

EDWIN S. PORTER AND THE 'ORIGINS OF THE
AMERICAN NARRATIVE FILM, 1894-1907

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the traditional claim that in 1903, while an employee of the Edison Manufacturing Company, Edwin Stanton Porter discovered the principle of editing construction which made possible the fictional motion picture narrative. It will show that Edison studio policy in the period would have discouraged such an achievement and that the crucial first step in the elaboration of the early film narrative was the development of a compositional aesthetic derived from the staged or 'fake' newsreel. Based on that aesthetic between 1904 and 1907 film directors including Edwin Porter turned out a short-lived, tableau-action narrator-dependent story film in actuality style that became the basis of the nickelodeon boom dating from 1906. The social and industrial pressures engendered by that success led to the fragmentation of the complete action tableau and the displacement of the tableau narrative by a shot-dependent, autonomous narrative constrained by the formal features of actuality composition. The final chapter analyzes a leading example, the 1907 emergence of parallel editing in the production of one-reel screen tales of last-minute rescue.

RESUME

Une des plus importantes thèses soutenues par les historiens traditionnels du cinéma veut qu'Edwin Stanton Porter ait découvert en 1903, alors qu'il était employé à la compagnie Edison, le principe du montage comme condition préalable à l'émergence du récit cinématographique de fiction. Nous montrerons que la politique des studios Edison à cette époque aurait découragé semblable réalisation et que le premier pas décisif vers l'élaboration des premiers récits filmiques fut la création d'une esthétique du cadre tirant son origine des premières "actualités reconstituées". C'est sur la base d'une telle esthétique que Porter et les autres cinéastes de son temps ont conçu, entre 1904 et 1907, une forme de récit par tableaux qui nécessitait la présence d'un bonimenteur. Ce type de récit filmique, qui connut une vogue éphémère, contribua largement à l'essor des "nickelodeons" à partir de 1906. Le succès qu'a vite connu cette forme narrative provoqua une série de pressions sociales et industrielles qui conduisit à la fragmentation du tableau indépendant et au remplacement du récit par tableaux par une forme de récit autonome basé sur l'articulation de plans et soumis aux contingences de l'esthétique du film d'actualités. Notre étude se termine sur un exemple privilégié, soit l'apparition en 1907 de la structure du montage alterné à l'intérieur des courts métrages de fiction fondés sur le thème du sauvetage à la dernière minute.

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PREFACE

Knowledge is the achievement of a community. Never produced in isolation it cannot be the possession of any individual. In embarking on the research for this study of Edwin Porter's role in the development of the early film narrative I initially imagined myself working in the near privacy of a forsaken topic. It soon became clear, however, that to my good fortune there were a growing number of footprints on an island I had taken to be practically deserted. At virtually each stage of the work I encountered just the fellow castaway I needed to, some offering useful guidance and bits of previously unheard of information, others that species of constructive discouragement whose true value can only be measured in retrospect.

I am grateful to Eileen Bowser, Curator of Film, The Museum of Modern Art, above all for her dedication, her professionalism and her friendship; to Bob Summers and Jon Gartenberg, also of the Museum, for insider knowledge and specialist information; to Charles Silver of the Museum's Film Study Centre, who cheerfully tolerated the questions and demands of a neophyte film historian; to Paul Spehr of the Library of Congress, for insights based on his prodigious knowledge of the Edison studio; to Reed Abel, Curator, Edison National Historic Site, for assistance in my exploration of the uncatalogued and unindexed treasures buried there; and to J. Porter Reilly, godson of Edwin Porter and

a wonderful human being, for recounting biographical data only he possesses and for allowing me to see a draft of his own work-in-progress on Porter's life and career entitled Flicker of Glory.

It is difficult to pay proper tribute to Eileen Bowser and David Francis of the National Film Archives (London) for their work in organizing the symposium on international film production 1900-1906 at the 34th Annual Congress of the International Federation of Film Archives held in Brighton, England in May 1978. That event marked a major turning point in research on the cinema's formative years. I remain indebted to Eileen and to Paul Spehr for their invitation to me to join with other film historians in the effort to make a selection of American films for screening at Brighton. Our group, known then and since as the Brighton Group, continues to meet from time to time. My membership brought me into contact with many of the major American scholars on the period including Charles Musser, Thomas Gunning, John Fell, Russell Merritt and Jay Leyda. Conversations and exchanges of information with Charlie, Tom and John Fell have proven invaluable. And then at Brighton I encountered Barry Salt and Noel Burch.

For information supplied by letter and long distance telephone I am grateful to Kemp R. Niver whose milestone labors made the paper print records of film production in the period available to all of us.

Budd Schulberg was admirably candid in offering ideas about Porter based on his father Benjamin Percival's professional relationship with Porter. George C. Pratt gave valuable

advice in reply to a letter from a stranger. Ray Fielding patiently listened over the phone to my description of the initial formulation of some of the elements of this dissertation. And the library staff at George Eastman House in Rochester responded promptly and effectively to all my requests for photocopies of arcane material.

For making it possible for me to view hundreds of films from the period I am indebted to Eileen Bowser and the staff of the Film Department, Museum of Modern Art, to Marshall Deutelbaum at George Eastman House, to Paul Spehr, and to Robert Daudelin of the Cinémathèque québécoise, a prince, who from our very first meeting put at my disposal without conditions the extraordinary resources of a great institution.

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I am much indebted to Ken Jacobs, a great American artist, whose understanding of the film medium is unsurpassed and from whom I continue to learn important lessons about the ways in which the problems of the cinema and its history are connected to the problems of its audiences and their history.

A word of thanks is due Rosemary Lydon of the Westmount Public Library through whose efforts I was able to review microfilm of The New York Dramatic Mirror, as well as to the

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To my dissertation director, Prof. Garth Jowett, of the University of Houston, and the faculty of the Graduate Program in Communications, McGill University I am grateful for helpful assistance, encouragement and patience, to Prof. Curt Cecil, of the Department of English, McGill University, for critical comments on an unfinished draft, and to Carmen, my typist, for her knowledge of scholarly procedures and her good humor throughout a difficult task.

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And more than anyone, I owe Jeannie, to whom this work is dedicated, for always believing in me.

FOR
JEANNIE

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

. . . the cult of the new, arising out of nineteenth-century notions of personal expression, has come to dominate our thinking about art . . .

Leonard Meyer

1.1 Film Before Griffith: The Parameters of an Issue in Film History

The early history of the American narrative film has come down to us as a sentimental Victorian tale. In the standard version a mechanical babe of uncertain parentage, deposited on the doorstep of the twentieth century, frees itself from kindly but wrong-headed plebian foster parents and through the ministrations of a brilliant gentleman succeeds in realizing its true aristocratic nature. D.W. Griffith is cast as the brilliant gentleman, vaudeville first nurtured the waif, and the blue-blooded destiny was, in Arthur Knight's phrase, "the liveliest art." The plot of that larger fable assigns Edwin Stanton Porter, an Edison Kinetograph Department employee from 1900-1909, an important if secondary role: the able fireman who rescued the fledgling from the cold flames of cultural and commercial oblivion, a feat he accomplished by stumbling upon the key to its real identity.¹

While Edwin Porter has indeed been accorded a very prominent place in the early development of the narrative film not one single full-length study of the precise nature of that achievement has yet been published.² This is a little remarkable given the broad claims that have been made on behalf of his career at Edison and the way those claims have masked the realities of an emerging industry. Among the most familiar of them is that together with LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN (1903), Porter's THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY

(1903) contributed a crucial — if not the crucial — technical discovery, as Karl Reisz put it, that "the single shot, recording an incomplete action is the unit of which films must be constructed."³

It is a notion that has persisted in one form or another at least since 1912. In that year an anonymous New York Telegraph reporter wrote that Porter had "doped out many novel effects, most of which are still in favor."⁴ As recently as March 1979, it re-surfaced in the pages of Variety:

. . . the Edison-backed and Porter-fabricated 'The Great Train Robbery' became the prototype of the story-line film and as such launched an industry.

In a May 1979 follow-up maintaining that Porter had yet to receive his proper historical due, Budd Schulberg observed:

. . . 'Porter' put together our first dramatic film (LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN) . . . in time that amazing little film (THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY) inspired every one of the original handful of pioneers, . . .⁵

Those assertions have, however, been challenged by two persistent and less flattering charges. The first was that the creator of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY was without meaningful insight into his achievement. In Adolph Zukor's words, Porter was more "an artistic mechanic than a dramatic artist" and that it was precisely a mechanical imagination that produced his landmark one-reel Western.⁶ The other

4

challenge, issued by the French film historian Georges Sadoul in 1946, was that Porter borrowed his editing ideas from the British, from James Williamson and the Brighton School.⁷

The purpose of this research is to correct those conflicting views of Porter's place in early cinema history by examining his work at the Edison studio in the context of developments within the American film industry between 1894 and 1907. It was a period that witnessed the transformation of motion pictures from a private peepshow and arcade oddity to a mass commodity public spectacle. By its conclusion the illusionism of the short actualities and trick films that followed the invention of cinematography had merged in a story film with a newsreel aesthetic.

It ought to be stated quite clearly at the outset that this study is not intended as a comprehensive social history of the Edison studio, and it is not a full biographical exploration of Porter's life and career, nor, for that matter, is it an attempt at an exhaustive treatment of the beginnings of the American cinema. It takes as its starting point the legend inscribed in numerous historical accounts that in 1903 Edwin Porter, labouring in the service of The Edison Manufacturing Company, 'launched an editing revolution that transformed the American film industry and world motion picture art. The evidence of a great deal of primary data including hundreds of surviving films, film copyright records, company correspondence, litigational documents, motion picture catalogues, sales records and trade journal materials will show that the screen phenomenon

historians tended to credit Porter with and to date in 1903, the continuous narrative constructed out of edited shot fragments, made its debut circa 1907. In some kinds of historical work a four-year error is as good as a bullseye. In this instance, however, the error was a serious one, based on a misreading of the way an industrial imperative, subject to social pressures and constrained by the features of actuality composition, shaped the beginnings of a new medium.

1.2 Traditional Approaches to the Historical Meaning of Edwin Porter's Edison Studio Career

Whatever their differences, film scholars dealing with this period generally agree on the nature of the problem: the need to explain how a new 'language' or articulatory syntax emerged from the apparatus of cinematography, and how that 'language' not only spared the machine the fate of other nineteenth-century optical novelties but continues to sustain its ideological and commercial applications. Here it ought to be clear that we are not simply faced with an empirical issue an excavation of the correct facts will resolve.

The Victorian education of the first generation of film historians, whose work dates from the 1930s, is perhaps what led them to assume that biography dominated history with the result that their efforts to bestow aesthetic respectability on the new medium obliged them not merely to demon-

strate that the medium had a history, but to insist that the history of its early years in particular revealed a legitimate formal essence discovered by 'great men'. In the formulation of that conclusion some of the facts were inaccessible, others overlooked and still others distorted, by memory, by the circumstance of their recital and by the swollen hyperbole characteristic of entertainment industry pronouncements.⁸ J. Porter Reilly, the godson of Edwin Porter, has warned me against accepting all of Edwin Porter's courtroom statements on behalf of Edison interests as "the whole truth." "They were," he advised, "the truths that his employers wanted recorded."⁹

It is, of course, important to acknowledge the fact that Edwin Porter's reputation was not a nostalgic invention. In 1912 when Adolph Zukor was in search of a production chief to bring "Famous Players in Famous Plays" to the screen he had set his mind on signing up either D.W. Griffith or Edwin S. Porter — "the best of the screen directors" — for the job; THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY had, after all, helped launch Zukor's movie career.¹⁰ The fabulous commercial success the film enjoyed following its December 1, 1903 release was undeniable. According to Beaumont Newhall:

During Christmas week that year (1903), it was shown simultaneously in eleven theatres in New York City alone. Chicago reported that during the same week it made the biggest hit of any film shown in the Olympic Theatre, and from Denver came news that the Orpheum was holding it over for a second week, 'contrary to all precedent.' The film was in demand as late as 1907, when the distributor announced that the negative of this 'greatest selling film ever made' was worn out and prints could not be supplied.¹¹

Viewed in its own time, the film was applauded for its photography and verisimilitude which seemed the basis of that success. In his 1904 catalogue, George Kleine, a Chicago dealer in optical goods who had added peepshow cabinets, films, projection machines and cameras to his line of merchandise, offered potential exhibitors the following analysis of the drawing power of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY:

The explanation of the success of The Great Train Robbery lies in this: it follows accurately . . . what a perfect film should be. In photography it is beautiful, only one scene of the fourteen being somewhat dark: that where the passengers pile out of the coaches with 'hands up.' In the treatment of the story it is matchless. From the first appearance of the hold up men in the railroad telegraph office, throughout the various chapters of the story, to the final killing of the bandits, the observer finds his interest rising, reaching its highest point at the end. He sees inexorable fate bearing down upon the malefactors, pursuing them with irresistible force, until with a heavy hand it strikes them down . . . 12

As far as Kleine was concerned the impact of the film did not lie in its having broken any new cinematographic ground. Quite the contrary, not only did the film comply with the established canons of skillful photography, but in what was referred to as its sequence of "chapters" — rather than shots or even scenes — it apparently obeyed very sound Coleridgean narrative principles as well.

Curiously, William "Billy" Bitzer, who was for many years Griffith's cameraman and who worked for Biograph at the time of the release of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, had a somewhat different recollection, one more concerned with the motion picture's battle for cultural legitimacy:

Up to the Birth of a Nation, Social Status uncertain.
 then Prize fights made it definitely low brow.
 Development of narrative.
 From bits of low comedy, came the joining together of dissociated photographic images.
The Great Train Robbery.¹³ [My emphasis/]

Bitzer may have been encouraged by his reading of a later generation of film writers to remember things that way; it is difficult to say.

Porter's own views first appeared in an article by George Blaisdell published in The Moving Picture World in December 1912. On the basis of an interview with Porter shortly after he joined Zukor, Blaisdell declared that it was at Edison that Porter "originated the plan of producing pictures which is followed today — of inserts, switchbacks and follow up." THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY was mentioned in passing. Blaisdell, who assigned LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN a 1900 production date, called it the "first dramatic production of the Edison company." It is, however, unclear whether those were ideas that Blaisdell got from Porter or conclusions he arrived at on his own.¹⁴ In a piece Porter wrote for the same publication two years later there was no direct mention of those technical accomplishments nor a single reference to THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY. Dating FIREMAN in 1899, the innovation Porter said it inaugurated was "the dramatic story in motion pictures."¹⁵

In 1920, Terry Ramsaye began work on the series of articles for Photoplay Magazine that would become his two-volume A Million and One Nights, published in 1926.

In the chapter entitled "The Story Picture is Born" Ramsaye apparently took his cue from Porter's statement that the success of *LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN* initiated the story film era. To enhance his fulsome tribute to Thomas Alva Edison, Ramsaye identified the film with "the emergence of the narrative idea . . . in the Edison studios "where, as he put it, "the art of film was born."¹⁶ On the other hand, Benjamin Hampton, in his History of the American Film Industry (1931), made no mention of Porter's fire rescue drama. The importance of *THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY*, he noted, was that it signified a major shift in motion picture length. Within a year or two of its production "one thousand feet became standardized as 'one reel', the screening time of a reel being about fourteen minutes, sufficient to present a short story or the essentials of a stage play."¹⁷

In France, Bardèche and Brasillach (1935) tended to dismiss the American cinema of the period as an amusement commodity derived from arty European models. *THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY*, they wrote, was,

. . . the first narrative film in America . . . the first genuine expression of the national spirit . . . Its success established a whole school: burglaries and criminal assaults were to be the order of the day.¹⁸

Setting an image of the grasping American, Edison, beside their own gentle Gallic Méliès, Bardèche and Brassillach scorned the Porter film as aptly metaphoric of the fierce conditions that appeared to them to prevail within the

young unscrupulous 'new world' industry:

. . . it is rather significant that the industry in America developed as a series of guerilla wars between gangs armed literally as well as figuratively.

In the sense that it marked the start of the discourse on the historical meaning of Porter's Edison production the work of Ramsaye, Hampton and Bardèche and Brasillach revealed some of the problem that arose out of the effort to fit the medium's first decade into a framework bounded by its total story. Moreover, a serious conceptual difficulty not readily apparent in, say, Ramsaye's lively, upbeat account may be read out of the later, opposing views about Porter's Edison career argued by Lewis Jacobs and Georges Sadoul. Because their conclusions have more or less defined the Porter debate since 1940, and in some quarters continue to do so, those conclusions are worth dealing with in some detail.

1.2.1 Lewis Jacobs: Edwin Porter as Original Genius

A great admirer of the Russian directors of the twenties, Eisenstein and Pudovkin, Lewis Jacobs believed they had developed "a unique body of concrete principles which have become the basis of all modern film making."

The Russian emphasis on image juxtaposition, he said, ~~was~~

. . . was more profound than the German emphasis upon camera eye and camera mobility; it was nearer the essence of film art . . . the camera was an essential but . . . subordinate tool to the cutting process. [My emphasis] 20

The aesthetic transformation of motion pictures, Jacobs argued some years later, was achieved when a

. . . revolutionary form of composition peculiar to 'screen art was discovered and developed. Professionally called 'editing', this was a method of organization which linked a series of shots or scenes together, and by combining and arranging them in a specific order, created a specific meaning. 21

If Georges Méliès was, as Méliès himself had declared, the first to perceive the theatrical possibilities of cinema, Edwin Porter, by improving on Méliès, said Jacobs, was "the first to push the cinema toward the cinematic way." Echoing Ramsaye in crediting Porter as "the father of the story film," Jacobs went on to elaborate his interpretation of Porter's historical importance in terms of an essentialist notion of the movie-as-art:

It was Porter who discovered that the art of motion pictures depends on the continuity of shots, not on the shots alone. Not content with Méliès' artificially arranged scenes, Porter distinguished the movies from other theatrical forms and gave them the invention of editing. Almost all motion picture developments since Porter's discovery spring from the principle of editing, which is the basis of motion picture artistry.²²

According to Jacobs, in addition to the discovery of the principle of editing introduced in LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN, Porter's contributions to the evolution of the narrative film included direct story construction in THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY — from the methods of the FIREMAN film — contrast construction in THE EX-CONVICT (1904), parallel construction in THE KLEPTOMANIAC (1905), new social subject matter and novel camera devices in DREAM OF A RABBIT FIEND (1906) and an enlarged scale of production in UNCLE TOM'S CABIN (1903). All those innovations, Jacobs claimed, were inspired by Porter's imaginative response to the work of Méliès:

In the laboratory Porter had the opportunity to handle and examine the 'magical films' of this French director at first hand. Impressed by their length and arrangement, he scrutinized them closely, noting that they contained more than one scene or camera shot and that the scenes were strung together progressively to illustrate a story. Porter hit upon the idea that he also might make stories by cutting and joining, in a certain order, scenes that he had already shot.²³

That experience led, Jacobs concluded, more or less directly to the production of LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN, the "first American dramatic film." It was, said Jacobs, "unique,

depending for meaning upon its combination of shots into scenes."

This process of cutting film, recombining and rearranging its units, is now known as editing and is what makes a film expressive.

But Jacobs, who was working with the scenario published in the 1903 Edison catalogue rather than the film itself, tended, given his basic premise, to anticipate an effect rather than describe the actual impact of the FIREMAN film. As he himself acknowledged with a certain reluctance:

It was not until ten years later . . . that the shot as a single element in a scene of many elements was to be fully understood and used by film makers.²⁴

Moreover, he hedged the claim somewhat with the statement that "Porter himself . . . was aware of few of the implications of what he had attempted."²⁵ Nevertheless, the basic view that Edwin Porter mapped out the direction of a cine-matic art by extending and improving on the discoveries of Méliès has recurred, with minor variations, in the work of many academic and popular writers of film history.

1.2.2 Georges Sadoul and the Brighton School: Porter as Plagiarist

In 1946 the French film historian Georges Sadoul, who shared Lewis Jacobs' estimate of the achievements of the Soviet cinema, proposed a radically different view of Edwin Porter's place in early film history, one that directly challenged Jacobs' claims with respect both to Porter's originality and to the link between his work and the films of Méliès. The creators of editing, Sadoul maintained, were two Englishmen, G.A. Smith and James Williamson, "who patterned their work on the fortuitous and unconscious discoveries of newsreel photographers . . . themselves the imitators or disciples of Louis Lumière."²⁶ In an argument based, as Jacobs' was, almost entirely on available catalogue descriptions, Sadoul vigorously disputed the fact that there was any meaningful relationship between the procedures of Méliès and those of Porter. Porter's FIREMAN film was, Sadoul declared, directly inspired by Williamson's FIRE! (1901) in the same way that THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY owed its method to Frank Mottershaw's THE ROBBERY OF A MAIL COACH (1903), completed a few months before Porter's Western.²⁷

No admirer of Edwin Porter, Sadoul, in a revised version of his article published the following year, referred to "the palpable wretchedness of the famous THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY" and reiterated the basic tenets of his case. To the contributions of Smith, Williamson and Mottershaw, he

added that of Alfred Collins, "the first to obtain really dramatic effects from the methods discovered almost by chance by topical cameramen."²⁸

Sadoul employed the term ubiquity — an effect Alfred Hitchcock in his interview with François Truffaut some twenty years later would describe as "putting the camera inside the action" — to identify the spatio-temporal character of the method and to distinguish it from Méliès' linear arrangement of photographed scenes.

Sadoul's view has been both hotly disputed and accepted with varying shades of qualification. In a 1947 letter to Hollywood Quarterly Theodore Huff challenged the French historian's claim that montage, the close-up and the chase were first introduced to motion picture narratives by the Brighton school in 1900. The contention, he argued, had only enthusiastic catalogue descriptions and other written material to support it. At the same time, Huff was not any more impressed with Lewis Jacobs' conclusions about the historical significance of LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN.²⁹ Fulton (1960), a stalwart disciple of the Jacobs' theory, also questioned Sadoul's allegations. There was, he said, no evidence that Porter had ever actually seen the work of the Brighton school.³⁰ According to Gessner (1962), LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN was "the film which most dramatically demonstrated that a unique art is possible in cinema." Williamson, he said, was the mentor of Porter, just as Porter had been the mentor of Griffith.³¹ Macgowan

(1965) found that LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN was an improvement on the devices employed in Smith's MARY JANE'S MISHAP (1901) and Williamson's ATTACK ON A CHINA MISSION (1900). But, he too believed, the British did do it first: "The true chase — which because of its very nature can't help being cinematic — appeared first in English films." There was little doubt, said Macgowan, that the origins of the Porter film were to be found in R.W. Paul's PLUCKED FROM THE BURNING (1900) and Williamson's FIRE!³² Commenting on Lewis Jacobs' claim that Porter owed his inspiration to Méliès, Mitry (1967) said it would have been improbable for Porter to have completely ignored the work of Smith and Williamson. Mitry otherwise rejected the substance of the Sadoul hypothesis.³³

Deslandes and Richard (1968) argued that the Brighton school never consisted of more than two individuals — Smith and Williamson. Sadoul, they said, belonged to a generation of film journalists that had witnessed the triumph of montage, notably in the Soviet cinema 1925-1930, which was what led them to focus on the origins of montage in the history of cinema and to give it a place of special prominence. The scenario of LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN appeared to them to describe a near-classic sequence of scenes employed for some fifty years previously in magic lantern slide shows.³⁴ As far as Slide (1970) was concerned, the debt Porter's FIREMAN owed to the Brighton school and to Williamson's FIRE! in particular was "obvious".³⁵

In a paper published in 1978, Barry Salt came out strongly on the side of Sadoul. Porter's FIREMAN was, Salt claimed, little more than an imitation of James Williamson's FIRE!; also, that Porter had seen Mottershaw's DARING DAYLIGHT BURGLARY before he made THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY and that Porter's STOLEN BY GYPSIES (1905) also owed most of its appeal to "the method of overall construction stemming from FIRE!"³⁶

On the occasion of a 1940 interview with The New York Times a year before his death, Porter remembered the circumstances that led to the production of LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN this way:

. . . many of the vaudeville houses and theatres where pictures were being shown as addenda to the regular bills began to drop these programs. I felt that there was nothing wrong with the screen itself, but that the public was becoming tired of the short, single scene type of newsreel films that predominated then. From laboratory examination of some of the popular story films of the French pioneer director Méliès — trick pictures like 'A Trip to the Moon' — I came to the conclusion that a picture telling a story in continuity form might draw the customers back to the theatres, and set to work in this direction.³⁷

What appears to be Porter's sole reference to the Brighton group occurred in 1904. His identification of the British film makers with a collective and identifiable 'genre', revealed less a shrewd technical understanding of the medium than a deliberate avoidance of the Brighton model by the Edison company. What the British subjects re-

presented to Porter at that point was an imported fad —
 "chase pictures":

I remember one entitled "A Day Light (sic) Burglary" in which a thief or burglar is pursued by persons endeavoring to capture him. I remember another film in which a pickpocket is pursued, another in which poachers are pursued and another in which train robbers are pursued.³⁸

But as we shall see, if indeed Porter came under the influence of the Brighton school it was mainly through the Edison studio policy dating from the late summer of 1904 of re-making Brighton-inspired Biograph hits.³⁹

The concept of everything-after-nothing-before editing structure has not turned out to be any more fruitful because it has been international in scope. Danish director Viggo Larsen's fake wildlife documentary LION HUNTING (1907) is a good case in point. For a time the film was thought to contain advanced cross-cutting between three different locations. Interviewed in 1954 by film historian Marguerite Engberg, Larsen told her that the cutting had not been an attempt to innovate the narrative but was imposed by the production concept. In trying to supply a simulated impression of an African jungle safari he was obliged to exclude from the frame the bars of a zoo cage in one of the sequences, which he joined to two others, of the rented lions on an island and in a wood, to complete the illusion. Larsen, in other words, was striving for a big you-are-there scene by manipulating actuality compositional features including camera angle, camera position and

frame edge.⁴⁰

1.2.3 The Problem of Media

Without in any way denying the international character of early motion picture development, one may conclude that the Jacobs-Sadoul disagreement over details set in lucid relief a concurrence with regard to essentials: that the discovery and application of an unprecedented editing procedure initiated the historical appearance of an ideal screen form — the cinematic — and that film historians who wished to account for that phenomenon needed simply to compile a descriptive chronology of its progressive evolution, taking care to emphasize the factors of originality and individual influence. But to perceive the formal stylistic intricacy rendered by a complex interaction of social, economic, cultural and technical factors as some sort of natural donné inherent in the apparatus of movie making is to deny the very existence of an historical issue. Moreover, the ideology of progress implicit in such a view invariably sends one off in search of the appropriate concatenation of unique discoveries, refinements and modifications.

It is a perspective that seems, in part, to have originated in the need, articulated by an earlier generation of historians and theorists, to convert what began as a

lowly fairground gimmick into a respectable art form. . The problem was twofold: it was first necessary to deny, or at any rate to minimize, the novelty of motion pictures; at the same time, it appeared crucial to demonstrate that the new medium possessed an essence thus entitling it to the status of an art.

To achieve the first of those goals, film writers outlined a case for the origins of motion pictures in a past that anticipated the invention of cinematography and its commercial exploitation dating either from the 1894 Edison kinoscope debut or the Lumière Brothers 1895 screen projections. It was important, in other words, to assign to the machinery and the money the very smallest of roles.

Searching for the origins of movies in a dim and distant era, one writer found evidence of cinema thinking in a passage by Lucretius; another half-seriously wondered whether we ought not to regard the cave drawings of pre-history as some sort of paleolithic film festival produced and viewed in the flicker vision of torchlight.⁴¹ Others identified the parentage of movies in a range of pre-filmic media. For Rudolf Arnheim, the motion picture with its debt to dance, pantomime and theatre, was simply a "recent manifestation" of the older art of the moving image, an art "as old as humanity itself."⁴² Sergei M. Eisenstein made a point of acknowledging the ancestors of montage in the short fiction of du Maupassant, the iconographic design of da Vinci and the poetry of Milton.⁴³ The cinema, said

André Bazin, represented the realization of an age-old dream.⁴⁴ C.W. Ceram, who distinguished the cinema as idea from the technology of cinematography and insisted that there was no cinema until the invention of the technical apparatus in the nineteenth century, went against the grain.⁴⁵ Aside from the commitment to one or another of those origins, in much of the theoretical work in film we generally find the delineation of an ideal or essential screen form toward which the cinema evolved or should have evolved, whether that ideal is represented by the intricacies of montage, as Eisenstein claimed, or the everything-in-the-shot vision of Bazin.⁴⁶

Let us consider an early and by no means obscure example. In 1934, Iris Barry, who was at work setting up the film library at The Museum of Modern Art, enlisted the assistance of the well-known art critic Erwin Panofsky to present a lecture at Princeton University in support of the aesthetic values of film. The talk, Barry felt, was crucial: "What snob could now venture to doubt that films were art."⁴⁷ Apparently, it was necessary to persuade influential and wealthy skeptics that Barry's project was worthwhile.

Panofsky's text, first published in 1934, re-appeared in slightly revised form in 1947 as the often-cited "Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures." It contained any number of striking perceptions based on a first-hand knowledge of the works of the then forty-year-old art. Those perceptions were, however, in turn derived from a very particular concep-

tion of the specificity of the film medium. As Panofsky expressed it:

The medium of the movies is physical reality as such To prestylize reality prior to tackling it amounts to dodging the problem. The problem is to manipulate and shoot unstylized reality in such a way that the result has style.⁴⁸

Panofsky was no less explicit about the historical implications of this view, much more explicit in fact than most:

The legitimate paths of evolution were opened, not by running away from the folk art character of the primitive film but by developing it within the limits of its own possibilities. Those primordial archetypes of film productions on the folk art level — success or retribution, sentiment, sensation, pornography, and crude humor — could blossom forth into genuine history, tragedy and romance, crime and adventure, and comedy, as soon as it was realized that they could be transfigured — not by the artificial injection of literary values but by the exploitation of the unique and specific possibilities of the new medium. ⁴⁹ [My emphasis]

The notion that different media have essentially different characteristics and properties which in turn ought to restrict the uses to which any medium may be put dates from classical times. Among its sources in modernist criticism was an essay written by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in 1766 entitled Laokoon.⁵⁰ In part a protest against the inclination to confuse the arts, to draw parallels between, say, painting and poetry, its major impetus appears to have been an historical situation in which traditional forms of authority, including critical authority, were crumbling.

It was a period that witnessed the beginnings of the novel in England, the melodrama and the notion of the avant-garde in France, experiments in chemistry and optics that facilitated the invention of photography and a rising demand for reproduced images. Those developments were accompanied by a falling away of aristocratic patronage. Society grew increasingly unable to justify the inevitability of its particular cultural forms: "All the verities invoked by religion, authority, tradition, style were thrown into question."⁵¹ From the point of view of art criticism, media prescriptivism, with its classical precedents, was a shelter for critics seeking protection from the storm. In search of a new source of authority, Lessing apparently hoped to find one in the formal properties of media; it was after all necessary not so much to shore up a decaying classical ideal as the very act of critical judgment upon which that ideal had rested.

For modernists such as Lewis Jacobs and Georges Sadoul, attempting to come to grips with the beginnings of a new medium almost two hundred years later, the dilemma remained: in the absence of a coherent theory of cultural novelty acts of critical and historical judgment were subordinated to the problem of media, which is to say, to the task of underwriting the authenticity of a range of cultural practices on formal, sociological or political grounds.⁵² Following the example of Jacobs and Sadoul, historians have in the main seized on the formal route to legitimacy, viz. that film was an art form because it possessed an essence consisting

of shot-by-shot construction. The major consequence of that premise was incisively summarized by Jean-Louis Comolli when he complained that historical studies, "empiricist in method and idealist in their concept of cinema" were excessively preoccupied by "that chain of inaugurations of technical and stylistic procedures" he referred to as "the fetishization of the first time."⁵³ Ironically, the quest for the great formal discovery that would grant movies indisputable status and legitimacy, as well as the man who discovered it, led Lewis Jacobs to look in the least likely of places, the Edison studio circa 1903.

In his brief review of early cinema history, Christian Metz argued that the specific signifying procedures first generated by the cinema were the result of a confrontation with "the problem of narration," the procedures themselves "perfected in the wake of the narrative endeavor." Edwin Porter, along with James Williamson, Georges Méliès and D.W. Griffith, were, he claimed, "the pioneers of 'cinematographic language.'" Metz said it was the "role" of Griffith to define and stabilize, i.e., "to codify" the function of those procedures in a "syntax" or "syntagmatic category" in relation to "the filmic narrative."⁵⁴

But that, it would seem, is simply to re-state the traditional view in fashionable language, particularly with respect to the notion of the presence of a unique narrative syntax in the cogs and gears of the photographic apparatus. A recent book-length study about the impact of early-century American Progressivism on the motion picture industry makes it clear that the "narrative endeavor" was answerable to other than purely formalist interrogators.⁵⁵

Concealing an overbearing formalist goal in a mildly auteurist slant, most formulations of Porter's role in the beginnings of the narrative film, with their absorption in the evolution of a cinematic "code", have not, until quite recently, allowed for much attention to the real social and industrial influences on the elaboration of that code. A more careful examination shows that it was not a great artist alone but the massive industrial success of the motion picture narrative in its early nickelodeon phase, as well as the apparent social influence of that success, that produced the conditions for what Metz called stabilization. Both Ramsaye, who celebrated what he saw as Edwin Porter's invention of the story film, and Jacobs, who associated Porter with the discovery of editing construction, did refer their conclusions to the nickelodeon boom, but only for the demotic vote of approval it appeared to confer on their claims.

In sharp contrast is Jean-Louis Comolli's overtly materialist hypothesis. Comolli pointed out that the Lumières' December 28, 1895 show of short actuality subjects in the basement of the Grand Café in Paris did not demonstrate the practical capability of their projection device. That had been done at a technical exposition a few months earlier. What was important about the December screening, he suggested, was that the public was invited to witness the marvel for an admission fee. Thus, Comolli concluded, it was the medium's commercial potential, linked to an ideology of reproduction, rather than any age-old dream or new invention that turned the theatrical motion picture into a twentieth-century cultural reality.⁵⁶ The problem is that Comolli articulated the case for the role of commerce in too extreme and facile a way that reduced to a parody of historical analysis leaving the notions of Ramsaye, Jacobs and Sadoul cracked but intact.

1.2.4 The Paper Print Collection

For some time first-hand historical research on early American film production was virtually impossible to do. Substantial portions of the motion picture subjects did not become generally available until the completion of the Library of Congress Paper Print Collection project in 1961.⁵⁷ Prior to that date there were very few sources of access to the material. The formation of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) did not occur until 1938. Before the establishment of the first film archives in

Berlin, Paris, London and New York around 1935, there was little chance to view a film more than two years old, the span of a normal distribution cycle.⁵⁸ In that year both the British Film Institute and The Museum of Modern Art Film Library came into being. Experiments to discover a method of transferring the bromide paper print film rolls submitted for copyright between 1894-1912 to cellulose acetate film only began in 1942, three years after the publication of The Rise of the American Film; completion of the project would take almost another twenty years.

On the other hand, genuine questions have been raised about the completeness and authenticity of the 3,001 restored paper print titles. As Anthony Slide observed:

Too many films have disappeared completely, and even more remain as just titles in trade papers.

Even when it is possible to view these early productions, one can never be positive that the print one is seeing is exactly as its maker intended it to be seen; has not been re-edited or in any other way tampered with at some later date.⁵⁹

It is quite true that a surviving print may bear little relation to the original. Let us briefly consider one of the Edison company's films about the assassination of President McKinley. Titled COMPLETE FUNERAL CORTEGE in the 1901 catalogue, it was not registered for copyright as such but in parts.⁶⁰ One of those parts, TAKING MCKINLEY'S BODY FROM TRAIN AT CANTON, OHIO, appears to include in its six shots portions of three of the others. A special print prepared exclusively for copyright purposes,

it was never sold, exhibited or otherwise seen in the form in which it has survived, which is to say, as a masterfully-photographed, economically-edited, late-century TV news item. The six shots break down as follows:

- Shot #1: A high angled medium view of the flag-and-flower draped coffin being taken off the train and carried to the right by navy pall bearers;
- Shot #2: A matching view of the cortège moving to the right past the corner of a building;
- Shot #3: The coffin carried by navy men moving in a soft diagonal right to left and cut off at the bottom of the frame;
- Shot #4: A closer view from the same angle with some visual evidence of a break in the footage;
- Shot #5: A reverse angle showing the rear of the procession and the coffin being loaded onto the hearse;
- Shot #6: The rear of the hearse from another angle, after the coffin has been loaded onto it.

A viewing of the print out of context might readily persuade an unsuspecting film historian that he or she had "discovered" an example of sophisticated editing construction a full two years before its legendary 1903 debut.

At another level of authenticity there is the less obvious though more serious problem that the paper print material conveys at best a shorthand indication of the full character of the film experience in its first years. The inevitable quality loss afflicting available prints appears to make something of an implicit case for the dramatics

of edited narrative sequences. Paper print collection images absolutely lack the extraordinary impression of action in depth and sharply etched detail of prints produced from original negatives. I was privileged to view a reel of such material transferred to 35mm format from the original 68mm Biograph negatives. The powerful appeal of the compositional effects of depth and framing in A TRIP ON A MONORAIL (189?) and DELHI DURBAR ELEPHANTS (189?) might have rendered unnecessary the formal delights of intricately edited stories.⁶¹ Viewing the 16mm paper print footage one may be inclined to wonder precisely what it was that so thrilled vaudeville audiences and reviewers alike and according to one New York Clipper reporter, "called forth storms of applause" and encore calls when those images were first projected on New York City screens in 1896.⁶²

Assuming, as Slide has warned, that many films are missing, perhaps forever, how many is too many? In the case of Porter, a complete filmography is virtually impossible to compile. Copyright records at the Edison National Historic Site in West Orange, New Jersey make it possible to determine all the subjects he photographed between May 1903 and October 1909. On a number of those subjects, such as RESCUED FROM AN EAGLE'S NEST (1908), he filmed action directed by others. Are they all then to be loosely labeled "Porter" films? The same sort of hard empirical record of his work before May 1903 does not exist at the Edison site; apparently it was destroyed in a fire.⁶³ Given the fact that James White was officially in charge of the Edison

studio in the years before 1903 and that White, unlike the department managers who succeeded him possessed his own photographic skills, the problem of determining Porter's output between the fall of 1900, when he joined the company on a full-time basis, and the spring of 1903, when White left for Europe, seems considerable. To add to the difficulty, the record shows that the Edison company in that period copyrighted a number of films, both American and foreign, that they did not produce and did not copyright all the films they offered for sale.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the Niver paper print collection does not contain any Edison production after October 1905. At that point the company elected to protect their longer multi-shot subjects by submitting only individual photographs representing a film's separate scenes rather than bromide paper rolls.⁶⁵

It must therefore be conceded that we are working with a flawed corpus of primary material. On the other hand, we may assume that that even with this problem, real as it is, the information and data gaps are more than adequately bridged by the sort of general redundancy that characterizes any production domain. Moreover, it does appear enormously unlikely that a hidden storehouse of footage and documentation will someday be unearthed so radically different as to compel a substantial alteration, on empirical grounds alone, of hypotheses based on existing material.

Even if the persuasiveness of the paper prints as evidence is not absolute, their value in having preserved important features of film production from that period is, for all that,

substantial and invaluable. A good example is the controversy, only recently resolved, over the existence of two very different versions of Porter's *LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN*. In the final scene of the Pathé print, acquired by the film library of The Museum of Modern Art in 1944, there is intercutting between the interior and the exterior of the burning building, in accordance with the museum's "Jamison continuity" of photographic stills published in Jacobs' text. The paper print version held by the Library of Congress, on the other hand, does not contain this montage. Here the rescue of the mother and child is rendered as a temporally overlapping action; the event is seen first from the interior, followed by an exterior view without the intercutting.⁶⁶

To add to the confusion, over the years different writers chose to reproduce the Edison studio scenario description, especially the problematic final scene, differently. Karl Reisz, unlike Jacobs or any of the other writers, divided the scene description into three paragraphs but like Jacobs used italics for references to the dissolves.⁶⁷ Pratt explained his decision to eliminate the italics this way:

The Supplement synopsis of the film indicates dissolves between the scenes; they will not be found in all prints, but could have been supplied originally in the printing.⁶⁸

He might have added that there were no italics in the original 1903 catalogue outline. Pratt was probably aware

that at the time he was writing there were at least two very different prints of the film extant. There are now three. A few years ago Lawrence Karr, a staff member at The American Film Institute, located a nitrate print dating from 1903 or 1904 in Maine. Different from both of the others — the dissolves had been eliminated but it showed the final scene as an overlapping action without the intercutting — it appeared to confirm the authenticity of the Library of Congress print restored by Kemp Niver. Based on the paperprint version of the film and related materials, two recent studies have conclusively refuted the longstanding claim that LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN's cross-cut concluding sequence represented a remarkable leap forward in editing technique.⁶⁹

1.2.5 Early Film History After the Paper Print Collection

That both Lewis Jacobs and Georges Sadoul — and many of their disciples — worked almost exclusively from studio catalogues and related documents makes it clear that their preconceptions, lacking much of an empirical basis, would not be immediately dispelled by the availability of more abundant documentation, including the films themselves. That conclusion is supported by the earliest studies based on the paper print collection.

The first was Richard Arlo Sanderson's University of Southern California doctoral dissertation, "A Historical Study of the Development of American Motion Picture Content and Techniques Prior to 1904." A sample of 681 films,

both fiction and nonfiction, produced before 1904 was used. Sanderson stated that he chose that cut-off date in part as a convenience, as a way of dealing with the massive amount of material available to him. Behind the convenience was the apparent fact that 1903 was "the commonly accepted date for the birth of the story film."⁷⁰

Though Sanderson made no reference whatsoever to Sadoul, his findings were oddly Sadoul's. His major conclusion was that a range of motion picture techniques, including panning, tracking and dolly movement, tilts, long, medium and close shots of the same subject, reverse angles and continuity editing, emerged inadvertently from the efforts of early newsreel cameramen, working with unwieldy equipment and in conditions over which they had very limited control, to bring back simple records of actual events. For whatever reason, Sanderson did not attempt to apply that fine insight directly to Porter's work. Curiously, his comments on Porter were drawn entirely from various re-statements of the Jacobs position by Vardac, Griffith and Mayer, Knight and Franklin.⁷¹

Adopting a point of view that also corresponded to the one spelled out by Jacobs, Kemp Niver stressed "the transition from 'instant' movies to planned ones" and the difficulty of pinpointing the precise date — assuming there was one — when that transition occurred.⁷² For Niver, the Porter problem simply reduced to inadequate acknowledgement of pre-production thinking or incorrect dating of the technical innovations that reflected such thinking.

Thus: Porter's construction of a geared camera mount that made possible the panning effect in CIRCULAR PANORAMA OF ELECTRIC TOWER (1901); the earlier appearance of the matte technique, considered an innovation in THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY (1903), in UNCLE JOSH AT THE MOVING PICTURE SHOW (1902); the appearance, in THE TWENTIETH CENTURY TRAMP (1902), of the identical panoramic view seen in DREAM OF A RAREBIT FIEND (1906).⁷³

More recent studies possess a number of advantages.⁷⁴ They are based not only on the paper print collection but on a thorough examination of company documents and copyright records as well as trade journal reports and advertising. In addition, film historians today feel little need to use their work to proclaim the aesthetic values and social status of movies. Likewise, there has been considerable atrophy of the commitment to the quest for the man who discovered the essence of an art form. Moreover, we have witnessed the appearance of early film history specialists much less concerned than an earlier generation to make their findings fit a grand historical design, quite unwilling to hurry on from Edison and the Lumière brothers past Porter, Méliès and Williamson to D.W. Griffith and beyond.

Together with an inclination to face the mechanical and commercial facts of film head on and to see in industrial necessity, if not a source of inspiration then at least a circumstance demanding a rational accommodation, the major shift in current research has been a fruitful attention to

the non-montage features of the first narratives. We have the work of John Fell and Charles Harpole on the treatment of space through compositional strategies; Martin Sopocy's mapping of the transformation of stage performance into screen performance in the work of James Williamson; Barry Salt's exploration of lighting technique; Jon Gartenberg's treatment of camera movement; and Thomas Gunning's insights into the ways in which the great popularity of motion pictures elicited a social response that in turn altered their thematic narrative content.

The issue of editing construction and its initial appearance has not disappeared. Eileen Bowser's survey of international film production in the years 1900-1906 revealed evidence of multi-shot narratives, which is to say of a type of editing, before 1903 but no real trend to longer films until the late months of 1904. Charles Musser found that Porter's *LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN*, his "early cinema", represented an obsolete, backward-looking mode of screen entertainment, one derived from the nineteenth-century lantern slide show. In a paper completed at about the same time André Gaudreault wondered whether *THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY* did not contain a certain adumbration of parallel action and as such constituted a precocious if inadvertant flash-forward to a happier cinema future. The research of Thomas Gunning, Charles Musser and Martin Sopocy has demonstrated that in the period 1903-1906, the one in which Edwin Porter was supposed to be working great miracles in the Edison lab, the story film, Porter's as well as those

of Williamson, Biograph, Lubin and Vitagraph, was a discontinuous tableau-action, lecturer-dependent vaudeville house sensation.⁷⁵ The later shot-fragmentation of its complete-action scenes, it has been found, coincided with the height of the nickelodeon boom and, in part, represented an industrial adjustment to new market conditions.⁷⁶ All in all, a fresh set of facts and ideas have become available that taken together point to a fascinating development that has so far remained undefined.

1.3 From News Fake to Art Form: An Alternate Hypothesis

If the more recent studies of the Porter problem have found no great editing discovery at the Edison studio in 1903 it would nevertheless be incorrect to conclude that the development of the early American film narrative was an altogether random one or that Edwin Porter had no role in that development. Not only does the evidence make a solid case against the traditional view of Porter's Edison studio achievement, it offers a compelling argument on behalf of the primacy in the initial development of the narrative of the compositional features of screen reportage.

While the favorite account of what occurred in the American cinema before Griffith took up his duties at Biograph has centered on Porter's 1903 "discovery" of shot-by-shot construction, Porter's 1904 catalogue description of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY promoted the film's audience appeal in terms of an altogether different sort of technical triumph:

"It has been posed and acted in faithful duplication of the genuine 'Hold Ups' made famous by various outlaw bands of the far West."⁷⁷ [My emphasis] By 1903, the faithful duplication, which is to say the application of news-reel styles to staged topical narratives generally referred to as re-constituted newsreels, re-enactments and reproductions, had been reasonably well-established by American producers.

Fred J. Balshofer described how in 1899 the Lubin company "faked championship bouts by using matched doubles for the boxers and staging the round-by-round action from newspaper accounts." Balshofer worked on the production of a one-reel re-enactment of the January 26, 1906 shooting of Stanford White by Harry K. Thaw. Later in the same year he tried his hand at a reproduction of the San Francisco earthquake and fire:

. . . we staged tumbling buildings made from cardboard profiles, but even with the smoke that we used for effects and the silhouettes of the cardboard buildings, the scenes looked like fakes.⁷⁸

The 1898-1899 manufacture of Spanish-American war footage is one of the better-known examples of the practice. Others included Edison's Boer War scenes fought in New Jersey scenery, a table-top Boxer Rebellion naval action, Russo-Japanese battle episodes, prison escapes, executions, the coronation of Edward VII, murders, robberies, natural disasters and Biograph's version of BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN, entitled MUTINY ON THE BLACK SEA (1905).⁷⁹

As early as 1901, producers were inclined to drop the pretense that their topical reproductions of crime, war and disaster were the work of cameramen who had been to the site of calamitous occurrences. Instead, they began promoting screen subjects such as LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN and THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY for their technical and ideological values. Increasingly, the topical link was maintained only to enhance those values. Biograph's THE BLACK HAND (1906) contained this title:

Levying the Blackmail
A Clever Arrest
Actually as made by the New York
Detectives

In addition, alternate methods of re-enacting newspaper stories for the screen which relied on canvas sets and theatre conventions declined in relation to the narrative staged in documentary-style tableaux and purporting to reproduce the highlights of a familiar topical event. What is extremely suggestive for our purposes is the way that style rapidly displaced other illusionistic paradigms in the production of longer fictional subjects.

The problem then is to understand that coincidental emergence of narrative complexity and "fake" newsreel techniques, a development that preceded any sustained attention to intricate editing construction. The formal constraint of actuality screen features appears to have been quite powerful, as Harpole's research demonstrated. Not only did he

find evidence of that parallel development but also of the ways in which the use of frame depth shaped other filmic elements and was accompanied by movement on diagonal axes toward and away from the camera and a modified acting style.

In attempting to account for the association of narrative complexity and frame depth, it is possible to develop an explanation too severely bounded by the language and methods of industrial economics. We know, for example, that screen actualities were very popular, and that after 1908 American audiences and critics alike complained of their disappearance.⁸⁰ We also know that two years or so later the Pathé company responded to the complaints by distributing a weekly reel of featured news items especially for the American trade. Why, then, would American production companies effectively retreat from a potentially lucrative territory, or at any rate, leave the path of entry poorly guarded against the inevitable attack of an entrenched foreign interest like Pathé?⁸¹

One view is that by concentrating on narrative subjects film manufacturers thought they could control costs and increase quantity in a period of high demand. According to Robert Allen:

The narrative film was probably the most suitable cinematic form for the demands of an industry which required films which could be quickly and cheaply made and whose popularity did not depend on exigencies external to the production process.⁸²

If, however, the return to a modification of the studio conditions of the Black Maria was simply an economic strategy, we are still left to explain the application of that strategy to the replication of the Lumièrian aesthetic.

A narrowly economic account provides a partial explanation at best and at worst no explanation at all. If, indeed, the earliest news fakes were, as Allen concluded, simply attempts to "obviate the logistical and financial difficulties of trying to produce a cinematic newspaper" for vaudeville audiences, we are left to account for the appropriation of the compositional character of the "fake" to the fictional narrative.⁸³ It was a practice that not only had its own built-in problems, but one that appears to have begun in the pre-nickelodeon kinoscope period for reasons that were not directly commercial.

To examine the problem from an older and slightly different vantage point there is the thesis of Nicholas Vardac to the effect that the motion picture in theatrical form was conceived in the belly of nineteenth-century stage realism. Movies could be considered, said Vardac,

... the ultimate aesthetic expression of a cycle of realistic-pictorial theatrical productions which had been a part of the re-birth of the objective spirit in the middle of the eighteenth century and which was to mature through the nineteenth-century age of invention.⁸⁴

The notion that whatever Wild West show designer Steel MacKaye might attempt in the domain of 'spectacular realism' the motion picture could achieve with superior success has acquired its own set of advocates. Thus the claim of Frank Rahill that:

The millions who thrilled to The Great Train Robbery on the screen were able to compare it to the stage play, and its superiority was obvious.⁸⁵

It is a case in two parts: the first is that the movies thrived at the expense of the shortcomings of increasingly cumbersome theatrical machinery; the second is that the screen delivered the knockout blow by readily and easily appropriating the plots and tricks that had given the melodrama its position of supremacy in the pre-movie era.

There would seem to be more of a philosophical connection between motion picture realism and other media than a formal one. In his discussion of the beginnings of the novel in the eighteenth century Ian Watt observed that modern realism began with the proposition that "truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses."⁸⁶ Coinciding with the rise of the novel were a range of experiments in chemistry and optics leading to the beginnings of photography and the re-constitution of the diorama and other optical amusements derived from that premise.⁸⁷ Under its powerful influence the "fake" journals of Daniel Defoe acquired the status of aesthetic form for much the same reason, it would seem, that many years later Edwin Porter's "faith-

ful duplication" of a western holdup was singled out as a first instance of screen art.

From the early films of Lumière, cameramen in the field brought to their work that equation of experience with reality found in realist literature, impressionist painting and of course photography. A holistic filming scheme, it included as crucial elements the features of frame depth, action moving into that depth and especially out of it toward the camera-viewer, and the manipulation of frame edge and angles of view. Those elements, with their roots in an earlier tradition of illusionism, were selected and arranged into a rhetoric of imaginary presence in the concrete space and time of an "actual" scene, rendering the cameraman Everyman discovering truth through his senses.⁸⁸

To date an examination of the origins and development of that rhetoric has been stymied, by an undue attention to editing construction, by relying on an industrial rationalization for more explanatory power than it possesses, and by the tendency to concentrate on isolated ingredients of the recipe, including alleged first-time uses of camera movement, the close-up, etc. The major features of that early compositional mode were more or less evident in Porter's THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, a familiar news-as-entertainment item, a train heist, conveyed on the screen by the coverage strategies of the newsreel merged with the stop-motion illusionism of the trick film in a synthesis constrained by the elements of actuality composition and framing.

The "problem of media" we confront in attempting to deal with the longer narrative based on that compositional aesthetic is the problem of coming to grips with the emergence of an apparently novel form, which is to say a problem of motive. The error of early film historians has been to misread the sequence of development. In focusing their inquiries on the longer film constructed out of a larger number of smaller pieces of footage, that narrative's compositional aesthetic, shaped by a rhetoric of authentic presence, has been mostly ignored. Consequently, at the level of motive one finds a number of attempts at seeking a cause for an inadequately defined phenomenon: in an age-old dream; in a new machine; in the screen appropriation of elements of pre-motion picture popular culture, including montage; in the technical conversion of stage spectacle realism; in the a priori notion of a narrative endeavor; in the demands of industrial success; in the unprecedented individual discovery of a Lessingian cinematic essentialism; and in the case of two early film critics, in the view that the motion picture narrative represented a certain modernity, the articulation by a new industrial consciousness of a new dramatic form:

All modern thought is assuming kenetic forms and we are coming to see the absurdity of the old ideas of immutability and immobility. A similar revolution is impending in art. At last we glimpse the possibility of a new form of pictorial art which . . . will make our present pictures appear as grotesque as the reliefs carved on Egyptian tombs or the scrawls on the caverns of Altimira.⁸⁹

. . . mass and class live so hard and so fast that melodrama (the stage variety), which depends for its force largely on its swiftness, can go no faster, and its speed and vigour are not strong enough to hold the popular attention.⁹⁰

What we discover instead is a two-stage development; first, an extended fictional narrative fashioned from complete-action tableau shots in newsreel style that characterized production in 1903. Then, in response to social and industrial pressures, a trend, dating roughly from 1907, to the fragmentation of those tableaux, constrained by the formal features of the newsreel aesthetic and based on an illusionistic recipe described by Biograph director Wallace McCutcheon in a 1904 court case, into temporally-oriented melodramas of the clock, cross-cut scenes of last-minute rescue that communicated the constrictions of industrial labor, its routines bound by work hours, production time-tables and delivery schedules.

1.4 Overview

In response to Thomas Edison's stubborn concept of how to exploit a mechanical curiosity, Edwin Porter, on the evidence, offered no alternate scheme, neither one more in tune with shifting industrial trends, nor a counter vision. If anything, Porter's artistic bent and the studio's doomed production policy were never in serious conflict. As we shall see, Porter's specialty was the creation of scenic qualities and compositional effects, not montage sequences of continuous action. Moreover, it was a specialty

that suited the company's copyright and sales schemes.

That is not, however, to conclude that Edwin Porter's work at the Edison studio was without significance. As the chapters that follow will demonstrate, his Edison output did contribute to a short-lived mode of narrative cinema, the narrator-dependent, newsreel-style screen tale of topical story highlights in tableau structure, as exemplified by THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, with its optical tricks concealed in the compositional cover of fake documentary features. Reflecting the discontinuous structure of a range of nineteenth-century popular entertainments including circus spectacles, Wild West shows, lantern slide exhibitions, waxwork displays, comic strips and tabloid graphics, it was a motion picture mode that flourished for only a few brief years to be abandoned under the new industrial circumstances of the nickelodeon craze it helped launch. As a film form it neither looked progressively forward to the Biograph films of D.W. Griffith, nor was it some aberrant, obsolete stage in an evolutionary development; as popular entertainment it could not be said to have been deficient in the requisite virtues of such entertainment. Nor was it in any way uncinematic. It simply collapsed under the tremendous weight of a success it could not sustain, falling victim to a rising trend common in other industries of the period to the production of standardized commodities for mass markets. The circumstances of the emergence and displacement of that tableau narrative in newsreel style constitutes the major focus of this disserta-

tion. Past historians were inclined to ignore the development and disappearance of its abandoned diegetic syntax and in the gap erected an exaggerated Victorian fable.

As for the historical re-enactment and the news fake, the young expanding industry found a place for both. Fake newsreel techniques were employed almost exclusively to report on World War I for picture palace audiences.⁹¹ D.W. Griffith's BIRTH OF A NATION (1915) with its stars in close-up, nick-of-time melodramatics and "fake" newsreel framing persuaded some doubters that the motion picture was an art form. Indeed, what is most striking today about S.M. Eisenstein's OCTOBER (1928) and BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN (1925) is less their fabled montage than their evocative documentary aura.

NOTES: CHAPTER 1

¹ See: Terry Ramsaye, A Million and One Nights, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926; Gilbert Seldes, The Movies Come From America, New York: Scribners & Sons, 1937; Lewis Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939; Nicholas Vardac, Stage to Screen, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949; Joseph H. North, The Early Development of the Motion Picture: 1887-1909, doctoral dissertation, Cornell University, 1949, published by Arno Press, 1972; Karl Reisz, The Technique of Film Editing, London and New York: Focal Press, 1953; Richard Griffith and Arthur Mayer, The Movies, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957; Arthur Knight, The Liveliest Art, New York: The New American Library, 1957; Joe Franklin, Classics of The Silent Screen, New York: The Citadel Press, 1959; D. R. Fulton, Motion Pictures, Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960; Richard Arlo Sanderson, "A Historical Study of the Development of American Motion Picture Content and Techniques Prior to 1904, University of Southern California, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1961; Edward Wagenknecht, The Movies in the Age of Innocence, Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962; Jack Spears, "Edwin S. Porter: One of the Movie Greats Has Been Practically Forgotten," Films in Review, XXI, No. 6 (June-July, 1970); Harry M. Geduld, Focus on D.W. Griffith, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971.

² A major study of Edwin Porter's Edison career to be co-authored by Prof. André Gaudreault of Laval University and myself will be published by the Cinémathèque québécoise in 1984. Charles Musser will be submitting a manuscript dealing with Porter's work to an American publisher in the fall of 1983.

³ Reisz, p. 19.

⁴ The New York Telegraph, December 12, 1912. Page reference unavailable.

⁵ Hy Hollinger, "A 1903 Pic On the Right Track," Variety, March 14, 1979; Budd Schulberg, "Edwin Porter U.S. Pioneer: Given Too Little Honor; Goaded Edison, Obscured by Griffith," Variety, May 9, 1979, pp. 46, 558. See also Budd Schulberg, Moving Pictures, New York: Stein and Day, 1981.

⁶ Adolph Zukor, The Public is Never Wrong, New York: Putnam Publishing Co., 1953, p. 20. See also Paul Spehr, The Movies Begin, Newark, New Jersey: The Newark Museum in cooperation with Morgan and Morgan, Inc., 1977, p. 40; and Kevin Brownlow, The Parade's Gone By, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968, p. 10.

⁷ See Georges Sadoul, "Early Film Production in England," Hollywood Quarterly, I, No. 3 (April 1946), pp. 249-59; "English Influences on the Work of Edwin S. Porter," Hollywood Quarterly, III, No. 1 (Fall 1947), pp. 41-50; "British Creators of Film Technique," British Film Institute, 1948, (pamphlet).

⁸ Faulty memory and clever press agency sometimes combined to produce "authentic" show business mythology. When in 1912 Porter joined with Adolph Zukor to distribute Louis Mercanton's QUEEN ELIZABETH starring Sarah Bernhardt, Benjamin Percival Schulberg, who had met Porter in 1910 while a young reporter for a small trade paper called Film Reports, was hired on as the project publicist:

. . . Zukor decided to offer it as his own production. Bernhardt had disdained the lowly film form, said the Schulberg press release, until Zukor persuaded her it was important to record her art for future generations. On seeing the finished product her conversion was complete.

'Ah, Mr. Zukor,' she reportedly exclaimed, throwing her arms around him. 'You have put the best of me in pickle for all time.'

The story was so widely circulated that Adolph Zukor gradually began to believe it genuine. At a dinner honoring his first five years as a company head, he was asked what had been his most thrilling moment in film making. He recited, word for word, the story of Sarah Bernhardt, his persuasive powers with her, and her embrace at seeing herself pickled for all time.

In Norman Zierold, The Moguls, New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1969, pp. 159-160.

⁹ Correspondence, from J. Porter Reilly, March 18, 1981.

¹⁰ Zukor, p. 87.

¹¹ Beaumont Newhall in his "Introduction" to the Billy Bitzer autobiography, Billy Bitzer: His Story, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973, p. xxi.

¹² From "About Moving Pictures" in The Complete Illustrated Catalog of Moving Picture Films, Stereopticons,

Slides, Films, Kleine Optical Company, Chicago, Illinois, October 1904, pp. 30-31, as cited by George C. Pratt in Spellbound in Darkness, New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, Connecticut, 1966, p. 37.

¹³ G.W. Bitzer, unpublished notes in the Bitzer Collection, Film Study Centre, The Museum of Modern Art, circa 1941.

¹⁴ George Blaisdell, "Edwin S. Porter," The Moving Picture World, December 12, 1912. Porter Reilly told me in his March 1981 letter that Edwin Porter had "contempt for the trappings of success — which in the theatrical world included both self-praise and much publicity. Porter shunned both; further, he was obviously embarrassed when certain publicity was thrust on him."

¹⁵ Edwin S. Porter, "Evolution of the Motion Picture," The Moving Picture World, July 11, 1914, p. 206.

¹⁶ Ramsaye, p. 414.

¹⁷ Benjamin Hampton, History of the American Film Industry, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970, p. 31.

¹⁸ Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach, The History of Motion Pictures, (translated and edited by Iris Barry), New York: W.W. Norton and Co. and The Museum of Modern Art, 1938. (Published in France under the title Histoire du Cinéma, 1935.) p. 30. This was a text that neither the Film Library's Iris Barry nor museum director John E. Abbott was entirely happy with. "Their conclusions," said Abbott of Bardèche and Brasillach in his introduction, "do not necessarily coincide with those of the Film Library."

¹⁹ Bardèche and Brasillach, p. 32.

²⁰ Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film, p. 313.

²¹ Lewis Jacobs (ed.), The Emergence of Film Art, New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1974, p. 4.

²² Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film, p. 35.

²³ Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film, p. 37.

The Edison studio apparently did a fair amount of duplicating, i.e., duplicating the work of other manufacturers. Méliès, who did not take out American copyrights until 1903, was a victim of film dupers. And this was very likely the circumstance that gave Porter the opportunity to examine Méliès' work in the Edison studio lab. See Pratt, Spellbound in Darkness, pp. 23-24; also, Georges Méliès, "Propos sur Les Vues Animées," Les Dossiers de La Cinémathèque, Montréal: Cinémathèque québécoise, 1982.

²⁴ Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film, p. 38.

²⁵ Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film, p. 41.

Circa 1935 The Museum of Modern Art had acquired, according to Iris Barry, "a lavender preservation print of The Great Train Robbery." See Iris Barry, "The Film Library and How It Grew," Film Quarterly, XXII, No. 4 (Summer 1969), pp. 19-27, for an informative account of the beginnings of this wonderful institution. It is likely that Jacobs had the opportunity to screen that print. It is difficult to tell from his chapter on Porter whether he did or not. On the topic of Porter's inadvertant discovery, see Jacobs, p. 41; also, Knight, p. 26; Franklin, p. 11; Roy Armes, Film and Reality, Penguin, 1974, pp. 95-96; and Robert

Sklar, Movie-Made America, New York: Random House, 1975, Vintage Books, 1976, pp. 24-27.

²⁶ Sadoul, "English Influences on the Work of Edwin S. Porter," p. 41.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 46, 50. There appear to be at least two versions of the Williamson film. The print I saw at the FIAF symposium on early cinema in Brighton in May 1978 was a one-shot work dated 1900, and very different from the four-shot film described by Rachel Low and Roger Manvell in their History of the British Film, 1896-1906, 1948, p. 70, the one Sadoul appeared to be referring to.

²⁸ Sadoul, "British Creators of Film Technique," p. 8.

²⁹ Theodore Huff, "Sadoul and Film Research," Hollywood Quarterly, XI, No. 2 (January 1947), pp. 203-06. A letter written to the publication after the appearance of Sadoul's 1946 article.

³⁰ Fulton, pp. 51-52.

³¹ Robert Gessner, "Porter and the Creation of Cinematic Motion," Journal of the Society of Cinematologists, II, 1962, p. 1.

³² Kenneth Macgowan, Behind the Screen: The History and Techniques of the Motion Picture, New York: Delacorte Press, 1965, p. 107.

³³ Jean Mitry, Histoire du Cinéma: Art et Industrie, Vol. 1, 1895-1914, Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1967, pp. 232-245.

³⁴ Jacques Deslandes and Jacques Richard, Histoire Comparée du Cinéma, II, Paris: Castelman, 1968, p. 365.

³⁵ Anthony Slide, Early American Cinema, New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1970, p. 13.

³⁶ Barry Salt, "Film Form: 1900-1906," Sight and Sound, XLVII, No. 3 (Summer 1978), pp. 148-53.

³⁷ Ezra Goodman, "Reminiscences of Edwin S. Porter, or the History of the Motion Picture," The New York Times, June 2, 1940, Section IX, p. 4. Méliès, as remembered by his granddaughter, Madeline Malthèle-Méliès in her book entitled Méliès, l'enchanteur, Paris: Hachette Littérature, 1973, perceived little connection between his work and Porter's.

³⁸ See American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, Complainant vs Edison Manufacturing Company, Defendant. "Defendant's Affidavits in Opposition to Complainant's Motion for Preliminary Injunction," United States Circuit Court for the District of New Jersey, December 3, 1904, pp. 4-10 (Edwin Porter's affidavit).

³⁹ See Chapter 2 for a comprehensive treatment of this point.

⁴⁰ Marguerite Engberg, "Danish Fictional Films Before 1908: The Pre-Griffith Period," unpublished, submitted to the Film Department, Museum of Modern Art, 1981.

⁴¹ Raymond Fielding, A Technological History of Motion Pictures and Television, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967; and David Antin, "Duchamp and Language," 1972.

42 Rudolph Arnheim, Film as Art, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953, p. 213.

43 S.M. Eisenstein, Film Form, (edited and translated by Jay Leyda), New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1949.

44 André Bazin, What is Cinema?, (essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.

45 C.W. Ceram, Archeaology of the Cinema, London: Thames and Hudson, 1965. As far as Ceram was concerned, the cave drawings, medieval tapestries and all the rest were false ancestors, which is to say that the technical and aesthetic precedents of the motion picture were discontinuous both as culture and technology with the phenomenon of the cinema.

46 V.F. Perkins, Film as Film, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972; also, Andrew Tudor, Theories of Film, London: Secker and Warburg, 1974; J. Dudley Andrew, The Major Film Theories, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

47 See Iris Barry, "The Film Library and How it Grew," p. 26.

48 Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures" in Dan Talbot (ed.) Film: An Anthology, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969, pp. 29-30.

49 Panofsky, p. 18.

⁵⁰ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Laokoon, in Walter Jackson Bate (ed.), Criticism: The Major Texts, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1952.

⁵¹ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" in Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, Mass Culture, New York: The Free Press, 1957, p. 98. Reprinted from The Partisan Reader, 1946.

⁵² For a comprehensive discussion of this topic see Leonard Myer, Music, the Arts, and Ideas: Patterns and Predictions in Twentieth-Century Culture, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967; see also Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, edited with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, pp. 217-252.

⁵³ Jean-Louis Comolli, "Technique and Ideology: D  p  th of Field," Cahiers du Cin  ma, No. 229 (Winter 1971). Trans. British Film Institute, distributed in mimeograph format.

⁵⁴ Christian Metz, Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema, translated by Michael Taylor, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 95.

⁵⁵ Lary May, Screening out the Past, New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

⁵⁶ Comolli.

57 See Howard Lamarr Walls, Motion Pictures, 1894-1912, Washington, Copyright Office, Library of Congress, 1953; and Kemp Niver, Motion Pictures from the Library of Congress Paper Print Collection, 1894-1912, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967. For an account of the Paper Print project and Niver's role in it see Sanderson's dissertation, pp. 28-32. The September 20, 1943 issue of Life magazine, pp. 18-20 contained an article accompanied by 22 frame enlargements from paper prints. In the same year that the Paper Print project was completed, Gordon Hendricks' diligently researched The Edison Motion Picture Myth was published, followed in 1964 by his work on the Biograph camera and in 1966 by his study of the kinetoscope. It is difficult to determine why the availability of this factual material was so little taken into account by work on early film history published after those dates, i.e. after 1961.

58 Eileen Bowser, "Lost Films Are Found in the Most Unexpected Places," The New York Times, Sunday, June 25, 1978, p. D-1, D-22. As reported in the Iris Barry article, in 1935 Museum of Modern Art Film Library holdings included, in addition to THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, a number of Méliès' subjects "and the prospect of laying hands on what remained of the old Biograph negatives," p. 22.

59 Anthony Slide, Early American Cinema, New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1970, p. 7.

60 See Edison Films, Thomas A. Edison, September 1902, pp. 13-17.

⁶¹ The work was done for the Film Department of The Museum of Modern Art by Karl Malkames in 1978. The reel was screened at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., in December 1981. The exact dates of production are unknown.

⁶² The New York Clipper, May 9, 1896, p. 152.

It can also be difficult to conceive of the character of the shows organized from these works. Mme. Madeleine Malthèle-Méliès, the granddaughter of Georges Méliès, recalled that her grandfather's projections required the accompaniment of a pianist and a sound effects man as well as a narrator. Mme. Malthèle-Méliès was present at a "Hommage to George Méliès" arranged by the Cinémathèque québécoise in Montreal, Québec, November 28, 1982.

⁶³ That is the view of Reed Abel, Curator, Edison National Historic Site (ENHS), West Orange, New Jersey supplied to me during my visit in the summer of 1979.

⁶⁴ Based on a comparison of Walls and the company's September 1902 film catalogue listings.

⁶⁵ Correspondence, F.L. Dyer to Thorwald Solberg, Registrar of Copyrights, Washington, D.C., October 6, 1905.

⁶⁶ Information about The Museum of Modern Art's acquisition of the Pathé print comes from Eileen Bowser, Curator, Film Department. See also Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film, p.45.

⁶⁷ See Reisz, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁸ Pratt, p. 29.

⁶⁹ See Charles Musser's, "The Early Cinema of Edwin Porter," and André Gaudreault's "Detours in Film Narrative: The Development of Cross-Cutting," in Cinema Journal, XIX, no. 1 (Fall 1979). The debate apparently began with Theodore Huff's 1947 Hollywood Quarterly reply to Sadoul. Huff said that he had examined a paper print of LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN in Washington, D.C. in the summer of 1941 and found it at variance with the claims of Jacobs published in The Rise Of The American Film. See also, Macgowan, pp. 113-114; and Deslandes and Richard, p. 385.

There are some less well-known examples of discrepancies in the prints held by different institutions. In 1977 it was found that The Museum of Modern Art's circulation print of UNCLE TOM'S CABIN existed in a sequence bearing little relation to the one in the Edison catalogue. Some titles had been inserted in mid-scene, others were missing and film was 71 feet shorter than the paper print originally copyrighted in 1903 and held by the Library of Congress archives. The difference appeared to be the result of an attempt to "modernize" the film by re-editing it. The museum's print of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY at 265 feet was also considerably shorter than the 308-foot Library of Congress print, the shot sequence at variance with the catalogue sequence and the beginnings and endings of some scenes were missing. Likewise a tracking shot in the Library of Congress copy of Porter's BOARDING SCHOOL GIRLS had been deleted in the museum's version. Source: Internal memorandum, Film Department, The Museum of Modern Art, April 11, 1977. I am grateful to Jon Gartenberg of the Film Department for this information.

70 Sanderson, p. 6.

71 Sanderson, pp. 100-04.

72 Kemp R. Niver, The First Twenty Years, Los Angeles: Locare Research Group, 1968, p. 5.

73 Niver, The First Twenty Years, p. 16.

74 See the special number of Cahiers de la Cinémathèque, No. 29 (Winter 1979). Edited by André Gaudreault of Laval University, it contains articles by Thomas Gunning, André Gaudreault, Charles Musser, John Hagan, John Fell, David Levy, Eileen Bowser, Paul Spehr, Martin Sopocy and Jon Gartenberg. The articles by Musser and Gaudreault on Edwin Porter have since appeared in English in Cinema Journal, XIX, No. 1 (Fall 1979). Sopocy's piece on James Williamson appeared in Cinema Journal, XVIII, No. 1 (Fall 1978). In 1977, Eileen Bowser of The Museum of Modern Art's "Brighton Project" gathered a small group of film historians from the United States and Canada to conduct a selective viewing of film materials for the 1978 Brighton symposium organized by FIAF. Much of the new work in early film history mostly originates with this group, originally in the form of papers written for the FIAF symposium. See Eileen Bowser "The Brighton Project: An Introduction," The Quarterly Review of Film Studies, IX, No. 4 (Fall 1979). This article appeared in French in the special number of Cahiers de la Cinémathèque. All the FIAF papers have more recently appeared in English in Roger Holman (ed.) Cinema 1900-1906, National Film Archive (London) and the International Federation of Film Archives, 1982. See also Noel Burch "Porter, or Ambivalence"

in Screen, IX, No. 4 (Winter 1978-79); and Charles Harpole, Gradients of Depth in the Cinema Image, doctoral dissertation, New York University (1976), published by Arno Press, Inc., 1978. An anthology of articles on the early cinema edited by John Fell and titled Film Before Griffith is scheduled for publication by the University of California Press in 1984.

⁷⁵ See the work of Gunning, Gaudreault, Musser, Hagan Fell and Gartenberg in Cahiers de la Cinémathèque. See especially Sopocy's study of the "narrated cinema" of James Williamson and Musser's analysis of the early career of Edwin Porter.

⁷⁶ See May, Screening Out the Past. Also, Garth Jowett, Film: The Democratic Art, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976, especially chapter IV, "The Initial Response."

⁷⁷ Edison Films, January Supplement, 1904, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Fred J. Balshofer and Arthur C. Miller, One Reel a Week. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967, p. 9.

⁷⁹ Niver, Motion Pictures from the Library of Congress, pp. 330-339.

⁸⁰ See Allen, "Film and Vaudeville," chapter 5; The Nickelodeon and After, pp. 172-173.

⁸¹ Raymond Fielding, The American Newsreel: 1911-1967, Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972.

⁸² Allen, p. 218.

⁸³ Allen, p. 117.

84 Vardac, p. xviii.

85 Frank Rahill, The World of Melodrama, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967, p. 283.

86 Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972, p. 12. First published by Chatto and Windus, 1957.

87 Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964.

88 For a semiotic view of the character of photographic reality see Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message" and "Rhetoric of the Image," in Roland Barthes, Image-Music-Text, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath, Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977, pp. 15-51.

89 "The Birth of a New Art," Independent, LXXVIII, No. 8 (1914), as cited in Myron Osborn Lounsbury, The Origins of American Film Criticism 1909-1939, doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1966, published by Arno Press, Inc., New York, 1973, p. 32.

90 Horace Allen, "The Dramatic Picture Vs. the Pictorial Drama," Harvard Monthly, L, No. 23 (March 1910), as cited by Lounsbury, p. 37. For an insightful critique of this notion of culture and culture change as a direct formal response to a new general consciousness or psychology, see E.H. Gombrich, "Meditations on a Hobby Horse, or the Roots of Artistic Form," in Aspects of Form, Lancelot Law Whyte (ed.),

London: Lund Humphries, 1951, pp. 209-28.

⁹¹ See Fielding, The American Newsreel, pp. 109-26.

CHAPTER 2

EDWIN PORTER'S EDISON CAREER

Subjects dependent on the imagination
are infinitely varied and inexhaustible.

George Méliès

2.1 The Edison Studio: Litigation Over Innovation

The claim on behalf of Edwin Porter's innovative 1903 achievement is in effect a claim that such an achievement was desirable or even possible while he was in the Edison company's employ. It is the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate that that was not the case. The fact of the matter is that there could not have been a more unlikely organization from which to expect, let alone get, a radical movie concept either before or after 1903. A variety of documentation, including courtroom depositions, film catalogues, copyrights registrations and sales records reveals the Edison studio in the grip of a production and marketing strategy that actively discouraged the sort of continuous action subject Porter was supposed to have pioneered.

Most of the energies of Edison executives and patent attorneys were spent in courtroom efforts to obtain a monopoly on the new entertainment industry. Their approach was based as much on the enforcement of legal if questionable patent claims as on deliberately drawn-out litigation intended to exhaust the opposition, whatever the legal merits of a case. Edison officials clung to the notion that dominating the industry did not require them to enter the marketplace with a superior software product. Theirs was essentially a hardware policy geared to projection machine sales and founded on the notion that the motion picture was an industrial invention, much like the lightbulb and the phonograph, to be commercially exploited under the protection of massive

patent litigation for a pile of nickels and dimes. During the period of Porter's tenure at the studio, Edison officials were chiefly preoccupied with corporate manoeuvring to corner the phonograph market.¹ Those skirmishes appear to have been the main source of their ideas about handling the motion picture business.

The hypothesis of Porter's revolutionary 1903 "discovery" at the Edison studio is smashed to pieces by the evidence of a legal battle that arose between Edison and the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, a favorite courtroom antagonist, less than a year after the release of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY. The legal-industrial discourse of the copyright infringement suit Biograph brought against the Edison organization in the fall of 1904 contained an explicit statement about how film manufacturers, and particularly the one for whom Edwin Porter toiled, perceived narrative continuity as it involved a changing relation of the individual shot to the longer film. At issue was a film Porter completed in August 1904, HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN GOT A WIFE THROUGH THE NEW YORK HERALD "PERSONAL" COLUMNS.² Biograph alleged that the Porter film was a transparent steal of their own vaudeville house hit, PERSONAL, released only a couple of months earlier. And they were absolutely right. Unknown, perhaps to Biograph lawyers, in the space for "Title of Subject" on the Edison company's copyright envelop, Porter had first absent-mindedly written and then scratched out the word "Personal," underneath which he scribbled the Edison title.³

Vaporizing

When turning in Motion Picture Subjects this blank must be filled out and the following information furnished promptly by our photographers.

Title of Subject *Personal*

How a French Aristocrat got a wife through the New York Herald "Personal" Column

Photographed at New York & Englewood N.J.

on August 23 & 24

Actual length of negative 822 cut to 658' ¹⁹⁰ 4

Listed length of negative 660 ft

If special subject, state who made for

Taken by Edwin S. Porter

Give here brief description with salient points:

NOTE.—The above information with brief description embodying the salient points of the films must positively be furnished with each negative turned in.

The story was a simple one. A French gentleman in the Biograph version — a nobleman in the Edison re-make — places an ad in The New York Herald personal columns stating his desire to meet and marry an American woman — handsome in the Biograph version, wealthy in Edison's. When a crowd of "Gibson girls" appear for the rendez-vous at Grant's Tomb the fellow flees triggering a brief chase through city and country that culminates in his capture by one of the pursuers. The wording of the "ad" in the Biograph Bulletin No. 28 of August 15, 1904 read:

PERSONAL--Young French gentleman recently arrived in this country, desires to meet handsome American girl; object matrimony. Will be at Grant's Tomb at 10 this morning, wearing boutonniere of violets.⁴

Edison Films, September Supplement, 1904 had it this way:

Young French Nobleman recently arrived, desires to meet wealthy American girl; object matrimony; will be at Grant's Tomb at 10 this morning, wearing boutonniere of violets.⁵

The Edison catalogue description added the false claim that the ad had actually appeared in The New York Herald on August 25, 1904, and even went as far as to back the claim with an anonymous press quote chastising the Herald for carrying the "bogus advertisement of a moving picture concern." It was a crude attempt at representing the re-make as part of a yellow journalism exposé about improvident foreign noble-men preying upon affluent American women whose less well-off sisters posed as "marriage-mad-heiresses."⁶

In an affidavit given in the case, Porter, officially preoccupied with the differences between his film and the Biograph original, made no reference to any of that:

My photograph is not a copy but an original. It carries out my own idea of how the French Nobleman should appear, as to costume, appearance, expression, figure, bearing, posing, gestures, postures and action. Complainant's Frenchman is short, mine is tall; theirs dresses in poor taste, mine dresses in good taste; theirs presents an undignified appearance, mine is of gracious and gentlemanly bearing. Theirs looks and behaves like a monkey — mine like a gentleman. These differences I believe I have made apparent in every picture of the series, by means of the said costume, poses, postures, actions, etc.⁷

The legal fight that ensued is fascinating for the light it sheds on the way the Edison company's legalistic obsessions shaped their production concepts. The courtroom arguments, when examined in the context of sales records for the period 1904-1906, show Edison executives not merely uninterested in but in fact quite hostile to advancing the cause of the continuous action film narrative along the lines of the great breakthrough cinema historians have claimed for *LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN* and *THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY*. Moreover, the arguments the company used to defend its interests reveal the deep roots of Edison studio production in nineteenth-century popular entertainment forms and copyright laws. Those arguments, in part, help explain the major trends in Porter's Edison output, both before and after *LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN* and *THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY*. The Edison studio stayed the course, hardly modifying its

original orientation even after the success of the Porter western was clear. As a middle-level employee, Edwin Porter lacked the authority to influence Edison studio thinking. A nineteenth-century artisan-showman, Porter's production ideas were never seriously at variance with that thinking.

2.2 From Peepshow to Projection

On February 24, 1888, Eadweard Muybridge, the celebrity photographer of animals in motion, had been invited to give a lecture on his work at Orange, New Jersey, home base of the Edison laboratory. When Muybridge visited Thomas Edison at the lab two days later, the possibility of joining sound recordings and motion photography was discussed. Edison, whose work on the phonograph was already well-advanced, would go on to deny that such a meeting had ever occurred, though in later years he did acknowledge a debt to "the zoetrope, the work of Muybridge, . . . and others."⁸ Toward the end of 1892 W.K.L. Dickson, an Edison employee, demonstrated the first successful Edison motion picture camera. In February 1893, four months later, the company erected a film studio. Completed at a cost of \$637.67 and known as the Black Maria, it would be used to produce material for a coin-operated peep-show device called a kinetoscope, also the work of Dickson. The initial public demonstration of the device took place in Brooklyn on May 9, 1893. The following February, in anticipation of the opening of a kinetoscope parlor in April, the Black Maria went into production.⁹ Consisting of brief

inconographic celebrations of familiar vaudeville personalities, including Eugene Sandow the strongman and members of the Buffalo Bill Wild West troupe, the topical allure of the kinetoscope subjects was centered in a Muybridgean frame and photographed at a fixed distance against artificial backgrounds.

A little over a year later kinetoscope patrons appeared to be tiring of filmed vaudeville turns and related fare. In August 1895 the company received a plea from their kinetoscope agents, Raff and Gammon, to supply more topical material. A more urgent incentive for exploring new subject matter and modes of filming arrived in New York City in the spring of 1896. On April 23, 1896, the Edison vitascope debuted at Koster and Bial's, a Manhattan vaudeville house. In spite of Edison's stated hostility to projection, his company acquired, on the recommendation of Raff and Gammon, just such a machine. Developed by a Life Saving Service clerk, C. Francis Jenkins, it was represented as his own invention by a Washington real estate operator, Thomas Armat.¹⁰

The press, in preparing the public for the great occasion, got the story wrong, as it often did. The following announcement appeared in The New York Clipper:

(Koster and Bial's will be the scene of the first public exhibition of Thos. A. Eidson's latest invention, the vitascope, as soon as the details, now pending, can be perfected.¹¹

By early June 1896, this new "Edison" machine was on the bill at the Orpheum in San Francisco, The Bijou in Philadelphia

and at Keith's New Theatre in Boston.¹²

Competition was swift in establishing itself. A French machine, the Lumière brothers cinematographe, made its American debut at the end of June 1896 at Keith's Union Square.¹³ The method of presentation included a lecturer, one Lew Shaw who, the Clipper reported, "fluently introduced" new and familiar views.¹⁴ In October 1896, the biograph appeared on the bill at Hammerstein's Olympia.¹⁵ Other machines had surfaced including the kineopticon, the kinematograph and the Amet magniscope.¹⁶ But the biograph seemed the best of the lot, according to the Clipper:

The series of pictures shown are among the most striking that have yet been given in this city and created unbound enthusiasm The pictures . . . show but little of the flickering noticeable in the earlier inventions of similar character.¹⁷

The projection of motion pictures, it was quickly understood, was not simply a new mode of display. It also meant a new type of subject matter that provided a new media experience. The biograph team, clearly familiar with the 1895 work of Louis Lumière, chose to introduce their apparatus, as he had, with the image of a train, The Empire State Express, heading directly at the audience at what the Clipper reporter described as "full speed."

For Edison the vitascopes was something of an about-face. Absolutely refusing to sell cameras, Edison was initially opposed to projection believing that it would ruin the movie business.¹⁸

In 1900, the Edison company was selling the same type of film for both kinetoscope and projecting kinetoscope use, even though kinetoscope footage was not entirely suitable for projection. The longest piece of raw stock obtainable ran 195 feet. However, as James White put it, "for performances requiring greater length . . . we join two or more pieces together." Edison filmed subjects at 20, sometimes at 15, and at 45 frames per sec. The slower speeds allowed for the recording of what White described as "a longer performance" on a 50-foot strip, though with a resulting loss of "continuity of motion." The practice, White claimed, was imposed on the company by the demands of competition.¹⁹

The introduction of screen projection was accompanied by a number of Edison studio trends that were to characterize the period of Porter's association with the company: exploiting the ideas of others through a policy of imports, dupes — duplicating — and re-makes; showing little concern for motion picture quality; and seeking through the courts to maximize the commercial return on those practices. Proud of his inventive gifts, Edison thought of himself as a developer of profitable hardware. In a May 1903 letter he rated his inventions in what he judged to be their order of importance as follows: Incandescent Electric Light System, Phonograph, Kinetoscope, Transmitter of the Telephone and Nickel Storage Battery.²⁰

"I am," he stated in an 1898 affidavit, "the inventor of the art of portraying natural movement of animate scenes by

photographic reproduction," adding that he "conceived the idea about a dozen years ago." Edison went on to stress the importance of "the artistic touch in the portrayal of animate scenes."²¹ But the element of art, even at its most rudimentary industrial level, "seems always to have mattered much less to him than what he perceived as the rewards of litigation.

On December 7, 1897 the firm of Dyer and Dyer, acting on behalf of Thomas Edison, filed a petition in the United States Circuit Court for the Southern District of New York to put Kuhn and Webster's International Film Company out of business. Their sin was that they manufactured a competing projection machine. It was the first shot in a litigational war involving over 500 separate legal actions and extending over a period of two decades. In the months ahead the Edison company would aim its legal guns at all American competitors. The targets included the firm of Joseph D. Baucus and Frank Z. Maguire, Edison's own peepshow agents in England and Europe, who were importing European films to the United States; Sigmund Lubin, the Philadelphia dealer in optical wares; Edward A. Amet, of Waukegan, Illinois, who had put the magniscope projector on the market; the Eden Musée, for using an unlicensed camera to film a version of the Passion Play; the theatre magnates Klaw and Erlanger, for attempting to import a competing film version of the Passion Play; Augustin C. Daly, a writer of successful melodramas, for considering an entry into the new entertainment business; the American Mutoscope Company and vaude-

ville house operator Benjamin F. Keith, for engaging that company's American Biograph projection service; and J. Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith, who operated the Commercial Advertisizing Bureau and the American Vitagraph Company, for related offenses.²² Assisting in those campaigns were patent attorneys familiar with Edison's phonograph problems, including Richard Dyer, Frank Dyer, his younger brother, and "Judge" Howard W. Hayes, a New Jersey lawyer and reputed "fixer", as well as William E. Gilmore, head of Edison's phonograph and motion picture operations from 1894 to 1908.²³

Their absorption in hardware protection left company officials little time for attention to software quality, and when it did come it came too late. In a letter Hayes wrote to Gilmore from London in 1901 he wondered whether a company doing so well in its patent battles ought not to spend a little more money on the quality of its films. He was surprised, he said, at the calibre of the films he had seen in London and Paris, "very clear and with no jumps." Films about important topical events, he added, were on the market within two days.²⁴

The point was repeated two years later in a letter from London James White wrote to W.H. Margraf, the man who had taken over from White as Kinetograph Department chief. The company's UNCLE TOM'S CABIN was overpriced, White suggested; French and English manufacturers were offering very good film at very low prices. White, who at that point was European sales manager for the Edison phonograph opera-

tion, was in effect warning the company that their legalistic hold on the American industry was not a substitute for offering buyers quality subjects at competitive rates, and that it could no longer regard motion picture production as a minor division of a business that included, as White's letter-head indicated, Phonographs, Records, Projecting Kinetoscopes, X Ray Apparatus, Battery Fan Motors, Edison-Lalande Batteries, Dental Outfits, Surgical Outfits and Automatic Hand Numbering Machines.²⁵

By May 1909, a few months before Porter left the company to go into business on his own, the shortcomings of Edison motion pictures and the need for radical improvement were abundantly clear, even to the company's chief patent attorney, Frank Dyer. In a memorandum to Horace Plimpton, a carpet salesman who had taken over as Kinetograph Department manager, Dyer wrote:

I think one feature in the film business is capable of some development, and that is, to make pictures of more direct interest to the class of people who principally see them. These people, for the most part, are men and women in the middle walk of life, such as mechanics, laborers, carpenters, plumbers and their associates. I have noticed that pictures dealing with young mechanics and their sweethearts are always very popular. The Biograph Company is doing a lot of work along this line and are undoubtedly building up a big business. I think they have struck a very good field.²⁶

2.3 Edison Production Before and After THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY

In his 1912 interview with The Moving Picture World, Porter said that in 1900, following the fire that wiped out the small shop in which he and William Beadnell, an employee of the Eden Musée, manufactured motion picture equipment, he was hired by Edison to design and build cameras and projecting machines. After working for Edison in this capacity for a short time there was an opening for a cameraman and producer at the new studio Edison had built in 1896. "I was," Porter said, "given charge of the first skylight studio in this country — at 41 East Twenty-first Street." ²⁷ If the contents of a letter James White wrote to a prospective Edison employee in June 1900 are anything to go on, Porter was paid a salary of \$20 per week and royalties on "kinetoscopic" films of 25 cents per 50 feet of "perfected" footage. ²⁸

By the time he became involved in filming THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, Porter had apparently grown dissatisfied with the arrangement. In the recollection of Max "Bronco Billy" Anderson, in 1903 Porter "was considering giving up making pictures because business was bad." ²⁹ There was, after all, little evidence that the company thought much of his work. LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN, released in January 1903, received scarcely any special promotional treatment in the company's prominent trade journal ads fol-

lowing its January 1903 release.³⁰ Moreover, the pattern of Porter's 1903 post-LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN production likewise revealed little recognition, on the part of the company or of Porter himself, that the film embodied a new and enduring principle of movie making.³¹ The most elaborate and expensive Porter subject of that period was UNCLE TOM'S CABIN. Completed in June, it was at 1,100 feet an attempt at capitalizing on the renown of a popular stage work, as was the shorter THE STILL ALARM, completed in May. RUBE AND MANDY AT CONEY ISLAND was, at 725 feet, a sixteen-shot sequence based on an excursion round the park that concludes with an emblematic close-up of the rubes' vulgar discovery of the delights of the hot dog; while there is no "story", apart from the gimmick of the bumpkins' encounter with the sights that motivated a series of Lumièrian snapshots of a popular New York City leisure spot, there are fluid shifts from scene to scene, a variety of camera angles, panning camera work and some sharp matching cuts. The other longer film of 1903, ROMANCE OF THE RAIL, was at 275 feet a promotional subject for the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad. It featured Phoebe Show, a fictitious character created by the company in 1900 to encourage train travel:

Says Phoebe Snow,
 About to go
 Upon a trip
 To Buffalo:
 "My gown stays white
 From morn till night
 Upon the road of Anthracite."³²

Marie Murray played Phoebe Snow in a picture with an actuality look and a montage structure much like that of the earlier RUBE AND MANDY. Here Porter compressed the actual trip, between Hoboken, N.J. and Buffalo, N.Y., into one tableau shot as he would do the pursuit in THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY.

The balance of Porter's 1903 output was rather ordinary: short actualities taken in and around New York City, including scenes of the harbor area, the Caledonia Club's Scottish games, and children cooling off at a public fountain; comic and trick films included a voyeuristic peepshow subject, THE PHYSICAL CULTURE GIRL, and GAY SHOE CLERK, with its insertion of an unmatched novelty close-view of a foot-fondling scene into an unexceptional vaudeville shopping routine. Porter employed the same device in THE MESSENGER BOY'S MISTAKE to insert a close-up of a note into what was otherwise a one-scene subject. In WHAT HAPPENED IN THE TUNNEL Porter used a black leader insert to simulate a train's passage through a tunnel in a one-scene subject that combined a racial stereotype with the popular kiss motif and some interior train action.

THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY went into production in November 1903. Three fictional subjects were completed in December immediately following the release of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY: OFFICE BOY'S REVENGE, a short work much like the vaudeville comedies the company produced in 1900; HOW OLD IS ANN?, with smooth movement between physical and psychological states in a two-shot tale of a fellow driven mad

by a newspaper contest; and UNDER THE MISTLETOE, in which a man hanging some leaves while perched on a faulty ladder crashes to the floor to supply a cheap laugh.

The record does not show that Edison executives held any high hopes for the commercial success of Porter's one-reel Western classic either. In early December 1903, only days after the film had been completed, Edison company general manager Gilmore sent a cable to White in England to complain that the Vitagraph company was receiving British imports before Edison:

They have received poachers (sic), deserters, falling chimney and others at least ten days ahead of us. 33

Presumably, Gilmore was referring to films like Walter Haggart's DESPERATE POACHING AFFRAY, released July 1903; James Williamson's THE DESERTER, released October 1903, and THE WRONG CHIMNEY, released in July 1903.³⁴ In a letter dated December 3, 1903, two days, that is, following the copyright of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, White replied, assuring Gilmore that "very heavy shipments" were en route to New York, and that the arrangements he had made would ensure that the Edison company obtained the "latest" foreign products from London and Paris before the competition "or at least as soon."³⁵

If the extraordinary potential of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY was not obvious to the Edison people it was evident enough to Sigmund Lubin. On June 27, 1904, Lubin copyrighted a prefatory shot-by-shot re-make of Porter's famous Western action film without even bothering to change the title. His ad in the Clipper of July 2, 1904 featured the nervy telegraphic re-iteration: "No Copy. Original. Original. No Copy."³⁶ Edison officials lost little time in drawing up a Bill of Complaint, but then decided not to drag Lubin into court.³⁷

The direction of Edison company thinking was made clear in a July 1904 letter Frank Dyer wrote to Gilmore on the subject of "copying our competitors films." "There must," he counselled, "be a good profit in that business as it does away with making an original negative."³⁸ It is a little difficult to account for that attitude in the light of the ROBBERY success. Thomas Edison's own statement, prepared in connection with the Lubin ROBBERY re-make, claimed that the film had already earned "large sales." Billboard ads revealed a ROBBERY industry in full blossom as of that month.³⁹

The Edison studio's first directly acknowledged response to the film's popularity was THE LITTLE TRAIN ROBBERY, a 1905 re-make with adolescents and the added cachet of a chase. In the catalogue description the company proclaimed itself confident that the film would —

. . . meet with the same unqualified approval and unprecedented success as 'The Great Train Robbery' universally admitted to be the greatest production in MOTION PICTURES.⁴⁰

When the company released THE TRAIN WRECKERS a few months later, its Clipper ads called that one "The only Original Sequel to The Great Train Robbery."

But those moves would appear to have been intended to block the inroads Sigmund Lubin was making with his one-reel tales of crime. In July 1904, Lubin released a holdup subject modelled to some extent on British director Frank Mottershaw's DARING DAYLIGHT ROBBERY (1903).-- Called THE BOLD BANK ROBBERY, the Lubin film was in turn the model for one of Porter's best works, CAPTURE OF THE 'YEGG' BANK BURGLARS, a picture that went into production on August 15, 1904, eight days before shooting began on the PERSONAL-derived HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN, but left uncompleted until two weeks after its release.⁴¹

The major change in Edison production dated roughly from the late summer of 1904, i.e. from the release of those longer Biograph and Lubin subjects; that trend involved the production of subjects in lengths of between 500 and 1000 feet based on the taking of more footage than was offered for sale.⁴² If Porter's THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY was such a big money-maker for the company, a fact that was clear by the summer of 1904, why was their bank robbery follow-up a remake of a concept Lubin had appropriated from the British?

Would it be correct then to conclude that the influence of the so-called Brighton school reached the Edison studio second hand, through earlier Biograph and Lubin releases?

Between the completion of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY in December 1903 and the release of HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN in August 1904, Porter's output consisted mainly of short comic and trick subjects and a handful of news films, very much the sort of thing he had been assigned before THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY.⁴³ The longest films he produced in that interim period included the BUSTER BROWN SERIES, based on a comic strip, the news reproduction SKIRMISH BETWEEN RUSSIAN AND JAPANESE ADVANCE GUARDS, FIRE AND FLAMES AT LUNA PARK, CONEY ISLAND, based on a live show and two actualities, INTER-COLLEGIATE REGATTA, POUGHKEEPSIE, N.Y., and SCENES IN AN ORPHAN ASYLUM. It seems reasonable to conclude that in 1904 Edison officials drew most of their inspiration, not from Porter's train robbery classic, but from the work of Biograph directors.

On February 20, 1904, an anonymous New York Dramatic Mirror reviewer hailed Biograph's "long film of scenes in the life of Kit Carson" on view at Keith's as "by all odds the best that has been shown at this house."

The pictures are beautifully colored and splendidly taken, and reflect the utmost credit on the man who posed them and selected the scenes in which they were photographed. It would be hard to imagine anything finer in the line of animated pictures.⁴⁴

The publication was equally lavish in its praise for THE ESCAPED LUNATIC at Keith's the following month.⁴⁵ And in November the Mirror applauded THE LOST CHILD as "a remarkable picture."⁴⁶

Biograph's first long production dated from October 1903, when they completed THE AMERICAN SOLDIER IN LOVE AND WAR, in three parts, KIT CARSON, in thirteen parts, and THE PIONEERS, in six parts. But at that point, Biograph was simply endeavouring to keep up, taking their cue in part from the popular Buffalo Bill Wild West Show historical spectacles, but mostly from Edison's longer 1902-03 subjects like JACK AND THE BEANSTALK, LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN and UNCLE TOM'S CABIN.⁴⁷

By the summer of 1904, however, the tide had turned. In January, a mere month, that is, following the completion of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, Biograph had released THE ESCAPED LUNATIC, one of the earliest American "chase" subjects. They followed it up with BATTLE OF THE YALU in March, PERSONAL in June, THE MOONSHINER in August, THE HERO OF LIAO YANG in September and THE LOST CHILD in October. The Edison company suddenly found itself having to struggle to keep up with re-makes. Porter completed MANIAC CHASE, the Edison-Porter version of THE ESCAPED LUNATIC in October 1904 and STOLEN BY GYPSIES, Edison's re-make of THE LOST CHILD, in July 1905. In April 1904, the company had Porter hurry out a static rehash of Biograph's YALU, called SKIRMISH BETWEEN RUSSIAN AND JAPANESE ADVANCE GUARDS.⁴⁸

As early as the March 1904 release of the Russo-Japanese war re-enactment BATTLE OF THE YALU, it was clear that Biograph had begun offering very serious competition in the longer film field. When Edison officials in the late summer of 1904 assigned Edwin Porter the task of grinding out a re-make of PERSONAL, it amounted to an admission that they had relinquished their early lead to Biograph in the software chase for motion picture profits.

2.4 An Edison Company Employee

If in 1904 the Edison studio had lost significant ground to Biograph, Edwin Porter could be assigned the task of helping them play catch-up but very little of the blame. One may conclude from an examination of company documents that Porter was considered an employee whose job it was to follow instructions. Rarely consulted on business policy or on decisions affecting production, he was, in other words, a minor company figure whose input into the formulation of legal and marketing strategy, pivotal Edison concerns, was extremely limited. Moreover, Porter worked out of the Manhattan studio, whereas the Manager of the Kinetograph Department was based at the Orange, New Jersey headquarters where the key decisions were made.

The affidavit Porter submitted in connection with the HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN litigation provided a reasonably comprehensive picture of his multiple duties at the studio.

They included film casting — "engaging the pantomimic performers" — and directing — "instructing them as to the scenes which I wished them to have enacted" — as well as choosing the locations, doing the camerawork, and processing the negatives.⁴⁴ According to a 1905 document, Porter was also responsible for drafting the publicity announcements. We may conclude, based on that same document, that Porter's editing work in the 1904-1905 period was limited to trimming the negatives, which in 1905 were processed at the New Jersey facility.⁵⁰ The trimming of negatives and related tasks required to produce a longer film was a procedure that Edison lawyers would in 1904 argue did not constitute a feature of film authorship.⁵¹

In a 1909 deposition, as his Edison career was nearing its end, Porter stated that as of April, 1909, he had been appointed "technical expert" for the company's Kinetograph Department which apparently meant that he was no longer working in the New York studio; he also said that for the previous nine years he had been "head photographer, stage manager and superintendent of the studio."⁵² In 1912 Porter told Blaisdell that upon his departure from the company in November 1909 he held the post of Manager of Negative Production. Whatever those different titles in fact signified in terms of Porter's real authority in his last days in Edison's employ, between him and, say, Gilmore and Dyer, let alone Edison himself, there was always someone to whom he was immediately responsible, the Manager of the Kinetograph Department.⁵³ James White held that position until the

spring of 1903, Margraf, Gilmore's brother-in-law, was in charge between March 1903 and March 1904, Alex Moore had the job between March 1904 and March 1909 when Horace Plimpton took over.⁵⁴ There is no evidence to show that in his dealings with any of those people at a higher level of authority Porter had superior or even different motion picture production ideas that were rejected. There are, as far as anyone has been able to determine, no written accounts of active studio resistance to such ideas among surviving Edison studio records.

2.5 Edwin Porter's Pre-Edison Career

When he joined the Edison studio in 1900, Edwin Porter was well-versed in the mechanics and modes of presentation of precisely those nineteenth-century popular entertainment forms Edison copyright and patent attorneys had made the cornerstone of their litigational schemes. A seasoned veteran of film exhibition, Porter's working experience, which included sign painting, ticket selling, circus publicity, comic opera stage production, electrical work for the United States navy, motion picture camera and projector design, and the arrangement of complete film programs, both on the road in America, Central America, the West Indies and Canada, and at the Eden Musée in Manhattan, had equipped him with the requisite technical skills and showman's savvy for a career in the new industry.⁵⁵ In a 1907 deposition, Porter

recalled the beginnings of his motion picture career this way:

I first entered the moving pictures business in 1896. During the years 1896 and 1897 I was engaged as an operator of projecting machines, by various firms in New York, California and South America. I returned to New York in 1898 and went to work at the Eden Musée, and I operated a projecting machine there until 1900. While there I built projecting machines, and also built cameras of my own design. I built the cameras, the printing machines and projecting machines for the Palmer-McGovern prize fight. In the summer of 1900 I went on the road with a show of my own, and in the fall of 1900 I went to work for the Edison Manufacturing Company, and have been with them ever since, as a moving picture photographer. Since being with the Edison company I have designed cameras, and projecting machines for moving pictures.⁵⁶

At the Eden Musée, Porter had put on elaborate Spanish-American War shows employing genuine and staged film scenes, slides and a narrator. It was Porter's mechanical talents that had initially led him into the employ of Eden boss, Richard G. Hollaman. A Manhattan waxworks emporium that had opened in 1884, according to The National Police Gazette the Eden did "an immense business showing waxen effigies of national and local celebrities."⁵⁷ Within a year of the trend to projected motion pictures in New York City Hollaman had established a regular program of screenings at the Eden's Winter Garden. A July 1897 program announced two separate sets of films, one exhibited at 1,3,5 and 9 p.m., the other at 2,4,8 and 10 p.m., every day except Sunday.⁵⁸ In order to maintain that schedule, Hollaman required a more varied supply of subjects and above all a steady, reliable

projection apparatus. William Beadnell, the Eden's advertising and promotion manager, asked Porter to join the project on which Hollaman had initially put a former Singer Sewing Machine mechanic, Frank Cannock, to work. As part of the deal Porter was also hired as a projectionist.⁵⁹

It was probably at the Eden Musée that Porter got his first look at the work of Georges Méliès. Eden screenings in that period included subjects purchased from Méliès, Pathé, Lumière, Warwick and Paul, in the words of Ramsaye, "intermittent, tentative products."⁶⁰ It is also fairly safe to assume that prior to his job at the Eden most of the films Porter had seen and projected consisted of short kinetoscope strips and some scattered Lumière subjects. During the 1897-1898 season he had spent operating a moving picture tent with Percy Mundy's carnival company in Wisconsin, he would have had little else to offer.⁶¹

The showman's skills Porter brought to the Edison studio, skills honed by his carnival and Eden Musée experience, were quite unlike those demanded of a movie director in our time or even a mere decade after Porter joined Edison. Steeped in the scenographic traditions of pre-motion picture popular entertainment, the coherent reality produced by the extended seamless performance of late twentieth-century screen art was not one Porter would have aimed for, nor was it something Edison officials would have encouraged him to attempt. That older amusement tradition, one in which both Porter and his employers were raised, included variety entertainment, popular theatre, arena spectacles, processions,

travelling carnival sideshows and amusement park acts. Such entertainment offered scenically structured illusionism, fantasy and spectacle dependent on direct showman involvement and characterized by a very casual attention to the demands of verisimilitude, narrative consistency and good taste. Requiring minimal scenic detail, its variety structure incorporated a combination of independent acts with little information transfer between the component performances.⁶² It was the basic structure of vaudeville, the music hall, minstrel entertainment and burlesque. Edwin Porter, as much as any Edison patent attorney, would never relinquish his devotion to that structure. He would always remain a devotee of its big scenes and attention-grabbing special effects stunts, and of longer films concocted out of a sequence of discontinuous tableau stunts and scenes.

2.6. Toward a Legal Definition of the "Continuous Incident"

In August 1904, Edison general manager, W.E. Gilmore wrote to George Kleine, the Edison company Western jobber since 1898, complaining about ads Kleine's company had placed in The New York Clipper on August 6, 1904 and August 13, 1904, for Biograph and Pathé subjects:

From a purely commercial standpoint I do not see how we can continue to give you every advantage to the detriment of all other dealers, and from a legal standpoint we do not consider it good policy that a jobber like your concern should take up and push the goods of other manufacturers⁶³

On August 18, 1904, Kleine wrote back protesting his loyalty and affirming his usefulness to the company.⁶⁴ Gilmore replied six days later, in effect reiterating his charge that Kleine was not holding up his end of the deal between them, and insisting that Edison subjects were at least on a par with Biograph's.⁶⁵

That Gilmore could get few people, including himself, to agree with the claim is testified to by the company's release of the Edison re-make of Biograph's PERSONAL, a film that went into production a mere five days after Gilmore's self-serving assertion. In a published letter dated August 31, 1904, the Biograph company advised their customers that PERSONAL had just completed a four-week run at Keith's Union Square in New York City. A caveat was added against the Edison-Porter re-make, which, the letter went on,

. . . deliberately appropriated our original idea changing the advertisement upon which the story is founded . . . for the purpose of avoiding our copyrights, and reproducing the action of our film as nearly as they could.⁶⁶

In early September, John C. Kerr, an attorney acting for Biograph, formally advised Edison counsel Frank Dyer of his client's displeasure.⁶⁷ Dyer, in a letter dated September 17, 1904, told Kerr that he didn't think Biograph had much of a copyright infringement case. "I have," he noted, "serious doubts if a copyright can legitimately cover a moving picture film, comprising many scenes and incidents in widely different localities."⁶⁸

What precisely Dyer had in mind was an April 20, 1903 ruling that granted the Edison company an injunction to prevent Sigmund Lubin from duping and selling portions of an actuality Edison had copyrighted on March 1, 1902, KAISER WILHELM'S YACHT 'METEOR' ENTERING THE WATER. The legal battle had been fought over whether the Edison company, in order to comply with an 1870 copyright law for photographs, ought to have registered each of the 4,500 pictures in the 300-foot length of film individually. Overruling a lower court decision in Lubin's favour, the appellate court judge declared that: i) since the series had been taken from one camera at one operation; ii) since there was no distinguishable difference detectable by the naked eye between the separate pictures; and iii) since the economic or commodity value of the footage depended on its status as a single entity, the series was practically one picture. By duping even a portion, Lubin had been infringing on the Edison copyright.⁶⁹

On November 28, 1904, Melville Church, another Edison attorney, wrote to Delos Holden at the Edison Laboratory requesting that he obtain an affidavit from Edwin Porter stating that the PERSONAL footage "must have been taken from different standpoints, at different times, and, probably upon different films."⁷⁰ Church did not refer to the late-September completion of another Edison re-make of a Biograph success, Porter's MANIAC CHASE, essentially a copy of THE ESCAPED LUNATIC.⁷¹ The gist of his letter was that he had been reading the judgment in the Edison-Lubin case which, he

noted, was, based on the finding that "all of the pictures appear to be taken from a single standpoint, by the same camera, as a continuous performance." The key tactic in Edison's legal strategy would be to demonstrate that since Biograph's PERSONAL consisted of a number of negatives and not one continuous strip taken from a single camera position, it was not protected by their single copyright.⁷²

Just how much that move was a blend of confidence and bluff was revealed by the Edison side's eagerness to dig up a comic strip that Porter claimed contained the original idea. He had seen it, he said, in a newspaper lying around the office of Wallace McCutcheon, the director of PERSONAL, several months before the film had been undertaken. On November 23, 1904, the same day that Holden wrote to Church about his failure to uncover the strip, he had received a letter from the City Editor of The New York World, Horace Thurlow, informing him that he, Thurlow, had been unable to track the strip down. Thurlow, apparently unaware of the circumstance that had honed Holden's interest, added: " . . . exactly (the) scene as you describe is on exhibition in a moving picture series. I have seen it at Keith's."⁷⁴

2.7 Continuous and Natural: Recipe for an Illusion

Sent in to carry the ball for the Edison side, Porter's task was twofold: to persuade the court, in Dyer's terms, that Biograph had not properly copyrighted their picture, and in the event that the PERSONAL copyright did stand up, to convince the judge the Edison film was an original and not a plagiaristic infringement.

Much of Porter's December 3, 1904 affidavit was devoted to defining the technical, commercial, spatial and temporal unities of movie production in the period to show that PERSONAL comprised a discontinuous "aggregation" of separate sequences rather than a single "continuous" photograph that could be covered by a single copyright registration. He began by describing what he called the two "common" motion picture production practices. The first involved:

. . . a camera placed in a single position, in order to depict a single event, such as the launching of a vessel or the run of a fire department. In this class of pictures all the exposures are taken upon a single sensitized film . . . and the background of each picture of the film is exactly the same except when the camera is turned on a pivot to a different point on the compass.⁷⁵

The other method was "to build up long series of moving pictures" with each "scene or set of pictures entirely different from that of another set or scene." A film of that type, Porter stated, might require several weeks to complete and include "six or eight different acts or scenes taken from as many different view points."

By way of emphasizing the time element, Porter maintained that widely separated views were "seldom taken the same day." And more, that "the different scenes were almost invariably taken on different films," which Porter and his employer apparently believed was an additional argument, from a technical standpoint, in deciding whether PERSONAL could be considered a single photograph.

I have been informed and believe that the taking of the pictures occupied three different days. My opinion is that four or five separate sensitized films were used, and that these films contain as many as five or six different series of impressions, each portraying a different scene.

Those different scenes, Porter added, depicted settings at distances too great to have been managed "even with a camera pivoted so as to take a panorama." PERSONAL was thus "in no sense a single photograph, since the view points are not the same in all the views."

In attempting to adhere as closely as possible to the legal precedents of the Edison-Lubin case, Porter's company-assisted statement didn't omit the commercial argument:

. . . the photographer generally aims to take more exposures than are necessary, in order that he may trim off some of the pictures from both ends of the film and thereby produce what he considered a fitting and attractive beginning and end to the scene.

The Edison people believed that the integrity of the continuous action film was a matter of commercial option. As Porter described it, the long film was merely a "series of

scenes" or "really an aggregation of several series of negative impressions," that were used "to produce a positive film upon a single long continuous strip." Each series deliberately constituted one independent photograph, and for a very good reason:

. . . each scene is generally sold separately so that a purchaser or exhibitor may obtain one scene or two scenes or the entire series, as he wishes.

To counter PERSONAL's claim to originality, Porter simply repeated the groundless allegation that the Biograph film was based on a newspaper comic strip and even went as far as to insist that Wallace McCutcheon had admitted as much to him in a conversation. Though a common enough practice, there was no evidence that PERSONAL had been adapted from such a source.

Wallace McCutcheon had led off his affidavit for Biograph by refuting the claim that PERSONAL was derived from a comic strip, stating that the idea had been developed by another Biograph employee, Frank Marion.⁷⁶ But of much greater import was a document he appended to his statement called "Descriptions of Positions of Camera in Taking Views for Complainant's 'Personal' Photograph." McCutcheon listed eight separate camera positions or scenes and, conceding their physical non-contiguity, concluded with this:

These positions were carefully chosen so that when the impressions were joined in one photograph, the action would appear continuous and natural.

It amounted to the basic principle of the trick film, in other words, merged with filmed action in real-life settings. Here we have the rudiments of a story editing scheme of sorts in which the key role of the cameraman creating independent tableau shots was subordinated to a larger conception that determined the selection of the settings in which the "pantomime" was to be photographed. The illusion of continuous screen action, an integration of actuality framing and trompe l'oeil effect, was based on a sort of temporal stop-motion technique in which the perceived spatial unity of a "continuous exterior setting" became a necessary condition for the impression of "continuous and natural action." The structure of the Biograph subject and the Edison re-make, and in fact the larger chase picture genre, did little more than satisfy that condition: action emerging from the frame depth, with the chasers and the chased heading toward the camera-viewer, generally in the frame together, before they leave the frame out of one of the bottom corners. The empty scene then brought on a cut to a comparable piece of more or less complete action, and the procedure was repeated a half-dozen times until the "capture".

To substantiate McCutcheon's claim on technical grounds, Harry Marvin, a Biograph executive, stated that the "successive views" in PERSONAL "were taken on one negative consisting of a strip of film about 370 feet long." As for the commercial aspect of the case, Marvin maintained that "each view (was) not sold or rented by itself, but . . . in one strip of film."⁷⁷ (Curiously, in their August 15, 1904

Bulletin, Biograph announced that PERSONAL and their "other great productions" were "restricted to our own use and not for sale" adding that they were "the only concern in America prepared to supply an exclusive service."⁷⁸ And to further counter Edison claims, Frank Marion pointed out that HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN had been advertised for sale in The New York Clipper in a complete version on September 17, 1904, but in parts on October 10, 1904.⁷⁹

To press their brief that PERSONAL was "a single photograph of a whole" Biograph attorneys pointed to the continuity of performance — "actors the same" — and the continuity of action — "motion continuous from beginning to end" — while conceding that "only the background is changed as the scene progresses from point to point." Moreover, they contended that there was a similarity of method in the production of Edison's METEOR footage and PERSONAL. In the former the angle of view had been altered by the movement of a camera on its pivot; in PERSONAL, the change was the result of the movement of the camera and tripod from one position to another. And there was, they reasoned, "no difference in principle between the minutes, or seconds it may be, in the one case, and days in the other, between the taking of several views." The very method of PERSONAL, they argued, signified progress in motion picture art which had gone from the showing of "single scenes of objects and persons in motion" to "continuous action of objects and persons in the portrayal of episodes, public functions and events."⁸⁰

The Edison side, prepared to concede no "artistic" input from the editing function, held their ground. Biograph's projected positive was, they insisted, a mere mechanical print, since "the negative alone require(d) the work of authorship."⁸¹ The Edison studio's championing of the independence of the individual shot or "series of impressions" was not simply a clever legal dodge but, as this study will show, a very real and overriding aspect of their marketing policy, one which appeared to have the support of the 1903 Edison-Lubin judgment and which continued to influence production throughout the term of Porter's employment.

On May 6, 1905, Judge Lanning, in denying Biograph's application for a preliminary injunction, accepted their argument that a positive film containing "a series of pictures that may be thrown in rapid succession upon a screen telling a single connected story of a man fleeing from a crowd of women," even though it had been taken from different positions, could be copyrighted as a photograph. Biograph, he concluded, did hold a valid copyright, but whether in producing their re-make Edison had infringed upon it was another matter.⁸²

The major impact of the case at the Edison studio was a new copyright registration scheme. In a May 9, 1905 letter to Kinetograph Department Manager Alex Moore, Dyer discussed the desirability of registering their longer films in separate parts or scenes and wondered about the additional

expense.⁸³ Six months later he had apparently found a way to reduce that expense. On October 6, 1905, he wrote to the Registrar of Copyrights in Washington, D.C., requesting seven separate copyrights for Edwin Porter's POOR ALGY. But instead of forwarding paper rolls of the material, Dyer enclosed seven "single pictures from successive scenes of the film." And he provided this justification:

In Edison vs Lubin . . . it was held by the Court of Appeals, Third Circuit, 'that a series of pictures of such a character that the difference between successive pictures is not distinguishable by the eye' may be regarded as a single photograph, and therefore, the subject of a valid copyright.

As Dyer explained, he was sending a "representative picture from each scene, limiting the copyright to that picture, but depending in case of infringement upon the substantial identity of all the pictures of any scene with the copyrighted picture."⁸⁴ It was a practice designed to permit the Edison company to play both sides of the street; to protect their investment in longer fictional pictures that could be put on the market in parts as well as complete versions.⁸⁵

2.8 Continuous Incidents and Edison Sales Policy, 1904-1906

According to one film historian, Porter's LIFE OF AN AMERICAN POLICEMAN (1905) "was so loosely connected that later editions of the film were able to rearrange its scenes quite drastically without in any way harming its continuity."⁸⁶ Shot in November 1905, the film was copyrighted on December 6, 1905, in eighteen separate scenes, numbered H69527-44, although the company's catalogue listed a maximum of eight scenes.⁸⁷

The explanation is to be found in a preamble to the catalogue description. Here prospective buyers were informed that they could choose between two 1,000-foot versions, each containing only one of the production's two "most thrilling and realistic scenes," "River Tragedy" and "Desperate Encounter Between Burglar and Police." The film, shot with cooperation of the New York City (Metropolitan) Police Department and screened at a benefit for the Police Relief Fund on December 5, 1905, was further described as "absolutely perfect as to detail, action and surroundings, and depict(s) in the most realistic manner actual daily life and happenings." In other words, very much the sort of re-enactment of an institutional routine Porter had attempted in LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN. The catalogue went on to explain the two versions this way:

In order to give our customers a selection between these two scenes (River Tragedy and Desperate Encounter Between Burglar and Police), as well as to keep the production within a reason-

able length, we have decided to furnish this picture complete with either of the above scenes, as the customer may select, the length in each case for the entire production being 1,000 feet.⁸⁸

Records for the years 1904-1906 show that sales of the version with "River Tragedy" totaled six copies in 1905 and twenty-two copies in 1906.⁸⁹ A mere five copies of the version with the "Desperate Encounter" scene were sold in 1906, and none in 1905. In 1906, the company also sold or was prepared to sell the film in separate parts. The same records show that two copies of the 300-foot "River Tragedy" scene were sold separately as were seven copies of the 260-foot "Desperate Encounter." Scene 7, "Runaway in the Park," and scene 8, "Joke on the Roundsman" were also offered for sale separately, each with its own separate catalogue number, but no sales were recorded. An apparently related 240-foot scene also dating from the same December 1905 period, BICYCLE POLICE CHASING AUTO, earned sales of five copies in 1905 and three copies in 1906, as did a 380-foot subject listed as SPECT. SCENES N.Y. CITY FIRE (sic), with three copies sold in 1905 and seven in 1906.

The company's January 1, 1907 catalogue listed the two versions of the complete film and the separate scenes, "Desperate Encounter," "Runaway in the Park" and "River Tragedy," as well as "Two Little Waifs," which seems the film's third scene, "Lost Child." In 1905, each full-length version would cost a buyer \$150. The July 1906 catalogue also listed both versions at \$150. In 1907, the version

with "Desperate Encounter" was still being offered at that price while the more popular one with "River Tragedy" had been discounted down to \$146.25.

The case of Porter's two 1904 Yeggman films was a little different. Originally filmed in two full-length parts, the first, ROUNDING UP OF THE YEGGMAN, was shot between August 15 and September 10, 1904, and a 952-foot length registered for copyright on September 16, 1904. The second part, CAPTURE OF THE 'YEGG' BANK BURGLARS, was filmed in the same period, but copyrighted in four separate parts on September 28, 1904.⁹⁰ The parts were, however, registered, perhaps by a clerk in the copyright office, out of the sequence presumably intended by Porter — "Tracked", "Dive Scene", "Cellar Scene" and "Capture". Niver, following Walls, simply transferred the material from that sequence, which Walls gave as "Capture and Death", "Cellar Scene", "Tracked" and "Dive Scene".⁹¹ Edison sales records for the period do not show sales for two separate films. Rather, there is one title, CAPTURE OF 'YEGG' BANK BURGLARS with sales of forty-two copies in 1904, twenty-one in 1905 and twenty-three in 1906 of a 960-foot length. Also, the records show the separate sales of an 80-foot LOCOMOTIVE HEAD-ON COLLISION, apparently the concluding scene from ROUNDING UP OF THE YEGGMEN, as a separate subject. The complete version the company offered for sale, a fifteen-scene subject called CAPTURE OF 'YEGG' BANK BURGLARS, combined both parts, but excluded the two-shot actuality railroad collision sequence.⁹²

As far as the records indicate, the railroad smash-up sequence was never offered for sale as part of the complete version but only as the separate subject, LOCOMOTIVE HEAD-ON COLLISION.

Porter's 1,000-foot, eleven-scene HONEYMOON AT NIAGARA FALLS, filmed between August 7 and August 14, 1906, and copyrighted on October 16, 1906, in eleven separate parts, numbered H83903-13, had what seems a typical sales history.⁹³ Seventy-five copies of the complete 1000-foot release print were sold in 1906. But the company was prepared to sell eight of the parts separately, each of them representing a portion of actuality footage of the Niagara site: "American Falls", "Horseshoe Falls", "Maid of the Mist", "Horseshoe Falls" (in a shorter length), "American Falls" (in a longer length) "Trip on Chippewa", "Whirlpool Rapids" and "Cave of the Winds".

Other Porter films given the same sales treatment were HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN, etc., THE WHOLE DAM FAMILY, THE KLEPTOMANIAC, THE SEVEN AGES, STOLEN BY GYPSIES, ON A GOOD OLD FIVE-CENT TROLLEY, THE BURGLAR'S SLIDE FOR LIFE, and BOARDING SCHOOL GIRLS. An exhibitor or exchange operator could purchase the complete 675-foot release print of HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN or any of nine separate parts. Four parts of the 300-foot THE WHOLE DAM FAMILY were available in that form; "Sneezing", "Cigarette Fiend", "Cry Baby" and "Chewing Gum". A 150-foot section of the 670-foot THE KEPTOMANIAC titled "Scenes in a Police Court" was offered as a separate subject,

but in 1906 still had no takers. Three of the tableau scenes from THE SEVEN AGES were sold as separate subjects: "Engagement Ring", "Old Sweethearts" and "Old Maid & Pet Cat". Two of the scenes from the 845-foot STOLEN BY GYPSIES, "Dressing the Baby" and "Fortune Telling Gypsies" were offered in separate parts with little response from prospective buyers. Two sections of the 265-foot BURGLAR'S SLIDE FOR LIFE, "Burglar & Vapor Bath" and "Burglar and Bull Dog" were offered in separate parts with better but far from spectacular sales success; a total of one copy of the former and nine copies of the latter were sold in 1905 and 1906. One copy of a section of the 545-foot ON A GOOD OLD FIVE-CENT TROLLEY titled "Always a Gentleman" was sold in 1905 and again in 1906. Six sections of the 965-foot BOARDING SCHOOL GIRLS were offered for separate sale with equally tepid results.

Curiously, the records in fact tend to show that the company was more successful at selling complete release prints: a total of ninety-one copies of HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN between 1904 and 1906; seventy-five copies of HONEYMOON AT NIAGARA FALLS in 1906; 136 copies of THE WHOLE DAM FAMILY in 1905 and 1906; forty-three copies of THE KLEPTOMANIAC between 1904 and 1906; fifty-nine copies of STOLEN BY GYPSIES in 1905 and 1906; ninety-two copies of BURGLAR'S SLIDE FOR LIFE in 1905 and 1906; seventy-one copies of GOOD OLD FIVE-CENT TROLLEY RIDE in 1905 and 1906; and forty-six prints of BOARDING SCHOOL GIRLS in the same period.

Moreover, the figures suggest that extended film length did not pose a marketing problem in the years 1905-1906. And more, that sales for the longer films turned out in that period were superior to those for the shorter production offered in 1904, which began to decline significantly in 1905 and 1906. In 1904, for example, the company sold forty-two prints of the 240-foot trick-film DOG FACTORY, but only nine in 1905 and 1906. Short actuality footage from at home and abroad which had enjoyed reasonable sales in 1904, likewise dropped considerably in 1905-1906: RUSSIAN INFANTRY, WARSAW, at forty-five feet, had sales of twenty-five copies in 1904, eleven in 1905 and three in 1906; twenty-five copies of the sixty-five-foot BABY AND PUPPIES were sold in 1904, eight in 1905 and only two in 1906.

On the other hand, the sales fate of actuality material upon which the practice of selling longer films in parts was based was a different one. The Edison company sold as many complete copies of the 750-foot INTER-COLLEGIATE REGATTA (1904) as parts, but fewer copies of the 1,000-foot PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S INAUGURATION (1905) than 155-foot, 170-foot, 90-foot and 110-foot sections. Sales of the complete 800-foot RUSSIAN-JAPANESE PEACE CONFERENCE (1904), however, were better than part sales. SCENES AND INCIDENTS HAWAIIAN ISLANDS (1906) was only sold in parts as was the footage of SAN FRANCISCO EARTHQUAKE (1906). But sales of the complete 735-foot A TRIP THROUGH THE YELLOW STONE PARK (1906) were superior to part sales.

Among the company's top commercial successes in the period 1904-1906 were: CAPTURE OF YEGG BANK BURGLARS, eighty-six copies of a 940-foot print; eighty-two copies of LOCOMOTIVE HEAD-ON COLLISION (80 feet); seventy-four prints of THE EX-CONVICT (660 feet); seventy-three prints of HOW JONES LOST HIS ROLL (575 feet); seventy-six prints of RAFFLES THE DOG (635 feet); thirty prints of THE LITTLE TRAIN ROBBERY (725 feet); thirty-eight prints of WHITE CAPS (835 feet); fifty-seven prints of POOR ALGY (315 feet); thirty-eight prints of THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER (975 feet); forty-two prints of THE WATERMELON PATCH (725 feet); fifty-nine prints of DOWN ON THE FARM (440 feet); 157 prints of THE TRAIN WRECKERS (815 feet); 192 prints of the 470-foot DREAM OF A RAREBIT FIEND.

Until 1908 actuality subjects dominated the work of American film producers. But the bits-and-pieces actuality sales approach did not suit the trend to longer fictional subjects that dated from late 1903. The Edison company's own records made it clear that by 1906, certainly, the nickelodeon demand for complete versions of those films had outstripped part sales.

Nevertheless the concept of the longer film as an aggregation of independent scenes and novelty effects persisted as an Edison litigational and production principle. In an October 1907 Bill of Complaint the company filed in a suit against Robert Bachman's Twentieth Century Optiscope Company, the thirteen separate copyright and deposit certificates for each

of the thirteen parts of Porter's DANIEL BOONE and the same set of separate documents for his twelve-part LIVES OF A CAT were deposited with the court as exhibits.⁹⁴ In a deposition given in connection with another round of Edison litigation over VOICES FROM THE DEAD the following year, Porter maintained the notion of a single camera loaded with "a reel containing an unbroken tape-like photographic film." During the filming, he deposed, "the camera was kept stationary so as to have all the pictures taken from a single point of view." Moreover, Porter stated that the point of view of the camera was not changed for the filming of each of the twenty scenes, though there was some variation in the angles of different scenes. The photographs of each "object in motion" appeared on the negative "as observed from a single point of view in a continuous straight line sequence of length."⁹⁵

Not merely the stuff of a public courtroom posture, that conception of motion pictures represented internal company doctrine. In a letter Dyer wrote to Church dated August 9, 1907 about a proposed future suit against Pathé he referred to the fact, an apparently common one by 1907, of "many films . . . where the camera is in motion or . . . where the film represents small snatches from a series of disconnected scenes."⁹⁶ A film of that type, it was implied, went against the company's litigational schemes.

2.9 Ideological Features of Porter's Edison Production

Conceding the limited contribution Porter's Edison films made to the development of montage, which is to say their apparent formal shortcomings, some historians have mistakenly sought to rationalize those alleged shortcomings within a humanist or avant-garde perspective. As Lewis Jacobs attempted to excuse Porter's formal failings on the grounds of "strong social feeling," Robert Gessner and Eric Rhode endeavored to cover those failings — failings only as presumed on the basis of an implicit premise and not in any other way a proven conclusion — with an avant-garde veneer. In doing so, the genuine historical problem of Porter's part in the early development of a twentieth-century entertainment industry is displaced into a future he could never have imagined. Gessner, for example, wondered whether *LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN*'s replayed, overlapping concluding action was not a precursor of the kind of time juggling aesthetic employed in Alain Resnais' *LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD* (1961).⁹⁷ Eric Rhode, noting that Picasso completed Les Demoiselles d'Avignon in 1907, proceeded to a dubious conclusion:

Porter and other pioneers, in helping to release film from the bondage of consecutive time, freed it from the tyranny of geographical space and unself-consciously allied it with Cubism and with many kinds of assemblage that resulted from Cubism.⁹⁸

The truth is simpler, if somewhat less palatable: with the merit or potential merit of Porter's Edison production

undercut by the company's copyright and sales policy, his work was produced, marketed and exhibited mostly for its novelty values and reactionary ideology.

The requirement that longer motion picture subjects appeal to the tastes of vaudevillem meant that novelty was their main selling point. Edison studio circulars and catalogue descriptions, some, if not all of them, written by Porter, provide the best insight into his concept of how to tailor and promote motion pictures to suit that entertainment setting. THE WHOLE DAM FAMILY (1905) was touted as "a popular fad . . . widely advertised by lithographs and souvenir mailing cards . . . illustrated in a most unusual and original way." A Porter film released in November of the same year, EVERYBODY WORKS BUT FATHER," . . . opens with a laughable "Jumble" Announcement — a new feature, exclusively Edison . . ."⁹⁹ DREAM OF A RAREBIT FIEND (1906) was alleged to have "photographic 'stunts' . . . never . . . seen or attempted before."¹⁰⁰ Ostensibly a chase picture, there was no special reference to the technique of the chase in the synopsis of RAFFLES (1905) nor, for that matter, in those of any of the other Edison chase pictures including HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN, their first in the genre. What the company proclaimed was important about RAFFLES was that it was "strictly up-to-date," though it was in effect only an extended vaudeville trick-dog act packaged in a chase.¹⁰¹

Within the body of that superficially topical subject matter in gimmicky formats we find the use of visual novelty as a vehicle for racial stereotypes and related period notions on the one hand, and on the other, the same techniques employed to advance progressivist themes. Taken together Porter's Edison films appear to contain a certain ideological confusion: The watermelon-maddened blacks in Porter's THE WATERMELON PATCH with its comic lynch mob scene, COHEN'S FIRE SALE with its greedy, arson-prone, large-nosed jew in close-up, the "poor chink" in THE TERRIBLE KIDS and LIFE OF AN AMERICAN COWBOY's "Mexican greaser" and band of indian renegades, and the skulking gypsies in STOLEN BY GYPSIES seem very much at odds with the pleas on behalf of the downtrodden in THE EX-CONVICT and THE KLEPTOMANIAC, with its final tableau depicting a corrupt justice system; the rampaging vigilantes in THE WHITE CAPS replayed the fulsome police department tribute of LIFE OF AN AMERICAN POLICEMAN.¹⁰² THE SEVEN AGES, a "humorous feature," marked a concealed reference point, its chronological sequence of embraces framing a picture of ordered 'wasp' existence, of pre-destined family-rooted progress through a sober establishment career.

But perhaps those themes were as much, if not more, the perfunctory trappings of an age as of a man. There is, on the other hand, some strong and consistent emotion in Porter's films. A childless husband whose wife had endured a number of miscarriages, the Victorian theme of father-daughter relationship recurs throughout his work.¹⁰³ Heightened by the urgency of menace, in LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIRE-

MAN, THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, STOLEN BY GYPSIES, THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER, THE TRAIN WRECKERS, RESCUED FROM AN EAGLE'S NEST and LOST IN THE ALPS the drama is resolved in a happy family-reunion. Good men had good families, bad men were without families and were forced to live in the social world beyond, a world of crime, dishonesty, injustice and disaster.

In this chapter I have shown that the tableau structure of Edwin Porter's 1903-1904 Edison production was at great odds with the traditional conclusions about his work in that period, as well as the ways in which that production articulated certain social, cultural and industrial constraints on movie making. In the next chapter I will deal with the compositional features of those tableaux, features that lent them their distinct newsreel character. The unities of documentary production, that from served as the basis for copyright protection and defined narrative structure, in turn articulated from a legal perspective the deliberately promoted cameraman-at-the-scene screen rhetoric from which that newsreel character derived.

NOTES: CHAPTER 2

¹ Robert Conot, A Streak of Luck, New York: Bantam Books, 1980.

² Copyright records, Edison National Historic Site (ENHS), West Orange, N.J..

³ Copyright envelope, ENHS.

⁴ Biograph Bulletin, No. 28, August 15, 1904.

⁵ Edison Films, September Supplement, 1904, pp. 11-12.

Lubin also put out a version advertised in the Clipper on November 5, 1904 as MEET ME AT THE FOUNTAIN which he copyrighted that same day as NEW VERSION OF 'PERSONAL'. His 'personal' read:

Young French Nobleman recently arrived in this country, desires to meet handsome American girl. Object matrimony. Will be 'At the Fountain' at 10 o'clock, wearing a chrysanthemum boutonniere.

In his attempted escape, Lubin's nobleman made use of a train. The following year Pathé remade the film as DIX FEMMES POUR UN MARI.

⁶ Edison Films, 1904.

⁷ American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, Complainant vs. Edison Manufacturing Company, Defendant. "Defendant's Affidavits in Opposition to Complainant's Motion for Preliminary Injunction," United States Circuit Court for the District of New Jersey, December 3, 1904, pp. 4-10.

⁸ Gordon Hendricks, The Edison Motion Picture Myth,

Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961, pp. 4,12; and Beaumont Newhall, "Muybridge and the First Motion Picture," Image, V, No. 1 (January 1956), p. 11.

⁹ Gordon Hendricks, The Kinetoscope, New York, 1966. Reprinted by Arno Press, New York, 1972, pp. 23,36,54.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.142-143.

¹¹ The New York Clipper, April 18, 1896, p. 104.

¹² The New York Clipper, June 6, 1896, p. 212.

¹³ The New York Clipper, July 4, 1896, p. 280.

¹⁴ The New York Clipper, July 11, 1896, p. 296.

¹⁵ The New York Clipper, October 17, 1896, p. 522.

¹⁶ The New York Clipper, October 3, 1896, p. 488,497.

One of the machines was named a "Getthemoneygraph." See Ceram, p. 146.

¹⁷ The New York Clipper, October 17, 1896, p. 522.

¹⁸ Ramsaye, p. 119. "Let's," Ramsaye quoted Edison as saying, "not kill the goose that lays the golden egg."

Norman C. Raff of Raff and Gammon, agents for the Edison Kinetoscope, had approached Edison about producing a projection apparatus and received that reply in part. This may, of course, be another of the colourful but imprecise tales found throughout Ramsaye's volumes. In a 1926 interview with The New York Times, Edison, who thought so little of his kinetoscope that he refused to spend the \$150 required to take out an international patent, confidently stated that

the "talking" picture would not become popular with American audiences. (From The Merritt Crawford Archive, The Museum of Modern Art, page number not available.)

¹⁹ James H. White, deposition, in Thomas A. Edison vs The American Vitagraph Company (J.S. Blackton), in equity 6991, February 1900, United States Circuit Court for the Southern District of New York. For one analysis of the relative successes of the Lumière apparatus and Edison's Jenkins-Armat vitascope, see Robert Allen, "Vitascope/Cinématographe: Initial Patterns of American Film Practice." Journal of University Film Association, XXXI, No. 2 (Spring 1979), pp. 13-18.

For Louis Lumière's recollection of the beginnings of his machine see his interview with Georges Sadoul, "Louis Lumière: The Last Interview," in Harry M. Geduld, Film Makers on Film Making. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970.

Originally published in Sight and Sound, XXII, No. 66 (Summer 1948), pp. 68-70.

²⁰ Correspondence, Thomas A. Edison to Charles E. Manning, May 25, 1903.

²¹ Thomas A. Edison, affidavit, in Thomas A. Edison vs. J. Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith, in equity 6989, July 8, 1898, United States Circuit Court for the Southern District of New York.

²² Ramsaye, pp. 379-388.

²³ Conot, pp. 598-599.

²⁴ Correspondence, Howard W. Hayes to William E. Gilmore, July 31, 1901.

²⁵ Correspondence, James H. White to William H. Margraf, December 3, 1903.

²⁶ Memorandum, Frank L. Dyer to Horace Plimpton, May 19, 1909.

²⁷ Blaisdell, 1912. The year was in fact 1900.

²⁸ Correspondence, James H. White to Alex Werner, June 15, 1900.

²⁹ Joe Hyains, "2 Survive 'Great Train Robbery,'" New York Herald Tribune, October 9, 1961. Microfilm Collection, Film Study Centre, The Museum of Modern Art, (page number unavailable).

³⁰ Based on a review of New York Clipper advertisements, 1903. On April 4, 1903 there was a large ad that referred to the film's eight scenes; the catalogue listed seven (p.156).

³¹ Copyright records, ENHS.

³² From an undated magazine clipping supplied to me by Martin Sopocy.

³³ Cable, W.E. Gilmore to James H. White, December 1, 1903. Gilmore may have been referring in fact to Biograph.

³⁴ See Denis Gifford, The British Film Catalogue, 1972, listings for 1903.

³⁵ Correspondence, James H. White to W.E. Gilmore, December 3, 1903.

³⁶ The New York Clipper, July 2, 1904, p. 444.

³⁷ Thomas A. Edison, Complainant vs Sigmund Lubin, Defendant (THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY), 1904, ENHS. Confirmation of the Edison Company's failure to file is contained in a letter to George F. Scull, an attorney, from an unidentified employee, dated November 11, 1914, ENHS.

³⁸ Correspondence, Frank Dyer to W.E. Gilmore, July 21, 1904.

³⁹ See Joseph Csida and June Bundy Csida, American Entertainments: A Unique History of Popular Show Business, New York: Watson and Guptill Publications, 1978, p. 133.

⁴⁰ Edison Films, Edison Manufacturing Company, July 1906, p. 66.

⁴¹ It was a film that Lubin did not copyright, although he claimed in his circular to have done so on July 25, 1904. The information on the Porter film comes from the copyright records, ENHS. In a plot detail lifted from Mottershaw's DARING DAYLIGHT BURGLARY, Lubin's film had the police capture the gang by wiring ahead to the next railroad station.

⁴² Copyright records, ENHS.

⁴³ Copyright records, ENHS.

⁴⁴ The New York Dramatic Mirror, February 20, 1904, p. 18.

⁴⁵ The New York Dramatic Mirror, March 12, 1904, p. 17.

⁴⁶ The New York Dramatic Mirror, November 5, 1904, p. 18.

⁴⁷ Paul Spehr, "Film Making at the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1900-1906," The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress (Summer-Fall, 1980), pp. 413-421.

48 Copyright records, ENHS.

49 American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, Complainant vs the Edison Manufacturing Company, Defendant. "Defendent's Affidavits in Opposition to Complainant's Motion for Preliminary Injunction," United States Circuit Court, District of New Jersey, December 3, 1904, pp. 4-10 (Edwin Porter's affidavit) henceforth as Porter affidavit, 1904.

50 Internal Correspondence, Edwin Porter to Alex Moore, July 6, 1905. On the copyright envelope for EVERYBODY WORKS BUT FATHER, registered in November 1905, Porter wrote: "To be developed & Returned (sic) to NY Studio to be trimmed."

51 Biograph vs Edison, "Defendent's Rejoinder to Complainant's Brief in Reply," December 24, 1904.

52 The Motion Picture Patents Company vs George Brandenburg, deposition of Edwin Porter, July 15, 1909.

53 Blaisdell, 1912. Charles Musser believes that the new title represented a demotion that anticipated the dismissal of Porter from the company. Information on an index card at ENHS, based on what would appear to be a New York Times story of 1919 or 1920, gives the date of Porter's departure as November 13, 1909.

54 Separate documents, ENHS. A handwritten note at ENHS dated March 20, 1907, described Porter as a minor official who was bound to "follow instructions of Moore." (Legal Box 124, Folder 5.) That note appeared to contain elements of the litigational posture to be adopted in a case

that dated from 1904. It ought to be noted, however, that Porter's position in the Kinetograph Department could vary, according to the demands of a case, from simply "one of the photographers" to an expert on cameras and other apparatus.

⁵⁵ See Blaisdell, 1912. "E.S. Porter — He made the Famous Players Famous," New York Telegraph, December 15, 1912; Porter, Edwin Stanton, "National Cyclopedia of American Biography, XXX, pp. 406-408; Ezra Goodman, "Reminiscences of Edwin Porter," 1940; "Edwin Porter Dies: Pioneer in Films was 71," New York Herald Tribune, May 1, 1941; "Edwin S. Porter, 71, Pioneer in Films," New York Times, May 1, 1941; Kemp Niver, "The First Twenty Years"; Robert Sklar, "Porter, Edwin Stanton," Dictionary of American Biography, Supplement No. 3, 1941-45 (1972), pp. 606-608; Jack Spears, "Edwin S. Porter"; J. Porter Reilly, "Filming Fire in 1903," Firehouse, February 1981, pp. 46-47; Charles Musser, "Program Notes: Edwin S. Porter Tribute," The Museum of Modern Art, December 1978. Porter was named after Edwin M. Stanton, Abe Lincoln's Secretary of War. He was born in 1870 in Connellsville, Pennsylvania.

In 1940, Porter told New York Times reporter Ezra Goodman, that he began his motion picture career with Edison in 1893; "It was," he was reported to have said, "not until three years after I went to work for Edison that pictures were projected on a screen at all." But that seems unlikely. For one thing, there is absolutely no reference to Porter's employment at Edison in that period in the awesomely thorough research of

Gordon Hendricks, the leading authority on pre-1896 developments there.

⁵⁶ Thomas A. Edison vs the American Vitagraph Company, 1907, Legal Box 105, Folder 12, ENHS.

⁵⁷ Gene Smith and Jayne Barry Smith (eds.), The National Police Gazette, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972, p. 57. This is an anthology of material selected from the 1890s.

⁵⁸ Eden Musée File, Library and Museum of the Performing Arts, New York Public Library, Lincoln Center, New York City.

⁵⁹ Ramsaye, pp. 347-348. For a review of the problems of early projectors and projectionists see North, "The Early Development of the Motion Picture," chapter 4. Apparently, Hollaman believed that motion pictures would inevitably displace his own modelled tales of execution and assassination in wax. And he was right. In 1915 the Eden sold off its waxen figures at public auction and closed its doors for good.

⁶⁰ Ramsaye, p. 438.

⁶¹ Ramsaye, pp. 487-488.

⁶² Brooks MacNamara, "The Scenography of Popular Entertainment," The Drama Review, XVIII, no. 1 (March 1974), pp. 19-24.

⁶³ Correspondence, W.E. Gilmore to George Kleine, August 15, 1904.

⁶⁴ Correspondence, George Kleine to W.E. Gilmore, August 18, 1904.

65 Correspondence, W.E. Gilmore to George Kleine;
August 24, 1904.

66 American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, "To Our
Customers," August 31, 1904.

67 Correspondence, John C. Kerr to F.L. Dyer, September
16, 1904.

68 Correspondence, F.L. Dyer to John C. Kerr, September
17, 1904.

69 119 Federal Reporter, 993-994; and 122 Federal Report-
er, 240-243. The earlier ruling in favor of Lubin was made
on January 13, 1903; the decisive one in Edison's favor
was delivered on April 20, 1903. See also Jeanne Thomas Allen,
"Copyright and Early Theatre, Vaudeville and Film Competition,"
Journal of University Film Association, XXXI, No. 2
(Spring 1979).

70 Correspondence, Melville Church to Delos Holden,
November 28, 1904.

71 Porter's first choice for the title had in fact been
ESCAPED MANIAC which he subsequently changed to MANIAC CHASE.
Copyright Records, ENHS.

72 The legal tactic contemplated in the case against
Lubin over his re-make of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY was a little
different. The unfiled Bill of Complaint stated that it
consisted of a "series of tableaux showing the various inci-
dents connected with the stoppage and robbery of a railroad
train" which had taken "four weeks" to complete. The same
document described the technical production features as
follows:

. . . Successive views were taken on one negative strip of film . . . each separate view is not sold by itself but all are sold together, being printed on one strip for the foregoing purpose and constituting one photograph.

There is other evidence that the Edison company had few qualms about re-constructing the facts to suit the case. In a letter Holden wrote to Church, dated November 30, 1904, he wondered, in a P.S., whether "I may have gone too far in the affidavits, and brought out points which you might not consider wise, in view of the fact that we own a good many of these copyrighted photographs made up of various scenes." THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY was one of them.

⁷³ Porter's affidavit. An earlier version of this had Porter getting the story from a "woman who saw the comic page in McCutcheon's office." Correspondence, Delos Holden to Melville Church, November 30, 1904.

⁷⁴ Correspondence, Horace Thurlow to Delos Holden, November 29, 1904.

⁷⁵ The quotes cited here and the subsequent quotes attributed to Porter are all from his December 3, 1904 affidavit.

⁷⁶ American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, Complainant vs Edison Manufacturing Company, Defendant, "Complainant's Motion Papers and Rebutting Affidavits," September 17, 1904, pp. 30-32. We recall that in his affidavit Porter did not fail to spot the debt the Biograph picture owed to the subjects of the Brighton school. Clearly, Porter, or someone else, at the Edison studio was paying careful attention to

new industrial developments. The Brighton model, however, was one the company deliberately ignored in their own work — until its successful adoption by Biograph.

77 "Complainant's Motion Papers and Rebutting Affidavits," November 11, 1904, pp. 19-22. Marvin held the position of company president.

78 Biograph Bulletin, No. 28, August 15, 1904.

79 "Complainant's Motion Papers and Rebutting Affidavits," November 11, 1904, pp. 11-15.

80 "Complainant's Brief in Reply," December 22, 1904.

81 "Defendant's Rejoinder to Complainant's Brief in Reply," December 24, 1904. In the earlier "Meteor" case, Lubin's superintendent of motion pictures, John J. Frawley, was prepared to deny any artistic merit to documentary photography per se. James White in an affidavit dated June 9, 1902 had argued that "artistic skill was required in placing the camera in such position that the lights and shades of the picture when taken shall have proper values." Frawley countered on June 24, 1902 with this:

There is no particular skill or intellectual conception or original effect embodied in the photographs representing the launching of the meteor. These photographs (Edison's) are purely the results of the functions of the cameras, and a dozen different photographers with a dozen different cameras from the same general location would necessarily have obtained the same results.

82 137 Federal Reporter, pp. 202-208.

83 Correspondence, F.L. Dyer to Alexander Moore,
May 9, 1905.

84 Correspondence, F.L. Dyer to Thorwald Solberg, Registrar of Copyrights, Washington, D.C., October 6, 1905.

In the fall of 1904, Edison lawyers had produced a draft version of the scheme. On November 20, 1904 Melville Church wrote to Holden recommending a supplementary copyright submission for HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN:

I think the series of negatives which portray the French nobleman in his room making up his toilet should constitute the subject of one registration; the first scene before Grant's Tomb, another; the second scene, showing the sprint down the pathway from the Tomb, another; and so on.

In his reply, Holden pointed out one of the obvious problems with the procedure: it would, in effect, invalidate the copyright on Edison's previous longer subjects. The risk, however, was one the company ultimately believed it could live with. In February 1905, for example, eight separate bromide paper prints were sent to Washington to register each of the eight separate scenes of THE SEVEN AGES.

85 It was, of course, the case that Biograph with a different copyright policy, one aschewing parts registration, was producing films of the same type, though perhaps, superior realizations.

- 86 William K. Everson, American Silent Film, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. See especially, chapter 3, "The Birth of Film Grammar," pp. 30-53.
- 87 Walls, p. 33; Edison Films, "Life of an American Policeman," Thomas A. Edison, December 1905.
- 88 Edison Films, "Life of An American Policeman."
- 89 All sales figures and related statistics cited here come from an eight-page document titled "Film Sales" found in a file, "M.P. — Sales," ENHS.
- 90 Copyright Records, ENHS.
- 91 Walls, p. 10; Niver, Motion Pictures from the Library of Congress Paper Print Collection, p.172.
- 92 Edison Films, July 1906, pp. 64-66.
- 93 Copyright Records, ENHS.
- 94 Edison Manufacturing Company, Complainant vs Twentieth Century Optiscope Company and Robert Bachman, Defendants, "Bill of Complaint," October 31, 1907, ENHS.
- 95 Edison Manufacturing Company, Complainant vs G.W. and C.A. Brandenburg, Defendants, "Affidavit of Edwin S. Porter," November 1908, ENHS.
- 96 Correspondence, F.L. Dyer to Melville Church, August 9, 1907.
- 97 Robert Gessner, "Porter and the Creation of Cinematic Motion," 1962.

98 Eric Rhode, A History of the Cinema: From Its Origins to 1970, New York: Hill and Wang, 1976, pp. 40-41.

99 Edison Films, July 1906, pp. 36-37.

100 Ibid., p. 41.

101 Ibid., pp. 37-38.

102 Ibid., pp. 42, 98, 36.

103 Conversations with J. Porter Reilly. Mr. Reilly's forthcoming book-length treatment of the complete life and career of Edwin Porter will be brought out by an American publisher.

CHAPTER 3

SCREEN REALISM: THE RHETORIC OF AUTHENTIC PRESENCE

"There is a basic confusion concerning the newsreel film. They said that Lumière invented the newsreel — it was Méliès. Lumière photographed train stations, horse races, families in the garden — i.e. the stuff of impressionist painting. Méliès filmed a trip to the moon, President Fallières visiting Yugoslavia, the eruption of Mount Pelée, Dreyfus."

Jean-Luc Godard in
La Chinoise (1967)

3.1 Simple, Guileless Records

The assumption that motion pictures produce or ought to produce simple, guileless records of "real" life has led to the association of early examples of staged topical screen action with deceit and the identification of the news "fake" as a perversion of the medium's original innocence. There are two distinct issues here. The first concerns the false claim of a cameraman having been to the scene of an actual event; the other, more difficult and at the same time more interesting, raises the larger question of the role of staging, of a calculated arrangement in what purported to be the neutral record produced by a cameraman who was, in fact, there at the scene with his equipment. On the one hand we are led into a discussion of misrepresentation contaminating the activity of newsgathering for purposes of direct or indirect political manipulation. It is the problem Raymond Fielding examined in his confrontation with the status of the screen newsreel as an entertainment form.¹ The second issue involves the formal character of the documentary film record and the circumstances of its production. It is worth pointing out that all films rely to a greater or lesser extent on the device of staging, on some form of arrangement and pre-conception. Cameras do not create pictures on their own. Louis Lumière set up his equipment at the Ciotat station to encode a very particular experience of the arriving train.² The artificial arrangement of scenes for the camera as such matters less, however, than the development of a deliberate paradigm of arrangement, one based on a mode of

illusionism signifying an authentic presence having-been at an actual scene. It is the formal articulation of that rhetoric of authentic presence that most concerns us.

3.1.2 A Show of Real Life

Vaudeville house screen shows involved the joining together of separate pieces of footage with comment and continuity provided by a narrator. There were few standardized sequences and not much consistency from show to show. An exhibitor who wanted to attract an audience with, say, some torpedo boat action might purchase one or two or all three of the separate Edison scenes titled TORPEDO BOAT "MORRIS" RUNNUNG (1900), DISCHARGING A WHITEHEAD TORPEDO (1900), and EXPLODING A WHITEHEAD TORPEDO (1900). He could then show the footage in almost any way he wished; hire a narrator, join the footage to other material including lantern slides, and so on. Different audiences experienced different shows based on the same material.

The formal features of the documentary record those shows claimed to offer included frame depth, the dramatic use of frame edge, the movement of action out of the frame depth toward the camera-viewer, exits into the bottom frame corners, movement into the frame depth from behind the camera and changes in camera position, distance and angle. At a speed that cannot be explained by their limited experience, cameramen very quickly developed those features into a fiction of visual recording. The rhetoric of that fiction

contained a built-in promise, reiterated in the advertising and the live commentary, of the "authentic" record of an actual event, a record formally marked, in the ways Sanderson described, to convey the man-on-the-spot drama through which the recording had been obtained.

3.1.3 Obvious Cases, Media Events and Documentary Ambiguity

There are instances where the element of staging is reasonably transparent. An early example was the June 1894 prizefight organized for Edison's Black Maria camera between two lightweights, Michael Leonard and Jack Cushing. The six celluloid rounds were to be viewed on six separate kinetoscope machines. But the project enjoyed only limited success. Undaunted, the Edison company went on to stage a more dramatic contest. "Gentleman Jim" Corbett the reigning heavyweight champion, was matched against Peter Courtney, a game if inept challenger, and the contest, which Fielding called "the first news fake," scripted for a decisive sixth round kayo.³

A happy financial return on the exhibition of prize fight footage appeared to require a different method of display. Moreover, it did not seem to require the presence of a camera at the scene of the actual contest. In March 1897, Sigmund Lubin produced a fake of the Jim Corbett-Bob Fitzsimmons bout in Nevada. Employing a couple of burly stand-ins and using the press account of the bout as a scenario, Lubin called the enactment "THE GREAT CORBETT-FITZSIMMONS FIGHT",

with the words "in counterpart" affixed in smaller print.⁴ In the latter part of 1899, Lubin's company completed other reproductions of prizefights and wrestling matches including a version of the November 3, 1899 Fitzsimmons-Jeffries bout at Coney Island. One of four versions of that contest, three of them, one copyrighted by Edison, one by Vitagraph and one by Biograph were projected on vaudeville house screens in New York City in the week of November 26, 1899, each as the genuine record.⁵

The most legendary of the non-documentary, obvious cases was Richard Hollaman's version of the Passion Play as performed by the villagers of Horitz, Bohemia. When a deal for an on-location filming of the annual ritual came to nought, Hollaman organized and filmed a performance of his own. Shot by Eden cameraman William Paley on a Manhattan rooftop and released in January 1898, it enjoyed a solid three-month run at the Musée despite a New York Herald exposé detailing the actual circumstances of the filming. It was in fact a bigger commercial success than a special version actually shot in Eastern Europe.⁶

Edwin Porter's 1901 staged street scenes, SOUBRETTE'S TROUBLES ON A FIFTH AVENUE STAGE and WHAT HAPPENED ON TWENTY-THIRD STREET recorded unexceptional views of women's ankles in newsreel-style. On the other hand, Porter's LIFE RESCUE AT ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (1901) has the appearance of 'pure' documentary, an apparent accident having given a non-melodramatic naturalness to the three-shot rescue sequence filmed

from a high angle.⁷ Less interesting was Porter's NEW YORK HARBOR POLICE BOAT PATROL CAPTURING PIRATES (1903), its meager action arranged in depth with an elliptical two-shot pursuit in which the patrol boat heads out of the frame depth towards the pirate craft in the lower portion of the frame. Capitalizing on the title of a successful stage play, Porter's 1903 fire film THE STILL ALARM simply shows horse-drawn fire-fighting equipment moving out of a station toward the camera and passing several positions.

Edison's 1904 Western series shot by A.C. Abadie in Bliss, Oklahoma territory included two scenes that were clearly staged, BRUSH BETWEEN COWBOYS AND INDIANS and WESTERN STAGE COACH HOLD UP. Abadie's slick handling of action moving out of the frame depth toward the camera, frame-edge cut-offs and panning camera work demonstrated his mastery of a method of producing a documentary screen image that could bear a photographic resemblance though little actual relation to an incident that had occurred in the real world.

In the absence of the outbreak of war or a natural calamity, crowd-pleasing outdoor events could be arranged with the motion picture in mind. In 1906, The New York Dramatic Mirror reported that 40,000 to 50,000 spectators had been on hand at Brighton Beach race track July 4 to watch a railroad collision set up on a half-mile length of track. Widely advertised, the Independence Day event lasting ten seconds was filmed and the footage, reportedly 3,000 feet of it, was shown at Hammerstein's.⁸

At the opposite end of the scale is the screen record that at first glance appears a model of documentary neutrality, of the accidental presence of a sharp-eyed camera operator. Repeated viewings leave one less certain. In WEST INDIAN BOYS DIVING FOR MONEY (1903) a camera placed on the deck of a cruise ship observed the boys dive off the dock and swim towards the ship. Black heads bob in the water waiting for the coins to be tossed overboard, followed by the diving in a scene too complete and too well-framed to have occurred on its own.

Perhaps because it was an event that could conceivably have taken place without the presence of a camera, ELECTROCUTION OF AN ELEPHANT (1903) reveals the elements of a deliberate procedure for converting reality into authentic screen amusement. In the first shot we see the elephant approaching from out of the distant frame depth in what appears to be the vicinity of Coney Island. That introductory image of the elephant being led quite casually toward the camera coupled with the fate advertised in the title supplied a dramatic tension that would have required little verbal explanation. The animal is directed to the right, passing close to the camera. The camera was then stopped, presumably to allow attendants to secure the victim to a metal plate. The second shot, from the same camera position, cuts to a view of the elephant fixed passively to that spot. After a moment smoke rises from its feet and the elephant topples over as if in a rehearsed stunt, the camera panning left to follow the fall and then holding on the grey quivering body. The second shot on its own would

have fulfilled the promise of the title. But the episode owes its dramatic shape to the opening shot which places the anticipating viewer at the scene. By no means a simple "reproduction", the technique of the "accidentally" recorded incident applied with that kind of skill to a carefully staged occurrence highlights the larger ambiguity of the news film category no less than the sort of calculation involved in documentary impressionism.⁹

3.2 Authenticity as the Man Who Was There

Discussion of the re-enacted topical event, the so-called "fake" newsreel, in North, Sanderson, Gifford, Niver, and Fielding has concentrated on the absence of a camera at the actual scene of an occurrence as it unfolded.¹⁰ Footage taken by a cameraman who had been on location with his apparatus is labelled genuine and authentic; a film produced after the event, or prior to it, is dismissed as counterfeit, a cunning showman's nostrum. Sanderson divided his News category into "News, actual — Any film which dealt with a news event as it occurred" and "News, enactment — Any film of the news type which was an obvious reconstruction or re-enactment of the actual event" The fact of a reconstruction was not, however, always clear, as Sanderson confessed. ARREST IN CHINATOWN, SAN FRANCISCO, "the very first film in the sample studied and the only news film representing the year 1897 appeared to be a re-enactment."

[My emphasis]¹¹

In compiling his 1967 volume, Motion Pictures From The Library of Congress Paper Print Collection, 1894-1912, Kemp Niver took a step forward and established a separate category he called Reproductions. The criterion for identifying a film as a Reproduction was an apparently uncomplicated one that resembled Sanderson's:

. . . whenever we used the word "Reproductions," such as for prize fights, etc., the prize fight had already taken place, or the earthquake had occurred, or, as in the case of "The Great Jewel Robbery," the robbery had already taken place. Some were actually reconstructions, while others were reproductions of actual events. A motion picture producer could use the newspaper account as a scenario . . .¹²

Niver, however, ran into the same difficulty Sanderson had. A reel of footage registered by Biograph in 1905, THE BOER WAR, was not classified as a Reproduction. As Niver explained:

The film was photographed from several camera positions, and shows what appears to be authentic combat action. If the action was staged, however, it was done very well, inasmuch as the deployment of weapons and personnel shows a definite knowledge of technique.¹³

The news fake, Niver believed, disappeared after 1907, the last year for which he listed Reproductions, because camera equipment was by that date lightweight enough to permit an operator to be present at newsworthy events and he no longer needed to rely on press accounts.¹⁴

Two points are worth examining a little more carefully. The first is that different methods of producing "authentic"

news footage yielded that same set of formal features associated with an actual camera presence. Here it is important to take account of the fact that what we think of as "documentary" style did not emerge of a piece from motion picture cameras and one might legitimately consider the role of the makers of the news "fakes" in the development of that style. The ironic lesson they taught was that simply being there with a camera was hardly enough for success in an entertainment milieu founded on that very promotional claim. The other point is that the "fake" demonstrated the feasibility of arranging the elements of what purported to be an actual film record into a formulaic synthesis ideally suited to the new conditions of industrial production and mass-marketing in a way the amusements of the older artisan tradition were not.

By looking a little more deeply into the authentic-fake film documentary dilemma we find that ascertaining the ever-ambiguous fact of a cameraman's presence, even when it can be done, is ultimately of less value than an alternate formulation that begins to suggest itself. I refer here to the invention of a motion picture rhetoric of authentic presence at an actual scene and its origins in pre-cinema re-enactment spectacles and optical shows structured to provide the spectator with the sensation of being at the scene of a battle, or a violent incident, or a famous public event.

Special attention will be given in this chapter to the elaboration of that rhetoric in the Eden Musée's Spanish-

American War film shows. Commissioned by the Edison company, the film content was organized into very successful and profitable daily entertainments by Edwin Porter, the Eden projectionist. Coinciding with the Edison company's all-out legal campaign against its U.S. competition, that success probably reinforced the studio's basic motion picture strategy and thus contributed to the conditions that prevailed during Porter's nine-year tenure. As entertainment, the war films excelled by bringing to public screens heavily-promoted authentic tokens of the presence of a "special artist" at the scene who had returned home with a record of the experience that formally articulated the effort of the recording. Those vaudeville battle shows decisively turned motion pictures' isolated impressionism-in-action scenes of surf lapping anonymous shores to a journalistic role of enormous influence in the development of the film narrative.¹⁵

3.3 Motion into Action

One of the more serious errors of the traditional historical interpretation of the 1894-1907 period has been the claim that the original delight of motion pictures was the quasi-scientific image of mere motion on the screen and that a great intervening discovery circa 1903 transformed the mimetic pleasures of recorded movement into the superior thrills of narrative action. The nature of the error is clear when we compare the work of Eadweard Muybridge and Louis Lumière.

In the spring of 1880 Muybridge had given what has been called one of the earliest practical demonstrations of "real motion on the screen." The occasion was the first public exhibition of Muybridge's zoogyroscope, later re-named the zoopraxiscope. As reported in a San Francisco newspaper, the projection of fleeting sequences of attenuated hand-drawn figures-in-motion based on his photographic experiments included an ox trotting, a wild bull charging, greyhound dogs and deer running, and birds in flight. The highlight of the show, however, was the projected views of the horse in motion — walking, cantering, trotting, pacing, running and leaping. Those views appeared to prove that traditional representations of the horse were, as California governor Leland Stanford, the patron of Muybridge's work, had suspected, empirically false: the horse did not gallop in the attitude painters for several centuries had shown with forelegs thrust forward and hindlegs back.¹⁶

As exciting as the evening was for its scientific revelation, the demonstration appeared no less overwhelming as entertainment. "Nothing," one observer commented, "was wanting but the clatter of the hoofs upon the turf and an occasional breath of steam from the nostrils to make the spectator believe that he had before him genuine flesh-and-blood steeds."¹⁷ But, as a later commentator questioning Muybridge's status as the father of motion pictures observed, that was precisely the quality lacking in his exhibitions. The work of Muybridge, whose initial influence was felt by painters concerned with the depiction of motion, would

appear to have fallen in the gap between photography and cinema without having achieved the crucial link. "On the screen," observed Alexander Black, "his horse galloped on one spot. The illusion was of the ground being moved under the horse's feet, as in the zoetrope."¹⁸

Edison's kinetoscope subjects, mostly shot from a fixed distance against artificial backgrounds, were very much in the Muybridgean style. With some notable exceptions all were filmed in the Black Maria with an apparatus in every way as immobile as Muybridge's complicated system of cameras and trip wires. Driven by an electric motor, the Black Maria camera required a set of batteries or a power line and could not be used for exterior shooting unless altered for hand cranking. An extremely heavy instrument which only the combined strength of several men could move, it was initially anchored to the studio floor. It was not intended to and rarely did go out and record reality.¹⁹

The occasion for one of those exceptions was provided by the presence of the Buffalo Bill Wild West show in the New York City area. On October 16, 1894 four members of the contingent were filmed in what Raff and Gammon took extra care to note was "an out-of-door scene" entitled BUCKING BRONCO.²⁰ The other, FIRE RESCUE SCENE, produced in the Black Maria between October and December 1894 represented one of the earliest attempts at simulating or recreating the visual effect of exterior camera work. It not only featured uniformed firemen and smoke effects but, though a studio subject, it employed a style of framing absent from most of the kineto-

scope strips, a style generally associated with the actualities and topical films taken at real locales. Produced before the era of screen projection began, this early re-enactment revealed above all a deliberate mode of staging, one that represented a striking departure from the Muybridgean style employed in the production of the majority of kinetoscope subjects. And though, as a frame-enlargement reveals, it lacked the action-in-depth of BUCKING BRONCO, the figures involved in the rescue were cut off at the bottom of the frame, the dense "smoke" billowing out toward the edges of the scene adding to the overall impression of an on-the-spot drama.²¹

The creation of that impression called upon a method of staging far more elaborate and, in its way, much more self-conscious than the one employed in the taking of kinetoscope subjects. Location shooting required the cameraman to determine and frame the elements of the total process that might be subject to some sort of control, so as to better highlight the apparent randomness of the action unfolding in the camera's deceptively passive presence. That is what Louis Lumière did when he filmed the train looming out of the frame depth, its diagonal line of action delineated by a chosen angle of framing. It would seem that of necessity he did it with a very different camera than the one the Edison company chained to the floor of the Black Maria; the Lumière camera was a lightweight instrument of five kilograms. It was also hand cranked and extremely portable. The framed compositional effect Lumière achieved with a portable appara-

tus that enabled him to select his angle of view would appear to have been difficult to replicate within the Black Maria, or at any rate ought not to have emerged from that condition of filming. But it did in the form of the Edison studio's FIRE RESCUE SCENE, embodying an aesthetic that cannot be explained in terms of actual camera portability. If the trend to lighter, more portable cameras was urged on by the interest in selling topical film shows for vaudeville exhibition, the inclination to producing such shows appeared as we can see, before the debut of projection and its in-depth screen action.

In May 1897, an Ithaca, New York newspaper reported a screening of four fire films "representing a fire alarm in New York City." Available records indicate that the Edison company had produced four such pieces of footage in Newark, New Jersey in November 1896, titled A MORNING ALARM, STARTING FOR THE FIRE, GOING TO THE FIRE and FIGHTING THE FIRE, but shot no firefighting subjects in New York City that year. We may conclude that Lyman Howe, the showman who organized the screening, passed it off as the record of a more glamorous, big city calamity. Having gone as far as to join four unrelated pieces of actuality footage into a short continuous documentary compilation, providing misleading information about the locale might have seemed the lesser part of the fraud in which the compositional features of image depth, figures cut off at the edges of the frame, action moving toward the camera and exiting out of one of the lower frame

corners and non-eyelevel angles of view bore witness, with a commentator's assistance, to an authentic narrative scheme. The presentation of motion picture material in a sequence unrelated to the one in which the separate strips had been shot would appear to have anticipated by roughly twenty-five years the famous "Kuleshov effect". But even that is perhaps less important than the way Howe's primitive "editing" would have created a global illusion of camera mobility in space, Sadoul's notion of "ubiquity."²²

Muybridge's projections of lateral motion-without-progress viewed from a fixed distance against a fixed background lacking in depth communicated an analysis of motion. Altering the angle of view placed the spectator in a very different relation to, say, the horse in motion. Galloping toward the camera from out of the frame depth and exiting the frame out of one of the bottom corners, as in GOING TO THE FIRE, the horse enacted a drama of subjective involvement called realism, albeit a Lockean excess employed for its shock value.

3.4 Origins of the Rhetoric of Authentic Presence

The beginnings of that mode of screen experience lie neither in André Bazin's conception of an age-old dream nor in C.W. Ceram's vision of a new machine. Before the invention of cameras and projectors optical showmen had attempted to transform the perspective painting's invitation to step into the picture into a new amusement enterprise. They based that enterprise on the creation of impressions of whimsical

travel by enveloping the spectator in super-realistic, revolving, hand-painted scenes; by offering him the thrill of gazing down at an imaginary angle from the roof of St. Paul's in London; and before long, by putting the spectator himself into motion, which is to say, but turning him into a mobile, light-weight motion picture camera almost a hundred years before the appearance of the apparatus itself. Before the films of George Méliès, fanciful voyages to distant places and locales close to home, experiences of battle, disaster and famous public events, as well as pleasant sea and city scenes, attained a height of popularity in panoramic and dioramic shows as common as the contemporary movie theatre.²³ As a means of assuaging the boredom of routine existence in an industrial age, Louis Lumière's travelling cameramen substituted the travelogue for the diorama's imaginary trips into authentic events. Before Lumière and the diorama, peepshow makers had routinely reproduced news-like images, the titles of their perspective box subjects anticipating the listings in a Lumière or Edison catalogue: Opening of the Thames Tunnel, The Great Exhibition of 1851, The Coronation of Queen Victoria, The Mail Coach Setting off for the Post Office and Napoleon's Battle of the Pyramids.²⁴

The compositional qualities that appear unique and original to Lumière's documentary impressions of foreign places and the forms of the shows they were used to create belong to an older tradition of pictorial perspective dating from the Renaissance. In his book, Before Photography, Peter Gallasi isolated

the major features of that tradition as: i) the arrangement of the composition based on a choice of the moment "at which to represent an existing subject"; ii) point of view; and iii) the scope of view which established the edges of the picture. The deliberate use of those edges in obstructions and croppings, combined with spatial perspective, established a concrete, non-idealized, let us say, subjective moment in time as well as space that defined "photographic reality."²⁵ An elaboration of that pictorial norm that takes us very close to the motion picture were the comprehensive illusions of the panorama and the diorama.

The key to the success of those entertainments was that they provided the spectator with the thrill of finding himself in the midst of some action or scene through the verisimilitude of precise depiction in perspective, including lighting and sound effects, the mobility of a shifting point of view and the use of topical or familiar subject matter. Their origins date from the work of Philip Loutherbourg, a painter who had experimented with rear-lit scenes. In 1781, Loutherbourg exhibited his Eidophusikon, a picture house that brought spectators and moving image illusionism together in a common space to view transformations of misty scenes into sunlit vistas, looming cattle, shipping on the Thames and other such sights, with music and sound accompaniment. The darkened auditorium in which the works were exhibited was itself something of a novelty.²⁶

First exhibited in 1792, Robert Barker's panorama modified the relationship between the spectator and Louthembourg's screens by arranging for the images to revolve around the audience seated in the rotunda's semi-darkness. In his representations of cities, battles and public events, Barker took the spectator's experience into account in a de-idealized perspective that differed from the map-like precision of Renaissance city views. The audience was provided with the impression of being less detached objective observers than active participants there in the scenes. Another panorama artist, William George Horner, had attempted to offer the novelty of an unusual point of view. In an early, if unsuccessful effort at achieving a sort of camera-like mobility, Horner constructed one of his shows in a way that had the audience looking down on a view of London from an actual height. An 1812 panorama was exhibited to applause for its depiction of the Burning of Moscow a mere three months after the fact.

Introduced in 1822, J.M. Daguerre's diorama succeeded in producing Horner's sought after impression of a mobile vantage point. Daguerre built a slowly-revolving auditorium which moved spectators between the parts of his painted screens and between the screens. Much like early motion picture exhibition, music, a lecturer and program notes were provided to reinforce the illusion. One diorama artist, Carl Wilhelm Gropius, built an auditorium to resemble a small ship sailing across the Bay of Naples. To convey the subjective experience of a shifting ship's deck point-of-view, Gropius relied on

the combination of the pictures in motion and the movement of the audience in relation to them. One of the most outstanding of the diorama artists, Colonel Jean Langlois, created a spectacle, called The Burning of Moscow, that had the audience gazing down on the conflagration. His high-angled view was an improvement over Horner's earlier effort.²⁷

Those attempts at collapsing the wall between spectator and entertainment were later to be found in other media. At least seventy-five years after the work of Langlois, the Eden Musée reconstructed in wax what their catalogue described as "an incident which occurred in the Adirondack Mountains a few years ago." The equation the writer of the catalogue drew between the scene's realism and its impression of a subjectively experienced event created by light, shadow and color would not have been missed by the experienced diorama patron. "At first view," it was stated, "the visitors think they are in the mountain tops witnessing a real battle."²⁸

Before and even after cameramen were able to visit remote places and return with filmed records of their having-been-there, some showmen took the challenges of authenticity and verisimilitude as far as incorporating objects and personalities involved in the events they sought to present into their entertainments. In 1830, Langlois skillfully managed to integrate his auditorium and screens to locate spectators in the much-cherished centre of a total illusion. In his very first presentation, The Battle of Navarin, Langlois obtained the actual deck of one of the ships that had taken part in the

battle. He turned it into his viewing arena and painted the space between his screens and the spectators to resemble the lines of the deck, adding a precise replication of the ship's interior. Aided by sound and gunpowder blasts, Langlois gave his patrons a near-terrifying illusion of being present in the middle of a violent naval struggle.²⁹

Many decades later, Coney Island disaster amusements employed a variation on the trick. In May 1905, The New York Dramatic Mirror announced a grand \$2,225,000 Boer War re-enactment at a fourteen-acre Coney Island site involving a cast of thousands and including a number of genuine Boer War military celebrities, performers who had actually fought in South Africa.³⁰ In the summer of 1906, the Luna Park site at Coney Island featured a live-show version of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY. But in March the competing site, Dreamland, had put out word of an even more sensational Western show, this one starring former real-life holdup men Frank James and Cole Younger.³¹

The greatest of the re-enactment spectacles of the period were to be experienced as part of the Buffalo Bill Wild West show featuring Colonel William "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Between 1883 and 1916 the Buffalo Bill Wild West show regularly toured North America and Europe. The lavish poster publicity never failed to mention the actual appearance of Cody re-creating his historic deeds, a reference which clearly added to the perceived authenticity of the show's re-constructed chapters from American history extravagantly staged by Steel MacKaye.³²

To reinforce the genuineness of acts such as The Battle of Wounded Knee and Custer's Last Charge the show's promotional literature denied that its "faithfully reproduced" scenes were a show "in any sense of the word, but a series of original, genuine and instructive OBJECT LESSONS." In 1885, Sitting Bull signed a contract to appear in Cody's frontier "Lessons" along with five Sioux warriors; Geronimo went on to a career as a wild west performer with other shows. In 1893, when the name of the Cody entertainment was lengthened to The Buffalo Bill Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World, 100 Sioux braves were engaged to perform in enactments of their defeat.³³

By 1898, with the frontier less of an immediate social reality and American interests abroad directing the eyes of Americans to international developments, the wild west show turned to events from the Spanish-American War and the Boxer Rebellion in China. Roughly a month before the April 21, 1898 declaration that precipitated the Spanish-American War, The Buffalo Bill Wild West show played its annual engagement at Madison Square Garden in New York City. In second position, under the top-billed feature, Custer's Last Battle, was, according to the New York Times ad, a "GALLANT COLOR GUARD OF HEROES OF CUBA LIBRE - Twelve Famous Cavalry Officers and Eight Privates from the Insurgent Army." When the show returned to the New York City venue the following year, the featured act was Heroic Charge up San Juan Hill, advertised as a "vivid and inspiring reproduction" presented by a detach-

ment of those "FUTURE-FAMED AS ROOSEVELT'S ROUGH RIDERS."³⁴

Such was the renown of Cody's show that when Theodore Roosevelt sailed for Cuba to charge up San Juan Hill he had shrewdly borrowed the name "Rough Riders" from the appellation by which the show had been known to millions at home and far abroad for the past five years. To return the compliment Cody mounted an elaborate San Juan Hill re-enactment based on the skirmish in which Roosevelt was alleged to have played a key role. The feature was described in the New York Times as:

. . . a vivid, truthful, thrilling, heart-stirring dioramic reproduction . . . which will be presented by some of the GENUINE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FAMOUS BATTLE.³⁵

It would have been peculiar if early motion picture producers and exhibitors had not taken their original inspiration from dioramas, Coney Island spectacles, waxwork verisimilitude and Buffalo Bill's epic frontier acts. For Louis Lumière, whose early catalogues were crammed with travelogue material and whose mareorama used ocean footage in a constructed setting that placed a spectator, as Gropius had, on the bridge of a ship at sea, the motion picture might have seemed only a variation of the diorama's total illusionism.³⁶ In the same way, the mareorama might have been the inspiration for the Edison company's STORM AT SEA (1900), which was taken, it was claimed, by a camera lashed to the bridge of a ship during a rough sea voyage. The film provided an impression of churning ocean waves and darkly clouded skies as experi-

enced from a position on the ship's deck.³⁷

Among the best known of the diorama-derived methods of film exhibition was Hale's Tours and Scenes of the World.³⁸ An American amusement park fad between 1905-1907, it was the invention of a former Kansas City fire chief, George C. Hale. Set in a specially designed railway car it employed sound, movement and film to simulate the experience of train travel as a complete visceral illusion. The motion picture material consisted of the popular "phantom rides," scenes shot from the engine of a moving train, as for example Edison's 200-foot PHANTOM RIDE ON THE CANADIAN PACIFIC (1901):

Innumerable short tunnels are passed high bridges and many other picturesque effects are shown, and the view, taken from the front of a speeding train running at high speed, is one that even tourists riding over the line are not privileged to enjoy.³⁹

Hale's Tours enjoyed a large, if short-lived, success. Like the mareorama, it represented an abandoned direction in the use of the motion picture to market the experience of authentic presence at an actual scene. Rendered unfit by late nineteenth-century visions of mass markets and the related trends to standardization and duplication required to operate in those markets, the forms of the diorama were displaced by photography, the movies and journalism. But if those new media consigned the diorama's awkward mechanics to the optical museum, they fully absorbed its rhetoric of ubiquitous presence and topical newsy subject matter.

3.5 The Camera Goes to War

The birth of the movies coincided with major changes in American society. In the post-Civil War period a new national unity was beginning to take shape. The end of the Indian Wars circa 1890 overlapped with the rise of Wall Street. The frontier had been conquered and the frontier spirit turned to industry and the exploitation of markets at home and abroad. Labor strife and the rise of city slums did not diminish the growing perception of an international American role. If there were the ravages of fire, natural calamities and crime, there was an expanding technology and up-to-date institutions to handle them. By 1901, with U.S. forces bringing the nationalist leader Emilio Aguinaldo to heel in the distant Philippines, America's destiny seemed assured.⁴⁰

The defeat of Aguinaldo capped a process by which the young nation acquired important Spanish colonial possessions, Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean, and the Philippine Islands in the Pacific. The turning point occurred on February 16, 1898, at 9:40 p.m. when the U.S. battleship "Maine" exploded in Havana harbor. Two officers and 258 men perished. The public outcry that greeted the news — "To hell with Spain, remember the 'Maine'!" — helped steer the nation into a war that provided the basis for a stunningly successful Edison-Eden motion picture collaboration.

Cuban agitation against Spanish rule, which had begun earlier in the decade, had grown and impressed U.S. public

opinion as a noble cause. Wasting little time Cuban expatriates in the United States went into action with speeches, meetings and fund-raising campaigns. Most of their efforts were, however, devoted to getting their story into the newspapers. Without a press, one of their leaders had observed, they would get nowhere. The leading American dailies soon had correspondents in Havana filing dispatches on the brave rebellion whether or not there was any real news to report. Much of the war mongering in the American press was motivated by self interest: at the time Hearst's New York Journal and Pulitzer's New York World were involved in a bitter struggle for supremacy in newspaper sensationalism in New York City and were eager to play up the arrogance of ruling Spanish authorities and the suffering of the Cuban people.⁴¹

For Spanish officials in Cuba, the destruction of the 'Maine,' sent to lay at anchor in Havana on a surveillance mission, was as much of a shock as it was for American officials in Washington. Spanish flags flew at half-mast throughout the island and in addition to their sympathy Spanish officials offered much practical assistance. But the press in America paid little attention. Determined to declare war even before the U.S. government did, Hearst's Journal hurriedly published a diagram showing how a torpedo, placed under the vessel, had been detonated from the shore. The official U.S. Navy court of inquiry report declared the cause external, the result of a submarine mine, but to this day the real cause has never in fact been determined.⁴²

On April 21, 1898, after Spain had acceded to every single U.S. demand, however unreasonable, President William McKinley signed what amounted to a declaration of war. On April 30, 1898 Admiral George Dewey attacked and beat the Spanish squadron off Cavite in the Philippines, west of Manila; Cuba, after some fighting, was surrendered in July. A war that was itself a fake, declared and fought on a trumped up pretext, fittingly concluded with a sham battle. Both parties had agreed to stage this final encounter at Manila to facilitate the signing of the peace: it was necessary that Spanish forces appeared to have been defeated on the soil of their Asian possession. Despite the gentlemanly arrangement, the comedy of errors produced a token list of real dead and wounded.⁴³ A peace conference in February 1899 finally and officially brought hostilities between Spain and the United States to an end, though nationalist resistance continued the fight until the spring of 1902.

In March 1898, before the outbreak of war, negotiations began between the Edison studio, the Eden Musée and William Randolph Hearst's New York Journal to send William Paley, the Eden Musée cameraman, to Cuba to film the war firsthand. It was Paley's assignment to film scenes at the major American staging points of Key West and Tampa, Florida as well as in Havana. Hearst provided the transportation from Florida to Cuba aboard one of his yachts, Edison the film stock and Hollaman, a popular exhibition venue. In a letter to Edison general manager W.E. Gilmore the follow-

ing month, Frank Z. Maguire, one of the company's film and equipment jobbers, confirmed that he had advanced Paley \$500 against receipt of negatives and royalties with the proviso that if "hostilities should not occur, Paley is to return any unexpended balance."⁴⁴ The following day President McKinley signed the document that made war a certainty. The project was safe. For the next few months Spanish-American War shows were the Eden Musée's featured screen attraction. With Edwin S. Porter as ringmaster, authentic footage of troops and ships was joined to fake Cuban battle scenes along with lantern slides and a spoken commentary and presented to cheering audiences as a relay of triumphant multi-media cablegrams from the front.⁴⁵

The Eden's screen exhibitions combined the appeal of the Lumière travelogue material and the topical enactment entertainments of Wild West shows and popular theatre. In the 1860s the stage had been used to present timely and factual reports of Civil War military actions, some appearing on the boards within days of the events they treated.⁴⁶ By the time motion pictures became an entertainment attraction tabloid editors and waxwork house operators had grown well attuned to the commercial return on publishing and mounting topical content. The enormous public appetite for topical amusement boosted the circulation of illustrated magazines like The National Police Gazette. An 1891 Police Gazette story, "Shocked to Death" complete with a five-scene illustration appeared in the July 25, 1891 issue eighteen days follow-

ing the event it reported on — the electrocution of four convicted killers at Sing Sing prison.⁴⁷ The Eden's wax displays pursued news stories like the Spanish-American War as closely as the speed of the establishment's modelling artists would allow. Staying on top of events was the Eden's claim to fame. In 1897, a New York Times critic described the Musée's aesthetic strategy this way:

Every horror and every triumph, all that is good, all that is bad, in the contemporary world, find representation in the big and unique wax-works collection.⁴⁸

Ever alert to developments at home and abroad, as interest in the Spanish-American War began to decline the Eden, toward the end of October 1899, put a wax reproduction of Paul Kruger on display. Kruger, President of the South African Republic, was leading the resistance against British efforts to annex the Boer Republic of the Transvaal to Cape Colony. Thus was the Musée able to capitalize on a faraway war the same month it broke out.⁴⁹

The Eden's 1898-1899 Spanish-American War screen shows, on the other hand, represented one of the motion picture medium's earliest sustained newsgathering assignments. The footage, both "genuine" and "fake", comprised a major link between motion pictures and the nineteenth-century vogue in cumbersome you-are-there environmental amusements. In its news role the production and exhibition of film records of the war drew substantially upon that older set of entertainment traditions.

Up to that point the Edison studio had been a little uncertain as to how to make the transition from kinetoscope parlour to vaudeville house display. When in 1895 the public grew tired of fleeting peepshow views of vaudeville personalities the studio produced a number of compressed one-scene historical subjects. The main and perhaps only appeal of Alfred Clark's THE EXECUTION OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS, featuring an early use of filmed stop-motion, JOAN OF ARC, INDIAN SCALPING SCENE, A FRONTIER SCENE, DUEL BETWEEN TWO HISTORICAL CHARACTERS and RESCUE OF CAPT. JOHN SMITH BY POCAHONTAS, were their brief glimpses of staged gore.⁵⁰

With the introduction of screen projection, the company did not immediately alter its single-scene kinetoscope release policy but attempted to supply material for both kinetoscope and projector; we know that as late as 1900 the same type of film was being sold for both machines. The first vitascope projection in New York City had shown what amounted to a series of kinetoscope views. As reported by The New York Clipper, the material included "an umbrella dance, a butterfly dance, a burlesque boxing match, waves washing upon the beach, and a high kicking dancer."⁵¹

Between 1894 and 1897 the Edison company had produced or obtained brief contemporary re-enactments, like FIRE RESCUE SCENE, impressionistic scenes, like FEEDING THE DOVES and contemporary action subjects, like GOING TO THE FIRE, but not very much with the accent on direct newsgathering. Motion pictures at first avoided the promise of a screen

record of a contemporary news event made by a cameraman who had been there. Edison's 1897 catalogue subjects consisted of vaudeville turns, horse races, bicycle parades, fire footage, military and para-military drills, street scenes and home-movie-like works in the style of the Lumière brothers. All offered in short lengths intended for both kinetoscope display and projection, the subjects included film of the exterior of the Edison lab and one called EMPLOYEES LEAVING FACTORY, shot at a textile mill. In the fall of 1897, the Lumières' travelogue footage was being sold in grouped series under headings such as Algeria, Tunis, Germany, Russia, Mexico, etc. from which an exhibitor might select a greater or smaller number of items to be organized into a longer travelogue show. At that time Edison offered separate items in lengths of 50 and 150 feet. There appeared to be few exceptions. One of them was a series of seven Niagara Falls subjects shot in 1896. In June 1897 buyers were offered the Black Maria prizefights in complete versions but not in one-round parts.⁵² After 1899, however, and the Spanish-American War success, Edison catalogues began to resemble those of the Lumières. For one thing, much more travelogue footage was included. It was, according to an untruthful blurb, the work of an "efficient corps of photographers on an extended tour who had returned with actual reproductions . . . in every instance photographed from life."⁵³

One factor that may have encouraged the company to convert motion picture impressionism to Spanish-American

War reporting was the paucity of photographic coverage of current events in the daily press. The extremely low standards of newspaper journalism in the period leading up to the war required of the movies neither honesty nor diligence.

It would be difficult to argue with the conclusion that the American press helped bring the conflict about.⁵⁴ On February 12, 1898, Hearst's Journal published an inflammatory article under the heading "Does Our Flag Protect Women?" It reported that a group of Spanish police officers had boarded an American steamship in Havana harbour in order to search three young Cuban women. One of them was suspected of being a courier for the insurgents. The handdrawn illustration that accompanied the story was spread over half a page. It depicted three Spanish officers searching a single nude female. There had, of course, been a search. But the manner in which it had been conducted was, one of the women said in an interview, very different from the fabricated impression conveyed to Journal readers.⁵⁵

What seemed to most worry publishers in the period was a new technology that made possible the publication of half-tone photographs. One of the earliest practical demonstrations, called a leggotype, dated from 1869. The men responsible, William Leggo and George Desbarats, launched The New York Graphic in 1873 which printed a half-tone in 1880.⁵⁶ By 1897 the first half-tones printed on speed presses appeared in The New York Tribune.⁵⁷ Some fourteen years earlier Pulitzer's New York World had begun using illustrations based on photographs. In 1891 there were upwards of 1000

artists in America producing 10,000 news drawings each week, mostly copied from photographs, a practice that continued for almost twenty-five years after the half-tone became practical. Fearing that their readers would dismiss the half-tone as a cheap substitute for the hand-drawn item, publishers held back. Five days after the "Maine" exploded what were called the first published photos of the disaster appeared in Pulitzer's World. But they were in fact hand-drawings based on photos. Some publications, such as The New York Times Illustrated Magazine, a Sunday feature, did provide a generous amount of photomaterial with their war stories, but only on Sunday. Like its print competitors, the Times mostly left the task of supplying photo coverage of the war to the movies.⁵⁸

3.6 War Extra

By the time the Edison-Eden-Hearst deal was finalized other producers were moving ahead. In his letter to Gilmore, Maguire pointed out that obtaining war footage was a priority, that Biograph, which had already put out \$1000 for such footage, was "spending money without stint."⁵⁹ The month that the deal with Paley was made the Edison company had coerced The American Vitagraph Company's Stuart Blackton and Albert Smith into assigning to them the fabled TEARING DOWN THE FLAG, which Smith many years later claimed was completed in April. Two films were in fact involved, both called OLD GLORY AND THE CUBAN FLAG by the Edison company.⁶⁰ On May 20, 1898 the Edison company put out a circular called War Extra, its press reference announcing the availability of

more than two dozen Cuban titles in two series, "War Incidents" and "Naval War Views", comprising 1600 feet in all. Apparently the work of Paley, one is left to wonder why it took the company almost a month to publicize footage that had been on the Eden's screen as of the week of May 1.⁶¹ The "War Incidents" subjects were, according to Edison's War Extra circular:

. . . sure to satisfy the craving of the general public for absolutely true and accurate details regarding the movements of the United States Army getting ready for the invasion of Cuba.⁶²

Among the views of camp incidents, dock scenes, footage of the battered "Maine", the burial of "Maine" victims, and battleships and destroyers was an apparently staged piece of action called WAR CORRESPONDENTS, which was described this way:

About a dozen war correspondents of the different New York papers are running up the street in a bunch to the cable office to get copy of cablegrams to be in turn transmitted to their different papers. They rush directly toward the audience, turn a corner in the immediate foreground and disappear down a side street.⁶³

In the months that followed the Edison company added to their Spanish-American War subjects. The March 1900 catalogue listed seventy subjects in eight series, "Filipinos", "Dewey Doings", "Evacuation of Cuba", "The Campaign in Cuba", "Return of the Troops", "New York's Welcome to the Warships", "Camp Incidents" and "Naval War Views".⁶⁴ All the material in the "Filipinos" series were fakes; the following intro-

ductory note was attached to "The Campaign in Cuba" series:

We are indebted to the fearless activity of our artist, Mr. Wm. Paley for the following war views taken on Cuban soil. Under the protection of a special correspondent's pass given by the United States Government, he improved the occasions as they presented themselves with gratifying results, as is shown in the excellent films we are now offering to the public.⁶⁵

"Improved the occasions" was the Edison copywriter's way of saying that some of the material in the series were "fakes". While Paley was away in Cuba, George Méliès was at work in his Montreuil studio artificially arranging three Spanish-American War scenes for the American market: THE BLOWING UP OF THE "MAINE" IN HAVANA HARBOR, A VIEW OF THE WRECK OF THE "MAINE" and DIVERS AT WORK ON THE WRECK OF THE "MAINE". Méliès also turned out a Philippines action scene, DEFENDING THE FORT AT MANILA.⁶⁶

Edison and Méliès were not the only producers associated with Spanish-American War films. In his autobiography, Two Reels and a Crank, Albert Smith claimed that he and Blackton had been to Cuba and shot some film there. But that apparently was never the case.⁶⁷ Ramsaye said that Edward Amet had produced a bathtub fake of the Battle of Santiago Bay, but if he did it has not survived.⁶⁸ In February 1899 Sigmund Lubin copyrighted a fake called BATTLE OF SAN JUAN. In August he registered another fake titled AMERICAN SOLDIERS DEFEATING FILIPINOS NEAR MANILA.⁶⁹ Billy Bitzer in his autobiography claimed that Hearst had sent him off to Cuba where he took film of the "Maine" and some war scenes.⁷⁰

Biograph did copyright at least two fakes, LANDING OF U.S. TROOPS NEAR SANTIAGO, a high angled shot of a couple of dozen troops advancing through shallow water, and AGUINALDO'S NAVY, a brief view of some sampans.⁷¹

The Edison studio's May 1898 claim of "true and accurate details" was a deliberate misrepresentation planted in the hoopla of having sent a man to the scene. Of the thirteen subjects in the later "Campaign" series, four might have shot on location: U.S. TROOPS LANDING AT DAIQUIRI, CUBA; ARMY MULES SWIMMING ASHORE AT DAIQUIRI, CUBA; PACK MULES WITH AMMUNITION ON THE SANTIAGO TRAIL; and MAJOR GENERAL SHAFTER. SAILORS LANDING UNDER FIRE; RED CROSS AT THE FRONT; SURRENDER OF GENERAL TORAL; SHOOTING CAPTURED INSURGENTS; CUBAN AMBUSH; BATTLE OF SAN JUAN HILL; SKIRMISH OF ROUGH RIDERS; and U.S. INFANTRY SUPPORTED BY ROUGH RIDERS AT EL CANEY were clear fakes. The following is the catalogue description of THE BATTLE OF SAN JUAN HILL:

Soldiers are scouting through the thick underbrush. "Forward by rushes," comes the order, and up the hill they go, rushing, firing and throwing themselves flat behind each sheltering clump of bushes. Answering shots come from the block-house and the ranks wither. A struggle on the hill-top and victory! Our flag is there to stay!⁷² Has created greatest enthusiasm wherever shown.

Side-by-side with the fakes were the self-congratulatory claims of authentically produced footage. For "Dewey Doings" the company declared it had " . . . equipped eight parties on the occasion of Admiral Dewey's arrival in New York Harbor." In order to prevent competitors from cashing in on

Dewey's great popularity with a fake the blub writer added:

Ours was the only photographic apparatus on board the US Cruiser Olympia on this memorable occasion. The Admiral posed especially for our camera.⁷³

In the section, "New York's Welcome to the War Ships", the Edison company said they had "equipped three parties to secure views from all points."⁷⁴ It would have been unusual for the fakes to have carried such claims.

The main screen excitement of the genuine footage as well as the fakes was mostly a matter of believing that the films represented what the company descriptions or a live narrator said they did. Both relied on the simple manipulation of frame depth involving action moving toward the camera or the camera shooting a large battleship from a smaller moving craft that brought it suddenly and dramatically closer. In the first shot of U.S. INFANTRY SUPPORTED BY ROUGH RIDERS AT EL CANEY seven men bearing the ever-prominent flag take a short run on foot at the camera, with an officer on horseback present. While still a fair distance away they kneel and fire their rifles in the direction of the camera-viewer before rising and trotting briskly out of the frame into the bottom left-hand frame corner. In the second shot, following what appears to be a break in the print, the action of the first shot is repeated, this time the men kneel a little closer to the camera but do not fire their rifles. In the final shot a small body of riders gallop from the frame depth and moving on a diagonal exit in the bottom left-hand frame corner. According to the 1900 Edison catalogue description it represented the following action:

Up the road comes a detachment of infantry, firing, advancing, kneeling and firing, again and again. The advance of the foot soldiers is followed by a troop of Rough Riders, riding like demons, yelling and firing revolvers as they pass out of sight. Other troops follow in quick succession, pressing on to the front.⁷⁵

The documentary character of the "Naval War Views" battleship footage consisted in turn of manipulated action sequences on the one hand, and less dramatic painterly views on the other. The Cruiser "Detroit" was filmed with a camera on a small craft moving toward the ship as it lay at anchor: "The effect," the War Extra description stated, "is as though the vessel were approaching and passing the audience." The same method was employed to film the U.S.S. "Castine", the shot "taken from a steam launch which approaches and passes the vessel." COLORED TROOPS DISEMBARKING was, according to the description, "full of fine light and shadow effects."⁷⁶

There were six subjects in the "Filipinos" series, all based on U.S. military operations conducted against "insurgents" at Caloocan, near Manila, in February 1899, which is to say after the war with Spain had officially ended: ADVANCE OF KANSAS VOLUNTEERS AT CALOOCAN; ROUT OF THE FILIPINOS; U.S. TROOPS AND RED CROSS IN THE TRENCHES BEFORE CALOOCAN; FILIPINOS RETREAT FROM THE TRENCHES; CAPTURE OF THE TRENCHES AT CANDABAR; and THE EARLY MORNING ATTACK. With the exception of THE EARLY MORNING ATTACK the other five, screened in sequence, would have reproduced the highlights of a battle narrative much the way the Lyman Howe exhibition of separate pieces of fire footage in sequence projected the highlights of a firefighting action.⁷⁷

The Filipino subjects appear to have been copied from battle photographs that prominently featured trenches.⁷⁸ Moreover, those fakes, more than the Cuban fakes, show skill in the manipulation of documentary snapshot features, in particular, angles of view and frame edge. The trench battles were shot from an above-eyelevel angle, as they were in the photographs. In CAPTURE OF TRENCHES, the insurgents, portrayed by black performers, are cut off at the bottom of the frame as they fire their rifles in the direction of the right-hand side frame edge. Here, as in the other films, we observe the stage practice of signifying larger numbers by the appearance of smaller groups. The same number of men, eight, that overran the trench participate in U.S. TROOPS AND THE RED CROSS. An additional element of consistency linking those subjects is the movement of the U.S. forces in the direction from which the rifle fire had come, toward the left-hand side of the frame. FILIPINOS RETREAT, almost a 180 degree reverse angle shot of U.S. TROOPS AND RED CROSS, shows insurgent fire directed to the left-hand side of the frame from whence the American troops arrive to overrun the trench. Shot from a 'position' immediately behind the American advance, KANSAS VOLUNTEERS depicts the advance moving into the frame depth from behind the camera. THE EARLY MORNING ATTACK, apparently a four-shot subject and among the most interesting of the lot, contained a reverse angle in shot #2, and a matching cut from another angle in shot #4.

Whether those formal features were intended to underwrite the authority of the live narrator or whether the voice of the vaudeville house anchorman was supposed to authenticate the visual qualities of the scenes some viewers were not deceived. In May 1900, a Rochester newspaper challenged the authenticity of a piece of footage depicting U.S. troops charging insurgents in the Philippines. To obtain such scenes, the reporter reasoned, the cameraman had to place himself in the direct line of fire.⁷⁹ Most vaudeville patrons, caught up in the heated pro-war climate kept simmering by Eden wax exhibits, live stage shows, musical extravaganzas, vaudeville tributes and elaborate fireworks demonstrations not to mention daily press accounts, would probably not have noticed.⁸⁰

The first installment of the fruits of Paley's photographic labors was announced in the New York Times on April 24, 1898: "The Musée's artist has returned from Havana."⁸¹ The following week the Eden put out the word that it was showing "war scenes taken with the cinematograph by the Musée's special artists sent to Havana for that purpose."⁸² While there is a question about whether the Eden was being supplied by more than one cameraman, the fact remains, however, that no other individual was ever associated in the Edison catalogues and company documents with Cuban subjects.⁸³ Toward the end of March, Musée patrons had been informed of a screening of "Grand Patriotic Subjects by the Cinematograph," subjects that could not have represented any of Paley's efforts.⁸⁴

In the week of March 13, Eden screenings included footage of the "Maine" at Havana and other Cuban material which might have been pre-war stock footage.⁸⁵ The Edison company registered no Cuban footage before April 1898. We know that the Eden's war film program in May included at least one of Méliès' fakes, *DIVERS AT WORK ON THE WRECK OF THE "MAINE"* which was surreptitiously inserted into a program of Paley's material. Then in the middle of the month came word that Paley would be returning with a new series of action subjects.⁸⁶ It is, of course, possible but highly unlikely that, given the Eden's business relationship with the Edison company, Hollaman would have dealt with other suppliers.

The description of Paley, in the Edison catalogues and the Eden publicity, as a "special artist" was an attempt at associating his work with illustrator journalists called "special artists" who, dating roughly from the middle of the nineteenth century, journeyed from war to war with sketch pads producing hand drawings to accompany the new quantities of information brought to the desks of new editors by the telegraph.⁸⁷ There is no evidence that Paley ever got very close to the actual battles, or any closer than the illustrators in whose footsteps he travelled. It remains unclear whether the Cuban fakes the Edison company released along with his work under the fairly transparent guise that they too represented genuine film records from the war zone were produced by Paley or someone else, like James White. There is also a question about the creator of the Filipino fakes. Of even greater interest, however, were the efforts of the

Eden and the Edison company to advertise the material as the work of a "special artist" who had been to the front and returned with screen sketches of a popular conflict.

3.7 The News as Authentic Entertainment

The projector being the business end of the camera even if motion picture actualities were the products of a laborious and dedicated production method the new medium's pitch to vaudeville audiences required that they provide engaging entertainment. In a book he wrote about his experiences filming the Boer War in South Africa for the British branch of the Biograph company, W.K.L. Dickson observed that authentically produced footage could be seriously lacking in precisely those amusement values. Despite careful preparation and the cooperation of high-ranking military officers, the drama of battle, Dickson found, was difficult to record.⁸⁸ Actual warfare turned out to be a mindless grind without coherence, romance or heroics. What was wanted for the screens back home was a visual spectacle of clear-cut, ideologically-sound action that looked as if it had actually taken place and that someone had been there to film it. One solution was the calculated thrill of action coming at the viewer and for an illusory moment transforming him or her from an objectively detached observer into a subjectively involved participant. That thrill became identified with the neutral documentary record and its techniques of in-depth shooting, variation of camera angle, and the dramatic

use of frame-edge cut-offs. Those techniques were skillfully employed by the producers of miniaturized and life-size battle action as soon as if not before cameramen in the field.

Let us consider an Edison studio miniaturized naval battle, BOMBARDMENT OF TAKU FORTS, BY THE ALLIED FLEETS (1900), part of the effort of British and American producers to "cover" the so-called Boxer uprising for vaudeville and music hall patrons. This little film lays bare much of the intention of the film documentary — the "creation of the authentic drama of a camera-man's presence at an event in terms of the photographic subjectivity through which the event was captured on film by that man at the scene. It was copyrighted on August 16, 1900, two days following the lifting of the famous 55-day siege on the foreign legations in Peking. The siege had begun on June 20; the assault on the Taku forts was carried out between June 17-20.⁸⁹ The horizontal movements of the tiny attacking craft, junks out-numbering the allied vessels, were arranged in different planes to simulate depth. In the background stand two towers against some painted hills. The changes in camera position and apparent camera movement were clearly aimed at simulating the first-hand presence of a cameraman in the same way that the use of camera placement, depth and the frame edge did in life-scale documentary work.

The movement of mounted riders out of the frame depth toward the camera-viewer in Edison's Boer War fakes produced a few months earlier, reproduced a routine that was part of the Buffalo Bill Wild West show and that others had previously

put on the screen. In 1896 The New York Clipper reported filmed cavalry charges in the style of "The full front approach of the cavalry portion of Mr. Cody's Wild West Show."⁹⁰ The Boer footage was organized in patterns of arced and diagonal movement out of the frame depth with figures, animals and vehicles occasionally cut off at the bottom of the frame. In CAPTURE OF BOER BATTERY BY THE BRITISH, a horse passes in front of and very close to the camera, almost completely blocking the view. In CAPTURE OF BOER BATTERY, a soldier crosses the horizontal space of the frame very close to the camera. In CHARGE OF BOER CAVALRY, a sizeable group of riders gallop from the background depth right at the camera passing extremely close to it on either side; following what appears to be a slight break in the print, the rear end of one of the animals fills most of the frame. The catalogue description of the film reads as follows:

CHARGE OF BOER CAVALRY

In the distance is seen a number of grey objects rapidly approaching which, upon drawing closer, are recognized as a company of Boer cavalry. As they draw nearer, you can see that they are straining every nerve and urging their horses to the utmost speed. Waving their sabres aloft on they come, so that the audience involuntarily make an effort to move from their seats in order to avoid being trampled under the horses.⁹¹

Edison's make-believe battles, involving 200 Bowery recruits under the command of James White, were not without real flesh and blood casualties. On April 12, 1900 it was reported that two men had been injured "in West Orange at a sham battle in reproduction of the famous engagement at Spion Kop" through

the premature discharge of a large cannon.⁹²

Fake newsreel shooting features quickly found their way into "authentic" actualities and new subjects and in time mostly eliminated the routine panning camera location shots of earlier documentary work. By 1906 the action-at-the-camera device was used in a way no one would call "fake" in the filming of logs moving down a river in Biograph's LOGGING IN MAINE; two years later it was the dramatic basis of D.W. Griffith's first film as a Biograph director, ADVENTURES OF DOLLIE. Two variations were the penetration of frame depth in the "phantom rides," film taken by a camera mounted on a train engine, and subjects, such as Méliès' SCENES FROM THE ELEVATOR ASCENDING EIFFEL TOWER (1900) and Edison's BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA FROM A BALLOON (1902), depicting vertical depth motion.

A feature closely related to the values of frame depth was the frame-edge cut-off, representing an abandonment of classically-balanced composition for the tensions of partially visible action. A pictorial effect that may be observed in some seventeenth-century painting and has been equated with snapshot photography, the cut-off contributed to the illusion of participation in time as well as space.⁹³ Found in the work of early actuality cameramen attempting to film a popular event, such as ADMIRAL DEWEY AT STATE HOUSE, BOSTON (1899), from a crowd's-eye position, an original and unusual variation

was achieved by the anonymous cameraman who filmed the Queen Victoria Jubilee procession in London, England. He provided a view of the procession deliberately seen from between rather than over a pair of heads, reinforcing the impression of a ubiquitous camera presence at and inside of its movie subject.⁹⁴

3.8 The Role of the Publicist

To vouchsafe the authenticity of that presence film studios, after the Spanish-American War success, tended to claim, not only that their man and only their man, had been there at the scene of the war or disaster, but that he had been there first and had delivered his screen scoop home for exhibition with minimal delay. "We are prepared," ran the boast of one producer, "to reproduce pictures of current events in twelve hours after they have taken place."⁹⁵

In October 1900 a series of explosions demolished a pharmaceutical plant in New York City. "Within an hour after the first explosion," the Edison catalogue crowed, "we had a photographer on the spot (who) obtained these excellent moving pictures of the ruins, the falling walls and the search for dead bodies and other exciting events that followed the catastrophe."⁹⁶ "We receive films," Biograph advised its clientele in 1899, "as quickly as the illustrated papers are able to make their half-tone reproductions, and we have now won recognition as a formidable rival of the illustrated press." That motion picture orientation had begun in a tentative way in Biograph's 1896 subjects featuring McKinley's victorious election campaign and inauguration. By 1899

the technical thrill of projected motion pictures was sharing the bill with topical material on political personalities, launchings, kidnappings and yacht races.⁹⁷

In mid-September 1900, the Eden Musée put the Edison company's footage of the Galveston tidal wave disaster of September 8, 1900 on the bill, the authenticity of the eight subjects an important promotional feature. The marketing emphasis was on the Whitmanian 'man who was there,' returning with privileged first-hand testimony of his experience. The Edison studio luridly proclaimed its putative "scoop" this way:

At the first news news (sic) of the disaster by cyclone and tidal wave that devastated Galveston on Saturday, Sept. 8th, 1900, we equipped a party of photographers and sent them by special train to the scene of the ruins. Arriving at the scene of the desolation shortly after the storm had swept over the city, our party succeeded, at the risk of life and limb, in taking about a thousand feet of moving pictures. In spite of the fact that Galveston was under martial law and that the photographers were shot down at sight by the excited police guards, a very wide range of subjects has been secured . . . everyone will be interested in seeing authentic moving pictures of a representative American city almost entirely wiped out by the combined power of water and wind. The films we list below are genuine, and ours are positively the only animated picture films secured while the city of Galveston was in a state of chaos.⁹⁸

In his posthumously published autobiography, Billy Bitzer, then working for Biograph, claimed that he was "the only motion-picture cameraman to cover the story." Sent to Galveston through an arrangement between the Hearst newspapers and McCutcheon of Biograph, he took with him "the new light portable Biograph camera" which allowed him to "cover disaster

territory better."⁹⁹

Seventeen days after the event, the Biograph company sent this letter, dated September 25, 1900, out to theatre managers, making claims a little more modest than Bitzer's:

You will note by the attached Clipping that one of our operators has just returned from Galveston. He was one of the first on the ground and worked with a special Government permit.

We have developed his first installment of films and find them not only excellent photography but VERY SENSATIONAL -- rescue parties bringing out bodies, burying the dead, etc.

A quick booking of the American Biograph will give you a great opportunity for press work.¹⁰⁰

Authenticity was thus as much, if not more, an achievement of the copywriter as the photographer. The copywriter's task was to make clear not only that the company's man had been there with his camera, but that the lapse of time between the occurrence of some terrible event and its appearance on a vaudeville screen was minimal.

The what, where and sometimes even the how of what was being flashed on the screen was provided by the film titles. Functioning as surrogate mini-sound tracks elaborated in the catalogue descriptions, whatever gaps remained could be filled in by the vaudeville house narrator-explainer. The repetition of place names, as in Edison's Galveston series, seems a redundancy of identification, but it also indicates the possible variation in the quantity of the separate pieces that would have been incorporated into a particular documentary show:

PANORAMA OF EAST GALVESTON; SEARCHING RUINS ON BROADWAY,
GALVESTON, FOR DEAD BODIES; PANORAMA OF WRECKAGE OF WATER

FRONT; PANORAMA OF GALVESTON POWER HOUSE; PANORAMA OF ORPHAN'S HOME, GALVESTON; LAUNCHING A STRANDED SCHOONER FROM THE DOCKS; BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF DOCK FRONT, GALVESTON; and PANORAMIC VIEW OF TREAMONT HOTEL, GALVESTON. Though none of these subjects were "fakes", the denotative guidance of a title could on occasion be deliberately misleading; the bird's eye view of the dock was in fact simply a panning shot.

This is not to argue that the cameraman's job could be done by a publicity specialist, only that the publicist's reading of the meaning of his confrère's work was a powerful and all-pervasive one. It is all the more suggestive in that there is no evidence of any discussion of this point in the voluminous documentation of internal Edison studio communications. The intuitive goal publicist and photographer shared was to provide a symbolic replication, through the manipulation of spatial and temporal elements, of the process of an on-the-spot art. The publicist's task was to highlight the method of production in a way that subordinated the experience of a visual product to the conditions of its realization, i.e., to its markings of authenticity.

3.9 The Fake as Art

The ultimate solution to the problem of providing authentic screen entertainment based on a violent news event was to acknowledge the "fake" for what it was but then to peddle its documentary verisimilitude as a great artistic and technical triumph. In a veiled assault on Edison's Boer War fakes, The American Vitagraph Company placed the following caveat in the promotional literature for their South African films:

. . . every picture is absolutely genuine. We will on no condition sell Faked or Pre-Arranged War Subjects unless announced . . .¹⁰¹

In describing five of their short subjects as "the most Realistic and Exciting War Pictures of the age," and in openly declaring that they had been "specially posed for at an open air Military Tournament" Vitagraph was shrewdly looking ahead to a time when acknowledged fakery, which is to say the technical recreation of the newsreel look in a "faithful reproduction" would carry the day.

In the fall of 1898, François Doublier, a Lumière employée on a tour of pre-revolutionary Russia, put on a bogus exhibition titled L'AFFAIRE DREYFUS. Doublier's tour arrived in the Jewish districts of Southern Russia at a time when Jewish communities throughout the world were tremendously excited by the Dreyfus case. Audience discontent over the absence of pictures of Dreyfus from the program gave Doublier his inspiration. Choosing from among the three dozen subjects on hand, the shots he put together included a French army parade led by an officer, a Paris street scene with a large building, a Finnish tugboat heading toward a barge and one of the Nile delta.¹⁰²

Absorbing that exhibitor's ruse into the routines of film production and acknowledging its contrived character, as Georges Méliès did the following year, rendered the trick art. Méliès, who had been releasing fake news subjects for a couple of years, produced a thirteen-minute, twelve-part, 780-foot version of the Dreyfus story with some of its sets based on illustrations that had appeared in French weeklies. A series of tableaux

that reconstructed the major events of the case, the film was described by Bardèche and Brasillach as "a sort of animated waxworks," with each scene bearing a separate title.¹⁰³

Whether or not Méliès realized, as a member of Doublier's audience had, that the Dreyfus case took place in 1894, before there was a camera built that could film it, his 1899 reconstruction was a more sophisticated achievement than Doublier's. For one thing, it was not passed off as a newsreel but presented as a fictionalized treatment of a topical event. Whereas, Doublier had simply constructed his facsimile out of unrelated available footage, Méliès went a step further and successfully recreated the compositional features of the actuality for narrative purposes. Barry Salt has drawn our attention to the staging in depth in Méliès courtroom scene and in one of the street scenes, which, he added, represented one of the earliest uses of "a purely cinematographic angle" in fictional film:

In these scenes, apparently unique in Méliès work, and indeed in the fictional films of the period, bystanders and observers of the action fill the space between the principle actors from the upper background to the bottom foreground in a way that copies framing occurring in actuality footage of the period. [My emphasis]¹⁰⁴

Salt's equation of actuality framing with "a purely cinematographic angle" is worth keeping in mind. Dating from roughly 1904, the Méliès technique would be applied to the production of star-less little news dramas rendered by anonymous documentary performers that, in combination with the tableau structure of those dramas, focused spectator interest on the compositional treatment of topical themes and incidents.

NOTES: CHAPTER 3

¹ Fielding, The American Newsreel.

² See Erik Barnouw, Documentary: A History of Non-Fiction Film, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 5; also, Noel Burch, Theory of Film Practice (translated by Helen R. Lane), New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973, p. 109.

³ See Gordon Hendricks, The Kinetoscope, pp. 97-109; also Ramsaye, p. 110; Fielding, The American Newsreel, pp. 9-13.

⁴ Ramsaye, p. 288-89; North, pp. 63-64; Walls, pp. 50-51; Albert Smith, p. 13.

⁵ For various versions of this tale see Pratt, "No Magic, No Mystery, No Sleight of Hand," Image, XIII, No. 4 (December 1959), p. 207; Albert Smith, pp. 12-15; and The New York Times, November 11, 1899, p. 10; November 19, 1899, p. 18.

⁶ See Ramsaye, pp. 368-82 and North, pp. 136-43, mostly a Ramsaye-derived account. There was also a Lubin production. The version filmed by Klaw and Erlanger in Europe was shown in Montreal on April 7, 1898:

. . . a cinematographic reproduction of the Passion Play as performed by the peasants of Horitz, Bohemia. The pictures were life size & were very beautiful & most realistic, especially where the movements were slow as in the Last Supper. The accompanying lecture was good and sometimes we were treated to solemn music in the background. It was a great treat.

From the Diaries of Amy Redpath, Manuscript Collection, McGill University, Montreal.

In order to stop proceedings Edison had initiated against the Eden Musée for filming their version with an unlicensed camera, the rights were assigned to the Edison company for the sum of \$1.00. For an account of the Klaw and Erlanger production see Zdenek Stábla, "Queries Concerning the Horice Passion Film," The Film Institute, Prague, 1971.

⁷ "From What Strange Source," a 1903 newspaper article published in Image, VII, No. 8 (October 1958), pp. 183-87.

⁸ "Collision Draws Big Crowd," The New York Dramatic Mirror, July 14, 1906, p. 16.

⁹ Paul Spehr of the Library of Congress, Motion Picture Section, told me that the elephant, named Tops, had been a member of a circus menagerie. A midway patron who had thoughtlessly butted out a cigarette on its body was snatched up in the air and sent crashing to his death. Tops was shortly after ordered destroyed.

¹⁰ See North, p. 111; Sanderson, p. 114; Gifford, p. 7; Fielding, pp. 37-45; also, Niver, Correspondence with the

author, December 27, 1977.

¹¹ Sanderson, pp. 61, 114.

¹² Niver, Correspondence, December 27, 1977. THE GREAT JEWEL MYSTERY was a Biograph film released in 1904.

¹³ Niver, Motion Pictures From the Library of Congress, p. 239.

¹⁴ Niver, Correspondence, December 27, 1977.

¹⁵ See Charles Musser, "The Eden Musée in 1898: The Exhibitor as Creator," Film and History, XI, No. 4 (December 1981), pp. 73-82.

¹⁶ See Gordon Hendricks, Eadweard Muybridge: The Father of the Motion Picture, New York: Grossman Publishers, 1975; and Beaumont Newhall, "Muybridge and the First Motion Picture," Image, V, No. 1 (January 1956), pp. 4-11. See also Beaumont Newhall, "The Horse in Gallop," Image, I, No. 4 (April 1952) p. 3. Apparently fifteen years before Muybridge's revelation a Lieutenant L. Wachter published a book containing a series of ten sketches that predicted Muybridge's results — drawings made for viewing on a phenakistoscope. Was Wachter, then, the true father of the movies?

¹⁷ Newhall, "Muybridge and the First Motion Picture," p. 4.

¹⁸ Alexander Black, Time and Chance, New York: Farrar and Rinehardt, 1937, p. 120. See also, Aaron Scharf, Art and Photography, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin.

Books Ltd., 1974, pp. 223-234, (first published 1968) and
 John H. Dorr, "Thom Anderson's Eadweard Muybridge, Zoopraxo-
grapher," Take One, V, No. 1 (1976), p. 34.

¹⁹ Barnouw, p. 5.

²⁰ For the complete Raff and Gammon 1894 catalogue see
 Ramsaye, pp. 838-839.

²¹ See Gordon Hendricks, "A Collection of Edison Films,"
Image, VIII, No. 3 (September 1959).

²² See North, p. 73; Hendricks, "Edison Films," p. 162;
 Walls, p. 8. The Ithaca presentation could, of course, have
 been assembled from films supplied by another company.

²³ Olive Cook, Movement in Two Dimensions, London,
 England: Hutchison, 1963, chapter 2, pp. 23-46. See also
 Aaron Scharf, Art and Photography and John Fell, Film and
the Narrative Tradition, Norman, Oklahoma: University of
 Oklahoma Press, 1974. According to Fell

. . . the nonuniqueness of the movie's techniques . . .
 are reflected in media as seemingly different from
 one another as the nineteenth-century novel,
 early comics, magazine illustration, the Cubists
 and Impressionists, the most pop of popular liter-
 ature, and entertainments of the theatre, fair-
 ground and parlour. (p. xii)

²⁴ Cook, p. 27.

²⁵ Peter Galassi, Before Photography, New York: The
Museum of Modern Art, 1981.

26 Cook.

27 Cook.

28 Eden Musée (monthly catalogue), 1906. The following year Edwin Porter completed RESCUED FROM AN EAGLE'S NEST, a film based on that wax display.

29 Cook.

30 "Busy Days at Coney Island," The New York Dramatic Mirror, May 6, 1905, p. 16. See also John F. Kasson, Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century, New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.

31 See The New York Clipper, July 14, 1906, p. 566; March 10, 1906, p. 77.

32 See Vardac, pp. 144-151.

33 See Jack Rennert, 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, London, England: Hart-Davis, MacFibbon, 1976, end papers. Also, Don Russell, The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill, Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960; The Wild West: A History of the Wild West Shows, Fort Worth, Texas: The Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1970.

34 The New York Times, March 27, 1898, p. 9; March 26, 1899, p. 16.

35 The New York Times, March 26, 1899.

36 See Marc Mancini, "Pictures at an Exposition," Film Comment, XIX, No. 1 (February 1983), pp. 43-49.

37 Edison Films, Thomas A. Edison, July 1901, p. 16.

38 Raymond Fielding, "Hale's Tours: Ultrarealism in the Pre-1910 Motion Picture," Cinema Journal, X, No. 1 (1970), pp. 34-47.

39 Edison Films, Edison Manufacturing Company, May Supplement, 1903, p. 13.

40 For historical accounts of America in the period and its involvement in the Spanish American War, see: Walter Millis, The Martial Spirit, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931; Brig. General S.L.A. Marshall, The War to Free Cuba, New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1966; John Anthony Scott (ed.), Living Documents in American History, vol. 2, New York: Washington Square Press, 1968; Walter Lord, The Good Years, New York: Bantam Books, 1962, first published by Harper and Row, 1960; Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States, New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980; General Emilio Aguinaldo and Vincente Albano Pacis, A Second Look at America, New York: Robert Speller and Sons, Publishers, Inc. 1957; and Gregory Mason, Remember the Maine, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1939.

41 See Millis, Marshall and Scott.

42 Millis.

43 Marshall.

44 Correspondence, W.E. Gilmore to William Paley, March 7, 1898; Correspondence William Paley to Edison Manufacturing Company, March 12, 1898; Correspondence, William Paley to F.Z. Maguire and Company, April 20, 1898; Correspondence, F.Z. Maguire to W.E. Gilmore, April 20, 1898.

45 See North; also Musser, "Porter Tribute."

46 O.G. and Lenyth Brockett, "Civil War Theatre: Contemporary Treatments," in Civil War History, published quarterly by the State University of Iowa, I, (1955), pp. 229-50.

47 Gene Smith and Jayne Barry Smith (eds.), The National Police Gazette, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972. An anthology of Police Gazette material published between 1878-1897.

48 "Notes of the Week," The New York Times, November 14, 1897, p. 9.

49 "Notes of the Week," The New York Times, October 29, 1899, p. 14.

50 "List of New Subjects," Edison Kinetoscope Company circular, 1895. See also W.K.L. and Antonia Dickson, History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope and Kinetophonograph, 1895. Reprinted by Arno Press, Inc., New York, 1972.

51 The New York Clipper, May 2, 1896, p. 136.

52 "Edison Films," Maguire and Baucus, Ltd., January 20, 1897; "Fall Catalogue," Maguire and Baucus Ltd., 1897.

53 Edison Films, Thomas A. Edison, 1900, p. 14.

54 See Lord, The Good Years; also, Philip Knightley, The First Casualty, New York and London: Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1975, pp. 41-78. Knightley reports the possibly apocryphal tale concerning the experience of graphic artist Frederic Remington sent to Cuba by Hearst to provide visual testimony of the insurgents' struggle against Spanish authorities. "EVERYTHING IS QUIET," Remington cabled Hearst, "THERE IS NO TROUBLE HERE. THERE WILL BE NO WAR. I WISH TO RETURN." Whereupon Hearst is supposed to have cabled back this message: "PLEASE REMAIN. YOU FURNISH PICTURES. I WILL FURNISH WAR." Knightley, pp. 55-56.

55 Millis, p. 42.

56 From the texts that accompanied the exhibit called Photography into Print, McCord Museum, McGill University, Montreal, January 25 to February 7, 1982, organized by guest curators William and Elizabeth Baker.

57 Photojournalism, Time-Life Books, 1971, p. 16.

58 See Vincent S. Jones, "The Challenge of Photojournalism," Image, VI, No. 7 (September 1957), p. 153; Newhall, History of Photography; Mason, Remember the Maine; Photojournalism, pp. 12-19; and Sunday issues of The New York Times, 1898-1899.

59 Correspondence, Maguire to Gilmore, April 20, 1898.

60 Smith, Two Reels and a Crank; for Edison copyright dates see Walls, p. 42.

61 The New York Times, May 1, 1898, p. 10.

62 "War Extra," Thomas A. Edison, p. 2.

63 Ibid., p. 5.

64 Edison Films, Thomas A. Edison, "March 1900," pp. 4, 7-14.

65 Ibid., p. 9.

66 Paul Hammond, Marvellous Méliès, London: Gordon Fraser,

1974, p. 137. By 1898 Méliès had become an old hand at reconstructing topical and historical action for the screen.

In 1897, Méliès reproduced scenes from the Greco-Turkish War of 1897, WAR EPISODE, MASSACRE IN CRETE and SEA FIGHTING IN GREECE. THE LAST CARTRIDGES, based on a painting depicting an incident from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, was also done that year, as were other battle subjects and related works, THE SURRENDER OF TOURNAVOS, EXECUTION OF A SPY, FIGHTING IN THE STREETS OF INDIA and ATTACK ON AN ENGLISH BLOCKHOUSE. Apart from DIVERS AT WORK ON THE WRECK OF THE "MAINE," no prints of any of these films are known to have survived.

67 See Charles Musser, "The American Vitagraph: 1897-1901 - Survival and Competition in an Emerging Industry." Forthcoming in Cinema Journal.

68 Ramsaye, pp. 390-391. See also Ed Theisen, "The Story of the Newsreel," International Photographer, September 1933, p. 4. The piece contains what purports to be a frame enlargement.

69 Walls, p. 5, p. 2.

70 G.W. Bitzer, Billy Bitzer: His Story, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1973, pp. 33-39.

71 Walls, p. 32, p. 2.

72 Edison Films, March 1900, p. 10. Presumably this was Lubin's; the Edison company did not copyright a film with that title.

73 Ibid., p. 7.

74 Ibid., p. 11.

75 Ibid., p. 11.

76 "War Extra," p. 6, p. 7.

77 An alternate method of producing longer shows out of short strips of footage was loop projection, joining the head and tail of a strip of film for a continuous presentation.

See Musser, "The American Vitagraph."

78 See Millis, p. 402.

79 Cited by Pratt in "'No Magic, No Mystery, No Sleight of Hand,'" p. 206.

80 See The New York Times: April 10, 1898, p. 2, p. 9; April 24, 1898, p. 9; August 14, 1898, p. 6; October 20, 1898, p. 17.

81 The New York Times, April 24, 1898, p. 9.

82 The New York Times, May 1, 1898, p. 10.

83 Conversation with Charles Musser, January 24, 1983.

84 The New York Times, March 27, 1898, p. 9.

85 The New York Times, March 13, 1898, p. 9.

86 The New York Times, May 15, 1898, p. 9.

87 David Levy and Art Spiegelman, "Honk, Honk! It's the Bonk!: The News as Entertainment," RAW, I, No. 2 (1980), pp.12-16.

88 W.K.L. Dickson, The Biograph in Battle, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1901.

89 See Richard Connor, The Spirit Soldiers, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1973; also, Jay Leyda, Dyaning, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972; and Gifford's listings for 1900 for British Boer War Subjects.

90 The New York Clipper, July 18, 1896, p. 312.

91 Edison Films, Thomas A. Edison, July 1901, p. 28.

The 1901 Edison catalogue offered a total of eleven Boer War subjects. Listed in a category called Briton and Boer no claims of authenticity were made and no photographic credit was supplied, only this sales pitch: "Our Transvaal War Pictures are attracting immense crowds wherever they are exhibited." Planted in the catalogue among the fakes, five of the subjects appear to have been examples of footage actually shot in South Africa: ENGLISH TRANSPORT "ARUNDEL CASTLE" LEAVING FOR TRANSVAAL WITH BRITISH TROOPS; ENGLISH TROOPS BOARDING TRANSPORT; BRITISH HIGHLANDERS EXERCISING; BRITISH TROOPS ON DRESS PARADE and BOER COMMISSARY TRAIN TREKKING. Copyright records contain two different films with the title CHARGE OF BOER CAVALRY, one registered on April 14, the other on April 16.

An obvious fake, only one film is listed in the catalogue with that title. There are two other fakes with similar titles: CAPTURE OF BOER BATTERY, and CAPTURE OF BOER BATTERY BY THE BRITISH. However, only the latter was listed in the catalogue. The balance of the fakes included ENGLISH LANCERS CHARGING, BOERS BRINGING IN BRITISH PRISONERS, RED CROSS AMBULANCE ON THE BATTLEFIELD and BATTLE OF MAFEKING. See also Frank L. Dyer and Thomas C. Martin, Edison — His Life and Inventions, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1910, reprinted in 1929 with additional material by William H. Meadowcraft.

Ideologically, British and American Boer War subjects were slanted in opposite directions; the Americans were for the Boer cause, the British followed the lead of Kipling, Conon Doyle and young Winston Churchill in cheering on this latest episode of imperial initiative. According to one writer the aim of British-screened subjects like THE GORDON HIGHLANDERS LEAVE FOR THE WAR was to show the varied membership of empire all marching in step to the imperial tune while the fakes and their graphic Boer atrocities functioned as effective recruiting propaganda. See Knightley, pp. 65-78; also Elizabeth Grottle Strebel, "Primitive Propaganda: The Boer War Films," Sight and Sound, XLVI, No. 1 (Winter 1976), pp. 45-47.

⁹² "Injured in Sham Battle," The Public Ledger (New Jersey), April 12, 1900. Press clipping found in a file at ENHS. Page number not available.

⁹³ Galassi, Before Photography.

- 94 From the Bloch Collection, Museum of Modern Art.
- 95 "Circular," The American Vitae-Mirror Company, New York City.
- 96 Edison Films, July 1901, p. 14.
- 97 Niver, Biograph Bulletins - 1896-1908, pp. 12-16, 41-46.
- 98 Edison Films, July 1901, pp. 14-15. Edison's "party of photographers" consisted of Albert Smith. See Smith's Two Reels and a Crank, p. 126.
- 99 Billy Bitzer: His Story, p. 47.
- 100 Niver, Biograph Bulletins, p. 52.
- 101 "List of New Films," The American Vitagraph Company, circa 1900, p. 4. This was also done by R.W. Paul in England.
- 102 Francis Doublier, "Reminiscences of an Early Motion Picture Operator," Image, V, No. 6 (July 1956), pp. 135; and Jay Leyda, Kino, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1960, p.23.
- 103 See Hammond, Marvellous Méliès, p. 42; Bardèche and Brasillach, p. 16; and Frazer, Artificially Arranged Scenes, pp. 76-80. According to Frazer, this was a film that was banned in France until 1950; its subject was declared taboo until 1974.
- 104 Salt, "Early Development of Film Forms," Film Form, I, No. 1 (1977), pp. 91-92.

CHAPTER 4

THE "FAKE" TRAIN ROBBERY

I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there . . .
I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken,
Tumbling walls buried me in their debris . . .

Walt Whitman from "Song of Myself,"
Leaves of Grass, 1871-1873 text,
E.P. Dutton, 1912.

4.1 Two Trends: Commercial and Aesthetic

The two motion pictures that form the basis of Porter's reputation, LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN and THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, were very much transitional works within an evolving news reproduction tradition. Released at a time when actualities dominated U.S. production and claims of authenticity constituted an important vaudeville show selling point, both films marked an American industry trend to the fictionalization of topical themes and the documentary treatment of fictional subject matter.

The patterned modification of the news reproduction between 1900-1906, the subject of this chapter, possessed two key characteristics. On the one hand, we discover the trend to acknowledgement of the fakes as primitive docudramas, i.e. as staged works. Released that way, it was possible to enlarge their potential scope and appeal. Edison's SHAM BATTLE AT THE PAN-AMERICAN EXPOSITION (1901) featured a Wild West show skirmish between a band of Indians and a company of U.S. Infantry in three shots, voluminous clouds of artillery smoke and a camera placed in the centre of the action. Though the visual result turned out to be an uneven one, with the details of the action never very clear, that sort of camera placement employed in an "authentic" actuality might have drawn some skeptical comment.

Dropping the claim of having-been-there, producers took to marketing the illusion of authenticity and its frisson of vicarious experience as a technical achievement, the you-are-there sensation of the documentary merging with the self-con-

gratulatory pyrotechnics of the trick film. The result was the dramatization of a visual recording capability that shied away from any sustained engagement with social reality. In the process, the topicality of the films shifted from direct to indirect, i.e. familiar social themes or routines rather than specific news items served as pretexts for newsreel-like angles, camera movement and composition. Included among those fictional themes in Porter's work were many of the leading topics of the times: the menace of urban fire — LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN (1903); crime — CAPTURE OF THE 'YEGG' BANK BURGLARS (1904); the kidnapping of children — STOLEN BY GYPSIES (1905); ethnic tension — COHEN'S FIRE SALE (1907); alcoholism — THE WHITE CAPS (1905); and social injustice — THE KLEPTOMANIAC (1904). Absent was much enlightened reference to the rampant racism and labor turmoil afoot in the land.¹

The larger formal consequence of that development was a merger of modes of illusionism, fantasy effects like stop-motion on the one hand, and actuality composition on the other, in a screen impression signifying motion picture realism. The basic elements out of which that emergent screen realism would be constructed were present in the American cinema circa 1900. Moreover, the variety of material advertised in, say, the September 1902 Edison company catalogue only serves to underscore the larger selectivity operating on the evolving synthesis. The catalogue's 143 pages were mostly devoted to actualities, news material and travelogues. The largest single category, totaling sixteen and a half pages, consisted of the so-called

Mysterious films, stop motion, reverse motion and speeded-up motion tricks, three and a half pages of which were included in a special Imported section.

It is useful to bear in mind that until at least 1910 there was no firmly established boundary distinguishing news and entertainment subjects.² It might even be more accurate to say that all film production was intended as vaudeville entertainment. The July 1901 Edison catalogue contained a distinction of sorts between news and topical films including the fakes, and the comic and trick films. In the gap was a mixed bag, mostly of filmed vaudeville-derived routines. The Miscellaneous section included two staged ambulance rescue subjects filmed in 1897, some actualities and a lost early Western, STAGE COACH HOLD-UP IN THE DAYS OF '49. The 1906 Edison catalogue maintained the earlier perception of subject matter categories. Based on places, activities, personalities and topics it organized company releases in sections titled Acrobatic, Vaudeville, Mysterious, Fires and Fire Departments, Cowboy Series, Trains, etc. In 1906 THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY remained in the Trains section with railroad actualities, where it had been listed in 1904; LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN was still in the Fires section where it was put in 1903. The July 1904 catalogue classified UNCLE TOM'S CABIN in the Historical section along with some French imports including THE RISE AND FALL OF NAPOLEON THE GREAT, WILLIAM TELL, MARIE ANTOINETTE and EUROPEAN IDEA OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS' DISCOVERY OF AMERICA.³

Among the range of optical tricks and novelties marking the earliest exploitation of the film medium, one of them, the fabrication of the compositional and framing features of the outdoor actuality, quickly achieved a position of dominance, excluding or incorporating elements of all the others. The role of the topical news reproduction in that development was in part to provide popular subject matter for filmmakers to experiment with en route to establishing a stable recipe. It will be shown that cameramen and directors were for a time inhibited in their treatment of material from literary and stage sources, as well as from historically remote periods.

Even if, as we know, the practice of interpreting the fabled rise of the story film as a product of purely formal motives has more or less ceased, it nevertheless remains important to understand the ways in which the commercial push for extended screen subjects was constrained by the formal features of in-depth actuality composition. The major historical claim attributed to Edwin Porter's Edison career, the coincidental "discovery" in 1903 of editing construction and the longer story film, has had the effect of deflecting attention from two independent trends, one commercial, the other based on the aesthetic of the news "fake."

4.2 The Commercial Trend: Longer Story Films

Originating in part from the failure to distinguish between extended vaudeville film shows, which dated from the beginnings of projection in 1896, and the release of the longer film in a complete version only by a producer, the claim that 1903 marked the discovery of the multi-shot narrative film initiated a debate of trivial historical significance. The 1900 Edison catalogue stated that the PASSION PLAY at "about" 1,950 feet and OPERA OF MARTHA (Second Act), a 1,300-foot production done in the early months of 1898, could be purchased only in complete versions.⁴ While they were also the longest films listed in the 1901 catalogue, through a sales policy switch they were now also available in parts.⁵ The 1902 catalogue, in a section called Christmas Scenes, listed two Méliès dupes, LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD, at 550 feet but available in lengths of 300 and 400 feet, and THE CHRISTMAS DREAM at 500 feet. Also for sale to Edison customers was Méliès' CINDERELLA, a twenty-part subject at 400 feet not available in parts and advertised as "especially pleasing to an audience composed of ladies and children."⁶ The same catalogue described a 1000-foot actuality, THE GREAT BULL FIGHT, available in a complete version or in parts and a 675-foot "series," COMPLETE FUNERAL CORTEGE AT CANTON, OHIO.⁷ That record of assassinated President McKinley's burial ceremony in his home town was also available in six separate scenes of varying length: FUNERAL TRAIN ARRIVING AT CANTON

STATION (40 feet), BODY LEAVING THE TRAIN AT CANTON, OHIO (60 feet), PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT AT CANTON STATION (90 feet), CIRCULAR PANORAMA OF PRESIDENT McKINLEY'S HOUSE (80 feet), PRESIDENT McKINLEY'S BODY LEAVING THE HOUSE AND CHURCH (200 feet), and FUNERAL CORTEGE ENTERING WESTLAWN CEMETARY AT CANTON, OHIO (200 feet). Economic uncertainty at the exhibition end inclined the company to offer that dissolve-linked narrative, told in newsy illustrative highlights, in parts.

A similar type of erratic release pattern was applied to the company's short-lived series of topical screen editorials modeled on the political cartoon. Edwin Porter's 200-foot SAMPSON SCHLEY CONTROVERSY (1901), a polemical commentary on a military scandal dating from the Spanish-American War, was available only in a complete version.⁸ Described in the catalogue as consisting of "three scenes with beautiful dissolving effects, its cartoon-panel structure depicted Schley in action in the first two scenes, followed by the concluding one showing Sampson taking tea "with a group of old maids."⁹ Less a "story" structure than a trope-like configuration involving what Eisenstein might have called intellectual montage, that same basic non-narrative declamatory mode of cinema, exploited years later by the post-war avant-garde and TV commercial producers, was also used to treat the exploits of prohibitionist Carrie Nation and the he-man adventures of the ambitious American vice-president, Theodore Roosevelt.¹⁰ The Carrie Nation essay was offered as two separate short films, KANSAS SALOON SMASHERS, containing the stop-motion destruction of a bar mirror, and WHY MR. NATION WANTS A DIVORCE, in which the famous spouse is shown being driven to drink and then pun-

ished with a spanking. TERRIBLE TEDDY, THE GRIZZLY KING was a complete version two-shot spoof of Roosevelt's hunting exploits based on a cartoon that had appeared in Hearst's New York Journal and Advertiser; accompanied by a photographer and a press agent, Roosevelt bags a squirrel and rides off in triumph.¹¹

The same two-shot concept was employed in 1901 comic accident subjects that were probably the work of Porter, THE FINISH OF BRIDGET McKEEN and ANOTHER JOB FOR THE UNDERTAKER.

Encouraged by the commercial success of longer Méliès subjects such as the 410-foot CINDERELLA (1899), the 690-foot BLUEBEARD (1901) and the 845-foot A TRIP TO THE MOON (1902), Edwin Porter's JACK AND THE BEANSTALK (1902) was, at 645 feet, the Edison studio's initial venture into long fictional production.¹² Based on a stage work, JACK AND THE BEANSTALK represented a new and even daring move for the Edison studio: the genuine continuous action "story" film. A sixteen-shot, ten-scene subject, it was offered to exhibitors in three variations: basic black and white, coloured and a variation in which only the figures were coloured and the beanstalk was tinted. Calculated like CINDERELLA to attract women and children to the movies and supported by a tradition of fairy tales presented on stage and in the lantern-slide medium, it was a film the studio claimed took Porter six weeks to complete. More significantly, it could be obtained only in a "complete length."¹³

In attempting to account for the release of longer, more elaborate subjects, one may speculate that the motion picture business had begun to attract non-showmen with small-business backgrounds, entrepreneurs who would have welcomed the avail-

ability of extended pre-packaged ready-for-exhibition movie shows. That may explain the fact that, dating roughly from 1902, the organization of a film sequence became more and more the prerogative of studio employees like Edwin Porter skilled in all phases of the creation and marketing of popular entertainment. This left the neophyte exhibitor with the familiar little-commerce problems of sales and promotion.

4.3 The Aesthetic Trend: Merger of Modes of Illusionism

Even if historians were prepared to ignore the screen requirements of business expansion at the exhibition end, it is a little hard to understand why so little has been made of the highly-prized formal achievement of Edwin Porter's JACK AND THE BEANSTALK: a multi-shot "story" film released in a complete version containing a fine example of continuity editing. Let us consider the movement of Jack from the exterior of his cottage to the entrance of the giant's castle. In what the catalogue called Scene #5, also the film's fifth shot, there is a dissolve to an exterior showing the beanstalk in the centre of the frame. Jack exits his house on the left and then returns inside to get his mother out to see the beanstalk for herself. She waves a finger-warning at him which he disregards as he begins his climb. His mother exits into the cottage as he disappears into the top of the frame. Children appear, form a circle and dance around the beanstalk. Scene #6 dissolves to the beanstalk in mid-height, showing Jack ascending up into the bottom of the frame. He pauses for a moment to gesture to the crowd below, the action suggesting tem-

poral simultaneity and continuity with the previous scene through a partially repeated action. Jack then climbs around to the other side of the beanstalk, up past the top of the frame and out of view.

Scene #7 dissolves to a shot of Jack climbing over a precipice and into the giant's kingdom under a large crescent moon. Tired, the boy lies down to rest. In shot #8 a "fairy," through a stop-motion effect, appears over the sleeping figure. She descends in shot #9 through another stop-motion effect. In the next shot she waves her wand over the boy, he rises and the moon disappears. To conclude the multi-shot continuous scene, a circular slide projection of the giant's castle is superimposed in the position occupied by the moon, it goes out of focus and, as it fades away, the "fairy" points the way and then disappears. The next shot, #11, dissolves to the exterior of the castle, where the giant's housekeeper discovers Jack at the door. Shots #7 to #11 were considered by the catalogue as comprising a single scene, and indeed they make up a well-executed illusion of continuity through the sequence.

But for all that, JACK AND THE BEANSTALK with its fantasy tableau effects represented a motion picture paradigm of marginal influence, despite its deft editing for continuity. More indicative of future trends was another 1902 multi-shot Edison subject, this one too, presumably, the work of Porter, titled APPOINTMENT BY TELEPHONE. Here again dissolves were employed to move the nicely matched action through three separate locations; the interior of a broker's office, a street scene and a restaurant interior. More significantly

perhaps were the actuality-style framing and social realism of this minor comedy of marital infidelity found out; strollers passing close to the camera in the second shot, the arrangement of action in depth in an interior in the final one.

From the standpoint of continuous motion picture action, Porter's JACK AND THE BEANSTALK and even Méliès' A TRIP TO THE MOON were at least on a par with LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN and THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY. At the same time, it is equally obvious that we are dealing with two distinct types of film. The major difference, however, did not reside in their approaches to narrative continuity but in a very particular method of composition and framing. Clearly, the conception and technical realization of a multi-shot extended subject did not constitute that much of a novelty in 1903 when considered against the background of vaudeville exhibition practice.

The crucial development was an emerging aesthetic of realism based in turn on the merger of the two major modes of illusionism: the newsreel-style of the McKinley series and the fantasy-style of JACK AND THE BEANSTALK.¹⁴ Illusionism here defined refers to the transformation of empirical presence into symbolic manifestation, i.e. the deliberate use of visual representation to convey an impression or illusion of an action or event in such a way that from the tangible occurrence of something that is there on the screen we are led to believe we are perceiving an intangible reality that is not. What emerged, as a fundamental motion-picture narrative aesthetic, was a compositional synthesis, dominated by newsreel framing features, which included a number of specific elements drawn

from those modes and excluded others. Based on a systematic set of oppositions, the contrasting codes of illusionism are described by the following scheme:

<u>Newsreel Style</u>	<u>Fantasy Style</u>
1. Real exterior locations	Studio sets
2. Frame depth	Flat canvas backdrops
3. Diagonal movement toward and away from the camera	Lateral movement
4. Camera movement	Fixed camera position
5. Variety of camera angles and positions	Single camera angle
6. Dramatic use of frame edge	Centred action
7. Entrances and exits out of frame corners	Entrances and exits from left and right frame edges
8. Stop-motion for recognizable cause and effect realism	Stop-motion for "mysterious" appearances and disappearances
9. Restrained performance	Exaggerated posturing
10. Accidental acknowledgement of camera-viewer	Deliberate engagement of camera-viewer
11. Topical subject matter	Literary, stage or historical subject matter

The year 1903, formerly used to mark the appearance of the longer story film, seems in fact the point at which new industrial methods of product standardization, assembly-line manufacture

and division of labor had begun to convert an artisan exhibition activity into an industrial production recipe. That transformation was, however, in turn shaped by the formal constraints of a merged style incorporating the methods of filmed vaudeville routines and fairy tales into the compositional features of a documentary record of an actual event. The specific nature of the merger may be illustrated by examining two features from the larger scheme: stop-motion effects and engagement/acknowledgement of the camera-audience.

In the early months of 1902 film shows in both newsreel and fantasy modes were enjoying great popularity at the motion picture venues of New York City. In February the Eden proudly announced that it had acquired a new series of "mysterious" pictures. In March, the Prince Henry of Prussia footage appeared to be the most popular offered by Manhattan exhibitors while the Eden continued with its stock of trick films. In May, a dozen were added to Eden showings, the only serious competition coming from footage of European royalty.¹⁵ In June, however, an anonymous New York Times reporter expressed his disappointment with the "mysterious" motion picture vogue:

It is perhaps regrettable that such a wonderful invention as the reproduction of life motion by aid of the camera should have degenerated into a mere toy, but shrewd caterers to the amusement-loving public know that in order to interest they must amuse and mystify at the same time. Hence the retirement of the scenic view and the advancement of the clown with the accommodating organism.¹⁶

To illustrate the point the writer referred specifically to Méliès's ONE-MAN BAND (1900) and two Edison-Porter subjects, THE TRAMP'S MIRACULOUS ESCAPE and THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S MISHAP, both completed in 1901.

The Méliès and Porter subjects, however, involved two distinct types of visual legerdemain, originating in two quite different modes of illusionism. In ONE-MAN BAND Méliès, through an elaborate technique of multiple exposures, is seen playing all the instruments in a seven-piece band before a stop-motion disappearance in a puff of smoke and a re-appearance for a bow. That treatment of the screen, as a flat canvas-like surface for amusing effects intended to directly engage the audience, represented a system of illusionism sharing little with the one Porter employed in his trick films. Those subjects inserted a stop-motion dummy substitution technique into actuality-style features including real exterior locations and frame depth. It was a trick first seen in Alfred Clark's 1895 Edison kinetoscope short, MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS, here applied to the depiction of violent accidents. THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S MISHAP and THE TRAMP'S MIRACULOUS ESCAPE underwrite the menace of those great railroad engines lumbering out of the frame depth at the viewer. In this type of film, stop-motion, constrained by the cause-and-effect logic of actuality composition was employed to produce an impression of exaggerated realism rather than parlour fantasy.

In the one-shot photographer subject what the catalogue described as a "kodak fiend" marches forward along a railroad track from out of the frame depth.¹⁷ The tracks were framed

diagonally and extend from the top right-hand corner to the bottom left-hand corner of the frame. At one point we observe a figure climbing some steps in the frame depth, evidently an accident of outdoor shooting. The photographer is knocked over by an approaching train, his head visible in the lower left-hand corner of the frame. He "rises" and the camera pans to the right as he looks down the track. Two figures then hurry onto the rails and shove him out of the way of another train, the camera panning right again to capture the performers cut off at the bottom of the frame.

The structure of THE TRAMP'S MIRACULOUS ESCAPE is similar. Here the body of an indigent, struck on a track while pausing for a drink, rises from a stretcher to terrify the stretcher bearers. The subject of a popular period song, Bridget McKeen, is less fortunate. In THE FINISH OF BRIDGET McKEEN (1901) the explosion victim who had attempted to light her stove with the help of some kerosene is transformed through stop-motion into a dummy that is yanked upward and then dumped with shards of timber onto the kitchen-set floor. A dissolve to a painted gravesite caps the stunt.

That cause-and-effect logic was extended, in a way that the events of fantasy style subjects were not, to a psychological or interior narrative like THE TRAMP'S DREAM (1901). Here stop-motion was used to effect a precisely matched transfer across shots #2 and #3 from dream

to waking state: a tramp being beaten with a broom awakens on a park bench to find a policeman elubbing him on the same limb. In UNCLE JOSH AT THE MOVING PICTURE SHOW (1902), stop-motion was employed to depict the humorous efforts of a rube at a vaudeville house to "rescue" a damsel from the screen embrace of a bumpkin beau.

In those Edison-Porter films we observe an emerging total aesthetic that linked actuality-style composition and framing to the use of stop-motion in the depiction of recognizable causality. In straight fantasy style, the other category of period trick film and evidently the main target of The New York Times, stop-motion was employed to effect the "mysterious" transformations, appearances and disappearances of nineteenth-century stage magic: CHING LING FOO OUTDONE (1900), FAUST AND MARGUERITE (1900), THE MYSTIC SWING (1900), THE CLOWN AND THE ALCHEMIST (1900), AN ARTIST'S DREAM (1901), etc. In a similar vein Edison released THE MYSTERIOUS CAFE (1901) with its animated tables and disappearing furniture. FUN IN A BUTCHER SHOP (1901), in which dogs were transformed into sausages, was remade by the studio in 1904 in reverse — sausages converted to puppies — as DOG FACTORY and by Biograph in 1902 as SAUSAGE MACHINE.

Generally, however, American non-news subjects of the period tended to favor scenes of comic mischief. In UNCLE JOSH IN A SPOOKY HOTEL (1900) and UNCLE JOSH'S NIGHTMARE (1900), stop-motion phantoms pester a hayseed hotel guest. But here the preoccupation with magic rapidly shades into the theme of pranksterism. The couple seated in a cafe in ANIMATED

LUNCHEON (1901) appear to be annoyed by rabbits and chickens that inexplicably fly from a dish of food. According to the catalogue description it was "all a joke" on the waiter, the point presumably being that in such an empirical setting mischief may rule but nature can't go haywire.¹⁸

The youthful pranksters in A WRINGING GOOD JOKE (1899), BAD BOY'S JOKE ON NURSE (1901) and GRANDMA AND THE BAD BOYS (1900), whose brass and energy apparently represented the embodiment of American puritan values for the lower middle class motion picture audiences of the period, often directed their tricks at disrupting the courtship of lovers, as in MAUD'S NAUGHTY BROTHER (1900) and LOVE IN A HAMMOCK (1901). A recurrent theme in the subjects of that era, in Porter's LOVE BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON (1901) the disruption function is performed by a smiling voyeuristic moon that accordians forward to spy on a smooching couple; in Edison's THE LOVERS, COALBOX AND FIREPLACE (1901), registered by Biograph in 1903 as AN UNLUCKY LOVER, stop-motion assists Oedipal rage in driving a suitor from the home of his beloved.

An early consequence of taking the camera to the streets was the camera-conscious documentary personage. In Méliès' PANORAMA OF MOVING SIDEWALK (1900) passers-by stare directly into the lens. In PANORAMIC VIEW OF CHARLESTON EXPOSITION (1902) a stroller tips his bowler to the camera. In Porter's NEW YORK CITY "GHETTO" FISH MARKET (1903), a vendor glares at and then thumbs his nose at the apparatus. Recorded displays of happy curiosity or sullen hostility from citizens confronted

by a working photographer were a feature of early newsreel subjects that, like the repetitive once-numerous location pans, were rapidly eliminated from the fictional application of the actuality style.

The magic show prestidigitator, on the other hand, relied on direct engagement of his audience in order to pull off his sleight-of-hand routines. That same ploy initially accompanied scenes of filmed optical trickery, even though the stop-motion technique rendered such eye contact unnecessary. Thus in Eidson's THE MAGICIAN (1900) the stopping and re-starting of the camera that achieves the trick of displaying a few geese "mysteriously" flying from a length of fabric is linked to a direct acknowledgement of show patrons. The same association of performer-audience engagement with stop-motion stunts occurs in ANOTHER JOB FOR THE UNDERTAKER (1901). Here a rube is shown into a hotel room, does a tumble and "disappears" momentarily. He is directed to read a sign about not blowing out the gas. There are a number of stop motion tricks — his jacket is suddenly removed and there is some animation of boots and furniture. After he does blow out the gas the camera-audience is acknowledged in an apparent comic aside, before the cut to a newsreel view of a funeral procession.

Direct audience engagement can of course be found in films without stop-motion. Edison's 1900 re-make of the celebrated 1896 Rice-Irwin THE KISS, this one also titled THE KISS, featured a more attractive couple. Here the man winks twice at the camera while the woman appears unaware of its presence. Other period subjects concocted an eroticism, subtle or unsubtle,

based on the bordello-mirror voyeurism of women who didn't look back. Such was the case with the six vivacious women in FOLLOW THE LEADER (1901), JOKE ON GRANDMA (1901) and THE DONKEY PARTY (1901), coyly shown wiggling and cavorting for the camera. In WHAT DEMORALIZED THE BARBER SHOP (1901) a pair of female legs are seen by clients from a low angle. In TRAPEZE DISROBING ACT (1901) the audience shares the view of two rubes gawking at a young woman disrobing on a trapeze, an examined but unexamining being. Biograph's FROM SHOW GIRL TO BURLESQUE QUEEN (1903), however, has their young lady disrobe while making eye-contact with the camera-audience. Such contact was absent from a type of obvious peep-show subject arranged as a sequence of private kinetoscope views framed by key-hole mattes: Pathé's LA FILLE DE BAIN INDISCRETE (1902), Biograph's A SEARCH FOR EVIDENCE (1903) and Hepworth's INQUISITIVE BOOTS (1905).

The conversion of two-way voyeurism into a rhetoric of protected presence through a deliberate sealing off of the screen was incorporated into the association of actuality depth and framing with the use of stop motion to depict empirical cause-and-effect action. The ambiguity of transvestite performer Gilbert Sarony's mugging in close-up in the "facials" THE OLD MAID HAVING HER PICTURE TAKEN (1901) and OLD MAID IN THE HORSE CAR (1901) would soon be eliminated. The old maid's courting of the camera contains a dimension mostly absent from the parody of the rising bureaucratic class in EDUCATED CHIMPANZE (1901), consisting of close-up footage of the monkey

dressed for dinner, uncorking a bottle, reading, working a typewriter and pounding a miniature piano. Filmed events that otherwise strained credulity were directed at the camera audience: the dough sculptor in FUN IN A BAKERY (1902), nails a rodent climbing a flour barrel with a wad of dough that he next shapes into lightening celebrity caricatures for the approval of unseen onlookers.

A variation on the "facial", WATERMELON EATING CONTEST (1900), shows four blacks facing the camera, apparently incited to extreme behaviour by the consumption of some watermelon. In that type of borderline fiction subject presented as a documentary record the amateur performers were evidently not given very much direction and did not know if they ought to have engaged the camera with their eyes or not. No such uncertainty clouds Porter's BURLESQUE SUICIDE (1902). Listed in the Humorous section of the 1902 catalogue, it was described this way:

A dissipated looking man is seated at a table with a decanter of whiskey and a glass beside him. Upon the opposite side of the table lies a large revolver. The man is evidently a habitual drunkard and is lamenting his fate. He pours out a glass of whiskey, and with his face indicating despair, starts to drink it. He evidently changes his mind, and spies the revolver, seizes it, and places it to his temple as if to commit suicide, but right there changes his mind again, and laying the revolver carefully upon the table, drinks his whiskey with a smile of content. Of course when the audience sees the pistol placed to his head they are greatly excited. The old topper finally bursts out in a fit of laughter and points comically at the audience, as much as to say, 'Did you ever get left?' It is remarkable the effect this picture, which begins in so thrilling and ends in so comical a manner produces upon the audience.¹⁹

The choice of the tear-drop whiskey glass over the pearl-handled pistol staged through the actor's facial expressions marked a half step away from the "facial" and another half-step toward the physiognomic dramas played out in silent screen close-ups. Like the men and vehicles that came rushing out of the frame depth to excite motion picture viewers, the close-ups, too, were to be displayed as objects without audience consciousness. George Barnes unloading his revolver in the direction of packed vaudeville houses in the concluding tableau of Porter's THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY represented a late vestige of such consciousness, the close-up that looked back, soon to be a practice as obsolete as the gunfighter was in 1903.

With industrialization taking hold of the formerly artisan activity of motion picture production and exhibition, we observe the shrinkage of an earlier pluralism and the rise of a narrow visual recipe that involved the merger of newsreel composition, causal logic based on stop-motion and the non-engagement of the audience by screen performers. In the evolution of the news reproduction between 1900-1906 we find the crucial consolidation of that merger, in its application to topical stories, both specific ones that had been featured in the newspapers of the day, and those of thematic topicality based on the ideas and attitudes of the period. LIFE OF AMERICAN FIREMAN's newsreel framing, dream-balloon and dissolve-linked scenes, and THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY's varied camera angles and camera movement, mattes, stop motion for cause-and-effect realism and George Barnes

audience-engagement tableau revealed the merger at a crucial point-of-no-return transition. That merger, involving the concealment of visual tricks in actuality composition-al features, substituted a vaudeville house gimmick, later called realism, for a more illuminating examination of the world in which the new medium was born.

4.4 Merger of Modes: Screen Shows Created by Exhibitors

The Edison studio was anxious to repeat the bonanza it had garnered from motion picture sales of Spanish-American War subjects. Such success appeared to depend on the fortuitous occurrence of the right kind of topical event no less than on the uses a skillful motion picture exhibitor might make of such filmed material. There is no indication the company did as well with the trick film subjects and travelogue material with which it filled its 1900 and 1901 catalogues, or with the Galveston Tidal Wave series offered to exhibitors in 1900. The Boer War subjects appeared to depend too much on anti-British feeling in America, which apparently was not all that strong. As for the Boxer Rebellion in China, Edison officials did not take very much trouble to offer a substantial quantity of that material. There were only two short subjects in a section that bore the heading "The Boxer Massacres in Pekin May, 1900" in addition to the TAKU FORTS table-top reconstruction. Exhibitors and showmen seeking to excite American passions with images of the "yellow peril" were invited to amplify their spectacles with some routine

travelogue subjects from China, Japan and Hawaii listed in an Occident and Oriental series.²⁰ For a time the footage shot at the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo, New York with its Latin American angle designed to calm anxiety over American activity in the Caribbean, brought only ordinary response. As fate would have it, however, the Exposition site became the setting for the assassination of a popular American president, William McKinley, which the Edison company converted to a success as large if not larger than the one they reaped from the war in Cuba.

4.4.1 The McKinley Assassination

Wounded on September 6, 1901 by Leon Czolgosz, a luckless loner of Polish-Russian origins vaguely connected to the anarchist movement of the period, McKinley died on September 14. The Czolgosz trial began on September 23. Found guilty the following day, Czolgosz was electrocuted on October 29. The sequence of events offered exhibitors the opportunity to create motion picture shows combining Exposition footage, which was plentiful, with assassination-related material, including an Edison staged and acknowledged reproduction, probably the work of Edwin Porter, of Czolgosz meeting his end in an electric chair at Auburn Prison in upstate New York.²¹

At one point there was a move afoot to offer the public the real thing or as much of it as could be secured for cash from prison officials:

. . . two offers were submitted to-day by men of questionable enterprise. A museum keeper in one of the Eastern cities telegraphed . . . an offer of \$5,000 spot cash for either the body or the garments of the murderer, and the owner of a kineto-

scope wired Warren Mead that he would pay \$2,000 for permission to take a moving picture of Czolgosz entering the death chamber.²²

Failing that, showmen and their audiences had to settle for canvas sets and a large fake electric chair. Referring to their re-enactment of the Czolgosz execution as "(a) detailed reproduction of the execution of the assassin of President McKinley faithfully carried out from the description of an eye witness," the Edison company listed it in the Miscellaneous section of their 1902 catalogue:

Electrocution of Czolgosz

The picture is in three scenes. First: Panoramic view of Auburn Prison taken the morning of the electrocution. The picture then dissolves into the corridor of murderer's row. The keepers are seen taking Czolgosz from his cell to the death chamber. The scene next dissolves into the death chamber, and shows the State Electrician, Wardens and Doctors making final test of the chair. Czolgosz is then brought in by the guard and is quickly strapped into the chair. The current is turned on at a signal from the Warden, and the assassin heaves heavily as though the straps would break. He drops prone after the current is turned off. The doctors examine the body and report to the Warden that he is dead, and he officially announces the death to the witnesses.²³

The actual manner in which Czolgosz met his execution contained, according to one report, none of the "shrinking back" and "swboning" of the film.²⁴

Registered as EXECUTION OF CZOLGOSZ, WITH PANORAMA OF AUBURN PRISON on November 9, 1901, the Porter film was offered for sale in two versions: with or without the opening Auburn Prison panorama, thus revealing only another example of the marketing timidity that shaped Edison production policy

while Porter worked there. Three days earlier the announcement of a two-part scene in wax at the Eden had appeared in the New York Times:

A new and realistic wax group has been placed on exhibition representing the execution of Leon P. Czolgosz, the assassin of President McKinley. It stands in the Chamber of Horrors and represents the execution room and dynamo room of Auburn Prison.²⁵

Porter's five-shot, three-scene 200-foot re-enactment, based as much on ideological convention as on any eye-witness account, included dissolves from exterior to interior locations as well as staged material which he joined to actuality footage of the prison exterior creating an impression of simultaneity for a late-century viewer: a train passing the place of the execution, given the dimness of the opening panorama, in the night. And indeed, it has even been suggested that the prison exterior was filmed at the moment of the execution.²⁶

Present at the fair to record McKinley's speech, Edison cameras, the company claimed, had been able to film the mob gathered outside the Temple of Music after the shooting. The 1902 Edison catalogue listed twelve pages of material about McKinley and the Pan-American Exposition in four sections: President McKinley at the Exposition; President McKinley Funeral Ceremonies — Buffalo, Washington, Canton; Pan-American Exposition and McKinley's Inauguration. As a Special Announcement in the catalogue was eager to point out:

. . . the series of pictures of President McKinley at the Pan-American, and the President McKinley funeral ceremonies at Buffalo, Washington and Canton,

have drawn crowds (as never) before equalled since the invention of motion photography by Thomas A. Edison, . . . (by exhibitors) who are featuring these pictures and also those who are adding them as show strengtheners . . .²⁷

That the Edison studio had more or less cornered the market on McKinley subjects was a fact no less to be bruited about in their promotional literature:

We were . . . fortunate enough to have our camera in position while President McKinley was making his speech at the Pan-American Exposition, on Thursday September 5, 1901, and thus secured a picture of our Executive while making the last address before the cowardly assault upon his life. On Friday, September 6, 1901, we also had our cameras in position to photograph the President as he left the Temple of Music, but the deplorable assassination, of course, prevented our getting this picture. We did, however, secure an excellent panoramic view of the mob surging in front of the Temple of Music attempting to get at the assassin. These pictures have created intense excitement and interest. In addition to being the best and easiest recognized views of the President and Mrs. McKinley they depict the last acts of our beloved ruler before he was shot. Our cameras were the only ones at work at the Pan-American Exposition on the day of President McKinley's speech, Thursday, September 5th, and on Friday, September 6th, the day of the shooting. We secured the only animated pictures incidental to these events.²⁸

The studio was equally proud of the fact that on September 10, 1901, The New York World, in another example of a deal between a motion picture producer and a newspaper publisher, carried 3" x 4" photographic enlargements from Edison studio footage, "the only authentic newspaper pictures of the above occurrences."²⁹

On October 7, 1901, Edison registered another Porter contribution to the McKinley archive, THE MARTYRED PRESIDENTS — LINCOLN, GARFIELD, McKINLEY. A two-shot film in tableau-style, cameo images of the three presidents are dissolved in and out of view. The catalogue advised prospective buyers that for best results, it should be shown "in connection with the funeral ceremonies of the illustrious McKinley." The show produced by at least one exhibitor who had taken that advice was roundly applauded by the New York Times:

One of the most attractive and successful exhibitions of moving pictures that has been produced It is Thomas A. Edison's latest moving pictures of the great Pan-American Exposition and the Midway, with the equally realistic and wonderful scenes showing President McKinley's last speech and funeral ceremonies.³⁰

4.4.2 The Martinique Calamity

Two of the more popular motion picture shows for which the Edison company provided footage in the period between the McKinley assassination and the release of LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN were the volcanic eruption on the island of Martinique and the coronation of Edward VII. In the case of the former, the catalogue acknowledged its calamity material as studio-produced; for the latter, there was a reversion to the stale device of claiming they had had one of their men there at the scene with a camera. Reprinted in the September 1902 Edison catalogue was a Supplement put out in August that described the 1,700 feet of MARTINIQUE CALAMITY material as:

Moving Picture films of, and incidental to the destruction of St. Pierre, the greatest catastrophe since the days of Pompeii.³¹

The Edison studio openly referred to its Mt. Pelee-St. Pierre footage, based on the May 8, 1902 eruption, as Imitation(s). Released in three parts, an exhibitor could obtain all three or purchase the parts individually. Edison also offered the option of a 200-foot strip of the material and colouring at \$8.00 per fifty-foot length. All three parts were registered for copyright by the studio on May 31, 1902. One of the parts, ERUPTION OF MT. PELEE AND DESTRUCTION OF St. PIERRE seems, at 100 feet, a re-make of the Méliès subject of the same title, and like the other two, BURNING OF ST. PIERRE and MT. PELEE SMOKING BEFORE ERUPTION, were likely the work of Porter.³² The three films were miniaturizations with a "smoking" volcano in the background, indeterminate structures, perhaps buildings, in the foreground at an ocean water line. Tiny ship masts appear at the bottom of the frame in MT. PELEE SMOKING BEFORE ERUPTION, the first in the sequence, and there are signs of movement in the water.

The catalogue was careful to distinguish that material from what it described as "Genuine Pictures of the Ruined City of St. Pierre, Smoking Mt. Pelee, Fort de France and Other Historical Scenes Incidental to the Great Calamity."

Exhibitors were, however, encouraged to merge the "imitations" and the genuine subjects, i.e., to link them in longer

shows:

Our staff photographers have just returned from Martinique on the steamship 'Korona' and have brought with them a complete series of typical and genuine Martinique films which, when exhibited in connection with our Mt. Pelee films, will make a complete show in themselves.

4.4.3 Coronation of Edward VII

In August 1902, the Edison studio was offering for sale a total of 1,395 feet of film for vaudeville shows on the British monarch's coronation in seven subjects including exteriors of the arrival and departure from Westminster Abbey, most of the items available in varying lengths. According to the Edison catalogue:

Motion picture films of the coronation of King Edward VII, which took place on August 9th, 1902, were ready for delivery from our factory at Orange, N.J., on the 18th — the Monday, next following. A cablegram from our special photographers in London on August 9th, 1902 advised us that they had secured the complete pictures on that day, that the pictures were sent to Queenstown, and placed on board the fast steamship "Umbria" of the Cunard Line, sailing Sunday, August 10th, 1902. Thus we were enabled to receive the coronation films in America at least three days in advance of mail matter which was posted in London on the day of the coronation.

Remember we had the exclusive right of kinetographing the ceremonies at Westminster Abbey, and our pictures were not only the first to arrive in America, but they were the only authentic views.³³

Only the coronation date was accurate, the rest pure fabrication. There was no cablegram from London on August 9, but

there was a message from 'Judge' Howard Hayes dated August 22, with Hayes a day out of the port of New York on his way home from England:

I have a new film of the coronation taken by another company which Abadie gave me to give to White for him to 'dub.' I shall get to my house not later than noon, so if no one comes to the wharf for it you had better send a messenger to my house for it any time after twelve. The negatives of the Coronation Naval Review will arrive about next Wednesday.³⁴

The problem is to determine which film Hayes was referring to. Perhaps it was the one released by A.C. Bromhead, who had worked on Boer War fakes for R.W. Paul. But that one was a 320-foot "representation." The filmed version of the coronation ceremony Edison was offering, CROWNING OF KING EDWARD AND QUEEN ALEXANDRIA, was at 350 feet precisely the length of the famous reproduction done by Méliès, with later supporting material by G.A. Smith. Completed in June 1902 with the title THE CORONATION OF THEIR MAJESTIES KING EDWARD VII AND QUEEN ALEXANDRIA, Gifford identified it as a Warwick Trading Company-Star Film co-production running 330 feet. It was the film that Biograph registered for copyright on August 8, 1902, a day before the coronation, as REPRODUCTION, CORONATION CEREMONIES - KING EDWARD VII.³⁵ Having advised their clientele in the Spring that they were the sole agents in America for both Warwick and Méliès Star Film subjects, on August 12 Biograph announced that they had in stock ready for delivery "the magnificent Méliès reproduction of the wonderful ceremony in Westminster Abbey." A week later they tacked on a

\$10,000 production cost to sweeten the film's appeal in a way that looked forward to the publicity tricks of mid-century press agents.

Like Vitagraph in their handling of the Boer War fakes, Biograph saw that an expensive trick, well-publicized, could go as far if not farther than a dubious claim of authentic footage in satisfying the popular fondness for screen news.³⁶ It would appear that in the matter of topical re-enactments Edison would take its cue from others, Vitagraph and Biograph in particular. In all future Edison sales pitches for topical reproductions dating from LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN the studio would drop once and for all the claim of having had a man at the scene and substitute the more flexible boast of technical virtuosity.

4.5 Merger of Modes: Studio Productions

In turning out his much celebrated fire rescue drama, LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN, Porter may have browsed Edison stock shots of firefighting footage, but he certainly fixed his attention more directly on the entertainment traditions he knew, in particular the tradition of the topical enactment. It is clear from the catalogue description, if not from Edison production policy, that what he attempted was the screen verisimilitude of a "faithful duplication," and not an unprecedented experiment in editing construction;

LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN

In giving this description to the public, we unhesitatingly claim for it the strongest motion picture attraction ever attempted in this length of film. It will be difficult for the exhibitor to conceive the amount of work involved and the number of rehearsals necessary to turn out a film of this kind. We were compelled to enlist the services of the fire departments of four different cities, New York, Newark, Orange, and East Orange, N.J., and about 300 firemen appear in the various scenes of this film.

From the first conception of this wonderful series of pictures it has been our aim to portray "Life of an American Fireman" without exaggeration, at the same time embodying the dramatic situations and spectacular effects which so greatly enhance a motion picture performance.

The record work of the modern American fire department is known throughout the universe, and the fame of the American fireman is echoed around the entire world. He is known to be the most expert, as well as the bravest, of all fire fighters. This film faithfully and accurately depicts his thrilling and dangerous life, emphasizing the perils he subjects himself to when human life is at stake. We show the world in this film the every movement of the brave firemen and their perfectly trained horses from the moment the men leap from their beds in response to an alarm until the fire is extinguished and a woman and child are rescued after many fierce battles with flame and smoke.³⁷

It was the sort of promotional language used in the 1899 newspaper ads for Buffalo Bill's live re-enactments of the Battle of San Juan Hill. Moreover, we find in Edwin Porter's FIREMAN ad copy the same emphasis on technical finesse, on the complexity of the production, on the size of the cast, here 300 firemen playing themselves, which is to say, the same concern for having individual participants in real events recreate them for the edification of paying audiences. As with Wild West show and Coney Island spectacles the film was

offered as a faithful and accurate depiction celebrating American bravery and know-how. It was, after all, the story of an American social hero. As for the world-wide fame of the American fireman, that may have been part chauvinistic exaggeration. On the other hand, Kansas City fire chief George C. Hale's firefighting team exhibitions in London, England in 1893 and 1900 probably did make the American fireman world famous.³⁸ It is instructive to compare the Porter text with this one, promoting a demonstration by the United States Life-Saving Service that was part of the Buffalo Bill Wild West show in 1901:

What they (the members of the Life-Saving Service) do in the arena is but a repetition of what these very men have repeatedly done in the line of their regular duty, when the temperature was below zero, in the teeth of a tremendous gale, on a lonely beach, where the surf ran mountain high. The firing of the shot carrying a line over the mast of the doomed vessel; the planting of the sand anchor and connecting a hawser from it to the mast by means of a shot-carried line; the rigging of a breeches-buoy on the hawser and working it to and fro, over the surf, with the rescued mariners - all these are, like everything else in the Wild West, 'the real thing'.³⁹

That performance, with its display of technical skills, courage and, above all, authenticity, possessed the very virtues highlighted by the Edison company in their catalogue description. As Porter saw it, LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN offered exhibitors and filmgoers a filmed para-military enactment much like those put on by George Hale's team in London, or the one the Life-Saving Service offered in the Wild West show. And that was the achievement Porter believed that

the film represented, or so, in 1903, he claimed. In addition to "spectacular effects," the production feature he sought to draw special attention to was the film's length. Porter did remember matters differently in his 1912 and 1940 interviews. But on both those occasions, his comments seemed to reflect the state of the art at the time he spoke.

The February 1903 Edison-Porter catalogue description tended to emphasize precisely the para-military efficiency-drill aspect of the fire rescue spectacle:

SCENE 1. — THE FIREMAN'S VISION OF AN IMPERILLED WOMAN AND CHILD.

The fire chief is seated at his office desk. He has just finished reading his evening paper and has fallen asleep. The rays of an incandescent light rest upon his features with a subdued light, yet leaving his figure strongly silhouetted against the wall of his office. The fire chief is dreaming, and the vision of his dream appears in a circular portrait upon the wall. It is a mother putting her baby to bed, and the inference is that he dreams of his own wife and child. He suddenly awakes and paces the floor in a nervous state of mind, doubtless thinking of the various people who may be in danger from fire at the moment. Here we dissolve the picture to the second scene.

SCENE 2. — A CLOSE VIEW OF A NEW YORK FIRE ALARM BOX.

Shows lettering and every detail in the door and apparatus for turning in an alarm. A figure then steps in front of the box, hastily opens the door and pulls the hook, thus sending the electric current which alarms hundreds of firemen and brings to the scene of the fire the wonderful apparatus of a great city's fire department. Again dissolving the picture, we show the third scene.

SCENE 3. — THE INTERIOR OF THE SLEEPING QUARTERS
IN THE FIRE HOUSE.

A long row of beds, each containing a fireman peacefully sleeping, is shown. Instantly upon the ringing of the alarm the firemen leap from their beds and, putting on their clothes in the record time of five seconds, a grand rush is made for a large circular opening in the floor, through the centre of which runs a brass pole. The first fireman to reach the pole seizes it and, like a flash, disappears through the opening. He is instantly followed by the remainder of the force. This in itself makes a most stirring scene. We again dissolve the scene, to the interior of the apparatus house.

SCENE 4. — INTERIOR OF THE ENGINE HOUSE

Shows horses dashing from their stalls and being hitched to the apparatus. This is perhaps the most thrilling and in all the most wonderful of the seven scenes of the series, it being absolutely the first motion picture ever made of a genuine interior hitch. As the men come down the pole described in the above scene, and land upon the floor in lightning-like rapidity, six doors in the rear of the engine house, each heading a horse stall, burst open simultaneously and a huge fire horse, with head erect and eager for the dash to the scene of the conflagration, rushes from each opening. Going immediately to their respective harness, they are hitched in the almost unbelievable time of five seconds and are ready for their dash to the fire. The men hastily scamper upon the trucks and hose carts and one by one the fire machines leave the house, drawn by eager, prancing steeds. Here we dissolve again to the fifth scene.

SCENE 5. — THE APPARATUS LEAVING THE ENGINE HOUSE.

We show a fine exterior view of engine house, the great doors swinging open, and the apparatus coming out. This is a most imposing scene. The great horses leap to their work, the men adjust their fire hats and coats, and smoke begins pouring from the engines as they pass our camera. Here we dissolve and show the sixth scene.

SCENE 6. — OFF TO THE FIRE.

In this scene we present the best fire run ever shown. Almost the entire fire department of the large city of Newark, N.J., was placed at our disposal and we show countless pieces of apparatus, engines, hook-and-ladders, hose towers, hose carriages, etc., rushing down a broad street at top

speed, the horses straining every nerve and evidently eager to make a record run. Great clouds of smoke pour from the stacks of the engines as they pass our camera, thus giving an impression of genuineness to the entire series. Dissolving again we show the seventh scene.

SCENE 7. — THE ARRIVAL AT THE FIRE.

In this wonderful scene we show the entire fire department, as described above, arriving at the scene of action. An actual burning building is in the centre foreground. On the right background the fire department is seen coming at great speed. Upon the arrival of the different apparatus, the engines are ordered to their places, hose is quickly run out from the carriages, ladders adjusted to the windows and streams of water poured into the burning structure. At this crucial moment comes the great climax of the series. We dissolve to the interior of the building and show a bed chamber with a woman and child enveloped in flame and suffocating smoke. The woman rushes back and forth in the room endeavoring to escape, and in her desperation throws open the window and appeals to the crowd below. She is finally overcome by the smoke and falls upon the bed. At this moment the door is smashed in by an axe in the hands of a powerful fire hero. Rushing into the room he tears the burning draperies from the window and smashing out the entire window frame, orders his comrades to run up a ladder. Immediately, the ladder appears, he seizes the prostrate form of the woman and throws it over his shoulder as if it were an infant, and quickly descends to the ground. We now dissolve to the exterior of the burning building. The frantic mother having returned to consciousness, and clad only in her night clothes, is kneeling on the ground imploring the firemen to return for her child. Volunteers are called for and the same fireman who rescued the mother quickly steps out and offers to return for the babe. He is given permission to once more enter the doomed building and without hesitation rushes up the ladder, enters the window and after a breathless wait, in which it appears he must have been overcome by smoke, he appears with the child on his arm and returns safely to the ground. The child, being released and upon seeing its mother, rushes to her and is clasped in her arms, thus making a most realistic and touching ending of the series.⁴⁰

In producing LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN Porter subordinated the available resources of motion picture production, including vision-scene superimposition in the form of a dream balloon, dissolves, the close-up and dramatic staging, to an actuality compositional mode. That is to say that for his studio-produced fire rescue show he drew upon the methods he and other projectionist-showmen had employed in integrating or merging shorter lengths of footage, in a variety of styles and from different sources, both genuine and staged, into longer more elaborate vaudeville shows on the Spanish-American War, the Boer War, the McKinley assassination, the Martinique volcano tragedy and the coronation of Edward VII. For the impression of continuous action Porter used the device of re-iteration or overlap based on the linking of complete action scenes: the concluding rescue action is viewed twice, first from the interior, then from the exterior of the burning building; the sleeping firemen awakened by the alarm — a visual sound effect — are seen going down the pole twice in the two shots labelled Scene III, first from the interior of their sleeping quarters, then from the fire station interior below; the repetition of the horse-drawn wagons leaving their stations in Scene V and then galloping past a camera placement in Scene VI for the documentary illusion of a disaster in which large numbers, if not precisely 300 men, are participating. The result was a unique motion picture production that departed both from the documentary rigor of the British as well as from Mélièsian plunges into fantasy.

It is more than a little odd that historians would accuse Porter of plagiarizing the fire rescue concept, one of the late-nineteenth century's most unoriginal entertainment staples, or that he would be deemed to have lacked the requisite showman's skills for bringing that familiar amusement concept to the screen. Fires, both fictional and real, were very common events of the period. Buildings were generally constructed out of wood and burned down with unfortunate regularity. It was the genuine menace of fire that had made a showbusiness star of George C. Hale, inventor of Hale's Tours.

An 1887 theatre work, The Still Alarm, treated the adventures of a volunteer fireman. An equally big hit in England where it had travelled following its American success, the play was acclaimed for the realism of its enacted scene of a firehouse crew responding to an alarm.⁴¹

Six years before Porter completed FIREMAN the Eden Musée had offered the ever-popular classic fire rescue scene in wax. On display as of November 28, 1897, was a "house half-consumed by fire. A fireman has just rescued a woman from the flames. By an ingenious mechanism the flames and firebrands appear real and the scene is thrilling."⁴² That scene may have, in part, been suggested by a twelve-picture lantern slide show, Bob, the Fireman, produced in England in the late nineteenth century and sold in America, England and France where it was called Les Pompiers in the early 1900s.⁴³ The

hand-drawn images included loosely-related switches from interior to exterior scenes; photo-like "shots" of a horse-drawn fire wagon heading for the fire, seen from different angles, in one slide moving "toward" the viewer; scenes of firemen fighting the fire; and scenes of a fireman rescuing a mother and child. The May 1903 opening of Luna Park at Coney Island featured as their first disaster amusement a spectacle called FIRE AND FLAMES, with a blazing building and "firemen" who attempted to rescue trapped inhabitants. In 1904, a competing site, Dreamland, advertised its first show. Called FIGHTING THE FLAMES, it included a blazing building two stories taller than the one used in FIRE AND FLAMES and a cast of 4000.⁴⁴

4.5.1 Porter and Williamson

Between 1899 and 1901, British producers released five fictional films about fires and fire rescues: FIRE CALL AND RESCUE BY FIRE (1899), a 175-foot Warwick Trading Company subject in which a man sees some smoke, gives the alarm and firemen rescue two people; THE FIREMAN'S SNAPSHOT (1899), an 80-foot Birt Acres film, in which a fireman hoses a photographer in the act of taking his photo; R.W. Paul's PLUCKED FROM THE BURNING (1900), a 100-foot film credited to Walter Booth, the director who turned out most of Paul's Boer War reproductions, in which a fireman saves a woman and child trapped in a building on the point of collapse; Cecil Hepworth's THE BURNING STABLE (1900), at 100 feet, depicting the rescue of

horses from a burning stable; and James Williamson's FIRE!

(1901), in five shots at 280 feet. In January 1903, Charles Urban's Warwick Trading Company released a 475-foot THE GREAT CITY FIRE, exhibited in America by Biograph, as THE LIFE OF AN ENGLISH FIREMAN, in which firemen awakened by an alarm drive through London and rescue fire victims; and Cecil Hepworth's FIREMAN TO THE RESCUE, a six-scene, 321-foot subject released in November 1903, in which a child accidentally starts a fire and a station alarm brings firemen to the scene to rescue her by bashing through a wall.⁴⁵

Williamson's FIRE! (1901) told the same general story as LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN. Though a shorter film, its five shots were linked with cuts rather than the dissolves the Edison studio favoured in the period:

- Shot #1: Policeman enters the frame from the bottom left-hand corner. Smoke coming from the building. He tries the French windows, but they are locked. He turns and blows the whistle.
- Shot #2: Cut to the Hove Fire Department station. (Hove is a small community to the west of Brighton.) Policeman enters the frame from the left. He alerts the fire department by pointing in the direction from which he has come. The 'hitch' that follows is partly cut off at the right edge of the frame; firefighters involved are cut off as well.
- Shot #3: Cut to fire fighting team galloping down the street from the depth in the top left-hand corner of the frame. They are cut off at the bottom of the frame as they pass close to the camera and turn into the bottom left-hand corner.
- Shot #4: Cut to a tightly framed interior filled with smoke. A man is in bed. A fireman enters from the window, through the flaming curtain with a hose after the inhabitant has collapsed after attempting to put out the blaze. He lifts the man onto his shoulders and carries him toward the window.

Shot #5: Cut to exterior. Fireman is descending the ladder with the man, a very smooth cut on action. We see another fireman throwing bundles of belongings out of a first floor window. A child, brought out through the door, is happily reunited with man. The film concludes with the rescue of a third person who jumps down into a net.⁴⁶

In Porter's treatment of the fire rescue there is a more dramatic use of space, of the distance between the firemen and the burning building, which has the effect of heightening the suspense of the rescue, albeit without the temporal manipulation of cross-cutting between hero and desperate victim.⁴⁷

4.5.2 Re-enacting an Institutional Routine

Ramsay claimed that *LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN* "was built from the germinal thrill of the first fifty-foot subjects showing a fire department run." Jacobs in The Rise of the American Film gave this hypothetical account of how the film was put together:

Porter rummaged through the stock of Edison's old films, searching for suitable scenes around which to build a story. He found quantities of pictures of fire department activities. Since fire departments had such strong popular appeal, with their colour and action, Porter chose them as his subjects. . . .

Porter's next step was to stage such additional scenes as his plot demanded.⁴⁸

Based on the material in the Edison catalogues of 1901 and 1902, we may conclude that there was a fair quantity

of stock footage Porter could have used in his larger fire rescue production. Between 1896 and 1902, the Edison company had registered a total of eleven separate fire films. Titles and dates of the copyrighted out-of-doors fire subjects were: FIGHTING THE FIRE (1896); MORNING ALARM (1896); STARTING FOR THE FIRE (1896); BUFFALO FIRE DEPARTMENT IN ACTION (1897); DENVER FIRE BRIGADE (1898); BOSTON HORSELESS FIRE DEPARTMENT (1899); BURNING OF THE STANDARD OIL COMPANY'S TANKS, BAYONNE, N.J. (1900); MONTREAL FIRE DEPARTMENT ON RUNNERS (1901); BURNING OF DURLAND'S RIDING ACADEMY (1902); PANORAMA OF THE PATERSON, N.J., FIRE (1902); and PATERSON FIRE, SHOWING THE Y.M.C.A. AND THE LIBRARY (1902).⁴⁹ In a section labelled simply Fire, the September 1902 catalogue listed ten fire films, one a definite import. Information, as was usual, included length: DESTRUCTION OF STANDARD OIL COMPANY'S PLANT AT BAYONNE, N.J., BY FIRE ON JULY 5TH, 1900, available in lengths of 150, 100 and 50 feet; FIRE DEPARTMENT OF ALBANY, N.Y., available in one length, 115 feet; THE BOSTON FIRE BOAT IN ACTION, 65 feet; THE BOSTON HORSELESS FIRE DEPARTMENT, 175 feet; MORNING FIRE ALARM, 45 feet; MONTREAL FIRE DEPARTMENT ON RUNNERS, 100 feet; FIREMEN RESCUING MEN AND WOMEN, 65 feet; LONDON FIRE DEPARTMENT, 50 feet; THE FIRE DEPARTMENT OF CHELSEA, MASS., 100 feet; A QUICK HITCH, 50 feet.⁵⁰ The company's July 1901 catalogue listed some footage that, for whatever reason, did not appear in their literature the following year, including THE BURNING STABLE, in lengths of 50 and 115 feet; THE MORNING ALARM, at 125 feet, a different view than that

of MORNING FIRE ALARM; GREAT NEWARK FIRE, at lengths of 85 and 50 feet and ANSWERING THE ALARM, at 40 feet. Total number of fire subjects offered for sale in 1901 was thirteen.⁵¹ Some of the registered subjects do not appear to have found their way into the 1901 and 1902 catalogues and some of the material in the catalogues, apparently representing imports, does not appear to have been copyrighted by the company. There were, however, only two groups of scenes in which such footage might have been inserted: the shots of the teams leaving the station and the ones of the fire wagons galloping to the rescue. The opening and closing scenes, given their dramatic and postured style, would have had to have been done expressly for the film.

It would appear that Porter conceived the action of the film on the basis of his familiarity with disaster amusements as well as actualities like Edison's BURNING OF DURLAND'S RIDING ACADEMY (1902), with its panning movement to follow the firefighting action, its focus on the details of that action and its jumps from scene to scene. He was then, along with studio chief James White, a master of newsreel simulation, able to re-create a chain of events more or less as captured by an on-the-spot camera operator with the element of a personal drama standing in for a direct cameraman link with an actual fire rescue.⁵²

The Ramsaye-Jacobs claim that Porter constructed LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN out of substantial portions of stock footage was intended to emphasize the accomplishment of assembling larger visual entities out of smaller ones through editing

technique. But that is to deny Porter's own perception of the film as a series of separately interesting scenes, a theme that runs through his scenario.

From our late-century point-of-view, there is much inconsistency in the story; it is difficult to tell whether we are following the same characters through the tale from start to finish. A feature of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY as well, it is a reflection less of some technical mystery about motion picture continuity than of the status of the medium as a vaudeville entertainment dependent for its coherence on a live narrator. Based in turn on the relatively primitive state of film distribution, it mostly constituted a statement about the economic uncertainties of multi-shot production in 1903.

The discussion prompted by the existence of three different prints of the film and its putative debt to Williamson's FIRE! involve, as we have seen, cul-de-sac propositions. Whatever the original version, and at this date there is little doubt that it is the LOC print, there has never been any quarrel over the film's fundamental method of realization — the re-creation of the features of firefighting actualities of the sort that had appeared in the Edison catalogue: a variety of camera positions and angles; camera movement; frame-edge cut-offs; fire wagons moving out of the frame depth toward the camera audience and exiting the frame out of one of the bottom corners. The dream balloon device used in the opening

shot was, like the dissolves linking the scenes, an element soon to be abandoned. Whereas the close-up in the second shot was a forward-looking non-facial, i.e. a visage that did not look back. In terms of the argument being developed in this study, the film's primary significance is that it appeared to constitute an incomplete stage in the emergence of the longer narrative film derived from the staged actuality.

4.5.3 Robbing the Train

With their newsreel-style exteriors, both LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN and THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY were produced and promoted as acknowledged re-enactments of American institutional routines, firefighting and policing. That aspect of the Edison studio's publicity for THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY was quite explicit: it was promoted as the latest novelty, a motion picture that did not merely record life but reproduced it "faithfully."

This sensational and highly tragic subject will certainly make a decided 'hit' whenever shown. In every respect we consider it absolutely the superior of any moving picture film ever made. It has been posed and acted in faithful duplication of the genuine 'Hold Ups' made famous by various outlaw bands in the far West, and only recently the East has been shocked by several crimes of the frontier order, which fact will increase the popular interest in this great Headline Attraction.⁵³

Those were the terms in which the film's first audiences responded. An early reviewer praised the picture's verisimilitude, lauding the subject for the way scenes photographed within a fifteen-mile radius of New York City looked as if they had been filmed in the Rockies.⁵⁴ For the patrons at the Eden Musée, Huber's Museum, Hammerstein's, the Orpheum, a Brooklyn vaudeville house, and the Circle in Manhattan, it hardly mattered that the "outlaw bands" had by 1903 mostly faded away, their lives and deeds absorbed, sometimes with their active assistance, into lurid dime-novel tales, Coney Island spectacles and Wild West show mythology.⁵⁵

4.5.4 The West and the Western

On December 17, 1903, sixteen days after the Edison studio registered THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY with the Library of Congress in Washington, the Wright brothers, Wilbur and Orville, completed their first successful flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Roughly a decade previously, the United States government had quietly but officially declared the frontier a thing of the past. An obscure government pamphlet advised that since all the frontier had been divided into settlements it would no longer be considered in US census reports. In July 1893, Fredrick Jackson Turner delivered his landmark lecture at the Chicago World's Fair celebrating the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America, the same venue where the Buffalo Bill Wild West show had enjoyed its single most outstanding American success. Turner's lecture, "The

Significance of the Frontier in American History," was in effect a succinct statement of a general theme that ran through Teddy Roosevelt's multi-volume The Winning of the West, published in the 1890s; America no longer had a frontier to expand across. The West as American history was over.⁵⁶

In 1892, the Dalton Gang, described by the Police Gazette as "the most notorious band of thieves since the days of Jesse James" had been "exterminated" in the course of a double bank robbery attempt in Coffeyville, Kansas. The Wild West era, that period dating from the end of the American Civil War to the turn of the century, was in effect finished when Butch Cassidy and the Wild Bunch staged their spectacular robberies of Union Pacific trains in Wyoming in 1899 and 1900, apparently the "genuine Hold Ups" referred to by the 1904 Edison company catalogue. In 1898, Cassidy and his men had discussed the possibility enlisting in the war against the Spanish colonial powers in Cuba, which some did. But wanted dead or alive by the governors and peace officers of Utah, Wyoming and Colorado, Cassidy allowed his patriotism, which had flared briefly upon gazing at a press headline announcing the sinking of the 'Maine', to cool. Some of the details of the gang's June 2, 1899 caper at Wilcox, Wyoming appear to have found their way into the Edison-Porter motion picture: the uncoupling of the rail cars, the blowing up of the strongbox, the getaway on horseback and the posse, led by Pinkerton detectives, giving chase. On that occasion, however, the real bandits used too much explosive and blew the \$30,000 worth of bonds and currency all over the tracks; there was a shoot-out, but no capture.⁵⁷

On August 29, 1900, the gang hit the Union Pacific again, this time about two and one half miles west of Tipton, Sweetwater, Wyoming. The reward poster contained the following information:

In ADDITION to the reward of \$1,000 offered by the Union Pacific Railroad Company for the capture of the men, dead or alive, who robbed Union Pacific train No. 3, near Tipton, Wyo., on the evening of August 29th, 1900, the Pacific Express Company, on the same conditions, hereby also offers a reward of \$1,000.00 for each robber.⁵⁸

Coupled with the reward offer, an elaborate plan for pursuing and wiping out the gang was set into motion. Cassidy, hearing about the scheme, decided that robbing trains was no longer a viable career.

Three years later, the movement of frontier sagas from history to public entertainment spectacles was well-advanced. In 1903 Cole Younger and Frank James, brother of Jesse, were teamed up in the Cole Younger and Frank James Wild West. The roster included a band and side show in addition to the two reformed bandits. Between 1903 and 1906, the Buffalo Bill Wild West show toured Europe. A fading reality, the true West, as lived by the frontiersman was rapidly being re-constituted in popular mythology by dime novel writers and clever dramaturgists when Porter went to work on THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY. By 1903, the year Andy Adams published his account of range life entitled The Log of a Cowboy, the Dodge City of the Masterson brothers, Wyatt Earp and "Doc" Holliday belonged to a previous generation.⁵⁹

4.5.5 Crime on the Screen

THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY owed as much to an established entertainment tradition as to recent American history, but relatively little to screen precedents. In 1896 a stage work called The Great Train Robbery played the Bowery Theatre in New York City, one of many stage transcriptions of melodramatic Western action.⁶⁰ In 1886 Thomas Edison had seen an early version of the Buffalo Bill Wild West show at a Staten Island site and eight years later invited members of the troupe into the Black Maria to pose for kinetoscope views in the wake of their 1893 success at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago.⁶¹ The 1901 Edison catalogue listed a Western with the title STAGE COACH HOLD-UP IN THE DAYS OF '49, a likely Porter film that has not survived. It was described this way:

This scene will give you a good idea of the desperate 'Hold-Ups' that occurred on the plains when the rush was made to the new gold fields in '49. It shows the desperadoes coming from ambush, covering the driver of the stage with Winchester rifles and ordering him to halt. The occupants of the coach are compelled to dismount from their places, and are lined up in a very realistic manner with their hands thrown up. The outlaws get all the booty they can, and are just departing when an armed Sheriff's posse arrives. They pursue the bandits, and after a desperate chase and a brutal conflict, capture them and return to the scene of the robbery. The bandits are then forced at the points of revolvers to ride in front of the coaching party to Dad's Gulch, a mining town, where they are safely landed in the lock-up.⁶²

The following year the company released a short (125 feet) crime reproduction, 'CAPTURE OF THE BIDDLE BROTHERS, a probable Porter subject that was described as follows:

The public throughout the world is acquainted with the sensational capture of the Biddle Brothers and Mrs. Soffel, who, through the aid of Mrs. Soffel escaped from the Pittsburg jail on January 30th, 1902. Our picture, which is a perfect reproduction of the capture, is realistic and exciting.⁶³

Its shoot-out in newsreel style may have been a rehearsal for the concluding action scene in THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY. In order to film the capture, which constitutes the whole of the action, in one shot, Porter employed a duel-like structure: the opposing forces meet head on for their gun battle on a snow-covered rural highway.

Evidence in support of the claim that Frank Mottershaw's DARING DAYLIGHT ROBBERY, released in England in April 1903, was Porter's main inspiration is extremely superficial. Listed in the Edison company's July 1904 catalogue as DAYLIGHT BURGLARY, and containing neither Western action nor a criminal gang, Mottershaw's ten-shot chase showed the pursuit and capture of a single thief. There is a tussle on a roof-top and a stop-motion dummy substitution effect to depict a policeman thrown off the edge, a trick seen in THE PICKPOCKET (1903) as well as in British Gaumont's A RAILWAY TRAGEDY (1904). But unlike Porter's single big scene chase, Mottershaw's proceeds through seven shots in a style the Edison company avoided till 1904.

4.5.6 The West Faithfully Reproduced

The January 1904 Edison catalogue supplied the following scene-by-scene account of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, which included the information that the film would not be sold in parts:

SCENE 1. — INTERIOR OF RAILROAD TELEGRAPH OFFICE.

Two masked robbers enter and compel the operator to set the 'signal block' to stop the approaching train, also making him write a fictitious order to the engineer to take water at this station, instead of at 'Red Lodge,' their regular watering stop. The train comes to a standstill; conductor comes to the window, and the frightened operator delivers the order while the bandits crouch out of sight, at the same time keeping their revolvers trained on him. No sooner does the conductor leave than they fall upon the operator, bind and gag him, then hastily depart to catch the moving train.

SCENE 2. — AT THE RAILROAD WATER TANK.

The bandit band are seen hiding behind the tank as a train stops to take water (according to false order). Just before she pulls out they stealthily board the train between the express car and the tender.

SCENE 3. — INTERIOR OF EXPRESS CAR.

Messenger is busily engaged with his duties. Becoming alarmed at an unusual sound, he goes to the door, and peeping through the keyhole, discovers two men trying to break in. He starts back in a bewildered manner. Quickly recovering, his first thought is of the valuables in the strong box, which he hastily locks, and throws the key through the open side door. Pulling his revolver, he fortifies himself behind a pile of trunks, etc. In the meantime, the two robbers have succeeded in effecting an entrance. They enter cautiously. The messenger opens fire on them. A desperate pistol duel takes place, in which the messenger is killed. One of the robbers stands watch while the other tries to open the treasure box. Finding it locked he searches the messenger for the key. Not finding it, he blows the safe up with dynamite. After securing the valuables and mail bags, they leave the car.

SCENE 4. — THE FIGHT ON THE TENDER.

This thrilling scene was taken from the mail car showing the tender and interior of locomotive cab, while the train is running forty miles an hour. While some of the bandits are robbing the mail car, two others are seen climbing over the tender. One of them holds up the engineer, and the other covers the fireman. The latter secures a coal shovel and climbs up on the tender, where a desperate fight takes place with the outlaw. They struggle fiercely all over the tank, having several narrow escapes from being hurled over the side of the tender. Finally they fall, with the robber on top. He grabs a lump of coal, and strikes the fireman on the head, rendering him senseless. He then hurls the body from the swiftly moving train. The bandits then compel the engineer to bring the train to a stop.

SCENE 5. — THE TRAIN UNCOUPLED.

Shows the train coming to a stop. With the robbers' pistols close to his head, the engineer leaves the locomotive, uncouples it from the train, and pulls ahead about one hundred feet.

SCENE 6. — EXTERIOR OF PASSENGER COACHES.

The bandits compel the passengers to leave coaches with hands aloft, and line up along the tracks. One of the robbers covers them with large pistols in either hand, while the others ransack travelers' pockets. A passenger makes an attempt to escape, but is instantly shot down. After securing everything of value, the band terrorize the passengers by firing their revolvers in the air, and then make safe their escape on the locomotive.

SCENE 7. — THE ESCAPE.

The desperadoes board the locomotive with their booty, command the engineer to start his machine, and disappear in the distance.

SCENE 8. — OFF TO THE MOUNTAINS.

The robbers bring the engine to a stop several miles from the scene of the 'Hold Up' and take to the mountains.

SCENE 9. — A BEAUTIFUL SCENE IN A VALLEY.

The bandits come down the side of a hill on a run and cross a narrow stream. Mounting their horses, which were tied to nearby trees, they vanish into the wilderness.

SCENE 10. — INTERIOR OF TELEGRAPH OFFICE.

The operator lies bound and gagged on the floor. After a desperate struggle, he succeeds in standing up. Leaning on the table, he telegraphs for assistance by manipulating the key with his chin and then faints from exhaustion. His little daughter enters with his dinner pail. Discovering his condition, she cuts the rope and throwing a glass of water in his face, restores him to consciousness. Arousing in a bewildered manner, he suddenly recalls his thrilling experience, and rushes forth to summon assistance.

SCENE 11. — INTERIOR OF A DANCE HALL.

This typical Western dance house scene shows a large number of men and women in a lively quadrille. A 'Tenderfoot' appears upon the scene. He is quickly spotted, pushed to the center of the hall, and compelled to dance a jig while the bystanders amuse themselves by shooting dangerously close to his feet. Suddenly the door opens and the half dead telegraph operator staggers in. The crowd gather around him while he relates what has happened. Immediately the dance breaks up in confusion. The men secure their guns and hastily leave in pursuit of the outlaws.

SCENE 12. — THE POSSE IN PURSUIT.

Shows the robbers dashing down a rugged mountain at a terrible pace, followed closely by a large posse, both parties firing as they proceed. One of the desperadoes is shot and plunges head first from his horse. Staggering to his feet, he fires at his nearest pursuer, only to be shot dead.

SCENE 13. — BATTLE TO THE DEATH.

The remaining three bandits, thinking they had eluded their pursuers, have dismounted from their horses. After carefully surveying their surroundings, they begin to examine the contents of the mail bags. Deeply engaged in this work, they do not perceive the approach of the posse. The pursuers, having left their horses, steal noiselessly down upon them until they are completely surrounded. A desperate battle then takes place. After a brave stand, all of the robbers and several of the posse bite the dust.

SCENE 14. — REALISM.

A life size picture of Barnes, leader of the outlaw band, taking aim and firing point blank at

each individual in the audience. (This effect is gained by foreshortening in making the picture.) The resulting excitement is great. This section of the scene can be used either to begin the subject or to end it, as the operator may choose.

THE END.

Sold in one length only.

George Barnes, the figure in the film's concluding shot seen firing his pistol at the audience, was a performer at Huber's Museum. The cast included Frank Hanaway, an actor and ex-cavalryman, who could fall off a galloping horse without doing himself serious harm, Max Aronson, a vaudeville performer, known as Max Anderson and a few years later as "Broncho Billy" Anderson, co-founder with George Spoor of the Essanay — S & A — studio, and Marie Murray, the Phoebe Snow girl, who appeared in the film's dancehall scene. The train was borrowed from the Lackawanna railroad, and the railroad scenes were shot near Paterson, New Jersey, the riding sequences in Essex County Park, New Jersey.⁶⁴

Much like LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN, THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY was done in the tableau structure of a waxwork show telling what would have been a familiar tale by deliberately stringing together a series of Wild West show scenes in blocs of discontinuous action. The basis of its appeal lay in its compositional qualities, its attempt to replicate aspects of a genuine hold-up.

4.5.7 Continuity and Discontinuity

The limited concern for scene-to-scene continuity concentrated the film's energies on elements within the shots. Those energies in turn were shaped by a very particular concept of what the elements ought to have been and how they ought to have been arranged. Thus we find standard devices of the fantasy film like superimposed mattes and stop-motion effects integrated into the newsreel qualities of frame depth, camera movement, frame edge cut-offs and action moving toward the camera. It is these features, rather than any tight story continuity, that continue to lend the film its excitement. Examined a little more closely it is readily apparent that THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY contains a number of glaring narrative inconsistencies. At the level of style there is, as in LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN, a striking difference between the newsreel-style exteriors and the interior scenes with their painted canvas sets, immobile camera placements, centred action and lateral movement. As for Edwin Porter, his impressive photographer's skills in combination with a nineteenth-century showman's inclination to heightened scenes left him the problem, though as much that of the period as of the man, of dealing with temporal relations and physical continuity.

The scenario supplied narrative details that would have been impossible to obtain from an un-assisted viewing of the film's tableau-structured action: that the message the

telegraph operator was compelled to scribble ordered the train engineer to take water at this station rather than at Red Lodge; or that the little girl who comes upon the unconscious operator is his daughter.

The opening scene, in which two of the bandits enter the telegraph office and at gunpoint force the operator to stop the train and draft a false message to the train engineer was very ably managed. After the release of the signal, the train pulls into view in a matte shot to the right of the frame. The train conductor appears at the station wicket to enquire about the signal seconds after the message has been drafted. The bandits conceal themselves as he is handed the message by the operator. His departure from the wicket cues a knock-out blow from one of the bandits. The unconscious operator is then quickly bound and gagged by the bandits whose departure from the station in turn cues the right-to-left movement of the train in the matte shot. Though it all made for a busy tableau filmed from a fixed camera position, it contained no wasted detail.

In the next scene, shot out-of-doors, the film cuts to an X-framed water tank, the robbers concealed behind it to the left of the frame as the train, matching the right-to-left motion in the previous shot, pulls into view out of the bottom right-hand corner of the frame. A trainman in a condensed action swings the spout over and takes on the necessary water. The task completed, he returns, out of

view, to his position in the engine and when he does, the four train robbers board the train between the tender and the mail car. As they leap aboard the train begins to move. The general timing of the scene is such that we are not very much bothered by the temporal leap between the settings nor by the compressed action involved in the taking on of the water. Three conventionalized modes of presenting time, one continuous, one vague, one compressed, mesh in the perception of a continuous dramatic action.

In the second shot, we are shown four robbers boarding the train, two in black hats, two in white. In the following shot, inside the mail car, two black-hatted figures murder the clerk and make off with sacks of mail and some of the contents of the express box. Shot #4, according to the catalogue, a view of action occurring "while" the events of the previous scene were taking place, ought therefore to contain two figures in white hats. Instead, one of them sports a grey hat, the other a black one.

Scene #3, set in the interior of the mail car, located, as we have seen in the previous shot, just behind the tender, would appear to contain an unexplained time gap. The messenger is at his duties, the countryside moving past through the device of a matte shot to the right. The train, in other words, is already under full steam. After a moment the fellow, played by the same performer who appeared as the conductor in scene #1, "hears" something to his left. What he presumably

hears is the action of the bandits climbing on the train that concluded the previous scene. But to judge from the speed of the train, he apparently hears the action some time after it had occurred, granted that it is an inconsistency that bothers someone studying the film far more than it would someone merely watching it for pleasure. The bandits then break in from the car door at the left, wood flying, kill the messenger in a shoot-out, blow up the express box and flee with its contents and several bags of mail.

The shot that follows contains the only definite example, according to the scenario, of a parallel action. "Taken from the mail car showing the tender and interior of locomotive cab. . . . While some of the bandits are robbing the mail car . . ."

[My emphasis] The catalogue, that is, asks us to conclude that the actions in shots #3 and #4 were simultaneous, a conclusion a viewer might or might not have arrived at on his or her own. But even more important perhaps than that, what makes the action on the tender worth noting is the use of the stop-motion-dummy-substitution trick for the purpose of realism, an illusion reinforced by newsreel features including the depth of the scene, the passing countryside, the camera position looking down and the composition. The scene, as a result, is more convincing than the shoot-out in the interior of the mail car, which despite the matte effect, employed the stage conventions of the pistol pointed at the floor and the excessive posturing of the fatally wounded messenger. The fireman is overcome, has his head bashed in with a large piece

of coal picked up by his assailant and is then thrown off the speeding train, the action rounded off with a left to right pan so slight that it has almost never been remarked upon.

Shots #5 through #9 raise questions of both time and space. In shot #5, the train has been brought to a halt. Two bandits accompany the engineer who uncouples engine 921 from the mail car at gunpoint. The angle and setting are the same in shot #7, showing three of the bandits hurrying toward the engine out of the right-hand corner of the frame with their sacks of booty acquired from the passengers. In shot #6, however, the one in which we see the passengers being robbed, the bandits exit the scene to the right, the tracks in the foreground. The scene, that is, was set up on the "wrong" side of the train and filmed at an angle that did not match the physical position of the train seen in shots #5 and #7. The scene was obviously taken at a different location, one perhaps closer to the Edison plant so that his employees could play the roles of the robbed passengers. Several dozen of them have piled off the train and line up with arms raised. What is impressive about the crowd, however, is that it was a departure from a general practice, seen even in the films of 1904-1906, of using the stage convention of signalling the presence of larger numbers, say, armies, by the grouped presence of three or four individuals. The effect is in no way lessened by the weak spatial configuration of the shots that precede and follow. Perhaps Porter's attention

had been absorbed by the film's second murder, of a passenger shot in a run toward the camera while attempting to escape. The victim expired with some fuss, but did manage to lie quite still in the foreground, his feet turned at a convincing angle until the conclusion of the hold up, at which time his fellow passengers hurried over.

A hill is visible in shot #5, the scene in which the engine is uncoupled from the cars, but there was none in the depth of shot #4, in which the train was brought to a halt. Moreover, we observed a black-hatted figure getting off the train at the right in shot #4. In shot #5, continuity was achieved by a temporal overlap — the fellow descends from the engine again — but even more seriously, on the wrong side, that is, on the left. In the next shot, the one in which the passengers are robbed, the robbers hurry off to the right, instead of to the left. One of them carries a hand grip filled with the passengers' valuables. But in shot #7, presumably a cut on action set in the same general scene and at the same angle as #5, they run toward the engine from out of the bottom right-hand corner of the frame with two bags; the valise is nowhere to be seen. They have two bags when they get off the engine in shot #8 and head into the woods where they have tied their horses. But in the next shot they are in possession of three sacks, rather than two, which are not as "full" as the two in the previous shot appeared to be. There are still four men, only now two wear white hats, one a grey and one a black.

Shot #7. concluded with the bandits aboard the uncoupled engine and the engine in motion right to left. Shot #8 is a cut on action of sorts, the engine at some vague distance and time down the track enters the frame from the bottom right-hand corner moving left for continuity. It stops and the four bandits get off with their loot. There is a pan right-to-left and a tilt-down to follow them as they make their way across a field. In the next shot, an apparent reverse angle, they enter the frame moving from a wooded area at the top left-hand corner and are shown in a high-angled shot crossing a creek and heading toward the camera in the direction of the spot where their horses have been tied. There is another pan right-to-left to follow them as they begin to mount up. The problem here is that they now would appear to be at a considerable distance from the train station. One might presume that they did not walk the distance to get there. There could, of course, have been two sets of horses. But we are neither shown nor told of such a detail. It would simply appear to be a gap in the spatial logic of the story.

Shot #10 takes us back to the railroad station, with the matte shot, as in the opening scene, showing the scenery outside the station over which a window frame has been imperfectly superimposed. We see the telegraph operator regaining consciousness, his hands are still tied. He attempts to tap out a telegraph message with his chin before collapsing. His daughter then enters with his dinner. After attempting to rouse him, she cuts the signal cord used to bind him and douses him with water.

Before he has fully risen to his feet, the film cuts to the dancehall scene, a concertina and fiddle band playing on a raised platform to the right. Men and women are dancing a quadrille when a "dude" enters and is dragged to the centre of the floor. After having been obliged to "dance" to the music of gunfire directed at his boots the dude hurries out and the dance resumes as before. This brief sequence is interesting for two reasons: first, it contributes an element of suspense and some comic relief to the story and does so by drawing into the narrative at a significant point elements of the larger social world to which both the train robbers and their victims belong; second, it would appear to be among the first in what by now seems a countless number of movies containing a saloon or nightclub scene where a fictional community gathers to receive vital and decisive information, where status and sexual relationships are defined, and where matters affecting that larger community are resolved, one way or another.

Moments after the dude has departed, the telegraph operator staggers in to explain what has happened. The dance abruptly stops. The men seize their rifles and hurry out in pursuit of the escaping felons. Scene #12 cuts to the robbers fleeing through the mountains from the posse who are also in the shot close behind. The lapse in time between this shot and the preceding one is extremely vague. Moreover, we do not know for a fact that the posse depicted here represents the men seen in the dancehall sequence. They may be a very different group of lawmen

alerted by the message the telegrapher sent out upon briefly regaining consciousness. Both the spatial and temporal elements of the chase, limited here to one shot, appear to have been borrowed from the conventions of the stage or the Wild West show. What we are shown is in effect the tail-end of a pursuit-in-progress culminating in some shooting from horseback that fells one of the robbers.

The fate of the telegraph operator and his little girl, as was the fire chief's story in *LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN*, drifts out of focus, highlighting the problems of matching, continuity and temporal logical. In shot #7, the train was on the inside of two sets of tracks; in shot #8, it is on the outside. In shot #11, five men take after the thieves from the dancehall, in shot #12, they are pursued by a six-man posse, whose numbers have risen to seven in the shoot-out in shot #13, which may in turn be taking place hours or days later. Generally speaking, the elapsed time of the story is extremely vague; the clock in the telegraph office reads 9 o'clock when the robbers first enter; it shows the same hour in shot #10. The fact that the operator's daughter is bringing him his dinner may have been intended to suggest the passage of several hours, confirmed by the darkened windows of the dancehall in the following shot. For Porter, as for the period, it seemed enough to present the general sequence of robbery-chase-capture in a mode more symbolic than representation-
al.⁶⁵

What is in effect the story's concluding

scene shows the three remaining bandits in a wood, perhaps believing that they have evaded the posse, about to share the loot. After a moment members of the posse appear in the depth at the top right-hand side of the frame. The shoot-out, which wipes out the gang, catches their horses in the cross fire. The animals buck and shy in response to the "gunshots" as many were trained to do for Wild West show spectacles. The posse advances toward the camera to recover the loot. Though the catalogue advised that the coda-like close-up of Barnes firing his pistol at the audience could also be placed at the beginning of the picture, there is no known surviving print with the shot in that position. The meaning of that image, shown after the gang had been overcome, could only be that the train robbers, in a resurrection announcing the birth of a movie genre, would re-appear in innumerable future Westerns.⁶⁶

In his critique, John Howard Lawson tended to link the film's apparent humanistic failings — "its simple division of humanity into 'bad men' who murder for profit and 'good men' who murder to defend the law" — to its aesthetic shortcomings:

. . . the story is told without close-ups and each scene is a single long shot. There is no dramatization of the event as an experience in which the audience is involved Porter exhibits a tendency . . . to fall back on conventional theatre effects to achieve social or psychological meaning.⁶⁷

But that is to approach the film in terms that were not those of the period, and certainly not Edwin Porter's.

Of the thirteen shots or scenes that make up the story, nine were devoted to the details of the robbery itself, eight to re-creating those details as they might have been captured by an actuality cameraman. The result was a proto-caper film in which the main audience interest lay in the technical rather than the criminal aspects of the heist: how the train was stopped and boarded, how the mail car was entered, how the express box was blown up, how the train engine was uncoupled from the passenger cars; how the component tasks were shared by the felons; how the plan for the getaway was carried out; how the bandits were tracked and killed. It was, in other words, a technical display not unlike the one Porter provided in LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN or those featured in the riding, shooting and life-saving stunts of Wild West shows, as if the nation were as proud of its felons as of its lawmen. In creating that display, Porter incorporated visual tricks and fictional action into a documentary scheme that would appeal to the vaudeville appetite for topical novelties. From an industrial perspective, the major shortcoming of the film was its complete-action tableau structure, a structure unable to accommodate the needs of the emergent nickelodeon proprietor.

4.6 Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Constraint on Subject Matter

The apparently problematic character of Porter's 1903 production has tended to focus on UNCLE TOM'S CABIN. Lewis Jacobs claimed that Edison executives assigned Porter to the production when "his heart was set" on THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, and that Porter did UNCLE TOM'S CABIN "perfunctorily, without any of the originality" of LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN.⁶⁸ There are, however, a number of things about the UNCLE TOM film that give it a certain significance. At 1,100 feet, UNCLE TOM'S CABIN was the longest, most elaborate subject the Edison company produced after the release of LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN. Of no less interest were the elimination of dissolves to link scenes, so highly touted in the Edison studio's 1902 promotion material, and the use of printed titles to describe the action of the different sequences. The studio felt obliged to explain:

. . . we have made a departure from the old method of dissolving one scene into another by inserting announcements with brief descriptions as they appear in succession.⁶⁹

A mere year before a company blurb writer had declared the dissolves in JACK AND THE BEANSTALK a major selling point:

. . . in changing from one scene to the other, transformations are made by beautiful dissolving and fading effects. There are no sudden jumps whatever, and the entire effect is at once pleasing, gratifying and comprehensive, and the audience finds itself following with ease the thread of this most wonderful of all fairy tales . . .⁷⁰

The addition of the titles made for a film that did not require a live narrator-explainer and could thus be presented by a small theatre manager at minimum expense. After having given up plans to synchronize sound and film, Edison had at one point assigned some of his staff the task of conducting experiments to determine minimum reading times for short passages.⁷¹ The titles in UNCLE TOM'S CABIN capsulized action illustrated by the moving pictures that followed, which assumed reasonably literate non-immigrant vaudeville audiences for early films. A former expert telegrapher, Porter's titles linking the scenes of UNCLE TOM read like cable messages:

- 1st. Eliza Pleads With Uncle Tom to Run Away.
- 2nd. Tavern. Phineas Outwits the Slave Traders.
- 3rd. Eliza Escapes Across the River on Floating Ice.
- 4th. Rocky Pass. Reunion of Eliza and George Harris.
- 5th. Steamboat Race Between the Robert E. Lee and Natchez.
- 6th. The Rescue of Eva.
- 7th. Welcome Home of St. Clare, Eva and Tom.
- 8th. Eva and Tom in the Garden.
- 9th. Death of Eva.
- 10th. Bar-room. St. Clare Defends Uncle Tom.
- 11th. The Auction of St. Clare's Slaves.
- 12th. Cotton Picking. Tom refuses to Flog Emaline.
- 13th. Mark Avenges the Death of St. Clare and Uncle Tom.
- 14th. Death of Uncle Tom. Tableau.⁷²

According to the 1904 Kleine catalogue, the film was also offered for sale in a slightly altered sequence, the table-top boat race inserted as Scene #11, following The Auction of St. Clare's Slaves, instead of as Scene #5.⁷³ That disregard for fixed sequence, especially temporal sequence is also found in the instructions for using the close-up in THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY.

There is little about UNCLE TOM that would justify dismissing it as cinematically "retrograde." In the period, the development of a screen narrative as a series of discontinuous tableaux pre-dated UNCLE TOM and may be found in later films like HOW JONES LOST HIS ROLL, LIFE OF AN AMERICAN POLICEMAN, and THE SEVEN AGES, all three subjects directed by Edwin Porter between 1904-1905. The innovations for which the film has been singled out, the use of titles and the elimination of the dissolves, would have helped accommodate film production to a newly emerging circumstance in the field of exhibition. UNCLE TOM, historically important as a marker of that circumstance, is otherwise no less cine-matic than the subjects Porter worked on before or after it.

If the film is in any way distinctive it is not for its primitive montage, but rather for its avoidance of the devices of the filmed actuality and its fidelity to the theatrical and pro-filmic elements that characterized nineteenth-century optical shows and live presentations. Porter did more or less the same thing when he filmed the Wagner opera PARSIFAL (1904). Moreover, it is mostly the actuality-style compositional effects of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY that provide its illusion of spatio-

temporal continuity; the montage styles of both films are otherwise remarkably similar: each shot offers a complete view of the depicted action.

Released in 1903, *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* was evidence less of a backward narrative film style than of a firm but short-lived constraint on the screen rendering of subject matter from literary and stage sources, as well as remote historical periods. Topical stories were given the newsreel treatment.⁷⁴ The Edison studio's notion of fidelity to a stagework, of "every scene posed in accordance with the famous author's wishes," seemed to mean that the film producer had the license to endow his film with some kinds of optical enhancement, but not others. If a play had been staged with canvas sets, that was how it would be reproduced for the screen. Subjects with a literary, biblical or other non-contemporary source were shot with painted exterior sets, horizontal action, centred framing, static camera, etc. In films with interior and exterior scenes, the interiors were done in the flat framing technique of the fantasy films, which eliminated the impression of a continuous universe beyond the frame edge, and the exteriors were shot in the manner of the actuality film with its panoramas and random dramas relying heavily on the perception of a larger unframed and unseen physical world.

It was not a pattern restricted to Edison productions. Based on a familiar nursery rhyme, Billy Bitzer's *TOM, TOM, THE PIPER'S SON*, a 1905 Biograph title, depicts its chase sequences in lateral and vertical one-shot actions. Using a visual concept borrowed, according to the scenario, from

Hogarth's painting, Chatsworth Market Fair (1733), the canvas sets do limit the space in which the filmed action may evolve. On the other hand, the choice of flats and costumes seems to have been determined by the non-topical origins of the subject. Bitzer's Russian-Japanese battle re-enactment, BATTLE OF THE YALU, completed the previous year, shows by its newsreel compositional character, just how deliberate the difference was. Two things are explicit in the TOM, TOM scenario: the "Shakespearean" or "Early English" setting of the action; and that the action is "continuous, taking place at consecutive periods on the afternoon of one day." Because of the film's source, Biograph appeared to eschew the newsreel-style for reproducing the continuous chase action much in vogue in 1905.⁷⁵

The constraint appeared, however, to be in decline by 1907. The 1907 Danish Nordisk company's FOR EN KVINDES SKYLD (FOR A WOMAN'S SAKE), a tale of rivals for the king's daughter, was done in period costume with real exteriors, frame edge cut-offs, bottom corner exits and matched movement between interior and exterior scenes; that same company's DER VAR ENGANG (1907) employed painted exteriors and horizontal movement in another king's daughter story in costume. Vitagraph's FRANCESCA DE RIMINI (1907), a superb operatic film about a jealous hunchback who murders his wife, her lover and himself, was a costume drama performed in real exteriors with actuality camerawork. In one of the more intriguing 1907 releases, Pathé's HARLEQUIN'S STORY, the dissolves, giant mushrooms, fake-bearded children in the role of dwarves and trick explosions are set aside when the scene switches to

a castle in a real exterior; suddenly there are pans to follow the action, cuts to link scenes and movement in depth.

By the time Griffith turned out THE GOLDEN LOUIS (1909) close-ups, varied camera distances and scene shifts on action were employed with ease in a costume drama of failed rescue both literary in its origins and historically remote.

4.7 Topical Re-Enactments — 1904-1906

The trend to the acknowledged reproduction of extended news subjects meant that producers using the license of a "true story" could on occasion engage in sensationalist publicity for their very ordinary subjects. In a March 1906 New York Clipper ad for THE BLACK HAND, Biograph claimed to "reproduce, without exaggeration, the latest sensation of New York Police Annals."⁷⁶ The previous year Edison sold a scene from LIFE OF AN AMERICAN POLICEMAN this way:

. . . accurately depicts scenes and incidents of a noted crime in New York City — in which a well-known police officer was killed. The scenes were enacted over the very same ground, and the same night watchman and the same policeman who took part in the real tragedy are seen in the picture.⁷⁷

The shift to the fictionalization of topical stories in the wake of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY was not, however, a sudden one; producers did not immediately flood the market with full-blown vaudeville-act sized subjects and exhibitors did not abruptly abandon the practice of constructing their own shows out of the news footage that producers continued to supply. The releases based on the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 and the San Francisco earthquake disaster of 1906 show the way

in which a new production concept like the merger of modes of illusionism in an acknowledged and extended news reconstruction was both supported and constrained by established exhibition structures.

4.7.1 The Russo-Japanese War

On February 8, 1904 Japanese naval forces attacked the Russian-held Port Arthur in southern Manchuria. The Japanese issued a declaration of war on February 10. On May 1, Japanese troops defeated the Russians at the Yalu River. Russian forces besieged at Port Arthur surrendered on January 2, 1905; final defeat for Russia came in March 1905. The net result of the war was Japan's assertion of its role as an economic and political power in the region.⁷⁸

On two separate days, March 23 and 29, 1904, Biograph registered a four-part re-enactment called BATTLE OF THE YALU. The work of Billy Bitzer, the most peculiar thing about the film was that the battle of the Yalu did not actually take place until almost a month later, between April 26 and May 1, 1904!⁷⁹ The 217-foot, five-shot subject that has survived is one of the best examples from the period of newsreel style turned to the ends of fictionalized screen drama and all the more interesting perhaps because it anticipated the events it purported to depict. Bitzer's BATTLE OF THE YALU no less than Porter's THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY appears to have marked a decisive phase in the development of the American narrative film: the integration of fictional structures common to the period with the coverage strategies — switched angles of view, frame-edge cut-offs, changes in camera position and camera distance, etc. — of

the newsreel. And in effect the values of fictional structure seemed to do away with the need for an actual topical event scripted in the newspapers of the day.

With its Wild West-like chase and shoot-out structure, YALU was filmed in the snowy hills of the Syracuse area of New York State on March 18, 1904.⁸⁰ The film's compositional qualities communicate a powerful illusion of a deep physical space in which men and objects move without stage restraint. That impression was enhanced by Bitzer's use of large numbers of "troops." Those slick production values were balanced in part by the absence of "personalities," by the anonymity, that is, of the nameless dramatis personae. Though there is no sign in the film of the eponymous river which the Japanese army in fact crossed, the film did predict the Japanese victory. A big hit on the vaudeville circuit, BATTLE OF THE YALU was on the bill at the St. Charles Orpheum, a New Orleans theatre, in May 1904. THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY had played there in the first week of February and from the point of view of a local reporter YALU appeared to represent the same type of movie entertainment.⁸¹ However, as an indication of the element of perceived risk associated with the longer film, Biograph released YALU in two lengths. It was clearly acknowledged as a staged piece of action in terms not all that different from those in the Edison studio's description of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY:

. . . it is the only production carried out under strict military orders. Large bodies of troops, correctly uniformed, are employed and manoeuvred exactly as in actual warfare. There is, therefore, absolutely nothing fakey in the film.⁸²

In early April, Porter was instructed to hurry out a YALU re-make, SKIRMISH BETWEEN RUSSIAN AND JAPANESE ADVANCE GUARDS. At 565 feet it was among the longer Edison productions of the year. Shot at Forest River Hill, New Jersey, the filming activity attracted the attention of a New Jersey Advertiser reporter:

Sixty members of Companies H and I of the Fifth Regiment, National Guard, under command of Captain William A. Lord, of Orange, journeyed to Soho Saturday, and on a bluff over-looking the Second River, not far from the Forest Hill Field Golf Club grounds, divided, according to their physical proportions, and engaged in a fierce conflict that continued intermittently for three hours. The undersized men donned caps and coats that changed them as by magic to light-footed Japanese infantrymen, while the heavier warriors (sic), in long coats and upturned mustaches, became the heavy slow-moving fighters of Russia. A Gatling gun company from New York, a huge baggage wagon and an angel of mercy cast in wax wearing a nurse's costume and a fixed look of pity made up the tale of fighters and accessories.⁸³

Titles of the type used in UNCLE TOM'S CABIN identify the setting and action of the film's four scenes: Outpost on the Yalu River; The Attack; The Capture; and The Retreat, which depict a Russian attack and a successful Japanese counter-attack. Here, however, in comparison with Bitzer's YALU, Porter's film is relatively static, making limited use of depth or of the sweeping movements of men and objects within the depth.

The July 1904 Edison Films catalogue listed fourteen films in a category called Russo-Japanese War, in addition to three as Scenes From Russia and five as Scenes From Japan. A mix of authentic footage and fakes only two of the films.

were actually produced and copyrighted by the Edison studio, SKIRMISH and BATTLE OF CHEMULPO BAY, also the work of Edwin Porter, according to company records. The actual battle of Chemulpo Bay (Inchon) was fought on February 9, 1904, and enabled Japanese troops to land at the Korean port. Edwin Porter's studio fake, BATTLE OF CHEMULPO BAY, was a four-shot work containing a stage artillery piece set up on a painted ship's deck, miniaturization, an above-eye rear-view camera angle and frame-edge cut-offs. Shots #2 and #3 cut from the busy Japanese ship's deck to a telescopic iris sequence of a Russian flag, and presumably the ship below, being blown to bits. Shot #4 cuts back to the deck and shows a single tiny craft in the foreshortened background distance tilting over on its side. Played by children, the seven-man Japanese crew were an insufficient number for motion picture credibility.

4.7.2 The San Francisco Disaster — 1906

The major motion picture amusement event of 1906 was based on the April 18 San Francisco earthquake that ignited a city-wide blaze lasting three days. By early May a promotional battle raged in the pages of The New York Clipper between claims of on-the-scene authenticity and virtuoso reproduction. The intense if brief struggle began on May 5. A Lubin ad stated:

. . . WE HAVE SENT OUR PHOTOGRAPHERS TO SAN FRANCISCO and instructed them to take ten thousand feet of Films (sic)

We Guarantee All Our Films to be Originals, Taken at the Source of the Disorder.

On the same day and on the same page the Kleine Optical company made the resistable offer of "MOVING PICTURE FILMS of the STREETS OF SAN FRANCISCO" as well as stereopticon views, both produced before the disaster. Only Vitagraph, it seemed, had the genuinest stuff. Their ad, again on the same day and on the same page, promised that their "special photographer secured splendid views of the disaster," 600 feet of which were for sale at twelve cents a foot.⁸⁴

The following week W.B. Moore, a stereopticon manufacturer and film exchange operator based in Chicago, advertised a "lecture on San Francisco Fire and Earthquake with Slides from Negatives made by our own photographer now on the Pacific Coast."⁸⁵ The same day The Yale Operating Company of Kansas City, Missouri offered "400 Ready to Run feet," the "ONLY, BONA FIDE, GUARANTEED GENUINE Standard Gauge Moving Picture Film of the BURNING OF SAN FRANCISCO." They explained the length by saying that the photographer had only gone to the coast with 400 feet of regular film. Three scenes were being offered; the first taken from Alamo Square at 11:45 a.m. on the day of the earthquake; the second during an automobile ride down Market Street on April 23; and the third from an automobile driving along Eighth Street the same day. There was a \$5,000 forfeit if the claims could

be proven false.⁸⁵

Competition for the Yale Operating company's New York agent came from Biograph. Their ad that day announced, along with Panoramas of the Ruins, a 140-foot studio-produced reconstruction of the disaster, created by

. . . a big force of scenic artists at work in our studio, building a COMPLETE REPRESENTATION OF THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO . . . the most sensational and realistic thing of its kind ever made. Even if you have wasted your money on films of black and dead ruins, this will save you and get the money.⁸⁶

The Biograph Bulletin picked up the theme declaring that their SAN FRANCISCO film, embodied "dramatic elements and human interest altogether lacking in the ordinary views of the ruins." That was in small print under a come-on that read: "The Only Complete Moving Picture Production Showing the Fire in Progress." And then they explained how it was done:

We start with a magnificent representation of the fire, as pictured above. This was made from a model city, constructed in our studio from photographs. It is tinted red to represent the glare of the fire, and with the leaping flames and dense clouds of smoke, makes a sight long to be remembered.⁸⁷

That same day the Edison studio entered the contest announcing the availability of 430 feet of SAN FRANCISCO footage in five "Panoramas and Bird's Eye Views," none of that material ever copyrighted by the company. A week later Lubin was selling some panoramas and street scenes of his own. In a 180° reversal of their Boer war claims, Vitagraph, one of the earliest arrivals on the scene, tried to warn exhibitors against the Biograph reconstruction and most of the other footage available:

THE REAL GOODS, NOT Scenic Studio Reproductions, Clippings From Old Baltimore Fire Films, Scenes in San Francisco BEFORE The Disaster. BUT Whole-some, Honest, Genuine Motion Pictures, Photographically Fine, Bearing Every Evidence of Authenticity, Showing in Splendid detail the Stricken City After the Awful Cataclysm. 88

Toward the end of the month the Edison company advertised thirteen San Francisco subjects for sale and reminded clients that — "Any selection of subjects may be joined together." Business may have been flagging. The following week Edison ads rated the San Francisco footage only third below their featured offerings, LIFE OF A COWBOY with "REAL Cowboys And Indians Bronchos — Stage Coach" and their "latest comedy hit" THE TERRIBLE KIDS. By the end of June the Miles Brothers were advertising "almost new" San Francisco footage at ten cents per foot. The fad had exhausted itself and was now about to depart. 89

Coming after THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, the work of the Biograph company on the Russo-Japanese War and San Francisco disaster reproductions marked a clear shift from the authenticity of man-on-the scene footage to studio-produced reconstructions. Producers of the first generation of movie narratives, like LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN and THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, framed the experience of screen authenticity in topical reproductions cast in familiar and viable nineteenth-century entertainment forms — the stage melodrama, the lantern slide show, Wild West scenes and circus and Coney Island spectacle. The result was a story film composed of discontinuous

blocs of action staged in newsreel composition. Representing a new production scheme based on an older method of release, it flourished briefly in the years 1904-1906. Crushed by its enormous nickelodeon success, a combination of social, and industrial pressures, formally constrained by the elements of actuality framing and composition, led to its virtual displacement by continuous chase and cross-cut rescue action that drew upon a limited but available repertoire of rudimentary editing procedures.

NOTES: CHAPTER 4

¹ Zinn, A People's History of the United States, pp. 314-49.

² Fielding, The American Newsreel, pp. 64-72.

³ See Edison catalogues, July 1901; July 1906; Supplemental 180, February 1903; January Supplement, 1904; July 1904.

⁴ Edison Films, March 1900, p. 2. In 1900 Biograph released two five-shot subjects, THE DOWNWARD PATH and A CAREER IN CRIME. Consisting of filmed scenes from popular stage melodramas presented in waxwork tableau structure there was little attempt at establishing continuity between the tableaux. The same company's multi-shot TEN NIGHTS IN A BARROOM (1901) also relied on audience familiarity for its continuity.

⁵ Edison Films, July 1901, p. 2.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 57, 58.

⁷ Edison Films, September 1902, pp. 4, 15.

⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

⁹ The New York Times, February, April, September, 1901.

Following the destruction of Admiral Cervera's fleet attempting to run the American blockade of Santiago harbor on July 3, 1898, there were exchanges of angry words over who had in fact been responsible for the victory. The man at the helm had been Commodore William S. Schley; his immediate supervisor, Admiral

William T. Sampson, had sought all the credit. The bad feeling between the two received a lot of press in connection with a naval administration incident that arose in February 1901; the issue was still in the news in the late summer and early fall of that year when the Edison company released the film.

¹⁰ Carrie (Carry) Nation at the age of 54 declared in 1900 that because saloons were illegal in Kansas it was the right of any citizen to destroy the liquor and fixtures in state establishments selling alcohol. In the course of her axe-swinging campaign across the state's cities and towns she was arrested, fined, beaten and imprisoned. Her husband's exasperation and his demand for a divorce were national news. See James Tragger's The People's Chronology, p. 677.

¹¹ Musser, "The Early Cinema of Edwin Porter," p. 8.

¹² Méliès film lengths from Hammond, Marvellous Méliès; Edison's JACK AND THE BEANSTALK length from Edison Films, September 1902.

¹³ Edison Films, September 1902, pp. 116-18. Edison officials and W.E. Gilmore in particular were furious over the fact that Lubin was selling a JACK AND THE BEANSTALK dupe. Gilmore claimed in a letter to another Edison man, William Pelzer, on July 29, 1902, that it cost the company "pretty near a thousand dollars," a fairly large sum for the time. In one deposition connected with the move in the courts against Lubin, Arthur White, brother of James, stated that he assisted Porter in the production which required six weeks to complete. Porter's statement of the same day, October 20, 1902, re-iterated the claim of a six-week completion schedule. Still,

this may be less than conclusive. When confronting an infringer in court, Edison people were inclined to play up the trouble and expense of producing the infringed subject. But if the claim was only in part true, it still shows that there was no such thing as the simple filming of a stage drama. It is, however, interesting that both Porter and White stressed the problem of "posing the performers," not the time-consuming optical effects emphasized in the catalogue description. As for the reasoning behind the apparently abrupt move in 1902 to longer subjects, Musser thinks that the main incentive for the Edison company's new policy dated from the middle of 1902 when it had experienced a reversal of earlier court victories. The result was an unleashing of the competition, Biograph and Lubin, and the need to change a policy of news items, dupes and re-makes. This is not to suggest, as Musser points out, that Edison had experienced a change of heart toward motion pictures. He was, at the time, mostly pre-occupied with the phonograph, an iron ore mining scheme, a battery and a cement project.

¹⁴ That twin tradition of street scenes, still lifes and portraits on the one hand, and the optical trickery that produced snapshots of ghosts and spectre-haunted parlours on the other, was found in the work of nineteenth century photographers, according to Paul Hammond.

¹⁵ "In the Vaudeville Houses," The New York Times, February 16, 1902, p. 11; "Some Vaudeville Headliners," The New York Times, May 11, 1902, p. 17.

¹⁶ "New Things in Moving Pictures," The New York Times, June 29, 1902, p. 25.

¹⁷ Edison Films, September 1902, p. 87.

¹⁸ Edison Films, July 1901, p. 85.

¹⁹ Edison Films, September 1902, pp. 87-88.

²⁰ Edison Films, July 1901, pp. 16, 37-39.

²¹ See Lord, The Good Years, pp. 41-66; also "Assassin Czolgosz Is Executed at Auburn," The New York Times, October 30, 1901, p. 5. For a detailed study of Leon Czolgosz and the controversy that arose over the medical treatment of McKinley see A. Wesley Johns, The Man Who Shot McKinley: A New View of the Assassination of the President, New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1970. In his autobiography, Two Reels and a Crank, Albert Smith of Vitagraph claimed to have been present at the assassination scene and to have obtained "a photograph of an American President at the searing moment of an assassin's bullet."

At the moment of gunfire my camera was on Mr. McKinley's face, but the frenzied crush that followed immediately prevented my obtaining any footage on the assassin, though I recorded considerable of the wild and angry attempts of the people to get their hands on Czolgosz.

As if in anticipation of the question, Smith hastened to add that the negative had "deteriorated" but that he still had "four or five frames" of the lost film, none of which, curiously, were published in his book (pp. 132-33). A 1903 Albuquerque, New Mexico newspaper clipping did describe a travelling motion picture show managed by the Beaty Bros. — "Kinetoscope Kings of the World" — that featured 1901-1902 Edison subjects including one depicting "the assassination

of President McKinley." From an unidentified newspaper clipping found in a file at the ENHS.

22 "Assassin Czolgosz's Body to be Destroyed at Auburn," The New York Times, October 29, 1901, p. 1. The story, though published on October 29, was dated October 28.

23 Edison Films, September 1902, p. 91.

24 The New York Times, October 29, 1901, p. 1.

25 "In the Vaudeilles," The New York Times, November 3, 1901, p. 8.

26 Fielding, The American Newsreel, p. 41.

27 Edison Films, September 1902; p. 17.

28 Ibid., p. 12.

29 Ibid., p. 13.

30 "The Pan-American at Oswego," The New York Times, November 20, 1901. A clipping found in a file at the ENHS identified as "Motion Pictures 1901."

31 Edison Films, September 1902, pp. 112-16.

32 See Hammond, p. 141; also Frazer, pp. 93-95 on the difference between the Edison and Méliès versions.

33 Edison Films, September 1902, pp. 144-46.

34 Handwritten note in a file called "Motion Picture Film-Subjects Coronation," on the stationery of the U.S.M.S. "Philadelphia" dated August 22, 1902, ENHS.

35 See Gifford, 1902; Walls, p. 50. Various problems have been cited to explain the decision to re-enact the cere-

mony rather than film the original: the lighting would have been unsuitable and the authorities had denied permission to Charles Urban, Méliès' British agent, to set up a camera inside the Abbey. The film was done at Méliès' studio in France. To assist with the project Urban sent Méliès pictures of the Abbey, costumes and related accessories and even visited the Montreuil studio to check on details. Smith's role was to film the arrival and departure of the royal coach at Westminster. Assembled with the ceremony footage done by Méliès, the result would be a representation of the event in the form of an abridgement featuring the highlights. The June 1902 completion date for the Urban-Méliès reproduction cannot be entirely explained by the fact the coronation was originally scheduled for June 26. Edward, we know, was taken ill with what was reported as acute gastritis. The postponement was announced on June 25. The previous day, however, Urban, who had received permission to film the June ceremony, claimed in a letter that he had applied for a renewal in order to do the August ritual inside the Abbey. Despite a "donation" to a royal official, that permission was denied. Did Urban, then, make the arrangement for the Méliès co-production to cover himself in the event that a botch of the real thing would have denied him his financial due? Was he manoeuvring in a situation more complex than it appeared? Had there been a deal with Edison and the Eden that fell through? Urban, born in America, was also Edison's British agent. There is evidence that Hollaman was keenly interested in coronation footage. In early June it was announced that he was on his way to England to attend the ceremony and to make arrangements "to secure moving pictures of the coronation for exhibition."

at the Eden Musée the first week of July." The vaudeville appeal of European royalty on the screen was such, in fact, that coronation footage enjoyed a record run at the Eden and was still on its screen in January 1903. And after all is said and done, why did the Edison company feel compelled to dazzle prospective buyers with sailing dates and other false declarations? See Hammond, pp. 53-54, 144; Frazer, pp. 100-02; Deslandes and Richard, pp. 454-61; also The New York Times, June 8, 1902, p. 10, June 25, 1902, p. 1; January 11, 1903, p. 34.

36 Niver, Biograph Bulletins, pp. 73-75.

37 Edison Films, Thomas A. Edison, Supplement 168, February 1903, pp. 2-3.

38 See Ramsaye, pp. 428-29 and Fielding, "Hale's Tours: Ultra-realism in the Pre-1910 Motion Picture."

39 Rennert, 100 Posters of Buffalo Bill, p. 14.

It was a period when military drill had a popular following, when private armies, armed with swords only, were maintained by Knights of Pythias, Knights Templar, Knights of Columbus, Knights and Ladies of Honor, and many other lodges. Buffalo Bill's Wild West presented infantry drill and artillery drill. The Spanish American War stimulated further military display.

From Don Russell, The Wild West: A History of The Wild West Shows, pp. 61-62.

40 Edison Films, Supplement 168, pp. 2-3.

41 Rahill, The World of Melodrama, pp. 255-257.

42 "Notes of the Week," The New York Times, November 28, 1897, p. 9.

43 See Musser, "The Early Cinema of Edwin Porter."

44 Kásson, Coney Island, pp. 71-72, 86.

45 Gifford, British Film Catalogue for 1899, 1900, 1901, 1903.

46 In Brighton, England in May 1978, I saw a somewhat different version, one in which the concluding sequence was done in two shots. Here the little girl was brought out of the burning building down a ladder. Which means that there is more than one print of this film as well; Gessner has described a print with ten shots. The cut on action linking shot #4 and shot #5 in the print referred to here, held by Cinémathèque québécoise, is more skillful than the ones attempted by Porter.

47 For a detailed comparison of the Porter and Williamson films see Sopocy, "A Narrated Cinema."

48 Ramsaye, p. 415; Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film.

49 Walls, pp. 78-81.

50 Edison Films, September 1902, pp. 66-67.

51 Edison Films, July 1901, pp. 53-56.

52 Ramsaye, pp. 414-15.

53 Edison Films, January 1904, p. 5. There is much to suggest that the appeal of the film had little to do with its narrative editing structure. "Since most of the people who saw this film were uneducated city dwellers who never rode on trains, the impact must have been startling. They knew that the scenes they were watching were plausible, yet to them they were fantasy." Edward R. Tannenbaum, 1900, The Generation Before the Great War, Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1976, p. 222. Tannenbaum went on to say that the emerging mass culture including screen entertainment and the "naïve empiricism" of the news media provided a very superficial education into the operation of a new industrial reality, its systems and structures, offering "mystification rather than an explanation." p. 237.

54 "The Great Train Robbery, As Rehearsed in New Jersey," The New York Times, 1903. This is a clipping found in a file at ENHS with a note that says "Published in 1903." Perhaps the date was in error since the story stated that "more than 5,000,000 persons" had already seen the film. This news story-review was somewhat critical of the film's histrionics; of, as the anonymous reporter put it, men who "drop dead too suddenly when shot."

55 According to Ramsaye (p. 418), THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY had its first runs at the Eden Musée, Huber's Museum and Hammerstein's. Toward the end of December 1903, it was on view at a Brooklyn vaudeville house, the Orpheum. There it was the closing attraction on a bill that included the prison

scene from Faust; a sketch, Présto the Parisian automaton; and a pony act. ("Vaudeville," The New York Times, December 20, 1903, p. 25.) Projected at the Orpheum on a Vitagraph machine, it would have been an unlikely "chaser." It is worth remembering, however, that in 1904 the screen experience and the projection machine, as much as anything that it projected, still seemed to constitute the main attraction of motion pictures and the theme of promotional copy. In the closing weeks of 1903 the "Edison projectorscope" was featured at Huber's, the "biograph" at Keith's. ("Vaudeville," The New York Times, December 27, 1903, p. 25.) Thus it was more than a little significant that when THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY was put on the bill at the Circle in New York City the week of January 2, 1904, it was referred to by title ("Vaudeville: This Week's Bills," The New York Dramatic Mirror, January 2, 1904, p. 19) this way: " . . . the vitagraph showing THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY."

56 See Edmund Morris, The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt, New York: Ballantine Books, 1979, pp. 459-79.

57 Gene and Jayne Barry Smith (eds.), The National Police Gazette, pp. 160-61; James D. Horan and Paul Sann, Pictorial History of the Wild West, New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1954, pp. 212-17. Indeed, a number of bond-size strips of paper flutter in the air in the mail car scene of the Porter film.

58 Horan and Sann, p. 216.

59 See Russell, The Live and Legends of Buffalo Bill; Ramsaye, pp. 416-17; Andy Adams, The Log of a Cowboy: A Nar-

native of the Old Trail Days, 1903. Reprinted by the Airmount Publishing Company, New York, 1969.

⁶⁰ Vardac, pp. 63-64. Porter had apparently learned of the stage production from Billy Marinetti, an acrobat, scene painter and handyman (Ramsaye, pp. 416-17). U.S. copyright records show a number of stage works registered with that title:

The Great Train Robbery a comedy drama in 4 acts by Edward E. Rose c Clara F. Rose, August 26, 1896.

----- an original Western Drama, in 4 acts, by Scott Marble. Typewritten. c Thomas H. Davis and William Keogh, July 13, 1896.

----- a play in 4 acts by Scott Marble. 73 p. Typewritten. c William T. Keogh, May 2, May 8, May 27, 1907. (The copy of this 1907 version I have seen contains story elements, such as the explosion in the mail car, found in the Porter film. It is difficult to say whether they were also in the 1896 version of the play.)

----- a realistic dramatic spectacle in 3 scenes by A. Voegtlin. 20 p. Printed. c Arthur Voegtlin, November 6, 1905, March 26, 1906. Ref.:

Dramatic Compositions Copyrighted in the United States 1870-1916, Vol. 1, A-N, Library of Congress, Copyright Office, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918. For this information I am indebted to Pat Loughney of the Motion Picture Section, Library of Congress.

⁶¹ Russell, The Wild West, p. 12.

⁶² Edison Films, July 1901, p. 80.

⁶³ Edison Films, September 1902, p. 93.

⁶⁴ The Film Daily, p. 75; Sephr, The Movies Begin, p. 62; file card, ENHS. Information on that card included the in-

formation that the man who was shot in the back was one John Booth.

⁶⁵ I am indebted to my colleague, Prof. André Gaudregault, for assistance with this analysis.

⁶⁶ The re-creation of violent events in their original Western habitat was, as it turned out, more than a novelty notion. In 1907, Col. William Selig took his cameras from Chicago to Colorado and began filming simple action stories. Hailed as the beginning, not merely of the Western as a genre, but of Hollywood itself, the distinctly American character of films like Selig's THE GIRL FROM MONTANA and THE BANDIT KING gave them a competitive edge at a time when the U.S. industry was in litigational disarray and the subjects of the Pathé Frères dominated the nickelodeon screens of New York, Philadelphia and Chicago. Pathé tried to fight back with HOOLIGANS OF THE WEST (1907), combining documentary footage of a wild horse round-up with a fictional rescue. Its European reading of Wild West show structures included Indians, a train robbery and a chase. But that was not enough to compensate for its lack of an instinctive feel for American frontier mythology, to say nothing of the absence of Western spaces, the ethnographic confusion of cowboys living in African-style thatched huts and an actual stream with large fake rocks. Edison joined the trend with Porter's DANIEL BOONE (1907), directed by Wallace McCutcheon, who for a time shuttled back and forth between the Biograph and Edison studios. Its weak narrative strung together some Wild West show stunts, an

Indian attack seen from inside and then outside the cabin and a rescue. Biograph entered the competition with ~~ATTACK~~ ON AN EMIGRANT TRAIN (1907), a featured Buffalo Bill Wild West spectacle filmed with cardboard mountains and a trick hydraulic bridge. Vitagraph responded with THE EASTERNER (1907), the tale of a dude who tames a prairie roughneck that includes a challenge race between a horse and an automobile, some sharp interior-to-exterior cutting and the distinctive photographic quality of performers who get at a closer distance to the camera than they usually did in Edison and Biograph subjects. In 1914 there was some internal Edison company discussion about producing a three-reel "re-issue" of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY based on the "advertising value of the title." Correspondence, L.W. McChesney, Sales Manager, Motion Picture Department, to Horace G. Plimpton, Manager of Negative Production, September 14, 1914. See Robert Anderson, "The Role of the Western Film Genre in Industry Competition, 1907-1911," Journal of the University Film Association, XXXI, No. 2 (Spring 1979), pp. 19-27.

67 Lawson, Film: The Creative Process, pp. 17, 18.

68 Jacobs, The Rise of the American Film.

69 Edison Films, Supplement No. 185, October 1903, p. 5.

70 Edison Films, September 1902, p. 116.

71 Clark, Edison: The Man Who Made the Future, p. 178.

72 Edison Films, October 1903, p. 5.

73 The George Kleine Collection, Museum of Modern Art, p. 157.

⁷⁴ A set of hand-drawn lantern slides produced circa 1902 and acquired in 1978 by Charles Musser from the estate of B.H. Pope of Charlton, London show a similar stylistic selectivity. A topical subject like the coronation of Edward VII was done in the conventions of the news photo, with depth, frame edge cut-offs and the continuous relation of foreground to background. The Pilgrim's Progress and Punch and Judy series show figures detached from their backgrounds, less detail and centred classical poses.

⁷⁵ This scenario, by Wallace McCutcheon, was obtained from Pat Loughney of the Library of Congress, Motion Picture Section.

⁷⁶ Advertisement, The New York Clipper, March 31, 1906, p. 160.

⁷⁷ Edison Films, December 1905.

⁷⁸ Trager, The People's Chronology, pp. 667, 703; Barracough, Introduction to Contemporary History, p. 81, p. 108, p. 110. Also, Christopher Martin, The Russo-Japanese War, New York, 1907.

⁷⁹ Martin, The Russo-Japanese War.

⁸⁰ Biograph production records, Film Department, The Museum of Modern Art.

⁸¹ See Allen, pp. 159-60; also, Sylvester Quinn Breard, "A History of the Motion Pictures in New Orleans, 1896-1908." M.A. dissertation, Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, June 1951, pp. 142-43.

⁸² Niver, Biograph Bulletins, p. 127.

83 Unidentified press clipping, ENHS. Copyright records show that the film was completed on April 4, 1904 and registered on April 8, 1904.

84 Advertisements, The New York Clipper, May 5, 1906, p. 324.

85 Advertisement, The New York Clipper, May 12, 1906, p. 334.

86 Ibid.

87 Niver, Biograph Bulletins, p. 244.

88 Advertisements, The New York Clipper, May 12, 1906, p. 334; May 19, 1906, p. 380.

89 Advertisements, The New York Clipper, May 26, 1906, p. 386; June 2, 1906, p. 425; June 23, 1906, p. 467. (

CHAPTER 5

MELODRAMAS OF THE CLOCK

Yussie had stripped off the outer shell of an alarm clock. Exposed, the brassy geometric vitals ticked when prodded, whirred and jingled falteringly.

"It still c'n go," Yussie gravely enlightened him. David sat down. Fascinated, he stared at the shining cogs that moved without moving, their hearts of light. "So wot makes id?" he asked. In the street David spoke English.

"Kentcha see? Id's coz id's a machine."

"Oh!"

"It wakes op mine fodder in de mawning."

"It wakes op mine fodder too."

"It tells yuh w'en yuh sh'd eat and w'en yuh have tuh go tuh sleep."

from
Henry Roth's Call It Sleep

5.1 From Tableau Structure to Shot Fragmentation

In an ad placed in The New York Dramatic Mirror on December 13, 1913, Albert H. Banzaf, D.W. Griffith's lawyer and agent, claimed on behalf of his client the introduction of a number of motion picture innovations including "large or close-up figures, distant views (and) the switchback," which is to say the last-minute rescue technique.¹ A year earlier George Blaisdell in his Moving Picture World article based on an interview with Edwin Porter declared that the former Edison studio chief had "originated" that same basic set of story film techniques, among them the "switchback".² A man of great modesty, it is unlikely that Porter would have made such a claim on his own.³

It is the purpose of the concluding chapter of this study to focus on one of those innovations, the last-minute rescue or switchback, and to propose an alternate account of its industrial adoption. Better known as parallel editing, its appearance on the nickelodeon screens of America circa 1907 delivered the message; for whoever could read it, that a wholesale transformation of the country's motion picture business was in progress. Generally associated with Griffith's 1908-1913 Biograph years, the switchback was only one marker of a new top-to-bottom production recipe.

The formal elements of parallel editing, viz. the temporal overlap and the cut-in, possess a narrative history that dates back at least to medieval literature.⁴ The problem we confront, it seems, is less the need to make that point or to demonstrate some tenuous first-time motion picture occurrence, than to explain the function of the switchback in

a transformed scheme of film production practice. To put it another way, our goal should be to analyse the circumstances in which the tableau-style narrative, from the evidence an enormously popular and profitable one, collapsed as a reigning structure, to be displaced by a narrow autonomous psychological drama. Based on the use of overlapping inserts of "parallel" action in non-contiguous spaces, its mechanical images of temporal urgency amounted, in effect, to disguised melodramas of the clock. Dating roughly from 1907, the articulation of that subject matter through the medium of the movies instituted a shift from the re-viewed story in tableau form to a mode of structural fragmentation, i.e. to shot dependence, and in turn to a tighter codification of spatio-temporal relationship constrained by the formal features of newsreel-style composition and based on the McCutcheon formula. What we find at the other end of the transformation of the news fake into the story film, in other words, is a temporal drama staged in the formal features of actuality camerawork that provided an imaginary you-are-there involvement in clock-based crisis.

In a number of ways 1907, the year the early signs of significant change began to appear, marked the culmination of the U.S. film industry's first industrial phase. Most of the basic technical discoveries had been made and its theatrical course was set. The following year Griffith directed his

first Biograph pictures. The beginning of a period of consolidation, 1907 was, as we have seen, the last year in which American producers registered actualities in significant numbers, abandoning the production of topical news footage, despite its strong popularity, for fictional dramas largely modeled on the re-constituted topical event. In that year the nickelodeon boom was the sensation of the pop amusement trade, a development that increasingly displeased the reformers of the Progressivist movement. That displeasure in turn joined with trade press criticism of the tableau-style narrative to create a powerful industrial pressure for a new, wholesome, independently-exhibitable product. The following year, 1908, would witness the formation of the instrument for realizing that formula, viz. the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC); a tentative agreement between many of the principals, excluding the Biograph company, had been reached in June 1907.⁵ In 1907 foreign product occupied seventy percent of American nickelodeon screens. Two years later U.S. production had gained some ground; by 1912 the 1907 ratio had been more than reversed with American pictures enjoying an eighty percent share of national exhibition.⁶

Edison motion picture fortunes in decline in 1907 were not to recover. Of a total of 1092 titles referred to in the pages of The Moving Picture World that year a mere twenty-four, or two percent, originated in the Edison studio. For comparison's sake, the Pathé company released 185 films in the U.S.

for a seventeen percent market share.

The Edison studio's problem was an obvious one, considered in the context of the competitive market: their goods just weren't up to much. In its July 6, 1907 issue, The Moving Picture World commented that "his (Edison's) machines lack durability, his pictures lack the pulsating life."⁷

The following year a remarkably perceptive anonymous reviewer had this to say about Edison-Porter subjects in The New York Dramatic Mirror:

Edison pictures are noted for elaborate scenic productions and the artistic beauty of the scenes, whether natural or painted interiors, but these results are sometimes secured at the expense of clearness in telling a picture story. Important action taking place in artistic shadow or at a distance which permits of a beautiful and extended view may, and usually does, weaken the dramatic effect.⁸

At the Edison studio, Porter did not appear to be lacking in resources or facilities. The new production facility in the Bronx, in operation by July 1907, was "equipped with every appliance of the regular theatre." There was a stock company of performers, four stage managers and rehearsals for scenes" never more than two or three minutes long."⁹ Presumably part of the problem was that those two-to-three-minute scenes were, as the Mirror reviewer found, just too long, and hampered the clarity of the productions they composed.

From the late summer of 1904 Edwin Porter's output, limited to managing the accomodation of Edison sales and copyright policy to the forms of a new production trend, consisted of three basic types of longer film: chases, tours and tableau narratives based on a discontinuous scenes-from-the-life-of structure. From the company's point of view the chief virtue of the strategy was its basis in a copyright protection scheme permitting the sale of longer films in parts as well as complete versions. The major drawback was the blind application of an essentially static narrative method, as The New York Dramatic Mirror had observed, involving the simple linking of trimmed complete-action shots; it was a method with what would become certain genuine limitations as the nickelodeon boom developed. But if Porter's Edison productions, dating from 1904, were at odds with the future, his predeliction for big-scene block action narratives were in harmony with the company's motion picture concepts.

5.2 Chases, Tours and Tableau Narratives

Chase action, which extended the newsreel compositional illusion of unrestrained movement within a vast and potentially limitless depth, borrowed its basic structure from the tours, searches and explorations of the cinema's first half-decade. The chase film combined the scene-to-scene structure of Biograph's *A SEARCH FOR EVIDENCE* (1903) and the actuality features of Lumières' single-scene *LA ROSSEUR ARROSE* (1895) in the creation of an illusion of progressive action through the manipulation of linked spaces in compositional depth. As analyzed by Wallace McCutcheon, the chase film owed its illusion of continuity to the compositional character of its separate images, which is to say to the temporal stop-motion effect that resulted when images in depth were joined in sequence under certain conditions: (i) the more or less coherent movement of recurring characters toward and away from the camera; and (ii) changes in setting, both necessary and sufficient conditions. The absence of one of them reduced the illusion to its transparent component elements.

The matted keyhole images in Biograph's thirteen-shot *SEARCH FOR EVIDENCE* (1903), for example, lack compositional depth, movement is lateral and changes in setting consist of a simple switch in room numbers. Porter's *THE BURGLAR'S SLIDE FOR LIFE*, a studio work produced in April 1905, employed a stop-motion technique for the chase action. The flat diagonal top-corner to bottom-corner action of a burglar's flight

down a tenement clothesline with a bulldog in pursuit fails to sustain the illusion of movement through space, despite the modification of background detail — changes in the items of clothing hanging out to dry — resembling the switched hotelroom numbers in A SEARCH FOR EVIDENCE. The fact that the participants do not appear together in the successive shots until the culmination of this "chase" makes little difference. The absence of depth is some but not all of the problem. The British film, RIVALS FOR LOVE (1901), does contain newsreel depth and movement toward the camera, but like SEARCH FOR EVIDENCE and THE BURGLAR'S SLIDE FOR LIFE, it lacks perceivable changes in exterior setting and camera angle and as a result, the illusion of continuous action.

Porter's first genuine chase subject, HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN, satisfied both minimal conditions. In the separate sequences of its six-shot chase the action begins in the frame depth and heads toward the camera-viewer in arced and diagonal patterns with each shot "complete" in the sense that both the "nobleman" and his female pursuers are shown entering each frame and exiting it out of one of the bottom corners. The empty scenes then cue cuts to comparable pieces of chase action.

In addition to its depiction of the apparent triumph of American energy over European pretention, HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN, like PERSONAL, contained a number of common chase picture features. One of them was the growing number of pursuers as the chase developed, from eight in shot #5 to

eleven in shot #6 to twelve in shot #7. Another was the progress of the chase through varying terrain: a stream to be crossed, fences to be negotiated and a quarry to be scurried down. Those landscape variations in turn necessitated the use of different angles of view that, as in the quarry action, occasionally brought into play compositional volume as well as depth. The varieties of camera angle, absent in SEARCH FOR EVIDENCE and RIVALS FOR LOVE, further contributed to the illusion of continuous action. Finally, there was the straggler, in the Porter film, a heavy-set female who is the unlikely winner of a foreign husband. Two 1907 Pathé films employed the straggler concept in comic and unexpected ways: in THE PUMPKIN RACE (1907) one of the pumpkins "lags" behind; in THE POLICE DOGS (1907) a German shepherd has a problem getting over a wall.

Edison-Porter chase subjects shared with those of other studios a general division of the chasers and the chased that reflected entrenched Edwardian attitudes: tramps and itinerants, lunatics on the loose, blacks, burglars, kidnappers, deranged alcoholics, men and children were pursued on foot, horseback, by train and in boats by agency detectives, policemen, shopkeepers, posses, parents, asylum guards and women. Ethnic bias, property, industrial duty and social position governed the chase values projected on the vaudeville house screens.

The catalogue copy for Porter's second chase subject, CAPTURE OF "YEGG" BANK BURGLARS, made no reference to the earlier

Lubin caper film on a similar theme. Concealing the debt in a documentary crime re-enactment format the studio claimed that their version was based on a paper William A. Pinkerton, of the famous detective agency, delivered at the Annual Convention of the International Association of the Chiefs of Police in St. Louis, Missouri, in June 1904. Pinkerton's talk, it was alleged, bore the title "'The Yeggman' or the 'Bank Vault and Safe Burglar of Today.'" Additional information and suggestions from other members of the agency were supposed to have found their way into this film about "the life and methods of the 'Yegg' bank burglar" in which a gang is pursued on horseback, by boat and train, by a posse.¹⁰

Notwithstanding all that, the action in the second part of the film owed more to Lubin's borrowings from British Gaumont's RAID ON A COINER'S DEN than to any inside information. In the Porter film a detective dressed in woman's clothes brings the felons to heel in a New York bar. Entering the place in a disguise he is caught listening in on their conversation; beaten and bound, he is locked in the cellar. A stop-motion effect shows him burning through the ropes on his wrists with a candle. When the woman who runs the bar returns he overpowers her and heads for the steps. There is a cut on action to the final shot in which he appears in the bar in her clothes. A shoot-out and the arrival of the police bring the story to a close.

In MANIAC CHASE a "Napoleon" figure breaks out of an institution and leads pursuing orderlies on a chase through

a rural area before returning to his cell. In 1906 Biograph re-made their own 1904 original, THE ESCAPED LUNATIC, in reverse. DR. DIPPY'S SANITORIUM, featured a newly hired attendant pursued and abused by a group of asylum patients. The following year a gratuitous three-shot lunatic chase was inserted into their ARCADIAN ELOPEMENT as a scenic incident.

Perhaps it was the abnormal energy of madmen and alcoholics that led early film producers to feature them in chase subjects. In Porter's THE WHITE CAPS (1905), a film that shares many of the elements of MANIAC CHASE, hooded vigilantes chase an alcoholic who has terrified his wife and daughter. Having briefly eluded his captors, the alcoholic is pursued, subdued and led off to a tar-and-feather punishment.¹¹ A FIVE-CENT TROLLEY RIDE, in which a tramp makes off with a jew's goose, was described in the company catalogue as "a burlesque on street car trolley service." Produced in May 1905, its "wild goose chase" motivates the gathering of a 'ship of fools' collection of social and ethnic stereotypes. An elaboration of the popular story-song picture format, it was supposed to conclude with printed music and lyrics.¹²

Taught to steal loaves of bread, sausages, satchels and packages from tradesmen and passers-by, the dog in RAFFLES THE DOG and his masters are chased through the Union Square area of New York City. That was a little unusual in that most Edison chases were shot at rural locations. Canny canines, a popular circus and vaudeville attraction, also performed in Edison's BUSTER BROWN SERIES, BURGLAR'S SLIDE FOR LIFE,

THE TERRIBLE KIDS and LOST IN THE ALPS. A clever collie starred in Cecil Hepworth's RESCUED BY ROVER (1905) and a dog plays a strong supporting role in Porter's THE TRAIN WRECKERS, a film that combines a chase and a rescue. Here "a gang of roughly dressed men . . . planning to wreck the next express train" are pursued and gunned down by "a train crew with a number of volunteers."¹³

Running a close second behind train and bank hold-ups, the kidnapped child was for a time one of the industry's most reliable chase story staples.¹⁴ Biograph's THE KIDNAPPER (1903) was a non-chase subject resembling British-Gaumont's THE CHILD STEALERS in which an abducted child is rescued from the kidnapper's lair.¹⁵ Porter's apparent re-make, WEARY WILLIE KIDNAPS A CHILD (1904), unfolds out of doors and treats the same problem, a child stolen for begging. Here the "chase" action of the nurse and the policeman searching the park for the missing child is implied between shots #3 and #4. .

Porter's STOLEN BY GYPSIES (1905) combined the comic mistaken-culprit chase of Biograph's THE LOST CHILD with kidnapping suspense and a delayed rescue. Working around the Edison company's prescriptive definition of the continuous incident in strictly spatial terms, Porter used the left hand side of the frame to represent the menace of strangers and the right to signify domestic security. The first two shots locate the child in a domestic setting and supply the fact of a butterfly birthmark which will play a role in the identification of the child by the family nurse in the gypsy

camp later in the story. In shot #3 an agile pan shows the seizure of the child who is loaded onto a wagon by his captors. In shot #4 we see the wagon coming out of the depth and then leaving the frame close to the camera on the left-hand side, the same direction from which the kidnappers had originally appeared. It is an effect that also serves to dramatize the fact that the seizure is taking the child an alien distance from home and doting parents.¹⁶

Comparing *STOLEN BY GYPSIES* with Griffith's first film, *ADVENTURES OF DOLLIE* (1908), Nicholas Vardac observed that the latter showed the Biograph director beginning "to refine Porter's editorial approach."¹⁷ But in fact Griffith was working the same basic vein. His tableau-style narrative possessed only something of a greater narrative economy. We know, for example, that the sack that Porter's tramps make off with does not contain the abducted child only some live fowl. In *DOLLIE* the framing of stop-motion effects in an actuality compositional style helps convey the persuasive illusion of a child trapped in a barrel. The six-shot chase-structured sequence showing the barrel floating down the stream always moving toward the camera/audience thus represented less of an advance in narrative editing than a shrewder application of the older McCutcheon recipe. The Griffith film is indeed more successful in dramatizing the temporal urgency created by the abduction but only because *DOLLIE* represented a more effective post-Mélièsian trick film, the trick nicely concealed in actuality camera work.

Porter's approach to the narrative flaws of tableau style was usually to dress up the separately saleable scenes and mostly ignore the fissures. In MANIAC CHASE the deliberate discontinuity inserted between the chase segments is exchanged for a heightening of individual scenes; the posturing of the maniac and a reverse-motion shot to show him leaping up into a tree. Illusions of continuous action appear to have been regarded by Porter only as tricks of the same basic type, achieved through cuts on action and changes in camera angle and distance. In the second shot of MANIAC CHASE we see an interior view of the "maniac" escaping from his cell through a window. There is a cut before he is completely out to an exterior shot showing his escape from the institution. Later, a dummy-substitution stop-motion effect combined with a cut on action and a change of camera angle is employed to show him heaving one of his pursuers over the side of a bridge, a ploy taken holus-bolus from the earlier Biograph subject on the same theme.

The chase sequence in CAPTURE OF THE "YEGG" BANK BURGLARS contains some editing on action instead of the more common practice of waiting for the empty scene to cue the cut. The film also reveals the growing importance of interior set design in the credibility of action sequences. But here as in most of Porter's Edison work it was the Big Scéné that really counted. In shot #3 we see the gang gathered in a wooded area awaiting the return of one of their number sent into town to case the bank. The leader is shown whirling a

live chicken in the air, ripping off the head and then stuffing the quivering body into a pot of water, the matter-of-fact brutality of the deed softened by the documentary camera distance. What Porter tended to do best he did in this film: a stop-motion explosion in the bank vault; the exterior shoot-out that primes the chase; the escaping gang rowing across a lake, massing clouds of painterly gunsmoke reflected in the water and filling the screen composing a gorgeous tableau.

THE LITTLE TRAIN ROBBERY (1905), Porter's re-make with children of his own 1903 classic, employed a narrow gauge railroad train and some adolescent robbers, in an unintentionally witty primer on the basic narrative mode of the period. The attempt to integrate the non-chase structure of the original with pursuit action resulted in a film about a reigning motion picture genre. Released as the pursuit picture was reaching the peak of its vogue, the element the studio stressed in its publicity for the film, however, was nostalgia, "the unwritten history of 'Young America.'" Adult spectators, the circular advised, would enjoy "recalling their own youthful days, when their highest ambition was to become a 'Jesse James' or a 'Bandit Queen.'"¹⁸ In this version the putative parallelism of the original was displaced entirely by the simple device of a double-chase conducted on horseback, on foot and finally in a boat. Led by a youthful and attractive bandit queen, the gang of hapless horsemen direct their ponies with great incompetence toward and past the camera in a parody

of what by 1905 would have been a stereotyped filmic gesture. An excessive amount of panning movement, necessitated by the barely concealed circular track captures the approaching train, the departing "bandits" and the pursuit. There is a nice opening shot of the interior of the robbers' hideout framed like an exterior, i.e., without the foreground space one generally finds in the interior shots of these films. The young passengers in the scaled-down open cars clearly knew how to be robbed; perhaps they had seen the original 1903 movie. Porter filmed this scene from an angle that approximated the original but without the murder. And while there is no gunplay at all, when the robbers depart the commandeered train engine and scurry down the incline with their booty, it is done in a way that replicates the much-celebrated pan-and-tilt of the original.

The chase genre expanded through re-makes. In September 1905, Biograph released WANTED, -- A NURSE, described in their Bulletin as "A New 'Personal' by the originators of the Original 'Personal'."¹⁹ An Edison studio pop-song based variation in the form of Porter's WAITING AT THE CHURCH followed in the summer of 1906. Here a bridegroom with cold feet unsuccessfully attempts to escape the wedding ceremony. Children join the bridesmaids in a pursuit that includes the by-now standard elements of motion toward the camera, frame-edge cut-offs and bottom corner exists. In the third shot there is a typical Porter embellishment: lying in a hammock, the bride-to-be dreams of her wedding day, the imagined scene

shown in a circular matted insert. A fall from the hammock awakens her and the dream balloon fades away. In 1907

Biograph released yet another PERSONAL re-make, WIFE WANTED, this one with some trick stop-motion river crossings and photography from a moving vehicle for tracking shots of the participants.

There was little deliberate effort on Porter's part or on the part of the studio to develop the chase film into a more elaborate continuing action subject. The catalogue description of WINTER STRAW RIDE (1906) for example, makes it clear that it was basically turned out to display and sell a technically-achieved scenic thrill, here "moonlight snow effects produced by appropriate mono-tinting." A group of "pretty girls" from a "young ladies seminary" meet a "party of young fellows" while out on a sleigh ride; there is a snowball battle and a chase with the girls emerging victorious. The colouring, according to the copy, turned the "chase scenes through the snow (into) a novelty never before attempted in motion pictures." The result was not merely a "photographic work of art" but one whose processing "completely obscure(d) all defects due to wear ordinarily so prominent in snow pictures and greatly increase(d) the life and value of the film."²⁰ THE TEDDY BEARS (1907) with its mix of studio and real locations, live performers and fake bears, miniaturized animation, six distinct settings, a point-of-view keyhole shot and scene-to-scene cuts was a typical Edison-Porter product of the period, a series of gimmicks strung along a token story-

line.

5.2.1 Tours

Even as late as 1907, the studios appear to have believed that it was necessary to in some way motivate the movement of the camera through a sequence of nominally connected scenes. The result was a genre of minimal narratives, "tours", based on the panorama structure originally developed to exhibit shorter pieces of travelogue footage. The tour story contained non-chase movement between scenes each of which showed a complete segment of action that could be detached without much damage to its separate appeal or to the coherence of the whole. Tour structure thus permitted an exhibitor to obtain a larger or smaller quantity of footage with no consequent loss of thematic continuity. Tour action was implied between the jump-cuts with careful attention paid to explaining how the character or characters — and the camera — reached and left the locales.

Porter's thirteen-shot EUROPEAN REST CURE, with its tableau scenes marking the shifts in continental places, opens with footage of its harassed traveler boarding an actual ship. This "fake" tour, composed of in-studio schlemiel routines concludes with the battered tourist being led off to a waiting carriage at an actual New York dock site. The documentary five-shot opening involved some re-cycled footage of the Manhattan skyline shot from a moving ship, the dropping of a

pilot and a high-angled view of a storm at sea in an effective continuity sequence, demonstrating that Porter could edit continuity sequences.

Cecil Hepworth's AN ENGLISHMAN'S TRIP FROM LONDON TO PARIS (1904) is a seventeen-shot travelogue composed, unlike Porter's EUROPEAN REST CURE, entirely of outdoor scenes. It featured a restrained performance that highlights the panoramic views of Paris as well as the continuity cutting. There are shots that cut from a longer exterior view of the vessel to a view of the traveller on ~~the~~ deck of the ship now moving toward the camera, and shots that depict the disembarkment from different angles. Pathé subjects, THE DIABOLIC ITCHING (c1907), THE YAWNER (1907) and POOR COAT (1907), in something of the manner of RUBE AND MANDY AT CONEY ISLAND, employed a comic music-hall figure to set up Lumièreian reviews of Paris street life and social scenes. A DETECTIVE'S TOUR OF THE WORLD (1905), also by Pathé, employed staged scenes and actuality footage shot in Yokohama, Japan, at the Suez Canal, in Bombay and Mexico for an effect much superior to Porter's EUROPEAN REST CURE.

The children enjoying themselves at a Coney Island beach in Porter's home-movie-like JUNE'S BIRTHDAY PARTY (1905) are seen in a long take of a maypole frolic, held for the time it took a ship to move across the horizon from one end of the frame to the other. Its potential as a separately marketable scene may have lacked the qualities of his nineteen-shot BOARDING SCHOOL GIRLS (1905), whose tableaux were offered to

buyers in parts. This "tour" of the rides and diversions of the Coney Island site is played out against the actions of a comic chaperone, Miss Knapp, who is unable to keep their pursuit of fun under control. As in *EUROPEAN REST CURE* and *HONEYMOON AT NIAGARA FALLS* (1906), the film opens with an elaborate continuous action departure sequence. A panning camera records the party mounting a high-seated touring automobile and a long tracking shot from another vehicle shows the group en route before their arrival at the amusement park gates. Biograph's *LIFTING THE LID* (1905) in its opening and closing shots, shows a group of young people setting out on and then returning from a slumming visit to a dancehall, an opium den and a nightclub.

Porter's 1907 films attempted a similar modification of scene-to-scene chase action. In both *THE RIVALS* and *STAGE-STRUCK* the narratives, of two men frustrated in their pursuit of the same fickle girlfriend and of a couple of parents trying to recapture three daughters seduced away from home by a burlesque artist, motivate comic tours of familiar social settings that include amusement parks and the seaside.

The Edison company's busiest tour structure subject was Porter's *GETTING THE EVIDENCE* (1906). Hawkshaw, a private detective equipped with a camera, is hired by a well-to-do client to gather proof of his wife's infidelity. His punishing efforts take him through parks, a golf course, into a restaurant and finally to the seaside. He is left at the conclusion to face the anger of his employer for having shad-

owed and photographed the wrong woman. Each of the droll scenes probably possessed sufficient independent comic merit to stand up on its own. Like the scenes in BOARDING SCHOOL GIRLS they comprise a teasing portrait of the middle classes taking their leisure, here framed by the hectic "chase" for photographic evidence. Porter's LAUGHING GAS was an affliction-motivated tour on the Pathé-Hepworth model; his JACK THE KISSER (1907) replayed the PERSONAL theme to depict the adventures of a street masher whose fate it is to fall into the clutches of a black maid.

The requirement of a "tour" to motivate the movement of the camera between non-contiguous spaces was less apparent in the trick films Porter worked on in that same period. His CITY HALL TO HARLEM IN FIFTEEN SECONDS VIA THE SUBWAY ROUTE was completed in October 1904 in anticipation of the opening of the New York City subway system on October 27, 1904. Based, perhaps, on press reports of construction accidents, the film's trick effects were integrated into a nine-shot, six-scene subject that combined real and studio settings in the comic depiction of a workman propelled through the tunnel by a dynamite blast. Porter's best-known trick film of the period, DREAM OF A RAREBIT FIEND, completed in February 1906, employed a range of visual effects including tilted angles, stop-motion, rapid panning, split screens, miniaturization and superimpositions to represent the interior consciousness of a series of drunken hallucinations. An attempt to capitalize on the popularity of the Pathé trick films of the period with

their actuality-style continuous action sequences, its likely model was a Ferdinand Zecca subject produced in 1905, REVE A LA LUNE. Its more immediate American inspiration was the famous Winsor McCay comic strip, Dream Of A Rarebit Fiend that began appearing in The New York Evening Telegram in 1905.²¹

5.2.2 Tableau Narratives

Unless there was some necessary sequence contained in a film's source material no very strong one was imposed. Even in UNCLE TOM'S CABIN a re-arrangement of scenes occurred. For PARSIFAL, a long film copyrighted in parts but only sold in complete lengths, Porter arranged each of the eight busy tableaux in a sequence that faithfully followed the operative narrative. Drawn from an established literary source THE SEVEN AGES hewed to the sequence INFANCY, PLAYMATES, SCHOOL-MATES, LOVERS, THE SOLDIER, JUDGE, and SECOND CHILDHOOD, Porter adding an eighth segment, WHAT AGE?

The sequence in HOW JONES LOST HIS ROLL, registered in seven parts, was determined by the animated present unreal conditional statement that was its illustrated subject:

If you met Mr. Skinflint
a suburban neighbor
and he gave you the glad hand
and much to your surprise
asked you to have a drink
when invited to dinner
you almost dropped dead
after filling you on cheap wine
he proposed a friendly game of cards

losing all your money
 you bet everything you had
 and you were compelled to go home like this
 wouldn't it make you mad?

Each of the film's seven tableaux was cut into the flowing jumbled title to illustrate a portion of the statement, an effect that, needless to say, would have been mostly lost on a non-English speaking member of the audience. The most popular Edison-Porter production of 1905, THE WHOLE DAM FAMILY AND THE DAM DOG, likewise would have required on the part of the spectator a certain linguistic-cultural knowledge to appreciate the pun that, together with the "facials", comprised the film's main attraction. The cameo introduction of the group, I.B. Dam, Herself, Miss U.B. Dam, Jimmy Dam, Annie Dam, Lizzie Dam and Baby Dam, followed the accepted hierarchical structure of the family: father, mother and the children in chronological order of birth.

LAUGHING GAS (1907), another loosely connected panorama of scenes, provided the novelty of a heavy-set black female performer. Following a visit to a "Painless Dentist" and the extraction of a large burlesque tooth, her infectious nitrous-oxide induced laughter upsets the passengers on a tram, a street vendor, some policemen, restaurant patrons where she works, a suitor and a church congregation. The film opens and closes with a shoulder-up (close-up). The scenes following her trip to the dentist have no necessary sequence.

The documentary style and episodic structure of LIFE OF AN AMERICAN POLICEMAN depict the routines of yet another

Edison model public servant and the technical details of his work. Though not itself a continuing action story the film contains clear examples of Porter's ability to create nice continuity sequences such as the rescue of a woman who attempted suicide in "River Tragedy", shots #8, #9 and #10. We see the rescue in shot #8, then a parallel action cut-in in shot #9 of the ambulance on its way to the accident followed by a demonstration of resuscitation after we observe its arrival at the scene in shot #10. The "Runaway in the Park" episode shows another rescue, this time of a young woman on a runaway horse, done in a smooth five-shot sequence. The final episode, "Joke on the Roundsman", is a seven-shot piece of action based on effective cutting between one interior and two exterior locations. A cop takes an unofficial work break by deceiving his superior into believing that he had remained in the carriage house. The joke, such as it is, was based on timing. To underline the point, at one stage in the sequence the roundsman checks his watch. It was almost a preview of the changing shape of the film narrative to come; by 1907 the subject of time-regulated work activity and its special anxiety would be particularly prominent.

But the treatment of that theme required a more constrained concept of narrative sequence than the one that prevailed in the early one-reelers. The tableau-style of, for example, Porter's THE EX-CONVICT resulted in a film that exists in three different versions. The catalogue suggested the order of the eight scenes as: 1. Leaving Home, 2. Discharged,

3. Have You A Reference?, 4. The Rescue, 5. Discouraged, 6. Desperation, 7. That Man Saved My Life, and 8. A Friend At Last. The catalogue did not refer to those titles nor mark the scenes by number as the copyright record did. The sequence in Walls was given as 1., 7., 2., 3., 5., 6., 8., and 4., with scene 7 called The Burglary.²² In the Niver paper-print version scene 3 precedes scene 2.

Terry Ramsaye described THE KLEPTOMANIAC as "two stories" that "ran through the film neck and neck."²³ Perhaps he had seen a version in that parallel form. No such parallelism, however, was indicated in the Edison company's circular. Here the eleven scenes in two acts, clearly marked out and including a rare cast list, outline a linear development as follows: ACT I, Scene I, Leaving Home, Scene II, Arrival At Department Store, Scene III, Interior Department Store, Scene IV, Superintendant's Office, Scene V, Under Arrest and Scene VI, Police Station; ACT II, Scene I, Home of Poverty, Scene II, The Thief, Scene III, In The Police Patrol, and Scene IV, Police Court. There was a concluding tableau titled Justice.²⁴ The paper-print version survives in the Ramsaye order: the rich woman arrives at the police station in the film's eighth scene, with the poor woman getting there in the scene that follows; also, the concluding tableau shot precedes the courtroom scene.

Leaps in time and space were generally handled verbally in the catalogue synopses, which points to the continuing need for a lecturer to explain the action, as for example,

this account of a cut-back in LIFE OF A COWBOY: "The scene now reverts to the ranch." Temporal simultaneity in THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY was explained in the published scenario with the term "while", in THE TRAIN WRECKERS and BURGLAR'S SLIDE FOR LIFE with "in the meantime." The larger leap in STOLEN BY GYPSIES was not simply left to a title, "One Year Later" but repeated in the catalogue description in a softer form: "A year is now supposed to have elapsed." A common method of handling those shifts in the catalogues was to refer not to the narrative action but to the screen format as, for example, "the second scene shows" in MANIAC CHASE or "the next scene" in RAFFLES.

The problem that would arise in applying that structure to more complex stories is evident in Porter's 975-foot THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER (1905), composed of eighteen shots including inter-titles and copyrighted in twelve scenes. A sentimental King Lear-like elaboration of the pre-1900 ELOPEMENT ON HORSEBACK, it tells the story of country girl Hazel's near downfall through an affair with Arthur Carrington, an artist with a wife and daughter. Ordered from the family home to the city, the destitute Hazel sees a superimposed vision "of her father on the vine-covered walls of the church," a Porter big-scene specialty.²⁵ She is rescued from a suicide attempt by Aaron Rodney, the miller's original candidate for son-in-law, and returns to her village for a marriage to the young man and a delayed reconciliation with her by-now blind father. Based on a number of shifting relations — between Carrington and

Hazel, between Hazel and Rodney, between country and urban locales, between lifestyles, between Hazel and her father — the film required a lot of narrative help. The Edison circular identified the main characters by name, which the film did not do; it also supplied explanatory details, that would have been impossible to get from an unaided viewing, about the re-possession of Hazel's sewing machine while stranded in the city and her discovery that her father had gone blind. Porter used two titles, the first between shots #6 and #7, "Wife and Child of Artist", introduced Carrington's first wife; "A-Lapse of Two Years" inserted between the final two shots was perhaps Porter's attempt to bridge the narrative ellipsis and lend credibility to the father-daughter reconciliation. Shot #7, in which Carringford's wife brings Rodney news of her husband's disappearance, followed by the scene in shot #8 in which the two visit the miller and alert him to the need to prevent his daughter's incipient marriage to the artist, also required textual explanation. The story then cuts to a chapel exterior. Hazel and Carringford are about to be wed when Mrs. Carringford arrives brandishing her wedding certificate. Shots #7 and #8, according to the catalogue, composed one scene. Shot #9, described as "the next scene", shows the overwrought miller driving his daughter, now the mother of a child, from his door. Those divisions may have facilitated part sales and provided useful guidance to lawyers hired to protect the film's copyright, but they did little for its lecturer-less coherence.

And even with those considerations there does not appear to have been much consistency in the company's method of indicating part sales in the catalogue descriptions, nor a clear pattern of logic in how the scenes were determined for copyright purposes. The 1906 catalogue listed films broken down in scenes or not in a way that bore little relation to either copyright or sales policy. We find, for example, films sold only in complete versions like CAPTURE OF THE "YEGG", BANK BURGLARS, LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN and JACK AND THE BEANSTALK described with scene divisions, and subjects sold in parts, like BOARDING SCHOOL GIRLS' and STOLEN BY GYPSIES, without them. The BUSTER BROWN series, a logical candidate for part sales, was copyrighted in one piece and not sold in parts. THE EX-CONVICT had its eight shots registered as eight separate scenes though it was never as far as available records indicate sold in anything but a complete version. BURGLAR'S SLIDE FOR LIFE, ON A GOOD OLD FIVE-CENT TROLLEY and THE WHOLE DAM FAMILY were all registered in one part but offered for sale in separate scenes. The text for THE TRAIN WRECKERS also eliminated explicit scene divisions, falling back on a verbal indicator, "in the meantime", to signify coincidental action. No scene divisions were indicated in the description of MANIAC CHASE, though here the commitment to tableau structure took the form of an odd sort of punctuation:

At each change of scene 'Napoleon' stops to pose in characteristic attitude producing a highly amusing effect.

This suggested not only the absence of a standard method of describing chase sequences but also a resistance to their illusion of continuous action. The description of the maniac chase relied on a verbal continuity marker, as for example "the chase continues."²⁶

5.3 Bijou Dreams — The Nickelodeon

In October 1904 Edison jobber George Kleine promoted the virtues of the longer story film in a way that tended to exaggerate the merits of the product:

. . . the public has now been educated to appreciate these long films which tell an interesting story and need few words of explanation.²⁷

Reaching that appreciative mass public initially required a division of the Lumières' combined camera-printer-projector one-man-show artisan machine into the integrated functions of production, distribution and exhibition. The key industrial developments, well-advanced by 1906, were (i) the rise of second-hand film outlets and rental agencies called exchanges and (ii) fixed venue exhibition outlets called nickelodeons. In effect the exchange concept made possible the nickelodeon exploitation of motion pictures at established locations on an exclusive or near exclusive basis. The older version of the nickelodeon story was built on the self-serving equation of sudden showshop success arising from Edwin Porter's equally sudden discovery of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY's cinematic essentialism.

In a February 1906 story applauding the achievements of its top motion picture advertisers, The New York Clipper provided a capsulized state-of-the-art account of the growing American film business. The new industry's importance, it reported, was not only being felt in "the amusement world" but in "the field of scientific education" as well. The anonymous writer, who may be forgiven his keenness to bathe the early film trade in a Progressivist glow, noted the parallel rise of the pictures and "stereopticon exhibitions" involving "complicated mechanical apparatus." Most machines, Clipper readers were informed, and the shows they were employed in, incorporated both modes of projection. The article went on to outline the development in films from "ordinary happenings of life and actual occurrences on sea and land, in the air and under ground" to the demand for novelties, leading to the production of "comic and trick films," the popularity of prizefight footage and news fakes — "ingenious methods used to secure correct representations of battles on sea and land." The educational virtues of motion pictures appeared to be confirmed by their commercial success. "There is," the piece declared, "hardly a vaudeville theatre in the world today that does not include pictures as one of the entertaining features of the daily programme."²⁸ Within a month the nickelodeon boom would be launched, and permanently alter the formal character of the screen fare that had brought it into being.

In November 1907, the Saturday Evening Post published an article by Joseph Patterson on those newly-arisen motion pic-

ture venues that described and attempted to explain their success. The piece cited one entrepreneur who estimated weekly expenses of running a nickelodeon at \$175 to \$200. A small theatre, containing 199 seats (to avoid the \$500 license fee charged 200-plus seat houses) and giving from twelve to eighteen performances a day, seven days a week, a nickelodeon's gross revenues, even calculated at the mythical five-cents a head, added up to as much as \$1,250 for a weekly net profit of over \$1,000.²⁹

The key to the phenomenon was the film rental exchange. Before its establishment most exhibitors and showmen had to purchase their films outright. In 1903, a 1000-foot reel costing roughly \$100 was soon converted by the demand for new subjects into what Ramsaye called "a dead asset."³⁰ The exchanges offered a more viable rental scheme; a related trade in worn and torn second-hand footage offered at bargain rates had also sprung up. Four distribution centres emerged, based in Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia and New York City.

In Chicago, the Kleine Optical Company acted as sales agent for the subjects of Biograph, Vitagraph, Méliès and Pathé as well as for those of the Edison company. But Vitagraph had also begun selling their films through the Miles Bros. exchange in San Francisco and Charles Urban in London, England. Competition in Chicago came from Max Lewis' Chicago Film Exchange, George Spoor's National Film Renting Service, which dealt in second-hand footage as well as rentals, and

Eugene Cline, a rental operation specializing in Pathé subjects. As of August 1906, a new boy appeared on the Chicago film exchange scene, the Inter-Ocean Exchange.³¹

The Miles Bros. in San Francisco operated one of the largest exchanges in the country, promoting the self-declared superiority of their subjects by reminding exhibitors that "when moving pictures came on in the Vaudeville Theatres, you could see over half the audience put on their wraps and take their departure."³² Among their San Francisco competitors was Peter Bacigalupi, Edison's west coast jobber.

In Philadelphia, Theodore J. Harbach, proprietor of Harbach and Co. had, as early as November 1903, advertised "Magic Lantern Outfits" and "Picture Machines" for a "Small Outlay." In March 1906, the company was selling slide shows and offering Edison films at 4.5¢ to 6.5¢ a foot in addition to a line of equipment that included Edison Kinetoscopes @ \$.75 and Star stereopticons @ \$21.50. Earlier that month, Harbach had placed the following ad in the Clipper:

Feature Films — Wanted. Train and Bank Robbery, Train Wreckers, Lost Child, Yeggman, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Passion Play, etc.³³

Before too long he had managed to contact a few sellers. The following month, Harbach was offering an unidentified 564-foot version of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY for \$40.³⁴

In March 1906 the New York-based Alf. Harstn & Co. advertised "Ed. Train Robbery, About 700 feet, \$50" and "Moonshiners, About 960 feet, \$60," as well as an additional

10,000 feet of other subjects "from 3¢ per foot and up."

In April 1906 the company offered machines and song slides "for rent with or without operators" and some of the big commercial hits of the year at slightly reduced lengths and much reduced prices:

Dream of a Rarebit Fiend, about 470 feet, \$50
 Train Wreckers, about 815 feet, \$100
 Life of an American Fireman, about 425 feet, \$28
 Battle of Yalu, about 550 feet, \$30
 Burned at Stake, about 600 feet, \$45.³⁵

But if business was booming in the free-for-all distribution sector, some problems remained at the exhibition end. One finds in the period an evident attempt at assuring exhibitors that projection flicker and the fear of fire were not insurmountable barriers to business success. In March 1906, the Selig Polyscope Company not only promoted longer subjects "perfect in detail" but also equipment that would deliver "steady" projection. "Noiselessly projects a flickerless picture" was the boast made by Powers on behalf of his Camerograph, a combined stereopticon and film projection machine. In a March ad for THE WRECKERS OF THE LIMITED EXPRESS, Lubin's 11¢-per-foot, 900-foot re-make of the Edison hit, his company touted the merits of Lubin's Marvel 1906 — Cineograph combined with Stereopticon — for \$85, with "Fireproof Film Boxes" \$20 extra.³⁶ Toward the end of the year the Edison Company advertised their Exhibition Model Kinetoscope with "Improved Take-Up and Film Magazines" at \$135.

The improvement adaptable to all 1906 models, was available separately at \$35. One suspects that the problem of spilled footage causing fire or print damage may have pressed the company to invent an alleged two-year developmental "test under the MOST SEVERE CONDITIONS."³⁷

The ready availability of popular film fare and improvements to projection apparatus set the stage for the nickelodeon boom, dating roughly from March 1906. The emergence of the storefront theatre has become the basis of an extraordinary myth of get-rich-quick business success in which earnest if pushy immigrants arrive in the Land of Opportunity and swiftly parlay modest investment and peasant cunning into amusement fortunes.³⁸ In a 1919 article in The Film Daily, Eugene LeMoyne Connelly gave full credit for the nickelodeon concept to two Pittsburg exhibitors, Harry Davis and John P. Harris. "It was," Connelly declared, "their joint initiative that gave the world its first moving picture theatre, and it was they who first coined the word Nickelodeon." In his 1907 article Joseph Patterson also dated the growth of the phenomenon in the period after 1904, adding that there were, in 1907, "between four and five thousand running and solvent, and the number is still increasing rapidly." Patterson's related claim that in 1904 there was not a single five-cent theatre devoted to motion pictures in America was perhaps inserted for dramatic effect. Gordon Hendricks found that buildings had been erected exclusively for the purpose of exhibiting motion pictures before 1900. We may conclude that

some time between 1907 and 1919 the 1905 Harris-Davis enterprise was assigned the status of a legend.³⁹

To begin, the name — nickelodeon — was the least of what was "new" about the early movie houses. Vaudeville theatres in New York and Boston had carried that appellation even before the 1896 projection of movies at Koster and Bial's. But more significantly, the trade press of the period clearly failed to show the sort of unprecedented 1905 amusement explosion described by Terry Ramsaye in the 1920s. Instead we find a development initially emerging out of economic competition within the vaudeville industry spurred on in turn by a rising demand for low-priced popular entertainment. That, combined with the strong appeal of motion pictures within the leading vaudeville circuits, was an important factor in the establishment of the store-front theatres.

On August 19, 1905, in a story called "Five-Cent Vaudeville," The New York Dramatic Mirror lashed out at a new phenomenon, lower-priced vaudeville houses:

Those who thought that the limit had been reached when the ten-cent theatres began to flourish will be shocked to learn that early in September (1905) a five-cent theatre will be established in New York City.⁴⁰

On March 17, 1906, came the announcement that former Keith vaudeville manager J. Austin Fynes had incorporated the Nicolet Amusement Company. Its purpose, according to the Mirror, was to:

. . . establish a chain of moving picture shows in stores and halls throughout the country. The first of these was opened last week in 125th Street near Fifth Avenue.⁴¹

A week later the Mirror had this description of nicole fare:

The entertainment consists of moving pictures and illustrated songs, and as the expense of running them is comparatively small, the chances for profit are very promising. Performances are given as often as the houses can be filled. So that the employees are kept very busy from noon to midnight.

On September 8, 1906, the paper evidently believed the phenomenon significant enough to inform its readers that a new moving picture theatre had been constructed in Scully Square, Boston at a cost of \$25,000.⁴³

Edison detective Joseph McCoy, who claimed to have made a careful study of nickelodeons, recalled that in 1907 seventy percent of the small film houses contained fire risks. Films would be run onto the floor or into a barrel or basket, and the operator might be smoking or have friends around.⁴⁴

To supply the market, in rapid expansion despite such risks, dealers in film entered into production with newly formed companies. In the early months of 1907 George Kleine formed the Kalem company in partnership with two former Biograph employees, Samuel Long and Frank Marion; a few months later George Spoor and "Bronco Billy" Anderson formed Essanay. Movie attendance in the U.S.A. that year, Patterson noted, had reached a daily figure of at least two million. Cutthroat competition between little nickelodeon

owners was rife. Some were being forced out of business and their small firms picked up by film rental companies. It signalled a trend, Patterson concluded, to "fewer, bigger, cleaner five-cent theatres and more expensive shows."⁴⁵

The previous year it had been reported that "the 'pictures' as they are known in the profession" had acquired "high financial importance." "Nickel vaudeville" and "animated songs" had become "all the go. Not only at summer resorts but all over town, whenever a vacant store can be had . . . In Coney Island alone there are more than 200 of them." Subjects, the anonymous journalist added, ranged from 150 to 1,500 feet and, he observed, were an established feature of vaudeville programs. The story rated "train robberies, jail breaks and the like, rendered with great fidelity to detail" the most popular of the then current screen offerings enjoyed by American audiences. Next came "the comics" which presumably meant the comic phases like Biograph's PERSONAL. In last position were "the 'trick' subjects at which the foreign concerns were especially clever," the work, in other words, of Méliès and especially of the Pathé studio, at that time the world's most prosperous.⁴⁶ By 1907, Patterson reported, "eccentric pictures", as for example, a stop-action sequence of a building demolition, that had been in great demand a couple of years previously, were now much less in evidence than the "straight-story show . . . with a consistent plot in 500 or 800 foot subjects running fifteen to twenty minutes." As an unidentified studio manager expressed it: "More story,

larger story, better story with plenty of action — that is our tendency."⁴⁷

The "straight story show" with a "consistent plot" was not, however a software component that magically emerged ready-made to be plugged into the nickelodeon network. Most traditional accounts of the rise of the store theatres have failed to show the extraordinarily profound impact that spin-off of the vaudeville industry had on what had begun as a popular if unexceptional music hall act. Like the dogs-to-sausages turn-of-the-century trick film, what went into the nickelodeon machine is not what came out.

The popularity of the movies as a vaudeville house act coupled with the demand in the period for cheap amusement, intensified perhaps by economic conditions, is what directed them into lower priced venues. The steady conversion of major vaudeville houses to the exhibition of motion pictures on a near exclusive basis was a fact of the period.⁴⁸ The role of the mini-depression of 1907 in speeding the decline of the live theatre was likely repeated in making available premises vacated by failing business. As a vaudeville attraction the early story film was dependent for its coherence on the sort of verbal assistance provided by an "explainer". The gradual disappearance of those showmen stuck the form with a kind of crisis, though not one, judging by its continued appeal, that was decisive. What appeared even more significant were the attacks of Progressivists and reformers who assailed the medium for its pessimism and immorality.⁴⁹ The

combination of those pressures set up a climate favoring a major formal modification. The hero of that troubled industrial moment was D.W. Griffith. His career at Biograph showed the way to the light. By 1909, the year the nickel fad entered a decline, the story film considered as a formal object had acquired a set of characteristics very different from those that had gotten the ball rolling. To put it another way, it had been a case of a product generating a marketing structure that had soon rendered that product inappropriate.

5.3.1 Tableau Narrative Structure and the Nickelodeon

The catalogue synopses of Porter's straight action films generally promised more than the films delivered, particularly at the level of narrative coherence, with the images frequently corresponding only minimally to publicity hyperbole. Inconsistency of detail was a prominent by-product of the policy of building stories out of independent tableaux. Rudimentary suspense effects well within Porter's technical grasp suffered as well. THE TRAIN WRECKERS (1905), a seventeen-shot subject containing all the elements of the rescue-suspense picture, is reasonably indicative of the way the Edison studio went about "telling a story in continuity."

Constructed out of repetitive self-contained actions and eschewing cross-cutting for rescue suspense the separate big scenes lacked dramatic impact. The documentary anonymity that lent credibility to the news fakes detracted from these longer fictional subjects. In the YEGG picture, for example, we

get only one close view of the members of the gang that does not allow a dramatic role to personality. Visual inconsistency was reflected in other ways. On occasion the number of people being pursued could vary without any sort of logical explanation. In KATHLEEN MAVOURNEEN five men are chased, three captured.

In LIFE OF AN AMERICAN POLICEMAN, it is not clear whether we follow the same character through all the episodes. It is difficult to make out from the surviving print, and here the catalogue text is of no help, whether the policeman shown having breakfast at home with his family in the first scene is the same one who later comforts the waifs and struggles with the burglar.

In LIFE OF A COWBOY (1906), there are a number of story details about the relationships between the main characters that would have been impossible to uncover without help. They were to be found in the catalogue text but not in the visual presentation. The opening sequence set in the Big Horn Saloon shows an old Indian about to accept a drink from the trouble-making "Mexican greaser." But one needs to know that it is his daughter who interferes and is spared the villain's wrath by the cowboy hero, a piece of information contained in the printed synopsis.

The film does contain an attempt at innovating chase structure to show progressive action. In the four-shot pursuit of the stage by the renegades, the coach is only visible in the third shot with the riders seen closing the gap in the one that follows. In the preceding shots the chase was shown in the standard way: both parties entering the frame from the depth and exiting into one of

the bottom corners. In the cowboys' ride to the rescue there is a comparable move in the direction of shot dependence: we see the wounding of a renegade in the shot that precedes the tableau showing the rescue.⁵¹

Organized into linear sequences, LIFE OF A COWBOY's double-chase action represented the same story structure employed in THE LITTLE TRAIN ROBBERY and re-cycled to depict the rescue in THE TRAIN WRECKERS. Here it is perhaps difficult to say conclusively whether Porter was following company directives or his own best lights. What is clear is that his solution to turning out a longer more elaborate narrative was to fall back on a formal variation of the replay technique used in LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN with its linear depiction of the rescue, first from the interior and then simply re-viewed for an exterior look at the same action.

Marked by uneven character development, narrative dependence on a verbal text, inconsistent directional editing, a lack of strict shot sequence and an awkward codification — to our late-century eyes — of spatio-temporal continuity, the tableau movie story could not long endure the nickelodeon embrace. Here one may speculate that its disappearance can be explained on the cognitive grounds that it was unable to effectively tell stories like the one in THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER, that it was simply narratively unfit.

That hypothesis is partially supported by the evidence of two related phenomena emerging within the American motion picture industry. The first was the departure of the vaudeville house lecturer as screen venues multiplied; on the one

hand the demand for such talent probably began to run ahead of the supply, and on the other, many smaller theatre operators seeking to cut costs to the bone decided that the lecturer was a fringe that could be trimmed. The result, as the nickelodeon craze took off, was that films constructed around the function of an "explainer" suffered a loss of coherence.

The second was the attempt to come up with some compensation. As early as October 1905, a device called the Phono-Bioscope was given a less than impressive try-out at Proctor's Twenty-Third Street. If that method of bringing talking accompaniment to pictures failed, later in the month Hammerstein's went with the old stand-by, a human being. Roy Knabenshue, "the celebrated aeronaut," was featured in a miniaturized airship model describing the construction and operation of the actual vehicle. To climax his talk some film footage of an ascent he had made over Chicago was projected. In March 1906, Hammerstein's gave prominent billing to a mixed-media song-and-dance number built around Edison's THE SPOOK MINSTRELS:

They are dressed like the men in the pictures and it helps out the effect wonderfully when they seem to step out of the picture and finish the chorus of the last song in full view of the audience.⁵³

In a Biograph Clipper ad that summer for LOOKING FOR JOHN SMITH the title was dwarfed by the words "Talking Pictures," — " . . . the words being spelled out from the characters somewhat as is done in cartoons."⁵⁴ The following October a German apparatus, the vocal graphbioscope, was slated for a vaudeville audition. "The idea," the Mirror

observed, "has had a peculiar fascination for picture and talking machine people."⁵⁵

The conclusion that the tableau story lacked autonomous narrative power had already occurred to Edwin Porter. THE EX-CONVICT (1904) was, the Edison studio claimed, "illustrated in such a way as to make an audience almost feel they can hear the principals talking to each other."⁵⁶ A comparable effect was promised in THE WHITE CAPS: "The blow, the fall, the woman's screams and the child's pleadings can almost be heard."⁵⁷ Prospective exhibitors and audiences were informed that the clever animated titles in HOW JONES LOST HIS ROLL were adequate to "tell the story in words," and that "further description was unnecessary." In 1907 Edison joined the "talking pictures" vogue with Porter's COLLEGE CHUMS. Its visually animated telephone-conversation titles and comic transvestite episode were assisted by actors speaking from behind the screen.⁵⁹

One Edison studio solution was the simple and obvious one of saying more in advance. Their 1907 circular for Porter's A RACE FOR MILLIONS, the tale of a miner's daughter, a ruthless gambler and a brave stranger, laid out all the action in complete telegraphic detail:

Night in a Western town - Streets deserted - Gambler and stranger seeking each other - they meet - Two shots - Gambler falls - The suspense is over - The girl appears - Finds "Her Stranger" alive - He holds her in his arms - She has won something more than millions now.⁶⁰

But to return to our original problem, the question of narrative fitness cannot be posed in absolute terms. Moreover, there is just too much evidence of the popular appeal of the tableau story film, even with its obvious show flaws, to base all of the case for its displacement on its cognitive failings. If, dating roughly from 1907, a genuinely new mode of scenography represented by the extended action film began to make its screen appearance, and that at the expense of an extremely lucrative, litigationally protected visual foreground, then that is a phenomenon deserving of careful consideration.

5.4 Lucid Illusions

From across the Atlantic, the Czech writer Vaclav Tille, writing in 1908, complained about the vague linkage in the scene-to-scene screen fiction of the period.⁶¹ A similar dissatisfaction was being expressed by Tille's American colleagues. They too had begun to press for a modular motion picture product that provided a continuous, uninterrupted movie experience they referred to as a "lucid illusion of reality."⁶² The astoundingly popular pre-1907 crime stories and rough-house comedy chases came under fire from other quarters as well, both inside and outside the business. Social critics sought a softer, more puritan, more sentimental style

of screen reality. As early as 1908, a trade-journal campaign for motion pictures with happy endings had surfaced.⁶³ It was a demand that nicely meshed with the point of view of nickelodeon exhibitors, disdainful of their blue-collar clientele and eager to attract the middle classes to their shows.⁶⁴ The larger debate was conducted in the pages of the emerging trade journals.

One critic, writing in The Moving Picture World in September 1908, insisted that the motion picture narrative possessed "a genuine technique, largely in common with the acted drama yet in part peculiar to itself . . . " and he went on to stress the need for screen action that unfolded "without explanation, from the prologue or lecture." The film's pantomime style of performance, he argued, rendered "Ibsen plots" improper motion picture material. Advising restraint in the use of titles to provide pre-visual summaries of movie action, he favoured them for the treatment of passing Time. The advantage of movies over the stage, he believed, was the potential use of an "unlimited number of scenes." These were to be shaped into "well-contrived" sequences aimed at perfecting the "illusion of reality," including close-ups "pictures . . . at close range" for representing shades of emotion.⁶⁵

Other voices from among the ranks of the literate middle class nickelodeon audience had already joined the lament of the reviewers. In February 1908, The Moving Picture World published a letter from a woman in Augusta, Georgia critical

of the departure of the screen lecturer. The result, she claimed, was a decline in trade: "People grow weary of what they do not understand." The cinema, she went on, was only being considered from the commercial point of view, "not from the artistic or the educational. It is a business that can be made a tremendous force for good, if rightly used." Another letter writer in favour of titles "at every 20 or 30 feet," complained in the same issue about the lack of clarity in screen stories and insisted on the desirability of "a printed description." The editor responded by blaming the actors for not rendering the story intelligently. "A perfectly thought-out plot, well put together, should," he concluded, "tell its own story."⁶⁶

5.4.1 Early Narrative Editing Procedures

The early story film did develop conventions for linking its complete action shots and "telling its own story": the temporal overlap, the cut-in and the ellipsis.⁶⁷ The temporal overlap was a very common method of depicting continuous action between contiguous spaces. It involved the repetition, from a new angle, of action seen in the concluding frames of a previous shot, and was based, as was the editing method of the chase, on the joining of complete action shots. Classic uses of the device occur in Méliès' TRIP TO THE MOON, in which the rocket lands twice, first in long shot, then in a closer view, and in Porter's LIFE OF AN AMERICAN FIREMAN.

The Edison catalogue copy for Porter's FIVE-CENT TROLLEY was explicit about its overlap: the second shot concludes with a goose flying through a trolley window; in the shot that follows we see an exterior view of the trolley entering the frame from the depth, moving toward the camera/audience and stopping. The goose is then seen exiting the tram window a second time. The copy describing the end of the preceding shot read: " . . . in the general melee, the goose finally making its escape." The description of the next shot was as follows:

The picture now changes to an outdoor suburban road. A trolley car is seen approaching. A goose flies out of the car and the passengers give chase.⁶⁸

The chase itself, as we have seen, was based on a similar principle of shot-to-shot re-iteration which is what probably gave it most of its nickelodeon success: no explanation, or little, was required.

The cut-ins, generally unmatched closer views, mostly replayed story details without a change in angle, though occasionally there was an apparent intention to make the cut function dramatically. Biograph's STORY THE BIOGRAPH TOLD (1904), built on the need to motivate a switch in camera position, shows a man kissing his secretary from two different angles. Porter's cut-in close-up of ankle fondling in GAY SHOE CLERK (1903) simply exploited a novelty effect, as he did a year later in ANTI-RACE SUICIDE (1904) to show a baby being weighed on a scale. The opening close-up of a child being dressed by

its nurse in *STOLEN BY GYPSIES* provides the important story detail of a butterfly birthmark. The shot is followed by an unmatched view of the same action from a medium distance which allows a pair of doting parents to enter the scene. The cut-in of the itinerant-with-hamster surrounded by his pursuers near the conclusion of Biograph's *THE LOST CHILD* adds little to the action except to provide a closer view of the general scene shown in the previous shot. The closer view of the widow enjoying the bouquet sent by her ribbon-counter suitor, in Biograph's *THE WIDOW AND THE ONLY MAN* (1904) likewise contributes no new narrative information. By way of contrast, the cut to a closer view that concludes Billy Bitzer's *THE MOONSHINER* (1904) is startling and dramatic in its effect. It links the shot of a woman who has just gunned down her husband's killer and run toward her spouse's fallen body in the frame depth, to a view of her holding her dying husband in her arms. Marred slightly by the sort of excessive stage gesturing that marked the films of the period, the display of emotion was not unexpected; earlier scenes provided other evidence of their close, loving relationship.

In *CAPTURE OF THE "YEGG" BANK BURGLARS* Porter used a cut-in of a member of the gang casing the bank which has the effect of a temporally parallel event; in the following shot he cut back to the gang gathered in the woods, viewed from an angle similar if not identical to the one that preceded the cut-in. Constrained by tableau structure the technique communicated the sort of ambiguous simultaneous action found

in earlier films, like THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY. That sequence was also characteristic of the sort of ellipsis or foreshortening of action employed in the period. The Yeggman takes too little time in the bank, with the camera not following him inside but remaining fixed on the empty scene of the building exterior. Two women enter the nurse's home in Porter's STOLEN BY GYPSIES and then briefly emerge with her after too short a time, the camera all the while fixed on the empty exterior. DREAM OF A RAREBIT FIEND has a similar scene. The "fiend" leaves the bedroom set, the camera fixed on the empty setting waiting for his return, ready for bed, only moments later.

Elliptical action was employed more obviously in the jump-cut editing of the Edison company's short 1901 accident subjects, ANOTHER JOB FOR THE UNDERTAKER and THE FINISH OF BRIGET McKEEN. In Hepworth's RESCUED BY ROVER, shorter pieces of footage link the action retracing the dog's route to the kidnapper's lair, in a way that suggests the later conversion of the ellipsis into the basis of continuity cutting. In at least one of his Edison films, THE COP FOOLS THE SERGEANT (1904), Porter's temporal link between two shots is overly extended, as it would have been in an overlap cut. The cop steps down into the basement of a bakery for a breather. He is shortly followed by one of the bakers who was unloading a wagon. When the film cuts to the interior of the basement, there is the cop, but it takes a little too long for the baker to make his appearance. In the penultimate scene of THE EX-CONVICT,

the run-on action of the family going up to bed, the desperate man entering the home, his apprehension by the father, the summoning of the police, his identification by the little girl and the dismissal of the police is severely compressed to fit a busy one-shot tableau.

One might readily be persuaded that the obsolescence of those devices relegated them, along with the complete-action-shot narrative structure that determined their functions, to oblivion. As we shall see, however, the collapse of the tableau-structured film in which they were first used, under the industrial pressure of nickelodeon exhibition, only concealed the transformation of the devices themselves, considered as rudimentary technical possibilities, into the screen logic institutionalized as griffithian film grammar. The effective conversion of those lowly show tricks into the elements of high art has been much remarked upon but mostly as some sort of donné supplied by individual genius. Here one example will suffice. The wonderfully prolonged moments in Eisenstein's news fake BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN (1925), the smashing of the dinner plates in the mess sequence and the famous Odessa steps segment, were achieved by nothing more elevated than the technique of the temporal overlap, not by the ingenious discovery of an ideal "cinematic" form that would dictate the course of development of an industrial art.⁶⁹

The apparent flaws of the tableau narrative would probably not have posed a serious problem, as long as the movies had remained a vaudeville house act. With the arrival of nickelodeon exhibition, the need for a major modification in

the mode of commercial display required of the manufacturers a lecturer-independent experience based on a stricter codification of spatio-temporal convention and a tighter sequential arrangement of focused visual detail. The model for that alternate mode of sustained illusory continuous action was provided by the highbrowism of the novel and bourgeois stage-works which organized their elaborate scenic verisimilitude in terms of narrative consistency. The re-constituted function of overlaps, elliptical representations and unmatched cut-ins helped solve an industrial problem, the solution intricately constrained by contemporary social reality and an existing finite repertoire of form, as well as by a certain cultural predisposition which equated the movie's apparent rhetoric of authenticity with the actuality compositional qualities of subjectivity and voyeurism.

5.4.2 The Progressivist Clean-Up

In seeking to apply the methods of mass production to a popular commodity, motion picture industry entrepreneurs ran into another problem: the increasingly vocal criticism of the new medium coming from Progressivist reformers. Those ladies and gentlemen had grown extremely concerned over the influence of industrialization and the turn-of-the-century wave of immigration on Victorian values. By 1895, immigrants formed a majority of the adult population of Brooklyn and Manhattan.⁷⁰ The Progressivist strategy was a simple one: to get the industry in line through active political lobbying that threatened its stability and profits. For the reformers what really mattered was the alleged immorality of screen amusement no

less than the concern with the occasional immoral business supposedly being conducted by "mashers" in the darkness of the halls. There came a demand for the brightening of that darkness by the installation of lights strong enough to read a newspaper in, the origin of the illuminated red theatre exit signs. Middle-class craving for comfort produced other changes; ice-water, comfortable seating, ventilation and the elimination of both theatre-front barkers and rowdy vaudeville acts on the bill.⁷¹

It is difficult to arrive at an exact understanding of how the audiences of the day, caught up in those changes, in fact perceived their film experience. Terry Ramsaye claimed that most of the nickelodeon patrons were non-anglo-phone immigrants. Poorly paid, they found traditional forms of amusement expensive and, when of interest, unintelligible. More recently, Jowett has pointed out that early audiences, in addition to that group, were composed of members of the middle class, who, because of their religious education, had never previously attended the theatre, and the middle and upper class patrons of stage melodrama.⁷² In 1907, Patterson found that thirty-three percent of the audiences were made up of children. Though few women between sixteen and thirty attended, many middle-aged and elderly women were steady customers. Generally, foreign patrons outnumbered English-speakers in the large urban areas where, he claimed, the moving pictures constituted a sort of "university of the poor."⁷³

That the popularity of the pictures in the nickelodeons was enormous is beyond question. While the financial "panic" of 1907 and the mini-depression it brought on took their toll on the legitimate theatres and vaudeville houses, the bad times had no noticeable effect on the nickelodeons which continued to prosper.⁷⁴ In an important sense the profound change that was about to seize the industry appears to have had little to do with mass audience taste or support, or at any rate, the support of the largest and most devoted segment of that audience. Rather, it seems mostly to have been the result of a deal struck up between social reformers and amusement entrepreneurs, a deal encouraged and abetted by a new wave of earnest film critics. It may be of only passing irony that the key agency for the centralized control necessary to place the motion picture in the service of Victorian uplift and assure its stability was the Edison Trust.

It is also very difficult to fully understand the changes that the motion picture was about to go through if they are isolated from the conditions of a society in a state of rapid industrialization. For as it turned out, the Progressivist program for cleansing immigrant tastes achieved its partial success through the very industrial conditions Progressivists claimed to loathe. The combined dangers of industrialization and immigration in effect cancelled each other out, the social organization of industry neutralizing the much-feared imported foreign influence. In this process the movies wound up playing a supporting didactic role.

5.4.3 Industrial Sentiment

At the debut of the twentieth century the United States, with a population roughly two-thirds that of Germany and England combined, had achieved a level of industrial production that outstripped their cumulative total.⁷⁵ But there was a price. In 1900, the national census had listed 1,750,178 fully employed children between the ages of ten and fifteen; by 1910 that figure had risen to 1,990,225. The increase would not have surprised anyone. A family required \$800 a year to survive; most unskilled workers were paid less than \$500. The wages of children, it was calculated, were needed to get families over the gap. In the preceding decades attempts to achieve a higher adult worker standard had been countered with brute force.⁷⁶

Little of that social history found its way into early American motion picture shows. When film producers tackled the tensions of the new industrialism, it was mostly to preach a sermon of industrial duty and compliance. To its public-spirited firemen, policemen and posses, the Edison company in *THE TRAIN WRECKERS* (1905) added a noble and brave station-master's daughter — perhaps the little girl in *THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY* grown to womanhood — who helped foil a gang of gratuitously evil train wreckers.

Bitzer's *THE PAYMASTER* (1906) re-iterated the theme of the content labourer with the fillip of what the *Bulletin* described as a "nick of time" rescue.⁷⁷ Frustrated by his inability to seduce the mill girl away from her affection for the company paymaster,

the evil superintendent, with the help of a hired felon, steals a bag of company money and arranges for the paymaster to take the blame. A dog detective smells out the buried loot, the paymaster rescues the heroine from a drowning death, the villains are arrested and peace returns to the woolen mill in this "drama of homely American life." The "nick of time" rescue promoted in the Biograph Bulletin was in fact a one-scene, non-switchback affair, a rescue from drowning much like those depicted in Porter's LIFE OF AN AMERICAN POLICEMAN and THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER. The attempt to introduce it into a story of industrial romance was not, however, altogether inappropriate.

Clock-ordered time had become not only the prime regulator of workplace and marketplace, but also a medium for Americanizing the immigrant hordes. In the Progressivist scheme to rescue nineteenth-century American Victorianism by turning mass culture away from gross Coney Island delights, the immigrant and his traditions loomed large. The established values of the family and society, Progressivists believed, had to be saved not only from the consequences of rapid industrialization but particularly from the influence of the waves of foreigners perceived as drinkers and womanizers lacking in protestant restraint, men bred "in traditions where work went according to the task or the season — not the regulation of the assembly line or clock."⁷⁸

The temporal theme, predictably, made its conceptual appearance on the screen in the more traditional tableau format, in

images of violence and nightmarish mental states rendered as comic subject matter. Biograph's MR. HURRY UP (1907) manages to work a visit to a dentist and a bar into his tight schedule. After dressing for work at high speed, a clock in the frame, and wolfing down his breakfast, he arrives at an office with a "Busy Day" sign on the wall. The strain of his daily pace is sublimated in a comedy of alcoholic hallucination. In Bitzer's THE TIRED TAILOR'S DREAM (1907), released by Biograph earlier that year, a nightmare of fatigue is dressed up as a humorous turn. Into the shop of Herman Stitch, the tailor, enters "Howling Hector from the sun-seared steppes of the Pampas Plains."⁷⁹ Gun in hand, Hector orders his unfinished suit completed within the hour. The hands of the clock show 4 o'clock. Herman sinks into a paralytic stupor but is rescued by Chalk, Square, Shears, Clothes Brush and Machine which in a cleverly animated sequence get the job done. Hector returns at the appointed time and points his gun at the clock whose hands have now moved to show the passing of precisely one hour.

Two related and highly suggestive phenomena begin to appear in the story films of the period: clocks with hands that move — the ones in THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY did not; and pursuits in which the spatial drama of the chase has been subordinated to a temporal tension. One might, of course, argue that moving clock hands were simply another feature of the growing realism of motion picture decor. But that is to ignore a much more complex pattern. Moreover,

it was not the case that all the clocks seen seemed to be real. In Cecil Hepworth's *THE FRAUDELENT SOLICITOR* (1907), a white-collar crime story with interior-exterior movement and a stop-motion effect to show yet another bobby plummeting from a rooftop, there is an office clock whose hands are stationary in all of the sequences in which it is in view. In Hepworth's *FATHER'S LESSON* (1908) a kitchen clock shows different times in two successive scenes. Biograph's *THE ENERGIZER* (1907) has a clock showing 9:15 in one scene and 10:15 in another. In Pathé's *TRICKING HIS WIFE* (1907) a woman sets an alarm clock to time her husband's hours away from home; this clock comedy then pendulums back and forth between home and bar scenes, resulting in a subject with the sort of fragmented photographic action Edison executives disliked.

A 1907 Eclipse film, *CHIENS POLICIERS*, opens with a shot of some policemen and their dogs. It first cuts to a street-mugging, then back to the cops who occupy the same aural space and have heard the sounds of the struggle. The film at this point cuts back once more to the mugging, the element of temporal urgency communicated by shot dependence linking actions in contiguous spaces. In Biograph's *THE ELOPEMENT* (1907), the automobile of the runaway lovers, pursued by the girl's parents in another car, develops motor trouble. This follows a two-shot sequence in which both vehicles appear in the frame of each shot. From the stalled automobile the girl looks back in the direction from which they have

come suggesting not only a documentary universe beyond the frame edge but the pressure of time. On foot, the couple head toward the river to continue their flight in a motor boat. The film then cuts back to the spot where their car broke down before returning the on-screen action to the boat which has now developed its own kind of motor trouble. The cut-in that follows, of the parents arriving at the scene of the lovers' abandoned vehicle, not only orients the story in space but also establishes a crude form of suspense. There was a similar ploy in Hepworth's *CATCHING A BURGLAR* (1908). The felons' automobile breaks down after a five-shot chase and one of the pair looks back, the gesture temporally focusing the action in a way the routine chase subjects did not.

Some of the earliest examples of deliberate crosscutting appeared in the films of the Pathé company in which they were used for comic rather than melodramatic effects. In *I FETCH THE BREAD* (1905), the head of the household leaves the dinner table to buy a loaf but gets waylaid at a number of wine bars. The action cuts back and forth between the fellow's exterior peregrinations and his increasingly irritated and anxious dinner guests. When one of them volunteers to go out and find him, we get triple scene cutting between him and his bar antics, the original bread buyer and the hungry guests. The two finally meet at a sidewalk cafe and drunkenly struggle back to the original location. In *THE RUNAWAY HORSE* (1907) repeated cutting between the clock-device of a diminishing bag of oats and the rounds of

a delivery man in the interior of a Paris apartment building marks the passing of time. Presumably the meal supplied the delinquent animal with the energy for the wild chase, some of it edited into the story in reverse, that comprised the film's main interest.

One of the first American films containing cross-cutting for suspense was Vitagraph's 100 TO 1 SHOT (1906). Here a son arrives in the nick of time to save his penniless parents from eviction. On the way to the rescue in his car from a gambling victory the film intercuts a shot of the desperate elderly couple. Vitagraph's THE MILL GIRL (1907), a tale of sexual harassment that culminates in a rescue from a burning factory, contains a nine-shot cross-cut rescue action between different spaces in the same time frame, matching interior-to-exterior cuts on action and centred directional cuts for continuity that extended the visual logic of its actuality composition in original ways. It was based on a larger number of shots, thirty-one, that was usual in the period, many containing incomplete dependent actions which relied for their meaning on the transfer of information between shots.

It was, however, not the use by Pathé and Vitagraph of back-and-forth cutting per se that constituted the novelty; the switchback technique was not "invented" in 1907 or 1906. The chase in Alfred Collins' THE RUNAWAY MATCH; or MARRIAGE BY MOTOR (1903) is shown in two sections; first the automobile of the girl's parents, from the point of view of the couple's

car, then the escaping lovers, seen from the point of view of the pursuing vehicle. More to the point, the parallel editing method represented the temporal overlap, the cut-in and elliptical compression integrated in a new motion picture concept, one that articulated the anxiety of factory time in an autonomous screen form that satisfied Progressivist demands.

The concept had made a premature appearance in two related 1897 Edison studio fake accident reproductions, AMBULANCE CALL and AMBULANCE AT THE RESCUE, described in the catalogue as follows:

Ambulance Call

Stable door opens and ambulance dashes out into the street. Policeman holds back furniture van till ambulance passes by.

Ambulance at the Accident

The Victim is lying on a trolley car fender. Ambulance drives up and the injured man is removed in a stretcher.⁸⁰

In AMBULANCE CALL, the horse-drawn vehicle leaves its barn and moves briefly out of the frame to the right, the arced motion bringing it back into view. It then heads left toward the camera, passing close to it, before leaving the frame out of the bottom left-hand corner. In AMBULANCE AT THE ACCIDENT the accident victim is sprawled across the tram cow-catcher, there is a policeman present and a crowd of bystanders in the background as the horse-drawn ambulance pulls into the frame from the right, an effective matching cut for continuity.

Screened in sequence those two pieces of footage consti-

tuted a fascinating work-in-progress. On the one hand, we see a filmmaker learning how to re-enact the impression of a cameraman's presence at a scene in terms of a defined set of formal features. On the other hand, the films appear to contain an overlapping action linking two distinct and distant locations, which is to say, a preview of the use of parallel cutting to dramatize a rescue.⁸¹ For good or ill, the social and industrial conditions of 1897 did not encourage the formal development of such a mode of temporal screen action.

Time had, of course, always been necessarily present in the motion picture experience. From the beginning there were the measured spans of Muybridge's horses in gallop and Lumière's spinning train wheels, both functioning as clock-like devices visually ordering the perception of duration.⁸² What began to emerge in 1907 was the re-constitution of spatially organized block-action chases into fragmented cross-cut rescues with the result that dramatic Time increasingly occupied a key position in the film narrative. The very structure of the rescue-action film deliberately exaggerated the element of temporal necessity while converting it into a hidden subject, a subject that contributed to the displacement of the arbitrary spatial shifts and loose temporal framework of the chases, tours and tableau narratives of the 1903-1906 period. Moreover, rescue structure served as a form of industrial didacticism for the seasonally-

oriented immigrant laborer unfamiliar with the time codes of factory practice based on production schedules and delivery dates.

That principle of industrial organization merged with the sentimental dramaturgy of the maid-in-peril in a screen image warning of the violent consequence of disobeying the clock. It was a message articulated in the camera-amplified close-ups, gestures and lighting effects of an erotic tease.⁸³ The recipe, deliberate if unconscious, was necessarily subject to the formal constraints of actuality compositional features stylized in topical tableaux, now re-constituted to communicate back-and-forth race-against-the-clock action. The industrial conditions of the nickelodeon era both assured and required the viability of a film constructed out of larger number of shorter dependent shot lengths and based on the transfer of information between them. Parallel cutting in turn extended the desired "lucid illusion of reality" into a vaster, deeper psychological territory.

5.5 The Damsel In Distress: Don't Be Late

Between 1908-1913 the anxiety of industrial time was a recurrent if concealed theme in D.W. Griffith's Progressivist-influenced Biograph work; not for nothing were his one-reelers called "last-minute rescues." In March 1908, four months before Griffith directed his first Biograph film, the company released a 969-foot subject called OLD ISAACS, THE PAWNBROKER, based on a scenario he had written. The studio claimed it was intended to dissipate "the malignant calumnies launched at the Hebrew race."⁸⁴ But one may detect another, secret motive in the script. A sick woman, threatened with dispossession, sends her little girl on a hopeless errand for aid to The Amalgamated Association of Charities. When the child next attempts to pawn a pair of shoes, the shop assistant, finding no value in the objects, sends her away. She returns with her more precious "dollie" this time to confront Old Isaacs himself who listens sympathetically to her tale and goes to the rescue with medicine, money and a large ham. What mostly concerns us here is the cut, during the girl's visit to the charity agency, back to her sick mother at home in bed, an edit that intensifies and focuses story emotion on the pressure of Time. Curiously, there was no special reference to it in the Bulletin which only seemed anxious to persuade exhibitors and filmgoers that the "lachrymal nature" of the picture was balanced by some "good, clean" pawnshop comedy.

Griffith's first last-minute Biograph rescue, *THE GREASER'S GAUNTLET*, was released on August 11, 1908. With its Western railroad construction site setting it replayed the studio's *SKYSCRAPER* (1906) plot with a twist. Mildred West, a New York girl, arrives at the last minute to save Jose, a falsely accused Mexican — the "greaser" of the title — from a lynching. As in *SKYSCRAPER* the real villain turns out to be another ethnic, a Chinese hotel employee. But instead of the sort of courtroom tableau rescue that wound up the *SKYSCRAPER* story, in *GAUNTLET* Griffith chopped the scene into parts and covered the mechanics of its anti-climactic suspense in religious sentiment.⁸⁵

Released a week later, Griffith's second nick-of-time drama, *THE FATAL HOUR*, both in title and story device, made the threat of the clock obvious. Here the dramatic highpoint was a race to rescue a female detective tied to a post, "a large pistol (arranged) on the face of a clock in such a way that when the hands point to twelve the gun is fired." Left in that precarious position at 11:40 it is clear that only coincidence could and would deliver salvation. For the sake of a sort of dramatic compression Griffith had the hands of the clock move visibly and rapidly. Repeating the description of the young woman's predicament, the *Bulletin* this time went out of its way to explain:

This incident is shown in alternate scenes. There is the helpless girl with the clock ticking its way to her destruction, and out on the road is the carriage, tearing along at breakneck speed to her

rescue, arriving just in time to get her safely out of range of the pistol as it goes off.

The villain here is Pong Lee, "a Mephistophelian saffron-skinned varlet" operating in "the female white-slave traffic."⁸⁶

Griffith's AT THE ALTAR (1909) features another clock-gun device, this one planted in the church by a jealous suitor. The device is carefully explained in an awkward pantomime soliloquy scene that includes a close-up. The rescue sequence cuts between the wedding ceremony and the cops racing on foot to the church. In LONELY VILLA (1909) the "clock" is a barricaded sitting room door; in HER TERRIBLE ORDEAL (1910) it is an airless company safe; in THE MISER'S HEART (1911), a burning rope from which a baby is suspended; in THE BATTLE AT ELDERBUSH GULCH (1913), the cabin door holding back a band of crazed Indian savages foiled at the last minute by the U.S. cavalry.

Before Griffith's last-minute rescues there were, as Eisenstein pointed out, the sensational salvations of the American melodramatic stage.⁸⁷ Nick of time rescues mounted by means of elaborate stage machinery constituted a major late nineteenth-century stage trend. Numerous heroes and heroines were saved on that melodramatic stage in the nick of time from speeding trains, burning steamboats and buzzsaws.⁸⁸ Without the motion picture's scene-switching facility those stage events took the form of big, spectacular "sensation scenes." In Augustin Daly's UNDER THE GASLIGHT, a train

is roaring toward the helpless body of Snorkey, the hero, tied to the track. Laura, the heroine, has been locked in a tool shack close-by, i.e. in the same tableau frame and, perhaps more importantly, within earshot so that she can converse with the powerless figure on the rails.

SNORKEY. Can't you burst the door?

LAURA. It is locked fast.

SNORKEY. Is there nothing in there? no hammer? no crowbar?

LAURA. Nothing. (Faint steam whistle heard in the distance.) Oh, Heavens! The Train! (Parlysed for an instant.) The axe!!!

SNORKEY. Cut the woodwork! Don't mind the lock, cut around it. How my neck tingles! (A blow at door is heard.) Courage! (Another.) Courage! (The steam whistle heard again - nearer, and rumble of train on track - another blow.) That's a true woman. Courage! (Noise of locomotive heard, with whistle. A last blow - the door swings open, mutilated, the lock hanging - and LAURA appears, axe in hand.)

SNORKEY. Here - quick! (She runs and unfastens him. The locomotive lights glare on scene.) Victory! Saved! Hooray! (LAURA leans exhausted against switch.) And these are the women who ain't to have a vote! (As LAURA takes his head from the track, the train of cars rushes past with roar and whistle.)⁸⁹

The necessarily contiguous relation of rescuer and rescued clearly provided no need, nor opportunity, to go to work, i.e. to travel across a space within a time limit, as Griffith's protagonists had to do. The urgency of Snorkey's circumstance, however, was carefully heightened by verbal parallelism: moments earlier Laura informed him that a gang of robbers and killers were on their way to his cottage. Lacking those verbal means, the cinema found an alternate method, one which most writers, echoing Vardac, gave all the advantage.

Booth, for example, concluded that the cinema had a definite edge in managing rapid scene changes, especially sensational rescue scene drama:

. . . the ponderously elaborate realism of the sensation drama of the 1880's and 1890's cried out for cinematic techniques.⁹⁰

It was a cry that Thomas Edison chose to ignore. In 1898, the Edison company acted as plaintiff in two separate injunctions to prevent Augustin Daly from entering the film business. Both were discontinued. Daly, apparently, knew enough to know when to leave the heroism to other players.⁹¹

5.5.1 Switchback at the Edison Studio

In Porter's pre-1907 films there were examples, characterized by ambiguous temporality, of cutting back to the same scene, in THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, THE TRAIN WRECKERS and CAPTURE OF THE "YEGG" BANK BURGLARS. Porter's first film with a great deal of such cutting action shows him reading the trend partially and imperfectly. The main point of interest in the vapid HOW THE OFFICE BOY SAW THE BALL GAME (1906) is the impression of a continuous event conveyed by the clock-like device of a ballpark scoreboard marking the successive innings. Otherwise, most of the film's twenty-three tableau shots, including inter-titles, appear in an interchangeable sequence.

Porter's more obvious version of the tyranny of workplace punctuality, *THE SUBURBANITE'S INGENIOUS ALARM*, was completed on December 24, 1907, about a year, that is, after the Biograph subjects that appear to have inspired it. The twelve-shot print opened with an image of its beleaguered hero, Mr. Early, arriving at the office late one morning to face the displeasure of his boss, officious finger indicating the clock. The main film action consists of scenes cross-cut between the fellow's bedroom and the exterior of the building to show his frustrated attempt at having a pal wake him up on time by tugging from the street below at a rope attached to his bed. A well-dressed drunk spoils the plan by tying the rope to a passing milkwagon. Mr. Early, in what for Porter was probably the film's main selling point, is thus punished for his habitual tardiness by being yanked from his room and dragged all over town. When he finally does arrive at the office, a battered wreck, there is a cleaning woman to greet him pointing at the clock to show that this time he has gotten there too early.

LOST IN THE ALPS (1907) stars two enormous St. Bernard dogs who come to the rescue of a sister and younger brother trapped in a New Jersey snowfall that is supposed to pass for an Alpine blizzard. Provided with the opportunity to create switchback suspense, Porter here tended instead to rely on his photographic skills and inclination to tableau action scenes. But perhaps that was the way the studio wanted it. The film's twenty-four shots offered the scope to attempt

the effect. But almost half those shots, eleven of them, are devoted to the dogs romping through the snow in apparent pursuit. After it has been established that the children are trapped in the snow, the film cuts back to the mother working in her cabin kitchen. She looks up at a prominently featured clock showing 6:04, paces, looks out a boarded window, looks up at the clock again, paces, rocks in a chair, puts on a cloak and goes out. The interior shot of this sequence shows her opening the cabin door and then the door closing behind her. The next shot shows an exterior view, with the door opening a second time. Following a horizon scanning gesture she briefly leaves the frame before re-appearing and re-entering the cabin, leaving the set empty a second time to permit the return of her husband struggling back home from the storm. It was the way such a scene would have been done on the stage, but no longer needed to be on the screen. The eleven-shot sequence of the big dogs searching the snowy terrain includes some panning camera work and a tilt action. It is a pleasant documentary view, if an absolutely undramatic one. There is no cutting between the children and the dogs, nor between the children and a worried mother. In the next-to-last shot the film finally cuts back to the cabin; the children have been found and the mother is at the window, with the arms of the clock still showing 6:04. It is a film manifesting all the essential technical features of switchback suspense, except the concept.

Completed nine months later, *RESCUED FROM AN EAGLE'S NEST* (1908), in fact shows Porter very capable in the use of the overlapping cut-in technique that is the basis of switchback suspense. In an early shot we see the baby seized by the fake eagle outside the cabin door. Porter then cuts from the next shot, of the bird carrying the child through the air, back to the anxious mother on the ground, careful to arrange the editing movement between contiguous spaces.⁹²

But as a film he completed the previous year demonstrated, it was not a constraint that excluded the potential for the suspense of temporal anxiety. Released in November 1907, *THE TRAINER'S DAUGHTER*; or *A RACE FOR LOVE* contains a reasonably successful attempt at parallel cutting. Here a jockey slated to ride to win a wager, overhears the discussion of a plot to drug his animal and is blackjacked by the plotters. In the moment before he staggers, head bandaged, into the owners' area of the stable, a member of the party checks his watch. Now only the trainer's daughter can save the day. As she climbs the stairs to dress, the film briefly cuts to the track tower and the bugler announcing the start of the race, and then immediately back to the stable area. The watch is checked again repeating the clock-image provided by the bugler, and a hand is cocked to an ear, a gesture that conveys the temporal simultaneity of the overlapping action in the two shots. Thus, was an apparently retrograde practice, the temporally overlapping cut-in, transformed into cinema-

tic parallel montage.

When the following year Porter attempted a bolder switchback, one requiring him to forsake the apparent narrative safety of contiguous spaces, his effort met with critical disapproval. In June 1908, another anonymous Mirror reviewer praised Porter's THE BLUE AND THE GREY for its "consistent dramatic force, moving heart interest and clearly told story." Completed on June 4, 1908, the film represented an elaborate Civil War reconstruction that in many ways looked forward, if not to Griffith's BIRTH OF A NATION, then certainly to his Biograph last-minute rescues. Well-pleased with the performances, costumes and staging, the writer objected to Porter's insertion of a form of parallel action:

... when the young officer has been stood up to be shot and the command of 'fire' is about to be given, the scene is shifted to Washington where the girl pleads with President Lincoln. The spectator is thus asked to imagine the firing squad suspending the fatal discharge while the girl rides from Washington to the Union camp. It would have been better if the Washington scene had been inserted somewhat earlier.⁹³

Whether the Mirror man took exception to the parallel cut because it was ineptly managed or was simply put off by the novelty editing is not clear. It can be said with more certainty that it represented the emergence of a cinema that would offer little scope to Porter, the documentary-cinematographer and special effects technician.

5.5.2 Conclusion

To sum up, the record shows that the Edison company's clearest response to the success of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY was to look to the longer 1904 Biograph and Lubin productions for the ideas for their own longer films. It was a pattern too obvious not to have been deliberate. Porter's role in the decisions that produced it remains unclear. It is reasonable to conclude that throughout his career at the studio Porter was in the position of implementing the broader production policies outlined by others, that the origin of those policies emerged out of discussions between Gilmore and Dyer and other Edison attorneys, and that those discussions were limited, for the most part, to considerations of hardware protection not software innovation. The company's response to the Biograph suit over HOW A FRENCH NOBLEMAN marked a decisive point in Edison motion picture fortunes. The arguments Edison executives and lawyers marshalled in the company's defense proved self-hypnotic and led to a major modification of their film copyright procedure. The net effect of that change was to further entrench the tableau narrative in their production scheme. As a result the studio was ill-equipped to successfully confront the new set of industrial conditions that began to take shape in 1907 as a consequence of the nickelodeon expansion. In that year George Kleine, working with the major manufacturers, was laying the groundwork for a hardware trust, the MPPC, based on the pooling of patent claims. It was,

as events proved, a mistaken move. With the arrival of the longer film in 1903, the orientation of the American industry had shifted from hardware to software competition. Thus, unprepared to hold their own in the software contest and determined to persist in their efforts to control the industry through patent and copyright litigation from a position that only appeared to be strengthened by the formation of the MPPC, the Edison company could not and did not last. Whether or not the Wizard realized it at the time, Porter's departure in 1909 meant that he had lost yet another industry he claimed to have invented. After 1918, when the studio closed its doors for good, Edison left his pathetic claims to historians like Ramsaye and others.⁹⁴

While it may be a little tempting to try to imagine what Porter's career might have been like at another studio, say at Biograph or Vitagraph, or in the employ of Sigmund Lubin, it is difficult to be persuaded that it would have been very different. It may be concluded with greater certainty that the Edison studio was probably the last place in the world from which to expect innovation at any level, let alone the sort of revolution in film practice historians have claimed for Porter's work there in 1903. Initially, those claims had more to do with bolstering the reputation and fame of Edison and his hired hands than with the complex realities of the early film industry. During the last years of Porter's tenure at Edison the company's patent-obsessed production policy was severely at odds with the trend to fragmenting

actuality-style tableau action into the smaller manipulatable pieces of an optical timepiece. There is little evidence it was a trend that Porter really understood or that once free of the Edison routine he succeeded in turning out more enlightened or imaginative representations of screen art.⁹⁵

It seems reasonable to conclude that it was not the elaboration of procedures for converting shot fragments into story structure per se that abruptly brought about the motion picture narrative, certainly not any less reasonable than it would be to insist that a particular narrative mode, one constructed out of such shot fragments, was always somehow immanent in the medium's apparently facile and perhaps paradoxical capacity to project motionless individual photographic frames, frames that need to be stopped for a split second in the projector to be seen at all, into images of continuous action. This is only to say that there are a variety of ways of using the motion picture camera and the screen to tell stories, none more legitimate or authentic, more cinematic than the others. For one thing, as we have seen, the notion of the cinematic, as it has come to be understood, owes more of its identity to a style of composition derived from the filmed actuality than it does to a constructivist method. For another, the genuine commercial success enjoyed by the sort of tableau narrative Porter specialized in testifies to a certain viability, however primitive one may choose to regard it.

The tableau narrative, with its well-defined spatial dramatics and vague temporality, was not one man's backward, dead-end creation. Originating in an older tradition of scenography, it constituted a form imposed by a condition of industrial practice. That practice was built on a scheme of tableau copyright protection tied to an inflexible method of film distribution. Its rejected story syntax certainly did not possess any less narrative logic than the editing codes that displaced it. Moreover, that tableau narrative in actuality style established the fundamental compositional rhetoric to which all future technical and stylistic developments in film narrative from 3-D to verité may be traced.

Between 1903 and 1907, the inscription of those compositional features signifying authentic cameraman presence were absorbed into acknowledged technical re-creations, which is to say into a director's art. The always important role of the motion picture publicist in drawing attention to the conscious and deliberate qualities of the production process, as the studio wished them to be understood, now shifted a third time; from the initial 1896 emphasis on the moving image as a form of scientific magic, to the Spanish-American War screen experience as the news record from an authentic scene, to THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY's "faithful" reproduction of the labour of that recording presence. Logically, the problem of motivating camera movement between physical scenes receded at more or less the same time as did the concern with copyright protection based on the unities of documentary

production. What followed was the de-substantiation of the cameraman and his effective conversion into a sort of trick-film phantom presence hovering, at the bidding of a master illusionist-director, between the scenes of a drama played out in distant spaces.

A fundamentally decent man, Edwin Porter could not have been very happy in his employ at the Edison studio. And yet, working there within an entertainment style he knew, with the limited means at his disposal, he managed to produce, in THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, an enduring motion picture classic, all the more remarkable for its having been constructed out of the junk elements of an abandoned film form.

NOTES: CHAPTER 5

- ¹ Cited by Robert Henderson in D.W. Griffith: The Years at Biograph, London: Secker and Warburg, 1971, p. 158.
 - ² Blaisdell in The Moving Picture World, 1912.
 - ³ From conversations about Edwin Porter with J. Porter Reilly.
 - ⁴ Eric Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, (trans. from the German by Willard Trask), Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1957, pp. 83-107.
 - ⁵ The Motion Picture Patents Company was known as the Edison Trust and still is. In a June 14, 1907 letter to Edison official William Pelzer, George Kleine referred to "plans that have been contemplated." In a letter of May 5, 1907 addressed to W.E. Gilmore, Kleine informed him of Vitagraph's willingness to join the scheme "along the lines which you indicated." At this point Pathé and Vitagraph seemed eager, Selig had "indicated his willingness to join" and Méliès would "probably come in." The Biograph company was "not considered in the matter."
- On July 29, 1907, Kleine wrote to Pelzer about a newly formed company, Goodfellow Film Manufacturing Company, based in Detroit. He enclosed a copy of a trade announcement in which the concern claimed branches in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Montreal, Havana, London, Paris and Hong Kong.
- "These little film plants," Kleine wrote, "seem to be starting right and left, and the sooner we carry out our original plan

the better for all of us."

Trade difficulties the Edison company was experiencing in the summer of 1907 only partially explain their keenness to get the Trust established. And yet that keenness did not deter the Edison company from its goal of controlling the industry in the courts. On June 18, 1907 Pelzer wrote to Kleine re-affirming the company's determination to pursue a patent infringement case against one of its potential Trust partners, Vitagraph. "There is," Pelzer stated, "no assurance that all the manufacturers will come to terms, and our action is one that necessarily must be taken in order to protect our interests."

Part of the explanation for Pelzer's attitude can be found in a February 22, 1908 response published in The Moving Picture World by Biograph Vice-President H.N. Marvin to the announcement the previous week of the formation of what he called "the combine." In the spring of 1907, Edison had won a major patent victory. The courts upheld his camera patent claims against all the manufacturers with the exception of Biograph. His company initially refused, Marvin said, to join the Trust because it involved "paying a royalty to Edison." The others would have had little choice in the matter.

⁶ Lawrence F. Karr, "Introduction," Index to Volume I, of The Moving Picture World and View Photographer by Rita Horowitz, The American Film Institute, 1974. See also Eileen Bowser, "Production Patterns of the Biograph Company: 1907-1916," xerox, The Museum of Modern Art, 1981.

⁷ Cited by Slide, Early American Cinema, p. 21.

⁸ From The New York Dramatic Mirror, November 14, 1908, reprinted in Stanley Kauffmann (ed.), American Film Criticism, New York: Liveright, 1972, pp. 13-18.

⁹ "Silent Play Actors." An unidentified press clipping, ENHS.

¹⁰ Edison Films, July 1906, p. 64. Eric Partridge's Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional Usage, p. 970, defined "Yeggman" as a "travelling burglar or safe-breaker," the term originating in the United States and adopted by "Cinema Fans" in England as a slang term starting in 1932.

¹¹ According to the July 1906 Edison catalogue, the White Caps, operating in Ohio, Indiana and other Western States, was an organization of "law-abiding citizens . . . which dealt summarily with outlaws and the criminal classes in general." It was their aim to "rid the community of undesirable citizens." (pp. 55-56).

¹² Edison Films, July 1906, pp. 35-36.

¹³ Edison Films, July 1906, pp. 67-68.

¹⁴ Zinn in A People's History of the United States described a "traffic in immigrant child laborers . . . either by contract with desperate parents in the home country or by kidnapping. The children were then supervised by 'padrones' in a form of slavery, sometimes sent out as beggar musicians. Drove of them roamed the streets of New York and Philadelphia." (p.260).

15 It may even have been the same film re-titled.

16 Apparently, this was a film to which PERSONAL director Wallace McCutcheon lent his skilled hand. See André Gaudreault, Analytic Filmography, 1900-1906. London: The British Film Institute, June 1982, p. 1027. McCutcheon also worked with Porter on THE WHITE CAPS, WINTER STRAW RIDE and DANIEL BOONE. His work for Biograph on THE BLACK HAND, copyrighted March 24, 1906, indicates that he was to some extent dividing his time between Edison and Biograph assignments. But perhaps more significantly for our purposes, this constitutes yet another piece of evidence in support of the argument that the Edison studio's appreciation of Porter's skills was limited, even after the commercial success of THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY.

17 Vardac, p. 200.

18 Edison Films, July 1906, p. 66.

19 Niver, Biograph Bulletins, p. 264.

20 Edison Films, July 1906, pp. 106-107. On page 113 the catalogue described monotinting as a special Edison tinting process superior to "the usual method" which amounted to "a cheap staining process" that did not protect the colours from the light of the projector.

21 Winsor McCay, Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1973. The eight-panel strip on p. 13 seems the source of segments of the Porter subject.

22 Walls, p. 18.

23 Ramsaye, p. 421.

24 Edison Films, July 1906, p. 55. The problem was not in any way unique to Edison subjects. The Biograph Bulletin described the sequence of THE PAYMASTER (1906) as follows: The Birthday Fete; In the Mill, showing the girl at work at the looms, an actual scene; The Conspiracy; The Robbing of the Payroll; Riot of the Mill-Hands; The Burial of the Money by Moonlight (tinted); The Dog Detective and the Recovery of the Money; The Denouement and the Daring Rescue at the Mill-Pond. See Biograph Bulletins, . 249.

The surviving print, restored by Niver, contains nine demarked scenes, but in an altered sequence. It opens with a close-up of money being counted and placed in pay envelopes, followed by these titled scenes: The Mill Girl and the Superintendent; The Birthday Fete; How the Superintendent Got An Accomplice; The Theft of the Payroll; Burial of the Money; Moonlight on the River; The Dog Detective; Recovery of the Money; and Villany Unmasked.

25 Circular, Edison Films, October 1905.

26 It is unclear how the scene divisions were determined or who determined them — Porter, the Manager of the Kinetograph Department, or someone else.

27 Cited by Pratt, Spellbound in Darkness, p. 36.

28 "Manufacturers and Dealers in Moving Picture Machines and Films," The New York Clipper, February 24, 1906, p. 2.

29 Joseph Patterson, "The Nickelodeons," The Saturday Evening Post, November 23, 1907. Reprinted in Roger Butterfield and the editors of The Saturday Evening Post (eds.), The Saturday Evening Post Treasury, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954, pp. 82-86.

30 Ramsaye, pp. 426-27.

31 Advertisements, The New York Clipper, August 18, 1906, p. 696.

32 Advertisement, The New York Clipper, March 24, 1906, p. 134.

33 Advertisement, The New York Dramatic Mirror, November 28, 1903, p. 22; Advertisement, The New York Clipper, March 17, 1906, p. 110; Advertisement, The New York Clipper, March 3, 1906, p. 45.

34 Advertisement, The New York Clipper, April 14, 1906, p. 230.

35 Advertisement, The New York Clipper, March 17, 1906, p. 90; Advertisement, The New York Clipper, April 14, 1906, p. 230.

36 Advertisement, The New York Clipper, April 7, 1906, p. 199; Advertisement, The New York Clipper, March 3, 1906, p. 46; Advertisement, The New York Clipper, March 17, 1906, p. 119.

37 Advertisement, The New York Clipper, December 22, 1906, p. 1175.

³⁸ See Ramsaye, Hampton and Mayer. Both Ramsaye and Mayer associated the rise of the nickelodeon with Porter's THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY. More complete accounts are to be found in Russell Merritt's "Nickelodeon Theatres: Building an Audience for the Movies," American Film Institute Report, May 1973, pp. 4-8; Garth Jowett's "The First Motion Picture Audiences," Journal of Popular Film, III, No. 1 (1974) pp.39-54; and Robert Allen's "Motion Picture Exhibition in Manhattan 1906-1912: Beyond the Nickelodeon," Cinema Journal, XVIII, No. 2 (Spring 1979), pp. 2-15.

³⁹ See Eugene Lemoyne Connelly, "The First Picture Theatre," The Film Daily, 1919, p. 77; Patterson, p. 82; Wendicks, The Edison Motion Picture Myth, p. 40.

⁴⁰ The New York Dramatic Mirror, August 19, 1905, p. 16.

⁴¹ The New York Dramatic Mirror, March 17, 1906, p. 17.

⁴² The New York Dramatic Mirror, March 24, 1906, p. 16.

⁴³ The New York Dramatic Mirror, September 8, 1906, p. 54.

⁴⁴ "McCoy Report," ENHS. Untitled and undated though from internal evidence it could not have been written before 1914.

⁴⁵ Slide, Early American Cinema, pp. 47-48, 65; Patterson, p. 83.

⁴⁶ "Moving Pictures Now A Commercial Factor." An unidentified press clipping, ENHS.

⁴⁷ Patterson, p. 84.

48 See Allen, "Film and Vaudeville," chapter 5.

49 Thomas Gunning, "Notes Toward an Understanding of Griffith's Biograph Films." A paper presented to the American Seminar in Film, February 1977. Unpublished. Gunning outlined a project for placing Griffith's Biograph achievement in the context of shifting film industry trends marked by the increasingly strong intervention of the Progressivists and the formation of the MPPC.

50 Edison Films, July 1906, p. 68.

51 Edison Films, July 1906, pp. 98-99. In the print preserved by George Eastman House, the concluding nick of time rescue sequence is missing. The catalogue described it as follows:

The final scene shows the greaser creeping through the underbush, and followed by the Indian girl who knocked the glass out of the greaser's hand in the opening scene. The two lovers are resting in a secluded spot. The greaser creeps closer and closer, raises his revolver, takes a steady aim and is just about to press the trigger when a bullet from the Indian girl's pistol drops him in his tracks. The Indian girl now approaches the two lovers and shows her gratitude to our cowboy here for his kindness to her and her old father.

52 The New York Dramatic Mirror, October 21, 1905, p. 18.

53 The New York Dramatic Mirror, March 10, 1906, p. 18.

54 Advertisement, The New York Clipper, August 18, 1906, p. 684.

55 The New York Dramatic Mirror, October 13, 1906, p. 20.

56 Edison Films, July 1906, p. 55.

57 Edison Films, July 1906, pp. 58-59.

58 Edison Films, July 1906, p. 35.

59 Charles Musser, "Program Notes: Tribute to Edwin S. Porter," The Museum of Modern Art, December 1978. A discussion of this issue is contained in an unpublished paper by Eileen Bowser, "Toward Narrative: 1907 - The Mill Girl," an extremely interesting analysis of the 1907 Vitagraph subject.

60 Edison Films, September 1907. The solution of nickel-odeon managers was to treat these subjects as raw show material, a practice facilitated by their mutable structure. On occasion they would have the chases projected at speeded-up rates and show horse races, fire engines and fast-moving automobiles at slower speeds. If audience excitement flagged, some operators reached for a pair of shears to add excitement by lopping off a length of the dull stuff; others provided a range of sound effects including the firing of blanks from real pistols. See Pratt, Spellbound in Darkness, p. 45, citing a Moving Picture World article dated July 13, 1907. For their part, audiences probably found their own compensations in the colored impressions achieved by tinting which produced, particularly in the Pathé subjects, brilliant effects, and also perhaps in their participation in the mass psychology of a social craze.

61 Vaclav Tille, "Le Cinema," Les Dossiers de la Cinémathèque, no. 4, published by La Cinémathèque québécoise, 1979.

A translation of material that originally appeared in Czech in three parts in the journal Novina in November 1908.

⁶² In 1906 Views and Film Index, the industry's first trade paper began publication. Variety, which hit the stands in 1905, started reviewing films a year later. The established amusement publications, Billboard and The New York Dramatic Mirror, joined Variety in accepting ads from the studios in return for brief film reviews, initially in the form of simple plot synopses. The Moving Picture World and Moving Picture News followed in 1907 with reports on equipment, industry competition and legal skirmishes. By at least 1908 an early form of film criticism had emerged. It departed from skimpy plot summaries and began advocating a motion picture aesthetic in tune with other key industry trends. Generally focused on the relation of film to other media like theatre, and particularly, on the offerings of foreign film producers, that aesthetic contained its own disguised meanings. See Myron Lounsbury, "The Origins of American Film Criticism 1900-1939." Doctoral dissertation. University of Pennsylvania, 1966.

⁶³ Gunning, "Notes Toward An Understanding of Griffith's Biograph Films."

⁶⁴ See Merritt, "Nickelodeon Theatres."

⁶⁵ Rollin Summers, "The Moving Picture Drama and the Acted Drama," The Moving Picture World, September 19, 1908. Reprinted in Kauffmann, pp. 9-13.

⁶⁶ The Moving Picture World, February 22, 1908, p. 143.

⁶⁷ For recent studies that have provided some formal analysis of those conventions and their origins, see Thomas Gunning's "The Non-Continuous Style of Early Film (1900-1906)"; Charles Musser's "The Early Cinema of Edwin Porter"; and André Gaudreault's "Temporalité et Narrativité: Le Cinéma des Premiers Temps (1895-1908) in Etudes Littéraires, XIII, No. 1 (April 1980), Presses de l'Université Laval, Québec.

⁶⁸ Edison Films, July 1906, p. 36. Other films of the period employing the overlap technique included Méliès' LE VOYAGE A TRAVERS L'IMPOSSIBLE (1904) and LE MARIAGE DE VICTORINE (1907); Edison's HOW THEY DO THINGS ON THE BOWERY (1902); CASEY'S FRIGHTFUL DREAM (1904); THE BURGLAR'S SLIDE FOR LIFE (1905); THE WATERMELON PATCH (1905); Biograph's A DISCORDANT NOTE (1903); ~~THE~~ FIREBUG (1905); THE TUNNEL WORKERS (1906); HYPNOTIST'S REVENGE (1907); and THE TRUANTS (1907).

⁶⁹ According to Jay Leyda in his book Kino, the Potemkin incident was mostly an invention without much basis in actual history. Biograph, Pathé and Gaumont had produced earlier versions. It was Eisenstein's sense of visual drama that really counted. His use of the Odessa steps, which has the effect of both speeding up and delaying movement, combined with the overlaps, give the sequence its extraordinary impact in showing a piece of history that never happened. Contemporary TV audiences experience the overlap in the technique of the slow-motion instant sports replay.

⁷⁰ Kasson, Amusing the Million, p. 39. Taken from a government survey.

⁷¹ Gunning, "Notes Toward an Understanding of Griffith's Biograph Films."

⁷² Jowett, "The First Motion Picture Audiences."

⁷³ Patterson, p. 83.

⁷⁴ Allen, pp. 222-25.

⁷⁵ Geoffrey Barraclough, Introduction to Contemporary History, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1967, p. 99.

⁷⁶ Lord, p. 298. On the screens of the period the menace to families and children came from gypsies and Italians, and occasionally from carnivorous birds and snowstorms. In SKY-SCRAPER (1906), a spiteful construction worker, "Dago" Pete, provokes a foreman-boss dispute leading to a fight and a rescue high atop an actual New York City building under construction. In THE TUNNEL WORKERS (1906) workplace dissension is provoked by an affair between the Supervisor and the Foreman's wife. In their attempt to dissociate the tensions of the workplace from the relations of capital and labour, both films seemed to be making the claim that apart from skulking immigrants and errant wives social progress had little standing in its way.

⁷⁷ Niver, Biograph Bulletins, p. 249.

⁷⁸ May, p. 14.

⁷⁹ Niver, Biograph Bulletins, p. 303.

⁸⁰ Edison Films, July 1901, p. 79.

81 Biograph's 1897 train footage included both shots of the train heading out of the depth at the camera-viewer and the phantom rides, taken from a camera position on the train engine. Editing those images in sequence would have provided a comparable experience of ubiquitous presence in an overlapping time frame.

82 I owe this insight to Ken Jacobs.

83 See Dorothy Bernard in D.W. Griffith's THE GIRL AND HER TRUST.

84 Niver, Biograph Bulletins, p. 344.

85 Niver, Biograph Bulletins, p. 375.

86 Niver, Biograph Bulletins, p. 377.

87 See Sergei M. Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today" (1944) in Film Form, edited and translated by Jay Leyda. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949, pp. 195-255.

88 See Michael Booth, Hiss The Villain - Six English and American Melodramas, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964, "Introduction," pp. 9-39.

89 Booth, p. 335.

90 Booth, pp. 39-40.

91 Ramsaye, p. 382.

92 This was supposed to have been the first film in which Griffith appeared. In fact that honour belonged to an earlier subject, FALSELY ACCUSED, which the Biograph company released in December 1907. In what may strike one as a highly symbolic debut performance we see Griffith putting up a screen for the presentation of filmed evidence in a court case, another story the "biograph" told. The story was a topical one, about the theft of plans for a motion picture camera. Eileen Bowser has informed me that RESCUED FROM AN EAGLE'S NEST was directed by J. Searle Dawley not Edwin Porter. In his book, The Public Is Never Wrong, Adolph Zukor claimed that the fake bird, built by Porter Reilly's father William, almost strangled D.W. Griffith when he became entangled in its wires. But that may be only another apocryphal show business tale.

93 The New York Dramatic Mirror, June 20, 1908. Reprinted Kauffmann, pp. 6-7.

94 A letter written by historian and inventor Merritt Crawford disputing Edison's claim to the invention of the movies appeared in The New York Sun on June 23, 1930. Frank Dyer fired back a reply two days later. After a cursory review of patent victories and royalty payments, Dyer concluded with this:

It was my hope that when Mr. Ramsaye's painstaking and definite work on the subject was published, any uncertainty as to Mr. Edison's real position in the art world would no longer be entertained by the layman . . . Edison . . . was the creator of the modern motion picture art.

95 See Balshofer and Miller, One Reel a Week, especially Chapter 5, "Working for Edwin S. Porter," pp. 43-53.

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