernism is in its crystallising of a set of related and emerging research themes.<sup>38</sup>

As for the 'translatability' of Hansen's work to this study, my purpose is to locate an explanatory paradigm which is allied, at least, to finding ways of conceptualising the forms of cultural interaction posited by New York actuality cinema. Of course, there are problems with adopting terms which Hansen uses, in part, rhetorically. For example, whereas Hansen appears to use the term vernacular to contentiously signal a distinction from rarefied forms of modernism, in its wider usage the term commonly refers to folk cultures.<sup>39</sup> Also,

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<sup>37</sup> For research concerning vernacular visuality see recent work by W.J.T. Mitchell, for vernacular modernity see Branston (2000), for research concerning historicising the vernacular see recent work by Anne Friedberg. See also Hansen's 2000 essay 'Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film As Vernacular Modernism'.

<sup>38</sup> Hansen's work is not, however, welcomed in all areas of cinema studies. For example, Charlie Keil takes exception to Hansen's account of classicism and derides her concept of vernacular modernism: "[i]n many ways this is a move one could have predicted" (2004: 62). Keil refers to a 1999 version of Hansen's essay: "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism" *Modernism/Modernity* 6, No. 2 (1999): 59-77.

<sup>39</sup> For example, see the 'The Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture' hosted by the Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/english/activities/lavc/> (accessed February

engaging with Hansen's ambitious attempt to reconceptualise modernism is clearly problematic within a thesis-length study of early cinema. Nevertheless, the identification of parallel research in related fields works to bolster the overall thrust of this study. In a report of a University of London Symposium devoted to Hansen's work, 'Film: The First Global Vernacular?', Mike Hammond sees Hansen's conception of the modern as:

encompass[ing] the functional impact and the affect of an everyday aesthetic produced by modernisation and its products: design, consumer culture generally, and mass entertainment, on the material experience and texture of living. (Hammond, 2004: 355)

In Hammond's formulation, the bridge train ride films could be thought to involve an "aesthetic produced by modernisation", where the "functional impact" on the "material experience" of living in Brooklyn is to enable, what Hansen terms, a "negotiation" of new transportation systems. More widely, the central idea in Gledhill and Williams' anthology of cinema 'constituting arenas of exchange and negotiation' in relation to the experience of modernity and modernisation works to undercut the dominance impasse, the power over the audience paradigm, which underpins the conventional critical reception of actuality cinema. Aside from bolstering this study's overall thrust, Hansen's work provides one concept which is manageable in the following chapters: that of negotiation.

In Chapter 1 we saw how the extended, rather than fleeting, temporality of actuality cinema involved a visuality, a thickened way of seeing consistent with a thickened present time. For the question of what happens in that time, whereas a temporality of instants tends to be allied to a dominance, power over the

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23<sup>rd</sup> 2005). Similarly, within the realm of architecture, as Carol Willis notes, the term vernacular "usually applies to structures of relatively small scale, often domestic, which are less *designed* than *evolved* in response to functional demands and the particulars of place (Willis, 1995: 7. Willis' italics).

audience model of film-viewer relations, an extended temporality holds the potential to enable a form of cultural negotiation. This theme consistently appears in Hansen's work and can be drawn from the above quoted sources. In relation to conceptualising cinema as a public sphere, Hansen's notion of publicness involves "arenas where meanings are articulated, distributed, and negotiated" (1993: 179). With Hansen's formulation of a history of sense perception, cinema is a "horizon" where "the effects of modernity were reflected, rejected or denied, transmuted or negotiated" (1995: 365). Similarly, in relation to an expansive notion of modernism, Hansen's concern is to identify cultural practices which "register, respond to, and reflect upon processes of modernisation and the experience of modernity" (2000: 333). Within a New York actuality cinema context, negotiation is allied to the theme of coming-to-the-city, or—for Brooklynites travelling on the bridge train—going from the city to the metropolis. Stereotypically, the coming-to-the-city theme relates to appropriate urban behaviour, such as avoiding the air grate in the film *What Happened on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York City*. More pointedly for Brooklynites using the Brooklyn Bridge, appropriate urban behaviour involves conceptualising or visualising and functioning within a new transportation system. In effect negotiating here is "succeeding in dealing with" (OED, 1989).

Establishing that actuality films enable a form of negotiation signals that such films do not wholly function in the service of, for example, regimes of attentiveness, commodification or spectacularisation. In one sense, this returns us to the politics of Gunning's original 'attractions' thesis, but with a different conception of actuality cinema. Whereas Gunning's analysis sought political potential within a montage-like series of visual shocks, the political potential of the New York actuality cinema analysed in this study is in extended periods of time. In the chapters that follow I will use the term negotiation as shorthand for

forms of cultural interaction involved in negotiating the experience of the modern. With regard to adopting the term vernacular as a description of a cultural realm, to avoid folk culture connotations I will use the broader term cultural in relation to an expansive notion of modernism: hence, cultural modernism. For this study's purposes, New York provides an especially productive context for an inclusive conception of modernism.

### **Cultural Modernism in New York: 'Heliographic Effects'**

In *New York Modern: The Arts and the City* (1999), William B. Scott and Peter M. Rutkoff describe the unfolding influence of modernism over New York artists in the period from the 1870s to the 1970s. According to Scott and Rutkoff, what is termed 'New York Modern' emerged from "the confluence of a long-standing tradition of urban realism, a more recently arrived European modernism, and the ever present, ever changing American vernacular" (xvii). In effect, "New York artists created an artistic culture that redefined 'the modern'" (xvii). Their use of the terms modernism and vernacular is, however, very different from Hansen's. For example, the 'American vernacular' relates to a generic American style rather than, as in Hansen's usage, an inclusive notion which attempts to elide categorisation. Moreover, 'modernism' is, for Scott and Rutkoff, a distinctly European influence which rejects realism, historicism and thus mimetic art. Furthermore, it is an art which 'insisted' that art "should not correspond to sensory experience" (xix). The 'Modern' in the title of Scott and Rutkoff's book is thus meant to signal a 'redefined', specifically New York response *to* modernism. It is, however, a response which is couched in terms of distinctive ties between art and the city and between art and commerce and technology, ties which are characteristic of New York art.

For New York's intermedial matrix, realist and urban influences characterise the sphere of artistic production. In effect, the reach of intermediality extended from journalism to painting. Within the period of cinema's emergence, what became known as the Ashcan School of artists provides an example of realist and urban New York art which is closely tied to journalism. In the introduction to *Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and their New York* (1995) Rebecca Zurier and Robert W. Snyder describe the 'distinctive viewpoint' on New York adopted by the Ashcan artists. As for their influences and relationship with the vernacular which Hansen describes, according to Zurier and Snyder, all of the Ashcan artists were:

intimately acquainted with journalistic illustration and its claims to represent reality. All of them admired Walt Whitman, a former newspaperman whose poetry celebrated the lives of ordinary Americans. (Zurier and Snyder, 1995: 14)

Hansen's concept of vernacular modernism is expansive and inclusive and does not attempt to make distinctions between vernacular modernism and aesthetic modernism. Within the specific New York context—where Ashcan painters were 'intimately acquainted' with journalism—it would be problematic to make such distinctions. As such, identifying a clear difference between vernacular modernism and, for example, a modernist use of the vernacular is, in the New York context, hardly the point. What is at issue, is whether so-called vernacular forms, such as actuality films or newspaper reports, can usefully be considered a response to the modern which provide, in Hansen's terms, a means to 'negotiate' the experience of the modern. A 1902 Brooklyn newspaper report demonstrates an intermedial matrix which both questions attempts to make distinctions between vernacular and aesthetic modernism and suggests the 'negotiation' role that Hansen describes.



Outside of its context, the ‘Heliographic Effects’ article [Fig. 2.8] could be dismissed as an example of journalistic hyperbole, or generically as an example of flotsam and jetsam from a period in which inhabitants were naïvely attracted to the modernness of their new surroundings. However, in the same way that early films from this period do not, as it were, speak for themselves, the ‘Heliographic Effects’ article requires context. The article is situated on the back page of a Tuesday edition of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and is surrounded by a report of an attempted suicide, another of a chess match, the local weather forecast and a headline article entitled ‘Redfield to Complete the Sewers of Flatbush’. Rather than being a page-filler on an inside section, the ‘Heliographic Effects’ report is situated alongside factual local news. The article was not unusual, however, in providing a commentary on the view across the East River and therefore advice for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle’s* readers on how to see the emerging New York skyline. To quote just one other example of this commentary, a *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* December 1902 article entitled ‘The Annual Spectacle’ recommended that readers stand on Brooklyn Bridge at around 6:00 p.m. on a weekday evening to witness the sight of the lights in the office windows of Manhattan skyscrapers (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1902: 4).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For a *New York Times* example, an 1899 article advised readers that the “best view of the city” could be had by crossing the Wall Street ferry to Brooklyn. The view of Manhattan’s skyscrapers was described in terms of “modern Byzantium Towers” (February 4<sup>th</sup> 1899: 75).

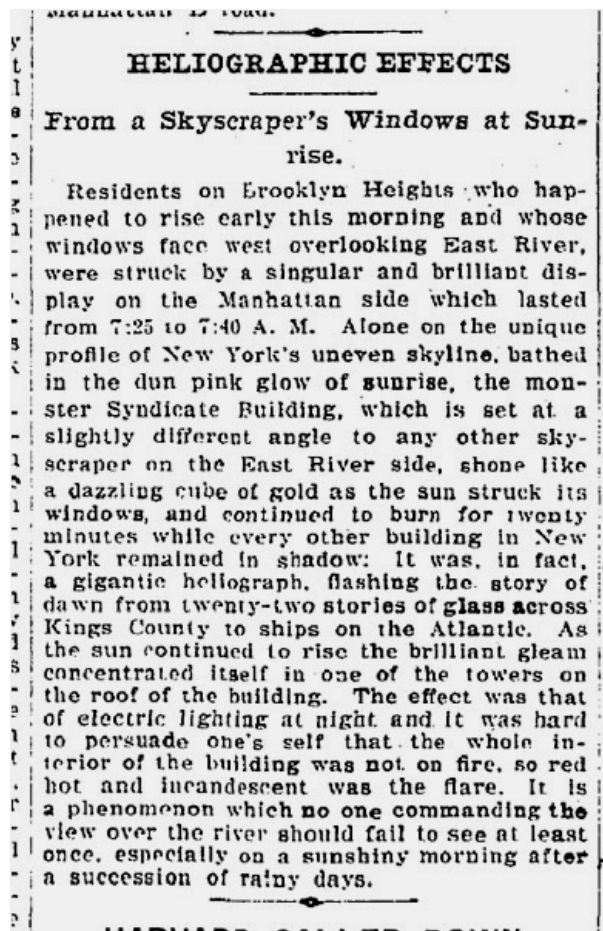


Fig. 2.8 'Cutting' from *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* January 28th 1902: 20.

In the 'Heliographic Effects' article, the skyscraper which reflected the sunlight, the 'monster Syndicate Building' was another name used at the time for the twin-towered Park Row Building (Landau and Condit, 1996: 252).<sup>41</sup> Situated at 15 Park Row, overlooking City Hall Park in the southern tip of Manhattan island, the Park Row Building was '[a]lone on the unique profile of New York's uneven skyline' given it was from its completion in 1899, and until the construction of the Singer Tower in 1908, the tallest office building in the world. At thirty stories and with a height of 391 feet, the Park Row Building's 'slightly different angle' was due to the forty-five degree angle at which Park Row is located in

<sup>41</sup> In this pre-radio period the heliograph, or 'sun telegraph', had common currency as a military device which used a mirror and shutter mechanism to transmit messages over large distances in Morse Code by reflecting sunlight.

relation to Broadway and the adjacent cross-streets.<sup>42</sup> The ‘towers on the roof of the building’ are the two distinctive fifty-four feet tall dome shaped towers on top of the building’s front tower, although in being over a mile away the towers would have been somewhat less distinctive from Brooklyn Heights. In terms of the critical reception of the Park Row Building, in 1898 the *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, a New York trade magazine which supported the interests of real estate developers, criticised the building’s blank side walls as “inexpressive and vacuous” and hoped that “no more [such] monsters will be allowed to rear themselves in New York” (cited in Landau and Condit, 1996: 256). The building, and in particular its ‘inexpressive and vacuous’ side walls, did, however, become an important subject for a wide range of modernist painters and photographers such as Alvin Langdon Coburn, Joseph Pennell, John Marin and Charles Sheeler.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the article’s context, the idea that the reflection of sunlight from a building’s windows constituted local news remains, from a later perspective, somewhat jarring. That such seemingly mundane occurrences warranted reporting in terms of ‘flashing’ a message ‘across Kings County to ships in the Atlantic’ does, however, point to a willingness to visualise a building in relation to its ability to represent. In addition, although from an architectural theory or an aesthetic perspective buildings do, of course, have a representational function, a newspaper article within a local news page is an unlikely source for a representational discussion. Furthermore, can the ‘Heliographic Effects’ report be thought to look both ways, to aesthetic responses to the city with the notion of a ‘gigantic heliograph, flashing the story of dawn’, and to vernacular responses

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<sup>42</sup> Rather than thirty stories, the ‘Heliographic Effects’ article comments on the ‘twenty two stories of glass’. Given the height of surrounding buildings it may have been that only twenty-two stories were visible from Brooklyn Heights.

<sup>43</sup> See for example Rawlinson, 2002: 57-65.

to the city with the detailed commentary on how to see the city from Brooklyn Heights? As such, in the same way that the Brooklyn Bridge railway films were part of systematisation concerns, could the ‘Heliographic Effects’ report can be considered as part of, for example, vernacular visualising or seeing the city concerns? The similarities to actuality, filmic responses to the urban environment would suggest so.

The use of the term ‘monster’, where the ‘Heliographic Effects’ report refers to the ‘monster Syndicate Building’, could be seen as a reference to the negative reaction to the Park Row Building within New York real estate circles. In providing a positive response to the view the building creates, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* report reappropriates the view of the building from a Brooklyn, or Brooklyn Heights perspective. The report also provides a prescient account of what became an important vantage point for seeing the New York skyline. At 391 feet tall the Park Row Building barely rises above the New York skyline, as shown in Plate 2, whereas later skyscrapers such as the 1908 Singer Tower (612 feet) and the 1913 Woolworth Building (792 feet) provided the beginnings of what became an iconic view of the New York skyline from Brooklyn Heights.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, vantage points were also a subject for early filmmakers. Moreover, the similarities between the ‘Heliographic Effects’ report and New York actualities extend beyond composition.

In the same way that the Brooklyn Bridge films are based on a sustained view of the bridge structure—including the two minute ride through the ‘inclosed structure’—the Park Row Building report is based on a fifteen minute, ‘7:25 to 7:40 A. M.’, view of the heliographic ‘phenomenon’. Rather than being based on

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<sup>44</sup> In the lower right woodcut image in Plate 4, the twin-domed Park Row Building is shown to the left of the Brooklyn Bridge towers. From a Brooklyn Heights viewpoint, rather than being below the bridge towers, later skyscrapers rose significantly above the height of bridge towers.

fleeting views of the urban environment, both the newspaper report and the films are based on studied views. In addition to the timing and duration of the view, despite the distance between the building and Brooklyn Heights, the report's detailed account of the Park Row Building's 'angle' and the 'towers on the roof', confirm its actuality-like description of the view. As we have seen in the introductory chapter, the idea of film functioning as a form of visual newspaper is but one of the many roles early film is thought to have assumed in the first decade of cinema. In being actuality-like, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* report indicates a two-way dialogue between newspaper reports and films in terms of issues of seeing-the-city or how-to-see-the-city. These issues and their constituent visual forms, such as postcards, posters, stereo photographs and films will be a subject of Chapter 4.

For Brooklynites watching the bridge ride films, the need to cope with or negotiate the experience of the new transportation system was also paralleled by the need to cope with, understand and, ultimately, negotiate the experience of watching moving pictures on screen. In the next chapter I will consider this theme in relation to the realism of actuality films. Gunning celebrated early cinema's "exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption", the "freedom from the creation of diegesis", in his 1986 attractions essay. Along with its extended temporality, the actuality cinema we will consider also involved a coherent world on screen, a representation of space and time that was expected from the new moving picture machine.

## Chapter 3

### Research Context: Early Cinema

Within a study which claims to identify previously unidentified cultural and cinematic roles for New York actuality cinema, there is a need to address *why* these roles have hitherto been overlooked. Accordingly, Chapter 1 considered the conventional visual understanding of actuality films and proposed a revised visual conception based in the notion of actuality cinema as a technology of simultaneity. In Chapter 2, following a discussion of early cinema's modernity thesis, I sought alternative explanatory models which could account for the Brooklyn Bridge train films episode, such as the idea that actuality films constitute a form of vernacular, or cultural modernism. In this chapter I want to argue that another underlying reason why New York actuality cinema's roles have hitherto been largely overlooked relates to the ways in which cinema's emergence has been conceptualised. More specifically, I want to argue that conceptualisations of cinema's emergence tend to downplay or prohibit a recognition of the newness of actuality film mediation, and in so doing tend to elide the cultural and cinematic roles identified in this study.

To be sure, a medium that emerges within an intermedial culture will be a product of that culture. Logically, within an intermedial matrix, all media are mixed media and thus the notion of a 'new medium' is incongruous in this setting. Cinema emerges within the context of an array of screen practices and optical devices which involve the representation of movement, albeit in simplistic ways in comparison to cinema. Many early filmmakers, such as Robert Kates Bonine, employ their prior photographic expertise in the making of films. The use of visual cues from stereoscopic practices is a significant component of both filmmaking and what was expected to be seen by audiences. As Simon

Popple and Joe Kember argue, “early film can be seen as the apex of nineteenth-century entertainments – even as the epitome of representational media at the fin-de-siècle” (2004: 34). In one sense, rather than constituting a primitive beginning, New York actuality cinema in the period up to around 1905 can be considered a sophisticated endpoint of late nineteenth and early twentieth century visual culture. Nevertheless, the projection of moving pictures onto a screen constituted a new experience, a new way of seeing and visualising the world. The correspondence presented between the world as experienced and the world projected on screen was itself a new experience. For early audiences, actuality cinema constituted a new form of mediation between representation and the world as experienced.

Questioning conceptualisations of cinema’s emergence is a theme which results from identifying complexity in cinema’s early years. If early cinema’s dominant form—actuality cinema—is considered as simple filmic snap-shots or registrations of actuality that function as analogues of the shocks and jolts of urban life, then emergence is hardly an issue. Given cinema’s intermedial emergence context, the medium is not conventionally seen as new in any significant sense. Rather, it is an outgrowth of existing representational forms. Conversely, in finding complexity in how films were made, seen and their role, explanations for emergence and, as we will see in Chapter 5, its demise, become more significant.

Understanding the period of cinema’s emergence in relation either to what preceded or what followed, and thus whether or not cinema constitutes a new medium, has long been problematic for cinema historians. To an extent the problem relates to early cinema’s heterogeneity. In terms of the many different types of films or the many purposes envisaged for cinema, the heterogeneity of

early cinema does not easily yield to arguments which posit a single line of development. A tension exists between attempts to explain cinema's emergence through establishing lines of continuity and early cinema's resistance to arguments which posit a single line of development. In section one, an account of how cinema's emergence has been conceptualised, I will identify how lines of continuity have been drawn between pre-cinema, early cinema and later cinema.<sup>1</sup> Section two provides a detailed analysis of the premiere of commercial screen projection in America. A British film, *Rough Sea at Dover* (Acres, 1895), was the star attraction at the New York premiere and offers an opportunity to return to Uricchio's notion of 'rocks and waves' films. Acres' film presents an example of what Charles Musser terms an 'unexpected congruence' between the world on screen and the world as experienced: in effect, Acres' film is an example of the beginnings of an actuality cinema which fulfils, what Uricchio terms, a late nineteenth-century concern for 'liveness'. In section three, I will consider the subsequent emergence of actuality cinema in New York. Another transportation system film, a film of the dangers of streetcar travel at New York's notorious Dead Man's Curve, signals the beginnings of actuality cinema's role as a visual newspaper. Lastly, in section four, I want to propose that, following Noël Burch, a conception of early cinema as a detour provides a useful model of actuality cinema's emergence.

### **Conceptualising Cinema's Emergence**

Historiographically, and perhaps not surprisingly in the light of cinema's predominant course through the twentieth century, narrative provided an initial model for interpreting cinema's emergence. In contrast to the notion of heterogeneity and thus the complexity of early cinema, the narrative approach to

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the term 'continuity' in this context should not be confused with 'continuity narrative' techniques.



cinema's emergence began in the post-Brighton era of early cinema research with a 'primitive' model of early cinema.<sup>2</sup>

Kristin Thompson's essay 'From Primitive to Classical' in Bordwell et al *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (1985) is perhaps the most widely available account of cinema's emergence that labels cinema in the period from the 1890s to around 1906 as primitive.<sup>3</sup> Thompson's essay is situated within a book which aims to define Hollywood filmmaking in the period 1917 to 1960 as a "unified mode of film practice ... a coherent system [involving] aesthetic norms" (Bordwell et al, 1985: xiv). Moreover, understanding Hollywood's 'mode', 'system' and 'norms' is, for Bordwell et al, "indispensable to a full grasp of the art and industry of cinema as it has existed in history" (xiii). Given these ambitious claims, the story of 'primitive' cinema is told by Thompson in relation to the later 'normalisation' of classical narrative techniques, such as the gradual emergence of linear causality. Within this schema of early cinema's 'formal norms', 'documentaries' are acknowledged to have been the dominant form in the period to 1903, but the "apparent crudity" of these films is such that, "they seem of minimal interest today" (159). Documentaries are part of Thompson's schema in that the move to narrative, and therefore a move away from non-fiction, was a 'key factor' in the shift from primitive cinema to classical filmmaking (161). From this narrative perspective, the apparent formal simplicity of non-fiction cinema is interpreted as 'primitive' or 'crude' beginnings. In effect, the heterogeneity of early cinema

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<sup>2</sup> As noted in Chapter 1, the FIAF Brighton conference (1978) is the standard marker for the beginnings of present day early cinema research. For pre-Brighton influences, John L. Fell's *Film and the Narrative Tradition* (1974) is an account of cinema's emergence which, for example, links storytelling techniques identified in sets of stereo photographs to later cinema narrative techniques.

<sup>3</sup> Although Thompson prefaced her argument by claiming that the term 'primitive' was used in a non-pejorative sense, as Tom Gunning noted in a 1990 essay, the terms continued usage was hardly welcomed by early cinema researchers (Gunning, 1990b: 96).

is suppressed with the emergence of narrative techniques constituting the emergence of cinema's "more complex approach to filmmaking" (159).

Thompson initially cites vaudeville as a pre-cinema influence which provides a line of continuity through to later cinema; vaudeville "helped determine the genres and formal norms of the primitive cinema" (Bordwell et al, 1985: 159). Photographs and magic lantern slides are cited as an influence for pre-1902 non-fiction cinema, but only in terms of "nearly direct imitations of existing forms" (161). The shift to classical cinema is then 'caused' by a "change in influences from other arts, from an initial close imitation of vaudeville, to a greater dependence on short fiction, novels and legitimate drama" (161). Thompson thus identifies a shift away from the 'imitation' of pre-cinema forms as a point of emergence. As such, she downplays lines of continuity from pre-cinema forms and instead emphasises the continuities between post-1902 cinema and later cinema, within what is termed the gradual 'normalisation' of cinema to classical Hollywood norms.

Although written in the post-Brighton period, in being concerned with establishing transhistorical cinematic norms Thompson's account would not seem to be representative of the post-Brighton project. In focussing on post-1902 cinema she is, however, broadly following the timeframe set by the Brighton project. Nevertheless, a more accurate statement of the Brighton project's direction was provided by an anthology edited by Thomas Elsaesser, *Early Cinema: Space - Frame - Narrative* (1990). In a series of section introductions Elsaesser carefully sets out an agenda which includes establishing cinema's "codes of intelligibility" (Elsaesser, 1990: 11). These codes function within a history of film form which is "bound up with the development of 'narrative'" (153), and where, in a final section, the work of D. W. Griffith provides "the

ultimate challenge to the student of early cinema” (293). Although summarising Elsaesser’s detailed and influential section introductions is problematic, for our purpose of identifying lines of continuity, Elsaesser was following Thompson’s schema, albeit in a far more sophisticated manner. For example, rather than seeing the development of narrative as the “inevitable destiny” of cinema, narrative was seen as “the most economical solution” to issues surrounding the “representation of space and time”, and “the representation of the spectator within this space-time” (153). However, in attempting to provide a ‘systematic’ account of early cinema, Elsaesser also asserted in a ‘General Introduction’ that the anthology was a “precondition ... for a cultural archaeology of the new medium” (1). Charles Musser went some way to providing a grounding for an ‘archaeology’ of cinema in a chapter of his *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*, also published in 1990.

In an opening chapter entitled ‘Toward a History of Screen Practice’, Musser signals what was to become a major shift in early cinema research. In questioning the value of starting points for cinema, Musser suggests instead the need for “an alternative perspective, one that places cinema within a larger context of what we shall call the history of *screen practice*” (Musser, 1990: 15. Musser’s italics).<sup>4</sup> In terms of lines of continuity, “cinema appears as a continuation and transformation of magic lantern traditions” in Musser’s schema (15). Moreover, magic lantern traditions provide a pre-cinema history which stretches back to the mid-seventeenth century and the introduction of devices, such as Dutchman Thomas Walgensten’s ‘thaumaturgic’ lantern, which used glass slides, a light source and a lens, to project images onto a screen (20-21). Importantly, as Musser notes, such devices were used from the outset to produce

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<sup>4</sup> For an example of studies which, in a sense, bookend Musser’s approach, see C. W. Ceram *Archaeology of the Cinema* (1965), and more latterly Giuliana Bruno’s *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (2002).

both fictional narratives and documentary programs consisting of, for example, illustrated lectures of overseas tours (21). Musser goes on to provide what have become obligatory stopping off points for a history of screen practices, including Robertson's 'fantasmagorie' (1790s); the use of multiple slides and slip-slides which produced the impression of movement; the introduction of photographic slide images in the late 1840s; and, finally, by the 1870s, Eadweard Muybridge's photographic projection of animals in motion using a 'zoopraxiscope'.<sup>5</sup>

The growing panoply of devices and practices in the second half of the nineteenth century culminate in what could be thought of as near-cinematic exhibition practices. For example, Brooklynite Alexander Black's illustrated lectures in the early 1890s, with titles such as 'Life Through a Detective Camera', included slides from photographs of street scenes taken with a hidden camera (Musser, 1990: 40). Adopting what Musser terms "an aesthetic of seamless realism", Black then went on to produce two-hour 'picture plays' in 1894 using dissolving slide images projected at a rate of four per minute (40-41).<sup>6</sup> Within these examples, then, a powerful argument emerges to situate screen practices as precursors or antecedents to cinema, which anticipate the arrival of projected moving images.

Musser's 'screen practices' schema establishes lines of continuity from pre-cinema through to early cinema which straddle more than two centuries of pre-cinema devices and practices. In the succeeding chapters of *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* Musser provides an encyclopaedic account of early cinema, which is intended to then connect through to the second volume in a series, Eileen Bowser's *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907-1915*

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<sup>5</sup> For research on 'Phantasmagoria', see Castle (1988); for Muybridge, see Braun (1992).

<sup>6</sup> A comprehensive account of Black's 'picture plays' is provided by Burnes St. Patrick Hollyman's 'Alexander Black's Picture Plays, 1893-1894' in Fell, 1983.

(1990). As such, Musser's history of early cinema's emergence is an account which looks both back to precursors to cinema and forward to later narrative-dominated cinema. However, rather than referring back to screen practices when examining early cinema, there is little evidence of the integration of screen practices within Musser's account of early cinema.<sup>7</sup> In addition to helping to instigate a shift within early cinema research to the study of pre-cinema screen practices, Musser was also foreshadowing an important separation of early cinema and later cinema research within the cinema and modernity correlatives approach to cinema's emergence. The aforementioned Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz anthology *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (1995) provides a primary example of this approach.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Charney and Schwartz's anthology is a seminal effort to understand early cinema's correspondences with its modern setting. As precursors to cinema, the panoply of screen devices in Musser's account are augmented in the anthology's essays by panoramas, dioramas, wax museums, folk museums, shopping arcades, posters, mail-order catalogues and so on. The heterogeneity of early cinema is thus acknowledged by the sheer extent of pre-cinema influences, which extend to a range of exhibition contexts and modes of consumption. Furthermore, rather than merely consisting of practices or devices which are precursors to cinema, in being 'inherently cinematic', modernity is thought to anticipate cinema. For example, Tom Gunning claims that "cinema's place in a new logic of circulation had been anticipated by the commodification of still photographs" (1995b: 17). Such claims that modernity 'anticipated' cinema do tend to be diminished, however, by the lack of connections through to later cinema, or rather, by the separation of early and later cinema within the

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<sup>7</sup> Deac Rossell, 1998a: 35 n.21 also makes this point.

essays in the Charney and Schwartz's anthology. For one contributor to the anthology, at least, this separation is not seen as problematic.

For Miriam Bratu Hansen the lines of continuity between early and later cinema which were established in Thompson's account of classical Hollywood cinema have been detrimental to early cinema research. Consequently, since the mid-1980s early cinema researchers have been, according to Hansen, shifting the 'image' of cinema's past:

from one of a prologue or evolutionary stepping-stone to the cinema that followed (that is, classical Hollywood cinema and its international counterparts) to one of a cinema in its own rights, a different *kind* of cinema. (Hansen, 1995: 362. Hansen's italics)

Hansen's own purpose, as we saw in Chapter 2, is to shift the timeframe of the study of cinema and modernity into the 'mass' modernity of the twentieth century and in so doing, "to reconstruct the liberatory appeal of the 'modern' for a mass public" (365). Rather than establishing lines of continuity from early to later cinema, Hansen attempts to transplant an early cinema model of analysis into a later cinema context. However, in providing what has almost become a maxim for early cinema and modernity researchers, namely that early cinema is 'a different kind of cinema', Hansen is validating an approach that neglects the connections between early and later cinema. As we saw in Chapter 2, this neglect is an oversight which, for David Bordwell and Charlie Keil, with their emphasis on cinema's transformation to a narrative-oriented medium, tends to undermine the cinema and modernity approach.

In turning now to technology oriented accounts of cinema's emergence, Deac Rossell provides a recent example of an updating of Musser's screen practice approach. In an essay from a collection of papers from the *Celebrating 1895*

cinema centenary conference in 1995, Rossell presents a technological perspective on Musser's approach and claims that the magic lantern:

was not so much a 'precursor' of the cinema, as it was the environment into which cinema was born, the *milieu* which nursed it through its extended period of invention to about 1903 ... . (Rossell, 1998a: 29. Rossell's italics)

Although Rossell attempts to elevate the status of the magic lantern to that of antecedent to cinema, by limiting his approach to the period up to the early 1900s Rossell appears to reiterate the difficulty of establishing lines of continuity from early to later cinema. However, in a subsequent book-length study, *Living Pictures: The Origin of the Movies* (1998), he provides an important pointer to the underlying problem of how to establish these lines of continuity. Rossell claims that the book is "a first attempt to examine the early days of moving pictures from a nonlinear and multidirectional perspective" (1998b: 3). He "strongly contends", furthermore, that in cinema's first decade:

not only were moving picture entertainments as they have become known through the twentieth century invented during this period ... but also that several other kinds of moving picture were invented as well. (1998b: 3)

Although Rossell's technological perspective tends to limit the potential significance that his initial approach promises, the notion of early cinema consisting of many kinds of cinema is a significant move.

Rossell's list of 'kinds of moving picture', or "alternative proposals for moving pictures", includes cinema as 'family portraits', as 'an instrument of science', as 'a mechanical variety act', and as 'stereoscopic photography' (Rossell, 1998b: 3). For his history of cinema technology, the significance of the many different purposes envisaged for cinema is that they "directly influenced" the technological solutions for cinema, and account for the many devices that appeared in the 1890s (4). In clearly stating an anti-teleological approach to

cinema's emergence, he asserts that "the later resolution of the medium was only one of several possible results" (4). To an extent, Rossell is echoing a conclusion that Tom Gunning reached in a pre-attractions thesis early cinema essay written some two decades ago. In exploring lines of continuity between early cinema and later avant-garde filmmaking, Gunning concluded that, "early cinema offers a number of roads not taken, ambiguities not absorbed into commercial narrative cinema" (Gunning, 1983: 366). Rossell's notion of many 'kinds of moving picture' thus updates Hansen's aforementioned maxim in that early cinema can now be thought to consist of 'different kinds of cinemas'.

The idea of many early cinemas offers several significant revisions to the ways in which emergence is conceptualised. Firstly, and for our purpose of tracing lines of continuity, it is an idea that underlines the difficulty of establishing connections from pre-cinema devices and practices that extend through early cinema and on to later cinema. Thompson's narrative-oriented model of cinema's emergence does acknowledge different kinds of cinemas to an extent, if only to then relegate the non-fiction kind of cinema to a primitive type which is irrelevant to later cinema. However, the criticism of the correlations-with-modernity approach's downplaying of connections through to later cinema can be partly answered by Gunning's idea of 'roads not taken'. If many of the different kinds of early cinemas constitute roads not taken, we should not expect to always find lines of continuity through to later cinema. Rather, we should expect to find discontinuities between early and later cinema. Similarly, with lines of continuity from pre-cinema through to early cinema, the notion of many early cinemas undermines the expectation that continuities should always be found. Rather than viewing the identification of continuities as a measure of the success of an approach, the many cinemas approach also suggests the importance of identifying discontinuities between pre- and early cinema. Secondly, and as a



corollary, the many early cinemas approach underlines the need to establish *which* early cinema is being explored within conceptions of cinema's emergence. Rossell's list of 'kinds of moving picture' begins to demonstrate the extent of the many cinemas within the medium's, or perhaps media's, first decade. The heterogeneity of early cinema is thus relocated within the many kinds of early cinemas. However, the extent to which early non-fiction cinemas remain a "jungle like area", to quote Frank Kessler, is a measure of the incompleteness of the project of conceptualising cinema's emergence as many cinemas (Kessler, 2002: 221). Thirdly, the many cinemas approach significantly revises conceptions of cinema's emergence in that reintegrating discontinuities into emergence schemas reenergises the idea that early cinema could provide, in any of its many forms, a new form of mediation. Rather than involving naïve *tabula rasa* assumptions, identifying different configurations of purpose, exhibition format, prior media reuse and modes of representation, within the many types of non-fiction role for early cinema, ought to yield examples of new forms of mediation.

The three themes of, identifying discontinuities, establishing which early cinema is under investigation, and identifying configurations of early cinema which provide new forms of mediation can provide a broad agenda for the remainder of this chapter. We will return to ways of conceptualising cinema's emergence and to tracing lines of continuity from New York actualities through to later cinema in Chapter 5. As for discontinuities within cinema's emergence, an underlying theme has been the extent to which cinema is anticipated within pre-cinema forms. Anticipation is a key issue for identifying new forms of mediation in that, a lack of anticipation would underscore the newness of mediation.

The extent to which the representation of the late nineteenth century New York urban environment could have been anticipated is clearly an issue in the case of New York actualities, such as the Brooklyn Bridge films. The underlying point of Robert Hughes' claim that representing 'transformation and process' became the primary challenge for modern artists is that concepts such as process or system had not been represented before. Even if the modern urban environment is in a sense anticipated, its representation as processes or systems could not have been. For example, although Brooklyn Bridge was anticipated within panoramic drawings of New York, by being drawn years before its completion [Plate 4], it is difficult to see how the 1899 bridge train ride, the bridge train films and their significance alongside systematisation anxieties could be anticipated within such drawings. Rather, the New York actuality impulse could be thought of as an important site of the new mediation aspect to cinema's emergence. As for correspondences between cinema and modernity, we can now identify a correspondence between sites of the modern: Brooklyn Bridge is an important site of the modern in New York and New York actualities are a site of a new form of mediation within the broader emergence of cinema.

I now want to continue exploring the anticipation of cinema through an analysis of the lead up to and the debut of the Edison Vitascope projector in April 1896. Although the debut, as we shall see, was a carefully orchestrated event, the reaction to the films did not comply with expectations.

### **The Vitascope Premiere, New York, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1896**

The vitascope premiere was the culmination of American attempts to produce the first commercially viable system for projecting moving pictures onto a screen. However, in contrast to the more than two centuries of screen practices identified by Musser, or the long history through the nineteenth century of the development

of putatively pre-cinema exhibition practices such as panoramas and dioramas, the development of cinema as a technology is a somewhat compressed affair.

Although there are many claims to ‘firsts’, Louis Le Prince, a French engineer living in Leeds, England is usually acknowledged as the first person to devise a working motion picture camera.<sup>8</sup> Extant frames from Le Prince’s October 1888 view of traffic crossing Leeds Bridge provide, probably, the earliest surviving example of a film. 1888 was also the year in which Thomas Edison met Eadweard Muybridge, following a demonstration of the latter’s zoopraxiscope in Orange, New Jersey in February of that year.<sup>9</sup> By October 1888 Edison had begun pursuing the development of a motion picture system along the lines of the his phonograph system and famously claimed that “I am experimenting upon an instrument which does for the Eye what the phonograph does for the Ear” (cited in Musser, 1990: 64).<sup>10</sup> In early 1889 a ‘kinetoscope’ project to develop a camera and viewing device began at Edison’s West Orange, New Jersey laboratories.

Edison engineers W. K. L. Dickson and William Heise worked intermittently on the project for four years until the first public demonstration of a prototype peep-hole kinetoscope viewing device at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences on May 9<sup>th</sup> 1893. The kinetoscope consisted of a floor-mounted wooden box containing a battery-powered electric motor which fed a continuous loop of film past a light-source and lens. Members of the Brooklyn debut audience filed past the kinetoscope, each in turn peering into the wooden box to witness a twenty second view of a blacksmith scene, accordingly entitled *Blacksmith Scene*

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<sup>8</sup> See the ‘Louis le Prince Centre for Cinema, Photography and Television’, University of Leeds.

<sup>9</sup> The following account of the development of the kinetoscope is indebted to Musser, 1990: 63-89, 1995: 5-22, 1997: 655-661 and Rossell, 1998b: 79-102.

<sup>10</sup> See Tom Gunning’s essay ‘Doing for the Eye What the Phonograph Does for the Ear’ in Abel and Altman, eds., 2001: 13-30.

(Edison, 1893). Films were produced in a specially constructed 'studio', called the Black Maria: essentially a wooden shed which revolved to allow sunlight to be directed onto a filming area, or stage. By early 1894 thirty-three films had been produced, production models of the kinetoscope were ready and ten machines were installed in a store front at Holland Brothers, 1155 Broadway, near Herald Square, New York. In the year following the opening of Holland's kinetoscope 'parlour' on April 14<sup>th</sup> 1894 Edison's moving picture business flourished. By April 1895, a further ninety-five films had been produced, hundreds of kinetoscope viewing machines had been sold and 'parlours' had opened up across America and Europe. The following year, however, sales of the viewing devices and films declined; having produced the first commercially viable moving picture system, the emerging moving picture business moved on to screen projection machines.

Once the technical means to develop a film viewing device had been devised, albeit through a peep-hole in a floor mounted box, attempts to adopt this technology for the screen projection of film occurred simultaneously across America and Europe. Chronologically, the list of screen projection premieres in the year from March 1895 to February 1896 goes as follows: the Lumières' cinématographe, Lyon, France, March 1895; Latham's eidoloscope 'Magic Lantern Kinetoscope', New York, April 1895; C. Francis Jenkins and Thomas Armat's phantoscope, Cotton States Exposition, Atlanta, October 1895; Max Skladanowsky's bioscope, Berlin, Germany, November 1895 and; Robert W. Paul's theatrograph, London, England, February 1896. Within this list of projection machines there are significant technical developments such as a shift from the kinetoscope's constantly moving band of film to the introduction of 'intermittent' projection mechanisms. What also occurs, however, is a rapid shift

in this period from the development of cinema as a technology to the introduction of cinema as a cultural medium.

The rapid shift to cinema as a cultural medium is important for conceptions of emergence. Although through the nineteenth century we can identify precursors to cinema, broadly put and in a practical sense, the extremely compressed timescale of the emergence of projection systems would surely influence the potential to integrate pre-cinema forms into cinema. Precursors and antecedents to cinema tend to be theorised at the level of epistemic shifts where cinema emerges within an intellectual and cultural framework, within discursive regimes. What I am concerned with at this stage, however, is how at a practical level cinema is able to engage with the so-called epistemic milieu given its compressed technological timescale and the rapid shift to a cultural medium. Issues of the regulation and control of cinema must also have been affected by the rapidity of cinema's emergence. In short, I want to argue that in a rapidly emerging market there simply wasn't the time for the nascent industry to do anything other than react to the responses to screen projection. The anticipation of cinema was also undercut by the rapidity of emergence; in the American context, the vitascope premiere provides an example.

Edison's business model for the kinetoscope launch in April 1894 included employing outside groups to market both the viewing device and the films. One such group, known as the Kinetoscope Company, included promoters Norman C. Raff and Frank R. Gammon. Following the downturn in kinetoscope business in mid-1895 Raff and Gammon pursued the development of screen projection through association with Jenkins and Armat and their phantoscope projector. With the imminent arrival in America of the Lumière cinématographe in early 1896, Raff and Gammon hurriedly organised the development and promotion of

what was by then called the vitascope projector. For the debut of the projector a prominent New York venue was selected to maximise press interest, and private press screenings prior to the debut ensured that journalists would attend. In addition, and despite his lack of involvement, Thomas Edison's name had been secured by Raff and Gammon as the supposed inventor of the projection machine. Although projection machines had been demonstrated in America in 1895, Raff and Gammon were now introducing an Edison-backed business model to the nascent industry.

The premiere of the 'Edison Vitascope' in New York City on the evening of 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1896 marked the beginning of commercial film projection in America. According to the standard accounts, Koster & Bial's Music Hall at 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway, close to Herald Square in mid-town Manhattan, provided the venue for an evening's vaudeville entertainments which included the vitascope projection of a set of six films onto a white screen lowered over the Hall's stage.<sup>11</sup> Although the white screen was hardly a new feature, given it was commonly used for lantern slide projections and the like, the projection machines were new. Two electrically-powered vitascope machines, each capable of projecting one twenty second in duration loop of film were mounted at the back of the Hall on an upper balcony. The vitascope was the seventh number on the vaudeville programme and just before ten o'clock, the lights dimmed, one of the projectors whirred into life, the Music Hall band struck up and the first film loop, a colour tinted print of *Umbrella Dance* (Edison, 1895) showing two dancers twirling umbrellas, ran through the projector. After a few minutes, that is after the first twenty second film loop had run through the projector half a dozen times, the first projector stopped and the second vitascope whirred into action

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Musser provides what can be thought of as the standard accounts of the vitascope premiere. See 1990: 115-118, 1991: 60-64, 1995: 23-28, 1997: 200-01 and 1999: 152-154.

projecting an English film, photographed by Birt Acres, of waves rolling against a harbour wall at Dover, *Rough Sea at Dover* (Acres, 1895).<sup>12</sup> Acres' film repeated at least six times while the first vitascope was reloaded with the next film loop. There then followed, with each film loop repeating at least six times, *Walton and Slavin* (Edison, 1894) a burlesque boxing bout, *Band Drill* (Edison, 1894) a film of marching soldiers, *The Monroe Doctrine* (Edison, 1896) a comic allegory and finally, to round off proceedings, another colour tinted film of a dancer, *Serpentine* or *Skirt Dance* (Edison, 1896).<sup>13</sup> According to reports which appeared in the following day's main New York newspapers, the premiere had been a resounding success. Edison's 'new wonder' had begun a sixteen week run at Koster & Bial's and for a brief period during the summer of 1896 the vitascope became the principal projection machine in use across America.

It would be easy to interpret the vitascope premiere as the debut of a machine—Edison's 'new wonder'—and that the role of the films was merely to, in some way, represent movement on screen. Right from the very beginnings of cinema, however, this is not the case, as the opening night's film program demonstrates. Raff and Gammon were experienced promoters and as part of their careful orchestration of the vitascope debut, the films had been carefully selected and sequenced for a purpose.

In 'Nationalism and the Beginnings of Cinema' Charles Musser argues that Raff and Gammon had calculated that the sequence of films would provide a nationalistic flavour, and thereby help to ward off competition from Europe.

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<sup>12</sup> *Rough Sea at Dover* is variously attributed to Birt Acres or Robert W. Paul. According to the National Museum of Photography Film and Television, Acres shot the film for Paul immediately prior to a business disagreement between them (<http://www.nmpft.org.uk/insight/info/5.3.43.pdf> accessed February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005). It would seem that after this disagreement both men claimed authorship of the Dover film. In attributing the film to Acres I am following *The Movies Begin* (2002).

<sup>13</sup> The title of the final serpentine dancer film is uncertain according to Musser, 1999: 153.

Whereas the peep-hole kinoscope had been marketed as “an expression of cosmopolitan culture, one homologous with the international culture of vaudeville”, for the vitascope premiere the promoters had “shifted ideological gears and adopted a commercial strategy based on nationalism” (Musser, 1999: 152). Regarding the sequence of films, Musser argues that in reproducing a familiar stage act, the first film, *Umbrella Dance*, provided an establishing shot, a “continuation of stage and screen” (153). The second film, *Rough Sea at Dover*, “metaphorically wash[ed] away the stage” and in so doing “assaulted the American patrons” in the audience (153). *Walton and Slavin*, which featured one tall and one short boxer, “visually evoked ... Uncle Sam and John Bull engaging in a fistic encounter”, and was followed by the fourth film, *Band Drill*, which suggested a “mobilisation” of the American army (153). The fifth film, *The Monroe Doctrine*, had been specially produced for the debut by Raff and Gammon at Edison’s Black Maria studio three weeks before the opening night. The new film was based on a political cartoon of an ongoing British dispute with Venezuela where America had intervened by invoking the Monroe Doctrine, which sought to prevent further European colonisation in the Americas. Walton, the boxer, played Uncle Sam and Slavin’s replacement John Mayon featured as John Bull in a film which, according to Musser, provided an allegory of the impending French Lumières’ expansion into the American market (153). The film program then ended with a second dancing film which, in echoing the opening film, returned the evening’s show from screen back to stage. Musser concludes that the film sequence was “[h]ardly a miscellaneous collection of films, this opening night program was a sophisticated achievement” which ‘consciously’ addressed the impending European competition (154).

Musser’s account of the vitascope premiere films is an important, if sadly rare, example of the value of the close analysis of films from this very early phase of



cinema. When separated from their context of the opening night, and in being static camera and single shot twenty second long films, these are hardly films which would seem to warrant such close attention. However, as Musser demonstrates, the exhibitor's role of selecting films enables a clear purpose, that of nationalism in this case, to be developed through the juxtaposition of films. The *Monroe Doctrine* film's basis in a well known political cartoon also demonstrates the interrelation of media forms. Raff and Gammon's use of the dance films to provide a transition from stage to screen and back to stage shows the interrelation of conceptions of exhibition. However, and importantly, by attempting to separate screen from stage through the dancing films device, Raff and Gammon were also pointing to the newness of the medium and its difference from expected stage entertainments. As with the Brooklyn Bridge films, newspaper reports can again provide a way into the reaction to the films, and their difference from what was expected.

Looking back at any of the opening night films it is difficult to comprehend the experience of seeing the films at the time and the reactions they provoked. Moreover, the repetition of each film seems a distinctly odd exhibition practice from a later cinema perspective. However, we cannot be certain how many times each film was repeated at the premiere. The vitascope projector was based on the kinoscope and thus used a continuous band of film which was approximately forty feet long and which, as Musser notes, took two minutes to load onto a projector (Musser, 1990; 117). By using two projectors at the premiere, it was therefore possible to repeat one film for two minutes while another film was loaded onto the second projector. In their subsequent advertisements for the vitascope, however, Raff and Gammon suggested that projector operators could show each film for "ten or fifteen minutes if desired, although four or five minutes is better" (cited in Musser, 1991: 63). Although 'ten or fifteen minutes'

equates with repeating a twenty second long film between thirty and forty-five times, it would seem likely that the premiere used the minimum two-minute film change method, or that each film was repeated six times. Film repetition is not, however, a focus of the opening night newspaper reports.

The *New York Mail and Express* commented that “the figures of the kinetoscope are projected, enlarged to life-size, upon a screen in much the same manner as ordinary, everyday stereopticon images” (24<sup>th</sup> April, 1896: 12. Cited in Musser, 1990: 117). As such, it would seem that the repetition of films had been normalised by viewing films through a kinetoscope and that screen projection was associated with projecting photographic slides via a stereopticon.<sup>14</sup> It would also seem, moreover, that repetition was an issue that was overtaken by the realism of moving pictures. The *New York Daily News* reported that with *Umbrella Dance* “[t]he representation was realistic to a degree” (24<sup>th</sup> April. Cited in Musser, 1991: 62) and that in the *Walton and Slavin* boxing film “the movements of the boxers were well represented” (cited in Musser, 1990: 116). According to the *New York Herald*, Birt Acres’ *Rough Sea at Dover* “was the closest copy of nature any work of man has ever yet achieved. (24<sup>th</sup> April 1896: 11. Cited in Musser, 1991: 63). Acres’ film was, moreover, consistently singled out as the main film of the evening within the reports.

### ***Rough Sea at Dover: Provoking a Way of Looking***

In reports of the films from the vitascope premiere in the following day’s newspapers, *Rough Sea at Dover* provided the main focus of attention. The *New York Mail and Express* claimed that Acres’ film was “by far the best view shown” (24<sup>th</sup> April 1896: 12. Cited in Musser, 1990: 116). For a *New York*

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<sup>14</sup> Whereas a photographic slide projector was called a magic lantern in England, in America it was more often termed a stereopticon. Musser attributes this difference in naming to the American practice of projecting one half of stereo photographs (Musser, 1990: 30).

*Herald* reporter, the reason why Acres' film was singled out lay in the film's realism, in that "[t]he thing was altogether so realistic and the reproduction so absolutely accurate, that it fairly astounded the beholder" (24<sup>th</sup> April 1896: 11. Cited in Musser, 1991: 63). In focussing on Acres' film each report provided a finely detailed account of the twenty second view. The film "brought to view a heaving mass of foam crested water", according to the *New York Herald* report (24<sup>th</sup> April 1896: 11. Cited in Musser, 1991: 63). Similarly, the *New York Mail and Express* claimed that, "[o]ne could look out to sea and pick out a particular wave swelling and undulating and growing bigger and bigger" (24<sup>th</sup> April 1896: 12. Cited in Musser, 1990: 116). Whereas from a later cinema perspective Acres' film could be considered, as the title suggests, as simply a view of a sea waves at Dover, the reports suggest the film provoked a way of looking at screen projection through a detailed, studied scanning of the view on screen.



Fig. 3.1 Three frames from *Rough Sea at Dover* (Acres, 1895).

From a later cinema perspective, Acres' film is jarringly unremarkable. The three frame stills from *Rough Sea at Dover* [Fig. 3.1] would seem to adequately show the action from and the extent of the film. Acres positioned his camera on the sea shore facing what appears to be a harbour wall. In what was most likely to have been one continuous take, Acres then filmed the sea waves rolling in against the harbour wall for twenty seconds.<sup>15</sup> Typically, the duration of films at this time

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<sup>15</sup> The extant version of the film used for this study is only seventeen seconds long. It is likely that lost frames account for the version's shorter than expected duration. We cannot therefore be sure, from the extant frames, that Acres ran the film through the camera in one take. For example, he could have stopped the camera part way through filming to wait for incoming sea waves. However, although stopping the camera to wait for action was a technique used in, for

was determined by how long it took for a forty feet length of film to pass through the camera, with the length of film being determined by the kinetoscope's film loop mechanism. Over the duration of *Rough Sea at Dover* we see one comparatively large sea wave and a number of smaller waves. In short, the film would appear to be an unremarkable filmic snap-shot. Nevertheless, in forcing oneself to look more closely, in overcoming the film's almost obstinate crudity, there is more to the filming of *Rough Sea at Dover* than is evident from what seems an appropriate glance.

In terms of photographic composition, and bearing in mind that Acres was a successful still photographer, the camera is very carefully positioned on the sea shore.<sup>16</sup> The harbour wall is accurately positioned, vertically, so that it is central within the frame. Although the wall is reduced in height near the shore, the near and far ends of the wall appear almost equal in proportion. Laterally within the frame, the wall juts out to three-quarters of the frame's width so that a view is available beyond the wall and out to sea. To provide a sense of scale for the frame, three figures are standing on the wall, perhaps as 'extras' for the film. With regard to the timing of the film, there is a water line evident on the side of the wall which indicates the extent of the highest sea waves. Although most of the sea waves do not reach the high wave mark, the one wave which does is exactly half way through the film. Given this apparent accuracy of timing it would seem likely that Acres used a timing device in order to study wave patterns and to thus synchronise the beginning of filming and the onset of a large incoming wave. The timing is, of course, also determined by it being a stormy day. These factors combine to suggest that rather than being an arbitrary filmic

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example, *At the Foot of the Flatiron* (AM&B, 1903), as we shall see in Chapter 5, it is unlikely that Acres employed this technique in 1895.

<sup>16</sup> For a brief Acres biography, see the National Museum of Photography Film and Television information sheet at: <http://www.nmpft.org.uk/insight/info/5.3.44.pdf> (last accessed February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005).

snapshot, compositionally the film is a product of accurate time and space decisions. Furthermore, the location for the film is significant for ways of seeing the film.

In Chapter 1 we identified the interrelation of stereographic photography and actuality cinema, especially through ways of seeing depth. The composition of *Rough Sea at Dover* provides a further example. In addition to the precise composition of the harbour wall within the film's frame, the wall is also carefully selected to provide an exaggerated sense of depth. The sea waves rolling in from the far end to the near end of the pier wall provide clearly identifiable movement within the frame; this movement can be considered as the subject of the film. Instead of being movement in a simple sense, however, such as the idea that being able to represent movement was cinema's novelty at this time, it is movement which provides a focus for scanning the frame. The sea waves rolling in could be thought to provoke the detailed, studied scanning of the frame which is evident in the newspaper reports. The view of the harbour wall selected by Acres is not, however, a subject which would complement the stereograph's effect of depth, in that the proportional difference between near and far objects within the frame are required for a sense of depth within stereo photographs. Increasing the effect of depth within the frame, rather than photographic composition, here provides the linkage from stereo photography to filmmaking. Acres' intention of provoking a way of looking which involves a detailed scanning of the film is consistent with the films analysed in Chapter 1. As with those films, and as indicated by the reports of Acres' film, a way of looking at the films involves an element of duration through a scanning of the image as if it were a stereograph.

*Rough Sea at Dover* is a surprisingly complex film. The *New York Mail and Express*' claim that '[o]ne could look out to sea and pick out a particular wave swelling and undulating and growing bigger and bigger' is far from an arbitrary claim. Rather, it is a claim that Acres' could have expected given his careful location selection. In turning now to the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* report of the vitascope premiere we can look more closely at the responses to his film.

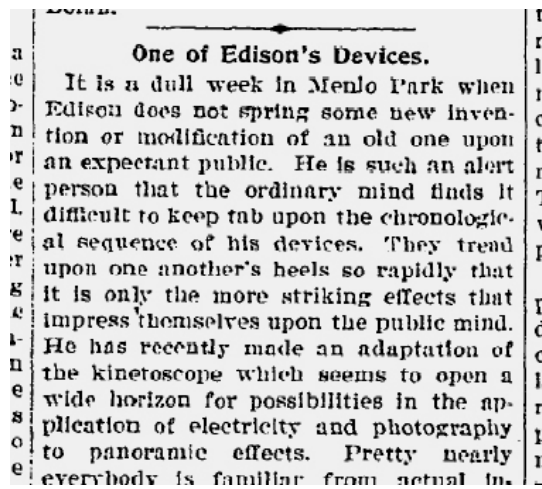


Fig. 3.2 'Cutting' from *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1896: 6.

With the distinctly inauspicious title of 'One of Edison's Devices' the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* report of the vitascope premiere heralded the beginning of screen projection in America with a perhaps more circumspect account than Raff and Gammon would have wished [Fig. 3.2]; again the Brooklyn newspaper provides a balance to the expected hyperbole of New York newspaper reports. Situated on page 6 alongside state and local politics news stories, the vitascope report commented that:

... (Edison) has recently made an adaptation of the kinetoscope which seems to open a wide horizon for possibilities in the application of electricity and photography to panoramic effects. (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 24<sup>th</sup> 1896: 6)

The report is here providing a conception of cinema which looks both ways. By looking back to expected precursors, such as 'photography' and 'panoramic effects', and forward to New York actuality cinema's modernity role of 'the

application of electricity’, the ‘possibilities’ to which the report points were soon to be realised within actuality modes of filmmaking. Furthermore, and without wanting to over interpret the report, the notion of cinema ‘open[ing] a wide horizon’ does correspond with, as we have seen in Chapter 2, Hansen’s conception of early cinema as a ‘horizon’ for social experience. Almost to foreshadow the many kinds of cinemas which were to come, the report speculates on the “uses to which this device can be put for amusement or instruction” before presciently, as we shall shortly see, citing Alexander Black’s ‘picture plays’ as an example of juxtaposing moving pictures and ‘dialogue’ (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 24<sup>th</sup> 1896: 6).

In keeping with the focus of the New York newspapers, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*’s sole focus in accounts of the six films projected on the opening night is *Rough Sea at Dover*; no other films are mentioned. Although five of the films were produced in the cramped surroundings of Edison’s Black Maria studio, the ‘panoramic effect’ conception of cinema is partly explained by the report’s sole focus on Acres’ film and the implication that *Rough Sea at Dover* was the only film which warranted reporting. In common with the New York reports, the Brooklyn newspaper provided a detailed account of Acres’ film, where the film:

showed an angry surf breaking on a sandy beach near a stone pier. The spectators saw the movement of the waves as they tumbled in furiously against the masonry, while the spray dashed high in the air.  
(6)

Films were repeated at the premiere many times, which would enable more detail to be seen and reported. Rather than provoking a simple fascination with the representation of movement, where the novel sight of the ‘spray dash[ing] high’ on screen provided the film’s attraction, the report of ‘the movement of the waves as they tumbled in furiously against the masonry’ relates to the representation of depth. However, interpreting the reasons behind the newspaper

reports' wholesale disregarding of Raff and Gammon's intended nationalistic agenda provides a further clue to the attention to detail provoked by Acres' film.

### ***Rough Sea at Dover: An Unexpected Congruence***

The newspaper reports point to a significant disparity between what was anticipated and the experience of seeing moving pictures projected onto a screen. Musser's detailed analysis of the selection and sequencing of the six films at the premiere does hold in relation to Raff and Gammon's intentions. However, the subsequent reaction to the films would seem to be in opposition to the promoter's nationalistic agenda. Whereas, as Musser notes, the intention may have been that Acres' film would function to 'assault the American patrons', the newspaper reports of *Rough Sea at Dover* provide a celebration of cinema which excludes any nationalistic agenda; rather than fending off imminent French competition, the reports were supporting the Lumières' commercial strategy.

Edison's film production up to this time had consisted solely of staged films produced in the Black Maria studio, including films produced by Raff and Gammon. Musser's catalogue of Edison films in this period shows that, of the 155 films produced prior to the vitascope premiere, only a handful of experimental films had been produced outdoors and these were photographed in locations around Edison's West Orange laboratory (Musser, 1997: 73-198). According to Musser, Edison film crews lacked a camera portable enough to photograph outdoor scenes such as *Rough Sea at Dover* at the time of the premiere (Musser, 1990: 118). In contrast, the French Lumière brothers' filmmaking business was founded on photographing outdoor scenes. By mid-1896 Lumière camera crews were touring Europe and America filming at outdoor locations. Hence, the Lumières had an extensive film catalogue ready and waiting for the kind of press reaction that the vitascope premiere had



elicited. As such, the reaction to the vitascope premiere films by the mostly invited and primed (through pre-launch press screenings) newspaper reporters could hardly have been more problematic for Raff and Gammon or more beneficial to their competitors. An underlying reason why Raff and Gammon's 'sophisticated achievement' backfired can, however, be identified within the promoter's own promotional literature.

Raff and Gammon's marketing strategy for the vitascope was based on a model used for the kinoscope, one that Edison had also used for the marketing of the phonograph. Exhibition rights for the vitascope were sold on a territory-by-territory basis in a 'States Rights' business model (Musser, 1990: 112-115). Territory owners could then resell rights to individual towns and cities within their territory. In a letter to phantoscope co-inventor Thomas Armat, Raff and Gammon asserted that this model was "of vital consequence" to their business (cited in Musser, 1990: 112). Country-wide positive newspaper reporting of the premiere was also vital. The promotional literature for this plan included a prospectus, in which Raff and Gammon described the operation of the vitascope and the staging and effect of the films as follows:

[w]hen the machine is started by the operator, the bare canvas before the audience becomes a stage, upon which living beings move about, and go through their respective acts, movements, gestures and changing expressions, surrounded by appropriate settings and accessories - the very counterpart of the stage, the field, the city, the country - yes, more, for these reproductions are in some respects more satisfactory, pleasing and interesting than their originals. (cited in Musser, 1990: 117-118)

The description of 'appropriate setting and accessories' for filmmaking indicates that Raff and Gammon envisaged that the Black Maria studio model of filmmaking would continue. More importantly, however, as Musser notes in a commentary on the Raff and Gammon prospectus in his *The Emergence of Cinema* monograph, "spectators were thus assumed to make a conscious

comparison between the projected image and the everyday world as they knew and experienced it directly” (1990: 118). By inviting a comparison between the world depicted on screen and the world as experienced, by stating that ‘these reproductions’ are ‘more satisfactory, pleasing and interesting than their originals’, Raff and Gammon were inviting the backfiring of their opening night agenda. Whereas the staged scenes in the five *Black Maria* films could hardly fulfil the invited comparison, *Rough Sea at Dover* clearly succeeded. Moreover, in juxtaposing staged films with Acres’ film, Raff and Gammon may have unwittingly emphasised the potential of Acres’ film to, as it were, stage the comparison between ‘the projected image and the everyday world’. The close attention to detail evident in the newspaper reports of *Rough Sea at Dover* can be interpreted as a commentary on the invited comparison between the world on screen and the world as experienced.

In what is a significant (if largely unnoticed) contribution to the field, Musser goes on to claim in a continuation of his Raff and Gammon prospectus commentary, that in terms of the comparison between ‘the projected image and the everyday world’:

[i]t was the unprecedented congruence between the two that was being celebrated. Projected images were conceived as a novelty in which lifelike movement in conjunction with a life-size photographic image provided a sense of heightened realism and intensified interest in the quotidian. This new level of realism dramatically expanded the screen’s importance ... (1990: 118)

Musser’s interconnected notions of an ‘unprecedented congruence’, ‘intensified interest in the quotidian’, and a ‘new level of realism’ are central to this study’s approach to early actuality cinema. For example, the New York actuality impulse we have explored with the Brooklyn Bridge films can be thought part of the ‘intensified interest in the quotidian’. The reports of the bridge films in the AM&B press reprints provide a commentary on the films’ ‘new level of realism’.

It is, however, the notion of an ‘unprecedented congruence’ which provides a fulcrum for this study’s approach.

In a literal sense, congruence is here taken to mean coinciding exactly when superimposed. However, rather than implying an exact copy and therefore tending towards what are now tired realism arguments concerning indexical realism, it is *what* is superimposed or rather what is represented by New York actuality films which is at issue in this study. By representing the ‘immensity’ of Brooklyn Bridge’s ‘structure’ or by representing the systematisation of travel, the bridge films not only provide congruence between the projected image and the urban environment, it is an unprecedented congruence given the newness of abstract representation. Congruence therefore provides a sharp contrast to the belief that the reaction to early films, for example with the bridge films or *Rough Sea at Dover*, derived from a form of naïve realism. Moreover, whereas with the bridge films the congruence is ‘unprecedented’, for *Rough Sea at Dover* the congruence is also unexpected.

The reasons for the success of Acres’ film, if measured by press reactions, can be identified in two related themes that we have been exploring in this study. Firstly, as intended by Acres, the film provokes a way of looking which involved a sustained scanning of the film. Secondly, as suggested by Raff and Gammon, the film provides an unexpected congruence between the world on screen and the world as experienced. The screening of *Rough Sea at Dover* is therefore a significant marker for the emergence of cinema. If it were possible to set an exact time, date and place for what amounts to the site of a discontinuity between pre-cinema and cinema itself and the beginnings of the subsequent seven year domination of early cinema by non-fiction films, then just after 10 pm on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1896, Koster & Bial’s Music Hall at 34<sup>th</sup> Street and

Broadway, New York is that time, date and place. *Rough Sea at Dover* provided what was for Raff and Gammon a very unexpected congruence. In reacting to the response to screen projection it was, however, a congruence which was immediately pursued by the nascent industry.

In adopting Musser's notion of an 'unexpected congruence' I am attempting to picture representation. In so doing, the intention is to provide a clear distinction between a conventional understanding of indexical realism and the specific form of realism presented by actuality films. Within a history of photography, the 'truth' value of images was integral to the purposes of reform photography at the time of cinema's emergence. According to Maren Stange, in her account of documentary photographers such as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, "reformers relied on the photograph's status as *index* – that is, as a symbol fulfilling its representational function" (Stange, 1989: xii. Stange's italics). Of course, a standard semiotic definition of photography's putative indexical realism fails to account for all that is involved in, for example, the initial act of taking a photograph: location selection, framing, composition, the technology of representation such as film types and lenses, and so on. As Stange goes on to argue in her study, *Symbols of Ideal Life*, although reformers "relied" on photography's indexical realism, on its truth claims, in practice, reform photographers employed the "*codes* of photographic realism" to ply their reform agenda (xii. My italics). Stange's study is an important example of the debunking of the myth of photography's indexical realism. Whereas this debunking has happened, through Stange's work and elsewhere, for the photography of, for example, Riis and Hine, it is less easy to debunk actuality cinema's putative indexicality.

To a large extent, accounts of actuality cinema as a primitive mode of cinema rest on the idea that indexicality was an attraction of the films. According to Philip Rosen, “the appeal of many actualities was in the relatively extreme rawness of the real they present” (2001: 244).<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, when viewing actuality films from a later cinema perspective, it is a paradoxical rawness. Frank Kessler, for example, describes the representational status of actuality views as consisting of a:

paradoxical relationship between transparency and opacity ... : the depiction of events seems almost unmediated, and at the same time, often enough one wonders what one really sees inside the frame, if there’s anything beyond the identification of a location, an event, an action, a movement captured by a cinematographic recording device. (2002: 211)

As such, a tension exists between the found simplicity, or ‘transparency’, of the seeming immediacy of actuality views and, what seems for Kessler, a suspicion that something lies ‘beyond’ which remains opaque. In common with conventional approaches, however, Kessler then goes on to assert that the “functioning of these films clearly cannot be deduced from the images alone”, and subsequently eschews close analysis of the films (212). In Mary Ann Doane’s analysis of the representability of time, although the “significance” of cinema is in its “apparent capacity to perfectly *represent* the contingent, to provide the pure record of time”, the notion of indexicality does have to be dissociated from the apparent realism of films (2002: 22. Doane’s italics). Indexicality is “essentially without content” (as are actuality films in Doane’s account), and instead denotes “‘this’ or ‘here it is’” (2002: 25). Doane’s claims for the contentlessness of actuality films aside, her notion of films denoting ‘here it is’ is an important distinction from Roland Barthes’ conception of photography as a “that-has-been” statement, and points to the, at the time, translation of

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<sup>17</sup> Rosen’s account of historicity in relation to film (from which the above quote is taken), includes a fine grained explanation of actuality cinema’s realism. The above quote does, however, represent a conventional position on actuality cinema’s indexicality.

*actualités* as ‘things happening now’, as we saw in Chapter 1 (Barthes, 1982: 92-97). Moreover, it is a conception of the indexicality of actuality films which relates to the simultaneity of actuality cinema.

In Chapter 1, William Uricchio’s description of ‘rocks and waves’ films, those showing ocean waves crashing on rocks and so on, bears a resemblance to Acres’ *Rough Sea at Dover*, and in more than a literal sense. According to Uricchio, such films were an attempt to “introduce a simultaneity effect”, and came as close as early cinema could to “‘simulating’ the simultaneous” (1997: 130). Moreover, Uricchio situated such attempts within a late nineteenth century concern for “liveness”, (129).<sup>18</sup> Here, then, is the root of the unexpected congruence between the world on screen and the world as experienced. Acres’ visually coherent spatial world on screen, coherent in its use of stereo visual cues, is congruent with the world as experienced in its apparent ‘liveness’. In so doing, Acres’ film simulates simultaneity. Quite possibly, the success of *Rough Sea at Dover* could have provided an impetus for the production of the ‘rocks and waves’ films identified by Uricchio. With the Brooklyn Bridge train ride films, the liveness of the films is coupled to a congruence between the representation of and the experience of systematisation. In effect, far from being an indexical realism, the realism of such films was based in seeming to present a live representation of the ‘forces’, as newspaper reports have it, which shaped the experience of the city.

In the next section I want to explore how very early cinema’s unexpected congruence, its liveness, is played out in New York actuality cinema in the period up to 1899, a period which includes the Brooklyn Bridge train ride films.

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<sup>18</sup> This concern for liveness can be thought part of the appetite for reality discussed in Chapter 2.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I will then focus on New York actuality cinema in the period after 1899 and how congruence shifts from being unexpected in the earlier period to being assimilated within narrative cinema by around 1905. In relation to conceptualising cinema's emergence, New York actuality cinema provides a focus for exploring one of the many kinds of early cinemas within the first decade.

The anticipation of cinema was identified in an earlier section of this chapter as a key aspect of the ways in which cinema's emergence has been conceptualised. In this regard, the unexpected congruence of Acres' *Rough Sea at Dover* is a theme which undercuts the anticipation of cinema. Moreover, it is a theme which, conversely, underpins the idea that cinema, at least in its actuality form could provide a new form of mediation. With regard to the many cinemas approach to cinema's emergence and the broad agenda outlined above, in exploring the beginnings of New York actuality cinema there is a shift in the following section from issues of discontinuities to the issue of identifying which early cinema is under investigation. With the latter issue, a Lumière film can serve to provide a contrast with New York versions of actuality cinema. Thereafter, a second Lumière film, which provides a contrast to the 1899 Brooklyn Bridge films, will signal a shift to the final part of the many cinemas approach agenda: identifying configurations of early cinema which operated to provide a new form of mediation.

### **The Beginnings of New York Actuality Cinema**

Just eighteen days after the premiere of the vitascope, on May 11<sup>th</sup> 1896, Edison cameraman William Heise positioned the newly developed portable Edison kinetograph camera overlooking the junction of Broadway and Sixth Avenue and filmed *Herald Square* (Edison, 1896). In a practical sense, Heise was responding

to the urgent need for new film subjects for the vitascope. Not only were single-shot street scenes cheap and quick to produce they would also provide direct competition to the impending arrival in America of the Lumières' cinématographe and their extensive catalogue of outdoor actuality films. Heise was also indicating the direction which New York actuality cinema was to take.

In positioning his camera overlooking Herald Square, and therefore the location of Koster & Bial's Music Hall, Heise was producing a film in which patrons of the Music Hall could see on screen from within the Hall the street scene outside, and maybe themselves on screen. As such, right from the beginning of actuality production Heise signals the actuality direction and emphasis of New York film production. Intriguingly, Heise was also producing an Edison version of the Lumières' 'factory gate' film *Sortie d'usine* (1895), which marked the starting point for Lumière actuality production. However, whereas the place of industrial production—the factory where film was manufactured and processed—provided the Lumière film's subject, the place of exhibition provided the starting point for Edison actuality production.

The different locations are an important pointer to what can initially be termed the interrelated impulses which drive actuality film production in New York. Firstly, New York actuality filmmakers were, as we saw in Chapter 1, New Yorkers and as such far better placed than their European counterparts to engage with local issues, such as the systematisation of travel in the bridge films example.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, the commercial imperative to produce films which would sell involved, for New Yorkers, what can tentatively be termed a form of openness to the city. Within a willingness to get closer to what would attract film

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<sup>19</sup> Although the Lumière company sometimes employed American filmmakers when producing American actualities, the Lumières encouraged, if not demanded, adherence to the company filmmaking manual (Author's conversation with Andre Gaudreault July, 2002).



viewers, there is an identifiable eschewing of any aesthetic intention in favour of re-presenting the city. In filming the place of exhibition, Heise's *Herald Square* should provide an initial example of these impulses.

Although Herald Square is usually cited as the first film photographed with the new portable Edison camera, in his catalogue of Edison films Musser lists three New York films photographed on May 11<sup>th</sup> (Musser, 1997: 202-204). With Raff and Gammon listed among the producers of the films, Heise photographed a view of fountains in Central Park, a view of an elevated railroad at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and the view of Herald Square. Musser notes that the filming of these outdoor scenes was "inspired by open air subjects taken for the Lumière cinématographe" (1997: 203). However, a subsequent report of *Herald Square* in the *Buffalo Courier* also suggests a relationship with Acres' *Rough Sea at Dover*. In describing the view of Herald Square the report noted:

The cable cars seem to move in opposite directions ... while at the same time the elevated trains are rushing overhead, pedestrians are seen moving along the sidewalks or crossing to opposite sides of the street, everything moving, or as it is seen in real life. (7<sup>th</sup> June, 1896: 10. Cited in Musser, 1997: 203)

As with Acres' film, the report's detailed description is impressive for a twenty second long film. Also, the movement of traffic such as cable cars, elevated trains and pedestrians, with 'everything moving' suggests that trajectories of traffic provided the same function as the sea waves rolling along the harbour wall in Acres' film. Heise may well have been inspired by *Rough Sea at Dover*. However, although *Herald Square* is listed among more than six hundred early films publicly available from the Library of Congress, the film has been incorrectly identified within the Motion Picture Collections, as indicated in Fig. 3.3.



Fig. 3.3 Frames from film listed as *Herald Square* in the Library of Congress catalogue.

The Library of Congress version of the Edison film which is incorrectly listed as Heise's *Herald Square* is twelve seconds long and suffers somewhat from frame loss. Although the Library of Congress film jumps forward at a number of points as if to indicate a number of jump cuts, it is likely that the original film would have been nearer to twenty seconds in duration and taken in one smooth continuous take. Nevertheless, from the extant frames, the film begins with a Broadway street car passing from right to left close to the camera position [Fig. 3.3]. With the camera remaining static throughout, pedestrians cross a busy road junction waved on by a policeman and someone who appears to be a streetcar company official. Another streetcar then passes from left to right even closer to the camera than the first passing streetcar. When not obscured by passing streetcars, in the middle distance we see streetcars turning a corner in front of a building undergoing demolition. The main route for the streetcars thus involves two ninety degree curves in the track and hence the location cannot be Herald Square. A search through Lumière films photographed in New York in this period provides, however, the likely location for, and identity of, of the film.



Fig. 3.4 Frames from Lumière film No. 328 *New York: Broadway and Union Square* (1897).

Listed as film No. 328 and entitled *New York: Broadway and Union Square* [Fig. 3.4], the Lumière film is thirty-three seconds long and photographed in one

continuous take from a static camera positioned on the same street corner as the Edison film listed as *Herald Square*. There is no evidence of frame loss. Over the duration of the film, three streetcars pass in front of the camera from right to left while one policeman, accompanied this time by three streetcar company officials, directs pedestrian traffic across the path of the streetcars. The camera is positioned at a slightly different angle to Union Square from that in the Edison film. Consequently, the building at frame right in the Edison film [Fig. 3.3] which was undergoing demolition, is at frame left in the Lumière version [Fig. 3.4] and is now being rebuilt as shown by a steel frame structure. The Lumière film was thus photographed six months or so after the Edison film.

I turn to Musser's 1997 catalogue to correctly identify the Edison film; listed at No. 217 is a film variously entitled *Broadway at 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Dead Man's Curve, Broadway and Fourteenth Street* and *14<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway* (Musser, 1997: 238). Produced by James White and Raff and Gammon, and photographed by William Heise, the film can be grouped with five other New York actualities filmed in late August 1896 at locations such as Park Row, Broadway and Park Row, the Bowery, Washington Market and another Union Square location (238-240). This list of locations provides another example of the Edison company's New York filmmaking activities in this period. The multiple titles for the Edison film No. 217, and that the Lumière film crew filmed from the same location, both point to the likely popularity of films of this part of Union Square. The second Edison title, *Dead Man's Curve*, provides a clue as to the likely reason for the popularity of filming at this location.

As noted in *The Encyclopaedia of New York City* (1995) edited by Kenneth T. Jackson, *Dead Man's Curve* was a nickname for a set of sharp curves on the

Broadway cable-driven streetcar line at Union Square (320).<sup>20</sup> Rather than slowing down for the curves in the track at Union Square, streetcars remained attached to the underground driving cable, which ran at a continuous speed. Streetcars appeared, from a pedestrians perspective, to quickly change direction and career round the curves in the track. Consequently, until the electrification of the Broadway line in the early 1900s, which allowed motormen to reduce speed when approaching a curve, many pedestrians were injured or killed at this location. Furthermore, this location became a well known subject of newspaper and magazine illustrations. In his study of melodrama and modernity Ben Singer reproduces a number of newspaper illustrations that depict Broadway streetcars (Singer, 2001: 71-82). With sensational titles such as 'In the Wake of a Cable Car', 'Another Trolley Victim' and 'Women Knocked Down by Cable Car', the illustrations provide graphic details of the ensuing carnage on the Broadway streetcar tracks. Streetcar carnage was also a subject for Ashcan School artist George Luks in his 'Annual Parade of the Cable-Trolley Cripple Club' published in *The Verdict*, a weekly magazine of political satire, in March 1899 (Zurier et al, 1995: 196-208). An 1899 *New York Times* 'Railroad Commission Report' noted that in the twelve months to June 1897 a total of 642 people were killed on the city's surface railroads, or an average of twelve persons each week (January 4<sup>th</sup> 1899: 2).<sup>21</sup> The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* frequently reported streetcar accidents, with article titles such as 'Day of Trolley Accidents - Conductor's Skull Crushed by Falling from His Car - Death Soon Follows' (September 25th 1899: 4).<sup>22</sup> For Brooklynites the dangers of trolley cars were, moreover, symbolised in the

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<sup>20</sup> Jackson's encyclopaedia also includes a photograph entitled *Dead Man's Curve*, ca 1900 which confirms the location of the Edison film, incorrectly listed as *Herald Square* in the Library of Congress catalogue, as Union Square (Jackson ed., 1995: 321).

<sup>21</sup> For comparison, the Report noted that 700 persons were killed in the twelve months to June 1898.

<sup>22</sup> 'Streetcar' is a generic term used for street railways at this time, whereas the terms 'cable car' and 'cable trolley' refer specifically to cable driven streetcars. 'Trolley' refers to either a horse-drawn, cable or electrically powered streetcar (see Jackson ed., 1995: 174 and 1127-1128).

naming of the main Brooklyn baseball team. As Marshall Berman notes in an essay entitled 'Modernism in the Streets', in reference to urban survival skills, the Brooklyn Dodgers were also known as the Trolley Dodgers in the 1890s (Berman, 1983: 160n). Across various forms such as satirical magazine illustrations, newspaper articles and newspaper illustrations, the dangers and consequences of streetcar travel were familiar urban issues in this period. Transferring this streetcar dangers anxiety to the medium of moving pictures would, however, have been problematic for early filmmakers.

Luks' 1899 illustration for *The Verdict* is subtitled 'Vigorously Dedicated to the Street-car Systems of Greater New York' and shows ghoulish motormen driving streetcars which have unidentified destinations [Fig. 3.5]. In effect, Luks provides a generic scene which satirises the sheer number of streetcar accident victims. In selecting Dead Man's Curve for filming the streetcar dangers issue, the location is, in a sense, also generic in that it was an infamous location and could represent the wider problem of streetcar accidents.



Fig. 3.5 'Annual Parade of the Cable-Trolley Cripple Club', *The Verdict* 1, March 20<sup>th</sup> 1899.

However, even with an average death rate of twelve per week, filming dead or injured pedestrians or attempting to reproduce the kind of illustration found in newspapers and magazines would have been problematic, at least for the timing of filming. Furthermore, it would have been difficult for filmmakers to identify

and adopt photographic conventions for representing an issue which circulated through cartoon illustrations and satirical drawings. In short, filmmakers were attempting to represent an issue which lacked an available visual regime suited to mediation through moving pictures.

The approach adopted by the Edison and Lumière filmmakers appears, however, to involve a somewhat more controlling perspective on the streetcar dangers issue than that found in newspapers and magazines. Instead of injured pedestrians, we see attempts by a policeman and streetcar company officials to regulate and control the flow of streetcars and pedestrians. In contrast to depicting the aftermath of streetcar incidents, the *Dead Man's Curve* films thus show attempts to police the potential for accidents. Although we cannot be certain without extant evidence, it would seem reasonable to speculate that Raff and Gammon and the Lumière film crew sought or agreed to the commissioning of the films by streetcar company and City officials. In effect, the *Dead Man's Curve* films could be interpreted as a form of advertisement for efforts to police the City. As a very early example of cinema operating in its visual newspaper mode, this is consistent with the tone of newspaper reports which attempted to allay fears of streetcar accidents. For example, an 1897 *New York Times* article, entitled 'No Place Like New York: Safety and Peace are Here', described the introduction of new safety mechanisms on the cable-driven streetcars. The report claimed that "no more must females scuttle across [Dead Man's Curve] with indecorous revelations of hosiery", and concluded that "[i]f Dead Man's Curve is safe, everywhere is safe, and people may now promenade up and down the cable tracks" (July 12<sup>th</sup> 1897: 2).

There are many early films which indicate some form of cooperation between filmmakers and City authorities, including *At the Foot of the Flatiron* (AM&B,

1903), where a policeman ushers along bystanders, and *Move On* (Edison, 1903) where, similarly, a policeman ‘moves on’ New Yorkers, this time in the form of unlicensed street traders.<sup>23</sup> This practice of collaborating with City authorities is in contrast, however, to the English Mitchell and Kenyon local actuality filmmaking practice, as we saw in Chapter 1, of collaborating with travelling showmen, where showmen commissioned filming. In addition to underlining the extent to which actuality films were far from arbitrary in terms of subject matter, the New York film commissioning practice also indicates a side of actuality cinema, perhaps a separate kind of actuality cinema, where filmmaking is in a sense regulated. Nevertheless, attempts to regulate the early cinema were, not surprisingly, rarely likely to avoid unexpected outcomes.

Ben Singer locates the streetcar dangers issue within sensationalist reporting and, more widely, within a neurological conception of modernity. The Dead Man’s Curve films could also be cited as an example of early cinema’s engagement with the shocks and jolts of urban modernity, albeit with an element of control over the dangers of streetcars. As such, the Edison and Lumière streetcar dangers films could be thought of as distinct from, for example, films such as *Rough Sea at Dover* which provoked detailed scanning or the Brooklyn Bridge films which involved a studied, almost contemplative, mode of viewing. There are, however, important differences between the Edison and Lumière films of Dead Man’s Curve, especially in relation to what I have tentatively called a willingness by New York actuality filmmakers to adopt a form of openness to what they were filming. In the current example this openness is manifest through composition.

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<sup>23</sup> *Move on* was filmed on October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1903 while the Flatiron film was photographed on October 26<sup>th</sup>, thus indicating the competition between film companies when commissioning City films. In Chapter 5 there is an extended discussion of *At the Foot of the Flatiron*.

An identifiable difference between the Edison and Lumière films is their respective compositional stances [Fig. 3.6]. The Edison camera provides a view towards West 14<sup>th</sup> Street, whereas the Lumière camera is turned slightly northward and provides a view of the trees in the south-west corner of Union Square Park. Moreover, the Edison camera used a lens with a slightly longer focal length, thereby providing a narrowly confined view in comparison to the wider perspective produced by the Lumière camera lens. Furthermore, the Edison camera is positioned some two to three metres closer to the streetcar lines than the Lumière camera. The effect of these differences is somewhat pronounced when the streetcars pass in front of the respective cameras.

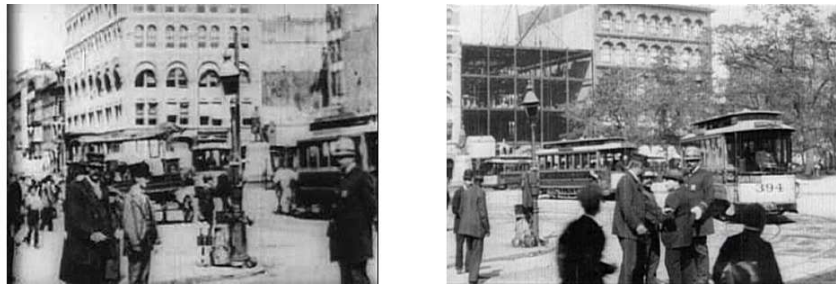


Fig. 3.6 Frames from, on the left, the Edison streetcar film and, on the right, the Lumière film.

In the Edison film two streetcars pass in front of the camera; the first one heads south down Broadway, whereas the second streetcar heads north towards the Square. In the Lumière film, however, three streetcars pass in front of the camera heading south down Broadway, but despite being almost twice the duration of the Edison film, none are seen heading north. In addition to the different compositional stances and lenses used by Edison and Lumière, this timing of the filming sequences is also central to the effect of the respective films. Although we can see the policing of pedestrian traffic in both films, in the Edison version, because of the camera's close proximity to the north-bound streetcar track, when the northbound streetcar comes into view at around half-way through the film it jarringly cuts across the frame [Fig. 3.7]. In the Lumière film, by contrast, there are no northbound streetcars visible, and the camera position is set-back from the



track, with the camera pointing northward towards the Park; what we see is streetcars gliding smoothly around the curve in the track, rather than careering in the near foreground of the frame. In effect, the Edison film subverts the policing of the pedestrian traffic by representing the sudden emergence of a streetcar and the obvious danger present at Dead Man's Curve. In contrast, the Lumière film reinforces the policing of the pedestrian traffic and, by showing the trees in the south-west corner of the Park, provides a picturesque backdrop for the smoothly gliding streetcars.

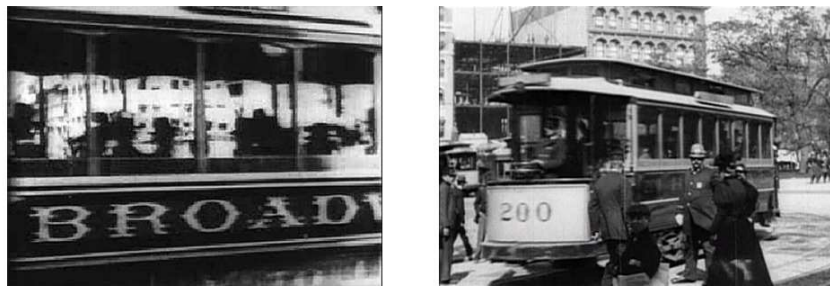


Fig. 3.7 Frames from, on the left, the Edison streetcar film and, on the right, the Lumière film.

The difference between these films is dependent upon the use, or not in the case of the Edison film, of conventional still photography compositional techniques. As we identified with *Rough Sea at Dover*, Birt Acres also employed still photography techniques, but in order to focus the manipulation of time and space, and thus to exaggerate the depth effect produced by the rolling sea waves. By contrast, in the Lumière *Dead Man's Curve* film, although the movement of streetcars towards and away from the camera could also be thought to involve a sense of exaggerated depth effect, the intermittent stream of pedestrians cutting across the path of the streetcars works to cut across any sense of depth. The Lumière film could hardly be thought to involve an intention to produce a stereograph-like depth effect. More appropriately, the Lumière film could be thought to prefigure Billy Bitzer's attempt, as seen in Chapter 2, to emulate the success of the Brooklyn Bridge train films through a panoramic view of New York from the Brooklyn side bridge tower. In both the Lumière streetcar film

and Bitzer's panorama a reliance upon photographic, or in Bitzer's case modern aesthetic, conventions seems incongruent in comparison to attempts to manipulate the correspondence between cinema and its urban environment. Tentatively, then, the Edison film appears to demonstrate an openness to anxieties about the dangers of streetcars, and to pursuing the representation of those anxieties through compositional decisions relating to time and space—cinematic composition—rather than through still photography conventions. As such, the Edison film demonstrates the effect of eschewing aesthetic intention in favour of an impulse to re-present the city.

The Dead Man's Curve films are just one example and from a very early phase of cinema. In looking ahead to early 1899, it seems clear which of the two Dead Man's Curve filmmaking strategies points to the filming of the Brooklyn Bridge train films. The Edison streetcar film's openness to streetcar accident anxieties, in contravention of the film's likely commissioning remit, would seem to be a necessary approach in order to produce the 'inclosed passage' journey and its correspondence with the issue of systematisation. Indeed, how could an early cinema which is effectively constrained by adherence to photographic or aesthetic conventions, such as that which the Lumière streetcar film points to, produce a film such as *New Brooklyn to New York, via Brooklyn Bridge*? While touring New York during early 1897, the tour in which the Dead Man's Curve film was photographed, the Lumière camera crew also filmed the Brooklyn Bridge railway. Again, the film is instructive in providing a contrast to the New York actuality filmmaking impulse. The contrast provided by this second Lumière film will also involve a shift to the third aspect of the many cinemas approach agenda, namely focussing on new forms of mediation within New York actuality cinema. Within this shift, I want to return to Musser's notion of early cinema involving an 'unprecedented congruence' between the world

represented on screen and the world as experienced. The issue of the realism of moving pictures will therefore become a focus.

The Lumière streetcar film is listed as No. 328 and would appear to have been filmed in the spring of 1897, given the progress on the building site in the background and the leafless trees in the Park. *New York, Brooklyn Bridge* is film No. 321 and is likely also to have been filmed during spring 1897, probably by the same camera crew. This is, then, some two years before the bridge train ride films and prior to the electrification development phase of Brooklyn Bridge. Nevertheless, the Lumière bridge film can illustrate the divergent paths that early cinema would take in the succeeding years. Compositionally, for *New York, Brooklyn Bridge* the Lumière camera is positioned on the New York side of the bridge, with the bridge towers visible at frame left [Fig. 3.8]. The main bridge tracks run from frame left, with the width of the tracks visible from the lower left corner of the frame to almost the centre left of the frame. The tracks curve to the centre of the frame at middle distance, then rise up towards the New York side bridge tower at frame left. A triangular portion of trackside ground is visible from the lower centre of the frame, with the apex of the triangle reaching to frame right. A small, flat-roofed trackside hut is seen in the middle distance, to the right of the frame centre. As such, the camera is carefully positioned in order to produce a conventional perspective view of the New York side bridge railway.

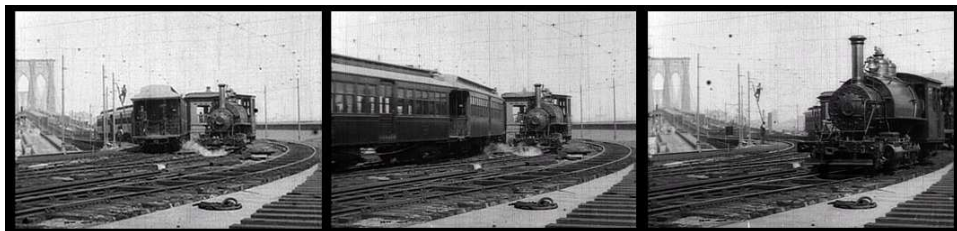


Fig. 3.8 Frames from Lumière film No. 321 *New York, Brooklyn Bridge* (1897).

With the camera static throughout, the film begins with a train running down the bridge incline towards the New York terminal. The four-car bridge train

negotiates the track curve and continues off and to the left of the frame. After sixteen seconds, and with the final car of the bridge train disappearing to frame left, a second train appears at frame left on the near-most track, heading towards the bridge. At twenty-seven seconds the second train completes its run into view; two steam-driven locomotives which accompany the trains are also visible. With the second train running up the incline, the film ends after forty-three seconds with the second train occupying the same position on the bridge incline, relative to the bridge towers and the flat-roof building, as the first train did when the film started. The film is therefore very carefully timed through the synchronising of the start and end of the film to coincide with identical corresponding bridge train track positions on the bridge incline, and the almost mid-point crossover of action from the first train to the second train.

Far from being an arbitrarily filmed, crude point-and-shoot actuality, the Lumière Brooklyn Bridge film is, in one sense, a highly accomplished example of early filmmaking. As with the Dead Man's Curve films, it is likely that the film was commissioned by, or at least produced with the agreement of, the bridge authorities. Given its clockwork-like precision the film could surely be seen, at the time, as a valued representation of the smooth functioning of the bridge railway system. Importantly, this effect of precision is the result of accurately transferring compositional spatial coordinates to the representation of time. In the same way that bridge space and frame space coordinates are carefully aligned in the Lumière bridge film, train movements within the frame and frame rate are similarly aligned. In being produced through a consummate alignment of space and time coordinates, the film also, however, reproduces a specific model of realism. In accordance with what we might expect from 'actuality' cinema, the Lumière bridge film produces a faithful representation of the New York side bridge railway scene. The film adheres to a straightforward

mimetic model of realism, where the accuracy of representation is the purpose of accurate space and time filmmaking decisions. However, the key issues for the bridge's location alongside systematisation concerns, as we saw with the 1899 bridge journey films, related to abstract themes such as congestion and the operation of the bridge railway within wider transportation systems. As such, the usefulness, or more properly in the American context, the utility of the Lumière bridge film is in question.

In the above discussion of ways of conceptualising cinema's emergence we noted Thomas Elsaesser's claim that, rather than being 'inevitable', narrative cinema was a 'solution' to filmmaking issues such as the 'representation of space and time' and the 'representation of the spectator within this space-time'. Clearly, the Lumière bridge film achieves the former but in choosing to adhere to a mimetic form of realism, not the latter. Here then, is a key reason for the popularity of the 1899 bridge journey films. By representing the train journey, rather than the smooth running of trains, the bridge journey films represent the spectator within the films.<sup>24</sup> However, rather than representing the spectator within the space-time of the films by, for example, providing a familiar railway carriage viewpoint, the spectator is represented as a component of the systematisation of travel.

Elsaesser is right to identify that the successful representation of the spectator within films is a key marker in the emergence of the language of cinema, or as Elsaesser has it, 'codes of intelligibility'. What we are identifying in the films in this study, however, is the emergence of 'codes of intelligibility' that include the

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<sup>24</sup> The use of the term 'spectator' in this context is problematic. As Hansen argues, "the film spectator, as distinct from a member of an empirically variable audience, did not come into existence until more than a decade later [after the inception of cinema]" (1991: 23). The term spectator is thus usually associated with a later cinema context. However, without terms for early cinema viewers, 'spectator' should here be taken as meaning 'early cinema film viewer'.

successful representation of the spectator within, not narrative cinema, but early actuality cinema. For example, in addition to the 1899 bridge journey films, the Edison streetcar film also represents the spectator by showing the sudden emergence of a streetcar and the ever present danger when crossing the street at Dead Man's Curve. The representation of the spectator within films is, moreover, an important aspect of actuality cinema's contribution to the emergence of narrative cinema, and will be a main theme for Chapter 5. That actuality cinema could introduce ways of representing the spectator also brings us back to the wider issue of ways of conceptualising cinema's emergence. In this regard, Musser's notion of very early films involving an 'unprecedented congruence' between the world represented on screen and the world as experienced is a notion upon which the Brooklyn Bridge films reflect.

As we saw with Birt Acres' *Rough Sea at Dover*, the film's 'unprecedented' and unexpected 'congruence' related to the stereograph-like effect of the rolling sea waves which provoked a way of looking at the film. The adoption of stereo photography conventions within actuality cinema is an important issue, which I will focus on in Chapter 4. However, as Musser noted when describing congruence in terms of a 'new level of realism', congruence also relates to the realism of films and, with the Brooklyn Bridge films, different forms of realism. For example, whereas the Lumière bridge film involved what could be thought of as a 'faithful copy' model of realism, the realism of the 1899 bridge films related to the congruence, or superimposition, of abstract elements of systematisation anxieties on screen and abstract elements of the experience of the bridge journey. The 'levels' of realism in the 1899 bridge journey films involved therefore, as expressed in the newspaper reports, a heightened level of realism.

That early films produced a new level of realism, involving a sense of liveness, could be thought to demonstrate early cinema's involvement with, or cultural role of, conflating the real and the represented. Conflation is, of course, central to theories of the commodification of culture, or in the early cinema context as we saw in Chapter 2, the spectacularisation of everyday life. However, the realism of the 1899 bridge films is rooted in congruence, which involves a knowledge of representation. Rather than involving attempts to conflate or fuse the real and the represented, congruence involves the superimposing of two elements, and therefore the knowledge of, the real and the represented. The distinction between conflation and congruence can be thought an important distinction between kinds of early cinemas.

Musser's notion of congruence also points to an issues that is recognised as problematic by early cinema researchers: the seeming representational duality of early actuality films. As we saw earlier, Frank Kessler described early cinema's duality as a 'paradoxical relationship between transparency and opacity', in that actuality films appear both unmediated and in some way mediated. In a 1979 essay, 'Structural Patterning in the Lumière Films', Marshall Deutelbaum explored the careful structuring evident in Lumière films as a contrast to the then long-held view that actuality films constituted 'snapshots' of "unadjusted, unarranged, untampered reality" (Lennig, 1969. Cited in Deutelbaum, 1979: 29). According to Deutelbaum, early Lumière actualities such as the factory gate film *Sortie d'usine* (1895) "dr[e]w their structure from the inherent processes selected for their subjects" (1979: 31). The opening and closing of the factory gates in *Sortie d'usine* provided, for Deutelbaum, a form of structure via a beginning and ending to the film. Similarly, as we have found, the structure of the Lumière bridge film relates to 'inherent processes' such as the smooth running of the bridge trains. In pursuing a mimetic or copy model of realism which involves an

attempt to fuse the real and the represented it is, however, a structuring that attempts to conceal the potential duality of actuality films.

Duality is also addressed by Richard Crangle in an essay where he defines the 'modes of representation' evident in early British films. Crangle identifies five 'parallel' aspects to early representational modes: 'hybridity' in terms of the interrelation of film with other texts; that early films were "strongly documentary in content and appearance"; a "rigidity of time portrayal" within early films; the use of "redundant detail" within films and lastly; that "film exhibits ambiguous or dualised portrayal" (Crangle, 1999: 94-95). He thus provides an important example of a representational approach to early films. In common with much early cinema research, however, he avoids film analysis, and instead argues for the need to "move beyond the evidence of surviving early films into consideration of a broader cultural context" (93). Nevertheless, he does focus on the problematic issue of the duality of early films and claims that:

[t]his duality becomes more problematic the more terms one uses to express it: realism and illusion, fact and fiction, recording and staging? There seems to be no coherent way of resolving this aspect of early film's mode, short of giving it a name which leaves the duality intact and accepts it as a defining feature without trying to separate its components from each other. (95)

Crangle then goes on to lament that, "I do not have a suggestion for that name, but I suggest that it would be helpful to find one" (95). Although from within our many kinds of cinemas approach providing one name for early cinema's duality would hardly seem appropriate, I would suggest that for New York actualities Musser provides a name for the representational duality of films: their congruence between the real and the represented.

As we have seen in the newspaper reports of early films, the simultaneous recognition of films as both seemingly real and as a representation points to the



potential duality of early actuality films. It is a potential duality, however, in that it depends upon a model of realism and what is represented by films, as we have seen with the Lumière bridge film example. Recognising the potential duality of early films in terms of congruence is then a simultaneous recognition of the many kinds of early cinemas and, in relation to an ‘unprecedented’ congruence, their potential to provide new forms of mediation.

In now working towards the conclusion of this chapter I want to draw together the various strands of the ways in which cinema’s emergence has been conceptualised. In this regard I want to resurrect a term used by Noël Burch almost two decades ago: the idea that early cinema involved a ‘detour’ from its expected course.<sup>25</sup> In many respects, especially with regard to claims that early cinema comprised a stable and coherent ‘primitive mode of representation’, Burch’s work has become something of a touchstone for identifying how not to undertake early cinema research (Burch, 1990: 186-201).<sup>26</sup> Regardless of any shortcomings in Burch’s work on early cinema, however, the idea of a detour is useful for conceptualising cinema’s emergence. Burch adopts the term detour in relation to a representational model of cinema’s emergence.

### **Actuality Cinema’s Representational Detour**

In *Life to those Shadows* (1990) Burch’s primary stated purpose is to provide “a critique of theoretical and historical discourses which tend to naturalise the ‘Hollywood’ system of representation” (2). To this end, he turns to early cinema in order to identify “contestatory practices” which serve to demonstrate a history of filmmaking practices and therefore that Hollywood filmmaking is “in no way

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<sup>25</sup> The term ‘detour’ is used in Ben Brewster’s 1990 translation of Burch’s essay ‘Charles Baudelaire Versus Doctor Frankenstein’ which was first published in English in *Afterimage*, 8/9, Spring 1981 (Translated by Tom Milne).

<sup>26</sup> See for example Crangle (1999).

natural, *a fortiori* that it is not eternal” (2. Burch’s italics). With regard to identifying lines of continuity from pre-cinema, through early cinema and on to Hollywood filmmaking, Burch claims that a “bourgeois ideology of representation” provides a traceable line from early photography to Edison’s Kinetophonograph, and through to Hollywood filmmaking (6). This line of continuity provides “step[s] towards the recreation of reality, towards the realisation of a perfect illusion of the perceptual world” (6). However, in relation to ‘contestatory practices’, Burch identifies a ‘scientific tradition’ which is traceable through the works of Muybridge, Marey and on to the Lumières. It is this tradition, or “ideological configuration”, which provides a “detour through applied science” (14). Moreover, it is a ‘detour’ which “delays and sidetracks” the “collective drive” towards the “institutional mode of representation” (7). In effect, Burch establishes an opposition between a “rationalist tradition”, which provides the detour’s main impulse, and a bourgeois tradition of “analogical representation” (20).

Burch’s polemics aside, there are important differences between his findings and the early cinema we have been tracing in this study. For example, Burch situates the stereoscope within an illusory, mimetic mode of representation, but as we have seen with *Rough Sea at Dover*, the stereoscope can be thought to provoke a way of looking at moving pictures that is in opposition to a mimetic model of realism. Nevertheless, the idea of a representational detour, albeit positioned somewhat differently to Burch’s model, offers an important way of conceptualising actuality cinema’s emergence in a number of ways.

Firstly, with regard to identifying lines of continuity from pre-cinema through to early cinema, the representational detour conception allows both for continuities and discontinuities. For example, *Rough Sea at Dover* demonstrates continuities

with the adoption of stereo photography practices and discontinuities in the unexpected and unprecedented congruence between the world on screen and the world as experienced; the detour conception allows for there to be both lines of continuity and a specific newness to cinema. In relation to lines of continuity from early to later cinema, the representational detour conception contrasts with Gunning's idea of early cinema's 'roads not taken', where early cinema consists of, as it were, cinematic cul-de-sacs. Conversely, the notion of a detour allows for, as we shall see in Chapter 5, the interrelation of early cinema's different routes with the assimilation of actuality and narrative cinema. In this sense, New York actuality cinema's detour from an expected cinema route, eventually turns back to, by around 1905, cinema's narrative route.

Secondly, with regard to the conception of cinema's emergence as many kinds of cinemas, a representational detour implicitly involves other cinemas from which actuality cinema detours. It is however, with the third aspect of the many cinemas agenda we have been exploring, that of identifying configurations of early cinema which provide new forms of mediation, where the representational detour is especially useful. The idea that New York actuality filmmaking involves an eschewing of aesthetic intention in favour of a form of openness to representing the city, or that actuality films represent abstract concepts, is difficult to comprehend in terms other than of a detour from expected or recognised representational conventions. Furthermore, the notion of a detour helps make comprehensible what are otherwise distinctly odd viewing practices, such as the reported ways of looking at moving pictures. As a representational detour, cinema's new forms of mediation are therefore most clearly evident. Intriguingly, in relation to ways of looking at moving pictures there is, moreover, a use of the familiar screen-as-window metaphor which would seem to encompass many of the representational detour's themes. Indeed, relating film

viewing to looking through a window was recognised right from the start of cinema exhibition.

In the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* report of Acres' *Rough Sea at Dover* at the vitascope premiere, the detailed account of the sea spray dashing 'high in the air' continued, "[i]t was just as if you were looking out of a window upon the actual scene" (April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1896: 6). In filming *Herald Square* less than three weeks after the premiere William Heise pursued the window metaphor literally by photographing the film through a window of a building. As the *New York Herald* noted, "[t]hey chose a window at the lower end of the square, where they were within full view of the Herald Building" (12<sup>th</sup> May, 1896: 9. Cited in Musser, 1997; 203). The practice of filming through windows when photographing street scenes was, to a large extent, a matter of logistics borrowed from still photography and was subsequently much used for filming street scene actualities.

Adopting a window metaphor is hardly a new approach. As Vivian Sobchack notes in an essay entitled 'Phenomenology and the Film Experience' (1994), "three metaphors have dominated film theory: the picture frame, the window, and the mirror" (45). In its conventional usage within classical film theory, the window is a realist metaphor involving a copy model of realism, where the object of cinema is to produce a real world-like experience. However, the realism of actuality cinema is, as we have seen, related to an unprecedented congruence or superimposition of abstract concepts represented on screen and abstract concepts from the world as experienced. Consequently, a conventional conception of the screen-as-window metaphor is hardly likely to be appropriate to its use within actuality cinema's representational detour. For example, in films such as *Rough Sea at Dover*, by provoking a stereograph-like scanning of the

screen and therefore the potential for a depth effect, looking at the window may also involve an intriguing looking through the window. Exhibition contexts are also likely to be part of the actuality screen-as-window.

In Plate 6 there are five examples from *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reports and advertisements of different exhibition settings for the AM&B biograph projector in the period from October 1897 to November 1900.<sup>27</sup> Contexts include Liebermann's shopping arcade in Brooklyn, an illustrated lecture by Alexander Black in Brooklyn, a religious lecture at a music hall in Manhattan, a vaudeville evening at Hyde and Behman's in Brooklyn and, as part of the Brooklyn newspaper's 1900 election night service, the projection of a moving picture onto the side of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle's* Washington Street building in Brooklyn. Such venues are examples of settings where the liveness of actuality films and the negotiation impulse we have been tracing could have operated for Brooklynites.

Clearly, this range of film viewing environments would have a significant impact on the reception of films, as would the picture quality (itself affected by the working order of the projection equipment, the lighting and the state of the reel of film being projected), especially for actuality cinema's 'liveness' mode. The

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<sup>27</sup> The projectors used in the above exhibition settings were somewhat different from the Edison vitascope projector. Technical problems beset the vitascope machine from the outset. The kinoscope-derived film loop mechanism rapidly wore the 35mm films with a resultant deterioration in projected picture quality. The vitascope system's frame rate was only sixteen frames per second and suffered from visible frame flicker. Machines were difficult to operate and consequently by October 1896, just six months after the premiere, the Edison Company severed ties with the Vitascope Company and the business rapidly declined (Musser, 1991: 91). The practice of repeating the projection of each film several times, as described in the vitascope premiere, was therefore a short lived phenomenon. One reason for the demise of the vitascope was the introduction in September 1896 of the far superior biograph projector. With a frame rate of thirty-two frames per second, by using 70mm wide film and with a superior film-feed mechanism the biograph projector produced larger, sharper and smoother picture quality than the vitascope. As Musser notes, the biograph was "designed for the top end of the market" (Musser, 1991: 92). Rather than producing a small, flickering picture, biograph projectors provided a high quality image.

sequencing of films within a film show, the time of day of the exhibition, the presence or not of a lecturer and the use of sound are also considerations. Moreover, issues of class, gender and age, the 'who' for any attempt to formulate film-viewer relations, are fundamental for accounts of spectatorship. Self-evidently, there is an extremely complex matrix of factors which affect spectatorship. For this study, however, the impetus to engage with a form of filmmaking which has hitherto been neglected is the identification of actuality films which do not cohere with conventional explanations, such as that provided by Gunning's 'attractions' thesis. My primary purpose, then, is to identify a coherent body of New York films, for the reasons set out in Chapter 1, to then trace connections between this side of actuality films and filmmaking and the modern: to consider how actuality cinema functions as a space and time machine. The identification of cultural and cinematic roles for New York 'rocks and waves' films, as Uricchio has it, then opens up areas of further research on this side of early cinema, including spectatorship. My contribution in that direction, within the limits of a thesis-length study, is to outline (in Chapter 1) an ideal addressee, if you will, for the film. New York is a specific context which impacts upon the types of films made and how they are made; it is highly likely that Chicago or Philadelphia, the other main urban centres of film production in this period, also harbour their own form of actuality liveness cinema.

In conclusion to this chapter and in returning to the question of why New York actuality cinema has hitherto been overlooked, the paucity of representational approaches to cinema's emergence has been shown to be a key reason. As for this chapter's purpose, identifying actuality cinema's representational detour has been central to identifying new forms of mediation within early cinema. In a rare comment on the commercial potential of actuality cinema, Richard Crangle notes

in an essay which demonstrates the popularity of x-ray photography as an entertainment medium in the 1890s that:

[t]he documentary nature of early film's content, in a period in which the technological progress of modern life was in itself a subject of wonder and entertainment, was far from the limitation as which it has since been perceived and closer to being a commercial advantage (Crangle, 1998: 143).

Despite the obstinate crudity, from a later cinema perspective, of films such as Acres' *Rough Sea at Dover*, Crangle's comment is a reminder that actuality cinema's representational detour was itself a commercial advantage in cinema's first decade.

## Chapter 4

### Early Cinema's Context: New York City

A key element in formulating the conception of actuality cinema as a cinema of simultaneity is identifying content within actuality films. Coupled to this is the recognition that, in contrast to (following Barthes) a photographic 'that-has-been' statement, actuality cinema provides (following Doane) a 'this' or 'here it is' statement, as we saw in Chapter 3. In essence, actuality cinema conveys a form of presence. For Doane, actuality cinema's 'here it is' statement is a function of photographic indexicality, but with the important distinction that actuality cinema conveys an "essentially contentless" presence (2002: 25). The contentlessness of actuality films is central to Doane's argument. With regard to cinematic time, actuality cinema functions to provide a "pure record of time" through the representation of the ephemeral, for Doane (22). Content is emphatically not at stake here. Instead, actuality cinema's "implicit thesis", that "anything and everything is filmable", demonstrates the "archivability of presence" (25). However, even with what Doane claims to be the 'purest of actualities', *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City*, content—in terms of a visually coherent urban space or the representation of urban anxieties such as air grate avoidance—is clearly identifiable. The question then becomes, what is the effect of content for actuality cinema's presence? For this study, instead of solely representing time, the actuality cinema under consideration represents both space and time; New York actuality films represent urban space over time. Instead of a record of presence, actuality cinema's 'here it is' becomes an expanded present time. In so doing, actuality cinema is here considered a cinema of multiple present times, a cinema of simultaneity. Such a formulation requires a return to the issue of indexicality and, again, Doane's account is useful here.



According to Doane, photography's "promise of indexicality" is the promise of the "rematerialisation of time", where time "appears to be free in its indeterminacy": "any moment can be the subject of a photograph, any event can be filmed" (2002: 10). Furthermore, photography "guarantees" a "privileged relation to chance and the contingent", with indexicality's "lure" being the "escape from the grasp of rationalization and its system" (2002: 10). Indexicality's contingency is in effect a form of indeterminacy, but in contentless actuality cinema indexicality produces indeterminate moments of time: 'any moment' is filmable. As with the issue of presence, the question becomes, is there an indeterminacy to a content-based cinema of simultaneity? There is, as I have argued, a careful structuring involved in filming actualities—location selection, composition, framing, use of photographic conventions, including stereo visual cues, and so on—which ought to work to remove elements of chance and the contingent, and therefore indeterminacy. Simply put, in the same way that MTV debunks the notion of any essential politics to montage, does CNN debunk any essential politics to a cinema of simultaneity, a cinema of liveness? In this scenario, the white shirted boy in *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City*, who is employed as the middle-distance stereo depth cue enhancer, could be thought a proto-CNN operative, part of the liveness mode of filming. Nevertheless, there is both a form of openness to urban themes identifiable in New York actuality cinema and an undetermined, perhaps indeterminate, relationship between the real and the represented. As Margaret Cohen argues, as we saw in Chapter 2, early film audiences are "transported into [an] epistemological twilight", with cinema functioning to "unmoor the separation of reality from representation" (1995: 247). As such, there remains a potential for indeterminacy within actuality cinema, in the form of a politics and a pleasure of openness.

To return to the issue of content, in this chapter I will reinforce the identification of content within actuality films by exploring a form and context relationship. New York is a significant context for early cinema, as shown in the proportion of early films whose subject is New York<sup>1</sup>. In addition to providing a subject, I will examine the significance of New York as an urban environment for ways of seeing moving pictures. One issue to consider is the extent to which the literal construction of New York, and the accompanying canyonisation of Manhattan streets, is implicated within stereograph-like ways of seeing films. Furthermore, an underlying question for this and the concluding chapter is, could New York be as important to early cinema as Hollywood is to later cinema? Whereas periods of time, in minutes, have been the focus of previous chapters, an event which lasts one year will provide this chapter's main example. In the period from around 1901 to 1904 one building became the primary site of the modern in New York and thus the locus for urban issues: the Flatiron Building in Manhattan. However, rather than solely concerning the completed building, the initial focus for these issues is the year-long construction of the Flatiron. It is, then, the building of, rather than the completed Flatiron, which provides this chapter's main example of the representation of the modern.

I will begin by exploring the Flatiron Building's status, once completed, as the primary site of the modern in early 1900s New York. The reasons why this building, among the many early 1900s skyscrapers, became a significant site are then explored through the building lot's former use. I will demonstrate that the stage was set for the construction of the Flatiron to be the locus of the representation of the modern. I then want to explore what the under-construction Flatiron Building represents through the work of one early filmmaker, Robert

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<sup>1</sup> See the Appendix for an analysis of the proportion of New York films in cinema's first decade.

Kates Bonine. In so doing, Bonine's photographic background will provide a focus for exploring how early films represent. Three of Bonine's films will then provide examples of what is represented by early 1900s films and how such films represent New York's urban themes. Bonine's work will also provide a contrast to actualities produced by the Edison Company in this period. A sense of the development of New York actuality cinema will thus be demonstrated. Firstly, I will begin by exploring 'seeing New York' via an early 1900s bus tour of that name. As we have been tracing throughout this study, 'seeing' is a far from straightforward concept in New York in the period: there are, for example, important connections between 'seeing New York' and watching early films.

### **'Seeing New York Starts from Flat Iron Building'**

Seeing New York was an important pre-occupation for early 1900s New Yorkers. Waiting outside the Flatiron Building offices of the 'Seeing New York' company, patrons onboard the company's tour bus were about to experience what would have been a familiar itinerary of Manhattan's sights [Plate 7]. Contemporary guidebooks and tour guides could provide us with the likely route of the tour bus, but we can just as easily follow their path from the countless extant pictures from the period.<sup>2</sup> The tour bus photographs show the start and end point of the 'Seeing New York' tour and a range of media such as paintings, sketches, cartoon drawings, woodcut newspaper images, lantern slides, stereo photographs and early films could indicate likely stopping-off points such as public squares and parks, construction sites, new buildings, shopping areas,

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<sup>2</sup> The following list of media and stopping-off points is indebted to Robert W. Snyder and Rebecca Zurier's 'Picturing the City' essay, where Ashcan artists are considered as New York 'sightseers' of sorts (Zurier et al, 1995: 85-88). Snyder and Zurier also reproduce a 'Seeing New York' postcard. However, despite the obvious similarities between Ashcan artists and early filmmakers, in claiming that Ashcan artists "offered more than a breezy overview" of New York's sights than that available in, for example, "early 'actuality' movies filmed in New York", Snyder and Zurier also reproduce the standard, denigrating account of actuality cinema (Zurier et al, 1995: 87).

immigrant districts and so on. These are perhaps expected sites and touring such sites may seem a familiar sightseeing activity. Moreover, there are standard accounts of sightseeing, as a cultural activity, through which we could interpret the 'Seeing New York' tour. The tour bus patrons could be situated within a commodification model of culture as an example of the broad shift from an economy of production to an economy of consumption. In this view, the sightseers signify the dutiful circulation of modern consumers and are thus akin to Schivelbusch's railway passenger 'parcel'. In short, the tour bus patrons could be thought of as observers who watch at a distance in a form of vicarious relationship with the urban environment. In the same way, however, that 'seeing' actuality films was far from a detached activity, the tour bus patrons were not merely observing New York's sights.

In their 'Picturing the City' essay, as part of a discussion of the 'intertwined lives' of those employed in the business of picturing New York and New Yorkers themselves, Snyder and Zurier formulate the notion of a New York picturing industry which "linked events, reporters, and readers in a dynamic conversation" (1995: 87). New York's picturing industry is an important context for early cinema's engagement with seeing New York and a context I will later explore in relation to identifying a logic of actuality film production. For now, however, the idea of active participation is intriguing in that it undercuts the binarisms between production and consumption and thus complicates the shift from economies of production to economies of consumption. It also complicates the act of sightseeing. Similarly, whereas the figure of the urban flâneur is often misread solely in terms of a form of detachment, as David Frisby argues in a sociological study of flânerie, Benjamin's flâneur is 'fundamentally ambiguous' (Frisby, 1994). According to Frisby, although often a "mere stroller", Benjamin's figure of the flâneur is also often "elevated to that of the detective, to

the decipherer of urban and visual texts” (82). In the light of such notions as active participation, detective figures and deciphering the visual, and in turning now to the photographs and postcards of the tour bus and its patrons, a different conception of ‘seeing New York’ can emerge.

The design of the tour bus itself points to the extent to which ‘seeing’ meant engaging with New York. Clearly, the design of streetcars could have provided a model for designing a tour bus which would provide a safe, insulated touring environment. Instead the ‘Seeing New York’ bus, or rather motorised platform, had open sides, no roof covering and seating which extended to the edges of the vehicle [Plate 7]. This design allowed patrons to witness the canyon-like streets in Lower Manhattan and the full height of tall buildings such as the Park Row Building. The tour bus’s design is one example of the wide-ranging influence of Manhattan’s built environment: the effect of the open platform design when travelling through New York’s neighbourhoods would also have been significant.

In their commentary on the ‘Seeing New York’ postcard, Snyder and Zurier note that “[s]ightseeing companies promised an authentic look at neighbourhoods, including ‘the Bowery—with its endless procession of human wrecks’” (1995: 87). As shown in the stereograph of the tour bus, with a tour guide announcing the location of and describing stopping-off points through a loud-hailer and with curious local inhabitants approaching the sides of the bus, the tour would clearly have provided an ‘authentic’ experience of New York [Plate 7]. Instead of involving a vicarious relationship with the city, the tour encouraged engagement with the urban environment. ‘Seeing New York’ could, then, be interpreted from a later perspective as ‘engaging with New York’.

A 1902 *New York Times* report of another sightseeing company's tours, the 'Seeing New York Observation Coaches', provides an example of sightseeing as engaging with the urban environment. The report began by claiming that "[e]veryone who comes to New York is anxious to see it thoroughly", and then went on to detail a horse-driven tour of the city's genteel sights such as Central Park, "at the fashionable hour", and Riverside Drive (November 16<sup>th</sup> 1902: 34). The following Sunday, the newspaper offered readers a direct comparison to the horse-driven tour. The report advised readers that in order to see New York, "a very different aspect" could be gained from the elevated railroad: in comparison to the observation coach, "[t]he prospect is less pleasant, but it is more illuminating" (November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1902: 26). The report continued:

less pleasant, but it is more illuminating.  
There is, in fact, no other means by which so close an insight into the life and activities of New York may be gathered as from the elevated. Take any train from the Battery northward, east or west side. From the car windows or from the platforms can be seen in rapidly passing procession almost every phase of life in the metropolis; the busy streets, with their throngs of hurrying people, jostling vehicles, clanging cars, and even the interiors of the blocks of buildings which face the railway lines. It is a wonderful panorama, kaleidoscopic in variety and unending in its human interest. No other city in the world can afford such a study, for no other city has such means for observation.  
In one block along Church Street near to

Fig. 4.1 'Cutting' from *New York Times* November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1902: 26.

The report speaks to a preoccupation with not just seeing New York, but getting in close, to "study" the city in order to gain an "insight". In echoing the reports of early films we saw in Chapter 2, where films 'illustrate new ideas of action and fresh phases of progress', the elevated railroad enabled a view of "almost every phase of life in the metropolis". The report described the "wonderful panorama, kaleidoscopic in variety", afforded by the Sixth Avenue line, in great detail, block by block, including cramped working conditions and housing for "the New York which works for small wages" (*New York Times* November 23<sup>rd</sup>

1902: 26). In contrast to Schivelbusch's railroad passenger, who became a commodified 'parcel', the newspaper's advice to see New York from an El train connected to a burgeoning Progressive reform agenda, noted in Chapter 3. In addition to being a genteel activity, sightseeing was also shaped by a visuality of reform, where "observation" meant getting in close and engaging with the city. As a 'panorama', the view from the El train was, in a sense, also shaped by New York's intermedial culture. Not surprisingly, filming the experience of sightseeing became a subject for filmmakers. The 'Sightseeing Autos!' advertisement, shown in Plate 7, provides an example.

The Sightseeing Autos Company used moving pictures in a similar way to the more well known Hale's Tours, which as noted in Chapter 2, made use of films such as the Brooklyn Bridge train journey films. 'Sightseers' were seated in a mock-up of an automobile and what the advertisement describes as the 'illusion' of sightseeing was provided by:

a panorama of moving scenes attached to the wall beside the Sightseeing Auto ... and the throwing upon a screen in front of the Sightseeing Auto the moving pictures which were taken from a moving automobile ... . (*Billboard*, 27th January 1906: 23. Cited in Abel and Altman, 2001: 172)

Patrons could thus see moving pictures of scenes from American cities to the sides and to the front of the sightseeing Auto. The Sightseeing Autos Company was demonstrating the expected intermediality of the tour bus experience and films from a moving vehicle. In effect, intermediality was here being driven by the congruence, or liveness, presented by actuality cinema. Furthermore, by situating an image of the Flatiron in the centre of their advertisement, the Company were also acknowledging the significance of the new skyscraper for seeing, or rather, engaging with the city.

Renting office space within the ground floor of the Flatiron Building would have been an expensive commitment for the Seeing New York Company, but very likely a necessary commitment for the success of their business given the status of the new skyscraper. The Company's claim that 'Seeing New York Starts from Flat Iron Building' involved, however, more than just promotional hyperbole. In turning now to a discussion of the cultural status of the Flatiron Building in its various phases of building lot, construction site and completed building we can begin to identify the urban themes which cohere around the experience of 'seeing' the city.

Completed in October 1902 on a triangular shaped lot bounded by 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, Broadway and Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, in what subsequently became known as the Flatiron District, the Flatiron Building was the pre-eminent skyscraper in 1900s New York, and thus the Chrysler Building (1930) or Empire State Building (1931) of its time. The Flatiron was built by the George A. Fuller Company and designed by the Daniel Hudson Burnham firm of architects. Although Burnham is usually cited as the Flatiron's designer, it seems likely that one of Burnham's staff such as Bruce Price—the architect of the similarly façaded American Surety Building (1896)—designed the Flatiron (Landau and Condit, 1996: 303). During the course of construction the building's name changed from The Cumberland (taken from the name of a hotel which had occupied the site), to the Fuller Building (the name of construction company which built the Flatiron) and, finally, to the Flatiron Building (Landau and Condit, 1996: 302-303).<sup>3</sup> According to the *Architectural Record*, an architectural journal which represented an 'Old New York' perspective on the merits of

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<sup>3</sup> Lacking an 'official' name, the building was variously called the 'Flat-Iron', the 'Flat Iron' and the 'Flatiron' in the first years after its completion. The building was officially named the 'Flatiron Building' in 1925, when the Fuller Company sold the building and moved into new premises further uptown (Berman, 2001: 114).



architectural design, an article entitled ‘The “Flatiron” or Fuller Building’ noted that “the public has thus far refused to accept the official title of ‘Fuller’, preferring the homelier and more graphic designation of the ‘Flatiron’” (October 1902: 528). The re-naming of the building thus provides one example of the influence of what Hansen terms the vernacular over, in this case, the interests of a prominent construction company.

With regard to pictures of the Flatiron, photographs such as Alfred Stieglitz’s *The Flatiron* (1902-1903) and Edward Steichen’s *The Flatiron-Evening* (1905) provide perhaps the best known examples from the period [Plate 8]. Both provide a familiar slab-like view of the triangular shaped building, which would tend to accentuate the Flatiron’s newness. However, both also use the trees in Madison Square Park to seemingly downplay or subvert the modernness of the Flatiron. As such, there is an identifiable tension in both photographs between what was known as the ‘Old New York’ and the emerging ‘New New York’. Stieglitz’s much quoted commentary on his 1903 Flatiron photograph illustrates this tension. According to Stieglitz’s memoirs:

[w]atching the structure go up, I felt no desire to photograph the different stages of its development. But with the trees of Madison Square covered with fresh snow, the Flat Iron impressed me as never before. It appeared to be moving toward me like the bow of a monster ocean steamer - a picture of a new America in the making ... The Flat Iron is to the United States what the Parthenon was to Greece. (Cited in Landau and Condit, 1996: 304)

Stieglitz then went on to note that in later years, after the completion of the Woolworth Building (1913), the attraction of the Flatiron waned in that it was no longer “representative of the coming age” (cited in Bender and Taylor, 1987: 207). Stieglitz thus adopts an ambivalent or perhaps reluctant stance towards the modernity of the Flatiron. In ‘watching the structure go up’ he recognises the significance of the building, in that it was ‘representative of the coming age’, but

chooses to obscure the Flatiron's newness through the picturesque device of the snow and trees in the Park. Arguably, then, Stieglitz was re-staging the problem of how to represent the modern which was identified with Billy Bitzer's and the Lumière camera crew's films of the Brooklyn Bridge. Conventional, or 'Old New York', aesthetic conventions—in contrast to the openness to the modern identified with New York actualities—stifled the representation of the modernity of 'New New York'. Nevertheless, Stieglitz's photograph and memoirs of the Flatiron Building do provide an example of a cusp-of-the-modern period of American art. However, Stieglitz was not the originator of the idea of the building 'moving ... like the bow of a monster ocean steamer'. As we have seen in example after example in this study, vernacular, or cultural, modernism can provide a much closer and more involved view of the modernity of New York.

In a June 29<sup>th</sup> 1902 'Illustrated Supplement' the *New-York Tribune* commented that the Flatiron "present[ed] an edge almost as sharp as the bow of a ship" (cited in Kreitler, c1990: 10). The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* then published a plea in November 1902 for the Flatiron to be renamed. In an article entitled 'Call It the Prow' the newspaper claimed that:

as one regards it from the upper streets it is like no other thing so much as an enormous steamship, plowing [sic] its way up through seas of buildings and dashing aside a-foam of traffic. There is almost a sense of motion in the bulk, and in the sense that it is likened to a ship, it stands for the triumphant progress of the city ... . (November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1902: 4)

This anonymous report clearly predates Stieglitz's celebrated 'ocean steamer' comments.<sup>4</sup> Aside from issues of authorship or Stieglitz's own aesthetic project

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<sup>4</sup> An October 1903 article in *Camera Work* entitled 'The Flatiron Building: An Esthetical Dissertation' commented that "we would not be astonished ... if the whole triangular block would begin to move northward ...", and then went on to note that, "the traffic of our two leading thoroughfares ... would break like the waves of the ocean on the huge prow-like angle" (56. Cited in Kreitler, c1990: 76). *Camera Work* was a mouthpiece for Stieglitz and his fellow artists and therefore it would seem reasonable to assume that the October 1903 Flatiron article was

which is outside of the scope of this study, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* report is a significant example of the voicing of representational issues within newspaper reports. Stieglitz's usage of the report demonstrates the difficulty of distinguishing between so-called vernacular and aesthetic response to the city. It is also an example of what 'seeing New York' encompassed in terms of abstract issues such as the 'progress of the city'.

As an example of the idea that buildings could represent, the Flatiron report echoes the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle's* 1900 Park Row Building article discussed in Chapter 2. However, rather than focusing on the view the building provides, as in the Park Row article, the 'Call It the Prow' plea stressed the dynamism of the new building. Whereas Stieglitz and Steichen blocked the forward motion of the building by framing the Flatiron with trees from the Park, the newspaper article is unequivocal in stating what the building represented. The Flatiron was 'like' an 'enormous steamship' which 'plowed' its way through the streets of Manhattan in that it 'stood for' the 'progress of the city'. Interestingly, despite the prevalence of the prow or ship theme in the 1902-1903 period, the period just after the building's completion, this is not a theme which is continued within later vernacular representations of the Flatiron.

The perspective adopted in the photograph-of-a-photographer photograph of the Flatiron could be thought, in some way, to refer to the prow theme [Plate 8]. However, it was the technological modernity of the building which became a feature of articles and pictures of the Flatiron in the immediate period after completion. For example, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* carried reports of the building's innovative use of technology such as a high-pressure water system, a

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either written or co-written by Stieglitz and was thus the source for Stieglitz's Flatiron comments in his aforementioned 1946 memoirs.

pneumatic cleaning system and the Flatiron's own electricity generating plant in the basement of the building.<sup>5</sup> One of the Flatiron's first tenants, the United Cigar Company, subsequently published a postcard-format advertisement which featured the building's system of lighting [Plate 8]. Despite this focus on the Flatiron's modernity the steamship metaphor is not evident once the building had been completed. Conversely, once completed the Flatiron soon transforms from being a symbol of 'New New York' to being allied more with 'Old New York'. As such, Stieglitz's was right to lament that the Flatiron was in later years no longer 'representative of the coming age'.

Looking back at the intensity of interest in the Flatiron it would be easy to assume that the building was New York's first skyscraper. Despite common assumptions that the Flatiron was New York's first steel framed tower or that when completed the Flatiron was the world's tallest building, neither of these claims are true. For example, Bradford Gilbert's Tower Building at 50 Broadway pre-dates the Flatiron as New York's first steel-frame tower by some fourteen years (Landau and Condit, 1996: 56-57). With regard to height claims, at twenty-one stories and an overall height of 307 feet the Flatiron was nine stories or 84 feet shorter than the 1899 Park Row Building. Furthermore, during 1902 the Flatiron was but one of sixty-six steel-frame towers under construction in Manhattan, of which forty-three would out-top the symbolic 280 feet height of Trinity Church's spire (Landau and Condit, 1996: 280). As for its triangular shape, the Flatiron was hardly unique either. Once steel-frame construction techniques were widely available, wedge-shaped towers became a common solution for triangular infill lots. Bradford Gilbert again provides an example with his 1897 triangular shaped English-America Building in Atlanta which was

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<sup>5</sup> See for example 'Sweeping by Air Suction', *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1902: 7.

itself quickly dubbed the Flatiron.<sup>6</sup> Although the structure, height or shape of the Flatiron was hardly unique, the building's location provides a clue as to why it became a focus of interest.<sup>7</sup>

Situated overlooking Madison Square Park, when completed the Flatiron was the tallest skyscraper north of New York's business district in the southern tip of Manhattan. The Flatiron thus dominated the skyline in Lower Midtown Manhattan. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle's* 'Call It the Prow' article alluded to this domination in claiming that the Flatiron was 'like ... an enormous steamship', when 'one regards it from the upper streets'. However, it is difficult to argue that height alone is responsible for the intensity of interest in the Flatiron, or that height alone accounted for the claim that 'seeing New York' should 'start from the Flatiron'. Rather, I want to argue that firstly, a series of structures in Madison Square Park and secondly, the former use of the Flatiron's building lot are factors which provide a setting for what was then the Flatiron's primary attraction: its literal construction.

Madison Square Park was the setting in the late nineteenth century for a series of structures which seem unusual, at least from a later perspective [Plate 9]. Firstly, in 1876 the arm and torch of the Statue of Liberty were mounted on a stone pedestal in Madison Square Park. In a study of Madison Square, Miriam Berman notes that for a fifty cent entrance fee New Yorkers could climb up inside the

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<sup>6</sup> See my essay 'The Attraction of the Flatiron Building: Construction Processes' (2000) for photographs of similarly shaped buildings which predate the New York Flatiron.

<sup>7</sup> In this account of a fascination with the Flatiron Building I am deliberately eschewing conventional accounts of attitudes to skyscrapers in New York at the time. As with themes such as 'watching construction' (later in this chapter) my purpose is to trace connections between newspaper reports, photographs and actuality films; i.e. accounts within the so-called vernacular domain. With regard to conventional accounts of architecture, works consulted for this study include: Bender (2002), Koolhaas (1994), Landau & Condit (1996), van Leeuwen, (1988), Page (1999), Schuyler (1961) and Willis (1995).

torch to a circular platform and view the Park (Berman, 2001: 26).<sup>8</sup> Secondly, in 1880 an electricity generating station was installed at 25<sup>th</sup> Street adjacent to the Park and in 1881 (partly to advertise the new station) the Brush Company installed what became known as a ‘sun tower’ in the Park.<sup>9</sup> Mounted on an 160 feet high tower, six large electric lamps illuminated the Park at night and such was their brightness that the light was reputedly visible from a distance of fifteen miles (Berman, 2001: 19). Thirdly, to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the first inauguration of president George Washington, a pair of temporary arches was built in 1889 on Fifth Avenue, one at either end of the Park. Featuring a castellated and turreted design, the arch shown in Plate 9 overlooked what was to become the Flatiron’s site. Fourthly, to celebrate Admiral Dewey’s triumphal return from the Spanish-American war in late September 1899, a plaster and wood pseudo-rococo style arch and a court colonnade were erected on Fifth Avenue adjacent to the Park. Although planned as a full-scale model of what was to be a permanent structure, Dewey’s popularity declined and, perhaps fortunately for Madison Square, sufficient funds could not be raised for stone versions of the arch and colonnade (Jackson, 1995 :331).

Based on the Arch of Titus in Rome, the Dewey Arch was the last in a series of outlandish structures in Madison Square leading up to the construction of the Flatiron.<sup>10</sup> The Dewey Arch had been constructed using what was known as ‘staff’, a mixture of plaster, hay and fibres which had been used extensively for the temporary buildings at the 1893 Columbia World’s Fair in Chicago. Consequently, the Arch quickly deteriorated and in early 1901 Bradford Gilbert,

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<sup>8</sup> Berman also notes that the Statue’s arm and torch were located in the Park for six years in order to raise funds for transporting the remainder of the statue from its manufacturers in France (26).

<sup>9</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch provides a history of ‘sun towers’ in his 1988 study *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialisation of Light in the Nineteenth Century*.

<sup>10</sup> Films of the Dewey Arch include AM&B’s *The Dewey Arch* and two Edison films, *Dewey’s Arrival at Triumphal Arch* and *The Dewey Arch - Troops Passing Under*. All three films were photographed on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1899.

the architect of the Atlanta Flatiron, organised its dismantling and removal (Berman, 2001: 136). The construction of the Flatiron began later in 1901. Within this context of outlandish structures in Madison Square, it is, then, hardly surprising that a 307 foot high limestone and terracotta wedge-shaped skyscraper would be built at this location and dubbed a Flat Iron. Moreover, the usage of the triangular site on which the Flatiron was to stand was important to the Flatiron's cultural status. The torch viewing platform, the sun tower and the processional arches in Madison Square had all provided novel forms of sights. Similarly, the Flatiron's lot also provided a tradition of novel sights.

Up until late 1900 the narrow northern end of the Flatiron's triangular lot had been the site of a row of two and three story offices occupied by the Eerie Railroad company. At the wider southern end of the lot stood the eight story Cumberland Hotel which had one blank wall elevation facing Madison Square Park. As shown in Plate 10, this configuration of buildings provided a form of stage for early screen displays and electric sign advertisements. The 1880 photograph of the lot shows a white screen attached to a metal structure situated on the roof of the Eerie Railroad offices. The screen advertised the 'Turkish Russian heated baths' at the Cumberland Hotel and was highly likely to have been illuminated at night. Overlooking the Park, the prominent illuminated sign would have complemented the night-time illumination of the Park by the sun tower. Subsequently, on election night in November 1888, the screen display was used by the *New York Herald* as a message-screen showing election results [Plate 10]. It is likely that a lantern slide projector was used to project the results. The woodcut drawing from *Harper's Weekly* shows crowds watching the screen which displays the message that 'Harrison carries the State by 12000' (November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1888. Cited in Grafton, 1977: 158). By the early 1890s electric

signage on the blank wall of the Cumberland Hotel had become the focus of novel sights in Madison Square.

In this pre-Times Square era and given the prominence of the screen displays, the Cumberland Hotel's wall was chosen as the site of the first electric sign erected in New York in May 1892. Using red, blue and green flashing bulbs the sign read 'Manhattan Beach - Swept by Ocean Breezes' (Holliday, 1931: 30). Two photographs in Plate 10 show subsequent electric signage advertising a range of products and the New York Times' 'All the News that's Fit to Print' slogan. According to Berman, by 1900 the Cumberland Hotel wall was the most valuable advertising space in New York City (2001: 114). Following the demolition of the Erie Railroad offices in late 1900, the thus enlarged Cumberland advertising space became the site of successive advertising campaigns by the Heinz company which featured six stories of electric signage topped by a thirty foot green pickle flashing on an orange background [Plate 10]. The photograph at lower right in Plate 10 shows fencing erected in readiness for the Flatiron's excavation works and the last use of signage on the Cumberland wall prior to the Hotel's demolition.

Although the electric signage can be cited as an example of novel sights or forms of display in Madison Square's pre-Flatiron era, they also raise the issue of conceptions of modernity. For example, in his essay 'Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism' (1995), Ben Singer argues that the Cumberland signage, in the photograph at lower right in Plate 10, is an example of modernity prefiguring postmodernity. Quoting Mike Featherstone's conception of postmodernity in terms of "immediacies, intensities, sensory overload, disorientation, the *melée* of signs and images", Singer claims that the photograph of the Cumberland signage points to a significant 'overlap' between



the notion of postmodernity and the neurological conception of modernity (Featherstone, 1991. Cited in Singer, 1995: 73). As such, the flashing electric signage could be thought of as an example of modernity's barrage of stimuli, with early cinema then similarly considered as part of modernity's sensory overload. This is a point Singer makes in his 2001 study of melodrama and modernity. This time quoting the much used 'rapid crowding of changing images' passage from Georg Simmel's 1900 essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', Singer claims that "[o]ne need only look at early 'actuality' footage of Manhattan ... to be convinced of Simmel's assertion" (Singer, 2001: 61-62).<sup>11</sup> We will go on in a later section of this chapter to look at an early actuality of the Flatiron building, which will clearly challenge Singer's claims. For now, however, I want to position the novel sights and forms of display evident in Madison Square alongside *watching*, rather than being 'disoriented' by, the 'changing' urban environment.

The distinction between, on the one hand, watching or looking at sights or forms of display and, on the other hand, being distracted by or disoriented by sights or forms of display is a distinction which is central to the overall thrust of this study. With the Brooklyn Bridge filming episode, it is a distinction which has been established between a reported engagement through periods of time or momentary attraction in the distraction model. The significance of the distinction is that the cultural role of sights or forms of display in the Madison Square example or early cinema in the Brooklyn Bridge example can be conceived as constituting forms of negotiation of the modern or, in the distraction model, 'sensory overload'. In pursuing early cinema's cultural role of providing ways of

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<sup>11</sup> My purpose here is to foreground a conception of actuality cinema within Singer's argument. Clearly, Singer's claims could be thought to be based in a misreading of Simmel. It is, however, outside of the limits of a thesis-length study to address such misreadings whenever they occur. What is important to this study, is challenging Singer's misreading of the cultural role of actuality cinema.

negotiating the modern, one way of stating this study's purpose, then, is in terms of establishing the need for a realignment of the predominant distraction conception of early cinema. In this regard, Singer's claim that 'one need only look at early actuality footage' to be convinced of cinema's distraction role is a clear example of the need to take account of the complexities of the concept of looking. As we have seen in earlier chapters of this study, ways of looking at film or photographs are central to the cultural role of films or photographs. What I am concerned with here is the extent to which looking involves 'ways of looking' which can be shaped or formed within the context in which looking takes place.

In Chapter 3 we saw how Birt Acres' film *Rough Sea at Dover* provoked a way of looking at films which was informed by another medium, namely the stereograph, and the perception of depth. In this chapter I am pursuing the extent to which a way of looking at the city, in this case New York City, can be identified in relation to a place, namely, Madison Square. For example, could the tradition of novel visual sights in Madison Square provoke a way of looking at the construction of the Flatiron Building? In now turning to the period of the Flatiron's construction, I want to consider ways of looking at New York through an analysis of what watching the construction process meant for New Yorkers.

### **Seeing New York: The Flatiron Under Construction**

The construction of the Flatiron presented a new phase in the tradition of novel sights in Madison Square. In effect, the torch viewing platform, the sun tower, the processional arches, the screen displays and the sight of electric signage had set the stage for what was one of the most eagerly watched events in New York in this period. Stieglitz had noted in his memoirs that he had 'watch[ed] the structure go up': newspaper reports show that he was not alone.

A *New York Tribune* 'Illustrated Supplement' report noted that following the removal of the scaffolding at the Flatiron construction works:

there is scarcely an hour when a staring wayfarer doesn't by his example collect a big crowd of other staring people ... No wonder people stare! A building 307 feet high presenting an edge almost as sharp as the bow of a ship ... is well worth looking at. (June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1902: 1-2. Cited in Kreitler, c1990: 10)

In July, a *New York Times* report entitled, 'New York's Latest Curiosity: Crowds Collecting Every Day to Look Up at "the Flat Iron"', claimed that the "peculiar office structure appears to exercise a strange fascination over some minds" (July 6<sup>th</sup> 1902: 25). The report noted that, following a band concert in Madison Square, "no sooner had the last notes been played ... [and] fully 200 people were blocking the sidewalk ... pointing and discussing, as though they were looking at a fire" (25). During September 1902 the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* carried a Sunday Supplement which detailed the extent of new building works in Manhattan. Entitled 'Floor Space in New Buildings Now Under Way Equivalent to an Increase of 16 Per Cent in the Area of Manhattan Island', the report provided two maps of Manhattan, one to scale and one enlarged 16% to represent the increase in office space. The report claimed that thirty-three buildings of over fifteen stories were under construction in Manhattan at that time. Despite the extent of construction works, with the Flatiron nearing completion, the report claimed:

eventually overtop it.

As for the "Flatiron" Building, it has been, during the period of its construction, the most talked of building in New York. Neither the new Chamber of Commerce, nor the new Stock Exchange, fine buildings as they are, and symbols of the wealth of the country, have given rise to anything like the discussion occasioned by that giant wedge-shaped structure, officially registered as the Fuller Building. Laymen and expert alike have been interested. There has always been a group of gentlemen of leisure superintending its construction and explaining things to one another or to any passersby who would listen. There

Fig. 4.2 'Cutting' from *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1902: 31.

The report went on to claim that “[t]here has hardly been a resident or visitor in New York within the past year who has not taken a wondering interest in the building” (31). In addition to newspaper reports, the number of extant photographs of the Flatiron under construction demonstrate the interest in the building. Proportionally, of the readily available photographs of skyscraper construction works in this period, extant photographs of the Flatiron outnumber photographs of all other buildings under construction put together. Plate 11 provides an example of photographs of the various stages of construction.<sup>12</sup>

The photographs show the construction works proceeding in three phases: the stone work at the base of the building, the limestone and terracotta curtain-wall in the middle section of the structure, and the building’s steel skeleton frame extending to the topmost stories. The photographs also indicate the different rate at which the three phases of construction proceeded. The steel work could be quickly built to the topmost stories, whereas the stone work at the base of the building and the curtain-walling proceeded at different rates. The design of the building involved intricate stone detail for the first three stories which had to be constructed in a conventional manner, whereas the curtain-walling was comprised of large, relatively uniform shaped blocks which were quicker to build with. The effect of this differential rate of construction is important in that it conflicts with what can be thought of as a traditional logic of building.

Traditionally, up until the introduction of steel-frame towers, building was a process that involved a straightforward and thus seemingly self-evident, sequential logic. Foundations were dug, walls were built brick upon brick, a roof

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<sup>12</sup> All of the photographs in Plate 10 are of anonymous origin. There is a possibility that the photographs were produced by one photographer and thus that rather than being a much photographed construction site the extant photographs are the result of one individual; however, there are sufficient differences in style to indicate the work of many photographers.

was added and so on. Moreover, this building process logic was, as it were, underpinned by a logical understanding of structural stability: logic dictates, for example, that the greater the height of a building the larger the supporting walls need to be. The Dewey Arch represents this logic of stability: even though the width of the Arch's two supporting columns restricted traffic along what was a busy thoroughfare, the oversized columns were necessary to represent the stability, strength or magnitude of the Arch and thus the importance of the monument. Similarly, municipal buildings typically feature emphasised structural stability in order to represent the stability or power of institutions. Thus, in the case of municipal buildings, monumental stone pillars are meant to represent literally the pillars of society.<sup>13</sup> As the photographs of the Flatiron show, however, neither the logic of building as a sequential process nor the logic of stability were evident, during the construction of steel-framed skyscrapers.

The under-construction Flatiron Building provided a highly visible demonstration of systems and processes which defied the traditional logic of building. By itself, the grid-like steel frame of the Flatiron complies with traditional expectations of a logic of structures. Similarly, the stone walling at the base of the building also complies with expectations. As shown in the six photographs, the walling seemingly starts from ground level and construction gradually proceeds upwards [Plate 11]. What disrupted the expected logic of

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, outside of their context, the aesthetic use of pillars could be interpreted in terms of a classical language of architecture, which is re-used to visualise the Republic or conceptions of civic culture. Within the context of New York newspaper reports of the time, however, such an interpretation is potentially misleading. For example, the July 6<sup>th</sup> 1902 *New York Times* report of the Flatiron Building began by noting that the Dewey Arch had been renamed the "Dewey" by New Yorkers and that its "correct name" was relevant only within the "circulars of the committee which sought to make it a permanent feature of city adornment" (25). In effect, there was a re-use of the intended name, and by implication its meaning, by New Yorkers. It is this re-use which is important to this study. Similarly, the use of a classical architectural language in the design of the Flatiron Building is not at issue in this study. What is at issue, as we shall shortly see, is the ways in which the design functioned at street level, as it were. To quote Marshall Berman, my concern here is with "modernism in the streets", rather than an aesthetic discourse which, as newspaper reports have it, is unsuccessfully imposed upon New Yorkers (1983: 131-171).

building, however, was the visual effect of the curtain-walling in the Flatiron's intermediate stories. Steel-frame construction techniques enabled the exterior of a building to be supported on each floor by the building's steel framework. As such, all of the external surfaces, including in the case of the Flatiron the stone walling at ground level, are 'hung' on steel plates at each floor level; hence the term 'curtain-walling'. Given the Flatiron's ornamental design, however, decorative stone detail in the lower floors meant that construction of the curtain-walling for the upper floors had to begin from the fourth story.

While stone masons worked on the decorative lower floors, crews of curtain-wall builders could quickly proceed with the upper stories. In effect, with the open steel framework remaining exposed in the lower four stories, the main mass of the building appeared suspended in mid-air. Moreover, the Flatiron's wedge-shape exacerbated the seeming instability of the building. In photographs 2, 4 and 6 of Plate 11 the position of the camera to either side of the building provides the familiar slab-like view of the Flatiron. At just ten feet wide at the northern end of the building, the Flatiron's design thus emphasised a new logic of building. Rather than merely being a building which appeared suspended in mid-air, the Flatiron's wedge-shape produced the appearance of a giant slab towering over the mid-town Manhattan skyline.

Given the tradition of novel sights in Madison Square and the extreme modernity of the under-construction Flatiron, crowds duly assembled to watch the construction works. As the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* noted, during its construction the Flatiron was the 'most talked of building in New York'. Despite the extent of construction works in New York at the time, no other building had 'given rise to anything like the discussion occasioned by that giant wedge-shaped structure', according to the Brooklyn newspaper. In being such a topic of discussion what,

however, could the under-construction Flatiron have represented for New Yorkers?

Once completed, the Flatiron was thought to represent the 'progress of the city', as noted by New York's newspapers and then by Stieglitz. During construction, in the same way that the Brooklyn Bridge films were part of a systematisation concern, could the Flatiron be part of an urbanisation concern? For example, could issues of process, system or structure become visible in the under-construction Flatiron? Quite clearly the construction site provided an important site of the modern, where modernisation was writ large in Madison Square. In representing progress the site also constituted modernity writ large. As a vernacular response to modernisation and modernity, can the 'Seeing New York' tour, which as the tour bus states 'Starts from Flat Iron Building', also be a response to the modernity of the under-construction Flatiron? The notion of a crossover from representing modernity to vernacular, or cultural, modernism is important and is signalled by the new ways of seeing the city provoked by the Flatiron. For example, as a crossover from watching construction to seeing the city the following photograph is instructive [Fig. 4.3].

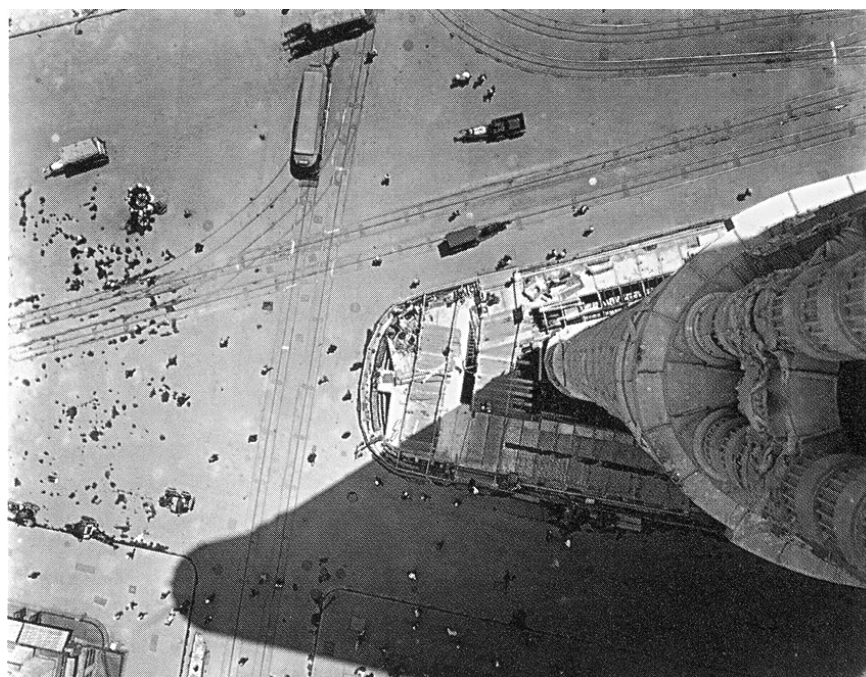


Fig. 4.3 The under-construction Flatiron Building.

Taken from the projecting cornice at the top of the Flatiron Building, this anonymous photograph is a jarring example of how watching construction in New York provoked new ways of seeing the city. Acknowledging the Fuller company's construction paraphernalia at the base of the building seems necessary in order to date the photograph. Without the scaffolding boards which can be seen covering the below ground construction works, and which thus clearly date the photograph to late 1902, it would be difficult to accept this is an early 1900s photograph. Taking a photograph from the Flatiron's projecting cornice is simply, of course, a matter of positioning the camera. There are, however, no aesthetic precedents or extant photographic precedents within New York's intermedial culture for adopting such a perspective. Rather, the photograph is a representation of the Flatiron as a site of the modern.

As an example of abstraction, the compressed height of the building seen from what is clearly an elevated viewpoint echoes the abstract logic of building identified in the six construction photographs [Plate 11]. By positioning the



camera at the narrow northern end of the Flatiron, the photograph emphasises the Flatiron's slab-like appearance. As for the Flatiron representing a steamship in motion, the narrow end perspective, the streetcar lines on Broadway and the abstraction of the scale of pedestrians and traffic at ground level enable a sense of movement in the photograph. With regard to the modernness of the photograph, although taken from a top-down perspective, the photograph is thus an example of how vernacular, or bottom-up, ways of seeing and ways of representing prefigure later aesthetic modernism.

The aforementioned *Architectural Record* Flatiron article, published at the same time as the top-down view was photographed, provides a further reflection on the interrelation of watching and seeing the city. The article begins by noting the “extreme conspicuousness and notoriety of the [construction] works” and that the Flatiron “attracts more attention than all the other buildings now going up put together” (October 1902: 528). Within what then becomes a largely critical account of the architectural merits of the building's design, the article bemoans the architect's focus on elevations rather than the building as a whole. According to the article, the architect was “designing elevations and not a building”, such that:

[e]ither of the principle elevations, taken in conjunction with the edge upon which they converge, has not the aspect of a closing wall, so much as of a huge screen, a vast theatrical ‘wing’ ... . (535)

Aside from architectural critiques, comparing the slab-like appearance of the Flatiron to a ‘huge screen’ points to early cinema's relationship with watching construction works. We will return to the Flatiron Building, and an actuality that was filmed shortly after the photographing of the top-down view of the slab, in a later section of this chapter. For now I want to explore how watching building

works in New York relates to filming New York and, in so doing, to identify a logic for New York actuality film production.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, construction works became a significant feature of New York's urban culture. In the thirty year period from 1875 to 1905 New York witnessed an average of 2,694 new buildings per annum, or an overall total of over 80,000 new buildings (Landau and Condit, 1996: 279). In the late 1890s, the period leading up to the construction of the Flatiron, the number of new buildings reached a peak of 4,894 per annum (280). Consequently, in newspapers and magazines construction processes and terms provided a new urban vocabulary. Furthermore, alongside detailed technical reports and woodcut drawings of construction works, reports of crowds watching construction works consistently appear. For example, in 1897 during the construction of a new East River bridge, under the heading of 'First Brooklyn Caisson',<sup>14</sup> the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reported that:

[s]hortly before 1 o'clock crowds of curious people began to gather in the vicinity of South Sixth street and Kent avenue and within a half hour all the piers ... were thronged with thousands. (October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1897: 1)

During the period of the Flatiron's construction, in an article entitled 'Crowds Watched Derricks' the Brooklyn newspaper provided a detailed account of cranes lifting eight granite columns into position during the construction of the Hall of Records in Manhattan. According to the report, each column took half an hour to position and during that time "[c]rowds watched the work from start to finish" (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle* August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1902: 4). Many reports noted the phenomenon of crowds watching construction works: this phenomenon provides

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<sup>14</sup> The term 'caisson' is an example of a now obscure construction term which would have been widely understood in New York at the time. The term usually refers to a watertight box structures used in the construction of underwater foundations. Ground conditions in Manhattan meant, however, that caissons were also widely used for constructing skyscraper foundations.

an intriguing perspective on the relationship between seeing the city and film production in New York.

### **A Filmmaking Logic: Watching Construction**

As an activity, watching construction does not easily cohere with conventional conceptions of, for example, film-viewer relations. Rather, to the extent that everyday activities are considered as a form of spectatorship, ‘looking’ is generally the preferred concept. In *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (1993) Anne Friedberg provides an account of the emergence of cinema spectatorship which takes account of the act of looking. According to Friedberg, the cultural contexts for ‘acts of looking’, such as “the examination of goods on display (shopping) and the experience of ‘foreign’ spaces (tourism)” are examples of the “organisation of the look in the service of consumption”, which then feed into the formation of cinema spectatorship (1993: 3). Typically, then, looking is an activity usually associated with commodification and consumption. In contrast, as reported at the Flatiron site and other sites in New York, watching construction does not easily correspond with the notion of consumption. It was, however, an activity which seems familiar to New York filmmakers. Three construction site actualities filmed in the early 1900s, two of which were introduced in Chapter 1, provide an opportunity to explore the relationship between watching and consuming, and watching and seeing the city.

*Excavating for a New York Foundation* (AM&B, 1903) was copyrighted on November 25<sup>th</sup> 1903, in a period when AM&B were copyrighting films from their back-catalogue, such as *Elevated Railroad, New York*, as we saw in Chapter 2. The precise date of the photographing of this construction film, the exact location and the cameraman are unknown. Clearly, the film can be thought part of the Manhattan construction fascination evident in newspapers. I include it

here as the film can serve to raise a visual question concerning the visualisation of filmic space, which relates to the notion of ‘seeing more’. From a broad historical perspective visualising can be thought a distinctly modern concern. As Nicholas Mirzoeff argues, the ‘frenzy of the visible’ in the late nineteenth century is not simply a result of visual or picturing technologies, but is also part of a “modern tendency to picture or visualise experience” (1999: 5). The question I want to raise is, could films such as *Excavating for a New York Foundation* function to enhance efforts to visualise the city?

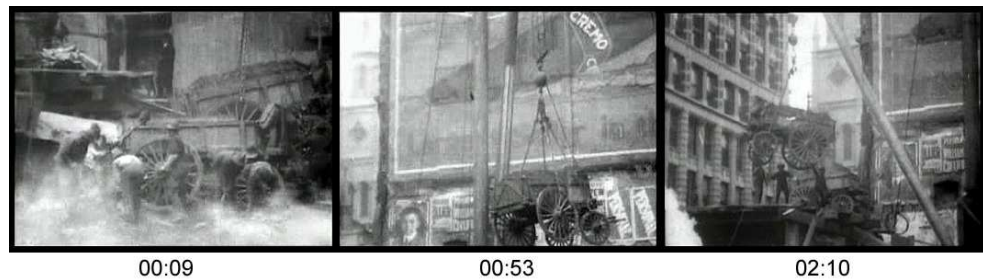


Fig. 4.4 Frames from *Excavating for a New York Foundation* (AM&B, 1903)

The film is two minutes and twenty-seven seconds long and begins with a view of workmen in the foreground shovelling rubble into a cart (Fig. 4.4). In the background a cart is lifted from the ground by a crane and, over the course of the film, the cart is swung across the building site and up to street level, ready for despatch to New York’s dumping wharf (seen in a film later in this chapter). In the background a large advertising hoarding covers an exposed wall of an adjacent building. In one sense, the film is about the operation of the crane that lifts the cart. The camera follows the movement of the cart as it swings upwards to the right of the construction site and then across to the roadway at the left. In part, the film demonstrates the use of a panning and tilting camera head. I want to speculate that, in so doing, the view the camera provides of first one side of the construction site then the other, could be a means to visualise the whole construction site. The composite picture at Fig. 4.5 is comprised of ten frames from the film ‘stitched’ together to show the full extent of the filmic space.



Fig. 4.5 Composite of frames from *Excavating for a New York Foundation* (AM&B, 1903)

The composite picture provides a wide view of the building site. Whereas the position and focal length of the camera lens constrains the view of the site, in part a function of a willingness to get in close to the construction works, the wider perspective of the composite picture provides a different view. The depth of the excavation works, relative to street level, the width of the site, the scale of the advertising hoarding relative to the site, and the relative size of the crane are shown in the composite picture. The perception of apparent depth could be enhanced in actuality films through the use of stereo depth cues. Similarly, the use of stereo visual cues prompted a scanning of stereographs, and could also operate to similar effect in actuality films. My concern with *Excavating for a New York Foundation* is whether the panning and tilting camera invokes a stereo-like scanning and thus prompts the visualising of the wider view of the site: the view provided by the composite picture. In this sense, visualising involves holding the view provided by successive views of the site in order to build a wider picture which connects together the various parts of the building site. As such, this question comes down to visual acuity and the problematic

issue of acknowledging that turn-of-the-twentieth-century visual culture could be based in seeing more and disavowing less.

In addition to construction, the demolition of buildings was also a key part of urban development in New York.<sup>15</sup> The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* carried a half page article in June 1901 entitled ‘Broadway Now Undergoing a Great Transformation’, which featured drawings and photographs of six “prominent corners where old buildings have been torn down to make room for new ones” (June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1901: 42). Positioned diagonally across the page, the pictures of Broadway corner sites represented the diagonal line which Broadway cuts across Manhattan island [Plate 12]. Included in the ‘prominent corners’ were Broadway and 23<sup>rd</sup> Street—the Flatiron site—and at the northeast corner of Broadway and 13<sup>th</sup> Street one block south from Union Square, the site of the Star Theatre. The theatre had opened in 1861 as Wallack’s Theatre and was re-named the Star in 1883. However, by 1900 the centre of New York’s theatre district had moved north to Longacre Square (soon to be Times Square) and so, although the building was only forty years old, the theatre was demolished to make way for a new office building (Jackson, 1995: 1168). AM&B cameraman Frederick S. Armitage undertook the task of filming the demolition as it unfolded over a thirty day period.



Fig. 4.6 Three frames from *Star Theatre* (AM&B, 1901)

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<sup>15</sup> This is a point Max Page makes in his *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900-1940* (1999). Page suggests that “we place the process of creative destruction at the heart of the story of urban development” in New York. (3). Although Page uses frame stills from *Star Theatre*, the notion of ‘watching’ construction (or demolition) does not feature in Page’s study.

As noted in Chapter 1, the resulting film, *Star Theatre* (AM&B, 1901), is an early example of time-lapse cinematography: in effect, thirty day long demolition work is represented in just over a minute and a half. A spring 1902 AM&B film catalogue listed Armitage's film as *Demolishing and Building Star Theatre, New York*, "[a] remarkable picture, showing theatre torn down and put up in a minute's time" (cited in Niver, 1971: 70). The film was listed in the AM&B catalogue under 'Trick Pictures' and, as the longer title indicates, was clearly meant to be run through a projector both forwards and backwards when exhibited to produce the effect of the building being demolished then rebuilt. As such, Armitage's film can be thought of as a remake of sorts of an earlier Lumière film, *Démolition d'un Mur* (1895), which similarly showed a wall being knocked down and then seemingly rebuilt.<sup>16</sup>

*Star Theatre* can therefore be thought a film which emphasises the spectacle aspect of the act of watching construction, or in this case demolition. Instead of watching the demolition on consecutive days, or instead of watching part of the demolition works, the whole demolition process is represented in one short film sequence. Whereas filming in 'real time' underpinned the congruence between the railway journey and the film of the journey in the Brooklyn Bridge films, the 'time-lapse' sequence in *Star Theatre* could undermine any sense of congruence in favour of spectacle. By translating watching into a spectacle, Armitage's film is an example of early cinema's role of, in Friedberg's terms, the 'organisation of the look in the service of consumption'. Similarly, *Star Theatre* can be considered as an example of what Roberta Pearson terms the 'spectacularisation of everyday life' which demonstrates that "existing social structures" operate

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<sup>16</sup> Another AM&B film *A Mighty Tumble* or *The Fall of a Brick Building* (1901), which showed the demolition of a four storey New Jersey building, could also be projected to produce the demolition then rebuilding effect. See Anbinder, 1987: 105. However, neither the Lumière 'falling wall' film nor the AM&B *A Mighty Tumble* film use time-lapse cinematography.

within a model of commodification to “determine the deployment of new technology” (1999: 392). Clearly, ‘spectacle’ is an important, if all too often overplayed, dimension of early cinema’s cultural role. Furthermore, as we have seen in the examples in this study, a closer look at early films can point to a different axis of cinema’s cultural role.

A conception of film as a series of separate photographs was, as we found in an analysis of the AM&B press reprints, common in cinema’s early years. This conception partly accounted for the detailed reporting of films and the detailed way of looking at films: *Star Theatre* provides a filmmaking example of conceiving of film as a series of separate photographs. As noted in Chapter 1, in relation to the perception of apparent movement, Armitage chose to photograph streetcars at set positions within the frame. Similarly, he selected key events in the demolition of the theatre to photograph, such as the removal of the theatre’s name-archway. As such, rather than exposing the time-lapse sequence frames at regular intervals, Armitage carefully photographed specific elements of the process of demolition. That he patiently selected events to photograph is significant in relation to the act of watching construction. AM&B sold the resulting film as a ‘trick’ film which we can then interpret as a form of spectacularisation of the act of watching. However, when filming *Star Theatre* Armitage reproduced the studied act of watching that we have been tracing in newspaper reports from the time. In effect, Armitage’s careful selection of events to photograph mimics the ‘discussion’ of the under-construction Flatiron reported by various newspapers. Rather than succumbing to cinema’s ‘attractions’ role, is it not possible that film viewers at the time also engaged with Armitage’s study of the process of demolition? In moving now to the second watching construction film, the seeming ambivalence of early actuality film-viewer relations will be less evident. Along with the Flatiron and Star



Theatre sites, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle's* June 1901 'Great Transformations' article provides a third Broadway corner location, this time the northwest corner of 34<sup>th</sup> Street, photographed in the article with a caption of 'all buildings to go' [Plate 12].

The June 1901 article provides a detailed account of the surreptitious purchase of all buildings and land in the 34<sup>th</sup> to 35<sup>th</sup> Street block fronting onto Broadway by R. H. Macy and Co. in preparation for building a "mammoth dry goods store" (June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1901: 42).<sup>17</sup> On January 18<sup>th</sup> 1902 AM&B cameraman Robert Kates Bonine photographed the below-ground construction works for the new Macy's store in a film entitled *Beginning of a Skyscraper* (AM&B, 1902). Positioned at a mid-point between street-level and the base of the excavation for the building and filmed in a single shot, Bonine's static camera provides a jarringly photographic view of the construction works, as we saw in Chapter 1. In order to interpret the film, I want to begin by analysing *Beginning of a Skyscraper* through Bonine's filmmaking and wider photographic activities.

Along with the films he produced, Robert Kates Bonine is a marginal figure within the history of early cinema.<sup>18</sup> Born 1862 in Pennsylvania into a family of professional photographers, Bonine's American filmmaking career began with the Edison Company in 1897. Copyright records attribute seven films to Bonine in the period from January 1897 to January 1899, all of which were photographed in Seattle and the Yukon Territory in Canada and all of which

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<sup>17</sup> The venue for the vitascope premiere, Koster and Bial's Music Hall, was one of the buildings demolished to make way for the new Macy's store. The Macy site therefore returns us to the site of the first Edison actuality, *Herald Square* (1896).

<sup>18</sup> In typifying the relative obscurity of early filmmakers in comparison to later filmmakers, the following account of Bonine's filmmaking and photographic career is from what appears to be the only source available, Kenneth Nelson's unpublished 1989 M.A. thesis, *A Compilation of Information About the Life of Robert Kates Bonine 1862-1923: With an Examination of his Early Years in Photography and Film*. Musser quotes Nelson's thesis in his 1990 and 1991 studies of early cinema. For example, see Musser, 1991: 512 n143.

related to Klondike gold prospecting expeditions. Bonine then worked for AM&B from June 1901 to January 1903 and photographed ninety-five films, according to copyright records. Although in this period around one-third of Bonine's films were vaudeville skits shot in AM&B's roof-top studio in New York, the majority of the remainder were scenic views filmed on tours to Japan, Hawaii, China, England, Canada and California. In late 1902 and early 1903, however, AM&B signalled its intention to focus on story films by building a new studio in New York, the first to use artificial lighting, and Bonine subsequently left the company. In early 1905 the Edison Company expanded its filmmaking operation, Bonine re-joined the company and between April 1905 and May 1907 he filmed fifty-four actualities. Included in these are films of Roosevelt's inauguration in April 1905, photographed in conjunction with Edwin S. Porter, and films from tours of Hawaii, California and Panama. According to Musser, during 1906 the Edison Company's film production was then split between Porter filming acted 'features' and Bonine filming actualities (1991: 367). For example, while Porter filmed narrative films such as *Life of a Cowboy*, Bonine filmed thirteen actualities of the aftermath of the April 18<sup>th</sup> 1906 San Francisco earthquake. By early 1907, however, Edison decided to focus on story films and Bonine left the company. Bonine later cited, in a letter to a friend, the increasing popularity of "comedy [films] or, in other words, anything of a subjective nature" as the reason for his resignation from the Edison Company in 1907 (cited in Musser, 1991: 370). Bonine subsequently moved to Hawaii where he lived and worked until his death in 1923 (Nelson, 1989: 55).

In addition to his aversion to narrative cinema, Bonine's pattern of New York actuality filmmaking activity is different to that adopted by other actuality filmmakers. As we saw in Chapter 3, the Edison Company's actuality filmmaking practice in the period from 1896 to 1900 commonly involved the

filming of groups of films, and often the photographing of a number of films in one day. For example, *Herald Square* was one of three films photographed on May 11<sup>th</sup> 1896. Similarly, in the period from April 28<sup>th</sup> to May 13<sup>th</sup> 1903 an Edison Company camera crew filmed, according to Musser, “at least fifteen travelogue-style subjects” in and around Manhattan, as we shall see later in this chapter (Musser, 1991: 241). In contrast, of the six New York actualities filmed by Bonine, three were on a one-film-per-day basis. I now want to examine other photographic activities undertaken by Bonine.

In an essay concerning the relationship between still photography and early filmmaking, cinema historian Patrick Loughney argues that trained photographers who became filmmakers provide “[o]ne of the direct means by which the influence of still photography was transferred to motion pictures” (1989: 37). Loughney goes on to argue that a readily available “continuity of subject matter”, the ease with which “production and marketing methods” could be shared and a “conceptual attitude towards motion picture” derived from the dominance of popular photographic genres are all factors which ensured the influence of photography over early cinema (41-45). Perhaps surprisingly, however, Loughney’s essay is a rare attempt to interrelate photography and early cinema.<sup>19</sup> As Bonine’s work shows, this is something of an oversight within the field.

As noted above, Robert Kates Bonine was born into a family of photographers. Robert A. Bonine and his three sons, Elias D., Ralph and Robert Kates, all worked as professional photographers (Nelson, 1989: 8-9). Having worked in his father’s photographic studio in the early 1880s, at age 24 Robert Kates set up a

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<sup>19</sup> Alan Trachtenberg’s short 1987 essay ‘Photography / Cinematography’ provides one other example of relating the two forms. See Anbinder, ed., 1987.

photographic business in Tyrone, Pennsylvania in 1886 which specialised in stereo views (9). Independently published under the business name of ‘R. K. Bonine, Photographic Art Publisher’ [Plate 13], Bonine’s work became nationally known in the late 1880s through his photographs of the May 1889 Johnstown, Pennsylvania flood (22). According to Nelson, Bonine published a set of twenty-five stereographs of the flood and the clear-up operations, all “superbly photographed, well captioned, and in an obvious progression of scenes” (16). Bonine then went on to publish a series of views of Washington, D.C., and New York (20). However, given increasing competition from national stereograph publishers, such as Underwood & Underwood and the Keystone View Company, and his dislike of studio work, Bonine quit publishing stereographs in 1895.<sup>20</sup>

After ceasing to publish stereographs in 1895 and after quitting the moving picture business in 1907 Bonine then went on to publish panoramic photographs, using a moving-lens panoramic camera, from his Hawaii base until 1921 (Nelson, 1989: 56). Rather than continuing to work in the burgeoning moving pictures business, Bonine saw the new panoramic camera as a platform for the continuation of his work. Plate 13 provides an example of the range of Bonine’s photographic work, from stereographs to a seventy-one inch wide panoramic view of Hawaii. In addition to bringing his camera skills to the business of early cinema, Bonine also brought, then, a style of photography which had been fostered in stereo camera work.<sup>21</sup> In his photography and early cinema essay,

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<sup>20</sup> Another example of Bonine’s camera expertise is his involvement in the Edison Company’s attempt to produce large format films of a gold prospecting expedition, intended for exhibition at the 1900 Paris Exposition. According to Musser, Bonine was hired to work on the project as Edison’s “motion-picture expert” (Musser, 1990: 282-3). See also Nelson, 1989: 31-36.

<sup>21</sup> Rather than examining Bonine’s style of photography, my purpose is to emphasise that Bonine brought to filmmaking considerable photographic expertise, especially with stereoscopy. Moreover, rather than tracing connections between Bonine’s stereo and cinema photography, my concern, within the limits of a thesis-length study, is with the use of stereo cues in actuality filming.

Loughney notes both Bonine's work and the influence of stereo photography on early cinema (1989: 37-38). Somewhat surprisingly, however, despite the dominance of stereographs in relation to photographic media in the late nineteenth century, stereo photography is a rarely acknowledged or rarely studied aspect within histories of photography.<sup>22</sup>

As a model for viewing actuality films, rather than involving the 'isolation of the viewer', the three dimensions of stereograph viewing could enhance the congruence which cinema presented. Furthermore, in making films such as the Macy construction site film, could not Bonine's 'horizon of expectation' derive from his experience of stereo photography? Similarly, could not a stereograph way of looking provide a model for viewing Bonine's film?

The temporal, depth and lateral dimensions to stereograph viewing bring together a number of themes we have been tracing. Bonine's detailed commentary which accompanied his stereo views, a common practice at the time, corresponds with the detailed inspection of stereographs. Rather than being 'mechanically' viewed, both sides of the stereograph card warranted inspection. In relation to the Brooklyn Bridge railway films, themselves based on a stereograph [Plate 5], the duration of time in the 'inclosed passage' and the sense of depth provided by the passage's structure correspond with a stereograph way of looking at the films. In returning to *Beginning of a Skyscraper*, a logic to a film which was impenetrable but important for this study, can now be identified.

By considering newspaper reports of crowds watching construction in New York—in particular the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle's* report on the 'transformation' of

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<sup>22</sup> As argued in Chapter 1, this neglect mirrors the neglect of actuality cinema and likely relates to historical ways of seeing.

Broadway corner sites, including the Macy site—a contextual analysis has identified watching construction as the subject of Bonine’s film. In relation to the film being jarringly photographic, we can now identify that Bonine’s ‘horizon of expectation’ was founded in a stereograph-like way of looking which corresponds with watching construction. Compositionally, Bonine photographs multiple, simultaneous events across the frame, rather than providing one point of action to direct the viewer, and thus elicits a stereograph-like detailed inspection of the film through a traversing of the frame [Fig. 4.6]. Moreover, Bonine photographs multiple levels within the frame from the base of the excavation works at frame bottom left to the street-level at frame top right, in order to produce a stereograph-like sense of depth. In effect, the unprecedented congruence of Bonine’s film is based in a correspondence between watching the film and watching construction in New York. Bonine’s photographic film is thus an example of what was one commonly used name for cinema at the time, ‘animated photographs’.<sup>23</sup> Therein, however, lies a conceptual difficulty with Bonine’s film which, from our later cinema perspective, works against ‘seeing more and disavowing less’.



Fig. 4.7 Frame from *Beginning of a Skyscraper* (AM&B, 1902).

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<sup>23</sup> See for example, 1896 advertisements for the Lumière cinématographe (Musser, 1990: 140).

The idea of ‘animated photographs’ speaks to the expected dynamism of photographs in this period. The early years of cinema abound with references to this expectation in the use of such terms to describe the new medium as ‘living pictures’, ‘photographs from life’ or ‘moving pictures photographed from life’.<sup>24</sup> As we saw in Chapter 1, constant references in newspaper reports to films consisting of thousands of ‘distinct’ photographs also spoke to the expected dynamism of photographs. Early exhibition practices also spoke to this expectation. As Tom Gunning has noted, the Lumières adopted a practice of projecting one frame from a film, then rolling the film through the projector (Gunning, 1994a: 118). In effect, when the film was rolled through the projector, the projected photograph would appear to move and thus be, quite literally, a moving picture. Similarly, as we saw in Chapter 1, John Stuart Blackton used this technique when exhibiting *Black Diamond Express*. Although no evidence is available, given Bonine’s camera and photographic expertise, adopting the same frame-then-roll projection practice could easily have been achieved in his illustrated lectures. A photographic film such as *Beginning of a Skyscraper* would have been especially suited to the frame-then-roll practice.

Despite such exhibition practices, the idea of ‘animated photographs’ remains problematic from a later cinema perspective. Rather than being dynamic, the terms frame ‘still’ or ‘still’ photographs speaks to a cornerstone of contemporary thinking about photography. The conception of photographs as a ‘this was’ statement is deeply entrenched and thus goes some way to accounting for the neglect of stereographs within histories of photography. The ‘minute-by-minute examining of’ stereographs, of scanning the image to find the ‘depths of the picture’, is incongruous from a later cinema perspective. In addition to the

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<sup>24</sup> For example, see Gunning, 2001b: 4 and Niver, 1971: 23.

incongruousness of dynamic photographs, the seeming randomness of Bonine's photographic film, that makes sense through a stereograph way of looking, conflicts with a second cornerstone of later conceptions of photography.

*Beginning of a Skyscraper* bears a clear resemblance to urban photographs from the period which are now available from collections such as the Detroit Photographic Company and Byron Company collections (American Memory). In a discussion of the Ashcan artists' depiction of New York's "subtle and densely layered systems of order", Rebecca Zurier and Robert W. Snyder provide a conventional account of the randomness of Byron Company photographs:

often composed with no distinct point of view or emphasis ... they render the urban scene as much more chaotic than it appeared to more directed observers, such as ordinary pedestrians or artists, whose purposeful activity compelled them to interpret and order the urban scene around them. (Zurier and Snyder, 1995: 22)

Zurier and Snyder go on to claim that, "their random composition ... can make them almost illegible. Byron photographs depict the city as a place of random chaos" (22). That stock photographs of urban scenes represented New York's 'random chaos' is consistent with the 'barrage of stimuli' neurological conception of modernity. The notion of pedestrians or Ashcan artists 'interpreting and ordering the urban scene' would then seem an appropriate response to New York's modernity. It would also follow that in seeming to be 'composed with no distinct point of view', Bonine's photographic film is, like the Byron photographs, an example of an 'almost illegible' depiction of the city. Clearly, however, as we have seen, this is not the case.

Zurier and Snyder's claim that 'random composition' results in 'chaotic' photographs is consistent with an expectation that composition involves, or rather, is largely defined by, a sense of ordering. Although consistent from a later



perspective, it does not cohere with the evidence provided by *Beginning of a Skyscraper*. As we have seen, the ordering within Bonine's film is a result of a way of looking which is no longer available within conventional accounts of visual culture. Although we might then expect Bonine's film to be an ignored and likely a denigrated artefact, to use Jay's term, it provides significant evidence of what might be termed vernacular visuality in New York. Two more of Bonine's films can help to fill out an analysis of a stereograph-like way of looking. The second of the two examples will bring us back to the Flatiron Building and to the concept of 'seeing New York'.

According to copyright records, following the January 18<sup>th</sup> 1902 filming of the Macy construction site, Bonine next filmed in New York City on May 15<sup>th</sup>. Adopting the Edison practice of multiple filmmaking, Bonine filmed three films in one day for the AM&B company: *Lively Brushes on Speedway*, *Parade of Horses on Speedway* and *Lower Broadway*. The two Speedway films were of horses and carriages being paraded along the then new 'Harlem River Speedway', built in 1900 in northern Manhattan along the banks of the Harlem River from West 155<sup>th</sup> Street to West 208<sup>th</sup> Street. The Speedway films are thus examples of a staple of the actuality side to early cinema, filming events. Rather than being a standard product, however, *Lower Broadway*, introduced at the beginning of this study, provides another example of a stereograph inspired film and thus another demonstration of the interrelation of stereo photography and filmmaking techniques.

With no identifiable beginning and ending, other than when the film starts and stops, and with no identifiable subject or action other than the movement of traffic and pedestrians on Broadway, *Lower Broadway* is again a film which lacks any immediately obvious logic. Bonine's camera is positioned on either a

raised platform, or perhaps scaffolding from construction works, and faces northward up Broadway at its junction with Wall Street, opposite Trinity Church in the southern tip of Manhattan.<sup>25</sup> Over the one minute and thirty-five seconds duration of the film a constant stream of streetcars and various horse-drawn vehicles travel along Broadway. The pavement (or sidewalk) is crowded with pedestrians, and vehicles intermittently pass across the frame either to or from the ferry terminals at the East River shore [Fig. 4.6]. In short, the film could be interpreted as an actuality of a busy Thursday afternoon street scene in lower Manhattan.<sup>26</sup>



Fig. 4.8 Three frames from *Lower Broadway* (AM&B, 1902)

Compositionally, as we might expect from Bonine, the camera is carefully positioned in order to frame the street scene. Streetcars heading north up Broadway appear at the lower left corner of the frame, with the base of the body of streetcars intersecting exactly with the corner of the frame. The streetcars travel diagonally across the frame to a point just above the middle of frame and to the right. At the far right of the frame in the middle distance, buildings fronting onto Broadway are just visible. Pedestrian traffic on the pavement mirrors the narrowing perspective produced by the view of the roadway. In terms of composition, then, and again as we might expect from Bonine given his expertise with stereo photography, the camera is carefully positioned to emphasise a sense of depth within the street scene.

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<sup>25</sup> The Library of Congress catalogue states the location as either Broadway and Wall Street or Broadway and Vesey Street, although the building in the left top corner of the frame clearly identifies the location as the former. (American Memory).

<sup>26</sup> May 15<sup>th</sup> 1902 was a Thursday and given the position of shadows on Broadway the film was photographed sometime during the afternoon.

Whereas the unorganised view of the Macy construction site enforced the need laterally to scan the frame in order to see layers of depth, *Lower Broadway* invites a looking into the depth of frame through the synchronising of the timing of filming with the movement of streetcars. The film begins with a streetcar moving northward at the lower left corner of the frame and, by half way through the filming, the last of three streetcars emerges at frame left corner. The emergence of streetcars therefore provides an initial focus of attention and with no more streetcars emerging, in the second half of the film the focus shifts to the movement of the streetcars northward along Broadway. Through the selection of location and the timing of the filming, *Lower Broadway* thus provides a vehicle, as it were, for reproducing a stereograph way of looking within the medium of cinema. In the same way that Birt Acres produced a stereograph-like effect of depth in *Rough Sea at Dover* via the waves rolling along the harbour wall, Bonine uses the streetcars to enhance the effect of depth. Moreover, in the same way that the stereoscopic effect of *Beginning of a Skyscraper* related to a purpose—watching construction—*Lower Broadway*'s depth effect also related to the construction of Manhattan's buildings.

The Manhattan skyscraper building boom from the late 1890s and into the 1900s was a largely unregulated phenomenon. Neither the height of buildings nor the grouping of buildings and thus the associated canyonisation of streets, were regulated. By 1914, however, a Building Heights and Restrictions Commission had been established and in 1916 what became known as the zoning plan was adopted to regulate building density and thus the canyonisation of streets. In the interim period, and especially in the business district in lower Manhattan, canyon-like streets became a feature of the urban environment. In addition to Manhattan's emerging skyline, depicted in the May 1903 Smith and Porter film,

canyon-like streets became an important subject for ways of visualising the development or transformation of New York City. For example, a much cited 1908 drawing of a future New York by Harry M. Pettit, entitled *King's Dream of New York*, depicted a canyon-like view of lower Broadway [Plate 14].<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, rather than envisioning a radically taller future New York, 'King's Dream' focussed on the pressing issue of congestion and the circulation of inhabitants via bizarre modes of transport. Congestion and circulation is also an issue we have explored in an analysis of the Brooklyn Bridge railway films and is a feature of Bonine's *Lower Broadway* film through the depiction of the circulation of traffic on Broadway. By filming lower Broadway and the circulation of traffic Bonine was therefore keying into an important site and a common theme for visualising the transformation of New York.

The stereographs in Plate 15 demonstrate the importance of the Broadway and Wall Street site for visualising New York in relation to the canyonisation of Manhattan's streets.<sup>28</sup> The first stereograph (top of Plate 15), *Looking down Broadway, from the corner of Chambers Street* published by Anthony's Instantaneous Views, is an 1870s view looking south down Broadway with the spires of first St. Paul's Chapel and then Trinity Church visible in the distance. The second stereograph, *Broadway from the Empire Building, New York* published by H. C. White and Co., is from 1903 and shows the transformation since the 1870s in the height of buildings relative to the 280 feet tall spire of Trinity Church. For example, in this second stereograph, on the right hand side

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<sup>27</sup> Pettit's drawing was part of the frontispiece to the 1908-09 edition of *King's Views of New York*. In subsequent editions Pettit's drawing was updated. For web-based version of the drawings see <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/3cities/axelrod.htm#1058> (accessed February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2003).

<sup>28</sup> The stereographs are from the 'Stereoscopic views of Broadway, New York, N.Y.' and 'Stereoscopic views of Broadway, New York, New York' collections (Robert N. Dennis Collection, 2003). Together these two collections consist of 179 stereographs which demonstrate the importance of Broadway, and in particular the Wall Street site, for stereograph publishers.

of Broadway we see the twenty-one story American Surety Building (1896, 312 feet). A commentary on the back of the stereograph card announces that:

Broadway is fast becoming the Grand Cañon [sic] of Commerce, with its towering sky-scrappers rising sheer above the side walk until the eye is soon weary of counting the stories piled one above another. (H. C. White, 1903)

The stereograph was taken from a window in one of the upper floors of the 20 story Empire Building (1898, 293 feet). The Empire, at the southwest corner of Broadway and Rector Street, provided an important vantage point for stereo views of Broadway as the third stereograph shows [Plate 15]. Published by Underwood and Underwood in 1903 and entitled *Broadway from the Empire Building, New York*, this view is from a higher floor than the H. C. White stereograph and thus brings the twin-domed Park Row Building (1899, 391 feet) into view. Clearly, Broadway was by 1903 already providing the canyon-like view of the city which was to feature in Pettit's 1908 'Dream' of New York.

The fourth stereograph (bottom of Plate 15) is a later, mid-1910s view again taken from the Empire Building. Published by the Keystone View Company, *North on Broadway past Trinity Church* shows the American Surety Building now out-topped by, on the left side of Broadway, the Singer Tower (1908, 612 feet) and Woolworth Building (1913, 792 feet) and on the right the Equitable Building (1915, 538 feet) at 120 Broadway.<sup>29</sup> Given the sheer density of tall and in the Equitable's case, literally massive skyscrapers, lower Broadway was clearly fulfilling H. C. White's 1903 claim that Broadway was 'fast becoming the Grand Cañon of Commerce'. The canyon-like streets were peculiar to New York given the lack of restriction on building height and mass. Canyonisation was, as shown in the Pettit drawing, an important theme for visualising New

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<sup>29</sup> In relation to 'rising sheer above the side walk', when completed the Equitable Building was reputed to "cast a noonday shadow four blocks long" and is commonly cited as reason for the 1916 zoning laws (Landau and Condit, 1996: 394).

York and a theme which corresponded with stereographic depictions of the city; stereographic views emphasised the canyon effect and the canyon effect provided a subject for the stereograph's sense of depth.

By selecting the Broadway and Wall Street location for filming *Lower Broadway* Bonine was thus selecting an important site of the modern in New York which was well suited to a stereograph-like film. In addition to demonstrating the influence of stereo photography practices over actuality filmmaking, Bonine was also exploiting the relationship between the construction of Manhattan's buildings and the stereograph's depiction of depth. A third and final example of Bonine's filmmaking can further elaborate the relationships between the stereograph, cinema and New York City.

### ***Panorama of Flatiron Building (AM&B, 1902)***

Following the filming of *Lower Broadway*, copyright records show that Bonine was employed from May 17<sup>th</sup> through to late August 1902 filming story films such as vaudeville skits at AM&B's rooftop studio at 841 Broadway, close to Union Square (Nelson, 1989: 75-76). On September 2<sup>nd</sup> Bonine then filmed two actualities in Long Island and Sheepshead Bay, New York before filming two panorama actualities of the Mt. Beacon inclined railway in New York State on September 18<sup>th</sup>, *Panorama from Incline Railway* and *Panorama from Running Incline Railway*. According to Kemp Niver's description, both of the railway films were shot from a moving railway car with the latter film also involving a pan of either side of the track (Niver, 1985: 236-37). Bonine's next filmmaking trip was three weeks later; it took him just ten blocks north of the AM&B studios, to 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Broadway and the almost completed Flatiron Building.



Fig. 4.9 Three frames from *Panorama of Flatiron Building* (AM&B, 1902).

Filmed on October 8<sup>th</sup> 1902, *Panorama of Flatiron Building* is another example of Bonine's one-film-per-day actualities. With the camera positioned on the northeast corner of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Broadway, in one continuous sixty second take Bonine's film starts with a view of pedestrians and traffic at the busy intersection in front of the almost completed Flatiron [Fig. 4.7]. At twenty seconds into the film, the camera then begins to tilt up towards the top of the Flatiron. At thirty seconds, with pedestrians and traffic no longer in view, the camera continues the smooth tilt up towards the top of the new building showing a slab-like view of the Flatiron. With the topmost stories of the Flatiron in view, the camera then lingers in the final ten seconds showing the Flatiron silhouetted against the sky.

With the building almost complete and following newspaper reports of the under-construction Flatiron—such as the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle's* June 2<sup>nd</sup> 'Broadway Transformations' and the September 21<sup>st</sup> '16% Increase in Manhattan' articles—Bonine's choice of location was hardly arbitrary. The resulting film provides a further example of how stereograph ways of seeing informed actuality filmmaking practices. However, the film is also a rare example of a New York actuality film which has received critical attention. Before continuing to explore the relationship that we have been tracing between the stereograph, cinema and New York, I want to examine an important example of actuality film analysis, albeit an example which can be seen to have contributed to the neglect of films such as Bonine's.

The analysis in question is provided by Tom Gunning from an article first delivered in a lecture series at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York in 1979 and subsequently published in John L. Fell's anthology *Film Before Griffith* (1983). As such, it is a pre-attractions thesis article and one which quotes the AM&B press reprints, as noted in Chapter 1. In the article 'An Unseen Energy Swallows Space: The Space in Early Film and Its Relation to American Avant-Garde Film', Gunning's purpose, as the title indicates, is to identify early filmmaking practices which influence later avant-garde filmmaking. In this regard, his aim is to identify early films which "restructure both traditional representations of space and the relation of spectacle to audience" (1983: 356). Three films are chosen by Gunning for analysis: firstly, French filmmaker George Méliès' 'trick' film *Le Mélomane* (1903) which shows an eccentric music master composing a tune using "detachable and self-multiplying" images of Méliès' head to represent musical notes (357); secondly, Edison's *Burlesque Suicide* (1902) where an intoxicated man, framed at the waist and sitting at a table, appears to contemplate suicide by pointing a gun at his head then lays down the gun, points his finger at the camera and laughs; and thirdly, Bonine's *Panorama of Flatiron Building*. In Gunning's view, all three films "show a unique representation of space on the screen and a particular relation between audience and spectacle" (356).

For Gunning's purposes, then, Bonine's camera tilt in *Panorama of Flatiron Building* provides an example of a film "in which camera movement within a space determines the whole structure of the film", where Bonine's camera "imitates the gesture of the rube in the big city craning his neck to see the first skyscraper" (1983: 361). From Gunning's perspective, then, "[t]he 'content' or purpose of this film is as much a demonstration of the camera's ability to tilt as it is the Flatiron Building." (362). He then positions Bonine's film in relation to a



'panorama' genre of early films, which work to 'reconstitute' the "thrill of motion and its transformation of space", where "a large part of their appeal was clearly as a cheap form of vicarious tourism for the masses" (363). By way of a conclusion, he claims that, although "[i]t is dubious that any of these films were thought about aesthetically at all", the films do display "quite nakedly new relations to the representation of space that the [cinema] camera made possible" (365). Nevertheless, although some of these 'possibilities' of cinema were 'rediscovered' by avant-garde filmmakers, they are also examples of "roads not taken, ambiguities not absorbed into commercial narrative cinema" (366).

Gunning's article is, then, at least in terms of defining 'roads not taken', important to the historiography of early cinema. However, as we saw with conceptualisations of cinema's emergence, effectively closing off 'genres' of early filmmaking via cinematic cul-de-sacs has contributed to the neglect of actuality cinema. Although this is a neglect which, paradoxically, Gunning later identifies, his grouping of Bonine's film along within a 'panorama' genre, presumably because of its title, has hardly been a productive approach to New York actuality cinema. Furthermore, situating *Panorama of Flatiron Building* alongside trick films and vaudeville skits, where the rube figure 'craning his neck' provides a form of parallel figure to Méliès' many severed heads or a suicidal drunkard, is hardly likely to be productive for the serious study of Bonine's films. Gunning's analysis of *Panorama of Flatiron Building* is very early example of actuality film analysis. However, the extent to which his analysis effectively removes the need for close visual analysis of actuality films is problematic. It is all the more problematic given that, paradoxically, Gunning's interpretation of Bonine's film does touch upon what is, arguably, one of Bonine's purposes, namely the representation of ways of looking. Through an

analysis of the opening five seconds of *Panorama of Flatiron Building*, we can begin to ‘rediscover’ Bonine’s ‘expectations’.

Bonine’s film demonstrates the organisation of filmic space in terms of ways of looking at stereo photographs. An initial clue to this organising principle can be seen in the first second of *Panorama of Flatiron Building*. In the opening frame there is a steam-driven automobile emerging from Madison Square Park, and being driven off to the right of the frame towards West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, disappearing after one second [Fig. 4.8, left frame]. From a later cinema perspective, a one second glimpse seems hardly enough to warrant attention. Within the context of a stereograph-like close inspection of images, however, the automobile could function as a focus of attention which establishes the first of many lines of movement within the frame in the opening five seconds of the film.

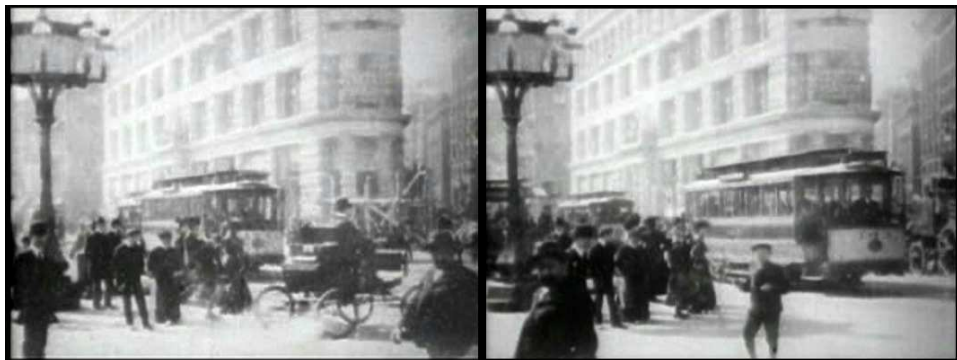


Fig. 4.10 Two frames from *Panorama of Flatiron Building* (AM&B, 1902).

With the automobile driving off to frame right, successive lines of movement are provided by streetcars moving diagonally across the frame (travelling north and south along Broadway), a streetcar emerging at frame left (from East 23<sup>rd</sup> Street), a horse-drawn cart emerging at frame right (from Broadway) and pedestrians cutting across the frame (moving towards and away from the Park) [Fig. 4.10, right frame]. Following this flurry of activity in the opening five seconds, movement within the frame gradually subsides over the next fifteen seconds. In the three seconds before the camera tilt begins, for example, lines of movement

within the frame consist of one horse-drawn cart travelling south down Broadway, one streetcar emerging from West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and reduced pedestrian traffic cutting across the frame. With attention established through lines of movement however, the focus becomes the slab-like view of the Flatiron Building. The final ten second lingering view of the topmost stories of the Flatiron then contrasts with the successive lines of movement established in the opening five seconds of the film. Moreover, this slab-like view was a highly unusual representation of a building at the time [Fig 4.11]. However, having establishing a stereograph-like inspection of the film, Bonine thus invites a way of looking at what would otherwise have been a largely illegible image.<sup>30</sup>



Fig. 4.11 A closing frame from *Panorama of Flatiron Building* (AM&B, 1902).

In the same way that the photograph taken from the top of the almost completed Flatiron prefigured later ways of representing the city [Fig. 4.3], the final ten seconds of Bonine's Flatiron film also provided a new way of representing the city. In the photograph, representing the theme of progress was identified as a

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<sup>30</sup> Although potentially illegible at the time, this image of the Flatiron is repeated in a celebrated modernist photograph by the Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius, *Flatiron Building, New York*, 1928. In *Cityscapes: A History of New York in Images* Howard B. Rock and Deborah Dash More note that Gropius "photographed the Flatiron from a perspective that emphasises its modernity as an isolated tower", and then claim that Gropius provided a "new perspective" (2001: xix).

motivation for the novel stance adopted by the photographer. In Bonine's film, although a stereograph way of looking at the film provides a logic for filming and thus a logic for a novel representation of a skyscraper, the theme of progress must surely have also motivated Bonine's filmmaking. By now exploring Bonine's staging of the film, the theme of progress can be explored.

In sharp contrast to Mary Ann Doane's claim that when filming actualities 'the camera is simply aimed at a street scene and allowed to record whatever happens', one of the themes we have been tracing in this study is the staging of actuality filmmaking (2002: 181). For example, the commissioning of actualities is a form of staging as we saw with the Edison, AM&B and Lumière Brooklyn Bridge films in Chapter 3. Similarly, Bonine's adoption of stereograph-like ways of looking as a logic for filmmaking is another form of staging. *Panorama of Flatiron Building* also involves a more familiar form of staging in the placement of figures and action within the frame. For example, as we shall shortly see, the steam-powered automobile crossing the frame in the first second of the film was hardly a chance occurrence. Rather, given the flurry of streetcar traffic which follows in the opening seconds of the film, it is highly likely that Bonine synchronised the beginning of the film with the onset of streetcar traffic. The start of filming and the automobile moving off towards West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street could both have been signalled to coincide with the onset of streetcar traffic. Bonine was thus repeating a technique he used in the filming of *Lower Broadway* and a technique employed by the Edison and Lumière camera crews in 1896 with the *Dead Man's Curve* films. The staging of action was then, across the examples we have explored, a routine actuality filmmaking technique. Bonine's placement of the automobile in *Panorama of Flatiron Building* also signals his representational purpose for the film.

Although the American automobile industry eventually became based in the Midwest with the manufacture of petrol (gasoline) powered vehicles, in the early 1900s New York was the centre for the manufacture of steam and electrically powered automobiles (Jackson, 1995: 68). The steam-powered automobile in *Panorama of Flatiron Building* was not just an example of new technology, it was also an example of the modernity of New York. Bonine's camera position also provided another view of the modernity of New York. In 1901 the Broadway cable-powered streetcar line had been electrified and thus the smooth running of streetcars around curves in the track became possible, rather than the careering around curves that was shown in the *Dead Man's Curve* films.<sup>31</sup> In *Panorama of Flatiron Building* we see streetcars smoothly drawing to a halt to wait for passing horse-drawn traffic or other streetcars. In showing the smooth intersecting traffic, Bonine's film shows the effect of electrification and thus the modernity of New York. Furthermore, the slab-like view of the Flatiron in Bonine's film was, as we have seen, the clearest example of the possibilities brought by new steel-frame construction techniques. In a number of ways, then, from the opening one second shot of the automobile to the closing view of the new skyscraper, Bonine's film was a representation of the modernity of New York.

Far from being a rube film, as Gunning has claimed, *Panorama of Flatiron Building* was a film which could engage with conceptions of progress, of which the construction of the Flatiron had been part. In relation to the modern problem of how to represent transformation and process, raised by Robert Hughes, New York actuality cinema can thus be seen as a medium for representing the modern and thus in itself is a site of the modern.

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<sup>31</sup> The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* carried a Broadway streetcar electrification article on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1901: 4.

As for Bonine's later filmmaking, with AM&B focussing its efforts on the construction of a new studio for the production of story films, Bonine went on to film his last New York actuality in November 1902. Entitled *Excavation for Subway*, the film provided a view of the construction works for the new subway system. Shortly afterwards Bonine left AM&B and did not return to filmmaking until 1905 and his second term with the Edison Company. By 1905, however, as we shall see in the concluding chapter, the New York actuality filmmaking business had become largely supplanted by, but also associated with, narrative filmmaking. Hence, Bonine's filmmaking for Edison in the period from 1905 to 1907 consisted almost entirely of actualities filmed on tours to locations such as Hawaii and Panama, according to copyright records. Earlier in 1903, a series of films produced by the Edison Company concerning urban reform provide an opportunity to return to the film selection criteria used in this study.

### **Civic Filmmaking: Edison's Reform Films**

The primary aim for this study's film selection criteria is to identify, in William Uricchio's terms, 'liveness' actuality films. Three urban themes, all of which are space and time themes identified in New York newspaper reports—transportation systems, watching construction and ways of seeing the city—provide a context for film selection. In addition to being space and time themes, such themes are also important to New York's urban visuality, explicitly with watching construction and ways of seeing the city, and implicitly, but just as importantly, with transportation systems, which involve ways of visualising such systems. The films selected for the three themes are argued to have provided a point of view on their respective themes. In so doing, the film viewer—'ideally', in terms of an addressee, a Brooklynite—is, in a sense, positioned within the films. Lastly, the 'liveness' of the films is a function of their realism, where, to re-use Uricchio's terms in relation to 'rocks and waves' films, the 'expositional'

corresponds with the 'analytic'. In effect, the congruence between the visually coherent spatial world on screen and the world as experienced is such that the content of the films becomes a thickened present time. Temporally, through periods of time, and visually, in relation to the re-presentation of a thickened present, such films can be thought to simulate simultaneity. Such films are also, as Uricchio rightly argues, outside of conventional explanatory paradigms; hence, their neglect, or as Gunning has it, their repression within the field. A further way of usefully restating film selection criteria is to identify films which do not cohere with the criteria: a series of Edison films produced in Spring 1903 provide an example.

Legal disputes between production companies were a significant influence on film production in cinema's early years. One such dispute, over the film copyrighting process, severely curtailed Edison film production in the year to April 1903. Film copyright practice at the time involved depositing a reel of positive prints of a film (known as Paper Prints) at the Library of Congress. Edison's copyright lawyers had successfully argued that by printing all the negatives from a film onto one reel of prints, the series of frames constituted one photograph and thus could be copyrighted as a photograph using existing copyright law. Competitors challenged this form of copyrighting, in order to lawfully dupe, or copy, successful films produced by competitors. In January 1903 Lubin's lawyers won a court ruling that every photograph should be copyrighted, that each frame would have to be individually copyrighted in order to copyright a film. However, on April 21<sup>st</sup> 1903, in what Charles Musser argues was a landmark decision, a court of appeal Judge overturned the January ruling and thus enabled Edison, or any other filmmaker, to once again protect films using the Paper Print copyright process (Musser, 1991: 237-238). On April 28<sup>th</sup>,

just seven days after the ruling, Edison's New York actuality filmmaking crew, consisting of James Blair Smith and Edwin S. Porter, resumed production.<sup>32</sup>

Over a two week period, Smith and Porter filmed some fifteen actualities.<sup>33</sup> *New York City Dumping Wharf*, *White Wings on Review* and *New York City 'Ghetto' Fish Market* were filmed on April 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and May 1<sup>st</sup> respectively. On May 9<sup>th</sup> four films, *Panorama of Blackwell's Island, N.Y.*, *Panorama of Riker's Island, N.Y.*, *Panorama water front and Brooklyn Bridge from East River* and *Sorting Refuse at Incinerating Plant, New York City* were produced. The following day, *Fireboat "New Yorker" in Action*, *Fireboat "New Yorker" Answering an Alarm*, *New York Harbor Police Boat Patrol Capturing Pirates* and *Skyscrapers of New York City, from the North River* were filmed. Lastly, on May 13<sup>th</sup>, Porter filmed *Lehigh Valley Black Diamond Express*.<sup>34</sup> The duration of the films were within the range of one and a half to just under four minutes. The May 13<sup>th</sup> train film aside, the films constitute a coherent series on the theme of urban reform. According to Musser, the post-ruling flurry of New York filmmaking consisted of "actualities showing the 'other half' of city life" (1990: 347). The phrase 'other half' is appropriate in that a selection of the films were used in a Klein Optical Company lantern show, 'Lights and Shadows of A Great City, New York', which included photographs by the renowned reform photographer Jacob Riis (Musser, 1991: 523, n.25). Accordingly, the dumping wharf, incinerator plant, White Wings and Riker's Island films featured the

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<sup>32</sup> As an example of the interrelation of actuality and story film production, Porter then went on to film *The Gay Shoe Clerk* in July 1903 and, what is the best known film from the first decade, *The Great Train Robbery* in November 1903.

<sup>33</sup> Musser claims that "at least fifteen" actualities were filmed by the Edison crew in this period (1991: 241). Identified here are twelve of the films.

<sup>34</sup> Producing another version of the Black Diamond train film more than seven years after the original 1896 filming underlines the commercial importance of this subject. As Musser argues, the 1903 version was "a replacement negative of that still popular subject" (1991: 241)



theme of cleaning the city.<sup>35</sup> The fish market, Blackwell's Island and harbour boat films showed the policing of the city, while the two 'New Yorker' films depicted the city's then famous fireboat in action.<sup>36</sup> To depict the setting for urban reform, the two boat-mounted panoramas, one from the East and one from the North River, demonstrated the sheer size of the metropolis undergoing reform through civic efforts.



Fig. 4.12 Frames, from left to right, from *New York City Dumping Wharf*, *Sorting Refuse at Incinerating Plant, New York City*, and *New York City 'Ghetto' Fish Market* (Edison, 1903).

Ostensibly, Smith and Porter's Spring 1903 filmmaking episode can provide films which fit this study's film selection criteria. For instance, when exhibited sequentially, as may have occurred in the Klein lantern show, the films could explicitly show multiple existing present times and places and thus be thought to simulate simultaneity. With regard to the production of the films, the staging of the filming with *New York City Dumping Wharf*, for example, involves the timing of the simultaneous emptying of the four carts [Fig. 4.12], and a similar timing with two larger carts at the end of the film. In relation to space and time issues, the two boat-mounted panoramas depict a relationship between the sheer scale of Manhattan's emerging skyline and the time taken to traverse the shoreline. In effect, such films provide a new point of view on the city. I'll return to these two panoramas shortly. Firstly, I'll explain why none of the other nine urban reform films cohere with the film selection criteria used in this study.

<sup>35</sup> The White Wings were men wearing white uniforms employed to sweep New York's streets. and Riker's Island was the site of a major landfill project at the time.

<sup>36</sup> The fish market film follows the route of three city officials employed to regulate the market., while Blackwell's Island was the location of New York's charitable and penal institutions.



Fig. 4.13 Frames, from left to right, from *Panorama of Riker's Island, Skyscrapers of New York City, from the North River*, and *New York Harbor Police Boat Patrol Capturing Pirates* (Edison, 1903)

The film selection criteria described at the beginning of this section details *how* actuality films could simulate simultaneity. For individual film selection within the themes, two criteria guide selection; assessing the visual coherence of the films through, for example, identifying the use of visual cues which relate to urban themes, and the identification of a form of openness to the city, a willingness to move in close. *Lower Broadway* is filmed from an elevated position, which could not be construed as ‘moving in close’. However, the visual coherence of the film, the use of streetcars to enhance the perception of apparent depth, fits the selection criteria; emphasising the visual depth of the view of New York’s streets corresponds with the coming-to-the-city theme of coping with, or negotiating, street distances within increasingly canyoned streets. *Beginning of a Skyscraper* is both visually coherent, again through the use of stereo depth cues, and is filmed from an in close perspective: within the dig for the new Macy’s store, instead of at street level. Rather than focussing on individual workmen or work processes, the film depicts the process of construction as a functioning whole. The film can be thought to aid the visualisation of change in Manhattan wrought by the pace of skyscraper construction, a theme identified in newspaper reports. Examining the Edison reform films chronologically, each film fails the selection criteria in different ways.

With *New York City Dumping Wharf*, the synchronised emptying of the four carts at the beginning, and the two carts at the end, highlights the staging of the

film [Fig. 4.12]. Rather than a congruence between the world on screen and the world as experienced, the film provides an obvious display for the camera. Although the camera in *White Wings on Review* does pan to show the depth of the street scene in the opening seventeen seconds, the remainder of the film resembles a stock, camera-at-the-side-of-the-street view of a parade. *New York City 'Ghetto' Fish Market* is neither visually coherent nor in close. Instead, the camera is guided by the regulatory route of city officials [Fig. 4.12]. Similarly, with both of the Riker's and Blackwell's panoramas, the boat-mounted camera follows the shoreline, in order to display the sights on each Island, rather than following a coherent urban theme [Fig. 4.13]. *Sorting Refuse at Incinerating Plant, New York City* is clearly in close, but otherwise serves as an example of filming whatever is in front of the camera, to paraphrase Doane's account of actuality filmmaking [Fig. 4.13]. Finally, with the three boat-camera views of the fireboat and the police patrol, filmed on May 10<sup>th</sup>, the camera literally pursues a logic of promotion, for the purposes of city authorities, rather than a logic of negotiation, for New Yorkers.

With regard to the New York themes selected for this study, the broad theme of urban reform is not explicitly visual in the same way that visualising systems, watching construction or ways of seeing the city are. Moreover, when depicted as a regulatory theme which focuses on cleansing and policing the city, it is a theme which can attenuate the putative indeterminacy found in the films selected for this study. The 1896-97 Dead Man's Curve films, for example, ostensibly depict the regulation of streetcars and pedestrians. However, whereas by moving in closer to the tracks the Edison film subverts the intended depiction of streetcar safety, the Lumière film adopts a conventional photographic perspective and in so doing coheres with regulatory concerns. Considered as a series of advertisements for the reform claims of the city authorities, the 1903 Edison

reform films can similarly be seen to cohere with regulatory concerns, but fail to connect with New Yorker concerns. As such—and aside from the perspective of the city authorities—the congruence between the New York depicted on screen and the New York as experienced is diminished. Potentially, however, the two Manhattan shoreline panoramas provide an exception to this. Both films offer a convincing portrayal of the scale of skyscraper construction in Manhattan’s southern tip. From a later cinema perspective, the films are attractive as documents of ‘what was there’ at the time. Of course, although attractive, such a perspective can work to obscure historical circumstances. When situated within the series of reform films, the suitability of the two shoreline panoramas for this study’s selection criteria is diminished. With the North River panorama, despite Edison’s claims for the ‘stereoscopic effect of the sky-scrapers’, as we saw in Chapter 1, the potential for a ‘here it is’ liveness to the film is diminished by the, directed, boat-mounted perspective. As we shall see in the concluding chapter, a transition from producing to directing provides an important distinction with transitional actuality films.

In concluding this chapter, the Flatiron’s peculiar wind currents provide one example of the effect of the built environment upon city life. More significantly for this study’s purposes, however, the historical coincidence of New York’s construction boom, including the building of skyscrapers, and the emergence of cinema provided both a subject and a logic for actuality filmmaking. As an example of actuality cinema’s representational detour, the canyonisation of New York’s streets provided a subject for stereoscopic ways of looking and a way of filming the act of watching the construction of New York’s buildings.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion: Transitional Actuality Films

The identification of an alternative axis of the relations between cinema and the modern is central to this study. Whereas the attractions thesis and neurological modernity nexus posits a momentary shocks and jolts axis of the relations between cinema and modernity, this study identifies an axis founded in periods of time: a cinema of simultaneity that responds to New York modernisation and which constitutes a form of cultural modernism. In being positioned as an alternative *axis* of relations between cinema and the modern, my purpose is to posit a form of cinema and a conception of the modern which is not separate from, but is itself part of a wider whole which includes the attractions thesis and neurological modernity nexus. As cinema emerged in the 1890s it became “the fullest expression and combination of modernity’s attributes”, to quote Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz’s influential study, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (1995: 1). It follows that we should expect to find different axes of the relations between cinema and the modern. As a heterogeneous medium which emerges within an intermedial culture, a multiplicity of cinema and the modern axes is to be expected. In being interdependent axes, cinema is echoing a central characteristic of the modern. As we have seen in previous chapters, in Mary Ann Doane’s study of cinematic time, two “tendencies” within modernity, “abstraction/rationalization and an emphasis upon the contingent, chance and the ephemeral”, are demonstrated to be “profoundly” connected, to be “interdependent”, to have formed an “alliance in the structuring of temporality in modernity” (2002: 10-11). For Jonathan Crary, in his study of modes of modern attentiveness, whereas “perception is fundamentally characterized by experiences of fragmentation, shock and dispersal” within the neurological modernity nexus, distraction and attentive norms and practices are in a “reciprocal” relationship

(1999: 1). Furthermore, in the same way that interdependent axes of relations of cinema and the modern should be expected, so should a cinema of simultaneity.

Contrary to an easy association of a Baudelairean modernity solely with the cinema of attractions, Baudelaire's modernity can also be thought to presage a cinema of simultaneity. In his much quoted essay "The Painter of Modern Life", Baudelaire begins by asserting that the "pleasure which we derive from the representation of the present" is in part due to the "essential quality of being present" (1995: 1). Within his aesthetic theory, a "historical theory of beauty", beauty is "always and inevitably of a double composition": an "eternal invariable element", and a "relative, circumstantial element" (3). Hence Baudelaire's famous phrase: "[b]y 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and immutable" (12). Baudelaire's 'painter of modern life', Constantin Guys, "sought after the fugitive, fleeting beauty of present-day life, the distinguishing character of that quality which ... we have called 'modernity'" (41). Guy's drawings of a "thousand aspects and episodes of outdoor life" included the depiction of ships and carriages where "the pleasure which [they] afford the eye would seem to spring from the series of geometrical shapes which this object ... cuts swiftly and successively in space" (39-40). Transpose Baudelaire's mid-1800 Europe for 1900s New York and the modernity, the "relative, circumstantial element" of the modern, involves an obviously different "present-day life". The "essential quality of being present" in New York includes being part of a transportation system, watching construction and finding ways of seeing the city. Actuality cinema provided a "thousand aspects" of "outdoor life" and afforded pleasure by depicting "geometrical shapes ... in space". Cinema emerges as a technology of the present, both a fleeting present in the cinema of attractions, and a thickened present in the cinema of simultaneity.

In critiques of the so-called ‘modernity thesis’ the apparent lack of modernity influences within transitional cinema (the period from roughly 1907 to 1913) is a central concern. In effect, because the cinema of attractions is not evident in later cinema, the validity and usefulness of identifying cinema and modernity correlatives is questioned. This critique is, however, itself questioned by the identification of alternative axes of the relations of cinema and the modern. In this chapter I will argue that the actuality cinema of simultaneity is one axis which can be thought to influence later cinema. To be sure, actuality cinema is no longer commercially dominant from around 1903. In this study, only a small proportion of New York actualities are identified as providing a form of liveness. As such, the liveness representational detour does not so much join with, or form an alliance with, the emerging narrative cinema; it could, however, have demonstrated the possibility of representing a coherent world on screen, and a spectator within that world.

As noted in Chapter 3, identifying the complexity of actuality cinema problematises accounts of the demise of actuality cinema. Simply put, if actuality cinema is considered a primitive form, its demise could be thought a natural counterpart of the wider development of ways of making films. Conversely, if actualities are considered in terms of complexity, including complex cultural roles, accounting for the ending of actuality cinema becomes a pressing issue. Conventionally, in terms of periodisations, actuality cinema is thought commercially dominant in the period from 1896 to around 1903. Thereafter, what is usually termed preclassical narrative cinema became dominant in the period to around 1907-08, with the transition to classical narrative cinema occurring in the years to around 1913. The reasons for the decline of actuality cinema are usually thought to be economic. Not in the sense that narrative films were more profitable *per se*, but that within the industrialisation of cinema,

narrative films offered a more predictable source of income. As Philip Rosen claims, “the denormalisation of preclassical documentary genres was probably economic, namely the need for a regularised supply of new products” (2001: 164). Rosen goes on to argue that, rather than being a response to audience “preferences”, the move to narrative may have been “imposed ... from the supply end of the industry” (165). This is an important point, in that the imposition of narrative would likely have created a commercial need to assuage audience demands. The industry would have needed to, at least, “deal with a pre-existing audience acquaintance with actuality”, to “negotiate the desire to see actuality”, as Rosen has it (165-166). This dealing with, or negotiating, is then theorised, by Rosen, in terms of a need to “presuppose”, or “compromise with” the actuality impulse, where actualities are “implanted” within “textual practices” (166). In section two of this chapter, I will examine the ‘implanting’ of actuality cinema in terms of the interrelation of actuality and storytelling representational strategies with *Interior N. Y. Subway, 14<sup>th</sup> St. to 42<sup>nd</sup> St.* (AM&B, 1905) and *The Skyscrapers of New York* (AM&B, 1906): two films which maintain this study’s focus on transportation and skyscraper construction, and which involve ways of seeing New York. Firstly, I want to elaborate upon Rosen’s notion of narrative filmmakers ‘compromising’ with the actuality impulse by arguing that actuality filmmaking was itself changing in this period. The complexity of actuality filmmaking became such that the ‘implanting’ of actualities within the narrative impulse was not just a one-way accommodation. Rather, the interrelation of actuality and narrative modes could also have been fostered by actuality filmmaking that was itself becoming, in a sense, oriented towards narrative. To begin, we will return to the Flatiron Building and an October 1903 film: *At the Foot of the Flatiron* (AM&B).



### *At the Foot of the Flatiron (AM&B, 1903)*

Soon after its completion in 1902, the Flatiron gained notoriety as the cause of peculiar wind currents at the narrow northern tip of the building. In newspapers, magazines and postcard illustrations the effect of these wind currents became a popular topic.<sup>1</sup> In January 1903 a Broadway store owner attempted to sue the Flatiron's owners for damage caused by the windstorms around the Flatiron (*New York Times*, January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1903: 3). A February 1903 *New York Times* article claimed that a storm had taken up "its headquarters" at the Flatiron Building and had resulted in the death of a boy who was blown under an automobile (February 6<sup>th</sup> 1903: 1). The *New York Times* carried a front page story on September 17<sup>th</sup> 1903 entitled "Furious Gale Lashes The City and Harbour" which reported that the Flatiron was the centre of the storm (September 17<sup>th</sup> 1903: 1). At the height of the storm, an area around the Flatiron extending two hundred yards into Madison Square, was cleared to prevent storm damage. According to the report, "anything less heavy than a street car that came within the zone dominated by the triangular structure was blown away" (1). Weather reports show that the 17<sup>th</sup> was the windiest September day in New York (US Department of Agriculture, 1903). The following month's report lists the 26<sup>th</sup> as the windiest day and this time an AM&B camera crew were on hand to film the effects of the wind.



Fig. 5.1 Frames from *At the Foot of the Flatiron* (AM&B, 1903)

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<sup>1</sup> See Schleier, 1986: 50 and Berman, 2001: 120 for examples of postcards and magazine articles and further examples of newspaper coverage of windstorms around the Flatiron.

*At the Foot of the Flatiron* (alternative title, *Windy Day at the Flatiron*) was filmed by AM&B cameraman A. E. Weed at a position adjacent to the single-story structure protruding from the northern tip of the Flatiron. Over the film's two minute and nineteen second duration we see pedestrians struggling against the wind, "being blown about like chips", according to the AM&B film catalogue (cited in Niver, 1971: 199). Considered as a response to newspaper reports and given the date (possibly the next windy day after the September 17<sup>th</sup> reports), the film is a clear example of actuality cinema operating in visual newspaper mode. Weed's film is also an example of the complexity of actuality filmmaking, countering any point-and-shoot conceptions. The street scene in front of the Flatiron is constantly crowded with people throughout the film. However, instead of being a "record[ing]" of "whatever happens" in front of the camera, to quote Doane, the film consists of eleven sequences and involves at least four actors and two New York cops (2002: 181). Although a two minute and nineteen second film, filming took place over a period of up to half an hour.



Fig. 5.2 Frames from *At the Foot of the Flatiron* (AM&B, 1903)

The opening five seconds are filmed in real time, then the film cuts to the next sequence, which ends with a cut at fourteen seconds as we see a woman peering into the camera [Fig. 5.2]. Three seconds later a cop walks in front of the camera and the film cuts again to the next sequence where a man's hat flies off in the wind [Fig.5.2].<sup>2</sup> At times, the film cuts on action, such as the woman peering into

<sup>2</sup> The policemen in the film, seen patrolling the windswept street, are enacting the '23 Skidoo' call, where policemen moved on bystanders (from 23<sup>rd</sup> Street) loitering for the chance of a glance at women's clothing being lifted by the wind, according to the legend. For one account of the origin and use of the '23 skidoo' expression see Berman, 2001: 119. Tom Gunning misidentifies

the camera, in others the film cuts when the street scene empties of people (such as at the end of sequence eight at one minute thirty-nine seconds). Later in the film, the sun shadow changes on the Flatiron’s window between sequences, indicating a real time difference of approximately ten to fifteen minutes between sequences nine and ten. In addition to actors such as the woman peering into the camera, the cop in front of the camera and the man whose hat flies off, another man loiters in various sequences, sequence nine features a woman attempting to read a newspaper in the wind [Fig. 5.2], and another cop appears in the final sequence. Across the eleven sequences there are different types of cuts, and staged action and shots, such as the full frame shot of the cop or the motif shot of the woman reading the newspaper.



Fig. 5.3 Fogged frames from *At the Foot of the Flatiron* (AM&B, 1903)

Recent work on Lumière actualities by Andre Gaudreault provides an explanation of the filmmaking techniques used for *At the Foot of the Flatiron*. According to Gaudreault, whereas the conventional view of Lumière actualities is that the films generally consist of one continuous shot, detailed frame-by-frame research on over one thousand Lumière films demonstrates that many of the films are “made up of successive frames that constitute *more than a single moment in time* and thus contradict the canonical model” (2003: 111).

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the effects of wind currents at the Flatiron in his account of the 1901 film *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York*, referred to in Chapter 1. According to Gunning the meaning of the 1901 film relates to the windstorms around the Flatiron Building, yet the Flatiron was not completed until late-Summer 1902 and the infamous winds were not reported until later that year (Gunning, 1993: 9).

Gaudreault's italics).<sup>3</sup> In almost 20% of 1899 Lumière films 'interruptions' are evident, caused by either 'fragmentation' of the film strip, as a result of cutting and gluing the strip, or 'segmentation', a form of in-camera-editing where the camera is stopped, then started again. Gaudreault's preliminary research on Edison films shows that an even higher proportion of 1899 films, around 60%, involve fragmentation, segmentation and assemblage. Such research on Edison, or AM&B, Paper Print actualities is potentially problematic given that in most cases the original negatives are not available.<sup>4</sup> However, even with 16mm versions of the Paper Prints, which have subsequently been reprocessed into 35mm format and then digitised, the marks of segmentation, or in-camera-editing, are clearly visible. In Fig. 5.3 there are three frames selected from *At the Foot of the Flatiron* which adjoin the ending of one sequence and the beginning of the next. The fogging of the frames is most likely to have been caused by Weed stopping filming and in the process overexposing a frame, or frames, before starting the camera when the next action sequence is ready for filming.<sup>5</sup> In other cases, there are 'clean' frames adjoining sequences, which could be the result of cutting the film strip and re-assembling the strip during processing of the film.<sup>6</sup>

Weed's eleven-sequence Flatiron film is an important example of the complexity of actuality filmmaking. The use of such terms as fragmentation, segmentation and assemblage is, as Gaudreault notes, necessary in order to guard against an

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<sup>3</sup> See also an earlier Gaudreault article which relates such techniques to pre-cinema devices and exhibition practices (2001).

<sup>4</sup> Gaudreault notes this problem and has secured access to the original Paper Prints, rather than relying on subsequent 16mm versions of the films (Gaudreault, 2003: 114).

<sup>5</sup> Gaudreault describes the various filmmaking and splicing technique and the resultant traces of the techniques on the film frames in his article (Gaudreault, 2003). NB Whereas fogging of negatives causes a darkening of the frame(s), print fogging appears as a lightening of the frame(s); presented in Fig. 5.3 are fogged frames which originated from Paper Print copies of the film.

<sup>6</sup> Without access to the fragile Paper Print originals, this interpretation must be considered provisional. (Such access is highly unlikely for PhD thesis research).

easy association of camera stop/start techniques, or cutting and gluing film strips at the processing stage, with the familiar notion of editing.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, with Weed's film, the use of the term 'sequence' is intended to avoid a straightforward association with the usual term 'scene'. Nevertheless, within a late 1903 context—where actuality and narrative modes are, for filmmakers at the time, in a state of flux—there is a validity and usefulness to exploring connections between modes of filmmaking. As Rosen notes (in a argument which draws connections between documentary and mainstream modes of cinema), in a straightforward sense, both documentary and mainstream modes are based in the “sublation of document into sequence” (2001: 241). In Rosen's useful simplification of cinema, the 'document' is an “indexically traced record of a preexistent, profilmic field”, with mainstream films consisting of “some two hours of such 'documents' sequentially ordered” (241). Of course (as Rosen is well aware), it would be somewhat misleading to consider actuality 'documents' as 'records'. However, Weed's 'sublation of document' into eleven 'sequences' with *At the Foot of the Flatiron* was unlikely to have gone unnoticed by, for example, Edison's Edwin S. Porter. A few weeks after the Flatiron filming, in December 1903, Porter made the landmark narrative film *The Great Train Robbery*, which included filming at Edison's studio just a few blocks away from the Flatiron. Porter's film consisted of thirteen 'sequences', rather than Weed's eleven, and, of course, the 'sequencing' of 'document' was, significantly, not sequential in Porter's narrative schema.

Aside from speculations about the influence of *At the Foot of the Flatiron* on Porter's narrative film, my purpose here is to underscore the potential for connections between actuality and narrative modes. There is a logical shift, a

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<sup>7</sup> Gaudreault argues for the need to avoid the use of the term 'editing' in order to “avoid any sort of historical telescoping and to be aware of the risk of teleology” (2003: 129, n. 7).

function of complexity, where actuality filmmaking creates its own demise. Weed's filmmaking techniques were simply an extension of those used by Bonine and others: by compressing up to half an hour's action into just under two and a half minutes, Weed was quite literally creating a thickened present. But in the process, the stop/start camera, the cutting and assembly of the strip of film and the dependence on staged events and actors, Weed was treading a fine line between actuality and artifice. Despite the contemporary fascination with the present, part of an appetite for reality, liveness may have created a means of negotiating the modern but it was unlikely to be itself negotiable.

In the period following Weed's October 1903 Flatiron film, New York actuality production was already showing the signs of decline. On December 19<sup>th</sup> 1903, both Edison and AM&B film crews covered the opening of the Williamsburg Bridge, which crosses the East River just over a mile upstream from Brooklyn Bridge. Edison then shot two winter scenes in Central Park on January 17<sup>th</sup> and February 8<sup>th</sup> 1904, both remakes of earlier successful subjects. AM&B produced a news film of a fire at the Adams Express Office in New York in late March, and Edison filmed a New York Fire Department parade on May 14<sup>th</sup>. The next main newsworthy event in 1904 was to be the opening of the subway in late October. In between, as had happened in the summer of 1903, the attractions at Coney Island provided the main draw for Edison's and AM&B's filmmakers. In the summer of 1903 thirteen films were shot at Coney and during 1904 fourteen were produced, according to copyright records. Although Coney Island had been a leisure attraction throughout the nineteenth century, the opening of amusement parks such as Captain Paul Boyton's Sea Lion Park in 1895 and George Tilyou's Steeplechase Park in 1897 marked a new era for the resort. With express trains from Brooklyn Bridge reaching Coney Island in just thirty minutes, visitor numbers soared. As John Kasson notes, in the early 1900s Coney attracted up to

200,000 visitors per day on Sundays and holidays; Coney was by this time literally “amusing the millions”, to quote the title of Kasson’s study (1978: 38).<sup>8</sup>

The Edison and AM&B 1903-04 Coney Island films cover a broad range of subjects from beach scenes to films of attractions, such as the newly opened Luna Park in May 1903 and Dreamland in May 1904. Coney was an obvious attraction for filmmakers and the concurrence of the emergence of cinema and the growth of Coney Island is a significant context for New York actuality cinema. ‘Disaster’ attractions at Coney, such as recreations of the 1889 Johnstown flood and the 1900 Galveston flood are events which had originally been covered by Bonine, in stereographs and then actuality films. With Dreamland’s daily attraction ‘Fighting Flames’, copied from Luna’s ‘Fire and Flames’, a mock up of New York tenements were set on fire and then extinguished by firemen, while residents leapt from windows into nets below (Kasson, 1978: 71-72). Accordingly, AM&B cameramen filmed the attraction in *Fighting the Flames, Dreamland* on July 21<sup>st</sup> 1904. In part, however, the liveness attraction of actuality films had by this time shifted to the recreation of events at Coney. The demise of New York actualities was not only related to industrial concerns for regularised products, it was also part of changing conceptions of what counted as real. In addition, actuality filmmaking techniques were also part of this shift. In turning now to a 1905 actuality filmed from the roof of a new Manhattan skyscraper I want to consider how the complexity of filmmaking involved a shift from producing a visually coherent world on screen to directing that world.

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<sup>8</sup> The phrase ‘amusing the millions’ is from a 1908 magazine article by Frederic Thompson, the then manager of Luna Park (Kasson, 1978, 116, n. 17).

This study began with a journey from ‘Brooklyn to New York Via Brooklyn Bridge’ and to the City Hall bridge railway terminal in lower Manhattan. From City Hall, the short distance to Broadway then brought us to one route through which New York actuality filmmakers chose to represent their city. Through an analysis of films such as *Lower Broadway* at Wall Street, *Star Theatre* at 13<sup>th</sup> Street, the Dead Man’s Curve films at 14<sup>th</sup> Street, *Panorama of Flatiron Building* at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and *Beginning of a Skyscraper* at 34<sup>th</sup> Street we have followed the New York actuality cinema Broadway route. This focus on Broadway sites is a form of lens on the city which constitutes a partial view of New York. One reason for this partiality related to the practicalities of film production; New York’s two main film producers were based on Broadway. Having established premises in 1896 at 841 Broadway, AM&B moved to new studios in 1903 at 14<sup>th</sup> Street, just off Broadway. Similarly, with their West Orange, New Jersey studio in disrepair, in 1901 the Edison Company established a studio at 21<sup>st</sup> Street, again, just off Broadway (Musser, 1990: 314). In addition to practicalities, the Broadway actuality cinema lens was also a product of New York actuality cinema’s interrelation with other New York media. For example, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle’s* 1901 Broadway ‘transformations’ article was one attempt by a newspaper to represent the wider transformation of New York through construction works at prominent corner sites on Broadway. In filming these sites, the actuality cinema Broadway lens demonstrated cinema’s intermedial context. Appropriately, then, a film shot at another prominent Broadway site and the site of another New York newspaper, *Panorama From Times Building, NY* (AM&B, 1905) provides our next stopping off point.

### ***Panorama From Times Building, NY (AM&B, 1905)***

Ostensibly, if the buildings which provide the subjects for each film are any measure, *Panorama From Times Building, NY* would seem to be an actuality



counterpart to Bonine's *Panorama of Flatiron Building*. The 'transformation' of Broadway from lower Manhattan to 34<sup>th</sup> Street described by the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in June 1901 had, by early 1902, reached 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and what was then known as Longacre Square at the junction of Broadway and Seventh Avenue. In the period up to the late 1890s Longacre Square had been a centre for horse-related businesses such as stabling, horse trading, carriage shops and so on (Hood, 1993: 102). However, the commercial potential of this important transport hub was about to be transformed by the introduction of a new mode of transportation, namely an underground railway system which included a station at the junction of Broadway and Seventh Avenue. In 1902 and with construction of the new subway system underway, the owner of the New York Times, Adolph Ochs, purchased a triangular lot of land bounded by 42<sup>nd</sup>, 43<sup>rd</sup> Streets, Broadway and Seventh Avenue. In late 1902 construction of the new Times Building began, by April 1904 the area had been renamed Times Square, on October 27<sup>th</sup> the Interborough Rapid Transit subway system opened and on December 31<sup>st</sup> 1904 the opening of the new twenty-five story Times Building was celebrated with a spectacular fireworks display.

While Times Square itself was to become, as historian Eric Sandeen argues, "one of the most emblematic spaces in twentieth century American culture", Ochs's Times Building quickly became an important landmark in New York (Sandeen, 2000). Built on a triangular lot and at a prominent Broadway junction, the Times Building shares similarities with the Flatiron. For example, as architectural historian Robert A. Stern argues, the first buildings in New York to "convincingly express the romantic characteristic of the skyscraper were built on freestanding, V-shaped lots", including the Flatiron and Times buildings (Stern et al., 1983: 164). Ochs also hoped to recreate the prominent publicity which the Flatiron Building had enjoyed.

On January 1<sup>st</sup> 1905 the New York Times published a “minutely detailed [and] lavishly illustrated” account of the construction of their new building in a special ‘New York Times Building Supplement’ (Landau and Condit, 1996: 309). In an opening article entitled ‘City’s Tallest Structure from Base to Top’ the Supplement listed the new building’s features including its “extreme height of 476 feet”, a claim that “it touches higher clouds than anything within twelve miles”, and numerous construction statistics such as a “new record in structural steel tonnage” (January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1905: 3. Cited in Landau and Condit, 1996: 309). Providing ‘minute’ detail of the building’s structure and the construction works was consistent with the construction watching theme we explored in Chapter 4. However, just as important to Ochs, as the title of the Supplement’s opening article indicated, was how to exploit the building’s height potential. Ochs’s claim that the Times Building was the ‘city’s tallest structure’ was accurate if building height was measured from the lowest basement floor to the top of a building’s flagpole, but not by standard measures.<sup>9</sup> However, the elevated ground level at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, in comparison to the business district, meant that the Times Building was the city’s highest, if not the tallest, structure. Ochs’s elaborate New Year’s Eve celebrations from the top of the new building were, then, one way of promoting the building’s stature.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, it was the new building’s height which became a subject for an AM&B camera crew in April 1905.

Photographed by a camera crew headed by Wallace McCutcheon, *Panorama From Times Building, NY* begins with a camera tilt from the roof of the recently

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<sup>9</sup> According to Landau and Condit, the Times Building was some thirty feet shorter than the Park Row Building when measured from the curb to the top of the building (1996: 309).

<sup>10</sup> See Sandeen, 2000 for an account of the cultural significance of the Times Square New Year’s Eve celebrations through the twentieth century.

completed building [Fig. 5.4].<sup>11</sup> The camera starts from a position looking down at buildings at the base of the Times Building and, over the opening thirty-five seconds of the film, slowly tilts up to the horizon looking northwest towards the Queens district of New York. The film then cuts to a one minute and thirty second, ninety degree, panoramic sweep of Manhattan, from a easterly view of Bryant Park on East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to a northerly view of the junction of Broadway and Seventh Avenue at 46<sup>th</sup> Street. The composition of the Times Building film is consistent with the actuality films analysed in this study in being carefully, rather than arbitrarily, composed. For example, the camera tilt runs for around one-third of the duration of the film and is positioned at around the mid-point of the ninety degree east to north pan. Moreover, the start and end points of the ninety degree pan provide views of what were important sites in New York such as the under-construction New York Public Library, visible adjacent to Bryant Park in the opening frames of the horizontal pan. By keying into New York's construction fascination, *Panorama From Times Building, NY* can be thought a continuation of actuality filmmaking practices. There are similarities between, for example, the Flatiron and Times Building panoramas in that each film expresses the height of the respective skyscrapers. The move from a ground-level to a roof-top vantage point is, however, significant.

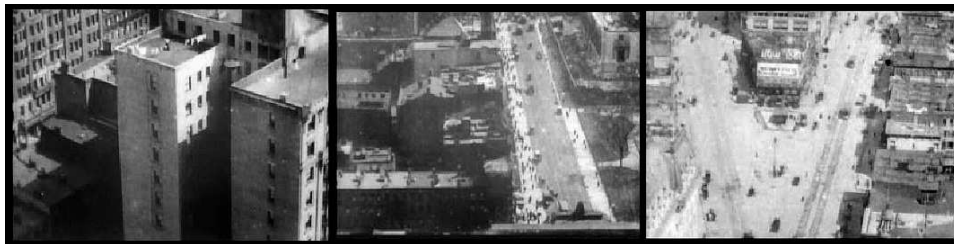


Fig. 5.4 Three frames from *Panorama From Times Building, NY* (AM&B, 1905).

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<sup>11</sup> Although McCutcheon is listed in the Paper Print copyright deposit as 'cameraman', his main activity was acting as the producer of story films (Musser, 1990: 226). It would therefore seem likely that McCutcheon produced rather than filmed the Times Building film.

With regard to the logistics of filming the panorama, Ochs's elaborate New Year's Eve fireworks display and the subsequent use of the Times Building for such celebrations demonstrate that access to the building's roof area would have been relatively straightforward for McCutcheon and his camera equipment. Moreover, although no evidence exists, it would also seem reasonable to assume that Ochs commissioned the filming as part of bolstering his claims for the new building's height. Furthermore, with the twenty-fourth floor of the building functioning as an observatory, McCutcheon's film could have been intended as an advertisement to draw visitors to Ochs's observatory.<sup>12</sup> From Ochs's perspective, a significant aspect of the new building's value was the view it provided and thus McCutcheon's film could serve as a representation of that value.

In addition to logistics and Ochs's interests, the emergence of sightseeing from the roofs of skyscrapers could also have provided an impetus for filming the Times Building panorama. A 1900 *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* article entitled 'Roofs of the Skyscrapers' claimed that visitors to the roofs of buildings such as the Park Row Building constituted "an army of no mean proportions", and argued that the extent of roof sightseeing was such that some form of 'regulation' was required (August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1900: 13). The article went on to claim that:

[i]t would surprise the ordinary New Yorker to learn of the extent of these sightseeing visitors. Most of them come from the South and the West where skyscrapers are rare or unheard of. They like to get a birdseye [sic] view of the metropolis ... . (13)

Sightseeing from the roofs of skyscrapers was, then, not an activity in which New Yorkers engaged, according to the Brooklyn newspaper. Whereas 'seeing New York' from tour buses was an activity (as we saw in Chapter 4) which

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<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the topmost storey of the Flatiron Building comprised an observation floor and restaurant (Berman, 2001: 118).

involved a close engagement with the city, sightseeing from atop skyscrapers involved a detached perspective on the city. Perhaps not surprisingly, this perspective was not favoured by actuality filmmakers.

AM&B cameraman Billy Bitzer provided an early example of filming a panorama film from the top of a structure with his 1899 pan of lower Manhattan from the Brooklyn tower of Brooklyn Bridge. Bitzer's film is, however, unusual. Of the eighty-two 'Panorama' or 'Panoramic' titled films from the Library of Congress Paper Print Collection, just three films are photographed from the top of structures: Bitzer's film, the Times Building film and a film photographed from the top of the German Building at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair (Niver, 1985: 236-244).<sup>13</sup> Instead of envisioning a 'panorama' to involve a view from above, early filmmakers shot panorama films almost exclusively from moving cameras or ground-level panning cameras or a combination of the two. New York panorama titled films provide an example. There are seven 'Panorama' and one 'Panoramic' titled films of New York in the Paper Print Collection. The total figure of eight, or 10% of the eighty-two Panorama films listed in Niver's catalogue, is again a measure of New York's proportion of actuality films in cinema's first decade. As for the mode of filming, apart from Bitzer's film and the Flatiron and Times Building films, four of the remainder were filmed from boat-mounted cameras and one film, an alternative title for one of the 1899 Brooklyn Bridge films, was shot from the front of a train.<sup>14</sup> Other notable examples of panorama-like films from cinema's first decade include an Edison

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<sup>13</sup> In addition to the eighty-two film titles beginning with 'Panorama' or 'Panoramic' there are four 'Circular panorama' and two 'Circular panoramic' titled films listed in Niver's catalogue (1985: 57). However, none of the films are photographed from the top of structures.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Musser's catalogue of Edison films in the period up to 1901, which includes non-copyrighted films and thus films not included in the Niver catalogue, lists thirty-five 'Panorama' or 'Panoramic' titled films, of which six were filmed in New York. Although a smaller sample, the New York panorama category films thus constitute 17% of all panoramas, a figure which corresponds with the 18% proportion of New York actuality films from the total number of Edison films in this period, as noted in Chapter 1.

film photographed from an elevator ascending the Eiffel tower during the 1900 Paris Exposition and a 1902 Edison film shot from a tethered balloon as it ascended and descended over the business district of San Francisco (Niver, 1985: 301, 287 and 30 respectively). The latter film is one of just three films from this period which used a 'Bird's Eye' title prefix.

The rare use of a 'Bird's Eye' prefix for film titles is one indicator of the selective, rather than arbitrary, adoption and interrelation of prior media forms within cinema's period of emergence. This is important in that the popularity of Bird's Eye style views of cities ought to have provided a source of income for film producers. For example, in a study of urban viewmaking, *Bird's Eye Views: Historic Lithographs of North American Cities* (1998), John William Reps notes that nearly five thousand separate lithographs of American towns and cities were produced in the period from the 1850s to the early 1900s (7). Plate 4 provides one example of the numerous New York views from a media form where demand for such views became "a universal hobby - almost a mania", according to one contemporary commentator (cited in Reps, 1998: 7). One example of the crossover of this 'mania' into another media format is the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle's* publication of a two-page wide, specially commissioned, 'birdseye' [sic] view of Brooklyn in their January 1898 'Consolidation Supplement' (January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1898: 101).<sup>15</sup> However, despite the commercial potential for filmmakers to borrow from and exploit an existing and successful media format, Bitzer's panoramic view of lower Manhattan and McCutcheon's panorama from the Times Building are the only extant examples of Bird's Eye style urban viewmaking in New York from cinema's first decade. Chronologically, whereas Bitzer's Brooklyn Bridge film was one of the first panorama titled films,

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<sup>15</sup> In the Consolidation Supplement the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* also carried a one-page wide 'birdseye' view of the City of New York (70). In 1902 the newspaper published a 'birdseye' view of Long Island (April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1902: 45).

*Panorama From Times Building, NY* was the last such film submitted to the Library of Congress in Paper Print format.

In one sense, McCutcheon's film from the top of the Times Building points to a more familiar form of filmmaking. Moreover, *Panorama From Times Building, NY* could be thought to provide a more realistic representation of the act of looking at the city from the view which the increasing number of increasingly taller buildings made possible. Paradoxically, however, the familiarity of *Panorama From Times Building, NY* also highlights that the film operates within a different representational schema to that which we have been tracing. In turning now to the effect of the vantage point adopted in *Panorama From Times Building, NY* I want to examine the partiality of the view provided by the film. In effect, rather than engaging with the actuality liveness themes, the film points to a modernist representational schema.

The New York actuality cinema Broadway lens provides a narrow, letter-box like perspective on the city which excludes, for example, the immigrant neighbourhoods in Manhattan's Lower East Side. In contrast to a naïve mimetic understanding of cultural artefacts, any form of representation will self-evidently constitute a partial view of whatever it represents. In the case of New York actuality films, the partiality of the views provided could have been assuaged at the time by what constituted an unprecedented congruence between the world on screen and the world as experienced. *Panorama From Times Building, NY* provides, however, its own form of letter-box perspective which is distinct from that provided by the actuality Broadway lens. Plate 16 consists of frames from the Times Building film which demonstrate the extent of the view provided from McCutcheon's camera. The vertical slit of frames is from McCutcheon's camera

tilt; the horizontal section of frames is from the camera's east to north pan of Manhattan.

A panoramic photograph taken in 1906 from the roof of the Times Building provides a measure of the partiality of McCutcheon's film [Plate 17]. At extreme left of Plate 17 we see the twin towered building which is shown in the vertical section of frames from McCutcheon's film [Plate 16]. The panoramic photograph then shows, in an east to west 180 degree panorama of the southern end of Manhattan, from left to right, East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Broadway, Seventh Avenue and West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. Although drawn in the 1870s, Plate 4 provides an example of a Birds Eye lithograph of Manhattan. Across the three forms of panoramic film, panoramic photograph and Bird's Eye lithograph we see, then, the extent of view provided by each form. Clearly, although the panoramic film provides a familiar and convincingly complete view, the view is neither convincing nor complete when juxtaposed with what were conventional panoramic forms. There is, then, a form of tension between completeness and partiality in McCutcheon's film. This is a tension which, even if inadvertently, McCutcheon stages in the cut from a vertical to a horizontal pan in *Panorama From Times Building, NY*.

In Chapter 2 we noted (with Christine Boyer's periodisation of aesthetic conventions) how a modernistic 'totalizing gaze' became a way of seeing and representing the city in the late nineteenth century (1994: 33). According to Boyer, a panoramic viewpoint provided a form of 'spatial order' which overcame the modern city's 'anarchic visual arrangement' (40-41). Bird's Eye views were thus an example of providing spatial order over cities which had become visually unordered. McCutcheon's film provides, however, a different take on the idea that a panoramic viewpoint enhanced spatial order. His initial camera tilt from



the base of the Times Building to the horizon echoes, albeit partially, the view of the city depicted in Bird's Eye drawings [Fig. 5.5 left frame]. The cut to the horizontal pan then juxtaposes a series of abstract shapes such as the pathways in Bryant Park and the walls of the under construction New York Public Library [Fig. 5.5 right frame].<sup>16</sup> In the same way that cinema's emergence in the form of actualities was hardly anticipated in prior media forms, the view from tall buildings such as the Times Building was hardly what was anticipated in Bird's Eye views.

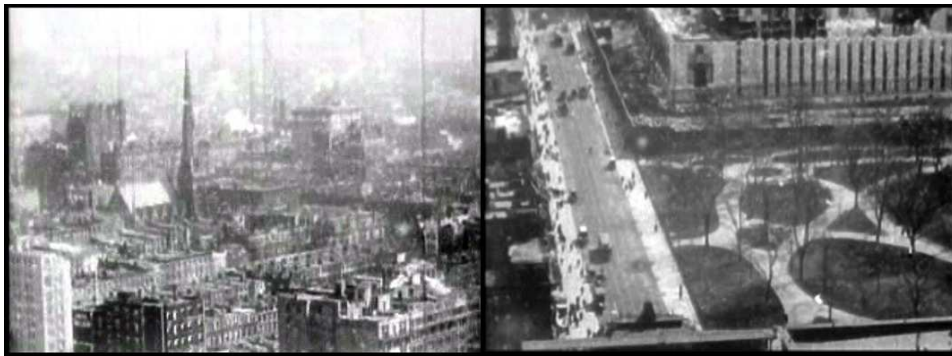


Fig. 5.5 Two frames from *Panorama From Times Building, NY* (AM&B, 1905).

This tension between rationalising impulses and visual abstraction, staged by McCutcheon, is an important component of urban modernisation and the broad shift from realist to abstract representational practices within aesthetic modernism. Although delineating this shift is outside the scope of this study, McCutcheon's staging of the tension between ordering, or completeness, and abstraction, or partiality, demonstrates a potential cultural role for McCutcheon's partial camera lens in relation to visualising the tensions within aesthetic modernism. This staging of an aesthetic tension is a counterpart to the representation of the abstract value of the height of the Times Building, as asserted by Ochs. Within New York's intermedial matrix, McCutcheon's film

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<sup>16</sup> McCutcheon's view of Bryant Park also prefigured modernist photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn's 1912 photograph entitled *The Octopus* (reproduced in Schleier, 1986: Fig. 29). According to Schleier, *The Octopus*, described by Coburn as a "cubist fantasy", was important to the development of abstract photography in relation to depicting "a multitude of detached, undifferentiated shapes." (49).

provides an example of the interrelation of modernist and actuality filmmaker concerns.

By adopting the view-from-above aesthetic convention, McCutcheon was emulating a feature of the Lumière filmmaking practice adopted in their Brooklyn Bridge and Dead Man's Curve films. In both the Lumière and McCutcheon examples, filming from a distance involved a detachment which was at odds with the New York actuality filmmaking impulse to move in close to what was being filmed. Whereas the Brooklyn Bridge railway journey films, the Edison Dead Man's Curve film or the construction watching films were all engaging with everyday issues, the view from atop skyscrapers was neither an everyday concern nor was it, claimed the Brooklyn newspaper, a concern for New Yorkers. Paradoxically, although cinema is self-evidently a visual medium, McCutcheon's articulation of visual abstraction was in contrast to the forms of abstraction articulated by earlier New York actualities, such as systematisation, progress and process. The roof-top vantage point thus presented a different form of abstraction.

With actualities such as the 1899 Brooklyn Bridge railway journey films or Bonine's 1902 films such as *Beginning of a Skyscraper* or *Lower Broadway* we found that periods of time, either within the bridge's 'inclosed passage' or the time involved in a stereograph-like scanning of Bonine's films, provided a form of sphere for the articulation or negotiation of issues such as systematisation, progress or process. Such films posit an axis of the relations between cinema and modernity which is founded in a temporality of an extended present time. There is, however, an important distinction between the above actualities and Bonine's Flatiron Building panorama. Whereas in the former, a stereo effect was produced

by, for example, the structure of Brooklyn Bridge or the movement of streetcars, in the latter Bonine both produced and directed a sphere for negotiation.

The use of the terms ‘produced’ and ‘directed’ is necessarily a loose borrowing from later filmmaking given that equivalent terms for actuality filmmaking are not available, partly as a function of the lack of understanding or acceptance of actuality filmmaking techniques within the field. Their usage here is meant to signal a transition in actuality filmmaking techniques. For example, with *Panorama of Flatiron Building* Bonine enabled a stereograph-like scanning of the film in the opening section, through the filming of multiple lines of movement within the frame. Establishing a scanning of the film then provided a way of seeing the abstract image of the slab-like Flatiron. The vertical camera tilt signals, however, a switch from producing a sphere for negotiation, to directing the viewers attention. In this sense, Bonine prefigured McCutcheon’s Times Building film in the second half of *Panorama of Flatiron Building*. McCutcheon’s opening camera tilt in *Panorama From Times Building, NY* involves a directed viewing experience, as does the film’s horizontal pan. Rather than involving a sphere for negotiation, the Times Building film provides a wholly directed viewing experience.<sup>17</sup>

McCutcheon’s film thus brings us back to what is a conventional conception of early cinema’s cultural role, namely cinema’s role in the spectacularisation of the everyday and thus the commodification of culture. In an essay entitled ‘The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular’ (1996) art historian Angela Miller provides us with yet another account of this role.

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<sup>17</sup> It could be thought that *Excavating for a New York Foundation* is a film which similarly directed the viewers attention, through the movement of the cart through space. While it is the case that *Excavating for a New York Foundation* wavered between actuality and artifice, the difference from the Times panorama is the visual coherence in term of a congruence with New York as experienced. The roof-top, rather than a close in, view is the important difference here.

However, whereas the spectacularisation account of cinema is in opposition to this study's findings with earlier New York actuality films, it is a role which can be identified with *Panorama From Times Building, NY*.

Miller provides an account of various forms of nineteenth century panorama, including static 360 degree panoramic paintings and moving panoramas which comprised a painted canvas moving past the viewer's field of vision. Within a standard account, Miller then argues that such panoramas "lay claim to being antecedents to cinema" (1996: 38). For example, panoramas involved a way of seeing, where, according to Miller:

[a]udiences of the panorama were both spatially and temporally confined. Their attention was not easily diverted, yet meditative absorption in the image was difficult, given the constant movement of the canvas past one's vision. The cinema reproduced this particular experience in the twentieth century<sup>18</sup>. (49)

In an argument which then follows Jonathan Crary's familiar conception of constructing observers (Crary, 1990), the panorama and cinema are both part of the "production of a particular kind of viewer-subject. ... shaped by a substitute reality presented with the revelatory force of the real", according to Miller (55). The notion of the 'constant movement of the canvas past one's vision' could be thought consistent with the viewing experience provided by McCutcheon's film. Moreover, 'meditative absorption' in the view of Manhattan provided by McCutcheon's panorama is prevented by the constant flow of images.<sup>19</sup> Through the directing of the viewing experience, *Panorama From Times Building, NY* is,

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<sup>18</sup> It is unclear within Miller's argument whether or not by dating cinema in terms of the 'twentieth century' she means later cinema and thus excludes early cinema from her argument. However, in light of the chronological flow of Miller's argument, where nineteenth century panoramas are thought to influence the emergence of cinema, by implication it can be assumed that Miller includes early cinema within her account.

<sup>19</sup> Clearly, there are differences between Miller's notion of aesthetic 'meditative absorption' and the notion of a functional 'negotiation' used in this study. Nevertheless, a broad distinction between absorption/ negotiation and 'confinement', to use Miller's term, is valid.

then, an example of the type of film envisaged within the commodification model of cinema.

However, a problem with Miller's argument is the reduction of cinema as a whole to one form of spectatorship, one viewing experience and thus one form of cinema. Bonine's *Beginning of a Skyscraper* provides one example of a New York actuality where, instead of a constant flow of images, the film provides a flow of movement within the frame which engenders the type of 'meditative absorption', to use Miller's terms, which is limited by the panorama in her argument. The Brooklyn Bridge railway films are an example of a panorama-like film which contradicts Miller's 'confinement' conception of panoramas. For example, the view of the 'inclosed passage' could be thought to be consistent with the constant flow of images. However, the constant within the 'inclosed passage' is provided by the view of the bridge's metal framework. Instead of directing the viewer, the constant view of the framework provides a space for negotiation—as reported by newspaper in relation to the detailed view of the bridge's structure and the traffic on either side of the 'inclosed passage'. *Panorama From Times Building, NY* does, however, point to New York actuality cinema's eventual role in the 'spectacularisation of the everyday'.

The New York actuality films analysed in previous chapters posit a representational detour from what was anticipated within prior media forms, such as the moving panoramas to which Miller refers. Whereas the representational detour was based in the production of a sphere for negotiation, the transition to actualities which direct the viewers attention signals an ending of the detour. In this sense, whereas *Panorama of Flatiron Building*, filmed in late 1902, is a transitional film, the 1905 actuality *Panorama From Times Building, NY* demonstrates a type of filmmaking which coheres with cinema's

wider transition to narrative cinema. The dates of the films are significant in coinciding with the ending of the commercial dominance of actuality cinema. Situated within a wider, more than one hundred year, history of cinema, the seven or so years in which actuality films were dominant is but a small proportion. In a strong sense, there is a nagging obviousness about the demise of the actuality in favour of storytelling; hence, the ever-present need to avoid teleological explanations for cinema's emergence. For New York early cinema, however, context provides a partial remedy for teleology. Almost a decade passed between the making of the Dead Man's Curve films in 1896 and McCutcheon's roof-top panorama. This is a long time for New Yorkers in this period; in many ways, the daily experience of the sheer pace of change in New York contributed to the expanded present that actuality films re-presented. In turning now to a 1905 construction site film I will argue that New York itself is part of the actuality demise equation.

### ***Pennsylvania Tunnel Excavation (AM&B, 1905)***

Gaining a perspective on the changes wrought by modernisation and modernity in New York in the period of cinema's first decade is problematic for the latter day historian: *Pennsylvania Tunnel Excavation* demonstrates the extent to which, visually at least, it was also problematic at the time. Conceived by architect Charles McKim of McKim, Mead & White, Pennsylvania Station was designed to provide a monumental gateway which would represent the wealth and power of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, America's largest railroad company at the time. The introduction of electrically-powered trains meant it was feasible to run trains through the long tunnels necessary to connect Manhattan with Newark to the West and Long Island to the East.<sup>20</sup> In 1910, the completed station

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<sup>20</sup> See Stilgoe, 1983: 30-36.

occupied two blocks, from 31<sup>st</sup> Street to 33<sup>rd</sup> Street and from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and was the site where an old New York “urban monumentalism reached its fullest development”, according to Thomas Bender (2002: 37). Construction began in the early 1900s and involved the demolition of some five hundred buildings, the excavation of a fifty-foot deep site for the station and the digging of tunnels under the East and Hudson Rivers. On July 19<sup>th</sup> 1905, AM&B cameraman G. W. Bitzer attempted to film the ongoing construction works.



Fig. 5.6 Frames from *Pennsylvania Tunnel Excavation* (AM&B, 1905).

Bitzer’s film was shot from an elevated camera position within the excavation works. Over three minutes twenty-two seconds Bitzer slowly panned the camera, around an almost 180-degree arc, to show the enormity of the construction project [Fig. 5.6]. In the opening thirty-five seconds the camera follows the path of a train entering the site, there is then a cut to a workman walking along the tracks. This second section involves a pan to the far end of the site, showing a train travelling to the left of the frame. Finally a third section, following a cut at two minutes forty seconds, to allow another train to come into view, completes the pan round to the right of the excavation works. Although using cuts which are timed on action, Bitzer’s film is hardly an example of the complexity of actuality filmmaking. Instead, what it demonstrates is the difficulty in achieving a point of view, given the sheer scale of the works.

As a construction site film and as an attempt to provide a point of view, a way of seeing what was, even for New York, a major project, *Pennsylvania Tunnel*

*Excavation* fits within the selection criteria for similar films analysed earlier in this study. In contrast to films such as *Beginning of a Skyscraper*, however, Bitzer’s film is strikingly devoid of action. Moreover, the vast open space of the excavation works is largely devoid of elements of scale. The workman shown after the first cut [Fig. 5.7], another in the distance part way through and a group of men at the end of the film, provide moments of anchorage for the viewer. Otherwise, the trains moving around the site look to be scale models within a mock-up of the works. To an extent, the difficulty with scale relates to the gauge of the temporary railroad system in the site. In the final frames we see a regular gauge railroad engine to the right of the frame and the site’s narrow-gauge tracks to the left [Fig. 5.7]. In effect, there is an incongruity between the vastness of the excavation works and the smallness of the narrow-gauge railroad; this destabilises attempts to achieve a point of view.

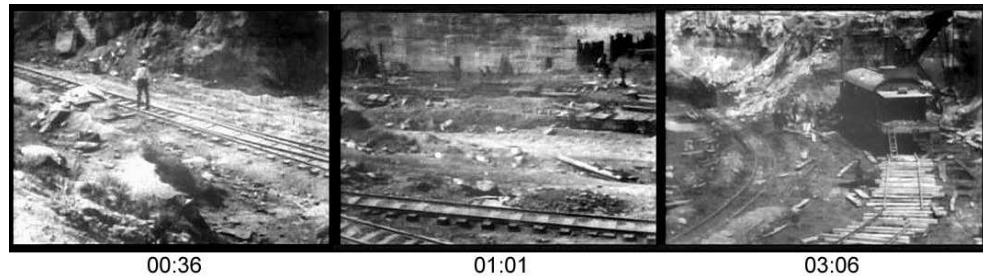


Fig. 5.7 Frames from *Pennsylvania Tunnel Excavation* (AM&B, 1905).

Bitzer’s film seems more an abstract rather than actuality view. Rather than simulating simultaneity, providing a point of view as if looking out of a window onto a live New York scene, *Pennsylvania Tunnel Excavation* was more a precursor to abstract representations of the city, where actuality liveness had no place. In effect, actuality liveness was becoming out of date in New York. The growth of the city in terms of the rapid expansion of transportation systems and the pace of building construction were two factors which had fuelled the actuality liveness impulse and provided its primary subjects. Yet the view from the roof of the Times Building or the view of the Pennsylvania Station project



demonstrated that the actuality Broadway lens was increasingly unable to provide a point of view. On a broader timescale, the 1890s Manhattan skyline served as a motif for the emerging metropolis, as shown by newspaper reports advising on vantage points, ways of seeing the city. By the 1910s, with the continual growth of the city, beyond the business district at the southern tip of Manhattan, the motif view became an abstract silhouette of tall buildings. In part, the demise of New York actuality cinema was part of that wider shift.

Not surprisingly for a heterogeneous medium, the demise of actuality cinema is far from a straightforward story of decline. Within an intermedial context, it should not be surprising that the many cinemas within the period of emergence were themselves involved in intermedial exchanges. Although, the actuality Broadway lens may have become insufficient and actuality filmmaking may have wavered beyond a line between actuality and artifice, the ability to construct a coherent world on screen and to place the spectator within that world were significant precedents which had value for the industry's turn to narrative. In the concluding section of this study, I will consider the interrelation of actuality and narrative filmmaking.

### **The Realisation of the Medium**

One underlying reason for the neglect of what is, from a later cinema perspective, a largely unintelligible form of cinema is the opinion that actuality cinema is inconsequential for later cinema. Gunning's conception of early cinema largely consisting of 'roads not taken', or Hansen's claim that early cinema constitutes a 'different kind of cinema', significantly contribute to the marginalisation of early cinema; cinematic cul-de-sacs are hardly likely to be research priorities. However, for conceptions of cinema's emergence as lines of continuity, the representational detour points to the potential for establishing

actuality cinema's influence within narrative cinema. Rather than constituting a dead end, the demise of actuality cinema could contribute to the wider emergence of cinema. In turning now to the relationship between actuality and narrative cinema I want to begin by examining accounts of representational schemas within early cinema.

As we saw in Chapter 3, Richard Crangle's 1999 account of early British non-fiction cinema is one example of recent attempts to define representational schemas within early cinema. However, taken together, Charles Musser's two early 1990s encyclopaedic studies of early American cinema remain the most comprehensive attempt to interrelate the many cinemas within the first decade of moving pictures (1990 and 1991). According to Musser's introduction to his 1990 study, early cinema's representational system was "predominantly syncretic, presentational, and nonlinear, while later classical Hollywood cinema favoured consistency, verisimilitude, and a linear narrative structure" (4). In a comparative approach that is oriented towards early cinema's storytelling role, nonlinearity refers to the representation of time, particularly through the arrangement of scenes within a film. For example, rather than employing parallel editing of scenes which occur at the same time, as in later cinema, concurrent events were typically shown successively in early narrative films. Whereas nonlinearity is a feature of early cinema which refers to failed attempts to coherently arrange story scenes, presentationalism refers to the borrowing of an existing theatrical representational approach.

Elements of the presentational approach include the gesturing of actors towards the camera and the use of theatrical backdrops rather than three-dimensional sets. In effect, presentationalism was a "practice of indication", rather than realistic representation (Musser, 1990: 3). The pervasiveness of presentationalism is

indicated by Gunning's familiar 'attractions' thesis, a conception of actuality cinema which foregrounds cinema's concern with display and exhibitionism. However, as Musser notes, early cinema's presentational style was "most vulnerable" when used in actuality filmmaking (4). By depicting real-world space and by emphasising the existence of off-screen space, actualities worked to undermine the theatricality of presentationalism. Similarly, when filming real-world events which determined the sequencing of scenes, actuality films enforced a logic of linearity, rather than nonlinearity. Actualities are also central to the third element in Musser's account of early cinema's representational system, its syncretism: the fusing or merging of modes of representation.

Rather than being based on mimetic consistency, as in later cinema, early cinema's syncretic representational style was based on the combining and juxtaposition of "different kinds and levels of mimesis", according to Musser in the introduction to his 1991 study (8). For example, in combining presentationalism and the realism enforced by actuality filming, two-dimensional backdrops were placed within a real-world setting. From a later cinema perspective, the seemingly naïve juxtaposition of such elements could be seen as an example of cinema's primitivity. The working out of ways to present mimetic consistency—such as the removal of backdrops from real-world scenes—was thus a matter of cinema achieving its logical goal. However, rather than adopting a teleological approach, syncretism can best be understood as a function of early cinema's intermediality. In this sense, syncretism is a cultural practice rather than a naïve phase of early filmmaking. As Musser notes, in opposition to a teleological account of Hollywood realism, early cinema's syncretism "had its equivalent in long-standing cultural forms", such as the theatre, newspapers and magic lantern shows (1991: 167). Syncretism is also a feature of early cinema which is influenced by actuality filmmaking.

Syncretism can be thought to provide an interface between actuality and narrative filmmaking. Not surprisingly, early films which feature the juxtaposition of actuality and narrative have been a focus of early cinema research, disproportionately so in comparison to actuality films as a whole. *Execution of Czolgosz, with Panorama of Auburn Prison* (Edison, 1901) provides one such example.<sup>21</sup> During September and October 1901 an Edison camera crew filmed a series of actualities at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York State, including a film of President McKinley's last speech and a film of a crowd outside the building where McKinley was assassinated by Leon Czolgosz, a Cleveland anarchist. The Exposition films and the subsequent funeral ceremony films were, according to Musser, the biggest grossing films for Edison in the period up to 1904 (1991: 186).<sup>22</sup> Given the interest in this set of films the Edison Company attempted to secure the rights to film Czolgosz's execution in late October 1901. With permission refused, an Edison camera crew, including James White and Edwin S. Porter, filmed a panorama of Auburn Prison, where Czolgosz was imprisoned, and a studio re-enactment of the execution. The resulting three minutes and twenty-six seconds, four-shot film, comprised of two panorama shots and two re-enacted execution scenes, thus provides an example of juxtaposing actuality and presentational staging within a narrative setting.

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<sup>21</sup> Whereas the majority of films analysed in this study have yet to receive any identifiable critical coverage, accounts of *Execution of Czolgosz, with Panorama of Auburn Prison* can be found in, for example, Musser, 1990 and 1991, Hansen 1991 and Burch 1990.

<sup>22</sup> One of the Exposition films, *Pan-American Exposition by Night*, provides an example of both the interrelation of media forms and a successful format for panoramic films. The film features a ground-level, circular panorama which dissolves from a day to night scene. According to Musser, this combining of a, magic lantern derived, dissolve and a panorama was a "visual tour de force" which outsold any other panoramic film produced up to October 1901 (Musser, 1991: 187).

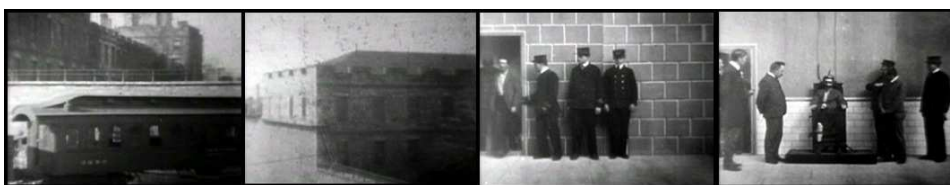


Fig. 5.8 Four frames from *Execution of Czolgosz, with Panorama of Auburn Prison* (Edison, 1901).

An opening panoramic shot, taken with a panning camera, shows a train taking witnesses to the execution [Fig. 5.8]. In the second shot the camera pans to show the exterior of Auburn prison, then a dissolve at one minute and fourteen seconds into the film is used to introduce the first of the re-enacted scenes, showing Czolgosz being led from his cell. In the final scene, again introduced through a dissolve, we see Czolgosz led to, strapped into and executed in an electric chair. From a later cinema perspective, the flat, two-dimensional staging in the re-enacted scenes appear crude in that, rather than moving towards the camera, all movement such as the guards leading the prisoner, is across the frame. However, as Musser claims, the film is “remarkable for its control of pro-filmic elements”, such as the elaboration of plot though the delayed appearance of Czolgosz from his cell (1991: 189). The use of limited gesturing restrains the presentational staging with, for example, the film showing the process of execution rather than emphasising the moment of Czolgosz’s death. As such, the film demonstrates a realist version of presentationalism. The film was also depicting a process which, as Musser notes, would have been well known to viewers through detailed newspaper reports (189). In a three thousand word report entitled ‘Assassin Czolgosz is Executed at Auburn’ the *New York Times* graphically described events, with sub-headings such as ‘The Witnesses Ready’, ‘Electrical Preparations’, ‘The Autopsy Performed’ and ‘Czolgosz’s Body Buried’ (October 30<sup>th</sup> 1901: 5). The report described the electrocution, where “at 7:12:30 Electrician Davis turned the switch that threw 1,700 volts of electricity into the living body”, and the autopsy, including how the “top of the head was sawed off”, and so on (5). Clearly there were limits to Edison’s cinematic

representation of events. Instead of an autopsy scene, the film's realist presentation of the re-enacted execution was bolstered through the use of the opening panoramic shots.<sup>23</sup>

The Czolgosz film is an example of using actuality footage to complement the realism of presentational staging. For example, as Musser notes, the opening panoramic shots provide a context for the film's narrative and thus, "a well-constructed world in which the action can unfold" (1991: 189). With this film syncretism's role is to heighten realism, or as Musser has it, to "intensif[y] the illusion of authenticity by integrating actuality and re-enactment" (1991: 259). There are, then, two early filmmaking principles at work here. Firstly, early cinema's embracing of syncretism enables the fusing of actuality and presentational modes despite, from a later cinema perspective, their seeming incongruity. Secondly, when fused, or in the Czolgosz film's case, dissolved with staged sequences, the role of actuality footage is to lend realism through the construction of a coherent world on screen. These two filmmaking principles have clear relevance to New York actuality filmmaking.

The opening panoramic shots in the Czolgosz film involved a minimal narrative potential in comparison to New York actuality films. As Musser noted, the Auburn prison panoramas provided a context for the execution through footage of the witnesses' train and the prison exterior. In contrast, rather than merely providing an outdoor context, New York actualities such as the Brooklyn Bridge railway films or Bonine's Manhattan films connected with urban themes. New

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<sup>23</sup> Whereas the Czolgosz film is commonly seen as being "sensationalist", as in Hansen's account, White and Porter were toning down the gruesome reports widely available in for example, the *New York Times* (Hansen, 1991: 31). Similarly, although films such as *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* are commonly thought to eroticise public space, they may have been seen as extremely tame at the time. Hence, rather than being an erotic film, the film could have functioned as a re-presentation of urban space which concerns the avoidance of air grate embarrassment, a coming-to-the-city theme, as argued in Chapter 1.

York actualities could have the potential to provide narrative content in addition to heightened realism when fused with staged scenes. In relation to efforts to create a coherent world on screen, I want to argue that New York actualities worked to provide a form of modernity diegesis which in some ways is comparable with the narrative diegesis of later cinema.

In relation to a cultural pedagogy, the notion of a diegesis of any form operating within the actuality cinema discussed in this study could be pedagogically misleading. In a standard definition, a filmic diegesis could be thought the “world of the film’s story” (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997: 478). Functionally, a narrative diegesis involves notions of absorption, of being led into a cinematic world through, for example, establishing shots, and then the maintenance of a spectator position within the diegesis through shot-reverse-shot techniques, and so on. In contrast, the notion of actuality films involving a sphere or horizon for a form of negotiation, of functioning to provide a means to visualise the modern world, in order to cope with the modern, to get by, is distinct from the conventional understanding of a cinematic diegesis. Nevertheless, with films such as *Panorama From Times Building, NY*, actuality cinema underwent its own transition, involving directing the viewers attention. There is, then, a form of coming together, where actuality filmmaking techniques became re-usable within efforts to produce narrative and, eventually, a coherent narrative world. In this sense, films treading the fine line between actuality and artifice can be thought to involve a form of diegesis. In using the term modernity diegesis, my intention is to retain a sense of negotiation, for want of a better word, where a modernity diegesis is formed by the modern, if only to be formed within a cinematic world. A film shot soon after the opening of the IRT subway in Manhattan, *Interior N. Y. Subway, 14<sup>th</sup> St. to 42<sup>nd</sup> St.*, which is part of a three film narrative series, will help to explain the notion of a modernity diegesis. Firstly, I

want to explore the notion of a diegesis alongside Tom Gunning's attractions thesis.

In an essay entitled 'The Whole Town's Gawking: Early Cinema and the Visual Experience of Modernity' (1994b) Gunning provides an updated account of his 1986 attractions thesis.<sup>24</sup> Gunning's claim is that, in addition to serving as a "cornerstone of formal analysis", the thesis has wider application for the study of modernity (191). For example, with regard to the visual, rather than merely serving as a "synonym for modern society's obsession with the visual", the notion of attractions will "prove useful as a tool of analysis for the investigation of the *topoi* of modernity", such as billboards, world's fairs, department stores and amusement parks (195, Gunning's italics). Attractions have, for Gunning, relevance to the experience of modernity, beyond that which a commodity model of modernity posits, and may thus "allow us to uncover a realm of modern experience otherwise illusive" (196). As the title of the essay indicates, his claim is that attractions can help to uncover modern modes of visual experience.

Gunning concludes that the "novel visual experiences" provided by early films such as 'phantom ride' actualities "pushed viewers to new thresholds of perception encountering the limits of representation" (198). The "fresh encounter with a new visual reality" provided by attractions, involved "liberating possibilities" despite their imbrication with commodification (199). This updating of the attractions thesis therefore returns to the political potential of its original form. The idea of attractions involving an encounter with the 'limits of representation' and 'liberating possibilities' is relevant to the findings of this study. Furthermore, that modernity could involve 'new thresholds of

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<sup>24</sup> Although Gunning provides a footnote to the essay which acknowledges Andre Gaudreault's contribution to the attractions thesis, in its common usage the thesis is usually solely attributed to Gunning. (1994b: 200 n3).



perception’—effectively, an extension of ways of seeing—is one of this study’s themes and one I want to return to shortly. For now, I want to examine Gunning’s claims, which preface the above account of the visual, that the cinema of attractions constitutes an anti-diegetic representational schema.

Gunning begins his updated account of the attractions thesis by reaffirming early cinema’s relationship with narrative filmmaking. According to Gunning, in a passage which is useful for exploring the notion of a diegesis:

[a]ttractions are temporally punctual as opposed to the extended use of time required for narrative. And rather than creating the imaginary constructs needed for a diegetic presentation of action, attractions openly acknowledge their own process of display and the viewer’s role as an ‘outside observer’. The viewer of attractions is positioned less as a spectator-in-the-text, absorbed into a fictional world, than as a gawker who stands alongside, held for the moment by curiosity and amazement. (1994b: 190)

Gunning thus distinguishes attractions from narrative cinema in terms of: time, their ‘temporal punctuality’; a lack of seamlessness, through ‘openly acknowledging ... processes of display’; and the resultant positioning of the spectator, who ‘stands alongside’ rather than being placed ‘in-the-text’. Attractions are also closely tied to a Baudelairean conception of modernity, for Gunning.<sup>25</sup> Baudelaire’s ‘motifs’ of modernity ‘evoke’ the characteristics of attractions in that something “appears, attracts attention, and then disappears without either developing a narrative trajectory or a coherent diegetic world”, according to Gunning (193). The cinema of attractions is thus very clearly differentiated from narrative cinema. Gunning does attenuate this position by noting that attractions provide one “schema of organisation” within early cinema, and that “different modes of spectator address often interact within a single film” (191). Nevertheless, Gunning’s position is somewhat in tension with Musser’s

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<sup>25</sup> As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the notion of a Baudelairean conception of modernity is problematic if considered solely in terms of ‘the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent’, which is Gunning’s take in his 1994 essay.

notion of syncretism and thus the principle of the merging of modes of address, rather than their 'interaction'. Furthermore, Gunning's position is somewhat at odds with the findings in this study.

Significantly then, in contrast to Gunning's 'schema of organisation', rather than being 'temporally punctual' films such as the Brooklyn Bridge railway journey films are based in a period of time in the bridge's 'inclosed passage'. Rather than involving a viewer who is an 'outside observer', stereograph-like films such as Bonine's *Beginning of a Skyscraper* involve a scanning around and looking through the screen. Rather than being positioned 'alongside' the 'text', with films such as *Lower Broadway*, the viewer could be 'absorbed' into a modern world, where the film is one element of an intermedial context which enabled a form of negotiation of the modern. Furthermore, rather than lacking a 'narrative trajectory or a coherent diegetic world', I now want to turn to an actuality film which provides an example of a 'narrative trajectory' and which operates within a 'coherent diegetic world'. *Interior N. Y. Subway, 14<sup>th</sup> St. to 42<sup>nd</sup> St.* also provides an appropriate final example in this study in terms of its relationship with the films analysed thus far.<sup>26</sup> In addition to being a transportation system film, the film also connected with the New York construction fascination we have explored in this study.

Rather than being an underground and thus largely out of view enterprise, the geology of Manhattan meant that constructing the IRT subway system was a highly visible and thus a much photographed and filmed process. Manhattan schist, a rock formation which is unevenly hard and susceptible to decay and collapse, covers much of Manhattan at varying depths across the island (Hood,

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<sup>26</sup> Like the Czolgosz film, *Interior N. Y. Subway, 14<sup>th</sup> St. to 42<sup>nd</sup> St.* has been widely studied. For example, see Burch, 1990: 152; Musser, 1990: 386-387 and; Hansen, 1991: 32.

1993: 76). Consequently, in lower and mid-town Manhattan the subway was constructed using a ‘cut and cover’ system which involved digging up whole streets to a depth of up to thirty-five feet, building the subway, covering over the subway and reinstating the roadway.<sup>27</sup> As for films of the works, in addition to Bonine’s *Excavation for Subway*, noted in Chapter 4, AM&B cameraman Billy Bitzer filmed *Rock Drill at Work in Subway* in June 1903. As the title of Bitzer’s film indicates, and in common with the skyscraper construction fascination, the technicalities of the subway construction works became a feature of representations of the subway. Subsequently, to commemorate the opening of the subway in October 1904, the IRT published a book entitled *The New York Subway: Its Construction and Equipment* (Interborough Rapid Transit, 1904). With fifteen sections such as ‘Types and Methods of Construction’, ‘System of Electrical Supply’, ‘Signal System’ and ‘Lighting System for Passenger Stations and Tunnel’ the book included construction diagrams, photographs and a highly detailed account of the subway’s infrastructure. As the section titles show, as well as being a feature of the travelling across Brooklyn Bridge, systems and thus systematisation was integral to an understanding of the subway system.

Within this construction and systems context, Billy Bitzer filmed *Interior N. Y. Subway, 14<sup>th</sup> St. to 42<sup>nd</sup> St.* on May 21<sup>st</sup> 1905, almost seven months after the opening of the subway. At six minutes and twenty-three seconds, it is much longer than any film we have thus far considered. Bitzer photographed the film from the front of a train which follows another train as it progresses from the 14<sup>th</sup> Street at Union Square subway station to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Street at Madison Avenue station [Fig. 5.9]. A third train, following the route on the adjacent tracks and equipped with lights mounted on an open subway car, provided illumination for

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<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly, there are numerous photographs of the construction works. For example, see ‘The New York Subway: The IRT Division’ archive (2002).

Bitzer's camera. Having moved off from the 14<sup>th</sup> Street station, the three trains pass through the 18<sup>th</sup> Street station, then stop at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, pass through 28<sup>th</sup> Street, stop at 33<sup>rd</sup> Street and then, finally, arrive at the Grand Central station at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street where passengers are seen milling about on the platform. The level of illumination from the lighting on the adjacent train ensures that different types of construction used for the subway are clearly visible [Fig. 5.9]. For example, we see the metal framework of the 'cut and cover' system used from 14<sup>th</sup> Street to 33<sup>rd</sup> Street [Fig. 5.9, middle frame] and, as detailed in the IRT book, the concrete lined tunnel section from 33<sup>rd</sup> Street and around the curve in the track to the Grand Central station [Fig. 5.9, right frame]. The film therefore provides a technical representation of the subway which is consistent with the New York construction fascination and the IRT's publication.

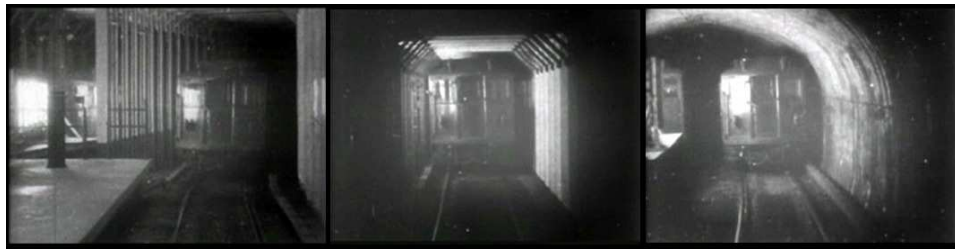


Fig. 5.9 Three frames from *Interior N. Y. Subway, 14<sup>th</sup> St. to 42<sup>nd</sup> St.* (AM&B, 1905).

In terms of the organisation of the filming operation, the running of the lighting train on adjacent tracks—on which trains usually ran in the opposite direction—would have involved the closing of the system to timetabled trains. This is important in pointing to the cooperation of the IRT, or as is more likely, the commissioning of the film by the IRT Company. Although filming took place on a Sunday, from its inception trains were overcrowded with passengers. As Clifton Hood notes in his study of the subway, the IRT “proved to be far more popular than anyone had anticipated” (1993: 113). Bitzer's film thus required extensive cooperation from the subway's owners.

One likely explanation for this cooperation was the extent to which the film could function as a safety-of-the-subway film that demonstrated the smooth

running of the railway and, through the use of the lighting train, also assuaged New Yorkers' fears about going underground. Passenger safety was a feature of a set of 'frequently asked questions' published in the *New York Times* on the day the subway opened. In a section entitled 'Some Subway Ifs and Don'ts' the newspaper presented such questions as "If a motorman runs past a danger signal, what will happen?", "What will happen if the lights go out in a train?" and "Is subway travel injurious to the eyes?", and provided suitably reassuring answers (October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1904. Cited in *The New York Subway*, 1904). Furthermore, through its method of filming, Bitzer's film seems knowing of the safety theme. In contrast to the belief that such films visually assaulted the viewer, although shot in the 'phantom ride' format and in a tunnel, the view of the train in front of the camera train reverses the spectacle of onrushing perspective and instead diminishes a sense of speeding through the tunnel. Over the six minutes and twenty-three seconds of its duration—for the majority of which the train is moving along the tracks—the film provides a way of articulating numerous urban themes: systematisation through the operation of the railway; progress regarding the city's new transport method; construction within the structure of the subway tunnels; or, as the IRT Company would have wanted, safety as a feature of subway travel.

*Interior N. Y. Subway, 14<sup>th</sup> St. to 42<sup>nd</sup> St.* provides, then, another example of a New York actuality which, rather than involving 'temporal punctuality' or an 'outside observer' positioned 'alongside' the text, provides time for the negotiation of urban fascinations and anxieties within a coherent modern world. As such, the film demonstrates its lineage in a line of early railway films, including the 1899 Brooklyn Bridge films. Furthermore, with regard to early cinema's syncretism and the fusing of actuality and narrative forms, in addition

to being sold separately, the subway film also functioned within a narrative sequence.<sup>28</sup>

On June 7<sup>th</sup> Bitzer filmed two narrative sequences which were sold with the subway train film as a set of films under the title *Reuben in the Subway*. The first narrative sequence, entitled *Reuben in the Subway* according to Niver's catalogue, was photographed at the 14<sup>th</sup> Street subway station and shows the ground-level entrance to the station with streetcars passing by and a rube figure entering the subway (Niver, 1985: 273). The second sequence, entitled *A Rube in the Subway*, was shot at AM&B's New York studios and shows a rube figure at a subway station being pickpocketed, missing a train and being electrocuted (although not fatally) on the subway's electrified third rail (Musser, 1990: 386). According to Musser, AM&B's intention was, when exhibiting the three films as a set, that the 'Reuben' film was exhibited first, then the section of the subway train film from 14<sup>th</sup> Street to 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, then the studio film, and finally the remaining section of the subway train film (386-388). When screened as a sequence the set of films provided a familiar coming-to-the-city narrative, where new technology and disorienting social customs confront a 'country bumpkin' figure with comic results. The coming-to-the-city story provided a much used theme for early filmmakers. For example, in two Edison films *Rube and Mandy at Coney Island* (1903) and *A Rube Couple at a County Fair* (1904) rube figures represent the social and cultural dysfunctionality of newly urbanised inhabitants of New York. There are a variety of interpretations of the rube film scenarios, ranging from issues of urban versus rural rivalry to the notion of acculturation. However, as can be demonstrated with the subway films, as well as satirising the

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<sup>28</sup> See Musser for an account of the separate selling and showing of the subway train film (1990: 386 and 522 n14).

rube figure's cultural dysfunctionality the films could also provide an important role for New York's more experienced inhabitants.

The IRT subway presented new social and cultural challenges for all New York inhabitants. In early 1906 the Bronx newspaper *North Side News* reported that "the trains and cars of the subway and elevated are jammed night and morning with people who want to go to their homes" (February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1906. Cited in Hood, 1993: 114). As Clifton Hood notes, although the subway had been designed to carry a maximum of 600,000 passengers per day, by October 1905 "its average daily patronage surpassed that number" (1993: 114). On the day the subway opened in 1904, the number of passengers had been such that the *New York Tribune* announced "the birth of [the] subway crush" (October, 28<sup>th</sup>, 1904. Cited in Hood, 1993: 113). By June 1905, the period when the subway rube films were produced, the issues of pickpocketing, missing trains because of the sheer number of passengers at stations or the dangers of inadvertently being pushed onto the tracks were everyday issues for all subway users. In this sense, Bitzer's rube satire could thus function as part of the IRT's necessary safety theme, rather than merely as a coming-to-the-city narrative.

Bitzer's three subway films had been produced just after the Edison Company had headhunted cameramen and producers from AM&B, including their main story film producer Wallace McCutcheon. Consequently, according to Musser's interpretation, Bitzer's two rube-in-the-subway films "lacked the clever narratives and representational techniques that characterised McCutcheon's efforts" (1990: 388). Nevertheless, the two rube films and the subway 'phantom ride' film provide a clear example of the fusing of different types of early cinema. Moreover, by involving a 'narrative trajectory' and a 'coherent diegetic world', two themes which, for Gunning, distinguish the cinema of attractions

from narrative cinema, the subway ‘phantom ride’ film can be thought to provide an important function for Bitzer’s two rube films. For example, the passage of the subway train from 14<sup>th</sup> Street, to the 18<sup>th</sup> Street station and beyond provides quite literally a trajectory for Bitzer’s rube narrative. It is, moreover, a trajectory that operates within the coherent diegetic world of the urban concerns articulated by the film. Whereas the New York actuality liveness cinema had been a result of the unprecedented congruence between the New York world represented on screen and the New York world as experienced, the subway film was part of a transition involving a form of diegesis. It is, however, with the potential to fuse the modernity and narrative diegetic worlds that New York actuality cinema could contribute to the realisation of the medium as a narrative medium. Bitzer’s subway films provide just one example of how early cinema’s syncretism could enable the fusing of New York actuality and narrative forms. During 1906 AM&B produced a series of workplace films including the over eleven minute *The Skyscrapers of New York*. The film begins with a fifty-seven second panorama of Manhattan, then cuts to a three minute view of construction workers amid the steel framework of an under construction skyscraper. Following a staged fight scene, the film ends with a presentational style court room scene. Appropriately, the location of the skyscraper was Broadway at Union Square and the film featured panoramic views up Broadway and thus along the New York actuality cinema route. This film and others within the series, such as *The Tunnel Workers* (AM&B, 1906), again involving a number of actuality shots of a construction site, are further examples of the syncretic fusing of New York actuality and narrative films.

An emerging question within this study has been the extent to which New York actuality cinema was as important an influence for early cinema as Hollywood was for later cinema. In this regard, Bitzer’s subway films have, arguably,



demonstrated one example of the influence of actuality filmmaking modes: presenting a diegetic framework for the representation of a spectator within the text. This study has indicated the validity of researching the influence of New York actuality cinema within the development of narrative cinema. A comparative analysis of, for example, the representation of depth in the actuality and staged scenes of the AM&B workplace films would then provide a basis for exploring the sharing, or merging of actuality and narrative filmmaking techniques. Such comparative research is, though, outside the scope of this study.

In conclusion, claiming that New York actuality films provide a form of negotiation role is difficult to support in isolation. The negotiation role ought to be identifiable across other media forms, in other historical contexts and within, for want of a better term, the vernacular domain. As such, rather than identifying a negotiation role and (within) a specific form of actuality cinema, it would have been preferable to have been able to take the negotiation role, as it were, off the academic shelf and apply it to actuality cinema. Such an availability of research tools for the vernacular would, however, necessitate a different way of looking at vernacular forms. Janet Staiger provides a reminder of this need in her *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (1992). In a chapter entitled ‘Rethinking “Primitive” Cinema’, Staiger questions the visual capabilities of early filmmakers and viewers.<sup>29</sup> According to Staiger, Bitzer’s 1905 subway film *Interior N. Y. Subway, 14<sup>th</sup> St. to 42<sup>nd</sup> St.* appears, from a later modernist perspective, to involve an “odd experience of perceiving visual illusions of the depth shifting from three dimensions to two” (1992: 122). In warning of the dangers of wrongly interpreting this effect through a later, more aware, form of vision, Staiger then asks “was such a perception possible in

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<sup>29</sup> The following questioning of Staiger’s claims is indebted to Gunning, 1994b: 197.

1905? Was it ‘unperceivable’? Or if perceived, was it considered a ‘mistake’?” (122). From this study’s perspective, however, Staiger’s questioning of visual acuity should be reversed: rather than seeing less, it is highly likely that early film viewers saw more. In short, in addition to approaching early cinema intellectually on its own terms, approaching actuality films has also necessitated an attempt to see such artefacts on their own terms: to recognise that New York actuality cinema could produce a functioning space and time machine, an example of cinema working.

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Broadsheet newspaper, 58 x 44 cm. Archive published by the Brooklyn Public Library
- Fig. 3.3 (p158) Frames from film listed as *Herald Square* in the Library of Congress catalogue.
- Fig. 3.4 (p158) Frames from the Lumière film No. 328 *New York: Broadway and Union Square* (1897).
- Fig. 3.5 (p161) ‘Annual Parade of the Cable-Trolley Cripple Club’, *The Verdict* 1, March 20<sup>th</sup> 1899.  
Drawing, George Luks. Reproduced in Zurier, et al., 1995: 198.
- Fig. 3.6 (p164) Frames from, on the left, the Edison streetcar film and, on the right, the Lumière film.  
From left.
- 1) Frame from *Broadway at 14<sup>th</sup> Street / Dead Man's Curve / Broadway and Fourteenth Street / 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway* (Edison, 1896).

2) Frame from *New York: Broadway at Union Square* (Lumière, 1897).

Fig. 3.7 (p165) Frames from, on the left, the Edison streetcar film and, on the right, the Lumière film.

From left.

1) Frame from *Broadway at 14<sup>th</sup> Street / Dead Man's Curve / Broadway and Fourteenth Street / 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway* (Edison, 1896).

2) Frame from *New York: Broadway at Union Square* (Lumière, 1897).

Fig. 3.8 (p168) Frames from the Lumière film No. 321 *New York, Brooklyn Bridge* (1897).

Fig. 4.1 (p186) 'Cutting' from *New York Times* November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1902: 26. Broadsheet newspaper. Archive published by the New York Times.

Fig. 4.2 (p200) 'Cutting' from *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1902: 31. Broadsheet newspaper, 58 x 44 cm. Archive published by the Brooklyn Public Library

Fig. 4.3 (p204) The under-construction Flatiron Building. Photograph. Reproduced in Berman, 2001: 115.

Fig. 4.4 (p208) Frames from *Excavating for a New York Foundation* (AM&B, 1903).

Fig. 4.5 (p209) Composite of frames from *Excavating for a New York Foundation* (AM&B, 1903).

Fig. 4.6 (p210) Three frames from *Star Theatre* (AM&B, 1901).

Fig. 4.7 (p218) Frame from *Beginning of a Skyscraper* (AM&B, 1902).

Fig. 4.8 (p222) Three frames from *Lower Broadway* (AM&B, 1902).

Fig. 4.9 (p227) Three frames from *Panorama of Flatiron Building* (AM&B, 1902).

Fig. 4.10 (p230) Two frames from *Panorama of Flatiron Building* (AM&B, 1902).

Fig. 4.11 (p231) A closing frame from *Panorama of Flatiron Building* (AM&B, 1902).

Fig. 4.12 (p237) Frames, from left to right, from *New York City Dumping Wharf, Sorting Refuse at Incinerating Plant, New York City, and New York City 'Ghetto' Fish Market* (Edison, 1903).

Fig. 4.13 (p238) Frames, from left to right, from *Panorama of Riker's Island, Skyscrapers of New York City, from the North River, and New York Harbor Police Boat Capturing Pirates* (Edison, 1903).

Fig. 5.1 (p245) Frames from *At the Foot of the Flatiron* (AM&B, 1903).

Fig. 5.2 (p246) Frames from *At the Foot of the Flatiron* (AM&B, 1903).

Fig. 5.3 (p247) Fogged frames from *At the Foot of the Flatiron* (AM&B, 1903).

- Fig. 5.4 (p255) Three frames from *Panorama From Times Building, NY* (AM&B, 1905).
- Fig. 5.5 (p261) Two frames from *Panorama From Times Building, NY* (AM&B, 1905).
- Fig. 5.6 (p267) Frames from *Pennsylvania Tunnel Excavation* (AM&B, 1905).
- Fig. 5.7 (p268) Frames from *Pennsylvania Tunnel Excavation* (AM&B, 1905).
- Fig. 5.8 (p273) Four frames from *Execution of Czolgosz, with Panorama of Auburn Prison* (Edison, 1901).
- Fig. 5.9 (p280) Three frames from *Interior N.Y. Subway, 14<sup>th</sup> St. to 42<sup>nd</sup> St.* (AM&B, 1905).





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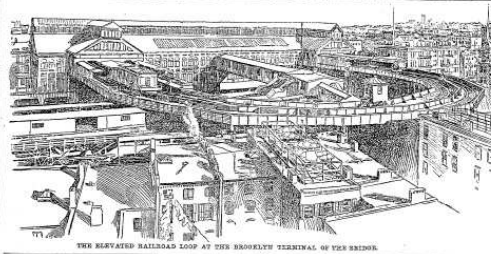
Plate 1. Frames from *What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City* (Edison, 1901).

THE BRIDGE'S GROWTH DURING THE YEAR 1898.

Nearly 200,000 People Now Cross to Manhattan Daily Over the Big Throughfare.

THERE WILL BE NO DEFICIT. The Annual Report Will Show a Balance on the Right Side of the Ledger.

The Brooklyn Bridge is the main artery of traffic between the borough of Manhattan and Brooklyn. This important fact is shown by the fact that the number of persons crossing the bridge daily is nearly 200,000. The bridge is the only thoroughfare between the two boroughs, and its importance is shown by the fact that it carries the traffic of the two boroughs, and is the only thoroughfare between the two boroughs. The bridge is the only thoroughfare between the two boroughs, and its importance is shown by the fact that it carries the traffic of the two boroughs, and is the only thoroughfare between the two boroughs.



THE ELEVATED RAILROAD LOOP AT THE BROOKLYN TERMINAL OF THE ERIE RAILROAD.

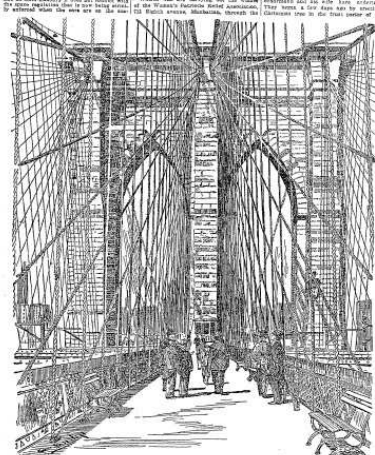
YALE ALL AT SEA OVER DWIGHT'S SUCCESSOR.

Progressive Element Wants to Find a Man Outside of Congregational Clergy.

CHURCHMEN IN THE MAJORITY.

Disfranchisement Advocates Suggested, Among Them Andrew W. Wilson, S. C. Gilman and Professor Bailey.

Yale University has elected a new President, and the result has caused a great deal of discussion. The new President is a man of high standing, and his election is a great honor to the university. The new President is a man of high standing, and his election is a great honor to the university. The new President is a man of high standing, and his election is a great honor to the university.



MANHATTAN TOWER OF THE BRIDGE.

Showing of the tower of the bridge, and the fact that the tower is the only thoroughfare between the two boroughs, and is the only thoroughfare between the two boroughs. The tower is the only thoroughfare between the two boroughs, and its importance is shown by the fact that it carries the traffic of the two boroughs, and is the only thoroughfare between the two boroughs.

A TREAT FOR POOR CHILDREN.

John Robinson Will Distribute Ten Thousand of Them at His Banquet.

John Robinson will distribute ten thousand of these at his banquet. The banquet is a great event, and it is a great honor to the city. The banquet is a great event, and it is a great honor to the city. The banquet is a great event, and it is a great honor to the city.

HUNGARIAN PEGASUS BALL.

An Attractive Feature That Shows Well in Popular Way.

There is no doubt that the Hungarian Pegasus Ball is a great success. The ball is a great event, and it is a great honor to the city. The ball is a great event, and it is a great honor to the city. The ball is a great event, and it is a great honor to the city.

WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY.

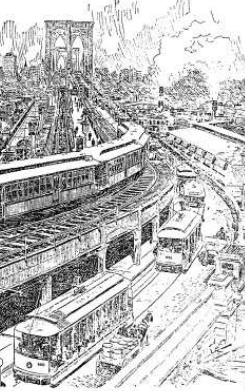
Successful Operation in Radio Laboratory-Experiments in Progress.

Wireless telegraphy is a great success. The experiments in progress are a great honor to the city. The experiments in progress are a great honor to the city. The experiments in progress are a great honor to the city.

RICH GIFTS RECEIVED.

The Massachusetts Trustees of Endowment Also Receive \$200,000 From the South States.

The Massachusetts Trustees of Endowment have received a great amount of money. The money is a great honor to the city. The money is a great honor to the city. The money is a great honor to the city.



THE CURVE AT THE BROOKLYN TERMINAL OF THE BRIDGE SHOWING THE OPERATION OF THE ELEVATED RAILROAD TRAINS AND THE TRAFFIC CAR.

Showing of the curve at the Brooklyn Terminal of the bridge, and the fact that the curve is the only thoroughfare between the two boroughs, and is the only thoroughfare between the two boroughs. The curve is the only thoroughfare between the two boroughs, and its importance is shown by the fact that it carries the traffic of the two boroughs, and is the only thoroughfare between the two boroughs.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHARITY.

John Emma and Richard Merchant Give Away \$1,000.

John Emma and Richard Merchant have given away a great amount of money. The money is a great honor to the city. The money is a great honor to the city. The money is a great honor to the city.

ST. JOSEPH'S CHURCH.

St. Joseph's Church Will Hold a Grand Festival on the 25th.

St. Joseph's Church will hold a great festival. The festival is a great event, and it is a great honor to the city. The festival is a great event, and it is a great honor to the city. The festival is a great event, and it is a great honor to the city.

SKILLFUL IN MANHATTAN.

Several Men Show Great Skill in the City.

Several men have shown great skill in Manhattan. The skill is a great honor to the city. The skill is a great honor to the city. The skill is a great honor to the city.

BREWERS GIVE BOTTLES.

Several Breweries Give Away Bottles of Beer.

Several breweries have given away bottles of beer. The bottles are a great honor to the city. The bottles are a great honor to the city. The bottles are a great honor to the city.

PRESIDENT'S WORDS INDORSSED.

President's Words Indorsed by the People.

The President's words have been indorsed by the people. The words are a great honor to the city. The words are a great honor to the city. The words are a great honor to the city.

TO KNOWN GOOD SALES.

Several Good Salesmen Will Show Their Skill.

Several good salesmen will show their skill. The skill is a great honor to the city. The skill is a great honor to the city. The skill is a great honor to the city.

# Press Comments on the Recent Achievements of the American Biograph.

Owned and Operated Exclusively by the American Mutoscope Company, 841 Broadway, New York.

## THE BIOGRAPH ON BROOKLYN BRIDGE.

This picture has proved one of the leading novelties of the season. It is full of action and offers possibilities for striking effects, such as the ramble of the elevated cars, the going of the passing trolley cars, the heaving of the horse loads on the bridge, etc. All of the leading New York papers have complimented this scene.

Seven hundred and eighty feet of film is a record, even for the Mutoscope, as applied to photography in motion. It was scored by the American Mutoscope Company a few days ago, when a series of pictures was taken on the Brooklyn Bridge, from the platform of the elevated cars, and from the trolley cars, on the rapidly moving bridge car, on

across the bridge from New York to Brooklyn. The view is from the front end of a fast bridge car and every pillar and joint and trolley car on the trip is minutely shown. The picture occupies just the length of time to representation that it occupies in nature, taken, in three minutes. — Brooklyn Eagle, March 7.

## THE LAUNCHING OF THE OCEANIC AT BELFAST, IRELAND.

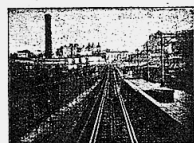
This scene is not only historic but is intensely dramatic when put on with the proper effects of clanking chains, rushing water.



ENTRANCE TO COVERED WAY ON NEW YORK SIDE.

the view from the Manhattan terminal to the Brooklyn end of the bridge. Some of the pictures that secured the new record. The time consumed in running this enormous film through the camera was over three minutes, the picture being taken at the rate of about thirty-two a second, or a complete total of 1,440 distinct pictures for the entire trip.

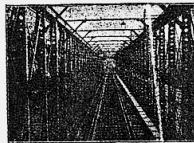
The view starts with a swift rush down the incline from the station on the New York side, shows the Brooklyn trolley cars in motion on either side and pedestrians on the sidewalks, and the view ends on the platform in the distance as the rapidly moving bridge car, on



APPROACHING THE BROOKLYN TERMINAL.

center, then takes a plunge in the iron archway which covers the tracks of the electric line for about two-thirds of the distance. The trolley cars whiz past with extreme rapidity, but the light is strong enough to show the traffic on either side and the river in the distance. After running through the archway as an almost dizzy race, the car suddenly runs out into the open space of the Brooklyn side and, with a bounding leap, descends into the Brooklyn station. The bridge film that had over 200,000 feet of pictures in this was one of 60 feet, which showed a host of the Paris Pottiers. — Mail and Express, March 11.

The Biograph held its popularity with a new set of views. One of them is a romantic



THE BIOGRAPH IN VENICE.

Venice has always been the paradise—and the domain—of artists who have sought to reproduce its wondrous beauty on canvas or paper. The artists who have done this, however, as everybody knows, but it has been the general verdict of all that an ordinary photograph of Venice, with its shimmering waters, its palaces and its strange scenes, could give an approximate idea of the original. The Biograph, with its astonishing moving picture machines, has come to remedy one defect of all preceding cinematographs, by adding the necessary element of motion to the picture, the action that has hitherto been missing.

Mr. F. H. Johnson, of the Biograph Company and Mutoscope Company, already famous for his credit with this scene, recently spent a week in Venice, and returned with a series of pictures which are the most interesting and picturesque scenes, and by turning the camera here and there as the eye would naturally have seen a remarkable comprehensive record of views. The illustrations show how well the Biograph reproduces the scenes, and how the camera has been used to secure the most striking and beautiful distinct photographs. As the pictures are projected from the screen the view, which appears quiet and lifeless as shown in the reproduction, becomes animated and full of motion. Graceful gondolas, bent on various courses of base or leisure, ply to and fro in the rippling waters, and pedestrians on the shore go back and forth wholly unconscious that not a movement which they are making is recorded the twinkling eye of the camera.

One of the most views is a trip in front of the Palace of the Doges. This film is particularly notable from a photographic point of view, for it has an unusual atmospheric effect, the distinct glaucous staining of the sky and the brilliant colors of the gondolas which as a rule is only attained by the use of atmospheric lenses. The pictures also show the wonderful Palazzo S'Orto, some of the most beautiful of the beautiful Italian bridges. The bridge of St. Mark is shown in very distinct views. There is a splendid view of the big market in the early morning, another on the Grand Canal—in fact, the series is so complete that after viewing them one feels almost as if one had been there.



THE INCLOSED PASSAGE—BROOKLYN TOWER IN THE DISTANCE.

ed what is the best thing yet seen here in that line, a complete representation of a trip

Form No. 124.

## EX-PRESIDENT FAUBUS OF FRANCE AND THE NEW PRESIDENT LOUIS.

We print herewith three interesting and valuable pictures by the courtesy of the American Mutoscope Co., which was given the privilege of photographing the late President Faubus of France, while he was enjoying his last hours. The pictures were taken by a large retinue of followers, servants and soldiers. This was always his custom, and on every occasion he seemed in delight in making an impressive appearance by the aid of a numerous body-guard.



A HUCKING BRONCO.

WINDSOR HOTEL FIRE. The burning of the Windsor Hotel in New York, with the attendant loss of life, made a world-wide sensation, and the picture of the burning which was made by the Biograph will be viewed with interest everywhere. It shows the burning in its search for bodies, the dead wagon on its way to the morgue and to the distance the toms of Miss Helen Gould.

ICE YACHTING. When warm weather comes on, and winter is left behind, an exciting picture of ice yachting on the Hudson will be in order. The first of the ice and winter scenes that has ever been taken, and shows a fleet of ice yachts in various interesting maneuvers, including a spill in which the yachtsman is thrown headlong into the slippery ice.

## FRANK GOULD'S CHAMPION ST. BERNARD DOGS.

The new series of Biograph pictures is full of interest, and several of the pictures were greeted with applause. The picture of the Windsor Hotel, showing Miss Helen Gould's residence at the end, was especially good and most impressive, and to the lovers of dogs, that showing the beautiful champion St. Bernard owned by Mr. Frank Gould is most pleasing. The picture of the St. Bernard with the beautiful "Providence Paws" on board is quite amusing, and this is followed by a picture showing the dog being taken up Broadway, showing Deputy Chief Hayes' hand, Col. Abbot and staff, and several other prominent figures. The pictures in it is evident that the sunlight was not so bright as when the picture was photographically photographed in the review by Gen. Shafter.—Providence Times, April 11.

No one who loves dogs—and probably I have my opinion of those who do not—can fail greatly to enjoy the Biograph picture of

## LAUNCHING OF THE OCEANIC.

The vessel is the largest in the world and was launched at a very heavy expense in order that a perfect picture might be obtained. An excellent picture of the launch of the Oceanic, at Belfast, Ireland, is the principal view shown by the Biograph at this time. It will be remembered, it is believed, that the launch of the Oceanic at Belfast on Saturday, in Monday night the scene was reproduced in London by the London correspondent at the Palace Theatre and at the Royal. At the latter the machine had been employed, and had succeeded in taking fifteen thousand distinct pictures during the few moments of the launch. Each picture is only one-tenth of an inch long, and the total of films is thirty feet long. For exhibition the pictures are magnified to twenty-two feet square, and every movement and detail of the launch is vividly portrayed. I am not sure, however, that the Palace success is not the result of the new method of the launch of the great ship nestled on the water. No fact or point could be as readily reproduced as to read about the great launch, which is shown in a picture which is so exact, with mechanical and public accuracy.—Sheldon (Chicago) Telegraph.

## THE BIOGRAPH IN THE BLIZZARD.

Blizzards and below zero weather do not better my opinion of those who do not—can fail greatly to enjoy the Biograph picture of



FRANK GOULD'S ST. BERNARDS.

that of the other series of views, which was taken with the thermometer at degrees below zero. The picture is a most interesting one, showing a continuous stream of snow to feet in the air, and the feet on either side of the railroad tracks. The other railroad view shows the process of clearing up the blockaded yard on the Hudson, Waterway and Goddard Railroad, at Hightstown Junction, after a three days' blockade, caused by the great February storm. The other view, of familiar scenes in New York, illustrates some of the effects of this storm on the city. One scene shows the Central of Hudson Square after the storm had blown in about the middle of the storm, indefinite snow into the Hudson River.—N. Y. Mail & Express.

## ILLUSTRATIONS.

The Biograph has recently introduced a new series of starting and amusing illustrations, accomplished wholly by trick photography, and without the use of rotator and other devices used by magicians. One of these, called "The Creditable Game," a pretty girl apparently buried in a coffin. A wave of the hand brings her back to rest life in an instant. Another view shows a young man making love to his sweetheart, who changes a similar character has been arranged.

## A BUCKING BRONCO.

With the cooperation of the "New York Journal," an exciting scene showing one of the eyes has been produced, showing the bucking bronco as a matter of fact, the Biograph had a better view of Saturday's race than most people. The reason for this was as a representative of the "Daily Graphic" secured a few rows carried from the chairman of the Biograph Company, that the camera had been placed by special permission in the bows of the umpire's boat. But to the aid of the company's chairman an even more surprising performance than that of the champion producing photographs of an event which took place at one o'clock in the afternoon, a clock in the evening, was that of another film on the Palace Theatre, the "Grand Game of Friday." This was a record in rapidity.

## RAILROAD SCENES.

The American Biograph has always led in railroad scenes, and during the winter, early spring some splendid pictures were secured. Among these were "A Narrow Gauge Race Between Two Trains on Parallel Tracks," "A Narrow Gauge Train on a Trestle in Front of an On-Coming Train," "Two scenes on the Putnam Branch of the New York Central, showing the reverse curve going to a mountain," and "Two scenes on the Manhattan Elevated Railroad at Harlem, and many others.



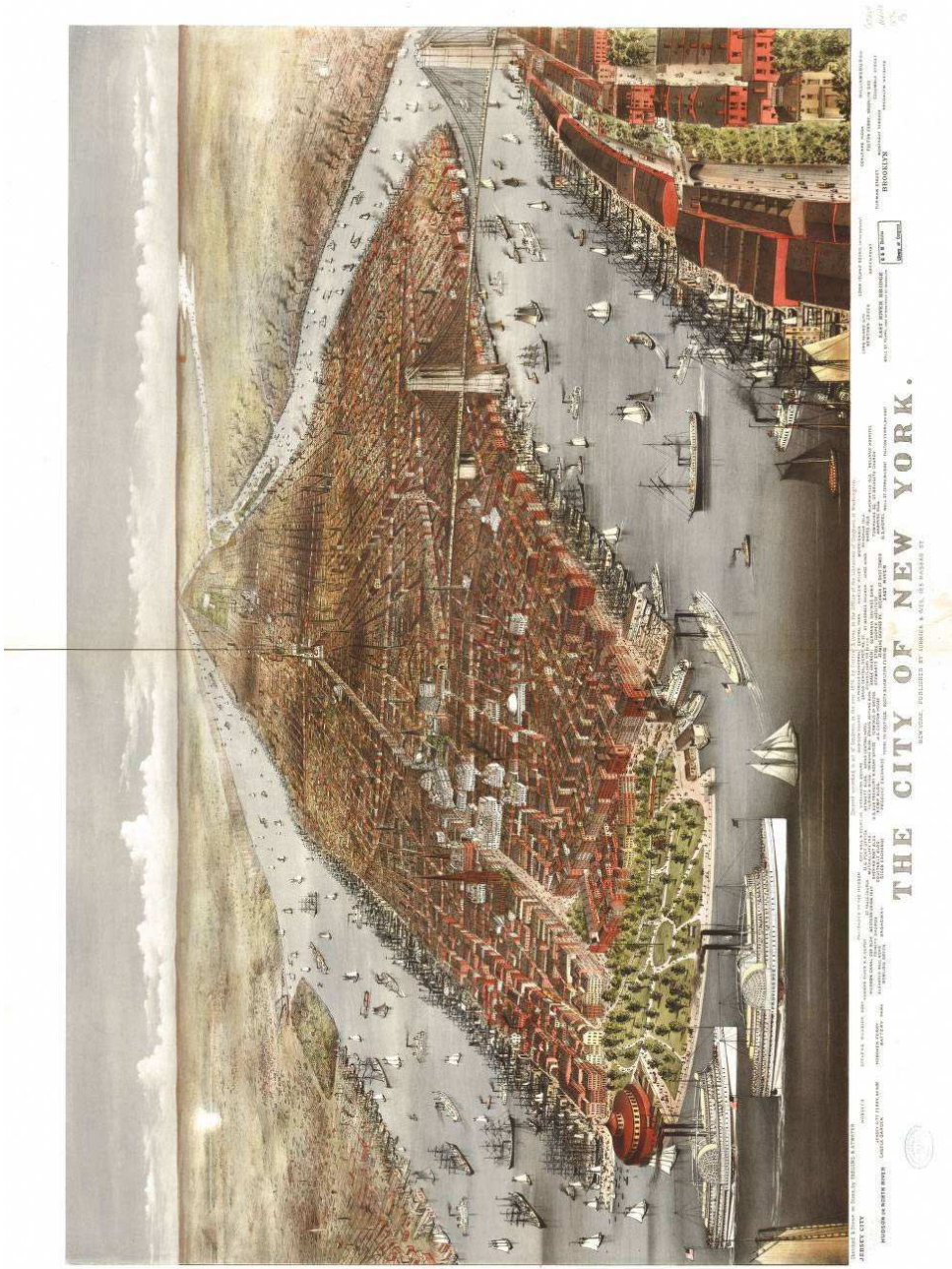
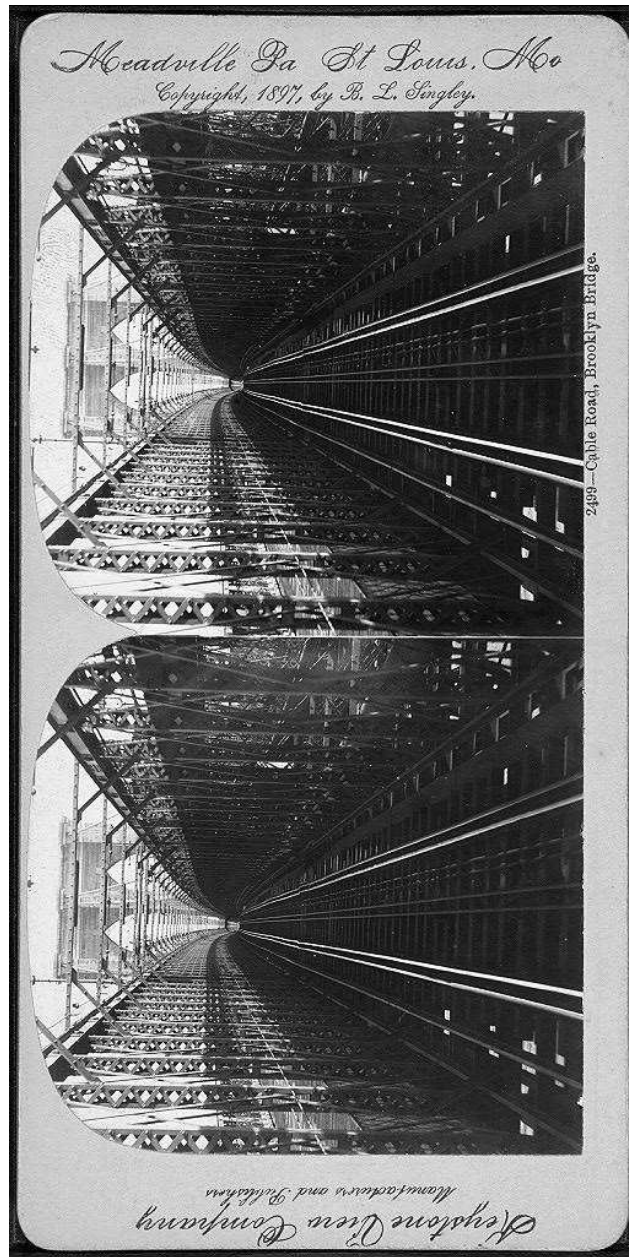


Plate 4. Panoramic map or 'Bird's Eye view' of Manhattan Island (1876).



*Headville Pa St Louis. Mo*  
*Copyright, 1897, by R. L. Singley.*

2499—Cable Road, Brooklyn Bridge.

*Steynstone Owen Company*  
*Manufacturers and Printers*

Plate 5. Brooklyn Bridge 'inclosed passage' stereograph (1897).

*The Liebmann Arcade*  
 MERCHANTS UNION, L. AND H. LIEBMAN,  
 Incorporated. Managers.

**EDISON'S BIOGRAPH,**  
 The marvel of the age, will be exhibited in the specially fitted dark parlor on the Basement floor, showing most interesting Live Pictures, continuously from 9 A. M. Never before shown in Brooklyn, and nowhere under 25c. to 50c., admission here merely nominal..... **5c**

Brooklyn Daily Eagle 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1897: 19.

**ELECTION NIGHT RETURNS.**  
**Where Eagle Bulletins May Be Seen on Election Night.**  
 The Eagle has made unusual preparations for the prompt display of bulletins on Election night. Its arrangements for obtaining returns are more elaborate than have ever been undertaken by any other newspaper in New York City.

**EAGLE SIGNAL.**  
 From the roof of the Eagle Building: A WHITE LIGHT will indicate the election of McKinley. A RED LIGHT will indicate the election of Bryan.

**THE EAGLE MAIN OFFICE.**  
**ON THE WASHINGTON STREET SIDE**  
 there will be a blackboard, on which the returns will be written by the Eagle's chief telegraph operator, who will wear a Morse telegraph instrument on his head, thus saving loss of time in transcribing. These returns will come direct from the Associated Press. There will also be a biograph in operation, producing moving pictures. Ladders have been built leading to the miniature White House at the top, and upon these figures of McKinley and Bryan will be advanced in relative proportion to their respective vote as fast as the returns warrant. At another station there will be an electoral bulletin board showing the vote by states for each candidate.

**ON THE JOHNSTON STREET SIDE** of the building a stereopticon giving bulletins prepared by the Eagle principally from Kings County, will be operated. A Colored Map of the United States will also be displayed showing the result of the election in each state. States in blue will show that McKinley has won; States in red will show that they have been carried by Bryan. In addition, bulletins will be announced by megaphone.

**EAGLE OFFICE, MANHATTAN**

Brooklyn Daily Eagle 4<sup>th</sup> November, 1900: 1.

**BLACK AND THE BIOGRAPH.**  
**An Unusual Opportunity to See Some Brilliant Pictures.**  
 Alexander Black, whose talks about his own pictures have proved so attractive in "Miss America" and his other picture plays, will vary the monotony of his experience this week by talking about the pictures of the biograph. The biograph is well known as the best of the machines for reproducing pictures of objects in motion. Its pictures of moving railroad trains and firemen in action have become famous, but these and other views of the machine have not been as much seen in Brooklyn as they ought to have been. A choice collection of views will be shown at Association Hall on Monday night and Mr. Black, who knows so much about pictures, will talk about them. The entertainment will be given for the benefit of the Church of the Good Shepherd, on McDonough street, near Stuyvesant avenue. The biograph will be preceded by stereopticon views, which Mr. Black will also explain. The orchestra of the Boys' High School will play selections before the views are shown, beginning at 7:45, and during the intermission.

ANGOSTERA BITTERS do not only distinguish

Brooklyn Daily Eagle 21<sup>st</sup> November 1897: 7.

**MANHATTAN AMUSEMENTS.**  
 Wonderful Moving Pictures of  
**HIS HOLINESS,**  
**POPE LEO XIII.**  
 FIRST PUBLIC EXHIBITION,  
**CARNEGIE MUSIC HALL,**  
 Wednesday Evening, Dec. 14,  
 by the  
**AMERICAN BIOGRAPH.**  
 Lecturer, Rev. THOMAS H. MALONE.  
 "They are excellent. They reproduce the features, the gestures, the movements, the life of the Pope and the Vatican with extraordinary accuracy."  
**ARCHBISHOP MARTINELLI,**  
 Apostolic Delegate.  
 Sale of seats and Boxes Opened Wed., Dec. 7.  
**A MEDICAN** 42nd St

Brooklyn Daily Eagle 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1898: 23.

**HYDE & BEHMAN'S**  
 MATINEE EVERY DAY.  
**JOHN C. RICE & SALLIE COHEN**  
 In COMEDY.  
 Geo. Fuller Golden, Bonnie Thornton,  
 Henri French, H. V. Fitzgerald,  
 McBride & Goodrich, The Morellos.  
 American Biograph. Big Laughing Show.  
 EXTRA  
 FEATURE, **BERT COOTE & CO.**

Brooklyn Daily Eagle 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1900: 4.

Plate 6. Examples of cinema exhibition contexts (1897-1900).



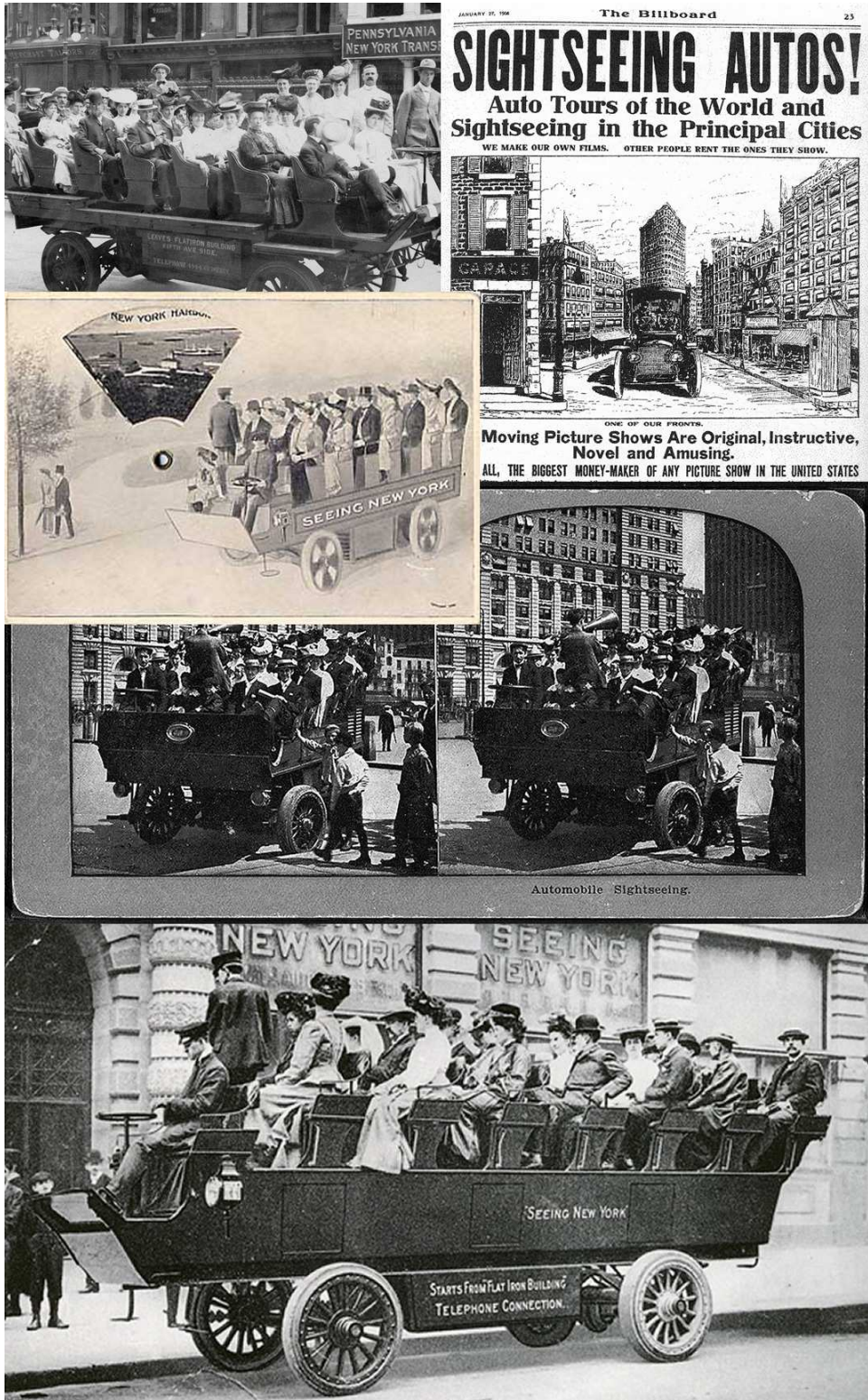


Plate 7. The Seeing New York Company tour bus.





Plate 8. The completed Flatiron Building.



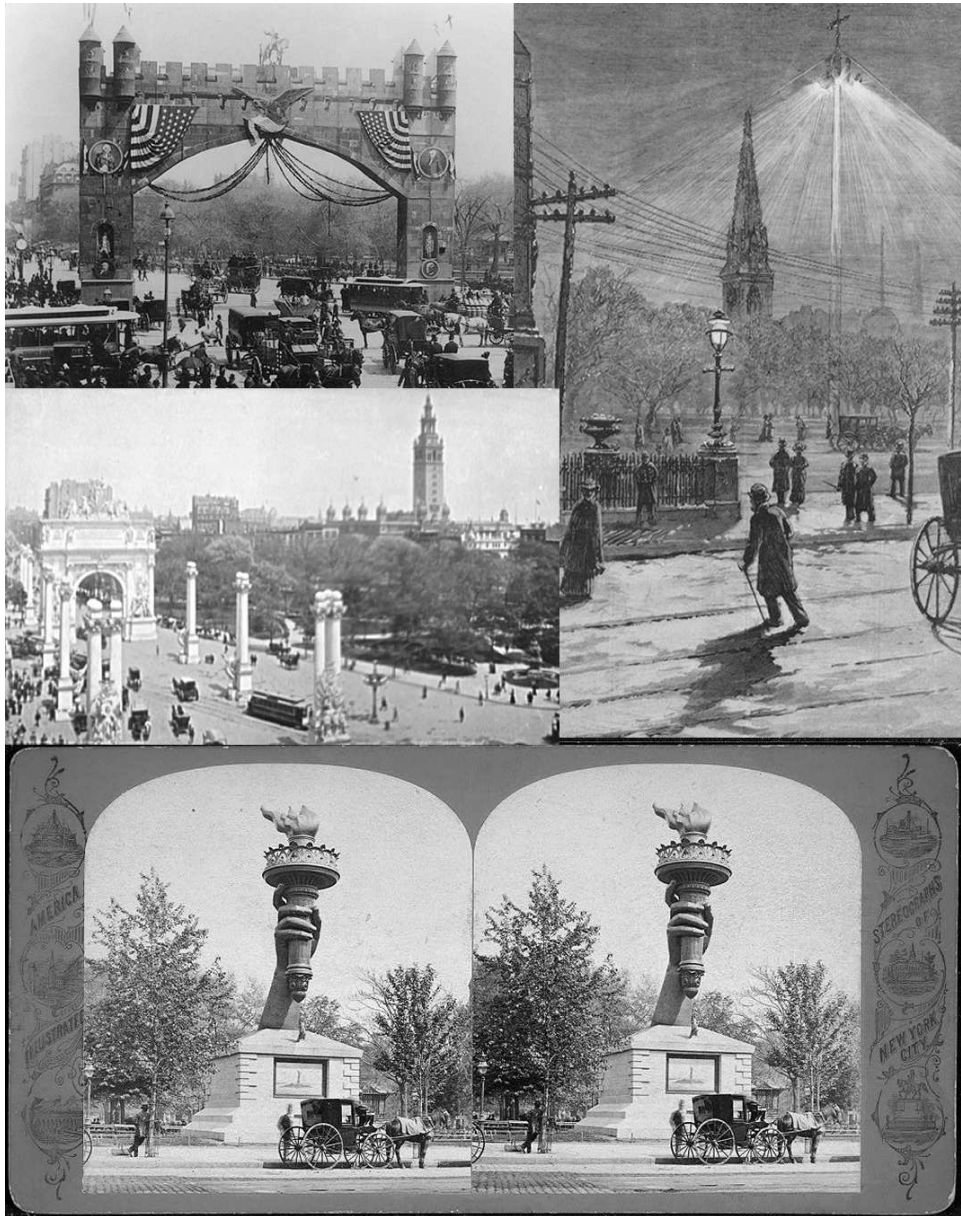


Plate 9. Madison Square, 1870s to late 1890s.

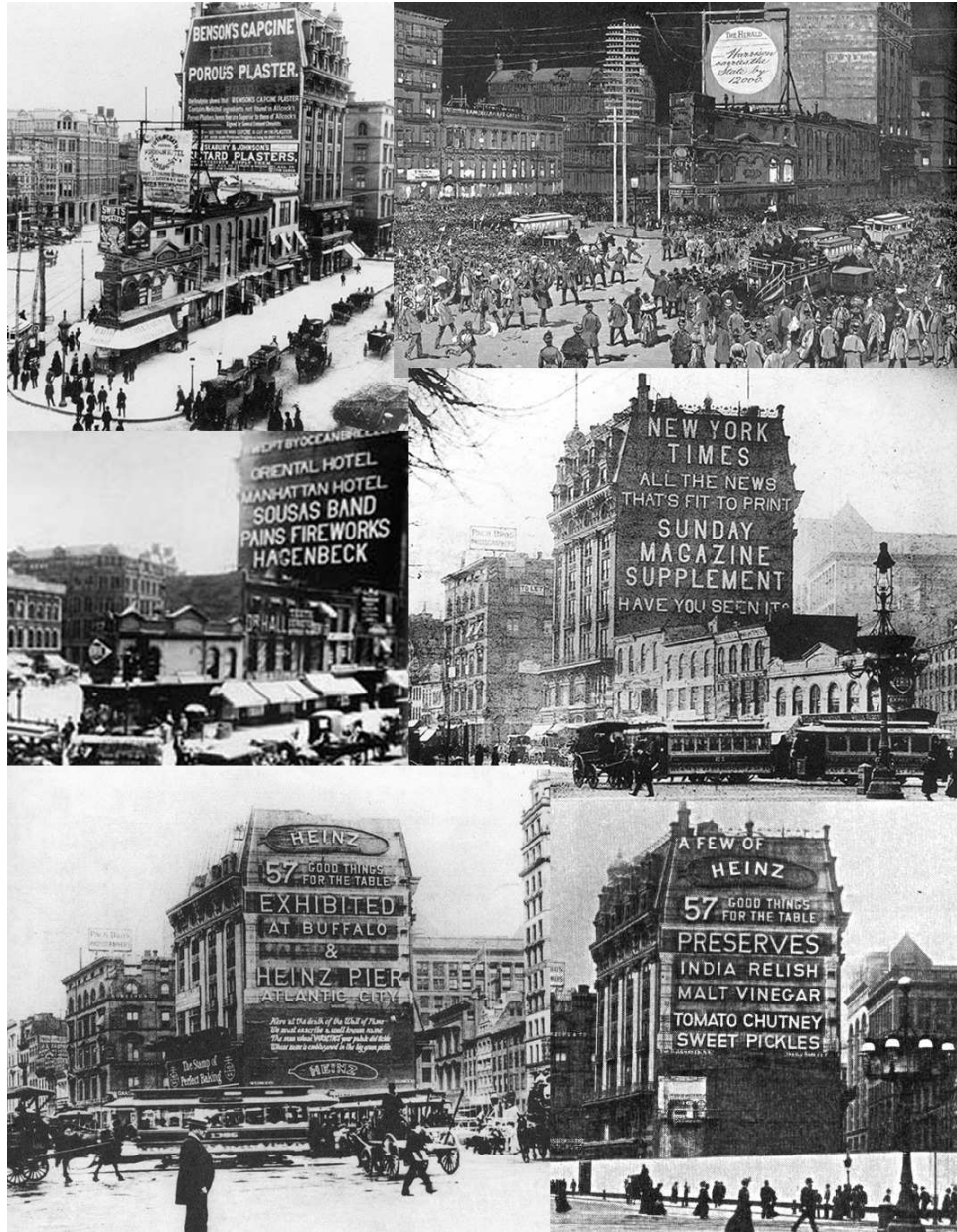


Plate 10. The Flatiron Building site, 1880s to 1901.

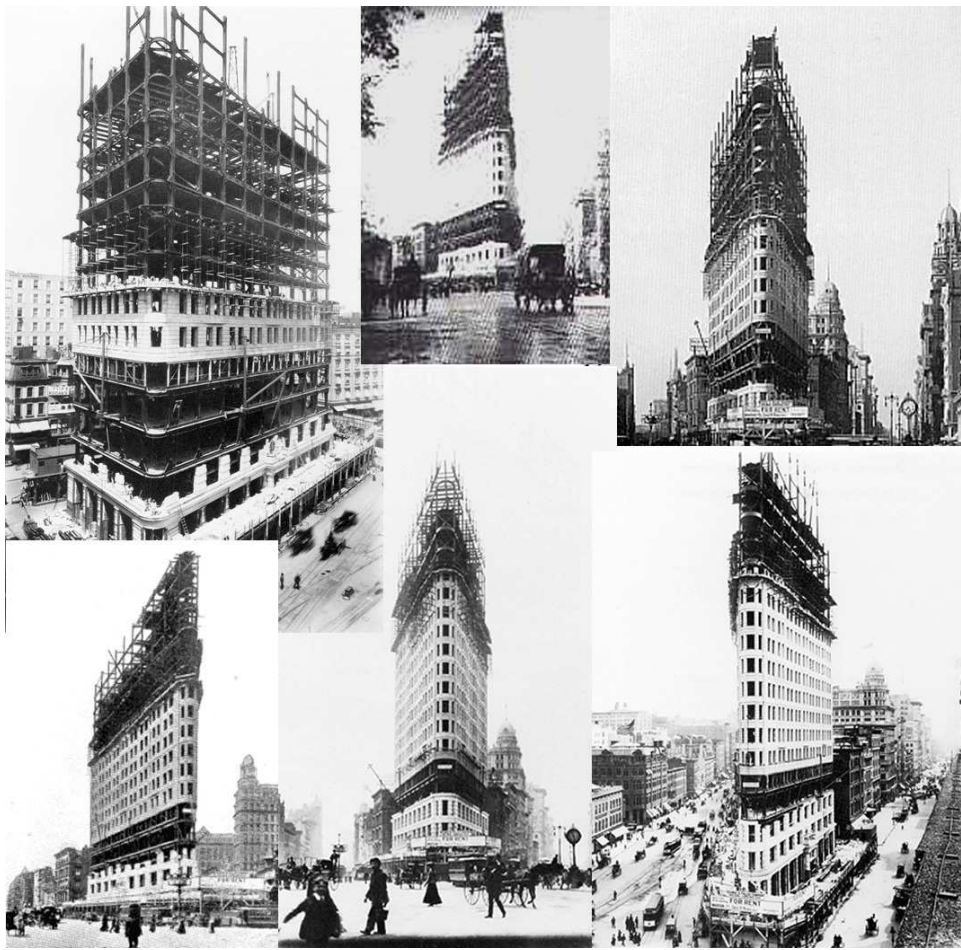


Plate 11. The under construction Flatiron Building, 1902.



# BROADWAY NOW UNDERGOING A GREAT TRANSFORMATION



NORTHWEST CORNER OF 25TH STREET AND BROADWAY



NORTHEAST CORNER OF 25TH STREET AND BROADWAY

## STREETS MADE TO ORDER

Response from Mayor's Architectural Board to the Board of Estimate. The board has approved the plan for the reconstruction of Broadway from 25th Street to 125th Street. The plan provides for a wide, straight thoroughfare with sidewalks, trees, and a central reservation for carriages and horse-drawn vehicles. The board also approved the plan for the reconstruction of the streets from 125th Street to 150th Street, which will be a similar thoroughfare with a central reservation for carriages and horse-drawn vehicles.

## ATTORNEY

Advertisement for an attorney, likely related to the Broadway reconstruction project. The text mentions the name 'James C. Thompson' and 'Charles S. Thompson'.

## 'IDLE-HOUR,' W. K. VANDERBILT'S COUNTRY HOME, HAS BEEN REBUILT IN RECORD BREAKING TIME.



W. K. Vanderbilt's 'Idle Hour' at Katonah, N. Y., the Idle Hour of which is just completed.

W. K. Vanderbilt's 'Idle Hour' at Katonah, N. Y., the Idle Hour of which is just completed. The house was rebuilt in record-breaking time, and the architect, John B. Thompson, has completed the work in a remarkably short period. The house is a masterpiece of architecture, with its intricate details and grand scale.

## IS PARLIAMENT DECAYING?

Discontent of the House of Commons. The article discusses the political climate in England, focusing on the House of Commons. It suggests that there is a sense of decay or decline in the institution, with various political factions and movements vying for power.

## THE VESTIGE OF THE PAPONS OF LAYTON, NOW DISAPPEARING



THE VESTIGE OF THE PAPONS OF LAYTON, NOW DISAPPEARING

The vestige of the papons of Layton, now disappearing. The article describes the historical significance of the structure and the efforts to preserve it. It notes that the structure is a remnant of a once-great site and is now being protected from further decay.

## THE PROBLEM OF THE CITY

The problem of the city. The article discusses the challenges of urban development and the need for effective planning. It highlights the issues of overcrowding, pollution, and the loss of green space in rapidly growing cities.

## THE PROBLEM OF THE CITY

The problem of the city. This section continues the discussion on urban development, focusing on the role of government and the private sector in addressing the city's needs.

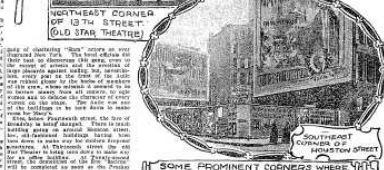
## THE PROBLEM OF THE CITY

The problem of the city. The article concludes by discussing the long-term implications of current urban policies and the need for sustainable development.

## THE PROBLEM OF THE CITY

The problem of the city. This section provides a summary of the key points discussed in the article, emphasizing the importance of thoughtful urban planning.

## SOME PROMINENT CORNERS WHERE OLD BUILDINGS HAVE BEEN TAKEN DOWN TO MAKE ROOM FOR NEW ONES



SOME PROMINENT CORNERS WHERE OLD BUILDINGS HAVE BEEN TAKEN DOWN TO MAKE ROOM FOR NEW ONES

## THE PROBLEM OF THE CITY

The problem of the city. This section discusses the impact of new buildings on the city's character and the need to preserve historical landmarks.

## THE PROBLEM OF THE CITY

The problem of the city. The article discusses the challenges of balancing modern development with the preservation of the city's heritage.

## THE PROBLEM OF THE CITY

The problem of the city. This section provides a final perspective on the city's future, suggesting ways to create a more livable and sustainable urban environment.

Plate 12. Brooklyn Daily Eagle 'Broadway transformation' article.

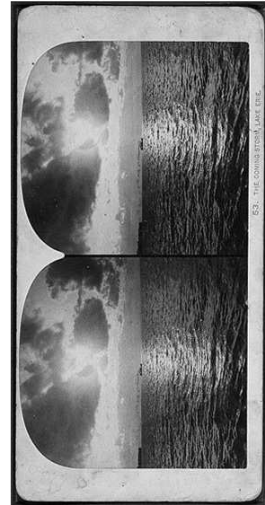
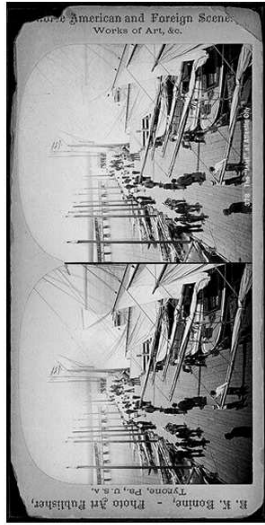


Plate 13. Robert Kates Bonine's photography.



Plate 14. Lower Broadway.



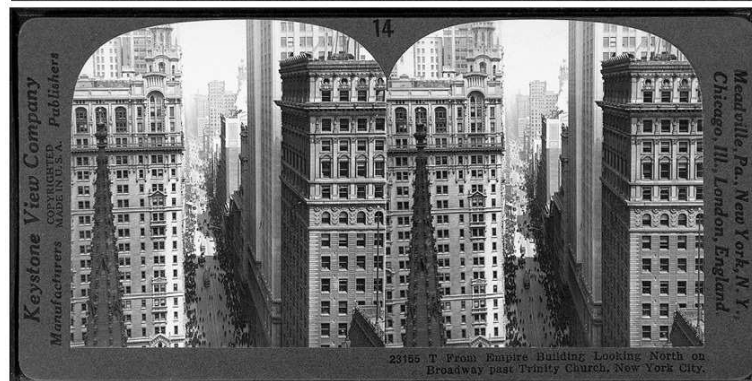
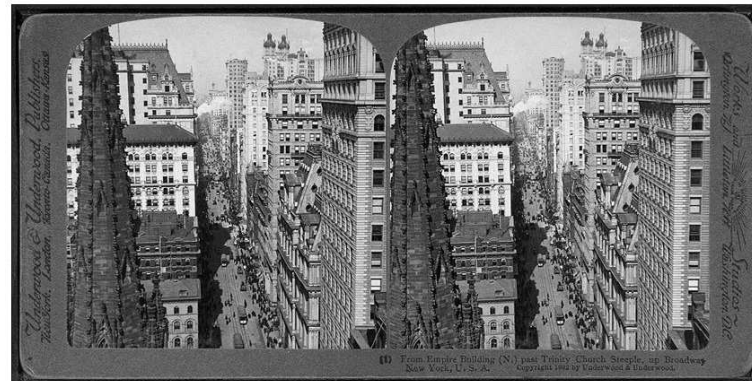


Plate 15. Canyonisation in lower Broadway, 1870s to c. 1915.

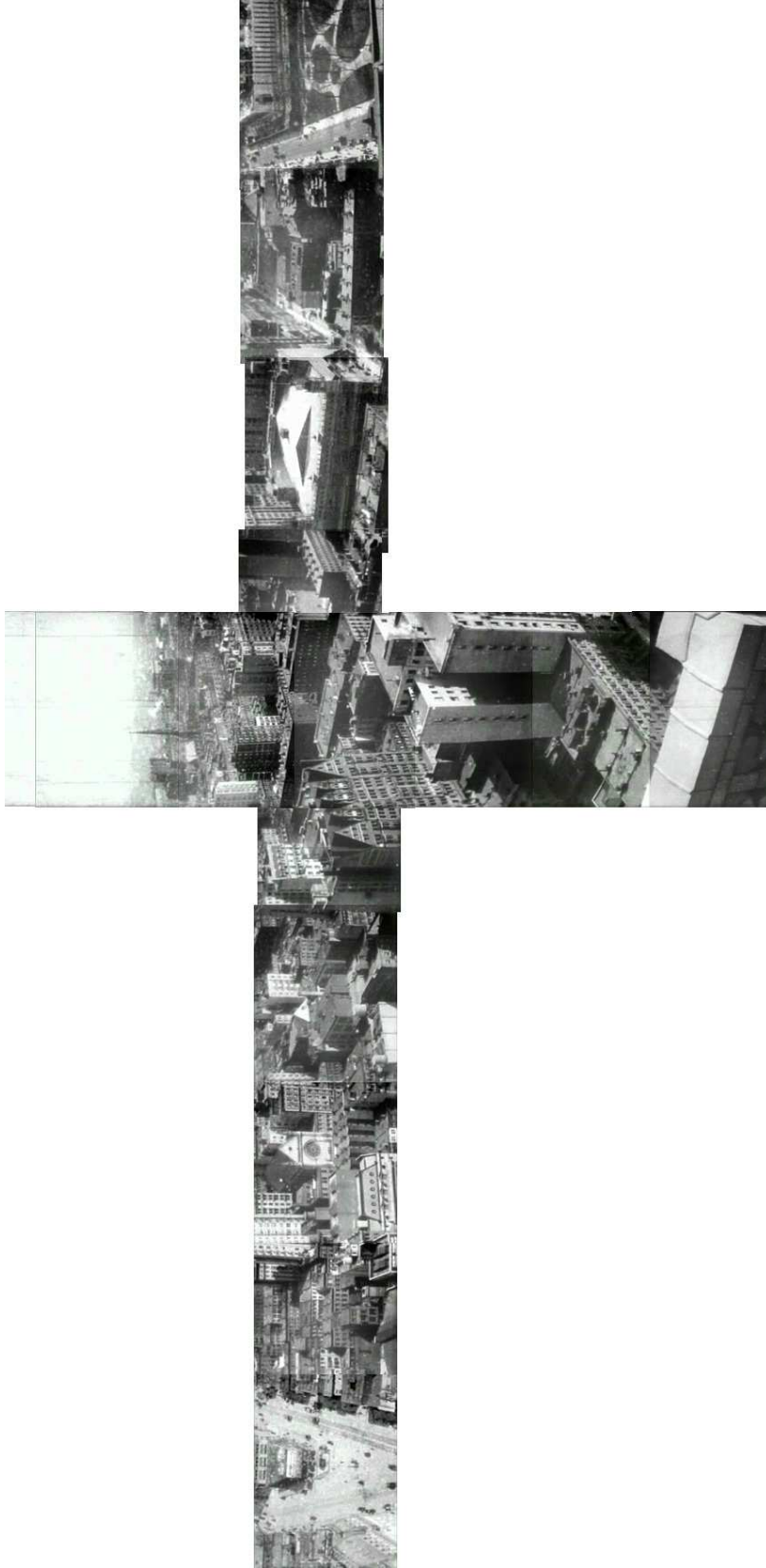


Plate 16. Panoramic film from Times Building, 1905.





Plate 17. Panoramic photograph from Times Building, 1908.

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*104<sup>th</sup> Street Curve, New York, Elevated Railway / Panoramic View, Elevated R.R., N.Y., 104<sup>th</sup> St. Curve* (Edison)

Copyright: April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1899; Length: 75 & 150 ft; Producer: James White; Photographed: Late March to mid-April 1899; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.

*Astor Battery on Parade* (Edison)

Copyright: 1899; Producers: J. Stuart Blackton & Albert E. Smith; Camera: J. Stuart Blackton &/or Albert E. Smith; Photographed: January 1899; Location: N.Y.C.; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.

*At The Foot of the Flatiron* (AM&B)

Copyright: November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1903; Length: 61 ft.; Camera: A.E. Weed; Photographed: October 26th 1903; Location: Broadway and 23rd Street, N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*Band Drill* (Edison)

Copyright: not registered; Producer: W.K.L. Dickson; Camera: William Heise; Photographed: 1894; Location: Studio, N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.

*Beginning of a Skyscraper / Starting a Skyscraper* (AM&B)

Copyright: April 18<sup>th</sup> 1902; Length: 14 ft.; Camera: Robert K. Bonine; Photographed: January 18th 1902; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*Black Diamond Express* (Edison)

Copyright: December 12<sup>th</sup> 1896; Length: 140 ft; Producer: James White; Camera: William Heise; Photographed: December 1<sup>st</sup> 1896; Location: Lake Cayuga, New York; Archive: American Memory Collection.

*Blacksmith Scene* (Edison)

Copyright: not registered; Length: kinetoscope loop; Camera: W.K.L. Dickson; Photographed: May 9th 1893; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.

*Broadway & Union Square, New York* (AM&B)

Copyright: July 8<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 16 ft; Camera: Arthur Marvin; Photographed: August 19<sup>th</sup> 1901; Location: Broadway and 14<sup>th</sup> Street, N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*Broadway at 14th Street / Dead Man's Curve / Broadway and Fourteenth Street / 14th Street and Broadway* (Edison)

Copyright: not registered; Length: 50 ft. & 150 ft.; Producer: James White, Norman C. Raff & Frank R. Gammon; Camera: William Heise; Photographed: by mid-September 1896; Location: Union Square, New York, N.Y.; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.

- Brooklyn Bridge / New York to Brooklyn Over the Brooklyn Bridge* (AM&B)  
 Copyright: not registered; Photographed: April 1899; Catalogued: Niver, 1971.
- Burlesque Suicide* (Edison)  
 Copyright: April 7<sup>th</sup> 1902; Length: 33 ft.; Camera: Edwin S. Porter;  
 Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Delivering Newspapers* (AM&B)  
 Copyright: April 24<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 27 ft; Camera: G.W. Bitzer, Arthur Marvin; Photographed: May 1<sup>st</sup> 1899; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Démolition d'un Mur* (Lumière)  
 Copyright: not registered; Photographed: 1895; Catalogued: Musser, 1990.
- The Dewey Arch* (AM&B)  
 Copyright: June 18<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 30 ft; Camera: F.S. Armitage;  
 Photographed: September 30<sup>th</sup> 1899; Location: Madison Square, N.Y.C.;  
 Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- The Dewey Arch – Troops Passing Under* (Edison)  
 Copyright: 1899; Photographed: September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1899; Location: N.Y.C..
- Dewey's Arrival at Triumphal Arch* (Edison)  
 Copyright: 1899; Photographed: September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1899; Location: N.Y.C..
- Elevated Railroad, New York* (AM&B)  
 Copyright: February 24<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 36 ft; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Empire State Express* (AM&B)  
 Copyright: 1896; Length: 160 ft; Camera: W.K.L. Dickson; Photographed: 1896; Location: Canastota, New York; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.
- Excavating for a New York Foundation* (AM&B)  
 Copyright: November 25<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 68 ft; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Excavation for Subway* (AM&B)  
 Copyright: March 11<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 32 ft; Camera: Robert K. Bonine;  
 Photographed: November 11<sup>th</sup> 1902; Location: Union Square, N.Y.C.;  
 Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Execution of Czolgosz, with Panorama of Auburn Prison* (Edison)  
 Copyright: November 9<sup>th</sup> 1901; Length: 84 ft.; Location: Studio, N.Y.C.;  
 Auburn, N.Y.; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Fireboat "New Yorker" in Action* (Edison)  
 Copyright: May 20<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 225 ft; Camera: J.B. Smith;  
 Photographed: May 10<sup>th</sup> 1903; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection.

- Fireboat "New Yorker" Answering an Alarm* (Edison)  
 Copyright: May 20<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 75 ft.; Camera: J.B. Smith;  
 Photographed: May 10<sup>th</sup> 1903; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American  
 Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Full View of Brooklyn Bridge* (Lubin)  
 Producer: S. Lubin; Photographed: 1899; Location: N.Y.C..
- The Gay Shoe Clerk* (Edison)  
 Copyright: August 12<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 28 ft.; Camera: Edwin S. Porter;  
 Photographed: July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1903; Location: Studio, N.Y.C.; Archive: American  
 Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- The Great Train Robbery* (Edison)  
 Copyright: December 1<sup>st</sup> 1903; Length: 302 ft.; Camera: Edwin S. Porter;  
 Location: Orange Mountains, N.J.; Archive: American Memory Collection;  
 Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Herald Square* (Edison)  
 Copyright: not registered; Length: 50 ft.; Producer: James White, Norman  
 C. Raff & Frank R. Gammon; Camera: William Heise; Photographed: May  
 11<sup>th</sup> 1896; Location: New York, N.Y.; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.
- Interior N.Y. Subway, 14<sup>th</sup> St. to 42<sup>nd</sup> St.* (AM&B)  
 Copyright: June 5<sup>th</sup> 1905; Length: 53 ft.; Camera: G.W. Bitzer;  
 Photographed: May 21<sup>st</sup> 1905; Location: Interborough Subway, 14<sup>th</sup> St. to  
 42<sup>nd</sup> St. N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver,  
 1985.
- The Jeffries-Sharkey Fight* (AM&B)  
 Copyright: not registered; Camera: Marvin; Photographed: November 3<sup>rd</sup>  
 1899; Catalogued: Niver, 1971.
- Lehigh Valley Black Diamond Express* (Edison)  
 Copyright: May 20<sup>th</sup> 1903; Camera: Edwin S. Porter; Photographed: May  
 13<sup>th</sup> 1903; Location: N.Y.C..
- Life of a Cowboy* (Edison)  
 Copyright: not registered; Camera: Edwin S. Porter; Photographed: 1906;  
 Catalogued: Musser, 1990.
- Lively Brushes on Speedway* (AM&B)  
 Copyright: July 1903; Length: 25 ft.; Camera: Robert K. Bonine;  
 Photographed: May 15<sup>th</sup> 1902; Archive: American Memory Collection;  
 Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Lower Broadway* (AM&B)  
 Copyright: June 13<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 42 ft.; Camera: Robert K. Bonine;  
 Photographed: May 15<sup>th</sup> 1902; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American  
 Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- La Mélomane (The Melomaniac)* (Méliès)  
 Copyright: June 30<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 75 ft.; Creator: Georges Méliès; Created:  
 Spring 1903; Location: Montreuil, France; Archive: American Memory  
 Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*A Mighty Tumble / The Fall of a Brick Building / Razing a Brick Building* (AM&B)

Copyright: May 1902; Camera: Congdon; Photographed: November 1901;  
Catalogued: Niver, 1971.

*The Monroe Doctrine* (Edison)

Copyright: not registered; Photographed: April 1896; Catalogued: Musser,  
1997.

*Move On* (Edison)

Copyright: October 27<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 38 ft.; Camera: A.C. Abadie;  
Photographed: October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1903; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American  
Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*New Black Diamond Express* (Edison)

Copyright: May 26<sup>th</sup> 1900; Length: 60 ft; Producer: James White;  
Photographed: May 1900; Location: Towanda, Pennsylvania; Archive:  
American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.

*New Brooklyn Bridge / New Brooklyn Bridge Panorama* (AM&B)

Copyright: March 11<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 28 ft.; Camera: G.W. Bitzer;  
Photographed: November 12<sup>th</sup> 1902; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American  
Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*New Brooklyn to New York, via Brooklyn Bridge, no. 1* (Edison)

Copyright: September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1899; Length: 58 ft.; Location: Brooklyn Bridge,  
N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*New Brooklyn to New York, via Brooklyn Bridge, no. 2* (Edison)

Copyright: September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1899; Length: 64 ft.; Location: Brooklyn Bridge,  
N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*New York, Broadway & Union Square (no. 328)* (Lumière)

Copyright: not registered; Photographed: 1897; Availability: The Movies  
Begin DVD.

*New York, Brooklyn Bridge (no.321)* (Lumière)

Copyright: not registered; Photographed: 1897; Availability: The Movies  
Begin DVD.

*New York City Dumping Wharf* (Edison)

Copyright: May 20<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 40 ft; Camera: J.B. Smith;  
Photographed: April 28<sup>th</sup> 1903; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American  
Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*New York City "Ghetto" Fish Market* (Edison)

Copyright: May 20<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 91 ft; Camera: J.B. Smith; Photographed:  
May 1<sup>st</sup> 1903; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection;  
Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*New York Harbor Police Boat Patrol Capturing Pirates* (Edison)

Copyright: May 20<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 60 ft.; Camera: J.B. Smith & Edwin S.  
Porter; Photographed: May 10<sup>th</sup> 1903; Location: New York Harbor, N.Y.;  
Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.



- Pan-American Exposition by Night* (Edison)  
Copyright: October 17<sup>th</sup> 1901; Length: 75 ft.; Camera: Edwin S. Porter, James H. White; Location: Buffalo, N.Y.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Panorama from Times Building, NY* (AM&B)  
Copyright: April 11<sup>th</sup> 1905; Length: 115 ft.; Camera: Wallace McCutcheon; Photographed: April 1905; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Panorama from the Tower of Brooklyn Bridge* (AM&B)  
Copyright: September 12<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 19 ft.; Camera: G.W. Bitzer; Photographed: April 18<sup>th</sup> 1899; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Panorama of Flatiron Building* (AM&B)  
Copyright: June 4<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 30 ft.; Camera: Robert K. Bonine; Photographed: October 8<sup>th</sup> 1902; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Panorama of Blackwell's Island, N.Y.* (Edison)  
Copyright: May 20<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 71 ft.; Camera: Edwin S. Porter; Photographed: May 9<sup>th</sup> 1903; Location: East River, N.Y.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Panorama of Riker's Island, N.Y.* (Edison)  
Copyright: May 20<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 58 ft.; Camera: Edwin S. Porter; Photographed: May 9<sup>th</sup> 1903; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Panorama Water Front and Brooklyn Bridge From East River* (Edison)  
Copyright: May 20<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 69 ft.; Camera: Edwin S. Porter; Photographed: May 9<sup>th</sup> 1903; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Panoramic View of Brooklyn Bridge / Brooklyn to New York via the Bridge / From Brooklyn to New York over the Bridge* (Edison)  
Copyright: February 4<sup>th</sup> 1899; Camera: J Stuart Blackton & Albert E. Smith; Photographed: January 1899; Location: N.Y.C.; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.
- Parade of Horses on Speedway* (AM&B)  
Copyright: July 8<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 27 ft.; Camera: Robert K. Bonine; Photographed: May 15<sup>th</sup> 1902; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Pennsylvania Tunnel Excavation* (AM&B)  
Copyright: August 30<sup>th</sup> 1905; Length: 35 ft.; Camera: G.W. Bitzer; Photographed: July 19<sup>th</sup> 1905; Location: Seventh and Eighth Avenues, N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Raising Old Glory over Morro Castle* (Edison)  
Copyright: February 4<sup>th</sup> 1899; Producers: J. Stuart Blackton & Albert E. Smith; Camera: J. Stuart Blackton &/or Albert E. Smith; Photographed: c. January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1899; Location: Studio, N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.

- Receding View, Black Diamond Express* (Edison)  
Copyright: 1897; Camera: James White / William Heise; Catalogued: Musser, 1991.
- Reuben in the Subway* (AM&B)  
Copyright: June 20<sup>th</sup> 1905; Length: 15 ft; Camera: G.W. Bitzer; Photographed: June 7<sup>th</sup> 1905; Location: 14<sup>th</sup> Street, N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Rock Drill at Work in Subway* (AM&B)  
Copyright: June 10<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 31 ft; Camera: G.W. Bitzer; Photographed: June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1903; Location: Subway, N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Rough Sea at Dover*  
Camera: Birt Acres; Photographed: 1895; Availability: The Movies Begin DVD; Catalogued: Musser, 1990.
- Rube and Mandy at Coney Island* (Edison)  
Copyright: August 13<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 295 ft; Camera: Edwin S. Porter; Location: Coney Island, N.Y. and Studio, N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- A Rube Couple at a County Fair* (Edison)  
Copyright: October 24<sup>th</sup> 1904; Length: 540 ft; Camera: Edwin S. Porter; Photographed: October 1904; Location: Danbury, Connecticut; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- A Rube in the Subway* (AM&B)  
Copyright: June 20<sup>th</sup> 1905; Camera: G.W. Bitzer; Photographed: June 7<sup>th</sup> 1905; Location: Studio, N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Serpentine / Skirt Dance* (Edison)  
Copyright: not registered; Photographed: 1896; Catalogued: Musser, 1990.
- Sky Scrapers of New York City, From the North River* (Edison)  
Copyright: May 20<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 85 ft.; Camera: J.B. Smith; Photographed: May 10<sup>th</sup> 1903; Location: North River, N.Y.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- The Skyscrapers of New York* (AM&B)  
Copyright: December 11<sup>th</sup> 1906; Length: 284 ft.; Camera: F.A. Dobson; Photographed: November 8<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> 1906; Location: 12<sup>th</sup> St. and Broadway; Studio, N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.
- Sortie d'Usine* (Lumière)  
Copyright: not registered; Photographed: 1895; Availability: The Movies Begin DVD.
- Sorting Refuse at Incinerating Plant, New York City* (Edison)  
Copyright: May 20<sup>th</sup> 1903; Length: 49 ft; Camera: Edwin S. Porter; Photographed: May 9<sup>th</sup> 1903; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*Spirit of '76* (AM&B)

Copyright: May 19<sup>th</sup> 1905; Camera: G.W. Bitzer; Photographed: May 19<sup>th</sup> 1905; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*Star Theatre* (AM&B)

Copyright: April 18<sup>th</sup> 1902; Length: 50 ft.; Camera: F.S. Armitage; Photographed: April 18<sup>th</sup> 1901; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*The Tunnel Workers* (AM&B)

Copyright: November 10<sup>th</sup> 1906; Length: 330 ft; Camera: F.A. Dobson; Photographed: October 14<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> 1906; Location: Studio and Pennsylvania R.R. ? [sic] Tunnel, N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*Umbrella Dance* (Edison)

Copyright: not registered; Photographed: September 1895; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.

*Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (Edison)

Copyright: January 27<sup>th</sup> 1902; Length: 125 ft; Camera: Edwin S. Porter; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*View of traffic crossing Leeds bridge*

Camera: Louis Le Prince; Photographed: 1888.

*Walton & Slavin* (Edison)

Copyright: not registered; Photographed: October 6<sup>th</sup> 1894; Location: Edison Laboratory; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.

*What Happened on Twenty-Third Street, New York City* (Edison)

Copyright: August 21<sup>st</sup> 1901; Length: 37 ft; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection; Catalogued: Niver, 1985.

*White Wings on Review* (Edison)

Copyright: 1903; Length: 225 ft; Camera: J.B. Smith; Photographed: April 29<sup>th</sup> 1903; Location: N.Y.C.; Archive: American Memory Collection.

*Willie's First Smoke* (Edison)

Copyright: 1899; Producers: J. Stuart Blackton & Albert E. Smith; Camera: J. Stuart Blackton &/or Albert E. Smith; Photographed: January 1899; Location: Studio, N.Y.C.; Catalogued: Musser, 1997.

Films archived in the American Memory Collection can be viewed at the American Memory web site at <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/>>

## **Appendix: The Paper Print Collection**

The close analysis of films for this study has been undertaken using digitised versions of the films rather than by viewing conventional film negatives. Moreover, in the case of the Edison and AM&B films, the digitised versions are derived from photographic versions of the films, known as Paper Print versions, rather than original negatives from the films. A number of issues arise relating to the status or validity of the resources used in this study, especially given that this study's findings are to a large extent based on the close analysis of what are considered to be primary resources. For example, it could be argued that the digitised versions of the films are in some way incomplete and are thus unsuitable for close analysis. Moreover, given that viewing digitised versions of films on a computer screen would seem to be some way removed from the original viewing conditions, claims for identifying viewing practices could similarly be thought to be problematic.

This appendix will address such issues by, firstly, considering the processes involved in producing the digitised versions of the films and thus how representative they are of the original films. Secondly, I will discuss the ways in which the films have been viewed for this study. Thirdly, issues surrounding the interpretation of cuts, or breaks in the film will be discussed. Lastly, I will present the findings of a detailed analysis of Kemp Niver's Paper Print film catalogue in order to assess the proportion of actuality films from cinema's first decade which were filmed in New York.

As we saw in Chapter 1, one feature of early cinema research is what Tom Gunning terms the 'neglect' or 'repression' of early non-fiction filmmaking. One reason for this neglect is the lack of availability of films from this period. From

the period of cinema's emergence until the late 1940s films were photographed using nitrate based film stock. A nitrate film base becomes unstable over time, resulting in the deterioration of film stock beyond any possible usage. Very few original film negatives remain from the first decade of American cinema. As Kemp Niver notes, in addition to nitrate deterioration, first decade films also suffered from "inferior raw stock, crude projection equipment that often damaged prints beyond repair, and friction that caused many a print to vanish in flames" (1985: x). However, a significant proportion of early American films have survived in what is known as the Paper Print format.

The provision for film copyright was not enacted in America until 1912. However, competition between the nascent film production companies necessitated that some form of copyrighting was devised. On January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1894 the Edison Company submitted a copy of *Kinetoscopic Record of a Sneeze* to the Library of Congress in the form of a roll of photographs consisting of one photograph for each film frame [Fig. A.1]. There was at this time provision for copyrighting photographs and as Niver notes "there was no apparent legal reason why [a photograph] might not be 35mm wide and a hundred yards long" (1985: xv). What the Edison Company had submitted was a roll of contact prints which exactly matched the film negatives. Subsequently, both Edison and AM&B submitted thousands of contact print versions of films to the Library of Congress. According to film historian and archivist Patrick Loughney, in the period from 1894 to 1915, of the 15,000 film copyright registrations received by the Library over 3,000 were in the form of contact prints (Loughney, 1994). The rolls of contact prints—which were thus not subject to nitrate deterioration—were duly stored in the Library's vaults until their rediscovery in the mid-1930s [Fig. A.1].

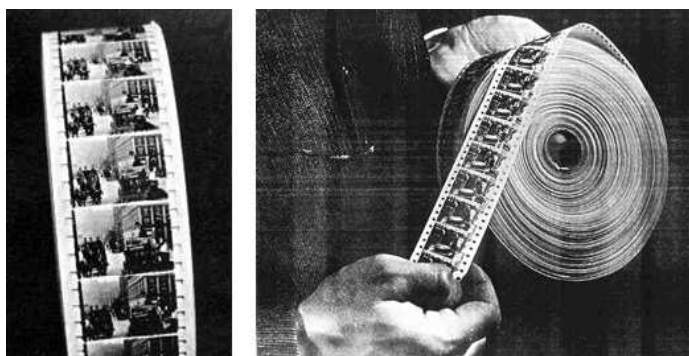


Fig. A.1 Examples of contact prints rolls. Photographs reproduced in Grimm, 1997.

In the early 1940s Library staff member Howard Walls made a detailed inventory of the contact prints and sought funding for a 'Paper Print' project to re-photograph the prints as films which could then be projected in the normal manner. Through the 1950s and into the early 1960s Kemp Niver undertook the task of painstakingly re-photographing the rolls of prints onto 16mm film stock. Niver's film versions of the contact prints were then made available to researchers at the Library. In the 1980s the Library decided to remaster the Niver versions of the contact prints onto 35mm film stock and to produce what are known as fine grained master copies and video copies. To date around 600 of the 3,000 16mm films have been remastered and, in digitised format, made available from the Library's web site.<sup>1</sup>

The digitised version of the early films analysed in this study are, then, fourth generation copies of the films. The original film negatives have been processed as contact prints, re-photographed onto 16mm film stock, remastered onto 35mm stock, then reprocessed into digital format. There is thus the potential for degradation of the 'films' or for frames to be lost at any stage of the processing. This is particularly the case with the digitising of the 35mm remastered films. As Anne Friedberg has recently noted:

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<sup>1</sup> See film preservationist Buckey Grimm's 'A Short History of the Paper Print Restoration at The Library of Congress' (1997) for an account of the remastering process.

[c]onclusions drawn from these films have to take into account that in their digitised format, 5-10 per cent of the original film frames are lost in the transfer. (Friedberg, 2000: 451)

This is, however, not the case with the digitised versions used for this study. The Library has made the films available in a number of digitised formats such as AVI, Real Media, QuickTime and MPEG. Whereas the Real Media and QuickTime versions do suffer from frame loss, the higher quality MPEG versions (which have been used for this study) are accurate copies of the remastered films.

With regard to the digitisation process, Marc Dudley, a Library staff member involved in the digitizing of films, has provided the following account:

[d]uring our film transfers, every frame should have been captured. In fact since most of the films were hand cranked at a frame rate much slower than 30 frames per second, our digitized/videotape archives may have captured every frame twice - remember that we did speed correction.

The notes field in the cataloguing record for each American Memory film provides the duration of film at a specific number of frames per second. (The majority play at 15 fps.) For example the cataloguing record for "Delivering Newspapers" states: Duration: 0:53 at 15 fps. Since video has 30 frames per second, each frame was copied twice. For the film "Panorama from the Tower of Brooklyn Bridge" the frame rate is 10 fps, so three copies of each frame were captured. (Email to Author: 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2003)

The 'speed correction' process is an attempt to reproduce a stable version of the film and therefore an attempt to reproduce a version close to the original. As noted in Chapter 3, production companies adopted differing frame speeds depending on the camera and projection system. Whereas Edison filmed at 15 fps, AM&B used a 32 fps system up until around 1902.

As for the validity of close analysis of the films, the point is that the original copies of the films would have been much higher quality than is available now. This does not detract from any of the conclusions drawn in this study. Rather, in

relation to Martin Jay's notion of the 'denigration of vision' and the claim that we now 'see less and disavow more', the original films were highly likely to have allowed early audiences to see more than can now be interpreted from the films. The issue of how much could be seen in the films brings us to the question of to what extent viewing films on a computer screen is different from the original viewing conditions.

Self-evidently, such viewing conditions are entirely different. More widely, however, the question arises as to the effect of approaching historical resources from the perspective of, for want of a better term, the digital age. In 'Film Theory and Spectatorship in the Age of "Posts"' Robert Stam and Ella Habiba Shohat argue that:

[t]he cinema in its long-standing specificity now seems to be dissolving into the larger bitstream of the audio visual media, be they photographic, electronic, or cybernetic, changing not only the 'identity' of the cinema but also that of those who consume it. (2000: 394).

In relation to this study, the inference here could be that a computer-based study produces a viewer and a consequent style of interpretation which is removed from early cinema's historical context: that computer-based study produces its own form of analysis of early cinema. Two issues mitigate this argument. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to vision, historicising is not simply a matter of naïvely attempting to reproduce what was seen. Rather, it is also a matter of identifying what Tom Gunning terms 'horizons of expectation' (1997: 9). Secondly, the use of computers for the study has not been undertaken without an appreciation of the mediating effect of computers. For example, the technical specifications of the equipment used has been selected to attenuate the 'blocky' bitstream effect to which Stam and Shohat refer.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, rather than viewing

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<sup>2</sup> The computer used for this study comprised: Windows 2000 Professional operating system; Gigabyte 7vaxp KT400 motherboard; AMD Athlon XP 2800+ CPU; 1GB PC2700 RAM; 2x 60GB IBM Deskstar 180GXP hard discs in RAID 0 configuration; Nvidia based GeForce FX



films in a small media player window, the films have been viewed projected onto a wall with an image size of 6 feet x 4 feet.

In turning now to issues surrounding the interpretation of cuts, or breaks in the films, close analysis of the films has to be undertaken in the knowledge that the Paper Prints are often incomplete versions of the original film negatives. There is the potential to misinterpret cuts or breaks in the films as intentional ‘edits’. ‘Breaks’ in a film could, for example, result from incomplete copyrighting of the film at the time, or frame loss over time for any number of reasons. Interpretation has to be undertaken on a case-by-case basis. For example, the cut from the vertical tilt to the horizontal pan in *Panorama from Times Building, NY* (AM&B, 1905) is clearly intentional and is highly likely to be an edit. Moreover, the symmetry of the two parts of the film—as demonstrated by laying out a grid of stills from the film—strongly suggests that we are seeing a complete version of the film and thus a complete edit (rather than a break in the film at about the point when an edit was intended). Whereas the Times panorama film is a fairly secure example of a complete edit, the two cuts in the Paper Print version of *New Brooklyn to New York via Brooklyn Bridge, no. 2* (Edison, 1899) are highly likely to be the result of missing frames, rather than two edits. The bridge train journey took three minutes and newspaper report of the film explicitly note that “[t]he picture occupies just the length of time in presentation that it occupied in being taken, three minutes” (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1899: 5). As such, each case has to be supported by surrounding evidence, as demonstrated in this study.

In returning now to the Paper Print Collection, background work for this study has involved a detailed analysis of Niver’s catalogue of films in order to assess the proportion of New York actuality films within the catalogue. Although Niver does provide lists of films by category, including a ‘New York’ films list, the following also includes an analysis by date and location.

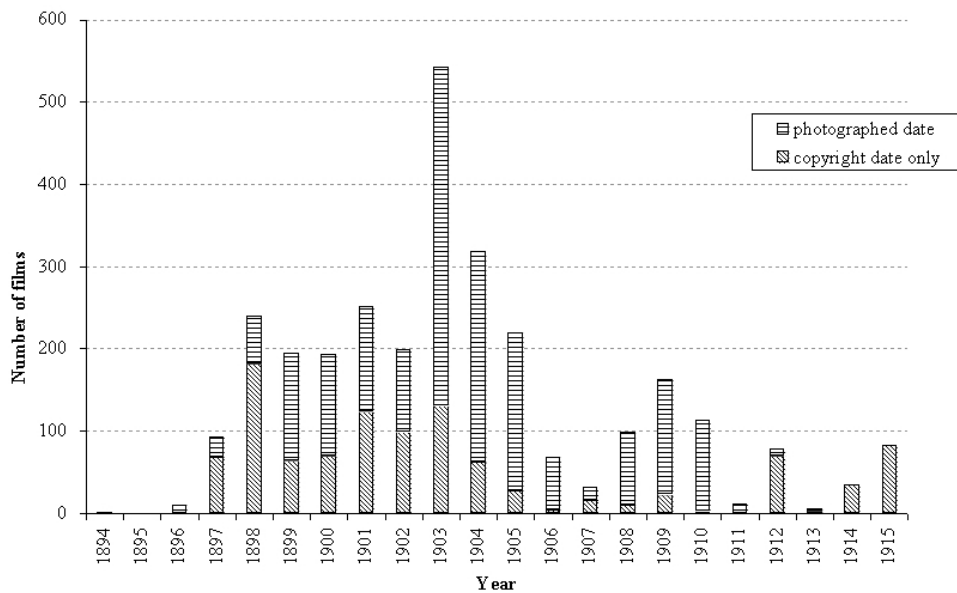


Fig. A.2 Total number of films produced per year.

Fig. A.2 shows the distribution of films per year across the 2,944 entries in Niver’s catalogue. In accordance with the film dating protocol used in this study, where available, the photographed date is used as the date for each film. For each year the graph shows both the number of films photographed and, when photographed date is not available, the number of films where copyright date only is known. The period up to 1906 is when actualities were produced, after this time story films account for almost all films submitted for copyright. Although the peak year of 1903 is usually attributed to AM&B submitting ‘reduction’ prints of films, the graph shows that 1903 was also a peak year for the number of films photographed.

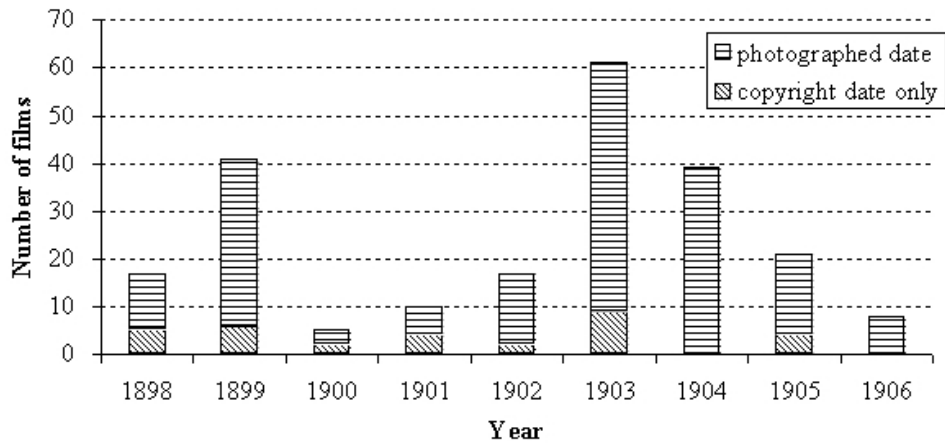


Fig. A.3 Number of New York actuality films per year.

Fig. A.3 shows the number of actuality films photographed in New York in the period from 1898 to 1906. The total is 220. Only actualities or the small number of films which include actuality scenes, such as the two 1906 AM&B films *The Skyscrapers* and *The Tunnel Workers*, are included in this graph. Although studio films were almost all filmed in the Edison and AM&B New York studios, no studio-only films are included. Again, 1903 is a peak year for photographing New York films. Fig. A.4 shows the distribution of locations across the New York actuality films. Where the location cannot be clearly identified, other than within the vicinity of New York, or where films were photographed from boats in New York Harbour, the location is listed as 'New York City'. Although the number of Manhattan films produced in each year is relatively constant, Coney Island clearly provided a popular subject in the years 1903 to 1905, as noted in Chapter 5. Lastly, Fig. A.5 shows the proportion of New York films per year, expressed as a percentage of the overall total of films for each year. The peak year of 1899, when 21% of all films were New York films, can be accounted for by the numerous films of Admiral Dewey's triumphal return.

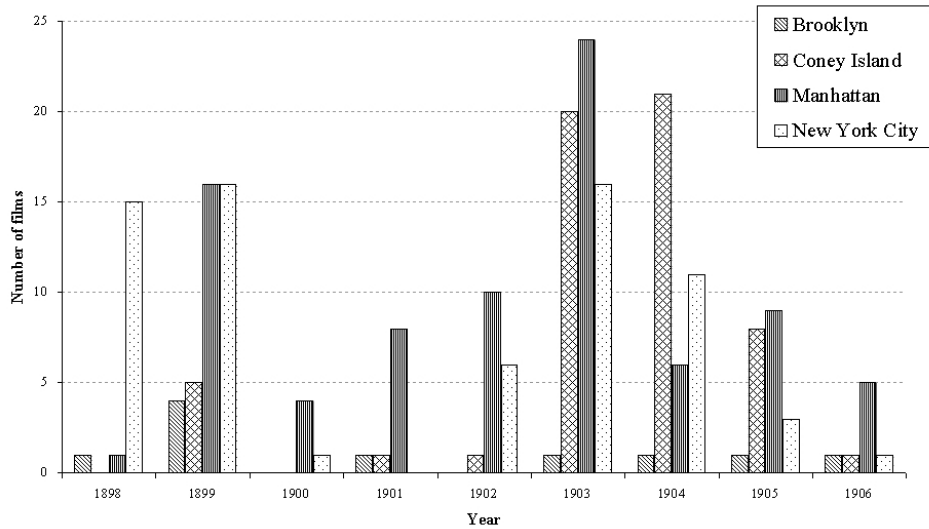


Fig. A.4 Location of New York actuality films.

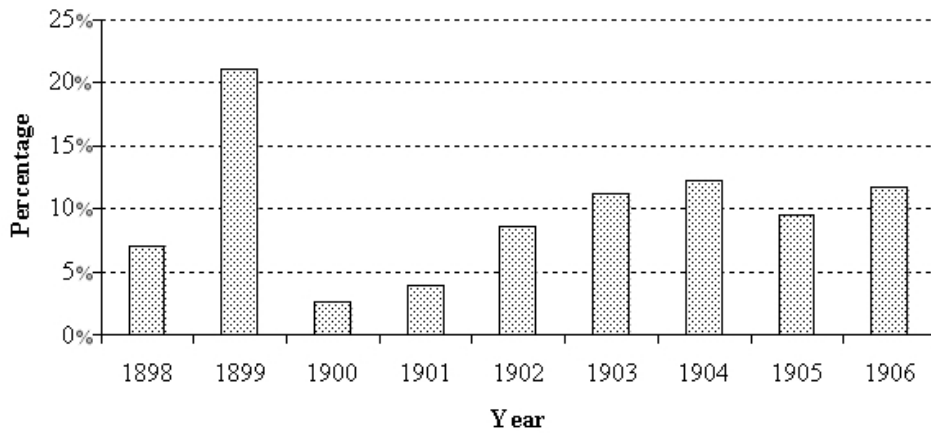


Fig. A. 5 The Proportion of New York actuality films per year.

Apart from this peak year, the years from 1902 to 1906 show that a relatively stable proportion of 10% of all films submitted for copyright were New York actualities. This 10% proportion is highly likely to be biased against the New York films given the nature of local actuality copyrighting. For example, Robert Kates Bonine could have produced films for illustrated lectures which were not copyrighted. The figure of 10% is, however, consistent with the proportion of New York panoramas as we saw in Chapter 4. What this analysis supports is the claim for the significance of New York actualities for early American cinema as a whole.