TIME MATERIAL: TEMPORALITY, NARRATIVE, AND MODERNITY IN SILENT FILM AND AMERICAN NATURALISM

By

Katherine Fusco

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Approved:

Professor Cecelia Tichi

Professor Paul D. Young

Professor Drayton Nabers

Professor Gregg M. Horowitz

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: NARRATIVE, TIME, MODERNITY

In Pathé's 1912 Film, *Onesime, Clock-Maker*, a lazy young man learns that he stands to inherit a great deal of money twenty years in the future. Not satisfied to wait for his fortune, Onesime sneaks into the room in the clock factory where the "regulating clock" is located and speeds up the clock, causing the world of the film to enter "fast time." Unsurprisingly, Onesime's attempt to change the universe backfires and he finds himself hanging on for dear life in the rapidly paced world he has created. While this film is obviously comic in intent, Onesime's failed attempt to control his temporal experience registers widely discussed concerns about modernity's accelerated pace, as well as popular fears about the influence of modern technologies on daily life. Although the film subverts time's regulatory influence on the workday and cadence of urban life, it also suggests that in contrast to Onesime's catastrophic attempt to exert agency over the temporal, the cinema can control and regulate a variety of temporal experiences. Whereas Onesime finds the fast-paced time of the film terrifying, the film safely contains it, producing Onesime's nightmare of increased temporal velocity as an entertainment for its audiences. In addition to the claims the film makes about its historical moment, *Onesime* also exemplifies the medium's double-edged representational capacities. *Onesime* showcases both the cinema's capacity for verisimilar temporal representation and its ability to produce temporal experiences that are entirely new.

In contrast, the writer figure in Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901), Presley, occupies a significantly less powerful relationship to time than that to which Onesime aspires. In part, Presley's comparatively ineffectual attempts to manage temporality derive from the tension Norris creates between Presley's efforts to write a poem of historical import and the historical narrative within which Norris frames him. When he writes his epic poem "The Toilers," Presley finds it difficult to recount the experiences of the wheat farmers struggling against the massive S&P Railroad. Though he means to establish the historical significance of the conflict in the San Juan Valley, the public receives his poem as a trite and trivial thing; the newspaper prints the poem "in a Gothic type, with a scare-head title so decorative as to be almost illegible" (394). Presley's struggles to narrate a real historical event echo the central concern of the American naturalist novel at the turn of the century: how can literature—here represented by Presley's poem—represent the relationship of human events to historical time that does not operate in accordance with human agency. Whereas both Onesime the character and *Onesime* the film succeed in exerting influence on the temporal (though this ends up terrifying the clockmaker), Presley's poem represents both an artistic and mimetic failure; he fails to revive what Norris positions as an old form and bungles his attempt to capture the significance of an historical event. In contrast, Norris's naturalist narration of the incident, which encompasses Presley's feeble attempt, offers his readers a new understanding of human history as located within "a larger view"—in which men are mere "motes in the sunshine" in comparison to the passage of time which acts as a force upon human events (652, 651).

Onesime and *The Octopus* reflect the centrality of the relationship between time and human agency to multiple art forms at the turn of the century. This is also the relationship that forms this project's central concern. By examining naturalist novels and silent films from 1895 to 1915, my dissertation projects backwards out of these representational "solutions" to identify a formal and philosophical problem: time as force. I argue that the early cinema approached the problem of time as an opportunity to demonstrate its representational capabilities as a new medium. In contrast, I suggest that naturalist novels and early narrative films registered a pervasive belief in temporal determinism on the level of narration and, as a result, frequently envisioned the passage of time as a limit to authorial freedom. Using two forms that obsessively posed and answered questions about temporal representation as a lens, I argue that conceptions of time as a force pervaded technological, aesthetic, and cultural discourses in the United States at the turn of the century.

Time as a Problem

This project has been inspired in part by recent histories of time in America, including Thomas Allen's *A Republic in Time*, Michael O'Malley's *Keeping Watch, and* Mark Smith's *Mastered by the Clock*. These studies examine the connection between changes to timekeeping and the production of American national culture(s). Allen's claim that writers and timekeepers in the nineteenth century "produce[d] versions of temporality…in order to found particular accounts of American nationhood" certainly holds true for early-twentieth-century narratives as well (3). For example, two texts I explore in this project, D.W. Griffith's exclusive vision in *The Birth of a Nation* and

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian feminist vision in *Herland*, stand as very different instances of artists exploiting the changed temporality of modernity to either contract or expand the category of American citizenship. While Griffith drew upon film technology's ability to personalize history to produce a national history out of fictionalized tales of individual white Americans, in *Herland*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman invoked the logic of Taylorist efficiency to make visible women's domestic labor and insist upon their place as economic citizens. In both cases, written or visual attempts to organize time help the author/filmmaker make claims about who counts as a citizen in American modernity.

By focusing on time in modernity, my dissertation draws upon work from the fields of film, literary, and cultural studies, which share an account of modernity as a distinct period formed by heightened urbanization and industrialization at the turn of the century. In his study of film and history, Philip Rosen describes modern temporality as a "battle terrain" on which "the disordering force of time struggles with the need and desire to order or control time" (141). Rosen's account of time in modernity bears special resonance for a project on naturalism; like the naturalists, his study locates time in modernity as a force "out there," needing to be brought under control. In his historical analysis of time in the American South, Mark Smith puts the opposition between the force of time and the human struggle to manage temporality somewhat differently, arguing that clock time "gave permanence to life events that would otherwise be forgotten and crushed by the larger march of historical time" (51). Rosen's and Smith's accounts propose that in modernity people struggled against time, which they

experienced as a material entity that was simultaneously beyond their control and increasingly shaping the course of their lives.

Onesime's and Presley's concerns about their power over time exemplify the human experience in modernity that Rosen and Smith describe and which so concerned theorists at this historical moment. Philosophers like Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Georg Simmel traced the impact of changes in transportation, circulation, and communication on the human subject, particularly their impact on human sensory experience. Simmel links modernity, the regimentation of clock time, and capital, writing, "the technique of modern life is unimaginable without the most punctual integration of all activities and mutual relations into a stable and impersonal time schedule" (177). More recently, scholarship on the cinema of attractions has linked historical experiences of modernity to film aesthetics, leading to the most controversial theory in the field of early cinema studies: the modernity thesis. Accounts of the modernity thesis ascribe to it the following claims: it describes cinema as the artistic reflection of modernity, it suggests that film participated in the creation of the modern condition, and it argues that modernity necessitated the creation of the cinema (Singer, *Melodrama* 102-3).[1]

Whichever the case, as Ben Singer explains, "the key point is that the modern individual somehow internalized the tempos, shocks, and upheavals of the outside environment, and this generated a taste for hyperkinetic amusements" (119). While Singer never directly aligns himself with modernity theorists, his conclusions—like those

[1] It is worth noting that the modernity thesis was never produced as a concretized polemic. Instead, the modernity thesis is a name that David Bordwell uses in *On the History of Film Style* to describe the body of work produced by scholars interested in theorizing the relationship between cinema and modernity.

of the modernity theorists—depend upon accepting the experiences of turn-of-the-century thinkers as evidence for cinema's interconnection with modernity. Writing in 1903, Simmel describes his experience with modernity in terms of acceleration:

> Lasting impressions, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts—all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates. ("The Metropolis" 175)

Simmel's writings work to explain the perceptual experience of living in modernity; he concerns himself with the modern subject's attempt to grasp images that appear only fleetingly and to make meaning of any one instance amidst the "onrushing impressions." As Simmel indicates, occurrences in modernity are difficult to capture as they pass: they move too quickly through time. While Simmel and some modernity theorists focus on the modern subject's perception of time, my project addresses the issue of temporality in modernity by examining how modern subjects—novelists and filmmakers—represented time.

The other account of time central to this period—that of time as a progressive entity—connects modernity to the naturalist novel and suggests a different solution to the problematic of time than that offered by the early cinema and modernity theory. The "onrushing impressions" Simmel describes represent a perceptual problem because they are difficult for eye and mind to process, order, and make sense of. The scattered experience of modern time would seem to constitute a problem for producing histories, or for tying the momentary into a longer historical trajectory. Because moments in modernity are constantly shifting, their "meaning and differing values…are experienced as insubstantial" (Simmel 178). The difficulty with understanding the significance of the

momentary throws questions of historical causality into flux. However, in his discussion of Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis, Alan Trachtenberg describes the culture of modernity as one that gave rise to history as a discipline: "The nation needed, that is, a coherent, integrated story of its beginnings and its development. Connectedness, wholeness, unity: these narrative virtues, with their implied telos of closure, of a justifying meaning at the end of the tale, Turner would now embody in the language of historical interpretation" (13). But history and other narratives of progress presented yet another problem: that of understanding human agency in the present. Within narratives of progress, time begins to appear monolithic, its directionality sacrificing human agency to the goals of teleological closure.

It is this problematic relationship between human agency in the moment and teleological history that naturalist novels take up as their main subject. Naturalist novels' interest in determinism stems directly from their attempt to understand the modern subject's relation to historical context. This concern registers on the level of narration, where novelists maneuver between describing events as they happen and registering an awareness of the events' ultimate and inevitable outcomes. In "The Mechanics of Fiction," Norris describes his ideal for narration: "Now the action begins to increase in speed. The complication suddenly tightens…an episode far back there in the first chapter…is suddenly brought forward and coming suddenly to the front collides with the main line of development" (1163). Norris describes the novel's climax as the moment towards which everything else in the narrative rushes. His emphasis on the collision of narrative threads suggests that his style of plotting draws not on mere foreshadowing, but on narrative and temporal determinism.

In addition to exploring history's relationship to narrative, this dissertation interrogates the relationship of narrative to the organization of time more generally—an issue that has come under much scrutiny in the study of early cinema. These narrative questions address the very heart of what constitutes film as a media form. In the context of cinema studies, the distinctions between time qua time and narrative time have been particularly touchy. In contrast, the relationship between time and narrative in novels has been comparatively free from such controversy. As Paul Ricoeur writes, the "structural reciprocity of temporality and narrativity is usually overlooked because…the epistemology of history and the literary criticism of fictional narratives take for granted that every narrative takes place within an uncriticized framework, within a time that corresponds to the ordinary representation of time as a linear succession of instants" ("Narrative Time" 35). Perhaps this is because the novel's account of time is so obviously constructed by the human—and therefore, narrative—whereas the cinema gives the impression that it records time as is. The question of medium is especially important here. If we agree with Ricoeur that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode," then the cinematic image's status as the product of a machine technology becomes increasingly problematic (*Time and Narrative* 52). For example, when avant-garde filmmakers create films that work to be explicitly non-narrative, are they exploiting yet another possibility of the cinematic medium, or are they struggling against its very nature as a medium? The controversial nature of film's status as a narrative form rests upon our definition of the medium. For example, Gaudreault argues that film has been narrative since the invention of the "cine-camera" (73). On the other hand, critics from the so-called "modernity thesis" camp have worked persuasively to show that narrative cinema was not the inevitable goal towards which the earliest films

were working. While it is beyond the scope of this project to reconcile the two sides of this argument, I hope that my focus on the cinema as a medium that offered new temporal experiences may help pose new questions about the ontology of the cinema. In particular, if the cinema is both a *medium* of time's passage, and yet also always a *representation* of time, how does this dual function in relation to temporality affect our judgment of the cinema as an intrinsically narrative form? Furthermore, drawing upon the questions of medium raised by the early cinema, how does the novel's status *as a narrative medium* impact the choices available to the novelist for temporal representation and innovation?

Film History/Film Time

To frame the terms of this dissertation, I here offer a short reading of early cinema studies. Scholars of this period employ the term "early cinema" in several ways: to refer to the filmic apparatus (and in this way, the technology of movies in general), to a set of formal practices and characteristics (cinema of attractions), and—less frequently—to an institution. Parsing out the critical uses of the term reveals that "early cinema" occupies a sometimes confusing relationship to discussions of formal technique and medium, even as scholars use the term to make differentiations both between and within these two categories. The stakes of parsing out what we mean when we say "early cinema" are two-fold: 1) The kind of judgments and claims we make about the early cinema depend upon whether we take the early cinema to refer to the filmic medium or to the cinema of attractions; and 2) depending upon whether we are talking about medium or style when we talk about the early cinema, we may mean that either technological determinism or filmmaker innovation shaped cinematic history. For purposes of continuity, I too use the term early cinema to refer to films from this period (1895-1906). But by early cinema, I

self-consciously refer to both an evolving set of changes to the medium and the accompanying formal innovations. I am interested here in both law and tendency: what the cinema could do and how this changed with technological innovations, and what films tended to do and the ways changes in technology allowed for the emergence of formal innovations and conventions.

Mary Ann Doane's use of "early cinema" exemplifies the slipperiness of the term. In *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, Doane takes the emergence of cinematic *machine* as her subject. Therefore, her deployment of the term "early cinema" largely refers to the filmic apparatus—the medium. Doane persuasively describes the possibilities and limitations of the filmic apparatus as a device that records, stores, projects, and otherwise represents time. However, her discussion of the early cinema's representations of time leads Doane into a discussion of stylistic principles that concludes with her making medium-based claims using formally-based conventions as evidence. As a result, she asserts what the medium *can* and *cannot* do based on what it *tended* to do, thus radically restricting the potential of the medium in her account. In her discussion of exhibition practices that included running films backwards so that people could be seen jumping out of lakes, she argues that such phenomena point to the *filmic* impossibility of experiments with reversal:

> The desire imputed to this spectator is a transgressive one, emanating from the knowledge that such a procedure apparently contradicts not only the laws of nature (of movement) but also, and *perhaps more importantly, the laws of the cinematic machine itself,* which incessantly and unrelentingly inscribes time as a succession of instants whose "true" directionality is ultimately incontestable. The "trick" corroborates the dominance and determinant status of the rule. (109, emphasis mine)

While Doane asserts that instances of reversed motion served a pedagogical function by pointing to their own strangeness, her description of the cinematic machine is exactly backward: the "laws" of the cinematic machine offer precisely the transgressive opportunities for temporal and directional reversals that the laws of nature disallow. One of the early cinema's greatest tricks is its ability to manipulate the temporal—specifically, to run events both forward and backward. This is particularly true of the earliest films, including "trick films" and the actuality films that exhibitors manipulated to the delight of their audiences. During a screening of the 1895 Lumière film, *The Demolition of a Wall*, exhibitors ran the film forward and then backward so that audiences could watch a pile of rubble reconstitute itself into a solid wall. This example reveals that forward temporal motion cannot be a law for the cinematic machine on the order of a natural law. If this were the case, the backwards-running film would not just *represent* an impossibility, but it would in itself *constitute* an impossibility. The transgressive desire Doane attributes to spectators who like their films to go backwards is only transgressive because of formal and institutional guidelines already in place in the early period: namely, that exhibitors typically showed films moving in a forward direction. In this case, the term "early cinema" acts as a set of institutional practices that discipline the cinema-going experience. So while forward-movement is not a law of the early-cinematic machine, Doane would not be wrong to call it a formal tendency shared by films in this period.

As the medium changed in the early period, so too did the formal possibilities it offered. In this way, the medium may appear as though it consists of certain formal qualities. This dependent relationship may go some way to explain the confusion built

into discussions of the early cinema. For example, when Doane speaks about the cinema's struggle to represent time, she explains the problem as though the cinema itself was making formal choices about representation. She writes, "the cinema embraces narrative as its primary means of making time legible" (67) Here, Doane, like many scholars writing on the early cinema, invokes a logic of technological determinism; because the cinema is now a primarily narrative form, it is easy to assume that this telos existed in the medium from its beginnings. And, indeed, the embrace of narrative to some degree depends upon innovations and changes to the medium, for example, the ability to make longer films with the arrival of the Latham loop.[2] However, it would be similarly incorrect to assume that the Latham loop necessitated narrative. As Christian Metz usefully explains, "The merging of cinema and narrativity was a great fact, which was no means predestined—nor was it strictly fortuitous" (93). When the cinema became a primarily narrative medium, it did so through the repeated use of certain formal tendencies, but these tendencies remain separate from any laws of the apparatus.[3] Although we cannot read changes to cinematic technology in terms of a determinist drive towards narrative, it is possible to read formal changes and the subsequent popularization of these changes as a reflection of audience demand. As Doane suggests, with the drive towards regimentation of time, also comes its opposite: a desire for chance and unpredictability "to make tolerable [the] incessant rationalization" of modernity (11).

[2] For more on the invention of the Latham loop, see Charles Musser's *The Emergence of Cinema* (96).

[3] I find the term "tendency" useful here because it allows me to make claims about the early period broadly—what early films were like—while also retaining space for the intentional choices of individual filmmakers who chose to make films in accordance with a set of general tendencies that characterized the cinema at this time.

While Doane's conclusion that "the cinema embraces narrative as its primary means of making time legible" usefully glosses the transitional era (67), Doane's arguments about time and legibility raise important questions for the study of early films. Although it is clear that narrative *does* make time legible, it seems too cursory to write off early cinema's representations of time as failures of mimesis. Rather, as I will argue in Chapter 1, it seems likely that early films produced original experiences of temporality that also met audience's desires. Early films, which lacked the regulating mechanism of narrative, made time legible by emphasizing its materiality through "tricks" that manipulate its representation, much like the reversal in *Demolition of a Wall*. In this case, narrative would appear to limit possible experiences of time by its insistence on time's unidirectional movement.

The Force of Naturalism's Form

In this study, I focus on naturalist novels because of their direct thematic and formal engagement with the issues of time and force in modernity.[4] Despite their historical position, naturalists employed a much more Kantian than Bergsonian conception of time and its relationship to free will: because they understood the modern subject's relation to his or her historical moment as a relationship to the force of never-

[4] As Donald Pizer usefully explains, the use of the term "naturalism" to refer to a body or literature separate from realist texts has a complicated history. In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Realism and Naturalism*, Pizer forwards a loose definition of both movements: "whatever was being produced in the 1870s and 1880s that was new, interesting, and roughly similar in a number of ways can be designated as *realism,* and …an equally new, interesting, and roughly similar body of writing produced at the turn of the century can be designated *naturalism*" (5). However, as Pizer himself admits, this is not an entirely satisfactory definition. In particular, this definition leaves out the relationship between the two literary movements. Quoting Norris, Pizer indicates that naturalism in the United States was in many ways a conscious break and move away from literary realism: "Naturalism, Norris declares, must abjure the 'teacup tragedies' of Howellsian realism and explore instead the irrational and primitive in human nature" (8).

ending temporal movement, naturalist novels' narration registers temporality as a problem of determinism. [5]

Just as the early cinema challenges films scholars because of its resistance to traditional modes of narrative interpretation, naturalism's overdetermined style of narration has also proven itself resistant to interpretation. Scholarship on naturalism has tended to work in one of two critical modes, oftentimes to the exclusion of the other. In his overview of scholarship on American naturalism, Donald Pizer points to a common tendency between naturalism's harshest critics and its most stalwart supporters: both groups focus their critiques on issues that are *either* stylistic *or* historical.[6] Recent scholarship has largely upheld the distinction between stylistic and historical concerns. Scholars like Donald Pizer, Richard Lehan, Ronald Martin, Michael Baguley, and Lee Clark Mitchell argue that naturalism should be read as a literary movement with a distinctive style that grows out of its philosophical commitments.[7] New Historicist approaches characterize the second dominant camp of scholarship on American naturalist literature. These critics tend to focus on naturalism as a response to its historical context, and include such varied scholars as Jay Martin, Walter Benn Michaels, Amy Kaplan, Wai

[5] See Bergson's *Time and Free Will*.

[6] Pizer traces the history of debates over the quality and value of naturalist literature, especially in comparison to literary realism and modernism. Because later works of naturalist literature, notably the novels of Dos Passos, Steinbeck and Wright, had ties to the socialist/communist movements of the 1930s, many scholars disparaged naturalism as a form of literature with ties to fascism and totalitarianism (Pizer 12). Pizer locates a resurgence in naturalist criticism in the late 1960's and early 1970's; Pizer's own work, *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (1966), constituted a major part of this movement.

[7] See Lehan's *Realism and Naturalism: the Novel in an Age of Transition*, Pizer's *The Theory and Practice of American Literary Naturalism*, Martin's *American Literature and the Universe of Force*, Baguley's *Naturalist Fiction,* and Mitchell's *Determined Fictions: American Literary Naturalism*.

Chee Dimock, and Bill Brown.[8] More recently, Jennifer Fleissner's book *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* has self-consciously worked to address the style and history of American naturalist literature as inseparable concerns.[9]

But the fact remains that with a few recent exceptions aside, the most influential works on American naturalism are still Walter Benn Michaels' groundbreaking study *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (1987) and Mark Seltzer's *Bodies and Machines* (1992). Using Seltzer's work as a test case, I will suggest that naturalism's resistance to interpretation derives in part from its similarity to the early cinema in its reversal of the usual literary relationship between form and content. Drawing upon terms and concepts from the field of early cinema studies, I argue that in naturalist novels, the content—discussions of force and agency—derives from the naturalists' treatment of narrative as the formal expression of the relationship between time and artistic innovation. I use Seltzer here as a test case not because of any failing in his work, but because he treats naturalist forms and naturalism as a genre far more seriously than Michaels, whose study focuses primarily on the relationship of naturalist novels' content to economic history. Seltzer, on the other hand, suggests that naturalist novels' interest in the causal relationships between technology and the body caused naturalists to stress "the

[8] Pizer objects strongly to the "New Historicist bent" that much criticism of naturalism has taken over the past twenty years. He writes: "[New Historicists] have tended to discount traditional historical divisions in the study of American literature on the ground that they obscure underlying ideological similarities present in all American writing since the Civil War" ("Introduction" 1). I think this characterization of New Historicism is somewhat unfair, particularly because much of this criticism—Amy Kaplan's account of Dreiser in *The Social Construction of American Realism* is a good example—works to show how historical contexts produced distinctive literary styles.

[9] With the term "compulsion," Fleissner gives us as a way to describe both the historical and philosophical preoccupations of naturalist writers and their very particular methods of plotting and narration (9).

materiality of writing" and to foreground "the scene of writing" (19), thereby generating a distinctively self-referential form—the novel as product of the "naturalist machine" (6). Seltzer's argument, while it synthesizes the form and content of naturalist novels, fundamentally derives from his claim that the relationship between the human body and the machine culture of modernity produced problems of causality and problems of representation (3). While I am on board with Seltzer's claims about culture in this moment of modernity, my argument that the cinema produced new temporal experiences that highlight the status of time as a problem in modernity leads me to conclusions about naturalism that are nearly the reverse of Seltzer's claims. Rather than reading naturalist narration as an outgrowth of concerns about force and agency, I argue that because naturalists treated time as a force, their narration produces the tension between force and agency. In other words, as the quintessence of linearly progressive temporality, naturalist narration's emphasis on irreversible causal chains of events *then* produces within the diegesis of the novel the traditional problems of causality that we usually think of as generating naturalist style and narration.

Despite Seltzer's interest in naturalism as a form of production, his focus on naturalist novels' depiction of causal problems leads him away from narration. In other words, his focus on individual naturalist bodies—even when he examines the process of abstracting individuals, as he does in his chapter on statistical persons—leads Seltzer to a focus on thematic problems of causality to the exclusion of naturalism's peculiar concerns with causality at the level of narrative discourse. Seltzer reads naturalist writing as an effect of machine/body confusion (4). As Seltzer explains, his book takes up "the 'realist' and 'naturalist' fascination with the *relays* articulated between the life process

and the machine process" (3). For Seltzer, these relays are at the heart of naturalist questions of agency and determinism, and give rise to naturalism's form and philosophy.

In contrast, this dissertation argues that what Seltzer examines as individual causal problems in naturalist novels are in fact problems of chronology—the ceaseless forward movement of time. For example, I would argue that the discourses Seltzer examines in his chapter on *The Octopus*, sexual biology and thermodynamics, are both "problems" for human agency only to the degree that both are subject to the irrevocable progressive linearity of time itself. So too are both the realms of the natural and—as I have argued in the context of the cinema—the machine. Although Seltzer comes near to this argument when he connects Marey's motion studies to Twain's and London's typography (16), he ultimately subsumes this under his overriding problematic—the modern body's "intimacy with machines" (17). This focus leads Seltzer to see writing (naturalist included) as just one more example of the negotiations between the machine and the human. However, I will suggest that these negotiations in modernity depend not just upon the subordination of space to time but, in many cases, upon the perceived bending of all things to the force of time.[10] This, as I argue in my final chapter, is what allows someone like Taylor to organize both men and machines into one system. What my dissertation offers, through its comparative focus, is a structure that allows us to see time as the force required for a human body to have an "intimacy with machines" in the first place.

Methodology: Questions of History/Questions of Narrative

[10] See Marx's formulation in *Capital,* "Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most the incarnation of time." As quoted in Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness (89)*.

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In addition to using an interdisciplinary, comparative media studies approach, my interest in the textual innovations that novelists and filmmakers developed to represent their experience of time in modernity leads me to adopt the methodological tools of narrative theory. The dissertation's second chapter draws heavily from Hayden White's classic essay, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," to argue that Frank Norris's and D.W. Griffith's historical works struggled to give the impression of "narrativiz[ing] without moralizing" in order to represent their versions of history as reality (25). However, my chapter also demonstrates, following Ricoeur's formulation of narrative time, that any narrativization of events cannot in fact represent unmediated reality, because "To tell and follow a story is already to reflect upon events in order to encompass them in successful wholes" ("Narrative Time" 43). Theories of narrative and history are especially important to my dissertation because many of the texts I examine either self consciously figure themselves as history—like *The Octopus* and *The Birth of a Nation*—or position themselves as definitive accounts of their particular historical moment, as *Sister Carrie* does.

My dissertation also draws upon Georg Lukács' *The Historical Novel* and Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious,* both of which take up the ideological consequences of narrative's moralizing function within the context of the realist novel. While both authors' explicit comments on naturalism are obviously useful here, I also find their analyses of narrative techniques as reflections of ideology exemplary for my project, which argues that organizing time counts as a political act as well as a representational one. As Lukács explains, the historical novel uses the past as a tool for explaining the present in which the author exists. The successful historical novel works

by "bringing the past to life as the prehistory of the present, in giving poetic life to those historical, social and human forces which, in the course of a long evolution, have made our present-day life what it is" (53). Jameson's study takes these ideas further, arguing that all novels, not just historical ones, reveal the conditions of their production within their narrative forms. In a statement that adds nuance to White's claim about the relationship between narrative and event, Jameson provocatively argues: "history is *not* a text…[but] as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form" (35). It is my hope that by examining the textual forms that grew up around concerns about temporality and narrative, my project will help us see the ideological bases for filmic and novelistic innovations in turn-of-the century American culture. An analysis of the ideologically constructed nature of narrative is especially relevant in the context of a study of naturalism and the cinema, both of which make special claims upon objectivity: naturalism, because of its aspirations towards a scientific approach to literary representation, and the cinema, because of filmmakers' claims that they show images as they are.

This dissertation consists of two related halves. The first develops an account of the complicated relationships between time, narrative, and human agency in silent film and American naturalism. In Chapter One, I explore the relationship between "the event" and narrative. To do so, I draw on a work that is clearly a narrative, but that is obsessed with the possibility of a person living in ignorance of progressive narrative time—Frank Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* (written in 1895, published posthumously in 1914). I set this work against a body of films that bear a more questionable relationship to narrative—the earliest actuality films. Chapter Two addresses history as a problem for artistic

innovation. I use two works that retell historical events, Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901) and D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, to illustrate the parallel narrative limitations placed upon the two artists by their conceptions of history as a determinist force. It is also in this chapter that I propose a new account of Griffith's narrative innovation, suggesting that Griffith's film style derives from his engagement with the formal techniques and worldview of American naturalist literature.

The second half of the dissertation shifts to an analysis of two related social issues, both of which center on women in modernity. Through this shift, I demonstrate that the pervasive concern with controlling temporality I examine in the first half of the dissertation connects the subject matter of these women-focused narratives to their formal strategies of representation. For example, Chapter Three posits that the new women posed a narrative problem for artists like Theodore Dreiser and George Loane Tucker who were interested in representing the new woman but were concerned with this modernized version of femininity. Their narratives convert the ideological problem presented by the new woman into a temporal problem that threatened the typical representational modes offered by the media forms that sought to represent her. Specifically, I argue that the new woman's version of sexuality posed problems for celebrations of modern progress, as well as fictional narratives that depended upon character change over time for their plotting—attempts to prevent women's modernization seemed to run counter to the values of both these discourses. In the final chapter, I take up discourses of industrial efficiency espoused by engineers like Frank and Lillian Gilbreth and Frederick Winslow Taylor in connection with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's feminist utopian ideas of motherhood, arguing that for varying ideological

purposes, these authors denaturalize the production of people, and instead posit that the production of people requires systems. Furthermore, I argue that by opposing the regularity of technological representation and industrial machines to the spontaneity and inefficiency of human individuals, these texts, as well as the factory films I examine in the chapter, produce an aesthetic of organized efficiency that depends upon making time not just legible, but visible. Finally, in the coda, I analyze a recent film and novel, Sidney Lumet's *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (2007) and Andre Dubus III's *The House of Sand and Fog* (1999), to suggest the continued relevance of naturalism in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER II

TIMING THE EVENT: TEMPORAL REPRESENTATION IN *VANDOVER AND THE BRUTE* AND THE ACTUALITY FILM

In Paris, on December 28th, 1895, the same year that a young Frank Norris completed the text of his first novel, *Vandover and the Brute*, the Lumière brothers held their first exhibition and showed ten fifty-second films. [11] Only one of the Lumière's first films—*L'Arroseur Arrosé*–was a fiction film, and it was the only strictly narrative film in the exhibition.[12] The rest were actuality films. [13] The first actualities were short, typically single shot, nonfiction films that represented a wide array of scenes: exotic foreign views, street scenes, and families at play. Precursors to documentaries, the actualities lifted events from everyday life. In this chapter, I will argue that the actuality films were as close as film ever came to nonnarrativity, and that these films achieved their nonnarrative quality by extracting moments from larger temporal contexts. In contrast, in *Vandover and the Brute*, Frank Norris makes a case against the extraction of the moment through

[11] Although Norris wrote *Vandover and the Brute* in 1895, the novel was not published until 1914, more than a decade after his death.

[12] In his essay "Film, Narrative, Narration: The Cinema of the Lumière Brothers" André Gaudreault focuses on *L'Arroseur Arrosé*, a film anomalous precisely for its narrative structure. Although he notes the difference between *L'Arroseur* and a film like *L'Arrivée d'un train*, he does not theorize the difference in genre-specific terms. Instead, he uses both as examples of how all film, no matter how short, or how intentionally plotted, contains at least the qualities of a "micro-narrative": "a first level on which is generated the second narrative level; this second level more properly constitutes a filmic narrative in the generally accepted sense" (71) In contrast, Charles Musser and Richard Abel have both categorized *L'Arroseur* as a bad-boy film, and Richard Abel notes its derivation from a comic strip (Musser 141, Abel 97). *L'Arrivée d'un train*, on the other hand, falls squarely into the actuality genre.

[13] In this chapter, I use the Lumière actualities as my representative example of the genre. While many early film manufacturers produced these films, no other company did so for as long, or was as famous for their actualities.

his exploration of the repercussions for experiencing one's life as a series of fragmentary events. In what follows, I weave together Norris's novelistic account of a man who divorces the events of his life from narrative with a recasting of the experience the actuality offered to the early cinema's spectators.

By the midpoint of *Vandover and the Brute*, the brute has entirely overtaken the novel's titular hero: "he went about the city from dawn to dark, his feet dragging, his head swinging low from side to side with the motion of his gait" (233). As curious as the change to Vandover's person may be, the change to his living quarters is equally striking. In the rented room Vandover occupies at his most degenerate state, newspapers overwhelm his living space: "[they] were pasted upon the ceiling…A great pile of old newspapers tied up with bale rope was kicked into one corner" (235). However, these are not Vandover's newspapers; they come with the rental, part and parcel of his shabby environment. Nor is this the first time Norris mentions the presence of newspapers. Newspapers in the novel haunt Vandover, following his every move. Because they narrate events, the newspapers stand in marked contrast to the howling and inarticulate Vandover. Even in his most degraded form, Vandover cannot escape their narrative power. Plastering even his ceiling, the newspapers are both omnipresent and oppressive, "covering" Vandover's every action in the filthy little room and insisting upon his containment within the context of their broader narratives.

At the turn of the century, films that created new temporal experiences may have held special appeal for audiences who found themselves living in accordance with temporalities not of their own choosing, whether in the context of the workplace, the adoption of standard time in 1883, or simply a world that seemed to be moving faster

than ever before. As Mark Smith writes in *Mastered by the Clock*, "The price to pay for well-coordinated public time schedules and the preservation of public order by the clock was the sacrifice of personal freedom from time" (57). And though Smith's study focuses on the antebellum South, the feeling that time's institutionalization came at the expense of individual freedom would only increase as the nineteenth century progressed. Furthermore, at the turn of the century, the lag time between events and their interpretation became increasingly condensed as rapidly proliferating and influential newspapers instructed readers how to understand events.[14] Although they would eventually be replaced by the newsreel, the earliest actuality films offered audiences an opportunity to experience events free from the heavy moral implications of narrativized and narrativizing accounts of history and current events. Rather than placing events into an immediate socio-historical context, actuality films gave the illusion that events were isolatable from progressive and consequence-laden temporal trajectories. The first actuality audiences could experience events as open, free from any kind of temporal determinism or meaning.

In contrast to actuality films, naturalist novels like *Vandover and the Brute* contain narratives that obsessively track the irreversible sequencing of events. Within these determinist narratives, the forward movement of time acts as the key limit to human agency. In *The Historical Novel,* Georg Lukács criticizes naturalism for emphasizing individual pathology over historical movements. Because Lukács believes naturalism

[14] In "McKinley at Home: How Early American Cinema Made News," Jonathan Auerbach notes that the earliest of news reels, the 1896 *McKinley at Home* and the 1901 films of his funeral, one-upped the immediacy of the newspaper, giving "citizens the experience of virtually instantaneous news" (780). See also Paul Young's "Media on Display: A Telegraphic History of the Early American Cinema" for an account of cinematic representations of telegraphy.

makes history overly personal, and thus removes it from the realm of dialectical historical progress, he links it to the bourgeois historical novel (237). For Lukács, making history personal means making it apolitical. Certainly, as anyone who has read either *Vandover* or *McTeague* (1899) will acknowledge, Norris leaves no idiosyncratic, pathological character unaccounted for. However, in this chapter, it is my contention that Norris's focus on the individual's relationship to time bridges the gap between pathological characters and a collective vision of history. While naturalism does route history through the individual, as Lukács argues, this chapter will demonstrate that naturalism does so to highlight the relative insignificance of the individual's temporal experience in the face of history's progressive forward movement—not to diffuse history into individualistic pathology. I make this argument through an analysis of what I will describe as the anti-modernist tendencies of the naturalist novel. In particular, I argue that *Vandover* acts as a polemic against new experiences of temporality produced by emerging forms in modernity.

Norris's exploration of pathological individuality culminates in Vandover's transformation from a respectable young man to a drunken and impoverished "brute." In *Bodies and Machines*, Mark Seltzer ties the brute to naturalism's aesthetic practice, arguing,

> Finally, and above all, the brute itself embodies not merely a counter-principle of generation, but a counter-aesthetic as well: an aesthetic of caricature, monstrosity, and deformity, an aesthetic of genesis as *de*generation—that is, the aesthetic of the naturalist novel. Stated as simply as possible, the brute is the generative principle of naturalism. (38)[15]

[15] By reading Norris through an emphasis on LeContian evolution, Seltzer is able to account for the "apparently conflicting processes of generation and degradation," which operate in Norris's naturalist fiction "within a more comprehensive technology of regulation" (40). In this way, Seltzer's project is somewhat recuperative, arguing that the inconsistencies of style and thematic treatment are in fact a function of this "double discourse," rather than a function of authorial failure (40).

Seltzer's reading of the brute serves as an extension of his central argument that naturalist novels obsessively retell the process of their own production.[16] Rather than reading the brute as the originator of naturalist style, however, I invert Seltzer's argument to show that Norris tracks the production of the brute *within* his naturalist narrative. In other words, the gradual transformation of Vandover into brute, while it makes up the novel's narrative, is also contained by Norris's narration. As I will suggest, the tension between Vandover's experience of life as a series of discontinuous events and the temporal continuity of the novel's narrative form is the tension that drives the novel's naturalist aesthetic. Or, put in terms of naturalism's investment in determinism, naturalism produces an account of progressive historical time as a natural force capable of subsuming individual experiences of temporal discontinuity in modernity. In contrast to the isolatable and fragmentary temporal experiences produced by the actuality films, naturalist novels—through their unrelenting style of narration—provided readers with an account of agency in the face of a linearly progressive temporality.

Producing the Event

The Lumière films from the 1895 Paris exhibition included images of factory laborers leaving the works, a card game, the demolition of a wall, the arrival of a train,

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[16] Norris's writings for the San Francisco *Wave* and the *Boston Evening Transcript* include numerous programmatic declarations on the art of the novel. His most well-known essays include, "The Mechanics of Fiction" and "Zola as a Romantic Writer," and "A Plea for Romantic Fiction." In "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," Norris makes his now-famous statement against realism, "the drama of a broken teacup," and calls instead for Romance, to which "belongs the wide world for range, and the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man" 1166, 1168-9).

and a baby eating breakfast, among others.[17] In his oft-cited essay, "The Cinema of Attractions," Tom Gunning writes, "early cinema was not dominated by the narrative impulse" (56). He uses the ubiquity of actuality films during this period (1895-1906) as evidence for his claim. Gunning emphatically defines the cinema of attractions through its interest in "showing and exhibition," and claims that "one can unite" both actualities and more fantastical fiction films, like Méliès's *Voyage to the Moon* (1902), "in a conception that sees cinema less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power…and exoticism" (56-7). At first glance, Gunning's essay does not seem to account for actuality films that—unlike travel films or bustling street scenes—did not present views that were particularly exotic. The Lumières filmed their families again and again, and although the films of their children are charming, one would be hard-pressed to find the content of *Baby's Breakfast* (1895) particularly exotic (Figure 1). However, Gunning also asserts that the cinematic medium was *itself* exotic, a claim which helps to explain the popularity of early actuality films (58). As film scholars like Charles Musser, Ben Singer, and Paul Young have noted, film cameras and projectors were new machines that emerged at a time when people could not get enough of either spectacular entertainments or cutting-edge technologies.[18] The cinema offered its audiences a perfect marriage of these two manias. By extension, anything that highlighted what this *particular* medium could do counted as an "attraction," even if it was just the moving image of a baby enjoying her

[17] These first films can all be seen on the KINO Video collection's *The Lumière Brothers' First Films*.

[18] See Ben Singer's "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and Popular Sensationalism," in which he writes, "As the urban environment grew more and more intense, so did the sensations of commercial amusement" which culminated in the cinema (88, 90).

porridge. Building upon Gunning's claim that the cinematic medium counted as an attraction in and of itself, I argue that the greatest attraction the medium offered in its early days was its ability to produce new experiences of time for its audiences.[19]

The actuality's aesthetic practice derives from the medium's ability to divide time into momentary units. Spectators could enjoy individual moments isolated from their contexts, and random happenings gained significance by being produced as events. In *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, Doane reads the cinema's production of "events" as an attempt to cut down on the contingency and meaninglessness inherent in the recording mechanism. She explains that "in an actuality, the time that is excluded or elided is constituted as 'dead time'—time which, by definition, is outside of the event, 'uneventful'" (159-160). Perhaps the most famous of these actualities is the 1895 Lumière film *Arrival of a Train (Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat).* Like most early actualities, this film is non-narrative. The train film is exemplary of the actuality film's ability to produce the everyday as both shocking and fascinating. The responses of rural audiences who were less familiar with trains aside, *Arrival of a Train* captures a relatively mundane event.[20] The one-shot film shows a train moving towards the screen

[19] In *Life to Those Shadows*, Noël Burch also argues that the early Lumière films had a unique appeal: "The pleasure Lumière himself and his spectators yesterday and today obtained and obtain from his films does indeed emanate from an *analogical effect* (produced by photography whatever one's intentions), but from one which is non-linear and acentric, which does not locate the spectator subject at the center of an imaginary space; that is why I believe the pleasure—and also the knowledge—he produced is of quite another kind from the pleasure of the Institution to come" (34).

[20] See Christian Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema.* Trans. Cecelia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982. Tom Gunning's essay, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment," historicizes Christian Metz's psychoanalytic reading of the panicking audience. The story both Metz and Gunning take up, the now infamous myth of the "Train-effect," speaks to the power of the filmic medium. Gunning begins his account by establishing the stakes of his argument with Metz: "the impact of the first film projections cannot be explained by a mechanistic model of a naïve spectator who, in a temporary psychotic state, confuses the image for its reality" (820). In his response to Metz, Gunning rereads the significance of train films: "while these early films of on-coming locomotives present the shock of the cinema in an exaggerated form, they also express an essential element

and eventually off into the lower-left corner of the frame, until the train finally comes to a stop (Figure 2). The arriving passengers disembark and the waiting passengers board the train. The impact of this film rests not on the particular events portrayed, but rather, as Gunning would argue, on the film's ability to show events at all. As Doane suggests, by isolating a particular moment, this film produces a segment of time *as an event* by choosing it as worthy of extraction from the everyday. However, her contention that the time on either side of the film—before the train arrives, after it leaves the station—is "dead," in comparison to the event created by the film, seems to overemphasize external meanings bestowed upon the event and underemphasize the construction of the event category as an accomplishment of note. To the contrary, the time outside the event seems to be quite "live" in this actuality. The so-called "dead time" of the film contains the train's journey across space transporting goods and people. Furthermore, in contrast to the time of the film, the time outside the event is fluid and ongoing—not dead at all. As this example suggests, rather than making the arrival of a train meaningful (in comparison to dead time), actualities dramatized time in new ways, by producing it as punctual, rather than durative; isolatable, rather than continuous; and *attractive*, rather than narrative.

While Gunning's arguments about the cinema of attractions are audience-based, I am here more interested in the hermeneutics of the actualities. As films that produced

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of early cinema *as a whole*" (824, emphasis mine). From here, Gunning connects the train films to the cinema of attractions: "the aesthetic of attractions addresses the audience directly, sometimes, as in these early train films, exaggerating this confrontation in an experience of assault" (825). Stephen Bottomore's "The Panicking Audience?: Early Cinema and the 'Train Effect'" also addresses this myth. Like Gunning, Bottomore also uses Metz's analysis as a jumping off point. In his essay, Bottomore usefully works through several different explanations of why the train film in particular may have been particularly shocking to early audiences. Martin Loiperdinger's "Lumière's *Arrival of the Train*: Cinema's Founding Myth," argues against what he sees as the over-theorization of the film by contemporary scholars and proposes that "What is needed is a historical reconstruction of *L'arrivée du train à La Ciotat*'s reception history" (114).

new temporal units—the isolated event—actualities are movies about what movies can do. Although the earliest actualities do organize the events they represent—through decisions about camera position, framing, when to start recording, etc.—these decisions need not be read as strictly narrative choices.[21] Instead, as Doane has suggested, at the moment of its emergence, the cinema was primarily engaged with representing the temporal. She argues that the appeal of the cinema derives from its two conflicting abilities: the ability to record the past, and the ability to represent events as happening in the present. She notes, "the obsession with instantaneity and the instant, with the present, leads to the contradictory desire of archiving presence" (82). Rather than reading actualities as failed attempts to represent presence, an argument forwarded by both Doane and Leo Charney, I see the actualities serving a function far less mimetic than these theorists would suggest.[22] Instead, I propose that these films are much more innovative than either Doane or Charney believe. The actualities offer the possibility that film can produce an event that never took place, not because the event is fictional, but because the event is isolated from a progressive temporality. While film may always be parasitic in the ways that Doane suggests—because it depends upon the existence of an external temporality as referent—the actuality films are significant for their generative capabilities. Actuality films produce a new temporal unit, the event.

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[21] In "Structural Patterning in the Lumière Films," Marshall Deutelbaum makes the opposite argument, suggesting that the choices involved in the actuality films, especially profilmic choices, create narrative patterns within the Lumière films.

[22] In his essay, "In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity," Charney writes of attempts to create the experience of presence in terms of failure: "Modern subjects (re)discovered their place as buffers between past and future by (re)experiencing this condition as filmgoers. Past and future clashed not in a hypothetical zone but on the terrain of the body. This alienation both grounded and arose out of the modern aspiration to seize fleeting moments of sensation as a hedge against their inexorable evisceration. The quest to locate a fixed moment of sensual feeling inside the body could never succeed" (293).

At its most fundamental level, the cinema reveals to its audience the passage of time. The name "moving picture" is therefore somewhat deceptive, since the medium's most basic requirement is not that the picture moves, but that time does. As Christian Metz notes, film has what photography lacks, "the dimension of time" (14). To the extent that in all films *something is happening*, even if that something is merely the passage of time, some scholars have claimed that all cinema is narrative. André Gaudreault makes a persuasive argument along these lines, claiming that the cinema is an inherently narrative medium.[23] Gaudreault's account of the Lumière films argues that since "each shot of a film, taken in isolation, constitutes a narrative," actuality films can likewise be described as narrative (71). However, Gaudreault distinguishes between the narrativity of the single shot and the actuality, which he describes as "micro," and the narrativity of films that develop relationships between multiple shots—"macro-narratives" (71). Written two years later, Gunning's arguments about the cinema of attractions counter that although all films at least minimally represent the passage of time, only some films are properly described as narrative. Gunning differentiates films from the cinema's early period from later narrative films, claiming that early films worked to present "a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself" (58)—as opposed to being of interest in relation to a larger narrative.[24] In other words, Gunning rejects the teleology implicit in

[23] For Gaudreault, any shot is at least minimally narrative. This does, as he admits, raise certain questions about avant-garde film, which frequently and explicitly rejects narrative as the cinema's râison d'être. In his defense of film as a narrative medium, Gaudreault proposes a term to explain one of the cinema's most basic functions: the monstrator. Describing monstration, he writes, "This is the first level, or first layer of narrativity, produced by a machine which is doomed to tell stories 'for ever.' This special feature of the cinema, that of always having been narrative right from the beginning, explains why this art…so quickly found its vocation as storyteller." In other words, although the cinema was not immediately a storytelling medium, it contained traces of narrativity (through monstration), but no narrator.

[24] Interestingly, Gaudreault's monstrator function seems to do the work Gunning attributes to attractions films: "less a way of telling stories than a way of presenting a series of views to an audience." However,

Gaudreault's description of single-shot films as micro-narratives, and instead focuses on their ability to show events at all. Whether or not the events represented by the actuality films constitute narrative is problematically linked to questions of audience reception: whether audiences saw them as small narratives, as Deutlebaum and Gaudreault suggest, or whether they experienced them as unnarrativized spectacle, as Gunning argues.

As Seymour Chatman notes, humans have a "powerful tendency to connect the most divergent of events [into narrative]." He explains, "That narrative experiment in which the reader shuffles his own story from a box of loose printed pages depends upon the disposition of our minds to hook things together; not even fortuitous circumstance—the random juxtaposition of pages—will deter us" (47). In the context of the debates I have outlined above, Chatman provides us with an explanation for Gaudreault's claim that film has been narrative since the invention of the "cine-camera" (73): given a choice, we humans will err on the side of seeing narratives everywhere.[25] But what if we were to imagine a human being who did the opposite—who perceived the world in the fragmentary and ahistorical manner that the actuality films presented it? In the novel Norris wrote as a Harvard freshman, he takes on such questions. *Vandover* suggests that if it is natural to make narrative, a man who fully embraces the experiences of temporal discontinuity offered up in modernity might become unnatural and less than human.

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unlike Gadreault, Gunning does not insist that this presenting of views is "the 'innate' kind of narrativity" that Gaudreault ascribes to the monstrating function and the cinema writ large. Rather, Gunning's description of actuality films' "attractions" provides us with a different model for understanding the early cinema's mode of addressing its spectators. This different conception is useful given that it seems unlikely that all the Lumière actualities have the same kind of "monstrator" that *L'Arroseur* does.

[25] Metz makes a similar point in addressing semiotic studies of the cinema: "The merging of the cinema and of narrativity was a great fact, which was by no means predestined—nor was it strictly fortuitous. It was a historical and social fact" (*Film Language*, 93).

Throughout *Vandover*, Norris demonstrates that a true understanding of the connections between past, present, and future is deeply tied to the act of narration. The novel opens with the following explanation: "It was always a matter of wonder to Vandover that he was able to recall so little of his past life" (3). While the first sentence of the novel seems to imply that Vandover's difficulty is a problem of memory, the second corrects the first by recasting Vandover's memory problem as a narrative one: "With the exception of the most recent events he could remember nothing connectedly" (3). In other words, while Vandover has memories, these memories are fragmentary and discontinuous; he remembers individual events from his life without understanding the connections between them. To the extent that Vandover does "not narrativize [his] reality, [does] not impose upon it the form of a story" (White 2), his memory pictures are akin to a program of actuality films, in which the films' order is determined by the unpredictable whim of the exhibitor, rather than because of any intrinsic relationship between the films.[26]

Like the spectator position created by the actuality films, Vandover sees events' sequencing and relationship to one another as arbitrary. For example, Charles Musser tells us that the first Lumière films shown in the United States premiered at a New York exposition in June 1896 and included the following: *A Dip in the Sea*; *The Gardener and the Bad Boy*; *Washing Day in Switzerland*; *Hyde Park, London*; *The Cascade (Geneva Exhibition)*; *The Messrs. Lumière at Cards*; and *The Arrival of the Mail Train* (Musser 138). In keeping with the actuality's thematic openness, the New York program includes

[26] Although Hayden White is here describing the annals historiographer—who does sequence events chronologically—his description is fitting because, like annals historiography, Vandover's thought pictures and the actuality films organize events in a sequence that offers no sense either narrative or causal relationships between the events.

a smattering of everything, from a seaside idyll to a city scene. Vandover's organization of his thought pictures is at best—like the organization of an actuality program—vaguely sequential, to the degree that one event follows another. Trying to put together a life story, Vandover finds that he is "obliged to collect these scattered memory pictures as best he could, [and] rearrange them in some more orderly sequence" (4). But this sequencing is unreasoned, neither chronological nor thematic. And, as Hayden White is careful to point out, chronological sequencing in itself leaves something to be desired: "events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence" (5). From White's account of annals history, we understand that even temporal sequencing fails to tell the whole story. Mere ordering does not supply causality. For Vandover and the actuality viewer, this crisis of meaning goes a step further, as they face events without even temporal relationships to connect them.

Like Van's thought pictures, the actualities also resist historicization. This resistance depends in part upon the actuality's resemblance to still photography. As Doane suggests, "With photography, the instants can be disentangled…the photograph isolates a moment in time and engraves what would otherwise be an ephemeral instant, unarchivable" (102). The Lumière actualities also produced the event as "disentangled" from other contexts, "isolate[d]…in time." In her discussion of Freud and Marey, Doane suggests that the actuality films' similarity to the photograph on this count proved problematic for the early cinema. She argues that the cinema needed narrative to make time meaningful because in its ability to record *any* moment, "the cinema level[s] all

moments until each is the same as the other—producing an overwhelming sameness and banality" (66-67). Doane argues that in response to this flux of meaning and "Despite the dominance of the actuality in the first decade of the cinema…narrative very quickly becomes its dominant method of structuring time" (67). Doane's account of the actuality films thus echoes White's description of the annals historian whose system of record keeping does not impart meaning to events. Whereas Doane reads the actualities' presentation of meaningless moments as a problem for the cinema, I have argued that producing these empty units of time was in fact the central innovation of the early actuality films. As in the case of Vandover's memory pictures, this kind of presence depends upon severing connections to the past and the future, effectively emptying moments of meaning.

While the actuality films' detachable moments resonate powerfully with Norris's description of Vandover's memory, Norris's novel takes a position similar to Doane's. *Vandover and the Brute* proposes that without narrative, causal relationships between events are impossible to determine and, as a result, qualitative rankings become similarly impracticable. Shortly after introducing Vandover's difficulty narrativizing memories, Norris alerts us that Van's attempts to sequence his memories have also failed: "What he at first imagined to be the story of his life, on closer inspection turned out to be but a few *disconnected incidents* that his memory had preserved with the greatest capriciousness, *absolutely independent of their importance*" (3, emphasis added). Vandover uses no hierarchy of significance to organize his thought pictures, or even to decide what to remember. The only requirement Van seems to place on his memories is that they be events—things that have happened—no matter how mundane: "One of these incidents

might be a great sorrow, a tragedy, a death in his family; and another, recalled with the same vividness, the same accuracy of detail, might be a matter of the least moment" (3). Norris's emphasis on the memories' consistent "accuracy of detail" is worth lingering over, especially since one of the critiques Lukács launches at the naturalists is their "principle of photographic authenticity of description and dialogue" (235), which he reads as symptomatic of "capitalist prose" in its replacement of "portrayals by mere descriptions—supposedly scientific, and brilliant in detail—of things and thing-like relationships" (244-5). Norris's description of Vandover's thought pictures and Vandover's bizarre relationship to the things he owns seems to run counter to Lukács's dismissive characterization of naturalism.[27] Although he does engage in the lavish description of objects for which Lukács criticizes the naturalists, Norris also casts the simultaneous vividness and randomness of Vandover's memories as qualities that indicate Vandover's memories are—as Doane describes the unnarrativized event—meaningless because of their "overwhelming sameness and banality."

By emphasizing the problematically haphazard organization of Van's thought pictures, Norris opposes his own method of recording events—which he describes in the essay "Fiction is Selection" (1897)—to Van's hodgepodge of memories, which, though photographically accurate, lack any principle for having been recorded in the first place. In contrast, the texts that surround and contain Vandover—including naturalist novels, newspaper reports, and his friend Charlie Geary's narratives of self-making—insist upon the causal relationships between temporally sequenced events. Vandover's trouble

[27] Bill Brown has produced a particularly persuasive account of Vandover's relationship to his "things." Brown argues that Vandover's things serve an ordering function in his life, and that as he loses these things—his stove, his Mona Lisa—through gambling, he loses control of his life and becomes the brute (64-65).

organizing events according to their temporal sequence is of a piece with his failure to understand the causal relationships between them. In *Vandover*, these two categories of relationships—temporal and causal—are indistinguishable. Vandover's inability to sort his memory pictures into an "orderly" sequence corresponds to his inability to think either causally or temporally. As a result, Vandover's experience life as something like pure presence, which, in the context of the novel, is also something like pure arbitrariness.[28] While the Lumière actualities allowed audiences to enjoy "disconnected events…absolutely independent of their importance" (*Vandover* 3), Norris's first novel asserts that Vandover's experience of time in modernity—the one offered up by actuality films—is ultimately unsustainable because it runs counter to what the novel constructs as the "natural" force of progressive narrative time.

Stories and the Self

Vandover is not a planner. Early in the novel, Norris contrasts Vandover's experiences of time with those of his good friend Charlie Geary. The two men understand their relationship to time in diametrically different terms. While Vandover experiences the events in his life as isolated from any larger timeline, Geary never undertakes an action without future outcomes in mind. And while Vandover is a great fritterer, wasting his time on unproductive actions, like the polishing of his infamous stove, Geary is a planner.[29] Vandover's actions count as unproductive on at least two levels: they are not

[28] Deleuze suggests the impossibility of achieving this state in the context of film, noting that "there is no present which is not haunted by a past and a future, by a past which is not reducible to a former present, by a future which does not consist of a present to come" (*Cinema 2* 37).

[29] Jennifer Fleissner links Vandover's repetitive polishing of his clock to Norris's feminization of Van, arguing that this wasteful action is an example of the feminine compulsion to repeat (27).

actions that produce event*ful* moments worthy of future narration, and they are economically *counter*productive. In his reading of the novel's gambling scenes, Walter Benn Michaels corroborates this view, noting that Vandover is not so much excited by the idea "of perhaps winning a great deal of money," but rather by the idea of "losing money" (143). And while Michaels reads Vandover's actions as an attempt to "buy his way out of the money economy" (144), such actions are also symptomatic of a person who cannot imagine the connection between today's gambling and tomorrow's debts. In Norris's novel, losing one's money is just one of the many consequences of treating moments as discontinuous fragments. In contrast, understanding the relationship between present and future pays great dividends. [30]

In his initial description of Geary, Norris writes, "Geary was quite different. He could not forget himself. He was incessantly talking about what he had done or what he was going to do" (13).[31] Geary's methods remain consistent throughout the novel: he plans his rise to the top of his law firm, plots his purchase of Vandover's property based on its future value, and even takes his planning impulse so far as to have his dance card for an upcoming dance filled at the preceding one so that he does not miss out on a single opportunity (139). Although at the novel's opening Vandover is wealthy—the son of a rich landlord—the end of the novel finds him cleaning the row houses once owned by his father, but which Geary has usurped. Myles Weber reads this reversal of fortunes somewhat differently, arguing that Vandover's decline corresponds to his inability to

[30] In *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism*, Walter Benn Michaels produces an extended reading of what it means for Vandover to gamble, arguing that Vandover's gambling is degenerate because it is based in an "excitement of losing money," which is to say, an excitement of "spending without buying" (143-4). In this way, Michaels argues, Norris presents us with a character attempting to "buy his way out of the money economy" (144).

[31] Norris also notes that Geary draws "the line at gambling" (15).

channel his nature into predatory capitalism.[32] And though I agree that Norris does not portray Geary as a particularly pleasant individual, there can be no denying that as Vandover's status declines, Geary experiences a corresponding rise in status.

By tracking Vandover's fall against Geary's rise, Norris outlines the costs of experiencing events as "disconnected incidents," revealing that Vandover's experience of time produces his degeneration. [33] Because his memories lack "connection," or narrativity, Vandover is unable to produce a progressive narrative of self-development to follow, and thus cannot achieve financial success. On the other hand, Geary's progress echoes the tradition of novels of economic achievement, like the Horatio Alger narratives, which emphasized values of thrift, ambition, and responsibility: all values that require a forward-looking perspective. Geary's self-narration reveals his awareness of time as a progressive force and buttresses his attempts to assert agency within that context. Although Vandover's inability to understand causal sequencing mirrors the fragmentary aesthetic of entertainments in modernity, Norris suggests that Vandover's mode of perception is at odds with the narrative temporality he unwittingly inhabits. In other words, while Geary appears to understand that time functions like a story and frames his actions accordingly, Vandover's tendency to experience time only as what is happening *now* causes him to treat the events in his life as detachable.

In this light, it becomes clear that Vandover's many vices result from his epistemological framework, rather than his character. The repeated scenes of excessive

[32] See "Lacking Brutish Conviction, Vandover's Tumble from the Leisure Class."

[33] Degeneration, the opposite of evolutionary progress, obviously preoccupied Norris during the writing of the novel. Seltzer and many others have discussed *Vandover* as a naturalist narrative of decline and have linked it to his study of LeContean Darwinism (Seltzer 36-39).

drinking in the novel metonymize Vandover's inability to understand his actions as relevant either to his history or his future. When Vandover gets drunk for the first time, "he looked at himself in the mirror for a long time, saying to himself over and over again, 'I'm drunk—just regularly drunk. Good Heavens! What *would* the governor say to *this*?" (15, emphasis original). Vandover's drunken monologue registers his interest in analyzing and assessing his feelings in the present; the statement "I'm drunk" is a claim about his present state of affairs. In contrast, Vandover's recollections the next day are decidedly fuzzier, and this in spite of the narrator's assurance that Van "was not so drunk but that he knew he was, and the knowledge of the fact so terrified him that it kept him from getting very bad" (14-15). Although it would appear that Vandover is here experiencing some of Geary's self-consciousness, his reaction—not "getting very bad"—is a reaction to fear of his *present* state, rather than fear for the future. This moment of self-awareness is further undermined when Vandover awakens the following morning, and is:

> surprised to find that he felt so little ashamed. Geary and young Haight treated the matter as a huge joke and told him of certain funny things that he had said and done and which he had entirely forgotten. It was impossible for him to take the matter seriously even if he had wished to, and within a few weeks he was drunk again. (15)

Although Vandover experiences fear his first time drinking, he never experiences regret or lets his initial concerns about getting drunk prevent him from doing it again. Moreover, although the narrator is careful to point out that Vandover doesn't get very drunk the first time, Vandover experiences blackouts and cannot remember his actions from the previous evening.

Some critics find a moral lesson in Norris's novel, reading Vandover's drinking and sexual activity as the behaviors eventually responsible for converting him into a brute. But the necessary preconditions for the brute's triumph over Vandover's better nature are evident from the novel's first sentence: "It was always a matter of wonder to Vandover that he was able to recall so little of his past life" (3).[34] When Van loses his virginity, the narrator explains, "The thing was done almost before he knew it. He could not tell why he had acted as he did, and he certainly would not have thought himself capable of it" (18). From the early episodes that describe Vandover's drinking and sexual encounters, we learn that in the context of the novel, causality is not so much a matter of intention as it is a set of temporal relations. Lee Clark Mitchell reads the novel in similar terms, arguing that the plotting of the novel reveals agency to be "simply a social fiction" (77). However, Mitchell's reading is not the norm. Deriving from Donald Pizer's account of *Vandover* as a "parable of the 'Way to Hell' available to the young American artist in a late nineteenth-century American city" (*Theory and Practice* 113), most scholarship on

[34] Many critics have argued that Vandover's decline results directly from his sexual activity. In "The Rise of a New Degeneration: Decadence and Atavism in *Vandover and the Brute*," Sherwood Williams argues that "Vandover not only reveals the debilitating effects of vice; he stages for is the *fin de siècle* production of sexual perversion, and suggests the genealogy of our own representations of 'perversity'" (710). In "Frank Norris on the Evolution and Repression of Sexual Instinct," Bert Bender reads the novel through LeContean ideas about sexual selection, arguing that in Norris's early novels, he "bring[s] the sexual best to life," and that in later novels like *The Octopus* and *The Pit,* he projects "his vision of evolutionary progress…to cleanse it of its grosser animal features" (82). And in Stephanie Bower's "Dangerous Liaisons: Prostitution, Disease, and Race in Frank Norris's Fiction," she argues that we should understand Vandover's degeneration as expressing a fear that the American body politic was becoming contaminated by contact with foreigners, particularly Chinese immigrants, and that this fear is manifested through explorations of venereal disease and impotence. She writes, "If in Norris's own literary criticism slumming provides the naturalist with the source of his inspiration and the nobility of his calling, in Vandover it provides characters with a lethal does of the clap" (43). In "Down on All Fours: Atavistic Perversions and the Science of Desire from Frank Norris to Djuna Barnes," Dana Seitler also connects Vandover's transition into an animal to his sexuality, arguing that "human-beast hybrids…are embodiments of a widespread cultural fascination with, and fear of, modern sexual perversity" (526). While I certainly find these readings—especially Williams' connection of aesthetics and sexuality—persuasive, they also share another similarity beyond a reading of Norris's representations of sex: they ignore the beginning of the novel, in which we note right away that something *is* different about little Van, but this difference is cognitive, rather than sexual.

the novel treats Vandover's *Lycanthropy* as a moral judgment upon him. In contrast to Mitchell's reading of the overall amorality of the novel, Eric Link argues that "Justification for Vandover's moral responsibility seems to stem from the *possibility* that the Brute might be defeated" (157, emphasis original), and Richard Lehan describes the novel as an account "of greed that goes beyond natural necessity" (128). In a more subtle reading of Vandover's vices, Sherwood Williams gives an analysis of decadence in the novel as a polemic against Wildean aestheticism, and ties Vandover's brutishness to his sexual perversity. He claims that Norris links the degenerate aesthete to childishness, arguing that "As Vandover deteriorates, both he and the narrative return to the fragmentation and unreliability that characterized the preadolescent stage where he 'remembered nothing connectedly'" (730). But from the scenes analyzed above, it is unclear that in adolescence Vandover maintains any greater control over his "thought pictures" than he does either as a child or when fully transformed into the brute. While I think that Williams is correct to link Vandover's deterioration to the aging process, it seems that the change to Vandover's memories is quantitative rather than qualitative. As an adult, Vandover's "thoughts, released from all control of his will, began to come and go through his head with incredibly rapidity, half remembered scenes…all galloping across his brain like a long herd of terrified horses" (225-6). In this passage, Vandover suffers from the effects of accretion, not regression. As Vandover ages, the number of "pictures" increases exponentially, and as a result, his consciousness becomes more and more chaotic as the number of disconnected memories increases. Drawing upon the filmic parallel to Vandover's thought pictures, we might say that as he ages, Vandover's memory becomes like a never-ending actuality program or vaudeville show. Whether the

events in Vandover's life are moral or immoral is ultimately an immaterial question; Norris does not relate brutishness to any particular actions, but instead to Vandover's obliviousness towards the causal connections and continuity between events.

Vandover's experience of the arts serves as a key to his relationship to lived events. Seltzer suggests that Vandover's paintings act as "a projected counter to generation and degeneration both" (37). Seltzer's reading focuses on Vandover's artistic failures, which occur alongside his degeneration, arguing that "the brute itself embodies not merely a counter-principle of generation, but a counter aesthetic as well: an aesthetic of caricature, monstrosity, and deformity…that is, the aesthetic of the naturalist novel" (38). While Seltzer produces a useful account of naturalist composition, this particular reading seems less useful as an account of Vandover's own brutishness. First, it is unclear why we should understand Vandover's artistic process as a reflection of naturalist aesthetics, especially given that Seltzer himself goes on to argue that "A few paragraphs into the novel…there is an abrupt shift in narrative mode…a taking over from Vandover that is an explicitly narrative take over" (43-4). Such a take over would seem to indicate that Norris, or at least the narrator, finds Van's way of understanding events to be incompatible with naturalism's narrative goals. Secondly, just as the seeds of Vandover's brutishness are present in the novels opening lines, so too is the indication that Van is a poor artist. Although his art gets worse as he does—becoming an "abortion" of his artistic goals, much as Seltzer suggests—it is unclear that Van's painting was ever very coherent in the first place.[35]

[35] Quoted from Seltzer, 37.

When Vandover first tries his hand at drawing, he devises a system of copying other artworks that results in paintings as incoherent as his thought processes:

> Over the picture to be copied he would paste a great sheet of paper, ruling off the same into spaces of about an inch square. He would cut out one of these squares and Vandover would copy the portion of the picture thus disclosed. When he had copied the whole picture in this fashion the teacher would go over it himself, retouching it here and there, labouring to obviate the checker-board effect which the process invariably produced. (11)

In this description, Norris underlines the *un*naturalness of Vandover's worldview, which takes even visually coherent images and breaks them into multiple pictures difficult to fit back together again. This description of Vandover's artistic education runs counter to the numerous claims that art in the novel "functions as an ordering principle and is linked with the spiritual" and "provides the means through which Vandover could be saved" (Civello 43). Instead, it seems more likely that, as Christophe Den Tandt suggests, Norris means for the reader to see the "vulgarity of this artistic training," which "is mirrored in the fact that, as an adult, Vandover develops a taste for bohemian bric-a-brac" (196-7). Even as Van's education progresses, his paintings remain imperfect. As the narrator explains, while Vandover "had no idea of composition, he was clever enough to acknowledge it. His finished pictures were broad reaches of landscape, deserts, shores, and moors in which he placed solitary figures of men or animals in a way that was very effective" (46). Even here, when Vandover's painting is both "clever" and "very effective," his paintings once again reveal Vandover's inability to draw connections between multiple things. Instead, he paints "solitary figures." Vandover's style of "composition" evinces his inability to organize pictures—whether his paintings or his memories—as well as his inability to tell stories. It is telling that "The Last Enemy," the

last painting Vandover attempts and is unable to complete, is one that tells a story: a British cavalryman facing off against a lion in the desert.

Perhaps because Vandover cannot tell stories about himself, he requires others to tell stories to him. Vandover is a novel reader, a magazine browser, and an attendant at fairground attractions. Although Norris repeatedly states that Vandover's "love for all art" is "the strongest side of his nature," and frequently makes reference to his novel reading, these assertions—which would seem to align young Vandover with young Norris—are undercut by as frequent references to Vandover's wasteful consumption of the arts as entertainments (154).[36] When Vandover goes on his sea voyage, a scene to which I will return, he is disappointed to discover "that he had neglected to get himself any interesting books" (86). The narrator then explains that Vandover "had for so long a time fed his mind upon the more tangible and concrete enjoyments of the hour and minute that it demanded them now continually" (86).[37] This distinction between "love for art" and love for "enjoyments of the hour and minute" would seem to distance the novels Vandover reads from the novels Norris writes. Describing Norris's representation of the kinetoscope in *McTeague*, Paul Young argues that when Norris represents other arts, he " relegates them to the role of a 'diversion'" ("Telling Descriptions" 645).

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[36] In her introduction, Fleissner calls the novel "semi-autobiographical," and writes that the novel features a "well-heeled, even dandyish would-be artist growing up, as Norris himself did, in San Francisco" (27, 85).

[37] Seltzer, Williams, and Fleissner have all argued that Vanderbilt's tendency to fill his time with constant frivolities suggests an effeminateness in Vandover (Seltzer 36-37). In his article, Williams focuses on discussions that connected homosexuality to the aesthetic behaviors associated with decadents like Oscar Wilde. Williams argues that the oscillation between sexuality as natural and sexuality as performance is demonstrated in Vandover's decline, which seems to be caused by a Brute within him (nature) and his decadent and degenerate acts (performance). Fleissner's reading is particularly persuasive, as she comments on Vandover's stuttering and stuckness in time—working to connect Norris's novel to Gilman's famous representation of neurasthenia, "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (36-7). While I agree that Norris in some ways feminizes his main character by associating Vandover with leisure activities like novel reading, in the context of narrative and time, Vandover's choice of leisure activities seems more symptomatic of his approach to events, rather than any innate femininity or masculinity.

Given the fleeting nature of the entertainments to which Vandover is accustomed, it is little wonder that even the most significant events in his life fail to maintain his interest once the initial shock of them has passed. Shortly after Vandover seduces Ida, an event that marks a major shift in the novel, he and his friends attend the Mechanics' Fair, which Norris describes as "a huge amphitheatre full of colour and movement" (65). Much like Vandover's thought pictures, the fairgrounds attractions form a garish patchwork with no organizing narrative focus:

> There was a vast shuffling of thousands of feet and a subdued roar of conversation like the noise of a great mill; mingled with these were the purring of distant machinery, the splashing of a temporary fountain and the rhythmic clamour of a brass band, while in the piano exhibit the hired performer was playing a concert grand with a great flourish. Nearer at hand one could catch ends of conversation and notes of laughter, the creaking of boots, and the rustling of moving dresses and stiff skirts. Here and there groups of school children elbowed their way through the crowd, crying shrilly, their hands full of advertisement pamphlets, fans, picture cards, and toy whips with pewter whistles on the butts, while the air itself was full of the smell of fresh popcorn. (65)

The fairgrounds scene Norris describes here reappears in his 1899 novel, *McTeague*, in which Trina and Mac attend a mechanics fair (401), and in which a kinetoscope presentation at the end of a vaudeville show bewilders the Sieppe family, inspiring Mrs. Sieppe to declare the moving picture a "drick" (337). Tom Gunning reads the vaudeville scene in *McTeague* as evidence that early cinema viewers were not as naïve as contemporary film scholars have suggested; he argues, "what Norris presents as a naïve response to the projected moving image directly opposes our now dominant conception of the naïve viewings of first movies…Far from confusing the film image with reality, Mrs. Sieppe dismisses it as mere trickery" (95).[38] Young reads this scene somewhat differently, arguing that *McTeague* is a novel that "speaks directly to the cinema's

[38] From "'Primitive' Cinema: A Frame-up? Or the Trick's on Us."

challenge to the cultural authority of the novel," but that in its representation of the cinema, the novel twists into "a literary refraction of the cinema itself" (646). In both *McTeague* and *Vandover and the Brute*, Norris works to represent the experience of a totally nonnarrative and heterogeneous entertainment within the narrative form of the novel, the fairgrounds and the cinema being two such experiences. Like Young, I read Norris's engagement with the cinema as a broader attempt to represent novelistically the "multiple and fragmentary" experiences of modernity (647). However, in *Vandover*, Norris registers the costs of maintaining this perceptual experience outside the space of the vaudeville theater. For Vandover, unlike the filmgoers in *McTeague*, fairgrounds attractions are not moments of trickery, falsely representing the real. For Van, such tricks are his normal mode of perceiving events. In this way, Vandover differs from the characteristic member of the urban masses, who is so desensitized to shock that he must seek it in the form of constant amusements.[39] While the Sieppes and Mac must go to the movies to get the experience of isolated moments produced by the actuality, Vandover sustains the fragmentary temporal experience of actuality filmgoers at all times.

Narrative Time and the Real

In his opposition between the false temporal experiences offered by modern entertainments and the narrative structure of his own work, Norris draws upon a very old assumption about narrative: namely, that it is through narrative that we make our world

[39] Ben Singer provides a thorough explanation of the relationship between shock and modernity in his essay "Modernity, Hyperstimulus and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism." Ed. Charney, Leo and Vanessa R. Schwartz. *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1995. In his essay, he argues that Simmel, Kracauer, and Benjamin produced theories that might be categorized as "*neurological* conception[s] of modernity," and that these conceptions centered on the modern individuals experience of modernity as "shocking" (72, emphasis original).

recognizable and establish our humanity. Describing the rise of narratology, Edward Brannigan notes, "It became clear that narrative was nothing less than one of the fundamental ways used by human beings to think about the world, and could not be confined to the merely 'fictional'" (xi-xii). Hayden White takes this idea even further, arguing that "To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture, and possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself" (1).[40] Such discussions, even when they comment on narrative as a phenomenon subject to historical change, would seem to privilege the novel as the ultimate humanist art form. In *Vandover*, Norris takes such claims a step further, insisting that being human requires narrating oneself as a historical agent, and that the rejection of narrative time in modernity produces monstrous results.

Through its deployment of deterministic naturalism, Norris's first novel works to remind readers of mankind's location within a temporal trajectory far larger and more powerful than any individual.[41] In his later critical writings, Norris distills this idea into advice for other novelists. In a *Boston Evening Transcript* article entitled "The Mechanics of Fiction" (1901), Norris describes his ideal for narration: "Now the action begins to increase in speed. The complication suddenly tightens…an episode far back there in the first chapter…is suddenly brought forward and coming suddenly to the front

[40] However, as White goes onto explain, the widespread nature of narrative belies the fact of its being constructed. He argues that "Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling" (1). White's opposition of knowing and telling does raise an interesting question about the actuality films, which, to draw upon well-known writing advice, appear to *show*, rather than tell.

[41] Other critics have commented on the novel's determinism, frequently using it as a tool for evaluating the coherence of Norris's narrative. See Ronald Martin's *American Literature and the Universe of Force* (154-5), Eric Link's *The Vast and Terrible Drama* (153-7), and Paul Civello's *American Literary Naturalism and its Twentieth-Century Transformations* (36-7).

collides with the main line of development" (1163). In this essay, Norris describes the climax of a novel as a moment towards which everything else in the narrative rushes. His emphasis on the collision of narrative threads suggests that for Norris, plotting involves much more than mere foreshadowing. Instead, Norris's narration highlights the impossibility of events being understood in any context other than the "main line of development," and suggests that their meaning as events is only significant in relation to this "main line." In another essay from the same year, "The True Reward of the Novelist," Norris asserts that narrative connection between events is simultaneously natural and transhistorical:

> Romance and Realism are constant qualities of every age, day and hour. They are here today. They existed in the time of Job. They will continue to exist to the end of time, not so much in things as in the point of view of people who see things. The difficulty then is to get at the immediate life, immensely difficult, for you are not only close to the canvas, but are yourself part of the picture. (1149-50)

In his insistence that romance and realism—the two genres Norris straddles as a naturalist writer—permeate every era, and have done so since the beginning of time, Norris makes a claim for understanding every event as embroiled in a much larger narrative. Furthermore, by telescoping his scale from "age to "hour," Norris's advice to novelists takes a stand against arts that would present even the smallest quantities of time as isolatable events. So while the vaudeville or the actuality films seem to be the appropriate art forms for apprehending modernity, Norris suggests that their view is too narrow, too "close to the canvas." However, despite the passion with which he argues that the grand narratives of "Romance and Realism" connect all moments, Norris admits that attaining this perspective can be difficult for artists limited by their own historical position. He advises the artist to get beyond thinking only "of himself or for himself" (1151), and to

attempt to see the "canvas" in its entirety. In Norris's works of literary criticism, "truth" emerges as an entity apprehensible only through tremendous abilities of perception. The novelist must be able to determine the "main line" that connects events, see transhistorically, and look beyond his own individualized point of view. Despite the difficulty involved in developing such a broad perspective, Norris argues that the project is worthwhile, stating that the "true reward" of the novelist is the ability to claim "By God, I told them the truth" (1151).

In *Vandover*, we see Norris developing his artistic theories through his novelistic practice. Anticipating the statements Norris makes in "The True Reward of the Novelist," the narration in *Vandover* positions the novel as the medium best equipped to reveal the temporal and causal relationships between events, even as it suggests that individuals may not always grasp such connections. Indeed, Vandover's perspective emerges as precisely the kind of historically narrow view that Norris opposes in his critical writings and which Norris here aligns with the fragmentary entertainments of modernity. The narrator of *Vandover and the Brute* obsessively records the duration of various actions, the start and finish times of events, and the times of numerous appointments. In the eighteen-chapter novel, thirteen of the chapters begin with a sentence that marks the relationship between the events of Vandover's life and the progression of time, whether clock time or calendar time: "In the afternoons Vandover worked in his studio" (Chapter 5), "On a certain evening about four months later" (Chapter Seven), "Vandover stayed for two weeks at Coronado Beach" (Chapter 9), "About ten o'clock Vandover went ashore" (Chapter 10), "The following days as they began to pass were miserable" (Chapter 11), "Vandover took formal possession of his rooms on Sutter Street during the

first few days of February" (Chapter 12), "Just before Lent, and about three months after the death of Vandover's father" (Chapter 13), and so on. The narration thus stands in ironic contrast to Vandover's pathological inability to understand himself in relation to his past and future. In this way, Norris's deterministic narration produces a counterargument to Lukács' critique of naturalism as an ahistorical genre.[42] Even as Norris centers his narrative on the individual actions of a pathological artist, he does so to illustrate the relative futility of Vandover's actions in the face of his embedment within a progressive and irreversible trajectory of forward-moving time.

Newspapers in the novel also insist that events are meaningfully connected to one another, denying the relevance of individual conceptions of events. Following the suicide of Ida Wade, the woman Vandover seduces, Norris introduces newspaper reports as a means of connecting agents, events, and consequences in a causal narrative. By contextualizing Ida's suicide, the newspaper insists upon Vandover's guilt in the matter. Vandover learns of Ida's suicide when Geary shows him the morning's paper: "At first he could not find it, and then it suddenly jumped into prominence from out of the gray blur of the print on an inside page beside an advertisement for a charity home for children" (77). The article, which sketched "the circumstances of her death with the relentless terseness of a writer cramped for space," suddenly gives Vandover a feeling of great responsibility: "At every moment now he saw the different consequences of what he had

[42] In "The Historical Novel and the Crisis of Bourgeois Realism," Lukács writes that naturalism "underlines the [bourgeois novel's] tendency to make history private" (237). He writes, "As attitudes towards society become more and more private, so such vividly seen connexions vanish. Professional life appears dead; everything human is submerged under the desert sands of capitalist prose. The later naturalists-even Zola—seize upon the prose and place it at the center of literature, but they only fix and perpetuate its withered features, limiting their picture to a description of the 'thing-like *milieu*. What Thackery, with the right instinct, though from a false situation, declared unportrayable, they leave as it is, replacing portrayals by mere descriptions—supposedly scientific, and brilliant in detail—of things and thing-like relationships" (244-5).

done" (77, 78). The narrative tracks this realization with a series of three short paragraphs, each beginning with the word "now": "Now, it was a furious revolt against his mistake," "Now, it was a wave of immense pity for the dead girl," "Now, it was a terror for himself" (78).

However, the flipside of the newspaper's narrativizing ability is its juxtaposition of dissimilar events. In this case, an advertisement soliciting donations for a children's home appears alongside the account of a tawdry suicide. So while newspapers narrativize events like Ida's suicide, they also juxtapose events and other miscellaneous news items in a haphazard manner that is structurally akin to a vaudeville program. Furthermore, newspapers at the turn of the century promoted spectacle, shock, and violence. But in contrast to the early films, which shared the newspapers' tendency to juxtapose disparate events, the newspapers do narrativize the shocks they represent. In his study of sensationalism in modernity, Singer describes the newspaper's paradoxical response to modernity: "The portrayals of urban modernity in the illustrated press seem to have fluctuated between, on the one had, an antimodern nostalgia for a more tranquil time, and on the other, a basic fascination with the horrific, the grotesque and the obscene." (88-9). Although Singer discusses the content of the newspaper and Norris engages with their formal organization, both accounts suggest a reading of newspapers as a form straddling two ages—bridging the gap between Vandover's ultra-fragmentary perspective and the novel's narrative continuity.

Although Vandover's perspective on events aligns him with the spectator position the actuality films create, Norris's narration, and the acts of narration portrayed in the novel, indicate that he occupies a subject position significantly more constrained. This

message develops with increasing intensity following Ida's suicide. When Vandover confesses his connection to the suicide to his father, both men express a desire to turn back the clock and somehow undo Vandover's guilt. His father decides to send Vandover away on a sea voyage in an attempt to "begin again" (83). While on the fateful trip, Vandover repeats his father's sentiment, noting, "He *could* turn sharp around when he wanted to, after all. Ah, yes, that was the only thing to do if one was to begin all over again and live down what had happened" (90, emphasis original). The repetition of the word "begin" underlines the desire of both men for Vandover to escape the forward-moving trajectory of effects and responsibilities that follow from his initial interaction with Ida. What critics and several characters in the novel read as the moral monstrosity of Vandover's attempt to evade blame in fact derives from his brutish temporal understanding. Vandover's conviction that a reversal of events is possible depends upon his view of events as essentially meaningless and disconnected.

The exhibition history of the 1896 Lumière film, *Demolition of a Wall*, demonstrates what an enactment of Vandover's desire might look like. The film portrays a relatively straightforward event, workmen knocking down a wall (Figure 3). However, when showing the film, an exhibitor accidentally ran the film backward, so that a demolished wall sprang back up, fully intact (Figure 4). The accident turned out to be quite popular with audiences.[43] By turning an actuality into a trick film, the original exhibitor emphasized film's ability to exploit audiences' day to day experiences of time. As I have suggested, rather than producing time as limited, unidirectional movement, early films presented the possibility of events emptied of meaning, and thus open to

[43] See Bertrand Tavernier's commentary for Kino Video's release of *The Lumière Brothers' First Films* (1998).

temporal manipulation. However, for Norris, events are always both inevitable and irreversible, tied to the forward-moving narratives from which they derive their meaning.

As *Vandover*'s narration of the events surrounding the Mazatlan's sinking indicates, narratively "empty" and reversible moments are only accessible through mistaken acts of perception. Notations of temporal progress permeate the chapter that describes the Mazatlan's sinking. Amidst the chaos of the shipwreck, the narrator carefully tracks the temporal continuity between individual actions:

> *When* Vandover *finally* reached the lifeboat, he found a great crowd *gathered* there; three people *were already* in the boat itself. The first engineer, who commanded that boat, and three of the crew *stood by* the falls *preparing to cast off*. Just below on the deck of the *Mazatlan stood* two sailors *keeping* the crowd in order, *continually shouting*, "Women and children first!" *As* the women *passed* their children forward, the sailors *lifted* them into the boats, some shrieking, others silent and stupid as if stunned. *Then* the women *were helped* up; the men, Vandover among them, *climbing* in *afterward.* The davits *were turned* out and the boat *was swung* clear of the ship's side. (100-101, emphasis added)

In the context of Norris's other writings, this passage is remarkable for the words not included. Here, Norris subordinates his typically lurid adjectival description to a narration of actions: actions sustained, in process, recently passed. When Norris's adjectival description falls away, what remains is his emphasis on sequencing and—in the face of the anarchy of a shipwreck—a clear sense of the temporal relationships between events.[44] It is clear from the narrator's and the reader's perspective that first the crowd gathers, then the women pass the children forward, then the women get in the lifeboat, followed by the men, and then the life boat casts off. However, from the perspective of those

[44] In contrast to my reading, Mitchell reads *Vandover and the Brute* as a novel made up almost entirely of description, arguing that Norris builds lists which refer to nothing "but themselves," and that their "inconsequence is…confirmed in a failure to illuminate character or advance the plot" (76). Mitchell's reading is of interest to my argument because his account would seem to align the novel with the descriptive tendencies of photography and the cinema. While I think these lists are of interest, I think they point to the tension in the novel between the tendency of representative modes in modernity towards description and Norris's own interest in force and plotting.

participating, the scene is chaos. Although his passage on the life boat saves him, to Vandover, "It seemed simple madness to attempt to launch the boat; even the sinking wreck would be better than this chance. Vandover was terrified, again deserted by all his calmness and self-restraint" (101). In this scene, Norris shows that Vandover, like the inferior novelist, is trapped within his own idiosyncratic perspective—as a result, he panics. In contrast, the narrator describes the launching of the lifeboat with an orderly sense of sequence and an eye to the larger view.

Once the lifeboat casts off, another horrible event occurs. The Jewish jeweler, Brann, has not made it onto the boat. As he attempts to pull himself out of the water and into the lifeboat, the women aboard the boat fear he will capsize it and call for the sailors to push the man off: "It was the animal in them all that had come to the surface in an instant, the *primal instinct of the brute* striving for its life and the life of its young" (103, emphasis added). The engineer beats Brann until he loses his grip and drowns. After his rescue by a passing schooner, Vandover reflects on "the drowning of the little Jew of the plush cap with the ear-laps. He shuddered and grew sick again for a minute, telling himself that he would never forget such a scene" (107). However, despite Vandover's insistence that the Jew's drowning is a *scene* he will never forget, Norris has already established that Vandover's problem is not that he cannot make memories, but rather, that because he sees events as fragments and does not narrativize them, he cannot understand their meaning. As Vandover's interaction with Toby in the following chapter implies, simply witnessing or remembering events is insufficient.

Vandover does not learn the full significance of the events that take place during the wreck until he returns to San Francisco and hears about it from Toby, a waiter who

has read about the catastrophe in a newspaper. When Toby hears that Van was in the lifeboat, he explains to Vandover the significance of his recent experiences: "Were *you* in that boat?…Well, *wait till I tell you*; the authorities here are right after that first engineer with a sharp stick, and some of the passengers, too, for not taking him in. A woman in one of the other boats *saw it all and gave the whole thing away*. *A thing like that is regular murder, you know*" (110, emphasis added). Toby's recounting of the incident to Vandover, who has just experienced the wreck, indicates that clarifying the significance of traumatic events requires someone to speak their temporal ordering—requires a narrator. Vandover does not perceive the meaning of the Jew's drowning until the woman in another boat "[gives] the whole thing away," the newspaper reports it, and Toby explains it. In addition to requiring a narrator, the juxtaposition of the two chapters also demonstrates that an accurate understanding of events requires a certain distance—either the woman in the other boat, or Toby reading the newspaper—in order to connect individual experiences of events (Vandover's, for example) into a meaningful whole. In other words, getting at the reality of events requires someone who can see the "canvas." In this case, the personal "scene" that Vandover thinks he will never forget is only a part of the bigger picture. Once narrativized, the event is reconceived as a murder charge.

Although it might seem that this interpretation of the Jew's drowning—which Toby describes in legal and moral terms—would align the novel more closely with realism than with naturalism, in *Vandover and the Brute*, Norris aligns narration with the real. If Vandover's thought pictures are a faulty and artificial form of temporal organization, Geary's reflections on his success, which appear near the end of the novel, provide an account of the ongoing progressive time that both men inhabit: "Vast, vague

ideas passed slowly across the vision of his mind…ideas of the infinite herd of humanity, driven on as if by some enormous, relentless engine, driven on toward some fearful distant bourne, driven on recklessly at headlong speed" (242). Geary's reflections come as close to a direct statement of Norris's view of forces as appears in the novel. Ever the planner, Geary realizes that to succeed, one must understand the rushing temporality that drives human life, since "To lag behind was peril" (242). Following his reflection on the aggressively forward-moving nature of the universe, Geary looks up and sees "Vandover standing in the doorway" (242)—one who, fundamentally misapprehending the nature of time, lags behind at his peril.

In this light, it does not seem to matter whether Vandover perishes or thrives because what matters to Norris is the unrelenting *force* of progressive temporality, which ensures that all events will gain meaning through their placement in a historical context. In a naturalist universe, there is always history, which is also to say, there is always narrative. But if this is the case, why must Vandover be a brute? As I have argued, the brute in this novel results from a perspectival condition that arises in modernity—not so much the result of particular behaviors as it is the side-effect of fully inhabiting a fragmentary perspective that makes one more susceptible to behaving badly. Vandover treats his actions as though their relationship to his fate and his person is totally contingent. But to do this, Norris suggests, is to live in ignorance of the forces that drive humanity. Returning to the description of the Jew's drowning, it is worth noting that Norris invokes the titular term "brute" in his description of the mothers who call for the Jew's death: "It was the animal in them that had come to the surface in an instant, the primal instinct of the brute striving for its life and for the life of its young" (103). While

the "brute" in this passage emerges from a Darwinian context, in which the mothers rediscover their primitive instinct to protect their young at all costs, Norris also suggests that their murderous act depends upon a momentary amnesia for what it means to be human. Or, using Ricoeur's formulation that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode" (52), we might say that the women momentarily forget about narrative and, *as a result*, forget their humanity. The women lack all sense of the future consequences for their acts in the present. However, the women only act this way in extreme circumstances; for Vandover, such behavior is a standard mode of operation.

Conclusion: The Unnatural Brute

Midway through the novel, as Vandover's gambling reaches disastrous proportions and his transformation into the brute is certain, Norris again reminds his readers of the centrality of narrative to human experience: "Over the roofs and among the gray maze of telephone wires swarms of sparrows were chittering hoarsely, and as Vandover raised the window he could hear the newsboys far below in the streets chanting the morning's papers" (213). Although the sounds of the day's news stories shape the environment of most San Franciscans, for Vandover, it might as well be the sparrows who are chanting and the newsboys who are chittering, since he will be unable to narratively process any of the events called out by the boys on the streets below.

Norris's juxtaposition of the world of nature—chittering sparrows—and the human world—chanting newsboys—reveals that Vandover occupies neither. As Den Tandt notes, Norris produces a paradoxical representation of communication: "on the one

hand, the text indicates that loss of articulated speech represents the most severe form of degeneration", but on the other, "it voices the suspicion that the language and the technology of industrialism and commercialism have an uncanny link to savagery or pathology as well" (197-8). The reason for this seeming paradox becomes clear if we consider the difference between the kind of brute represented by birds and the kind of brute Vandover becomes. As a subject position produced by specifically modern ways of perceiving chronology, events, and causality, Vandover's brutishness emerges as a consequence of modernity—rather than the falling away from modernity that so many have suggested.[45] In contrast to the degeneration that occurs when the women drown the Jew—which Norris describes in explicitly evolutionary terms—Vandover's brute is the opposite of the primal. Vandover is the unnatural brute.

In *Vandover and the Brute*, we see the counter-modernist tendency of naturalism emerge as Norris opposes narrative understandings of time against what he positions as the unreal experiences of modernity. In "Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," Hayden White argues that narrative acts as a moralizing force upon history (24). However, the primary "force" in *Vandover* is the amoral force of naturalist progressive time. In *Vandover*, narrative time is the real, and it is only through narrative interpretation that events' true meanings are revealed. In contrast, the experience of time manufactured by the actuality films is also amoral, but only because it is also meaningless. Because he perceives the events in his life as similarly disconnected from linear time and meanings,

[45] These studies typically read the novel as a cautionary tale in which devolution results from moral or physical contamination. In addition to the examples mentioned above, which focus on Vandover's promiscuity, Gina Rossetti argues that Vandover degenerates into a primitive Brute as punishment for his class mixing: "The novel thus chronicles and rationalizes Vandover's devolution, legitimates the innate degraded state of the primitive, or lower class, and forecasts as inevitable the destruction of the upper class by its unmediated contact with the primitive" (46).

Vandover inhabits a temporality that is unsustainable and which ultimately capitulates to real, or narrative, time. The painful consequence, then, of living in a naturalist universe is that agents experience their fates as both inevitable and deserved. History thus becomes a system of punishment and reward, although it remains unclear whether individuals' attempts to act differently would help them to achieve different outcomes. What is clear, though, is that for Norris, opting out of history is impossible and attempts at such a course do nothing beyond giving the inevitable the appearance of contingency. From Norris's perspective, if the actuality genre is appealing because it represents the contingent, it can only do so by insisting on the emptiness of event time—a trick that depends upon its remove from the necessitating forces of historicity. In the chapter that follows, I will examine determinist time within the context of narrative history by pairing two documents that fictionalize events from American history: Norris's penultimate novel, *The Octopus* (1901), and D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).

CHAPTER III

HISTORY AND FACT IN FRANK NORRIS'S *THE OCTOPUS* AND D.W. GRIFFITH'S *THE BIRTH OF A NATION*

While the previous chapter took up the actuality, an early film genre with a contested relationship to narrative, this chapter examines a film frequently credited with developing film narrative as audiences know it today—D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). This chapter argues that in his most famous film D.W. Griffith worked in a film style that invoked the tradition of Frank Norris's naturalist historical fiction. By tracing Griffith's formal innovations from *A Corner in Wheat* (1909) to *Birth*, I argue that in order to understand Griffith's development of narrative technique, his narrative development should be read through his engagement with Norris and naturalism.

In *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Peter Brooks argues that in a post-sacred world, "mythmaking could now only be individual, personal" (16). Although numerous critics have labeled Griffith's and Norris's works melodramatic, the texts I examine in this chapter, Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* and Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901), trouble Brooks' claims about mythmaking through their representation of individuals engaged with forces much larger than the human.[46] In response to the tension they identified between individual historical actors and the force of historical progress, Norris and Griffith worked in a naturalist style to address precisely the problem of personalization that Brooks outlines. This is not to say that Norris and Griffith produced

[46] Michael Davitt Bell, for example, describes Norris's "science" as "at bottom melodramatic and moralistic" (122).

the same kinds of history; the two men had very different affective relationships to naturalism. Evolving from his dismissal of pathological individual perceptions of time in *Vandover and the Brute*, in *The Octopus* Norris attempts to produce a narrative in which no forces would be reducible to individuals. This chapter argues that for Norris the formal challenge of *The Octopus* emerges from the fact that it is difficult to write a novel this way—almost without characters at all. Whereas for Norris, no pathos emerges from his conception of historical forces overrunning human agents, I argue that Griffith's relationship to naturalism was much more ambivalent.

In *The Birth of a Nation,* Griffith narrates history from a highly mediated subject position; Griffith's narrator occupies a position that corresponds to the perspectival problems Mary Lawlor ascribes to Western naturalist novels:

> it was openly problematic to assume that an observer who understood the region well enough to represent it with sensitivity and accuracy could maintain a transcendent position toward it…In attempting to establish their authority, the narrating voices of these texts produce a variety of reflexive references to their own voices and to their aesthetics, sometimes at the expense of the confident portrayal of the material and social dimensions of Western life. (61)

Lawlor usefully explains the double impulse in play in naturalist aesthetics; in order to provide a naturalist history of the West, authors like Jack London and Frank Norris had to simultaneously reference local knowledge of Western life and claim a broader aesthetic view of the landscape they worked to represent. In *The Birth of a Nation*, Griffith performs a similar maneuver, asserting specific knowledge—as a native son of Kentucky—and claiming for himself a transcendent view of human history.

Griffith's investment in film as historiography led him to explore the relationship between individuals and time, a concern that formed the center of Frank Norris's novelistic practice. After reading the naturalist response to the personalization of history

through Norris's first historical novel, I will argue that Griffith's narrative style draws on a naturalist vocabulary. His interest in the relationship between the individual and history operates on two levels. First, through his formal innovations, Griffith worked to develop new methods for managing film time. Secondly, within the diegesis of the films discussed in this chapter, Griffith explored the relationships between his characters and the narrative historical time that contains them. Whereas Norris embraced naturalism's disregard for the individual, I argue that Griffith's concern about the consequences of naturalist narration bubbles up in formal ruptures within *Birth*.

In his 1916 pamphlet protesting censorship of *The Birth of a Nation*, "The Rise and Fall of Free Speech," Griffith notes: "Censorship demands of picture makers a sugar-coated and false version of life's truths." Griffith's appeal for film's accuracy immediately references epic proportions ("life's truths") rather than the more mundane level of recent history (Reconstruction's truths). In contrast to Brooks's account of the melodrama's "smallness," Griffith's defense depends upon connecting his film to literary epics: "They tell us we must not show crime in a motion picture…Had the modern censors existed in past ages and followed out their theories to a logical conclusion, there would have been written no Iliad of Homer; there would not have been written for the glory of the human race that grand cadence of uplift called the Bible; there would have been no Goethe." The comparison Griffith draws—between himself, the Bible, Homer and Goethe—reveals that he conceived of *The Birth of a Nation* as the kind of creation myth referenced by the film's title: an epic tale of the nation's origins.[47] Griffith's

[47] In *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach gives an analysis of Homeric narrative, arguing that Homer produces a static, transhistorical sense of time and history; he explains Homer worked "to represent phenomena in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts, and completely fixed in their spatial and temporal relations" (20).

invocation of the epic not only justifies the violence and sexually explicit material in his works, but also testifies to the sweeping vision that required him to bring such sordid matters to light. Griffith implies that his film, like epics of past eras, accesses the true meaning of history by "bringing [events] together in a continuous and ever flexible connection" (Auerbach 6).

Frank Norris also referenced the epic form to describe his distinctive artistic approach. Norris's unfinished masterpiece was to be an "Epic of the Wheat," a three book cycle that traced the wheat trade from ranches in California, to speculators in Chicago, to a village in Europe dependent upon the American wheat supply. The first book in the cycle was *The Octopus*, a fictionalization of the Mussel Slough Tragedy. In his retelling of this event, Norris also references that ancient historian, Homer. In the scene preceding the novel's central climax, Presley looks out on the picnickers and is "delighted with it all. It was Homeric, this feasting, this vast consuming of meat and bread and wine, followed now by games of strength. An epic simplicity and directness, an honest Anglo-Saxon mirth and innocence, commended it" (505). Presley's observations in this scene are echoed by Norris's essays "The Frontier Gone at Last" and "A Neglected Epic," both published in 1902. In the essays, Norris locates the subject matter for an American epic in the West, and notes that with the closing of the West, American energies will have to expand abroad—ultimately culminating in the formation of one global nation of "simple humanity" ("Frontier" 1190). Russ Castronovo reads this impulse in Norris as linking the novelist's imperialist and aesthetic tendencies, suggesting that as the imperialist "fantasy unfolds in *The Octopus*, literature is no longer marching aimlessly: the aesthetic turns to Asia, its mission to sublimate crass empire building under the emergence of world

culture" (165).[48] Although Castronovo's reading of *The Octopus* focuses primarily on the final scene of the novel, his reading of Norris's globalizing ambitions persuasively accounts for the kind of history writing that I am here interested in exploring. Like Griffith, Norris implies that it is only through the artistic representation of specific and local historical events that United States citizens will be able to understand their place in relation to America's transcendent destiny.

History as Limit

At the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, Frederick Jackson Turner delivered a now famous speech, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," to the American Historical Association.[49] As David Nasaw explains, world's fairs like the Columbian Exposition in Chicago "provided Americans with the opportunity to celebrate in public their nation's recent accomplishments in the international arena and learn more of the places, peoples, and battles they had read about in their newspapers" (74). The world's fairs also worked to produce connections between America's past and its future through the lens of a concretized American character and destiny. In the published version of his speech, Turner discusses America's historical progress in terms of force:

> Behind institutions, behind constitutional forms and modifications, lie the vital forces that call these organs into life and shape them to meet changing conditions… This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion

[48] Amy Kaplan also argues that Norris participated in the project of empire, claiming that Norris "represented a historically changing construction of masculinity as simply the return to a mythical origin," but that "This instinctual self could only be recovered…on an externalized frontier remote from the United States" (*Anarchy* 98).

[49] As David Nasaw notes in *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*, "world's fairs were paeans to progress, concrete demonstrations of how order and organization, high culture and art, science and technology, commerce and industry, all brought together under the wise administration of business and government, would lead inevitably to a brighter, more prosperous future" (66).

> westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West.[50]

Within a decade of Turner's speech announcing the end of westward expansion, American naturalist writers, like Frank Norris, would embrace Turner's description of historical processes as determinist *forces*. As Ronald Martin notes, "Norris had an absolutist's sense of causality, and his concept of force helped him fill the explanatory gap between universal determinism and specific human events" (151). Although Martin aligns force in Norris's novels with evolutionary or biological determinism, in the context of Norris's abiding interests in the West and American expansionism, historical progress would seem to be the natural force with the most interest for the young San Franciscan novelist.

While the "Frontier Thesis" foreclosed one future for Americans—settling the Wild West—it also opened the door for another possibility. Although it was no longer possible for young men to "go West," as Horace Greeley had instructed them in 1865, the West's closing justified expanding the principles of Manifest Destiny towards foreign shores.[51] Turner's justification of American expansionism established a historical narrative that is remarkable for its causal structuring:

> Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity…He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise.

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[50] "The Significance of the Frontier in American History"

[51] Although the quotation, "Go West, young man" is widely attributed to Greeley, who published it in his New York Tribune editorial, the phrase was first used by John Soule in the Terre Haute *Express* in 1851.

Turner's justification for the project of empire depends upon his audience's acceptance of history as an inherently narrative entity—an assumption that allows for what Benedict Anderson describes as the "secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning" (11). In his explanation of historiography's development towards a narrative form, Hayden White explains that the presence of narrative indicates the presence of a collective attempting to produce a coherent identity: narrative comes from group or culture writing its own history (10). In the case of Turner's "Frontier Thesis," America's proud past of settling the wild would serve as a historical precedent for future expeditions into foreign lands. But just as importantly, his discussion of forces establishes a causal link between past and present: the force of America's pioneer spirit—established through the settling of the west—necessitates the movement to build empire abroad. Or, to use Anderson's terms, the expansion abroad was merely the next step in the "continuous" narrative of American history. By creating national narratives, historians like Turner produced a causal link between the United State's past history of continental expansion and its present prosperity that operated as a justification for future actions.[52]

For the fiction writer and fiction filmmaker, however, these same causal links between past and present could represent a formal problem when the artist attempted to retell historical events.[53] Historical fictions such as Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* and

[52] In her study of nineteenth-century textbooks, *Guardians of Tradition*, Ruth Elson notes that the "word 'nationality' appears for the first time in American schoolbooks in an 1828 reader" (101). By the mid-century, textbook authors used the concept of an American national identity to justify expansionist projects; Elson argues that the West figures strongly in these accounts; she writes, "Perhaps the greatest use of the West in these books…is as an illustration of the tremendous material progress unique to American development" (184).

[53] It also seems likely that historical fiction experiences a heightened version of the problem White attributes to historiography: "Insofar as historical stories can be completed, can be given narrative closure,

Norris's *The Octopus* reveal an anxiety about the place of creative agency in relation to history. While historical residuum justified foreign expansion in Turner's case, the lasting influence of past events made it impossible for creators of fictional narratives to cast their stories upon a blank slate. By retelling past events, Griffith and Norris hoped to challenge their audiences' perspective on current events. For Griffith, problematic current events included increasing civil and political rights for blacks and declining economic conditions for white southerners. For Norris, troublesome present conditions consisted of the increasing incorporation of American industry and the growth of monopoly capitalism that came at the expense of an authentic Western culture.[54] From the point of view of storytellers like Norris and Griffith, the problem with historiography is that it suggests the necessity of current affairs: history causes the present. And more problematically, once the status quo becomes necessary, it also begins to draw a kind of moral authority: the past *justifies* the present.

Even as their re-narrations of past events served to further emphasize the inevitability of present conditions, Griffith and Norris paradoxically embraced narrative as a means for changing their audiences' feelings about history. In the case of fictionalized histories, the narrative impulse must always be paradoxical because—in addition to the standard exercise of plotting as "a process of declining or narrowing

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can be shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality the odor of the ideal. This is why the plot of all historical narrative is always an embarrassment" (21).

[54]In his essay, "The Literature of the West" (1902), Norris writes that although the west has become increasingly civilized, beneath the surface of the now "bowler hat" and "pressed trouser" wearing westerner, "there is the Forty-niner. There just beneath the surface is the tough fiber of the breed" (1177). In Norris's eyes the westerner is thus both historically specific, and transhistorical, outwardly changed by events, but at core the same. In *Recalling the Wild*, Mary Lawlor suggests that Norris was not alone in viewing the West transhistorically, noting that "because its physical boundaries have been so protean, "West" has a stronger relativity in American culture than does 'the East,' 'the South,' or 'the North'" (76).

possibility" (Chatman 46)—the realness of the historical events narrated inexorably infringes upon the artist's narrative imagination. Indeed, as Jameson notes, novelistic realism appears incompatible with such "heterogeneous historical perspectives" as Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, to such an extent that "in the context of the gradual reification of realism in late capitalism…romance once again comes to be felt as the place of narrative heterogeneity and freedom to that now oppressive reality principle to which a now oppressive realistic representation is the hostage" (104). Norris's own literary criticism corroborates Jameson's view. In an essay published in the same year as *The Octopus*, "The True Reward of the Novelist," Norris expresses strong opinions about the right and wrong ways to write historical fiction. He defends the historical inaccuracies of Scott's *Ivanhoe* and rails against historical novelists who concern themselves with what Norris considers historical trivialities—he calls them "clothes"—rather than with imbuing their novels with the "realism" of the present moment. However, as I suggested in the context of *Vandover*, rather than attributing this mania for detail to capitalism, as both Jameson and Lukács do, Norris ascribes this tendency to a problem of historical perspective: "The difficulty then is to get at the immediate life, immensely difficult, for you are not only close to the canvas, but are yourself part of the picture" (1150). And while, as I argued in the previous chapter, seeing "the picture" implies having the vision to see the larger history that encompasses events and to understand modernity's relationship to that history, Norris's dismissive reference to historical "clothes" presents us with a telling metaphor that is specific to his view of historical fiction.[55] First, Norris's metaphor suggests that fundamental truths are transhistorical, and that dressing them up in period-

[55] Special thanks to Paul Young for pointing out the resonance of this metaphor.

specific details merely distracts from their significance. Secondly, his dismissal of "clothes" also points to Norris's frustration with the realist novel's tendency to overemphasize character over determinist force, thus drawing focus from the realm of transcendent force to the personal. While the romance tradition to which both Norris and Jameson refer takes up events from the distant past, the texts examined in this chapter relay much more recent events; this abbreviated historical distance compromises the creative freedom from realistic accuracy that Norris and Jameson ascribe to the historical romance. As a result, Norris works to divorce history from historical actors in *The Octopus* in order to open up historic events to greater artistic interpretation.

Scholars disparaging Griffith and Norris for their sentimentality and melodramatic style typically describe these flaws as regressive holdovers: Ronald Martin, for example, writes that Norris had "a propensity for bizarre melodrama" (151), James Agee calls Griffith "a great primitive poet" (398), and in his reflection on the Museum of Modern Art's celebration of Griffith's 100th birthday, William Johnson notes one of the prevailing assumptions about Griffith's work—that "Most of the content of his films cannot be taken seriously" (2).[56] But these same critics have also typically used the melodramatic tendencies of the texts in question as opportunities for biographical critiques of Griffith's or Norris's creative impulses, rather than registering them as the byproduct of their narrative experimentation.[57] In his 1995 introduction to *The*

[56] No less a figure than Sergei Eisenstein writes of Griffith's "moral preachment" and "slightly sentimental humanism" (231, 233). See also, Nick Browne's "Griffith's Family Discourse," and Robert Lang's *American Film Melodrama*, in which he draws upon Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination* to explore various deployments of the term in the context of Griffith's work.

[57] The most famous of these biographical critiques is Michael Rogin's "The Sword Became a Flashing Vision," in which Rogin produces a psychoanalytic reading of *The Birth of a Nation*, arguing that Griffith sacrifices "the autonomy of women and blacks" in the film because of his dual concerns with trust and vengeance. Rogin notes, "Given the primitive sources of the need for basic trust in infantile dependence

Melodramatic Imagination, Brooks posits the melodrama as "less…a genre than…an imaginative mode" (vii).[58] Although the term melodrama is frequently deployed as a pejorative term, Brooks works to resuscitate the genre by arguing that the practice of melodrama can also be read as a form of truth seeking—one very much in line with Norris's attempts to get at the "truth" behind historical events. As Brooks argues, although melodramatic writers do rely upon "strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions," they do so to reveal "the domain of spiritual forces and imperatives that is not clearly visible within reality, but which they believe to be operative there" (Brooks 11, 20). Although Norris occupies an ambivalent relationship to the moral polarization Brooks here describes, the naturalism Griffith and Norris deploy in their historical fictions draws upon many of these techniques in order to deliver up what the two men felt to be the true meanings of the historical events they narrativized. When approached through Griffith's and Norris's historicizing ambitions, the "problems" of sentimentality and melodrama in *The Octopus* and *The Birth of a Nation* emerge as more importantly symptomatic of the process of writing historical fiction at this moment than they are of any faulty sentimentality inherent to either man. Looking at the deployment of melodramatic techniques as a formal strategy in these texts, it becomes clear that Norris and Griffith drew upon the

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and attachment, the women and blacks from whom support was demanded became repositories for the panic against which trust defends, of violence, of loss, and mobile desires" (285).

[58] While the term has been "recovered" in the context of 1950's melodramas, most famously by Thomas Elsaesser's essay "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama" which revived analysis of Douglass Sirk's films, the failure to apply its more positive valences to films of the silent era seems puzzling, especially since the silent cinema emerges at the end of the nineteenth century, when the melodrama reached the height of its popularity. One recent study that attempts to do so is Michael Allen's *Family Secrets*, which focuses primarily on Griffith's post-*Birth* feature-length films.

traditions of melodrama, romance, and realism in order to produce an account of history that was distinctly naturalist in its vision.

Frank Norris and the Trouble with Mass Movements

On May 11th, 1880, a shootout took place between representatives of the Southern Pacific Railroad and the homesteaders who had been cultivating the railroad's land in the San Joaquin Valley of California. The railroad had advertised cheap land to encourage settlement in the area. The initial advertising brochure claimed that the settlers would be able to buy the land they had settled for the reasonable price of $2.50 an acre. The people came, built homes, worked the land, and raised their families in the valley. But the railroad did not keep its initial promise; when the homesteaders, who had invested a great deal of time, money, and labor in the land, asked to purchase the land, they learned that they were no longer able to afford the land on which they were living. The railroad had revalued the land at a significantly higher price, $35 an acre. Further complicating matters, although the Southern Pacific owned the land in the Mussel Slough region, it had decided to build the railroad in a different area together, thus stranding the homesteaders who had settled in the area with the understanding that they would be located alongside a major transportation route.

As the homesteaders became increasingly aware of changes to their original agreement with the S&P, tempers reached dangerous levels. The tragedy itself occurred on a placid spring day. Many of the settlers were enjoying a picnic when news arrived that railroad men were coming to evict them. Having suffered many injustices at the hands of the railroad, the homesteaders formed a posse to confront the railroad men.

During the confrontation, shots broke out, killing five men. The irony of the tragedy emerged afterward, when it became known that the railroad's representatives were not there to evict the settlers, but had come to the valley with an offer to purchase the land back from the settlers, and to offer compensation for their cultivation of the land.[59]

Although the event has since sunk into relative obscurity, the shootout at Mussel Slough gained notoriety in the early 1900's, decades after the event's original occurrence. It was at this time that the incident became known as the "Mussel Slough Tragedy." The renaming was largely the work of anti-monopoly journalists like Ambrose Bierce and W.C. Morrow, who used the Mussel Slough incident as their rallying cry.[60] In the political deployments of the incident, we see the enactment of Jameson's claim that "the literary work or cultural object, as though for the first time, brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one in the same time, a reaction" (82). The journalists who coined the name simultaneously recounted and produced the incident, imbuing it with meaning and significance through their interpretations. Although claiming that political movements reinterpret the past to serve contemporary political ends is now a commonplace, Frank Norris's 1901 fictionalization of the Mussel Slough Tragedy maintains a different relationship to history altogether. For Norris, the historical novel offered an opportunity to solve the problems of wrong-headed, individualistic perspective that he pinpointed in *Vandover and the Brute*.

As part of Norris's pedagogical project, *The Octopus* tracks a poet named Presley's movement through situations that confuse his sense of causation and

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[59] See Terry Beers's *Gunfight at Mussel Slough: Evolution of the Western Myth* and J.L. Brown's *The Mussel Slough Tragedy*.

[60] See Morrow's *Blood Money* (1882) and Bierce's "After Mussel Slough" (1881).

responsibility. When Presley first meets Shelgrim, the S&P Railroad president, it appears that the central problem addressed by the novel is one of corporate responsibility—the question of how corporate persons might be held accountable for their actions. This line of analysis is very much in keeping with accounts of naturalist literature as a genre that converts persons into things, or which calls the category of self into radical question.[61] Mark Seltzer and Walter Benn Michaels have each produced persuasive accounts of *The Octopus* as Norris's take on the failure of populism and the rise of the corporation.[62] Michaels argues that the novel produces an account of the corporation as an entity that replaces the human, arguing that in *The* Octopus, "The scandal of the corporation, then, is not that it is a new kind of man; the scandal is that it is the old kind" (206). This vein of criticism points to corporate personhood as a mode for abstracting authority to a blameless and unaccountable collective that exercises agency in ways that individual people never can. However, Norris's focus on events leading up to the shootout indicates that his concerns about the abstraction of people are much broader than Michaels' reading would suggest. Anything that might be termed a social or historical movement produces a representational problem for Norris, because in movements people begin to look like they are capable of functioning like forces, even as Norris wants to argue that their actions are circumscribed by forces that transcend individual human acts.

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[61] For an account of naturalism's ability to convert the human to the nonhuman, see Mark Seltzer's *Bodies and Machines*. In his *Determined Fictions*, Lee Clark Mitchell argues that naturalism produces an account of human agency radically opposed to realist notions of self.

[62] Seltzer argues that Norris "invokes a traditional 'agrarianist' opposition of producer and speculator" (26), but then transforms this problem into a problem of production and generation, in which Norris minimizes the role of women in biological reproduction and emphasizes the importance of a male managerial class (28). My masters thesis, *Abstraction, Liability, and Monstrous Incorporation: the New Corporation in Frank Norris's The Octopus*, also takes up these issues.

Moments before the novel's well-known "machine in the garden" moment, Presley stands on a hillside watching Vanamee's flock graze. And while Leo Marx marks the violent arrival of the train as the moment when the industrial disrupts the pastoral, Norris's peculiar description of the sheep suggests something else altogether: [63]

> Hundred upon hundreds upon hundreds of grey, rounded backs, all exactly alike, huddled, close-packed, alive, hid the earth from sight. It was no longer an aggregate of individuals. It was a mass—a compact, solid, slowly moving mass, huge, without form, like a thick-pressed growth of mushrooms, spreading out in all directions over the earth. From it there arose a vague murmur, confused, inarticulate, like the sound of a very different surf, while all the air in the vicinity was heavy with the warm, ammoniacal odour of the thousands of crowding bodies. (31)

The description of the sheep is strangely at odds with the pastoral tradition Marx reads into the scene. [64] The sheep are smelly and frightened; the air is dirty and suffocating; and the fauna in this scene seem to be at war with the earth itself. Although Presley witnesses this scene, the description in this passage is from the third-person narrator's perspective, not the poet's. The particular strangeness of this description derives from the inappropriateness to the pastoral tradition of the adjectives used. Instead, the words in this passage seem more appropriate to a setting radically opposed to the pastoral—the industrial cityscape. Norris's narration moves from describing the sheep as "huddled, close-packed, and alive" to the seemingly horrific declaratory remark "it was a mass." Echoing the phraseology of Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus" (1883), soon to be enshrined inside the base of the Statue of Liberty—"*Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"*—this passage notes the trauma of conversion from an "aggregate" of

[63] *The Machine in the Garden*, 343-4.

[64] Reuben Ellis's article, "A Little Turn through the Country," is in keeping with Marx's reading, and similarly associates the hillside scene with the pastoral tradition.

individual identities to an undifferentiated mass. Norris pursues this analogy, referencing xenophobic fears about America becoming a Babel of foreign languages, and calling to mind muckraking exposes of stinking tenement slums full of unknowable miasmas.[65]

However, the primary horror in this extended metaphor is not the sheep's immigrant-ness, but their mass-ness, a quality which presents both formal and generic challenges to Norris's narrative project. After insisting that the sheep are no longer an "aggregate" of discernible individuals, he quickly equates this condition with that of mushroom growth, which, although perhaps lacking neat boundaries or shape, does consist of discernible mushrooms. Throughout the passage, Norris moves back and forth between describing the sheep as a mass and as a collective of individuals. The final sentence of the paragraph hints at Norris's concerns about the problematic relationship between historical movements that are comprised of people and the individual people themselves, as the narrator ends the passage by converting the sheep back into "thousands of crowding bodies," rather than the amorphous mass. The mass, like the corporation, is a representational problem for Norris because it represents something at once whole and yet comprised of many individual entities. It is akin to what Seltzer has read as the semen-like mess in Annixter's bed—a strange substance. [66] But beyond the representational trickiness of the mass's physical qualities, the mass also represents a problem of individual agency that is specific to *The Octopus*'s generic project. As a naturalist, Norris wants to be able to treat time as a natural force—as he does in

[65] Bender's "Frank Norris on the Evolution and Repression of the Sexual Instinct" offers a persuasive reading of Norris's fear of hybridity produced by interracial sexual relationships.

[66] Seltzer argues that we should read the "sloop" in Annixter's bed as semen, and thus understand the novel as producing an account of reproduction that does not depend upon the biological (*Bodies and Machines*, 32).

Vandover—but in his historical novel, Norris confronts groups of people whose force-like behavior threatens his claims for the comparative insignificance of individual human lives.

Michaels and others center their accounts of *The Octopus* on the conversation between Presley and the railroad tycoon Shelgrim, reading it as pedagogical instruction on Norris's conception of force.[67] And while this conversation is central to the novel, such accounts tend to obscure the forces in the novel that are most troubling to Norris: movements made of people, not wheat. To understand the novel otherwise is to fall into the same logical trap with which Shelgrim snares Presley. When Presley attempts to form an accusation against the man behind the railroad company that has bankrupted his friends, Shelgrim interrupts and lays out his theory of force:

> Believe this, young man…*that Railroads build themselves*. Where there is a demand sooner or later there will be a supply. Mr. Derrick, does he grow his wheat? The Wheat grows itself. What does he count for? Does he supply the force? What do I count for? Do I build the railroad? You are dealing with forces, young man, when you speak of Wheat and Railroads, not with men. There is the Wheat, the supply. It must be carried to feed the People. There is the Demand. The Wheat is one force, the Railroad another, and there is the law that governs them—supply and demand. Men have only little to do with the whole business. (575-6, emphasis added)

The problem with readings of this passage is that they tend to take Shelgrim's account of forces as Norris's. However, by obscuring the fact that both supply and demand depend upon *human* masses, Shelgrim's account merges the two kinds of forces that Norris's novel works to separate. Although Shelgrim is right to say that the wheat doesn't depend upon Magnus Derrick, it seems dubious that without people there would be no railroad. In this light, it seems that Shelgrim's excuses are an object lesson in the problem of

[67] Seltzer, for example, claims that Shelgrim's explanation "concisely enunciates what Norris ends by endorsing as the 'larger view'" (26).

treating human energies as natural forces. Norris corrects Shelgrim's faulty view at the end of the novel when, through Presley, he makes the ponderous claim: "*But the* Wheat *remained*. Untouched, unassailable, undefiled, that mighty world force, that nourisher of nations, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, indifferent to the human swarm, gigantic, resistless, moved onward in its appointed grooves" (651, emphasis original). Here Norris asserts the force of the natural—the wheat—over the "human swarm." However, this passage also reveals a certain ambivalence on Norris's part towards representing "the people" who both create the demand for the wheat and grow it—for surely Norris the Californian knows wheat does not "grow itself"—appear to be simultaneously subject to the force of the wheat.

As much as *The Octopus* is a novel concerned with the problematic relationship between persons and things, the recurring scenes of events miscommunicated and misinterpreted suggest that the novel is *at least* as concerned with the representation of individuals' relationships to historical events, and more specifically, to historical movements. As I have suggested, the railroad is even more tied to the masses than the wheat is. In particular, the railroad has ties to the kind of masses represented by the problematic amalgam of sheep. Produced by human labor and symbolizing westward expansion and progress, the railroad occupies a somewhat embattled relationship to immigrant populations. The masses of humanity in both cases—labor and immigrant—are also the kind of mass likely to organize and to represent a political force—a movement. The account of mass movements forwarded by *The Octopus* centers upon problems of representation, in both the artistic and the political senses of the word.[68]

[68] In *The Age of Reform*, Hofstadter notes: "Now the growth of the large corporation, the labor union, and the big impenetrable political machine was clotting society into large aggregates and presenting to the

Norris's strategy for addressing both representational problems is emphatically naturalist; he shows the *force*ful organizations of men—represented in *The Octopus* by the Rancher's League—to be fundamentally incoherent as a mass, and he paradoxically insists upon the ultimate solitariness and smallness of any persons amalgamated within a movement. Initially, Norris's populist impulse would seem at odds with such a representational attack on the power of people to join together and fight monopoly capital. However, Norris's ultimate assurance that the monopoly will not triumph depends upon a naturalist worldview in which human actions can only be minor in comparison to the forceful progression of time.

Like the original event, Norris's fictionalized narration of the Mussel Slough Tragedy also hinges upon a misunderstanding. When news of the railroad men's approach reaches the picnicking farmers, "the multitude rose to its feet. Men and women looked at each other speechless, or broke forth into inarticulate exclamations. A strange, unfamiliar murmur took the place of the tumultuous gaiety of the previous moments. A sense of dread, of confusion, of impending terror weighed heavily in the air. What was now to happen?" (507). There are several things worth noting in this paragraph; the first is that, although spoken by the narrator, not Presley, the last sentence of the paragraph is a question. The question, coming as it does after a description of the multitude's mental state, might be attributable to them in the form of free indirect discourse, but since it also comes from the third-person omniscient narrator, it stands as a direct address to the reader, who—knowing the history of the event—knows the fate of the uneasy multitude and can answer the question.

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unorganized citizen the prospect that all these aggregates and interests would be able to act in concert and shut out those men for whom organization was difficult or impossible" (213-4).

It is also worth noting that this scene begins with two primary characters, Annixter and Hilma, talking. The narration's movement, from Annixter and Hilda to the mass of people, transforms the sounds in the scene from dialogue to, successively, silence, "inarticulate exclamations," and a "murmur." While the novel's individual characters—in this case represented by Annixter and Hilma—and the multitude will experience the same history, the difference in Norris's characterization of the two groups is remarkable: Annixter decides to take action, but the multitude is incapable of reflection on either the past or the future. Like Vandover, the masses become problematically not human—as represented in the conversion from picnickers to multitude. But here, unlike in Vandover, the conversion of people into the non human is full of historical import, as they become something like a force as Shelgrim describes it—neither agential, nor responsible. In this section of the novel, the emergence of the mass culminates in the shoot-out itself. As the railroad's representatives and the ranchers face off, a horse panics and knocks one of the ranchers to the ground. Norris's narration of the event emphasizes its contingency while simultaneously affirming the fatalism of the history it narrates: "The animal recoiled sharply, and, striking against Garnett, threw him to the ground. Delaney's horse stood between the buggy and the Leaguers gathered on the road in front of the ditch; the incident, indistinctly seen by them, was misinterpreted" (521). The act of group interpretation moves the level of the responsibility from an individual who misreads an action to a group's failure of perception. And a group's failure to understand events, Norris suggests, has dire consequences. Although the German immigrant, Hooven, fires the first shot—not something known in the case of the actual Mussel Slough incident—the shooting that follows is not attributable to any individual:

> Instantly the revolvers and rifles seemed to go off of themselves. Both sides, deputies and Leaguers, opened fire simultaneously. At first, it was nothing but a confused roar of explosions; then the roar lapsed to an irregular, quick succession of reports, shot leaping after shot; then a moment's silence, and, last of all, regular as clock-ticks, three shots at exact intervals. Then stillness. (521)

The description in this passage moves from that of subjective perception—"the rifles seemed"—to objective observation: "three shots at exact intervals." The change in narration and the change in narrative authority that occurs with the move from subjective "seeming" to incontrovertible reporting of fact reveals Norris's discomfort with explaining mob motivation and significantly greater ease with reporting the consequences of mob action.[69]

The historical "movement" represents a problem for Norris because movements offer the possibility for humans to act like a force in the naturalist sense, thus undermining naturalist claims about transhistorical and universal forces. The collective is menacing because it insists upon the relevance of persons to historical processes, and therefore insists upon the *relevance* of human agency to the operation of forces. In his reading of Gissing, Jameson elaborates the difficulty naturalists faced when they attempted representations of "the people." He argues that:

> if the 'people' functions successfully as a merely classificatory concept, the characters of the novel will be reduced to nothing more than illustrations of their preexistent essences…If, on the other hand, the notion of 'people' begins to take on class connotations in spite of itself, then it must fatally become relational…such a development would make the 'otherness' of the concept of 'people' unavoidable, and uncomfortably underscore its dependence on the privileged yet placeless observer who complacently yet dispassionately collects this narrative raw material. (191).

[69] Mitchell notes that naturalist literature's emphasis on "consequence at the expense of intention" results in a determinist-feeling narrative style that challenges readers' tendency to ascribe blame to individual agents (18).

Jameson's criticism of Gissing resonates with Norris's body of work as well. Norris's novels progress from tales of individuals overcome by forces beyond their control in *Vandover and the Brute* and *McTeague* to representations of large groups of people in the "Epic of the Wheat." His novelistic trajectory reveals a movement away from treating individual characters towards a focus on the forces that Norris believes drive human history. In *The Octopus*, the "people" appears in an even more problematic form than that which Jameson outlines. For here, the "people" emerge as a historically significant collective, a movement. In this way, the historical novel highlights what, for naturalists, is problematic about the form of the novel—its ties to character.

The shootout focuses the central issue Norris explores in *The Octopus*: how to understand the relationship of the mob, masses, or movement (all interchangeable in this novel) to forces. Or, put in novelistic terms, how to understand the relationship between character and plotting in the context of a naturalist novel. If Presley's statement about men as "motes in the sunshine" is meant to be a comforting reflection on the irrelevance of individual tragedies in the face of determinist forces that operate towards an ultimate and transcendent purpose, then histories which privilege the movement would seem to subvert this reassuring historical determinism. In spite of the increasing movement towards incorporation and organization at the turn of the century, *The Octopus* insists upon the individual as the relevant unit for understanding human agency in order to corroborate the novel's determinist account of the passage of time as force. In other words, despite his ambivalence towards literary fiction's emphasis on individual characters, Norris personalizes historical movements in order to subject them to his naturalist system of narration.

Near the end of the novel, Norris displays a particularly innovative narrative technique, which Griffith would replicate in filmic form eight years later. At this point, the tragedy determined by the historical record has already occurred, and it would appear that all that remains for narrative closure is a display of the shoot-out's far-reaching consequences. And, at first glance, that seems to be the purpose the novel's last chapters serve; Norris's narrative cuts back and forth between a grotesque banquet sequence in which the railroad magnate and his friends and family feast upon pheasants, shaved ices, and fresh asparagus, and a scene in which the widowed Mrs. Hooven and her young daughter wander the streets in desperation and hunger. However, the back-and-forth movement between locales in the San Francisco sequence contains two of Norris's most polemical statements.

The first statement is that most clearly echoed by Griffith's 1909 *A Corner in Wheat*: an obvious ideological comparison of haves with have-nots. However, the second position forwarded by Norris's narrative movement between feast and famine diminishes the impact of the first. Norris's cutting between scenes displaces blame from the level of individual to the level of circumstance, or condition, which, in *The Octopus*, is always attributable to force. Like Shelgrim, the narrator in this passage insists that we cannot blame Shelgrim. Although the cutting implicates him, Shelgrim's excess is not directly responsible for Mrs. Hooven's eventual death; their connection is circumstantial—based on their relative positions as motes—rather than causal.[70] By cutting rapidly back and forth between the two scenes, Norris highlights his narrative intervention, positioning

[70] Tom Lutz also recognizes that Norris does not assign blame to individuals in the novel, but he ascribes this to Norris's sensitivity to his economically conservative publisher, Doubleday, Page, & Company (139). Lutz argues that "Through Presley's change of heart after his meeting with a railroad magnate, Norris at least partially exonerated the railroad" (140).

naturalist narration as a reflection of the temporal progress that encompasses and necessitates the fates of both individuals. In his reading of Balzac's *Les Paysans*, Jameson suggests the costs of personalizing history: "The disaster of *Les Paysans*…is thus emptied of its finality, its irreversibility, its historical inevitability, by a narrative register which offers it to us as merely conditional history, and transforms the indicative mode of historical 'fact' into the less binding one of the cautionary tale and the didactic lesson" (169). Although Jameson would doubtlessly censure Norris for his extrapolation from historical process to force, Norris nevertheless avoids turning history into the personal tragedies that Jameson and Lukács associate with bourgeois realism.[71] Instead, as Mitchell notes, "Neither 'tragic' nor 'heroic'…are appropriate descriptions of naturalist efforts, since tragedy and heroism assume capacities of characters as well as standards from the reader that are precluded by determinism" (31). All this displacement of agency, from the human and specific to the forceful and circumstantial, works to emphasize naturalism as the literary genre most appropriate to tracking temporal progress, at the same time that it denies the relevance of the human to historical processes. Unsurprisingly, this abstraction works in the favor of Norris's naturalist project. While it suggests the irrelevance of the participants in events, it also suggests the necessity of an observer to interpret events in terms of force. Thus, when Presley, who has been invited to the dinner, reacts with the anger associated with anarchist and socialist characters in the novel, his speech about an uprising of "the People" is interrupted by the narrative switching to Mrs. Hooven's death scene—an ideological cut that converts "People" to Mrs. Hooven—"At ten o'clock Mrs. Hooven fell" (608-9).

[71] Lukács writes, "This tendency to make history private is a general characteristic of the nascent decline of great realism" (200).

Norris's cuts between the scene that culminates in Presley's invocation of "the People" and Mrs. Hooven's pathetic last moments produce a novelistic version of parallel editing, which acts as a formal expression of the relationship between individuals and historical progress.[72] While the contrast Norris develops by cutting between the banquet and Mrs. Hooven's death may provoke either a sympathetic or angry response, it also signifies that the characters are acting in a time scheme beyond their control.

In the novel's final paragraph, Norris offers his reader this reassurance: "Falseness dies; injustice and oppression in the end of everything vanish and fade away…The larger view always and through all shams, all wickednesses, discovers the Truth that will, in the end, prevail" (651-2). In these last words, we see that the individual acts of the ranchers and the railroad men are as but "motes in the sunshine" (651), relatively meaningless in the context of the "Truth" that will finally "prevail." Because Norris posits a universe in which transcendent forces overcome human weakness and greed, collective political action cannot be represented as historically powerful, because if forces are constituted by humans, then they cannot be transcendent at all.[73] In this context, Norris appears to be less of a populist than Michaels and Seltzer assume and his naturalist version of history emerges as an alternative to populist historiography.[74]

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[72] This relationship is similar to that Bruno Latour describes between individual creatures and nature in *The Pasteurization of France*. Latour notes that "Scallops also find that nature is a harsh taskmaster—hostile, nourishing, profligate—because fish, fishermen, and the rocks to which they attach themselves have ends that differ from those of the scallops" (167). In the context of *The Octopus*, Norris makes it clear that force also has a different end in mind that poor Mrs. Hooven.

[73] Paul Civello reads Norris's account of forces somewhat differently. Although also focuses on force in the novel, he reads the forces in the novel as moral, rather than determinist, arguing that "the Railroad is clearly immoral," in contrast to the "self-engendering wheat," "which is an expression of beneficent, divine will, not blind, deterministic force" (59).

[74] As both Hofstadter and Alan Trachtenberg and have noted, there was a shift in the late nineteenth century that occurred when the organization became more important in shaping the trajectory of American history than the individual, explaining, "economic incorporation wrenched American society from familiar values"

Presley's reflection at the end of the novel, which mirrors Norris's conception of naturalism as romance, reveals the representational problems and naturalist problems with the mass movement to be two sides of the same coin: the movement resists familiar and easily representable narratives of individual historic acts. From the naturalist perspective, then, the form of the novel serves as both problem and solution: the novel's ties to character agency threaten to undermine naturalism's representations of forceful time, but its ties to narrative and plotting allow Norris to solve this problem by writing a historical narrative that essentially renders character agency moot. For Norris, there is no pathos around the subjugation of characters to plotting, but this tendency—which arises out of historical fiction—appears in Griffith's films as a crisis of representation.

In *A Corner in Wheat*, his 1909 adaptation of Norris's 1903 work, *The Pit*, Griffith draws upon the kind of ideological editing that Norris constructs in *The Octopus*'s San Francisco scenes, but uses it to promote ends that are much more traditionally melodramatic. In contrast to Norris's immoral world of forces, in which men like Behrman are mere motes, Griffith adapted the work of the naturalist novelist to fit purposes that fit much more neatly with Brooks' account of the melodrama as "the principal mode for uncovering, demonstrating, and making operative the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era" (15). Although based on *The Pit*, the film concludes with a series of scenes drawn from *The Octopus*. Following the mad rush in the speculation pit that drives up the price of wheat and makes the "Wheat King's" fortune, Griffith's ideological editing increases. The film cuts back and forth between a scene marked by the

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(Trachtenberg 7), which had centered around a spirit of American individualism. However, this change was in many ways defied by the representational emphasis of the populists who "showed an unusually strong tendency to account for relatively impersonal events in highly personal terms" (Hofstadter 73).

intertitle "The Gold of the Wheat," which portrays a lavish feast in the home of the Wheat King, and a scene labeled "The Chaff of the Wheat" that portrays bedraggled families standing in line to buy overpriced bread. This editing is not, however, meant to establish spatial or temporal relationships between the two locations. Instead, as Tom Gunning argues, the parallel editing in this film might best be termed "editorial" narration, in which Griffith cuts between the two scenes to form a comparison in the service of social commentary (241).[75] Unlike Norris, Griffith uses parallel editing to indicate blame. A sign in the bakery reads "Owing to the advance in the price of flour the usual 5 cent loaf will be 10 cents" (Figures 5 and 6). After showing an old woman and little girl being turned away from the counter, unable to purchase their bread, Griffith cuts to the Wheat King's lavish home, where his guests are dancing. However, Griffith's tendency to read structural problems as individual ones somewhat undercuts Gunning's assessment of the film. As Kay Sloan argues, "Griffith took the controversy [surrounding speculation in wheat] and turned it into entertainment…The resulting cinematic version of the speculation interpreted the conflict as an offense to the individual—which could be resolved in the private sphere" (21). Eisenstein's reading of this tendency in Griffith's body of work is perhaps the most well-known. In "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today, Eisenstein argues that "The structure that is reflected in the concept of Griffith montage is the structure of bourgeois society…And this society, perceived *only as a contrast between the haves and the have-nots*, is reflected in the consciousness of Griffith no

[75]From *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film*. In *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, Miriam Hansen explains that in films like *A Corner in Wheat*, "the parallel construction [is] geared toward a conceptual point" and that "This preoccupation with message ran counter to the growing tendency of narrative film to organize patterns of linear causality around individual characters and their psychology, allowing ideology to work, all the more effectively, underground" (137).

deeper than the image of an intricate race between two parallel lines" (234). William Johnson's reading of Griffith's work supports Eisenstein's argument and also registers the difference between the parallel structure Griffith uses and that Norris develops. Johnson notes that "Griffith does not damn his characters for possessing wealth: they can attain redemption if they become authentically generous to the poor" (9). Eisenstein censures this tendency in Griffith as both bourgeois and melodramatic, and Norris would likely have opposed such personal solutions because they suggest that individuals have the power to change historical trajectories.

However, these critiques, which rightly acknowledge Griffith's tendency to personalize history, do not seem to fully account for Griffith's work in *A Corner in Wheat*. Because of its source text, *A Corner in Wheat* occupies a unique spot in the Griffith canon.[76] Eisenstein's account of Griffith's "slightly sentimental humanism" derives from his reading of Dickens and the Victorian novel as Griffith's primary influences (233). However, reading Griffith into the tradition of American naturalism accounts for both the editing in *A Corner and Wheat* and what I will describe as the anxious ruptures in *The Birth of a Nation*. By reading Griffith this way, I argue that we can see his bourgeois personalization of history as a *response* to naturalist forms of narration that he found simultaneously appealing and distressing. Furthermore, while it seems plausible that Griffith produces an account of a widespread economic practice as an *individual* wrong, Sloan's assertion that Griffith promotes an interpersonal resolution seems to either misread or ignore the film's ending, which includes a scene of the wheat

[76] Although, as Jan Olsson notes, Griffith also derived some of the images for the film from the work of French artist Jean-François Millet (42). Although I find Olsson's historical research useful, I am here primarily interested in Griffith's narrative structuring, which I argue stems from Norris's naturalist narration.

king drowning in an unrelenting stream of the grain.[77] As Gunning notes, *A Corner in Wheat* is one of Griffith's "Biograph masterworks," "which he never surpassed in sophistication of construction and cohesion between social message and filmic form" (240). Part of the sophistication Gunning hints at depends upon Griffith not limiting himself to the interpersonal familial drama that formed the center of so many of his other Biograph films. Rather than reconciling the conflict he establishes between haves and have-nots on the level on plot, Griffith ends *A Corner in Wheat* with a shot reminiscent of *The Octopus*'s ending: a man standing in a field of wheat, overwhelmed by its vastness (Figure 7).[78] Gunning closes his chapter on *A Corner in Wheat* and Griffith's links to naturalist narration with this statement: "through the resources of both editing and the enframed image, the narrator system could create a realm of reference that went beyond the actions of individual characters, or even their psychological motivations, to the world of economic relations and the processes of history" (252-253). It is the last part of Gunning's statement that I wish to take up in relation to Griffith's most famous and infamous film. While the formal similarity between Norris's and Griffith's work is perhaps most obvious in the parallel editing both employ, Griffith's image of the man overwhelmed by nature is at least as significant because it ties his storytelling to American literary naturalism, which, in Norris's words, takes "the larger view" (*The Octopus* 651) At the end of his discussion of Griffith's editorial mode, Gunning hints that Griffith's interest in the historical and in the literature of naturalists like Norris and

[77] Indeed, Sloan herself ends up contradicting this reading of the film, when she writes: "any real resolution to the serious issue was left up to divine forces…Like Frank Norris before him, Griffith elected Nature, not human decisions, to lead to social change" (22).

[78] Indeed, Gunning notes that "the devices of parallel editing reach a new abstraction in the film, creating Griffith's crowning work in the fashioning of an imagistic narrative structure" (*D.W. Griffith* 240).

London would lead the filmmaker to develop his own naturalist sensibility. This development occurs specifically in the context of Griffith's artistic confrontations with progressive and determinist-seeming historical time. In this film, Griffith would maintain the sense of a driving temporal determinism established in Norris's historical writing, but struggle with Norris's dismissal of character agency.

Griffith and History

The Birth of a Nation is Griffith's filmic interpretation of another novel, Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* (1905). In *The Clansman*, Dixon describes a white American nation divided in the wake of the Civil War, and casts the rise of the Klan as a historical movement that reunited and revivified the body of white America, protecting the nation from newly emancipated African Americans.[79] Though *The Clansman* provided the narrative source material and many of the characters for Griffith's film, some key distinctions differentiate the two documents. First, there is the matter of titles. Griffith did not use Dixon's title. Instead, by calling his film *The Birth of a Nation*, he announced the historical significance of his film as a declaration of national origins. Dixon, on the other hand, subtitled his novel "*An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*," thus invoking his novel's generic relationship to the works of novelists like Walter Scott and James Fennimore Cooper.

Dixon and Griffith also differed in their efforts to validate the historical accuracy of their works. Though in his "To the Reader," Dixon claims "I have sought to preserve

[79] Amy Kaplan suggests an additional extradiegetic historical reference for the film. She argues that in addition to reflecting Griffith's concerns about free blacks: "*The Birth of a Nation* takes place on a broader international terrain than the focus on the internal domestic conflict of the Civil War and the racial violence overtly suggests" (162). She notes, "In *The Birth of a Nation*, views of the climactic of the Klan echo on a grander scale films made of the Rough Riders on their way to rescue Cuba" (161).

in this romance both the letter and the spirit of this remarkable period…without taking a liberty with any essential historic fact," this is a far cry from Griffith's promotion of his film as an objective visual history (Dixon 1-2). Nor did Dixon trouble himself, as Griffith went to great lengths to do, with further claims to his novel's historical accuracy. Once establishing his adherence to the "letter and the spirit" of the period, Dixon launches into his narrative and no longer troubles himself with historical documentation. In this way, Dixon's invocation of the romance tradition allows him narrative license. Dixon is able to, as Ben Cameron does at the novel's end, act as a "revolutionist" by changing the course of history such that "the South [is] redeemed from shame" (374). For Dixon's romance of the South, the progressive time of history presents no representational problem, largely because it remains outside the narrative. Like Scott's *Ivanhoe*, Dixon's history may be said to invoke "heterogeneous historical perspectives" and ignore what Jameson describes as the "reality principle" that realist novelists championed (104). In *The Birth of a Nation*, however, Griffith attempted to represent Dixon's romance as fact, and in so doing, attempted to bring external historical time into the film's narrative time scheme. In his research into the source material of the film, Jeffrey Martin suggests that Griffith drew more directly from Dixon's little-known theatrical adaptation of *The Clansman* than from the novel, arguing that when viewed through the lens of Dixon's play, Griffith's film appears much less innovative than traditionally believed (87). However, Martin also notes that there are some differences between this possible source for the film and *Birth*, and one of them is Griffith's inclusion of historical tableaux. Whether we read *Birth* as an adaptation of Dixon's film or novel, and questions of Griffith's originality aside, the fact remains that Griffith,

unlike Dixon, felt compelled to repeatedly punctuate his narrative with references to its historicity.

This is not to say that Griffith's film does not attempt to change history. *Birth* works to produce many of the same affective responses towards the Camerons and the Stonemans that Dixon's novel did, and most of the events that Griffith portrays are the same as in the novel. Indeed, Griffith's representation of the events from Dixon's novel importantly distinguishes his approach to historical representation from Norris's. Whereas Norris describes men as motes, whose actions have little impact on events, Griffith's sense of the relationship between individualism and determinist time is much less straightforward. And while Presley's actions in *The Octopus*—such as his attempt to firebomb Behrman's house—are ineffectual, in *The Birth of a Nation*, Ben Cameron does change history within the diegesis of the film's narrative by gathering up Southerners to form the Klan. However, such moments of characters influencing events are in tension with Griffith's attempt to establish the facticity of his film through references to historical events. These events suggest a history that lies outside of Griffith's narrative romance, a monolithic history very similar to the naturalist view Norris constructs in *The Octopus*. While Griffith's characters are able to change history within the film's diegesis, his references to extradiegetic history point to the fictionality of his work, thus undermining the agency exerted by the film's fictional characters. Whereas *The Octopus* makes an argument against personalization of history, *The Birth of a Nation* represents Griffith's conflicted attempt to do just that.

Like Norris, Griffith has been on the receiving end of criticisms about melodramatic or sentimental style. In his introduction to *Focus on: the Birth of a Nation*, Fred Silva notes that, "Always a man of emotion and sentiment, Griffith was never able

to separate harsh realities from comfortable myths and see his heritage clearly" (7). However, such criticisms fail to register that these "problems" in *The Birth of the Nation* derive from the nature of Griffith's narrative project, and Griffith certainly would have objected to any implication that his film might be influenced by biography. In "Five-Dollar Movies Prophesied," Griffith expresses his belief that in the future everything will be taught by film, noting that students "will never be obliged to read history again." He goes further to claim that film is the ideal medium for producing history because: "There will be no opinions expressed. You will merely be present at the making of history. All the work of writing revising, collating, and reproducing will have been carefully attended to by a corps of recognized experts, and you will have received a vivid and complete expression" (10).[80] Here, Griffith expresses two views which align his opinions with Norris's writings on history. First, Griffith argues that the cinema captures a "complete" expression not accessible through other forms—in this case, history books. And, paradoxically, although Griffith claims that film will "make" history, his statement that "no opinions' will be expressed aligns Griffith echoes Norris's account of historical time as a real entity that only his medium can appropriately represent.

Despite his claims to historical truth and accuracy, Griffith's version of history was not universally accepted. Because of the controversy surrounding the film, even Woodrow Wilson withdrew his initial support.[81] Although Griffith drew on the work of numerous popular historians from the era to support his accounts, his was certainly not the only version of events, and many responses to the film reflected this. As Lee

[80] As quoted in *Focus on The Birth of a Nation*.

[81] Woodrow Wilson to Joseph Tumulty, April 28, 1915. In Wilson, *Papers* 33:86.

Grieveson recounts, "police in Boston sought to prevent black people from buying tickets to the film when it played the Tremont Theater, although the concern here was less about the audience's 'enthusiasm' than about its anger at the film's racism" (193).[82] Members of the black community objected to Griffith's inaccurate historiography as well as his racist depiction of blacks. In response to Griffith's offer of ten thousand dollars to anyone who could find a moment of historical inaccuracy in the film, a member of the NAACP challenged Griffith to identify an instance of a mulatto senator attempting to marry the daughter of a white senator (Rogin 287). Griffith's silence in response to this question demonstrates that he thought of the scenes from the Stoneman-Cameron narrative as belonging to a different order than the moments he explicitly referenced as history in the film.

Despite his efforts to create new perspectives on the historical events of the Civil War, Griffith faced one nearly insurmountable obstacle—the facts of the South's secession, eventual loss of the war, and following economic impoverishment. To create a version of history in which all whites—and in particular, Southern whites—were as victorious as they appeared at the end of Dixon's novel, Griffith needed to do more than create scenes of monstrous free blacks and villainous northern troops pillaging Southern homes. He had to create an alternative narrative that both encompassed and transcended the historical narratives of the Civil War and Reconstruction. And in this narrative, Griffith needed to both draw on naturalism's view of history as a transcendent force and also to represent men not as Norris's "motes"—swept along by the forward movement of time—but as leaders capable of leading movements that could alter the trajectory of

[82] For an extended reading of the African-American response to the film, see Thomas Cripps' "The Reaction of the Negro to the Motion Picture *Birth of a Nation*."

American history. As a result, *The Birth of a Nation* operates in accordance with two temporalities—similar to Deleuze's description of naturalism's two registers: the "historical milieu" and the "originary world," which operates according to the law of "*the steepest slope*" from "radical beginning to absolute end." However, because of his ideological project, Griffith reverses this schema, with his fictional characters appearing to emerge out of what Deleuze describes as historical milieu, and the events of U.S. history acting as the determinist "originary world." Griffith establishes one narrative time scheme for the overtly fictional story drawn from Dixon's novel. In this narrative, the film provides psychological motivation for the white characters and their actions have direct causal relationships to the events of the narrative. What is much less clear in the film, though, is the causal relationship between the fictional narrative of in the film and the second temporality it references—determinist historical time.

In his novel, Dixon takes great liberties with historical figures and events, imagining an extended conversation between Lincoln and Mrs. Cameron in which Lincoln explains that he recognizes her as a Southerner by her "easy, kindly way" (31), and a later moment during which the President tells Stoneman, "I love the South!" (54). In comparison, real historical events and figures have a much murkier relationship to the events of the *Birth*'s overtly fictional narrative, which, as Scott Simmon has noted, seems to render all history into interpersonal relationships between its main characters (119).[83] However, the inclusion of a historical figure like Lincoln seems poised to challenge Griffith's narrative project because Lincoln will always reference extradiegetic history, even as he participates in *Birth's* overtly fictional narrative.

[83] *The Films of D.W. Griffith*, 119. Simmon also suggests that the film recasts Harriet Beecher Stowe's model of female melodrama, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to "damn Reconstruction ideals of equality" (126).

Griffith works to establish his film's status as truth by adding "historical facsimiles" to his adaptation of Dixon's novel. However, these facsimiles, which Griffith included to prove the truthfulness of the film, also produce formal ruptures in the film's narrative. If, as Metz tells us, "Traditional narratives, with their definite conclusions, are closed sequences of closed events" (24), then the facsimiles threaten to open up Griffith's closed fictional narrative through their reference to closed historical events. The historical facsimiles include reproductions of Ford's Theater, The Oval Office, and the Appomattox Courthouse. Griffith painstakingly establishes the authenticity of the facsimiles, noting their historicity and accuracy with intertitles that cite written histories, such as Wilson's *History of the American People*, which function to position Griffith's work among other, culturally validated historical texts. These gestures aside, the historical facsimiles create a formal problem for the film, as Mimi White explains, "because of their prominence and familiarity, these scenes are likely to be recognized as constructions, threatening the film's proper unity" (217). Furthermore, their static quality disrupts the film's narrative progress; the facsimiles are visually and tonally distinct from other scenes in the film. Rather than following in the style of the Stoneman-Cameron scenes, the facsimiles look a great deal like the historical tableaux of the cinema's early period. Historical tableaux were typically single-shot films, shot from one camera position that depicted a well-known scene from history or scripture. It is unlikely that the historical tableaux would have seemed either "current" or realistic to audiences in 1915, which had had the opportunity to witness Thomas Ince's ambitious historical film *The Battle of Gettysburg* in 1913.

Taken by itself, the Stoneman-Cameron narrative proceeds with relative fluidity and works towards a consistent tonal development.[84] But when interspersed with the historical facsimiles, the narrative loses some of its forward momentum. The facsimiles look quite different from the other scenes in the film; Griffith presents them in long shot, with proscenium staging and limited camera movement (Figures 8 and 9). By contrast, the scenes with Elsie Stoneman use lots of scene dissection: close-ups on her face, her hands, the Union soldier watching her, etc. Furthermore, the acting styles vary greatly between the narrative scenes and the historical scenes. In the narrative scenes, the acting is expressive—borderline histrionic in the cases of Mae Marsh and Lillian Gish.[85] In the facsimiles, the actors playing Lincoln and his cabinet barely move, and Griffith provides no close-ups through which to determine their facial expressions or emotional state. It seems not too far a stretch to say that while the characters in the narrative scenes are almost entirely defined by their emotional states, the characters in the historical scenes seem to be affective ciphers. Silva puts this slightly differently, writing, "Griffith's researched scenes frequently lack the impact of some of the more spontaneous scenes" (13). The differences between the narrative treatment and the acting styles in the scenes reflect Griffith's concerns about the filmic implications of determinist historical time. The result is that even as the film attempts to produce a seamless account of North-South reconciliation, its historical source material threatens to unravel the narrative at every turn.

[84] This in spite of critics who want to divide the film into two halves; see Scott Simmon's description of this tendency in *The Films of D.W. Griffith* (109-110).

[85] I derive the term histrionic from Roberta Pearson's excellent study, *Eloquent Gestures.*

Why then, in what critics celebrate as the most formally innovative film from the silent era, does Griffith choose to use a film style several years out of date to present the history that forms the setting for his entire film? The first, most obvious, reason is that Griffith was concerned about his film being taken seriously as a history.[86] The historical facsimiles were a way for Griffith to "show his work," acting as footnotes to the tale of the Stonemans and Camerons. Indeed, Simmon claims that *Birth* might best be read as Griffith's attempt to replicate "academic history" (111). And it appears that doing his homework paid off for Griffith: the film was a great critical and commercial success. Woodrow Wilson infamously invited Griffith to screen his film at the White House and referred to *Birth* as "history written in lightning."[87] As Lee Grieveson notes, "The film was for many a realization of the potential of moving pictures, particularly as regards the provision of education and the documentation of real-life events" (195). What these celebrations—whether by the president or by Griffith himself—did not emphasize was the relationship between the film's formal qualities and the history it presented. However, thinking about Griffith's formal innovations as part and parcel of an attempt to produce a film that would revise history allows us to understand how Griffith's ideological project and his formal project dovetail, and, at the same time, to make sense of his historical facsimiles.

Griffith may have given his historical facsimiles different formal treatment than the Stoneman-Cameron narrative because he sensed that historical events were resistant

[86] Nicole Seymour has suggested that by citing the earlier film form of tableaux was a way for Griffith to access History through film history

[87] Arthur Lenning explains that the film "was not shown as a mere entertainment, however, but as an historical account" at the White House screening (121). Positioning the film this way excused "the president for seeing anything as frivolous as a movie in the sacrosanct White House" (121).

to his narrative reinterpreting. Unlike the events presented by the actuality films, or perceived by Vandover, the events in *Birth* exist within a historical context that has already "stained" them with "their own historicity" and narrative significance (Doane, *Emergence* 143). For example, Griffith's attempts to personalize Sherman's March by cutting between the soldiers and a huddling mother and child have the effect of stripping the historical event of its referent and transferring it to the realm of allegory. Although Griffith is certainly not one to shy away from the allegorical, with *Birth* he wanted to create a history. So while in the film's narrative Ben Cameron rides to victory, Griffith still struggled to incorporate the "historical facts" that referenced the extradiegetic time of progressive history. Although Griffith felt compelled to include the facsimiles—perhaps sensing that without historical references, his film would lack the seriousness he hoped it would achieve—they remain unnarrativized historical outcroppings on the face of the film, surprisingly static and superficial.

The historical facsimiles represent both the test case for and the limit to Griffith's narrative innovation. Whatever sentimental attributes Griffith might ascribe to his fictional characters, the facts of United States history burden his film. As Edward Brannigan notes, "Nondiegetic references are not taken to be part of the character's world, and hence not subject to its laws, but instead are taken to be *about* that world and are addressed only to the spectator. In this way the film allows the spectator to begin to see one thing…in terms of another" (49). In Griffith's case, the history that the facsimiles reference will always act as an additional and limiting interpretive lens for viewers of the Stoneman-Cameron narrative. The extradiegetic knowledge that whatever agency the characters or—perhaps more importantly—Griffith might exercise will have no effect

upon historical outcomes produces a feeling of determinism in the film similar to that Norris intentionally produces in *The Octopus*. In this context, Griffith's parallel editing becomes not just as a formal innovation, but also as metonymic echo of characters acting in a time scheme that is beyond their control—an innovation with philosophical as well as technological import. As in *The Octopus*, parallel editing in *The Birth of a Nation* reflects a concern about the relationship between individuals and time, which in turn, produces questions about the limits to narrative invention. However, in Griffith's narrative, parallel editing results in a personification of history that reflects a moral universe in which, to draw on Brooks's account of melodrama, the vices and virtues of his primary characters mirror the "forces in the world" (13). As Andrew Sarris notes, in the Stoneman-Cameron narrative "Griffith relied more on a theory of character than a theory of history" (108). If we read the film as an account of determinist history that blends naturalism's concerns about time and individual agency with the melodrama's concerns about morality, the most interesting editing sequences are not the famous fast-cutting race to the rescues, but the cuts between historical facsimiles and the Cameron-Stoneman narrative.

With the crosscutting in the race to the rescue, Griffith creates a relentless sense of forward movement, which builds suspense because the audience does not yet know what will happen to the characters. Editing between the film's overtly fictional plot and the historical facsimile scenes produces the opposite effect. In contrast to the suspenseful and future-directed temporal movement in the rapid cross-cutting of the Stoneman-Cameron narrative, the juxtaposition between the scenes adapted from Dixon's novel and the historical facsimiles produces a feeling of temporal stasis. The tonal quality is

different as well: while Griffith sets up his audience to admire the "Little Colonel" and the "plucky" southerners, cutting to Lincoln's meeting with his cabinet unravels the narrative work of the other scenes. The historical facsimiles, which are given authority by the intertitles and the distance and seriousness of the shot, takes the audience out of the storyline and reminds them of the historical events surrounding Griffith's fictionalized characters.[88] Audiences cannot really wonder whether the South will be victorious; instead, the audience's admiration for the brave Little Colonel must always be mediated by the knowledge that he and his comrades cannot win the war—although, as Rogin notes, this defeat is mitigated by the Klan's victory in the second half of the film (271). Rather than experiencing suspense, the audience—if sympathetic with these characters—can only experience something akin to regret as they watch the historical battle scenes unfold.[89]

The scene that best displays the film's regretful tone is the Ford Theater scene, which also varies greatly from the other historical facsimiles in the film. As opposed to the objective and complete view of historical events Griffith works to construct with the other facsimiles, in this scene, the overtly fictional characters are present—foregrounded even. The scene is also quite extended, containing multiple shots, sometimes associated with character perspective rather than a "neutral perspective," and showing different locations. In this scene, Griffith works to build the kind of suspense he creates in the cross-cutting sequences in the overtly fictional narrative of the film. The film cuts back

[88] As Ricoeur notes, "the repetition of a story, governed as a whole by way of its ending, constitutes an alternative to the representation of time as flowing from the past towards the future, following the well known metaphor of the 'arrow of time.' It is as though recollection inverted the so-called 'natural' order of time" (67).

[89] And certainly not all audiences were sympathetic to the film; the NAACP actively boycotted the film, and worked to have it suppressed.

and forth from Elsie Stoneman's spectatorial action—alternately watching the play, the president, and Booth through her opera glasses—and John Wilkes Booth's advance on and eventual assassination of the president. While the sequence has the formal characteristics of the suspenseful fictional narrative—close-ups of character expressions, cross-cutting, etc.—the tone and content are entirely different. For example, although Griffith uses close-ups of both Elsie and Booth, the contrast between the close-ups is telling: Elsie is quite animated; in contrast, when Booth first appears, Griffith presents his image as though in portraiture (Figures 10 and 11). The actor playing Booth (Raoul Walsh) is quite still, with no discernible emotional state registered on his face, and he appears framed by the oval masked shot. The different formal treatment of Elsie and Booth reveals Griffith's attitude toward the two sets of characters in his film. Ricoeur's formulation of the "asymmetry between the referential modes of historical and fictional narrative" usefully characterizes Griffith's different representational treatment of Elsie and Booth; he writes, "Only history can claim a reference in empirical reality…The past event, however absent it may be from present perception, nonetheless governs the historical intentionality, conferring upon it a realistic note that literature will never equal" (82). The fictional characters, represented by Elsie, are "live" with a multitude of narrative possibilities open to them and to Griffith.[90] The historical figures, here represented by Booth, are to Griffith dead or inert material, already destined for an ending beyond their and Griffith's control. Since the only spectator for whom the events

[90] Although as Mimi White notes, this scene registers Griffith's difficulty putting Elsie into the same narrative as the historical figures: "Elsie and her brother are no more than witnesses. They do not—and cannot—intervene in the historical drama which will inevitably occur" (215). In contrast, Hansen argues the opposite, writing, "the (re)construction of Lincoln's assassination is authenticated, made 'realistic' for the spectator, by the presence of fictional characters; Elsie Stoneman and her brother just 'happen' to attend the show" (166).

unfolding are not already known and determined is Elsie, the Ford Theater scene represents another instance in which the film can only produce a feeling of regret for its audiences.

Although Griffith cannot change the course of historical events in this scene, his innovations in editing do effectively personalize this particular moment in history. In the Ford Theater scene, Elsie's emotional response to the assassination supplants the narrative limitations placed upon the Griffith by historical events. Whereas Norris's literary cross-cutting renders individual lives ultimately meaningless in the face of historical time, Griffith's editing in the Ford's Theater sequence, as well as his cutting between historical facsimiles and other strictly fictional scenes, asserts the value of funneling historical events through the emotions of individuals, even though this action cannot change history. In these moments, which are much more personalized than any scene in *A Corner in Wheat*, Griffith's pathos over the futility of character agency in the face of determinist time appears in the film, and we see him distancing himself from the impersonal narrative of force that Norris developed.

Conclusion: Endings

Paradoxically, Griffith's ambivalence about the forward push of determinist history ultimately leads him to take a position similar to Norris's in the final scenes of his film. In the last moments of *The Birth of a Nation*, Griffith suggests that the historical events he has just narrated are merely incidental to the direction of a grander temporal trajectory. After Lincoln's assassination, the film's second half tracks the rise of the Klan and an extended battle between the Klan and renegade black soldiers in the film's now

famous extended fast-cutting sequence. At the film's end, however, Griffith moves away from his tale of national history. After he presents a view of the honeymooning Stoneman-Cameron couples, "the double honeymoon," Griffith introduces an intertitle that opens into the film's final image—the apotheosis of peace (Figure 12). In this scene, Griffith first displays a battlefield with a naked god of war astride a bull superimposed over the scene. This image then changes to reveal "the City of Peace," in which a superimposed image of Christ hovers over beatifically dancing souls (Figure 13). This scene marks an abrupt shift from both the historical and overtly fictional narratives in the film. In his explanation of the shift, Robert Lang argues that Lincoln's assassination serves as "the film's oedipal climax," after which, "without a patriarch of Lincoln's stature to preside over the nation, Griffith feels impelled to invoke the image of Jesus Christ himself" in the film's final scenes (*Birth* 22, 23). Lincoln's assassination carries with it the same finality as the North's victory: "all that is lost cannot be regained" (Lang 24). To remedy this loss, the film's conclusion discards of historical references entirely, replacing them with the transhistorical image of Christ.

Several critics have commented on the allegorical strangeness of the film's ending, but none link it to the influence of naturalism on Griffith's work. Fred Silva describes the film in terms similar to Norris's, noting, "The Civil War and Reconstruction have been only digressions from the general movement of the world and of America toward an apotheosis of peace" (12).[91] Though she does not register this, Mimi White's

[91] Silva also notes that, "careful consideration of *The Birth of a Nation* tells the student something about the construction of spectacle films. The director must balance grand historic, heroic *forces* against the ordinary individuals who give life to what otherwise would become empty operatic bombast. Griffith was able to maintain this balance because he understood completely the competing values of the *mass* and the *individual*" (13 emphasis mine).

reading of the film's final scene also recalls the language of literary naturalism. White notes that through Griffith's invocation of the Prince of Peace "a hierarchy is established in which the national story—of the civil war and its aftermath—is merely a moment…in the history of the family as a structure which is, at its best, the earthly-social expression of divine values" (223-4).[92] In a near echo of Norris's description of men as "motes in the sunshine" (*Octopus* 651), White notes, "any particular social historical reality is subsumed under and transcended by divine, ahistorical ideals, a process and relation which is mirrored in the structure and trajectory of the film itself" (224). Dissatisfied with the outcomes of the historical events that frame his narrative, Griffith invokes the naturalistic imperative to read history through "the larger view" while replacing impersonal naturalist force with Christian allegory (*Octopus* 651). Although Griffith's concerns about morality and characterization lead him away from the naturalist narration and discourse of force that he explored in *A Corner in Wheat*, his allegorical conclusion at the end of *Birth* suggests that Griffith retained naturalism's methods, if not its worldview.

Reading *The Birth of a Nation* alongside Griffith's engagement with Frank Norris provides an alternative interpretive model for understanding Griffith's most famous film, and perhaps other works—one that emphasizes and encompasses the formal problem presented by determinist historical narratives. In *Determined Fictions* Lee Clark Mitchell suggests that narration, and especially historical narration, always bears the mark of determinism because it traces causality backwards from effects (xi). By adopting a naturalist style, Griffith attempted to recast history through fictional characters at the

[92] As Arthur Lenning notes, the allegorical section at the film's end was not particularly popular with critics. Quoting the *Dramatic Mirror*'s review, Lenning writes, "When *Birth* finally opened in New York, the *Dramatic Mirror*…questioned the 'trite allegorical passages…dragged in to preach a universal peace moral'" (119).

same time that his insistence on historical accuracy sealed their fates within the larger narrative of American history. And if, as I have argued, regret is the overriding tone that Griffith's historical fiction produces, then we may understand the film in all its complexity—its form and its content—as Griffith's exploration of a genre that would allow him to both register and protest against historical determinism.

CHAPTER IV

THE MODERNIZATION OF LITTLE SISTER: IRREVERSIBLE TIME AND THE NEW WOMAN IN *SISTER CARRIE, JENNIE GERHARDT* AND *TRAFFIC IN SOULS*

In September of 1905, Curt Muller of Portland, Oregon required one of his female employees, Mrs. E. Gotcher, to work more than ten hours in his laundry. For his actions, the State fined Muller ten dollars for violating a 1903 act that stated, "no female (shall) be employed in any mechanical establishment, or factory, or laundry in this state more than ten hours during any one day." Muller's lawyers questioned the constitutionality of the ruling, which they argued interfered with individuals' rights to make contacts and did not apply equally to all persons (men and women alike). In 1908, the Supreme Court ruled on *Muller v. Oregon*. Justice Brewer delivered the court's decision to uphold the constitutionality of Oregon's 1903 act. In his decision, Justice Brewster cites reports from British health inspectors, noting, "The legislation and opinions referred to in the margin may not be, technically speaking, authorities…yet they are significant of a widespread belief that woman's physical structure, and the functions she performs in consequence thereof, justify special legislation restricting or qualify the conditions under which she should be permitted to toil." The "functions" to which Justice Brewster alludes are women's reproductive functions, and the court's decision in *Muller v. Oregon* suggests that women's wage labor negatively affects their reproductive capabilities. In his decision, Justice Brewster effectively argues that women's economic work in the public sphere threatens to harm women's physical structures; thus her "functions" in the private sphere must be protected from any public functions she may perform.

In his opinion, Justice Brewster opposes two forms of female productivity—the economic labor women perform in laundries, and the reproductive labor women perform in the privacy of their homes. Justice Brewster was not alone in casting women's work as a problem of productivity. The many "New Woman" narratives from the early twentieth century represented the modern woman's independent and largely public lifestyle as a threat to previous modes of feminine existence—most specifically, to the woman's domestic role as wife and mother. The majority of these narratives recast the problems of female independence as a concern about sexual threats to women's bodies, rather than the threat of fatigue from long work hours. In this chapter, I examine texts from the twentieth century's first decades that produced their own fictionalized accounts of threats to urban womanhood, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) and George Loane Tucker's film *Traffic in Souls* (1913), as well as Dreiser's later revision of *Sister Carrie*—*Jennie Gerhardt* (1911). [93]

In George Loane Tucker's *Traffic in Souls*, the filmmaker connects the New Woman to problems of looking and visibility, and more specifically, technologies of looking. In this film, Tucker struggles to produce a modern solution to the modern problem of the New Woman when it is the case that although the loss of virginity is irreversible, technologies are both endlessly reversible and promiscuous in their ability to be deployed for virtually any ideological project. On the other hand, while Dreiser's narratives do not serve the same moralizing function as Tucker's film, he does link the New Woman to irreversible forces of historical progress. In *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt*, Dreiser's narration betrays an uncertainty about how much his characters' fates

[93] I am using the restored University of Pennsylvania edition of *Sister Carrie*.

depend upon their choices, and how much they depend upon the external force of progressive temporality. This indeterminacy in Dreiser's narratives results in the production of a specifically gendered version of the classical naturalist problems of force and agency.

Though Dreiser and Tucker deploy their heroines' sexual misadventures to different ends, we can understand both artists as engaging with the cultural challenges presented by new forms of womanhood. A survey of recent studies on the New Woman reveals that the New Woman was a creature of the cities, her rise concurrent with an increase in urban living. [94] She worked, was single, and frequently lived apart from her nuclear family. The New Woman also broke with Victorian cultural norms by participating in new dating practices. This combination of traits made the New Woman a "force" to be reckoned with. As a young woman with her own money to spend, she represented a powerful new consumer with different needs and wants than previous segments of the consumer market. [95] As a young woman living alone and experimenting with new moral and social freedom, she also represented a threat to the bourgeois values attached to womanhood. At the same time that these women were emerging as economic forces—more and more women worked outside the home, and large corporations frequently understood women as their most important consumers—they were also increasing their public visibility.

[94] Studies of the New Woman include Shelley Stamp's *Movie Struck Girls*, Kathy Peiss's *Cheap Amusements*, and Jennifer Fleissner's *Women, Compulsion, Modernity*, among others.

[95] Rachel Bowlby's *Just Looking* and Lori Merish's *Sentimental Materialism* address the powerful influence of female consumers on American culture.

Through their focus on the New Woman's relationship to productivity, Dreiser's and Tucker's narratives reveal that the moral problems surrounding the figure of the New Woman are also always narrative problems. By rejecting the developmental trajectory made familiar by the marriage plot, the New Woman's sexuality resisted traditional progressive narratives. Furthermore, because the New Woman's sexuality was not necessarily directed towards furthering the race, it seemed perversely resistant to the era's zeitgeist of progress. Rather than producing the future through her offspring, the New Woman threatened a version of sexuality that seemed obstinately unproductive and stalled in the present, a kind of sexual wheel-spinning.[96] Drawing upon the rich scholarship on the New Woman, this chapter proposes that the New Woman represented a temporal and narrative threat, as well as a moral one, and that her relationship to virginity, biological reproduction, and narrative time produced a representational crisis for the male artists who portrayed her in fiction and film.

For Dreiser and Tucker, like Norris and Griffith, the external progressive time of history represented a narrative constraint on authorial innovation. However, unlike the time discussed in the previous chapter, the time I examine here is the time of modernity, not past historical time. Dreiser and Tucker associated the accelerated pace of life in modern cities with changing roles for women, and therefore, the fictional narratives that could be told about women. Drawing upon the concept of irreversible naturalist time established in the previous chapters, I argue that the New Woman narrative's intense interest in irreversible changes to womanhood and female productivity led Dreiser and

[96] Jennifer Fleissner also addresses the atemporality of the New Woman's sexuality, arguing that tropes of stuttering and repetition connect what were thought of as women's compulsions to naturalist writing styles. For example, Fleissner argues that in the end, Dreiser does not depict Carrie as better or worse, but instead "leaves Carrie still rocking, rocking—a woman 'adrift' on the waves of history" (193).

Tucker to focus on modern technologies and their relationship to women in modernity. In this chapter, I examine the relationship between narrative fiction (both filmic and novelistic) and modernity. However, I am not arguing that these texts are modernist. Critics have come down on both sides of this issue in response to Dreiser's writing. In his excoriation of Dreiser in "Reality in America," Lionel Trilling argues that Dreiser's writing exemplifies all that is wrong with what critics celebrate as American "realism": "his books have the awkwardness, the chaos, the heaviness which we associate with 'reality'" (245).[97] In contrast, Jameson argues that in contrast with Balzacian realism, one finds "a more properly modern practice of *style* in Dreiser" (160, emphasis original). Instead, I am here documenting the ways in which texts that are realist (Tucker's) or naturalist (Dreiser's) worked to represent modernity within their diegeses.[98] I am interested in using "modernity" as a lens for approaching Dreiser's and Tucker's representations of new women because the concept helps to elucidate the relationship between human agency and technology established in their works. Modern technologies—whether the train in Dreiser's novel, or technologies of surveillance in *Traffic in Souls*—represent the possibility for mastery over time at the same time that they metonymize modernity as a moment of rapid and irreversible change. On the one hand, modern technologies offered strategies for containing and controlling working

[97] In "American Literary Naturalism: The Example of Dreiser," Donald Pizer accounts for the critical hostility towards American naturalism. He argues that criticism like Trilling's should be read as a reaction against naturalists who "had so naively embraced some form of communist belief." He argues that Trilling's essay has "as an underlying motive a desire to purge American literature and its historiography of an infatuation with an alien and destructive political ideal" (346).

[98] My conception of modernity comes from the field of early cinema studies, which in turn derives from the work of Frankfurt School theorists including Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and other cultural historians. In "The Matter of Dreiser's Modernity," Bill Brown also reads Dreiser as engaging with modernity, although not properly modernist (86).

women, but on the other, they also participated in the creation of the New Woman. Dreiser's and Tucker's decisions to represent technological innovations within the structure of their own narratives reveals the deep ambivalence felt by artists who used narratives to gain representational mastery over both the figure of the New Woman and the modern technologies associated with her person. These paradoxical impulses towards innovation and control reveal a tension inherent to the task of representing women whose modern lifestyles and new relationship to traditional models of female productivity threatened to unravel the very narrative strategies male artists deployed to contain them.

Assaults on the Body: Modernity, White Slavery, and the New Woman

Chroniclers of urban life in the early twentieth century spent much ink and film enumerating dangers associated with big cities. One comedic example of this is *An Interesting Story*, a Williamson's Kinetograph film from 1905. In the film, a man walks down the street, thoroughly absorbed in his novel. A steamroller appears from the back of the frame and bears down upon the man, who, totally engrossed, does not move out of the way. The steamroller runs him over, and a pancake-flat dummy wearing the same clothes appears where the man had been standing. Following the steamroller accident, two bicyclists appear on the scene and reinflate the compressed gentleman with their bicycle pumps. Having resurrected him, they give him a good kick in the pants and send him on his way. "There you go," they seem to be saying, "back into modernity with you." Although bicycle pumps save the day, they are, like the steamroller, also representatives

of modern technology. [99] However, in their ability to undo terrible accidents, the bicycle pumps echo the cinema's relationship to the modern dangers it represented.[100]

The cinema reflected modernity's intense interest in bodies in peril. In the earliest attractions films, audiences saw bodies run over by steamrollers, hit by exploding motorcars, and so forth. In these early comedies, the value of film seems to be its capacity for reversing the damaging shocks that accompanied life in a technologically advanced urban landscape. Trick films from the period include such titles as *How it Feels to be Run Over* (1900), *The Mad Motorist* (1906), and *The Automatic Motorist* (1911)—in which a bride and groom are taken for a wild ride by a robot chauffer! Live-action film was certainly not the only realm in which violence to the body was made entertaining. Early animated cartoons, including the *Mutt and Jeff* films and the later *Felix the Cat* series, featured protagonists who either suffered enormous violence, or in the case of the *Felix* cartoons, caused great physical harm to others. And, as Donald Crafton notes, bodily violence was a part of animated cartoons from their beginning. In Windsor McKay's second film, *The Story of a Mosquito* (1912), a giant insect engages "in such an orgasmic frenzy of blood lust that he becomes dangerously engorged and explodes. Parts of his body and his feast of blood bathe the screen" (Crafton 110). Ben Singer corroborates this account of violent modern spectacles, arguing that modern citizens demonstrated an intense desire to witness urban dangers in a controlled setting, whether in the context of cartoons, death-defying circus stunts, or fairgrounds rides (91, 97).

[99] For an account of the bicycle's connections to modern life, see David Herlihy's *Bicycle: The History*.

[100] In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Walter Benjamin connects the compensatory nature of film to both the dangers of modernity and the poverty of experience in modern life.

Although it was just one among many spectacles associated with modernity, film was especially well-situated to do ameliorative work. Whether in the context of bicycle-pump inflated men, or cartoon animals springing back to life after a serious smashing, film positioned itself as a reanimator capable of rendering even that ultimate shock, death, reversible. As we saw in the context of *Vandover* and the actuality films, while the cinema might be capable of giving the experience of time freed from determinism, these "tricks" always reference an external temporality ruled by the linear passage of time. Despite the comic film's insistence on its ability to reverse time and render modernity harmless, the recurrence of horrific urban scenes in the form of entertainments suggests that while motor accidents might be undone, modernity and its associated threats were not going away any time soon.

If early comic films rendered city living both humorous and harmless to its viewers, contemporaneous newspaper articles *must* be read as the cinema's nay-saying brother, insisting that the city was even more dangerous than its readers may have believed and that this was particularly the case for cities' female denizens.[101]

The July 23rd, 1911 edition of the *Chicago Tribune* gives splashy coverage to what it implies is a uniquely urban problem:

JURY CONVICTS ENTICER OF GIRL

BOUGHT HER CHOP SUEY

Printed all in capitals, these headlines address a physical danger of city living, but unlike *An Interesting Story*, this sensational newspaper article points to dangers that are gender

[101] Ben Singer's chapter, "Sensationalism and Urban Modernity" in *Melodrama and Modernity*, recounts some of the most sensational newspaper stories from the period, including tales of automobile accidents, infant deaths, and fairgrounds tragedies.

specific. Several key features from these headlines resonate with the discussions of vice popular at the time: the girl was out in public, presumably alone, and an economic exchange occurred—chop suey for the girl's virtue.[102] The salacious combination of a single girl in the city with a questionable economic transaction is representative of fears surrounding female chastity, as well as concerns about women's participation in the economy. Accounts of white slavery, while they belied women's agency as sexual beings, worked to convert women's increased visibility in the public sphere into a well-publicized moral panic.

Directed by George Loane Tucker, Universal's *Traffic in Souls* is one of many "white slavery" films from the silent era.[103] Although white slavery films sensationalized the dangers faced by young working girls coming to cities in the first decade of the twentieth century, they drew upon an issue that was very much on people's minds, and that was not without some real precedent. As immigration increased and girls like Carrie made their way from the country to urban industrial centers, the first decades of the twentieth century saw an increase in crimes against women and a dramatic rise in sex trafficking. As a rapidly growing city, Chicago was particularly implicated in both the vice trade and disappearance of numerous working girls. The November 1st, 1892 issue of the *Chicago Tribune* announced that so many people, and especially young girls, had gone missing that the chief of police was considering opening a "mysterious

[102] In her introduction to *Out in Public*, Allison Piepmeier explains that the "connection between publicity and sexual availability" has a history dating back to the early nineteenth-century (1-5).

[103] Other white slavery films included, *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic*, *Little Lost Sister*, and *The House of Bondage*. *A Traffic in Souls* was the first and most famous of the white slavery films, and its commercial success lead to numerous imitators.

disappearances department."[104] Resulting from the increased publicity surrounding the vice trade, disappearing women and female sexuality, the white slave panic gave rise to the 1910 *White Slavery Act*, also known as the *Mann Act*, which banned interstate trafficking of women.[105] In 1913, the year Universal released Tucker's film, two court cases tested the limits of the *Mann Act*: *Hoke v. United States*, which decided that congress could not regulate prostitution within states, only trafficking between states, and *Athanasaw v. United States*, which extended the *Mann Act* to include debauchery as well as human trafficking.

In *Traffic in Souls*, an underground prostitution ring kidnaps a young shop girl named Little Sister, who spends the bulk of the film awaiting her rescue and return to her family. Although moralistic in its final message, the film shared the sensationalism of the *Chicago Tribune*'s headlines. Tucker framed his film with references to both its accuracy and the pervasiveness of the scandal it represented; the film contains several shots of newspaper articles calling for a greater awareness of prostitution rings. "50,000 girls disappear yearly," one proclaims. Universal justified *Traffic in Souls'* potentially lascivious content by positioning the film as the solution to the problems discussed in the fictionalized newspapers it displayed, thus referencing its own veracity and usefulness in educating young girls who might be otherwise led astray (Stamp 55). And while the film may have sold based on its "shocking" content, Little Sister's intact virginity and reunion

[104] Quoted in Erik Larson's *The Devil in the White City* (102). Larson's book gives the history of Herman Mudgett, a serial killer who murdered at least 9 people, mostly young women, in Chicago during the 1890s.

[105] The *Mann Act*, or *White Slave Traffic Act* of 1910, was also used to target racial miscegenation. The first person prosecuted under the act was the African-American boxer Jack Johnson, who was sentenced to a year in prison for taking a white girl out of a brothel and marrying her. Furthermore, the white slavery panic had ties to anti-Asian feelings in the early twentieth century. White slavers were frequently depicted as Chinese men who took advantage of innocent white women. Griffith's 1918 *Broken Blossoms* revises this stereotype by depicting a kindly Chinese man who takes in a wounded white woman.

with her family at the narrative's end speak to the moral fastidiousness of the film. In other words, like *An Interesting Story*, *Traffic in Souls* disturbs only to set things right again.

Theodore Dreiser's novels about young women in modern cities proceed along a far different course. Both *Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt* narrate the fall of their heroines from beginning to end, but the narration in Dreiser's novels takes a different moral position than that forwarded by *Traffic in Souls*. Whereas Tucker's heroine is a near victim of nonconsensual sex, Dreiser's women are sexual agents who make decisions about how to parlay their sexuality into financially viable existences in the modern city. Tucker's film promotes a decidedly traditionalist set of morals common in the melodrama: virtue triumphs over vice; the pure and the sinful share no overlapping characteristics.[106] In contrast, readers found Dreiser's nonjudgmental tone in *Sister Carrie* scandalous, and it was only through Frank Norris's championing of the novel that Doubleday begrudgingly agreed to publish it.[107] Many readers protested against what they read as the novel's amoral approach to its subject matter, taking particular exception to the absence of any explicit punishment for Carrie's transgressions.[108] As Clare Eby notes, more contemporary readers still struggle with the novel: "Those who disliked his

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[106] In the melodrama, "The polarization of good and evil works toward revealing their presence and operation as real forces in the works" (Brooks 13). For someone like Tucker, it is important to be able to blame female promiscuity on forces of evil so as to eliminate the possibility of a desiring female subject.

[107] Alfred Kazin discusses Norris's role in the novel's publication in his introduction to the Penguin edition, xv.

[108] In his introduction to *New Essays on Sister Carrie*, Donald Pizer provides a thorough overview of the novel's publication history and reception. He notes that the novel's most virulent critic was Mrs. Doubleday herself, who reportedly played a key role in the publishing house's attempts to suppress the book (11). Contemporaneous reviews of the novel frequently used the word "unpleasant" to describe the book, which, as Pizer notes, was "a code term intended to put the delicate prospective reader on her guard" (Introduction 9).

writing frequently saw Dreiser's non-judgmental treatment of 'fallen women' as evidence of his literary and/or moral ineptitude," and in the wake of feminist readings of Dreiser, "an area of increasing concern became the extent of his investment in gender stereotypes" (141). Despite the infamy surrounding *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser was not celebrating modern female sexuality; instead, like Tucker's exposé of white slavery, Dreiser's novel had ties to real life events that were distressing to the novelist. [109] *Sister Carrie* was Dreiser's retelling of his own sister's story. Dreiser's older sister Emma had run away with a married man whose story neatly parallels that of *Carrie*'s Hurstwood, complete with theft of money from the tavern where he worked and a flight from Chicago to New York.[110] Although it is impossible to know just how much Dreiser's biographical experience with a New Woman in the family influenced his disinterested form of narration, by the time Dreiser published *Jennie Gerhardt* in 1911, his narration was so divorced from Victorian codes of morality that Dreiser's judgment in the novel is reserved for the readers who might condemn Jennie's behavior, rather than for his fallen heroine. It is worth noting that although *Jennie Gerhardt* was not published until 1911—more than a decade after *Sister Carrie*'s publication—Dreiser began work on the manuscript in 1901. His immediate work on a revision of his first novel seems to point to dissatisfaction on

[109] In *The Novel and the Obscene*, Florence Dore makes the provocative argument that *Sister Carrie* metaphorizes the era's concerns with obscenity and obscenity laws through Carries very person. Dore suggests that Carrie's body represents a potential obscene text, and that the desire "'written' on her face signifies something outside of her, something not hers, the 'world's longing'" (38). By Dore's account, Dreiser produces the argument that Carrie's status as a sexual agent is only obscene to the extent that readers, whether internal or external to the text, find her arousing, and in this way, he protects his heroine from moral censure.

[110] In his essays "Dreiser and the Uses of Biography" and "Carrie's Blues," Thomas P. Riggio examines the influence of Emma's misadventure upon Dreiser's writing of the novel.

Dreiser's part with *Carrie*'s reception, and a desire to state his negative views of traditional morality more strongly.

Women, Production, Narrative

Shelley Stamp has argued that the New Woman simultaneously threatened the status quo and increased her own vulnerability by circulating freely in public spaces such as movie theaters: "Within the exhibition space women maintained a delicate balance as both spectator and spectacle, consumer and commodity" (48). Stamp's analysis characterizes numerous critical readings of the New Woman by scholars including Mary Ann Doane, Jennifer Fleissner, Priscilla Wald, and Kristen Whissel, which focus on the New Woman's public circulation as a form of directionless movement.[111] These analyses derive from examining the New Woman's status as a consumer and her treatment by films and novels as a commodity. Wald describes Dreiser's narrative as that of the "unattached woman," circulating in the "*promiscuous spaces*" of the city "where people mingled with strangers, where boundaries were fluid, and traditional spatial segregation held no purchase" (182). While the New Woman may have circulated in public, it is a mistake to think that Dreiser casts Carrie as directionless or that her movement in the novel is "an endless, wavelike motion in place" (Fleissner 178). By shifting the critical focus from representations of the New Woman to the narratives that contain her, we see that while Dreiser and Tucker represent Carrie and Little Sister as consumers and commodities, they do so by positioning them in narratives that insist upon narrative

[111] See Doane's *Femmes Fatales*, Fleissner's *Women, Compulsion, Modernity,* Wald's "Dreiser's Sociological Vision," and Whissel's "Regulating Mobility: Technology, Modernity, and Feature-Length Narrativity in *Traffic in Souls*."

directionality. By producing narratives around and out of circulating women, Dreiser and Tucker create directional paths for their heroines that center around an impending loss of virginity—thus converting the problem of circulating women who are not producing in the traditional sense into an opportunity for the artistic production of progressive narratives. For both men, the seduction scene and the loss of virginity metaphorize their fears about modernity's ability to change gender norms. The progress of their narratives reflects the inevitable forward movement of modernization, making the plotting of their narratives central to any analysis of Tucker's and Dreiser's representations of the New Woman.

Although Dreiser and Tucker represent a divergence in moral attitudes of the day, they each found in the New Woman a challenge to their own narrative productivity. Earlier narratives of heterosexual womanhood tended to follow a rather straightforward trajectory. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis explains: "Once upon a time, the end, the rightful end, of women in novels was social—successful courtship, marriage—or judgmental of her sexual and social failure—death. These are both resolutions of romance" (282). As "ideological scripts," romance narratives prove themselves to be relatively rigid structures (DuPlessis 283), following a progressive movement from girlhood to womanhood, a trajectory marked by romantic attraction, courtship, and marriage, with motherhood to follow. Amy Schrager Lang's analysis of antebellum romances such as *The Lamplighter* and *The House of Seven Gables* usefully points to the ideological functions served by narratives of romance. Lang argues that in these plots class conflict is resolved at the level of gender difference, as worthy young female orphans marry well-to-

do suitors (40).[112] As Lang implies, the antebellum romance taught its readers that marriage could resolve social as well as narrative conflicts.

In traditional romance narratives, the promise of biological reproduction is the culmination of a woman's story. And further, as Nancy Armstrong argues, the woman's story is to a large degree also the story of the novel. She argues that because "the modern individual was first and foremost a woman… one cannot distinguish the production of a new female ideal either from the rise of the novel or from the rise of the new middle classes in England" (8). By refusing what had been for so long viewed as her biological destiny and novelistic duty, the New Woman refused a plot firmly established by writers from Maria Cummins to Nathaniel Hawthorne. As Armstrong has suggested, the marriage of a fictional heroine has historically formed the purpose of the novel: "Around the time that Austen wrote, the novel was being defined by Scott, Barbauld, and others in a way that gave meaning to such narratives whose resolutions depended on marriage. The novel was identified with fiction that authorized a particular form of domestic relations" (50). In this light, the New Woman appears to be doubly unproductive—abandoning her duty as mother and threatening the traditional novelistic plotting that depended upon her marriage.

The New Woman raised a very specific narrative question, one of endings. By rejecting the fate of motherhood, the New Woman denied authors and filmmakers a conventionally unified ending, thus threatening narrative coherence. As Frank Kermode has suggested, "fictions, whose ends are consonant with origins, and in concord, however

[112] In *The Syntax of Class*, Lang argues that antebellum romances reproduced class problems on the level of the personal. She writes that *The House of Seven Gables* "privatizes the problem of social justice and allows for its resolution through the figure of the model woman" (40).

unexpected, with their precedents, satisfy our needs" (5). If, in modernity, the woman's plot was no longer the marriage plot, how would one narrate her story? And furthermore, given the discordance with her novelistic precedents, how could the New Woman "satisfy…needs"? Drawing upon Susan Winnett's critique of narrative theorists' masculinist assumptions, I argue that the "needs" that the New Woman threatened to leave unsatisfied, are explicitly male, and certainly not the "needs" of the New Woman herself. Winnett has argued that in the relationship between author and reader that theorists like Peter Brooks and Robert Scholes imagine, "woman is neither an independent subjectivity nor a desiring agent but, rather, an enabling position organizing the social fiction of heterosexuality" (141). Because the fictional female character so often served these purposes, many male novelists and filmmakers could not imagine a positive ending for the New Woman's plot, and instead reproduced what DuPlessis refers to as the "judgmental" romance. Dreiser's lines from *Sister Carrie* summarize the basic forms of these narratives: "When a girl leaves home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse" (3-4). A heroine could either succumb to the temptations and vices of the city—as does Crane's Maggie or "The Friendless One" in *Intolerance*'s Modern Narrative—and be ruined by them; or, she could resist them, which entailed a return to the marriage plot, typically through a romance with a virtuous young man, as in the Mary Pickford vehicle *Amarilly of Clothesline Ally* (1918). Rather than representing new women who were sexually active and engaged in dating or treating, new women narratives focused on the events leading

up to the heroine's loss of virginity or her ultimate success in resisting male advances upon her virginity.[113]

Both models have obvious narrative limitations. In the *Maggie* scenario, the New Woman succumbs to the pressures of the city and, as a result, meets a terrible fate, whether through suicide, murder, or disease. These tales update older seduction narratives, like *Charlotte Temple*, by aligning the rake figure with urban modernity, as opposed to a predatory upper class. The women are "failures" to the extent that they achieve no goals, and that their endings are tragic rather than triumphant. Rather than improving her situation by moving to the big city and becoming economically independent, the events contained in her narrative unravel the New Woman—life as a New Woman is quite literally her undoing.

On the other hand, the New Woman who "succeeds," by resisting vice, finding a "Ragged Dick" of her own, and reproducing a version of the bourgeois nuclear family in the slums, presents her own set of narrative problems.[114] Her trajectory merely dresses up the traditional marriage plot in modern trappings. For example, in *Amarilly of Clothesline Alley*, Mary Pickford's character, a working-class daughter of Irish immigrants, finds herself tempted by the glamorous but Gordon Phillips. In the end, Amarilly realizes that her loyalties lie with her family, her class, and her childhood sweetheart, Terry. The film concludes with a shot of a married Amarilly and Terry and their two children. Amarilly's story may be categorized as a success because she resists temptation and finds her proper place in the world. For this, film rewards her with a husband and children. In this

[113] Kathy Peiss describes the rise of dating and "treating" in working-class culture in *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*.

[114] See Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick (1868)*.

iteration of the "successful" New Woman narrative, there is progress *within* the space of the narrative: Amarilly becomes a productive young woman by marrying an honest lad and bearing a respectable (as opposed to her mother's ethnically-marked brood) number of offspring. However, narratives like *Amarilly* are socially and historically regressive, denying the realities of single, urban, ethnic, working-class women—nostalgically returning them to a glowing hearth.[115] In truth, the "success" the New Woman in these narratives achieves is as much her undoing as the death of the protagonist in the fallen woman narrative is hers. The difference being that in this case what gets undone is the *newness* of the New Woman, who, in the resolution of her narrative, returns to a role and a story that are very old indeed.

Tucker's account of female engagement with modern temptation fits somewhere between the judgmental romance and Stamp's account of serial melodramas, which "offered alarmist tales in which [female] independence is always circumscribed by the shadow of danger" (126). The melodrama allows for, and purportedly celebrates, the brave, independent spirit of the New Woman, only to punish her for it later.[116] In the same way that the melodrama suggests that the heroine's adventurous spirit places her in harm's way, *Traffic in Souls* presents Little Sister as complicit in her victimization because of her public circulation. Little Sister and Mary work together in a candy shop, an occupation the film suggests is as common as it is dangerous. "Is it possible our candy stores can be used as a market for this infamous traffic?" one hysterical newspaper

[115] It is worth noting that the glowing hearth of the domestic Victorian woman may never have been a reality for these women's working-class or immigrant ancestors in the first place.

[116] The punishment that follows the melodrama heroine's break with social norms is unsurprising, especially given that, as Brooks puts it, "melodrama…is the expression of the moral imagination" (55).

headline asks. Little Sister is a "working woman"—a phrase already fraught with certain implications. Her status as a shop girl is further complicated by a confusion between the sexual and the economic; she works selling goods at the same time that her "goods" are on display to the cadet and madam through the shop window (Figure 14).[117] Kristen Whissel suggests that the film expresses anxiety over the collapsing distinction between consumer and commodity: "the female body itself risks becoming a commodity once absorbed into the traffic of goods crisscrossing the city and the nation and perhaps delivered to the wrong destination—the bordello rather than the family home" (9). However, it is important to remember the specific kind of commodity *Traffic in Souls* focuses on is not by any means a new one. It is crucial to the film's logic that while the prostitute was always a commodity, the respectable woman only risks commodification in modernity. As both Patrice Petro and Miriam Hansen have suggested, critics of the cinema frequently linked a critique of the new art form's status as mass cultural commodity to images of commodified womanhood: "the prostitute came to serve as an emblem for the cinema as a whole, typifying literary intellectuals' simultaneous contempt for and fascination with an openly commercial (and hence 'venal') form" (Petro 8).[118] *Traffic in Souls*' presentation of Little Sister through the shop window, a frame similar to the cinema screen, reveals that Tucker may have felt some anxiety about his own

[117] The film's somewhat paradoxical relationship to this phenomenon is worth further exploration. Mary Ann Doane's *The Desire to Desire* provides a convincing reading of the cinema's sale of the female body as image. She argues, "the relation between the cinema and consumerism is buttressed by the film's capability for representing not merely objects but objects in their fetishized form as commodities" (24).

[118] See Miriam Hansen's "Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?" and Patrice Petro's *Joyless Streets*.

involvement in the visual confusion between the body of the prostitute and that of the New Woman.[119]

The film suggests that by locating herself within the marketplace, the New Woman risks being visually misinterpreted. And while Nan Enstad argues that working-class women made "an active and desiring gaze part of their public identities" by gazing into shop windows and participating in film spectatorship (180), the cadet's gaze in *Traffic in Souls* undercuts such empowering accounts of working women's participation in the public sphere. When viewed by the cadet and madam through the shop window, Little Sister becomes visually transformed into a potential prostitute. However, when she interacts with the Cadet in the candy store, Little Sister is the recipient of Mary's gaze, who reinterprets her little sister as an unwitting victim—a move that hints at Mary's later engagement with recuperative technologies. The flux of meaning contained in the multiple views of Little Sister's body references a larger anxiety about women's ability to "sell" themselves in exchange for greater economic and social freedom.[120] The willful blurring of visual markers of morality by young working women who looked to prostitutes as style icons, further confounding the already fuzzy distinction between the New Woman and the prostitute (Peiss 66). Sister Carrie's dress also links her to discourses of prostitution. It is the trip to purchase a jacket and shoes at Schlesinger and

[119] Hansen describes this problematic blurring of images of the prostitute with images of the New Woman in her reading of *Intolerance*. In the film, the Dear One "is introduced to the art of attracting men by watching a flamboyant young woman on the street" (222-3). She argues that "Figures of sexual exchange are thus linked to Griffith's ambivalent relation with a consumer-oriented art" (231).

[120] Helen Campbell, a feminist economist expressed such concerns in her 1893 *Women Wage* Earners, and these concerns reappear in Sue Clark and Edith Clark's 1911 study *Making Both Ends Meet: the Income and Outlay of New York Working Girl* (Balides 166).

Mayer's with Drouet that makes it impossible for Carrie to go back to her meager but honest life with her sister and brother-in-law.[121]

It is therefore unsurprising that the film encodes this troubling freedom within a narrative of prostitution. The prostitute embodies the modern "collapse of the opposition between sex and work—her labor is the selling of sexuality" (Doane, *Femmes* 260). However, the confusion between sex and labor is furthered in *Traffic in Souls*, in which all female labor seems to be at risk for being subverted into the selling of sex.[122] The particular type of labor Little Sister performs is also telling; by placing his heroine behind the glass window of a candy store, Tucker suggests that men might view her sexuality as a confection to be had for a price, not unlike the candy in the display cases (Figure 15). The New Woman produces a version of female sexuality that is hard to place, both because it is mobile, and because it explodes once-standardized borders between the moral and safe body of the respectable woman and the dangerously immoral body of the prostitute. *Traffic in Souls* plays upon this confusion by inextricably linking the New Woman with the prostitute, but offers its audiences clarity by producing a straightforward narrative out of Little Sister's circulation, ultimately removing Little Sister from circulation in the public sphere altogether.

Carrie's status as both a compromised woman and an actress makes her relationship to prostitution even more problematic than Little Sister's. Similarly to

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[121] In his distinction between periods of realism, Jameson notes: "Between the moment of Balzac and the moment of Dreiser, *bovarysme* has fallen, and the congealment of language, fantasy, and desire into Flaubertian *bêtise* and Flaubertian cliché transmutes Balzacian longing into the tawdriness of Carrie's hunger for trinkets, a tawdriness that Dreiser's language ambiguously represents and reflects all at once" (159).

[122] Trubus's receptionist, another figure of the New Woman, exchanges kisses with the go-between, who is most likely a married man. Her overt display of sexuality in the workplace codes her as being very much like a prostitute even though her job title is different in name.

accounts of *Traffic in Souls*, readings of *Sister Carrie* also focus on her circulation and the circularity of her actions.[123] Walter Benn Michaels argues that Carrie's primary desire in the novel is desire itself; he explains, "money for her is never simply a means of getting what you want, it is itself the thing you want" (34). Michaels reads *Sister Carrie* as a novel that enacts capitalism by producing its heroine as a never-ending chain of desires. Michaels argues that Dreiser opposes desire to equilibrium, which he aligns with death in the novel. He states: "What you are is what you want, in other words, what you aren't…And, in fact, in *Sister Carrie*, satisfaction itself is never desirable; it is instead the sign of incipient failure, decay, and finally death" (42).

I agree with Michaels' account of the novel as a refutation of the possibility of equilibrium, but not, as Michaels would have it, because equilibrium represents "exhausted desire and economic failure" (46). Instead, equilibrium represents an impossibility because it suggests an end to both narrative and history. Furthermore, the never-ending desire Michaels attributes to Carrie, her constant state of wanting, is itself a form of stasis, and, as Michaels notes, Carrie's actions—including her imitations of other women, and her stage career—are primarily directed towards reinventing herself, and producing desire in others (46). Or, as Jennifer Fleissner suggests, "Unlike the wife, the actress begs for love and money not to bring her need to do so to an end but to ensure that she will be able to beg for both all over again in her next production" (177). In both Michaels' and Fleissner's readings of the novel, what Carrie "produces" is distinctly and

[123] In *The Social Construction os American Realism*, Amy Kaplan argues that "In *Sister Carrie* the desire for social change is channeled into the desire for novelty, the desire to construct a social reality in which change most often yields more of the same" (149). See also Philip Fisher's reading of Carrie's rocking chair in *Hard Facts* (154-5).

intentionally unsatisfying.[124] These activities, if economic, certainly bear a problematic relationship to production, since the only thing Carrie seems to produce, at least by Michaels' account, is more desire.

However, Michaels' reading of Carrie and his reading of *Sister Carrie* occasionally overlap a bit more than they should. Although it seems clear that Carrie is capable of sustaining desire without end, it is less clear that Dreiser is able to do so, or would want to do so, within the context of his novel. Throughout the narrative, Dreiser deploys phrases like, "the threads which had bound her so lightly to girlhood and change were irretrievably broken" (3). Such descriptions chart a kind of narrative progress that derives from changes to Carrie's person and seem much less directionless than Michaels would have us believe. I am not the only critic to say that Dreiser's narrative follows a directional path that charts Carrie's transformation. Donald Pizer and Ellen Moers, both of whom Michaels discusses in his account, have read *Sister Carrie* as the tale of a young girl's growth from crass materialism to spiritual maturity.[125] Although I agree that Dreiser's narrative tracks Carrie's change across time, like Michaels, I find Pizer's and Moers' readings too optimistic. In the context of a modernizing society, and Dreiser's concerns about female sexuality and motherhood that remain implicit in *Carrie* but become explicit in *Jennie Gerhardt*, the transformation that seems most pressing to the

[124] In "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Actress," Barbara Hochman reads Carrie's stage profession completely differently than Michaels and Fleissner. She argues that Carrie's acting reflects Dreiser's feelings about authorship, arguing that "the act of representation is seen to have its sources in desire and its greatest satisfaction in a process that begins in collaboration—even dependency—but that ultimately affords the self a euphoric if short-lived experience of soaring autonomy" (46).

[125] See Ellen Moers' *The Two Dreisers* Donald Pizer's *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser*. In another example of optimistic reading, Pizer describes Dreiser's novel as "endorsing the agency implicit in the imaginative seeker [Carrie]" (*American Literary Naturalism* 135).

novel's narrative project is the historical transformation from the Victorian girl (who becomes wife and mother) to the modern New Woman.

If the New Woman appears as a problem of directionless movement, the solution presented by Dreiser and Tucker is not to echo this lack of directionality in their texts, but instead, to produce narratives that are explicitly directional and linear in response. In particular, by shifting our analyses of the New Woman from the realm of consumption to the realm of production, we see that because of Dreiser's concerns about the New Woman's productivity, the moral problems presented by the New Woman will always become converted into narrative ones. This transformation occurs in part through a focus on sequencing, which, for Dreiser, reveals the historical inevitability of the New Woman's emergence in modernity.[126]

Girls Who Can't Say No; Girls Who Say, "I Won't"

This argument raises certain questions. One might wonder why when Dreiser imagines a woman circulating in the public sphere, he sees her as a narrative problem rather than a social or moral one. In his attempt to imagine a narrative solution to the problem of the New Woman's circulation, Dreiser traces the moments of change through which the naïf from the countryside becomes a full-fledged woman of the city. And though he does not condemn Carrie for her sexuality, Dreiser never disguises the fact that Carrie gives in to "the large forces of allure" offered by the modern city. The initial train scene establishes the pattern Dreiser will use throughout the novel. Carrie's journey into Chicago on the train marks her entrance into both the public sphere and modernity itself.

[126] Malcolm Gladwell's popular book *The Tipping Point* reminded me of this useful term.

As she kisses her family goodbye and boards the unisex train car: "the threads which bound her so lightly to girlhood and home were irretrievably broken" (3). By moving the reader from Carrie's act—boarding the train—to a narrative and temporal statement, "irretrievably broken," this brief description establishes the novel's method of converting female circulation into narrative progress.

Although I am not here arguing for Dreiser's position as a modernist author, his novel's focus on technologies shows that he attempted to offer his readers an account of modernity. Dreiser invokes one popular literary metaphor of progress in particular—the train. Dreiser writes:

> She gazed at the green landscape now passing in swift review until her swifter thoughts replaced its impression with vague conjectures of what Chicago might be…Anyhow it was vast. There were lights and sounds and a roar of things. People were rich. There were vast depots. This onrushing train was merely speeding to get there. (3)

The next paragraph then begins, "When a girl…" The juxtaposition between the two paragraphs—the second and third of the novel—provides a key for interpreting Dreiser's project in *Sister Carrie*. As the reader progresses from the second paragraph to the third, she moves from the specific (Carrie and Chicago) to the general (a girl and cosmopolitan), and she learns that Carrie's story is meant to be taken as the story of "Sisters" everywhere. It is Dreiser's invocation of the train that gets the reader from Carrie to girl: "This onrushing train was merely speeding to get there." While it is clear that trains were quite literally the means by which young women arrived at newly burgeoning cities at the turn of the century, the reference to the train also carries metaphorical weight that helps elucidate the narrator's claim that only two possible choices await the girl hurtling towards the metropolitan depot: "When a girl leaves her

home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse. Of an intermediate balance, under the circumstances, there is no possibility" (3-4). There are several things worth noting about this concise explanation of options open to a young, working-class girl in the 1890s. In a move similar to Tucker's generic naming of his heroine, Dreiser frames Carrie's predicament in general terms. The narrator makes it clear that the binary frame of "better" or "worse" applies not just to Carrie, but to all girls who leave "home at eighteen." The move is somewhat disingenuous in this context, since it is difficult to tell whether, at the end of the novel, Carrie is simplistically "better" or "worse" than she might have been in Columbia City. However, it is clear from these few lines that Dreiser means to universalize the situation of Carrie Meeber on her way from Columbia City to Chicago as one faced by a growing class of women. And while Carrie eventually complicates the possible endings suggested by the narrator, Dreiser's emphasis on the availability of only two options is worth examining. While "better" and "worse" invoke a traditional moral code, they also invoke the narratives of female vice and virtue described earlier in this chapter. By citing other narratives, Dreiser assures his reader that no matter how directionless and "half-equipped" Carrie may be when she sets off to the modern city, the novelistic form still holds (4).

From Carrie's first encounters with the "drummer" on the train, the narrator registers her feelings and responses towards men as an approach towards a change that, once begun, is as unstoppable as the movement of time itself. When Carrie first meets Drouet on her train journey to the city, she acts reserved in the face of his advances. Eventually, he wins her over through his charm and urban glamour and Carrie reveals the

address of her sister's house. When she discloses this information, Carrie and the reader both realize that something has shifted: "She could not realize that she was drifting, until he secured her address. Now she felt that she had yielded something—he, that he had gained a victory" (9). Although Carrie's realization, "she had yielded," is moral in tone, the narrator's comment, "she was drifting," once again establishes that moral judgments are only interesting to Dreiser to the degree that they track Carrie's temporal progress.

One reason that Dreiser is able to insist on the relevance of narrative plotting in modernity is because he, like Norris, treats the movement of narrative as analogous to the movement of time.[127] His representation of Carrie's change echoes the changes that modernity creates in women. By focusing closely on each action Carrie undertakes, Dreiser reveals the ease and perhaps even the inevitability with which an entire class of women appears to be changing. The narration works to highlight each moment that Carrie proceeds further in her transformation. For example, with each gift from Drouet Carrie accepts, the narrator notes that Carrie is slipping further away from her original identity and towards a crisis point: "In all of Carrie's actions there was a touch of misgiving. The deeper she sank into the entanglement, the more she imagined that the thing hung upon the few remaining things she had not done. Since she had not done so and so yet, there was a way out" (70). While virginity still acts as a marker of transformation in Dreiser's text, unlike Tucker, Dreiser seems to regard Carrie's change into a New Woman as a process related to the historical processes of modernization, rather than an individual failing. The contrast between historical progress and character agency emerges when the

[127] Ricoeur explains the thought process behind such a worldview. He notes that while the succession of events is mere sequencing, plotting brings events together in a sequence that is "causal" and "therefore probable" (41). Norris and Dreiser align the probable—plotting—with the natural in their novels.

narrator explains that although Carrie is "[sinking] into the entanglement," she imagines that her virtue is still safe because of "the few remaining things she had not done." The disconnect between the narrator's assessment of the situation and Carrie's rationalization of her own actions reveals that whereas Tucker makes the moment of penetration the pivotal point of no return that must never be reached, Dreiser regards the conversion of old woman to new as an ongoing and quite possibly unavoidable process.

Young girls like Carrie left homes in the country and moved to the city to find work. However, despite Carrie's brief stint as a factory worker, neither she nor Little Sister can be termed a truly proletarian figure. As Amy Lang has suggested, "proletarianized" women

> cannot support a narrative of ascent: for the working class girl, gender is a liability…In fact, literary proletarianization, relying as it does on the construction of character around what are imputed as fixed class attributes and the construction of plot around the apparently irremediable conditions of industry, blocks the forward motion of narrative altogether. (103)

But perhaps more importantly, Carrie cannot count as a proleterianized woman because she never *makes* anything, besides, that is, the making of herself. As I suggested earlier, that Drouet's gifts come in the form of clothing links Dreiser's narrative to questions of class-based morality. As Nan Enstad explains, "By the late nineteenth century, middle-class women created a wide-spread literature promoting the idea that consumption without 'taste' could lead to working women's moral fall" (29).[128] Although Dreiser's narrative avoids the moral claims of women's reform literature, through his emphasis on

[128] Unlike many readers of Dreiser's novel, Enstad connects fashion to working-class women's labor as well as consumption. She writes, "working women often made shirtwaists and underwear and applied trimmings, lace, feathers, and other decorations to dresses and hats. Thus they rescued from their labor additional personal value, and inflected their consumer practices with an element of their own creative production" (64-5).

Carrie's changing wardrobe and Carrie's increasing interest in her own appearance, Dreiser invokes a much larger tradition of fallen women narratives.

In contrast to Dreiser, Tucker treats modernity as a villain whose progress must, *and can*, be stopped. *Traffic in Souls* presents a narrative typical of the white slave genre. However, the popularity of the genre also produced a great deal of controversy, especially since movie theaters were already the targets of crusades for moral uplift.[129] Critics of vice films expressed concern that young girls viewing vice film would be morally contaminated (Stamp 70). If, as critics feared, spectators came to *Traffic in Souls* with hopes of seeing the sex act represented onscreen, they would have been disappointed. The film never "arrives" at that last destination. Instead, the film produces a different kind of shock. Narrative deferral of pleasure becomes over inscribed in this case, when what the film defers, indefinitely in *Traffic in Souls*, is the rape of a young virgin—Little Sister.

Little Sister exemplifies many characteristics of the New Woman, but as it becomes clear in the film, her transformation from Victorian girlhood to modern New Womanhood is necessarily incomplete.[130] Tucker codes the incompleteness of this transformation as explicitly sexual. However, by positioning sexual penetration as the ultimate threat to the mobile female body, the film unravels its own strategies of control. For Tucker, female chastity remains the last bastion of the non-threatening Victorian woman; as long as female virginity remains intact, the possibility of resurrecting the

[129] In their respective volumes for the History of American Cinema series, Charles Musser and Eileen Bowser have commented on the cinema's strong appeal to working-class and immigrant audiences, as well as attempts on the part of theater owners and film distributors to appeal to more bourgeois audiences.

[130] From this point forward, I will be using "old" to refer to the idealized, chaste Victorian woman, and "new" to refer to the economically and socially mobile modern woman.

"old" woman from the threatened body of the New Woman remains. For this reason, Tucker is crucially invested in the incompleteness of Little Sister's transformation into the New Woman. Stamp suggests that:

> *Traffic in Souls* portrays not so much a battle between Little Sister and her enslavers as a struggle between the two facets of modern urban society. The first, principally embodied by the elder sister Mary Barton, represents traditional female life centered on the family home where women's sexuality and activities are contained within marriage and domesticity. The other, opposing way of life [is] symbolized by Little Sister's odyssey into the perverted domestic and sexual world of the brothel. (76)

Much like Sister Carrie, Little Sister stands in for vulnerable young women across the country. In contrast to her named sister, Mary Barton, the generic quality of Little Sister's name suggests her position as a type, rather than an individuated character. Little Sister thus represents not so much a person as a battle ground for the struggle between old and new suggested in Stamp's reading of the film.

Little Sister's complicity in her abduction becomes most obvious when read into the rise of dating culture. Having accepted his invitation, Little Sister eagerly leaves the candy store with the cadet, thus, the film implies, becoming a willing participant in her own attempted rape. In addition to exercising economic and physical freedom, Little Sister momentarily acts as a desiring woman. She enjoys flirting with the cadet in the candy store and enjoys her date until the moment the film asserts its project, and the cadet drugs her and carries her away to the brothel. Here, Tucker gives a dark take on the "treating" phenomena, literalizing the expected exchange of sexual favors for a night on the town (Peiss 54). It is precisely because of her independence, which the film suggests is getting a bit out of control (Little Sister dances vigorously with a man who is not her date), that she must be punished. It is as though Tucker needs to have the cadet drug

Little Sister at the last moment, lest viewers discover that she has sexual interests of her own. The film averts the possibility that the New Woman might claim her sexuality for "improper" purposes by drugging her and turning her own sexuality against her as vulnerability.

While the filmmaker's mobilization of the "white slave" narrative suggests Tucker's savvy assessment of the market value for "shocking" films, the film expresses an anxiety about its formal relationship to the subject matter. Little Sister's virginity remains intact throughout her lengthy captivity not just because of concerns regarding censorship, but also because the film figures female chastity as the last stronghold against modernity's corrupting influence.[131] A focus on the film's attempt to appropriate modern technology as a benevolent tool for healing wounds the body suffers in modernity reveals the importance of examining a gendered application of the modernity thesis. Like Little Sister's entrapped body, technology's recuperative potentiality becomes radically circumscribed in *Traffic in Souls*. While the New Woman may have appeared as a threatening figure on modernity's landscape—"the very figure of a modernism associated with illusion, deception, artificiality" (*Femmes Fatales* 263)—Tucker's film repeatedly turns her threatening potentiality back upon her.

While Little Sister fears physical penetration on screen, Tucker also mobilizes virginity to do ideological work. The film displaces female agency by posing the threat to Little Sister's virtue as an outside force, thus nullifying the possibility that she might not be interested in old ideas of chastity. By drugging and imprisoning Little Sister, the film

[131] Literary white slave narratives from this time would seem to undercut the likelihood of a woman remaining a virgin once inside a brothel. It was far more probable for brothel owners to rape their captives as soon as possible so as to decrease the chances of these young women returning to their families. For an autobiographical account of life as a prostitute, see Josie Washburn's *The Underworld Sewer*.

recasts the *threatening* New Woman as the *threatened* New Woman. The displacement of female sexual agency can be seen most clearly in the film's brothel scenes. Little Sister spends the majority of the film in one of the brothel's bedrooms, where she suffers threats of violence from both the madam and the cadet. Early in Little Sister's captivity, the madam enters the room with a negligee in hand. When she tries to force it upon Little Sister, Little Sister clearly mouths "I won't." The madam, frustrated in her attempts, exits the frame. Several scenes later, the madam returns with the negligee and holding a whip behind her back. When Little Sister mouths "I won't" once again, the madam raises the whip against her, at which point the film cuts to the police rescue team. When the film cuts back to the brothel, we see the cadet listening outside the bedroom door, apparently disgusted by what he hears. After again cutting to the rescue party, the film returns once more to the bedroom, where the cadet wrests the whip from the madam's hands and raises it against Little Sister himself. The power struggle between madam and cadet mirrors the power struggle taking place between Tucker and the threatening figure of the New Woman. For the New Woman (represented here by the madam) to threaten idealized female chastity (Little Sister) suggests the impossibility of recuperating the Victorian femininity. While the modern woman may be complicit in her victimization, she can never be seen as the driving force behind her own immorality, which would suggest the presence of female sexual desire—a frightening possibility that has the potential to undermine the film's threat. Instead, the film (represented by the cadet) appropriates threatening female sexuality and inverts it, threatening the New Woman with the possibility of sexual violence.

In *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser too treats female sexuality with some ambivalence. Rather than imagining a woman with sexual desire—the desire to "circulate"—he presents the progress of history as a force with almost physical powers, which culminates in the creation of the modern city and the New Woman. In most descriptions of Carrie's decisions, the narrator quickly converts her actions into impersonal events central to the plotting of the novel, which is also synonymous with Dreiser's plotting of history. Once the conversion from decisions to events has occurred, the plotting of events operates as a force that sweeps Carrie along. Although Carrie is always moving forward through the narrative, the Dreiser's diction indicates that the movement is unwitting, and lacks any exertion of agency or even human locomotion. Instead, Carrie is "drifting," swept along by external forces. Dreiser renders Carrie's choices in terms of physical movements that border on the bizarre. Through Carrie's body, Dreiser metaphorizes her experience as an agent in a determinist universe. To draw upon an incomplete list of examples, Carrie "[sinks] into the entanglement" (70), "was more drawn than she drew" (74), is "swept on by things which neither resound nor speak" (78).[132] This stripping of agency functions most explicitly in scenes during which Carrie makes (or doesn't make) decisions that compromise her virtue.

Dreiser links Carrie's fated-ness to her presence in the city and to places of entertainment more specifically. As Richard Lehan suggests, "What we get is the human experience as an amoral process; characters move around like driftwood…always being spoken through by a larger self, which is the voice of the city itself, and by the desire its materiality produces" (67). Like Little Sister, Carrie's presence in public spaces makes

[132] Den Tandt argues that Carrie's "passivity works as a form of empowerment in disguise," which allows her to succeed, first as a kept woman, and then as an actress (68).

her vulnerable to predatory men. Even when Carrie is not bodily present, Dreiser seems to suggest that she is always already imbricated in the tawdry world of modern amusements, as when Drouet brags to Hurstwood about his near conquest:

> Thus was Carrie's name bandied about in the most frivolous and gay of places, and that also when the little toiler was bemoaning her narrow lot, which was almost inseparable from the early stages of this, her unfolding fate. (49)

Once again, Dreiser converts Carrie's nonproductive circulation into a narrative production. In this passage, the narrator separates Carrie's "unfolding fate" from Carrie herself, thus stripping her of any agency in relation to her future. Furthermore, the "almost" inseparability of Carrie's narrow lot from the "this" mentioned by the narrator encourages a reading of Carrie's name as synonymous with Carrie's person. With the revelation that "Carrie," the name, is "bandied about in the most frivolous and gay of places," Dreiser unveils the dark underside to the gleaming lights and glamour of Chicago. Much like the candy store and dance hall in *Traffic in Souls*, the gay tavern of *Sister Carrie*, and later, the brightly lit theater stage, provides an attractive setting for the seduction narrative's heroine. Carrie's name enters a public discourse without her knowledge, suggesting that, even more so than Little Sister, Carrie's conversion into New Woman is inevitable, whether she knowingly participates in this transformation or not.

Although Dreiser does not privilege the loss of virginity as the ultimate metaphor for his heroine's transformation, he does impart importance to the concept of climax in its narrative and sexual connotations. The word climax recurs throughout the novel, always invoking its dual meanings. The word makes its first appearance in Dreiser's description of 1889 Chicago: "Its many and growing commercial opportunities gave it widespread fame which made of it a giant magnet, drawing to itself from all quarters the hopeful and the hopeless—those who had their fortunes yet to make and those whose fortunes and

affairs had reached a disastrous climax elsewhere" (16). The city is an appropriate place for Dreiser to locate climaxes, both sexual and narrative, because, as the narrative reveals, the modern city is the place from whence stories emerge. And this is certainly the case for Carrie, who appears to have no real past—Columbia City is something of a lacuna in the narrative.[133] It is only once Carrie arrives in Chicago that she begins to have stories worth telling. This is the case, for example, when Carrie begins her affair with Hurstwood: "On the first evening she did little but go over the details of the afternoon, always winding up at that delicious climax when she had confessed, by action, her too full sympathy for his lonely state" (131). Here, Carrie herself acts as narrator, retelling the story of her temptation and eventual acquiescence to Hurstwood, which hinges on a "delicious climax." It seems that even Carrie understands that sex is always a narrative event, as she appears to anticipate Peter Brooks' "Freud's Masterplot," in which he suggests:

> We emerge from reading Beyond the Pleasure Principle with a dynamic model that structures ends (death, quiescence, nonnarrativity) against beginnings (Eros, stimulation into tension, the desire of narrative) in a manner that necessitates the middle as detour, as struggle toward the end under the compulsion of imposed delay, as arabesque in the dilatory space of the text. (108)

Indeed, for Dreiser, the temporal structuring of the sex act, standing as it does as a gateway between women's possible selves, is at least as important as the act itself.

Because Dreiser sees sex in general, and the modern sexuality of new women in particular, as the result of historical processes, he uses the terms of narrative to metaphorize sex. The connection between sex and narrative is doubly important to Dreiser, given his concerns about female productivity. *Sister Carrie* can thus be seen as

[133] In "Carrie's Blues," Thomas Riggio explains that Carrie's lack of back story is made up for by the Chicago scenes, which "duplicate her past life of deprivation" (30).

Dreiser's literalization of the simultaneously sexual and narrative fear Brooks describes: "It is characteristic of textual energy in narrative that it should always be on the verge of premature discharge, of short circuit. The reader experiences…the fear of endlessness" (Brooks 109).[134] The fear of nonproductivity in the novel extends beyond the fear of "premature discharge" that Brooks describes. If, as Murat Aydemir argues, the act of ejaculation organizes the temporality of both the sex act and narrative (95), then the idea of nonproductive female sexuality threatens not just systems of male pleasure, but systems of male narrative production, here represented by the novel itself. In this light, we can read Dreiser's repetition of the word "climax" as a nervous textual reassurance that progressive and productive movement is occurring in the text and that novel, Carrie, and reader alike will receive their ending. Within the space of the novel, narrative productivity must make up for Carrie's otherwise unproductive sexuality.

Although *Sister Carrie* addresses prostitution less explicitly than *A Traffic in Souls*, the novel is very much about the transactions surrounding sex and money. In *Sister Carrie*, these transactions raise questions about inevitability and agency. When Carrie takes money from Drouet, the narrator notes, "She felt ashamed *in part* to have been weak enough to take it" (63). Carrie feels ashamed, but not wholly. Carrie's incomplete shame raises several questions. While it is certainly a possibility that the reason Carrie does not feel wholly ashamed is because she is a virgin, or perhaps because she has already begun a slide into moral decay, there are other reasons that seem equally

[134] In "Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure," Susan Winnett takes on the masculinist bias of narrative theory, and Brooks' "Freud's Masterplot in particular. Winnett argues that "the pleasure the reader is expected to take in the text is the pleasure of the man" (140). In *Images of Bliss*, Aydemir gives provocative evidence to such claims, relating the cum shot in pornography to narrative climax (93, 95). See also Teresa De Lauretis's *Alice Doesn't* for further critiques of narrative theory's masculinist assumptions.

plausible given Dreiser's dual interests in determinism and economic transaction. Carrie's shame may be incomplete because she realizes that she is taking the only action available given her circumstances. Although there is a sexual promise tied up in her acceptance of Drouet's money—a promise that, if fulfilled, would change Carrie irrevocably—it is unclear that continuing work in a shoe factory would change her less. From the novel's beginning, Dreiser establishes that Carrie cannot stay the same. Her agreement to take the money from Drouet seems different only in scale from an agreement to take any job in the city. Taking the drummer's money just hurries the process of Carrie's modernization along.

When Carrie leaves her sister's apartment to live with Drouet, Minnie grieves for Carrie's situation, saying, "poor Sister Carrie" (74). Lest the reader take this attitude, however, the narrator intervenes to offer a corrective to Minnie's view of events:

> We are inclined to sometimes wring our hands much more profusely over the situation of another than the mental attitude of that other, towards his own condition, would seem to warrant. People do not grieve so much over their own state as we imagine…We see, as we grieve for them, the whole detail of their blighted career, a vast confused imagery of mishaps covering years, much as we read a double-decade of tragedy in a ten-hour novel. The victim, meanwhile, for the single day or morrow, is not actually anguished. He meets his unfolding fate by the minute and the hour as it comes. (74)

In this passage, Dreiser shows that his novel, which measures Carrie's fate by individual, gradual slips—rather than the tragic fall of the "ten-hour novel"—is the proper form for representing the transformation of womanhood in modernity. Much like Norris in *Vandover* and *The Octopus*, Dreiser here aligns his novel's perspective with reality. Furthermore, Dreiser claims access to Carrie's perspective, which he suggests other novelists, whom he aligns with Minnie's provincial attitude, cannot understand.

Dreiser positions Minnie's attitude towards Carrie as both naïve and historically belated. After Drouet buys Carrie new shoes and a jacket, she realizes that she cannot wear them home because her sister and brother-in-law "wouldn't know where [she] got them (68)." When she confesses as much to Drouet, he offers to put her up in her own little apartment, which represents one of the last steps in Drouet's "brush[ing] the doubts away and clear[ing] the path" (68)." On Drouet's urging, Carrie takes him up on his offer, leaving behind the Hanson's apartment and the world it represents. The day after Carrie's first night with Drouet, she thinks to herself, "'what is it I have lost?' " (88). What she has lost appears to be not so much her virginity, as a way of life. This way of life, represented by Carrie's sister and brother-in-law, is one that is becoming increasingly outmoded. The Hansons live in the city, but they never go out, and Hanson raises continual objections to Carrie's going out alone and standing in the doorway. The Hansons represent the provincial immigrants to the modern city; they exist in it, but remain unchanged by it. On the other hand, Carrie quickly accustoms herself to the rhythms and patterns of the city, yearning to become part of it. Once she does, Carrie can no longer return to the shabby apartment; nor, more importantly, can she any longer return to Columbia City. Dreiser locates these places not only in Carrie's past, but—through her status as a "fair example of the middle American class"—in the nation's past as well. It seems appropriate, then, that Dreiser uses the frame of Minnie Hanson's dream to alert the reader that Carrie has fallen. Minnie's dream, in which she sees that "Carrie was slipping away somewhere over a rock, and her fingers had let loose and she had seen her falling," literalizes the idea of the fallen woman (79). Following a description of Drouet leading Carrie up to the apartment for her first night, Minnie's dream comes to us

in place of a scene describing Carrie's night with Drouet. But Minnie's dream is as provincial as she is; Carrie's loss of virginity comes not even a quarter of a way through the novel, and Carrie's deflowering is not the social death Minnie imagines it to be. It is instead the marker that Carrie has made a leap into modernity, with the different moral codes and measures of worth implied in that action. The remaining portion of the novel represents Dreiser's effort to produce a narrative out of such an individual's life.

Little Sister never makes this leap, and it would be easy to image Dreiser dismissing *Traffic in Souls* as a cinematic version of the "ten hour novel"—which, though it creates a temporally progressive narrative, is morally (and historically) backward in its attempt to resurrect Victorian values. Once inside the brothel, Little Sister becomes something of a cipher. Little Sister's victimization strips her of her economic and social mobility, which is literalized in her incarceration within the bedroom. Stripped of all agency—except, importantly, the ability to refuse sexual advances—Little Sister metamorphoses from New Woman into the "old," fragile Victorian woman. Little Sister's moral turnaround also allows for a reversal at the level of genre. Although Little Sister does not get married, her rescue allows for her sister Mary's union with Officer Burke—a sure marker of a return to the woman's romance plot.

It is worth noting that the race to the rescue begins only after the film shows her repentance. When she awakens in the brothel, Little Sister realizes her situation and quickly repents of her modern ways. The gestural soliloquy actress Ethel Grandon performs contains two gestures coded as feminine distress—hands to cheeks, the back of the palm to the forehead—as well as gestures of supplication. With her hands raised

heavenwards, Little Sister prays not only for rescue, but also for her forgiveness.[135] Once Little Sister repents, the rescuers mobilize to save her. Because the film positions itself as punisher and tutor, its pupil may return safely to modernity once she has learned her lesson. Here, the clarity with which Ethel Grandon mouths "I won't" becomes crucial to the film's narrative strategy. Although Little Sister emerges as a speaking subject in this scene, she receives no intertitle, an omission that stresses both her speech act and the condition that she only achieves subjectivity by negating her sexuality. Describing female speech in the context of sound film, Kaja Silverman notes, "Woman's words are shown to be even less her own than are her 'looks.' They are scripted for her, extracted from her in a trancelike state" (31). Tucker's film soundlessly enacts this tendency: in its insistence upon female sexuality as the last holdout against a fully modernized woman, *Traffic in Souls* relies upon the assumption that women do not really want to become "new" if "newness" implies sexual agency. In this way, the movement of Ethel Grandon's lips is akin to the jawing of a ventriloquist's dummy—she becomes a speaking subject only by delivering Tucker's message.

If female sexuality is all that remains to complete Little Sister's transformation into a New Woman, the film can never allow her rape to take place. Although the sex with which the film threatens Little Sister is nonconsensual, what Little Sister refuses is not so much rape and prostitution, but sexuality writ large. Her "I won't" rejects the life of the potentially desiring New Woman. However, as the mise-en-scene within the brothel reveals, Little Sister's repentance is so crucial to the film's project that her rape is

[135] For an explanation of the histrionic code of acting employed in this film, see Roberta Pearson's *Eloquent Gestures* (24, 42). In a perverse echo, the "man higher up," Trubus, mimics Little Sister's repentant movements before his death, underscoring the importance of atonement in the film.

an empty threat. The room in which the slavers imprison Little Sister contains no bed, an omission which suggests the unrepresentability of such a possibility within this narrative of feminine redemption. Because the film threatens female chastity in order to resurrect it, *Traffic in Souls* faces a tremendous paradox that renders the film's threat impotent. Little Sister—as her generalized name implies—represents modern women everywhere, who must be taught a lesson before it is too late. But because the film casts this deadline in explicitly sexual terms, female sexuality becomes the film's point of no return. The film cannot allow Little Sister to lose her virginity because, one the one hand, the restoration of virginity through filmic technology would imply that the hymen is not the sacred depository of virtue that the film means it to be, and on the other, lost virginity left unrestored would imply that it is too late to resurrect the idealized "old" woman. Thus while the film can reanimate an old plot, it cannot restore a defiled female body. For *Traffic in Souls,* the hymen is the wall that must hold.

However, the film's project relies on a fragile premise. It seems unlikely that female chastity can do the work of holding back the forces of modernity. The film itself reveals an anxiety that its project may already be too late. Although Little Sister's virginity remains intact, the audience's reassurance of her purity requires the eradication of her role as adult woman. At the film's conclusion, Little Sister becomes the child her name suggests. In the last scene in which she appears, Little Sister lies with her head in her father's lap, with Mary and Officer Burke standing over her (Figure 16). The scene implies that she is no longer a New Woman, but instead an infant charge. However, the film's excessive strategies of control (three bodies frame her, blocking her movement on all sides) once again undercut its reassertion of social norms. The guardianship of Little

Sister seems to require her biological father, the police, and the "old" woman Mary, who acts as mother to Little Sister and wife to the law. Presumably, this scene represents a return to patriarchal rule, with Little Sister showing homage by placing her head in her father's lap. However, the father's title in the film is in constant danger of a double reading. The film never refers to the father as Mr. Barton; instead, the intertitles dub him "the invalid inventor." Both readings of the word "invalid" become appropriate lenses for considering the film's anxiety: the father is physically disabled *and* no longer the legitimate locus of control. If the source of the father's invalidity is in part his inability to control his daughter, it becomes clear that the loss of female chastity will always entail a corresponding loss of patriarchal control. On the other hand, given the wheelchair-bound inventor's dependence on Mary, the possibility that he might act as a double for the filmmaker reveals an equally problematic version of masculine authority. The film thus narratively enacts the problem of the New Woman that it is trying to solve, producing a narrative trajectory without ending: both the father and the film, even as they struggle to reassert their power and bring the New Woman under control, depend upon the participation of both the female body and potentially reversible technologies for the completion of their nostalgic projects.

Playing it Again: Nostalgia, Reversibility, Inexorability, And the Problem of Technology

Although Tucker deploys innovative editing strategies in his film's final rescue sequence, he expresses ambivalence towards modern technology within the film's diegesis. If one considers the rise of the New Woman, for which the loss of virginity becomes code, as a shock on a cultural level, films like *Traffic in Souls* found themselves

faced with the limit to film's recuperative powers. In contrast, Dreiser's narrative, which tracks the temporal and narrative progress of women in modernity, does not fret so much over the instances of technology that appear in his narrative. Instead, Dreiser reads these technologies into his model of naturalism, developing an account of technological determinism that is very much of a piece with his overall model of historical inevitability.

Though the train had a reverse gear, its spread across the American landscape did not. In 1827, the first chartered railroad appeared, and railroad construction in the U.S. "peaked" in 1916 (Kirby 4). Literary representations of the railroad, including Norris's in *The Octopus*, also emphasized its relentless forward motion. In *Sister Carrie*, the onrushing train's movement and path are inevitable, emphasizing the necessity of modernity's arrival, the increased influence of the city on the country, and the irreversible transformation of country girls into city women. Although Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes about Paris, his observations also elucidate the growing reach of American railways and urban centers:

> the alteration of spatial relationships by the speed of the railway train was not simply a process that diminished space…space was both diminished *and* expanded…The nation's contraction into a metropolis, as described in the *Quarterly Review*, conversely appeared as an expansion of the metropolis: by establishing transport lines to ever more outlying areas, the metropolis tended to incorporate the entire nation. (35)

Given the growth of railroads in America in the late 1800s, one wonders if Chicago—standing in for modernity writ large—might have inevitably reached Carrie in Columbia City whether she embarked on her initial journey to the city or not.

From the novel's first pages, it becomes clear that staying the same is no more possible for girls of eighteen than it is to stop the onward progress of the locomotive. Although Lynne Kirby argues that "the motif of railroad time as inexorable and

irreversible, as all-determining, affected the structure of early film in a number of ways," her assessment also usefully accounts for Dreiser's novelistic representation of modernity as a gendered journey through space and time. As Kirby has suggested, in the early period of the cinema—a time frame roughly concurrent with Dreiser's novel—"the train appeared as a site for the instability of sexuality and of identity in general" (11). It is fitting that the novel's first seduction plot begins on the train, since Carrie's seduction by the modern city and her seduction by the drummer are functionally the same in their ability to convert her from one sort of woman to another. Like the train, in all his seductive finery, Drouet represents another agent of modernity, promising excitement of the sort never seen in Columbia City.

The social instability Kirby locates in the railcar may have derived from the perceptual instability experienced by train passengers. Schivelbusch suggests that train travel altered perception by detaching "the traveler from the space that immediately surrounded him, that is, it intruded itself as an almost 'unreal barrier' between object and subject. The landscape that was seen in this way was no longer seen intensively…but evanescently, impressionistically—panoramically, in fact" (189). Schivelbusch's reading of the train's impact on perception also makes sense of the two primary locations of Carrie's seduction—the train and the department store: "In the transition from the traditional retail shop to the department store, the customer's perception of the goods changed in a manner analogous to the traveler's perception during the transition from coach to train…The department store encouraged the development of the kind of perception that we have called 'panoramic'" (189). That Carrie meets Drouet on a train, where one might see things "panoramically," again indicates Dreiser's desire to position

his novel as an intervention into modern ways of seeing and also echoes Norris' call to take a larger narrative view. My reading of this scene contradicts Jameson's reading of the novel, in which he argues that—in response to commodification and the accompanying "construction of the subject" constituted into a "closed monad, henceforth governed by the laws of 'psychology'"—"what has happened is that 'Carrie' has become a 'point of view'…Not coincidentally, the emergence of such narrative centers is then at once accompanied by the verbal or narrative equivalents of techniques characteristic of film" (160). Although I agree that, especially in the train scenes, Dreiser invokes the techniques of the cinema, his panoramic point of view aligns him with aspirations towards a transcendent and objective perspective—not Carrie's limited one. As Civello notes, "no one could imagine that [Dreiser's] generalization reports Carrie's thoughts…for this narrator, Carrie's story is essentially a case study" (155). When Dreiser describes the "onrushing train," emphasizing speed and motion, he establishes a forward-moving trajectory for his narrative that invokes the trajectory of history moving his heroine forward into modernity. In his establishment of this trajectory, Dreiser connects the force that is Carrie to the force that is the train, as the "swift review" of the landscape from the train window is replaced by Carrie's "swifter thoughts" of Chicago. Both girl and train are "merely speeding to get there," wherever "there" may be. By the time the second paragraph concludes, with its close association of Carrie and the machinery transporting her to her fate, the body of the New Woman has been tightly linked with the forces of modernity: speed, progress, and change.

Consistent with Leo Marx's analysis of the train as a literary symbol of progress that simultaneously represented both the best and the worst of modernity, the image of

the train in *Sister Carrie* enacts a similarly paradoxical representation.[136] For Dreiser, the train stands in for both the forces of modernity that brought the New Woman into being, as well as the energies of the New Woman herself. Furthermore, given Dreiser's concerns about the productivity of working women, his view of the train can only be ambivalent. In *Grundrisse*, Marx explains: "This locational movement—the bringing of the product to the market, which is a necessary condition of its circulation, except when the point of production is itself a market—could be more precisely be regarded as the transformation of the product *into a commodity*" (534, emphasis original). The train's ability to convert both products and—in Carrie's case—workers into commodities is problematic for Dreiser. Even as he uses train technology as a narrative device to move his heroine through space and time—as well as to divide the first and second section of the novel—Dreiser's narrative deployment of the technology echoes the conversion enacted by the train in the first place.

Traffic in Souls addresses the problem of technological inexorability by distancing itself from the modern technologies it represents. Though Tucker works in a medium much more "modern" than does Dreiser, his strategy for resurrecting the "old" woman depends upon a decidedly anti-technological solution: the physical bodies of athletic men. Although Mary's facility with technology makes Little Sister's rescue possible—she discovers the culprits and records the evidence necessary to convict them by using her father's invention—the actual rescue sequence relies very little on cutting-edge technology. The race to the rescue approaches ludicrous proportions, seeming to rephrase the old light bulb joke: how many police officers does it take to rescue female chastity?

[136] I am here referring to Marx's seminal work, *The Machine in the Garden*.

Apparently three carloads full (Figure 17). Little Sister's rescue depends heavily upon human bodies, and, in its final moments, very little upon technology. After helping Mary record the evidence, her fiancé Officer Burke trails the cadet to the brothel to affirm its location. It seems strange that after showcasing high-tech spy equipment the film would rely on a human body to gather the last key pieces of evidence, but the entire rescue sequence is strangely embodied. The excessive quantity of human labor involved in Little Sister's rescue marks it as the opposite of technological, a message the film underscores with the extreme physicality of the police officers' movements. The rescue sequence becomes a showcase for masculine with actors shimmying up escape ladders and doing flips over high fences (Figures 18 and 19). However, at the same time, Tucker uses this moment of the film to show off his own technological dexterity by cutting rapidly back and forth between the rescuers and the interior of the brothel. But rather than undermining the anti-technological bent of this sequence, Tucker aligns his cinematic movement with the physical movements of the police officers, putting his film on the side of the law. In the same way that the cadet takes the whip from the brothel's madam, the corps of male police officers and Tucker's editing wrest control of the rescue from Mary's hands once she has done her job. It is also worth noting that after the criminals' capture, the police chief tells them, "the invention of the father of the girl you sought to ruin will convict you." Here the films strips even Mary, the good woman, of agency and reinscribes it upon the body of her father—the invalid inventor.

The film positions itself on the side of human law and moral codes through its fast editing sequence for good reason. The film needs to write the rescue sequence in terms of

human labor, rather than technological labor, for precisely the reason that Whissel claims the film celebrates technology: technology is reversible. Whissel writes,

> The melodramatic reversal of fortune that brings about the resolution of this particular film…is based on the idea that the lines of technology are themselves reversible: the same technologies that initiate a dangerous mobilization of bodies and identities in the film are used to return detoured bodies to their proper place and to arrest the dangerous movement of the illegitimate. (15)

What Whissel fails to note, however, is that technology is endlessly reversible, and as such, subject to constant shifts of control. Mary's use of technology cannot be what ultimately saves her sister for at least two reasons. First, at the same time that technology allows for the reversal of modern problems, its reversible nature also suggests a constant flux that is decidedly disturbing. Second, because the film produces an account of reversible technology that anyone can master, Mary's position as heroine becomes problematic as the film moves to its conclusion. Her skillful manipulation of technology places her dangerously close to the figure of the New Woman, even as she uses it to reunite the bourgeois family. In his reading of *Traffic in Souls*' representations of technology, Young argues that "Tucker appeals to the audience's curiosity about media that had not yet been weighed down by definite social functions" (66). However, at the same time that these new technologies titillated, they also produced feelings of instability, which Young describes as "the threat of the readerly text becoming, through ambiguity or distraction, a writerly one" (71). To assure that power is firmly located in its proper place, the film must displace credit for the rescue from technology and Mary, who circulates more and more as the film goes on, to the stable figures of patriarchal control. Because technology cannot care who controls it, it presents an insuperable problem for a film interested in stabilizing control. Thus, *Traffic in Souls* makes technology disappear at the

conclusion of the narrative, and disguises its own status as technology, because of technology's ambivalence towards moral projects.[137]

Although Dreiser represents technological modernity and its participation in the modernization of social norms much less hysterically, his emphasis on technological determinism makes it difficult to read Carrie as having any capacity for moral decision-making. The clearest example of technological determinism replacing Carrie's agency appears alongside Dreiser's second invocation of the train, during Carrie's flight with Hurstwood from New York to Chicago:

> The progress of the train was having a great deal to do with the solution of this difficult situation. The speeding wheels and disappearing country put Chicago further and further behind. Carrie could feel that she was being borne a long distance off—that the engine was making an almost stopless run to some distant city. She felt at times as if she could cry out and make such a row that someone would come to her aid; at other times it seemed an almost useless thing—so far was she from any aide, no matter what she did. (278-9)

It is at this moment that Carrie has most compromised herself. Leaving Drouet for Hurstwood, she casts herself permanently in the role of mistress. Her agreement to run away with Hurstwood finalizes their relationship. However, by returning her to the train, Dreiser again chooses to emphasize the inevitability of Carrie's conversion into a morally compromised New Woman, rather than indicating her agency in the process. The train again appears to be both an agent and creator of modernity—one that renders useless any actions Carrie might take. The "progress of the train" functionally replaces Carrie's agency and transports her to a new situation and new position in the world. Dreiser

[137] Indeed, Tucker may have been invested in obscuring the film's status as a modern product, since, as Doane has argued: "The relation between the cinema and consumerism is buttressed by…film's capability for representing not merely objects but objects in their fetishized form as commodities" (*Desire* 24). As we saw with the scene in the candy store, this commodification of objects is especially problematic when the objects in question are young women, and the suggestion that Tucker's film may be participating in the commodification of young women threatens to undermine the film's message.

further emphasizes Carrie's helplessness in the process through the passive construction "was being borne." However, at the same time that he suggests it does not "matter what she did," Dreiser also includes that niggling little qualifier, "almost."

Dreiser's deep ambivalence about how much agency to ascribe to his heroine and how much to ascribe to technological determinism goes some lengths to explain the narrative's shift in the second half of the novel. While the narrative traces Carrie's path to becoming a successful, if unhappy, actress, and there is a suggested romance between Carrie and Ames, Hurstwood emerges as the more interesting character in the novel's second half.[138] In the end, it is Hurstwood who meets the tragic fate of a fallen woman, committing suicide in a dingy room. As Fleissner points out, we might say that Carrie "is a 'realist' character, while [Hurstwood]—steeped in a passive nostalgia, pleading only for an ounce of sympathy from Carrie (and the reader)—could be called a 'sentimental' one (163). Michaels reads the shift in the second half of the novel somewhat differently, arguing that "Dreiser makes use of the verbal forms of fiction to commit himself to the physical forms of capitalism" (56). He explains that "Beautiful girls grow old and die, but beautiful girls in novels need not; rich old men, despite their riches, also die, but corporations, growing ever richer, need not" (56). And while it is certainly true that the beautiful Carrie need not have an ending, Michaels obscures the point that *Sister Carrie*, as a novel, requires one. This tension, obscured by Michaels' account of Carrie's economy of desire, is one way of understanding the difficulty surrounding the novel's and Carrie's endings. In the end, Carrie *does* achieve success in the city, but it comes at

[138] In the 1907 version of the novel, Dreiser concludes the novel with Carrie bemoaning her fate, rather than with Hurstwood's suicide.

the expense of Dreiser's denying her agency, which instead gets displaced onto the impersonal forces of modernity and modern technologies.[139]

In 1911, Dreiser addressed the problematic relationship between modernity and female agency and production by rewriting *Sister Carrie* as *Jennie Gerhardt.* In *Jennie Gerhardt*, Dreiser retells Carrie's story as a narrative of victimization—much more akin to Tucker's—in which processes of modernization prove damaging to innocent young women. In contrast to Tucker, however, Dreiser reverses the usual relationship between morality and sexuality. If Carrie is the economically savvy, but emotionally calculating New Woman, Jennie Gerhardt represents a woman less susceptible to the temptations of modernity, but more susceptible to the temptations of love and sex. Published a decade later, *Jennie Gerhardt* is both a revision of *Sister Carrie* and a departure from the narrative perspectives of both *Carrie* and *Traffic in Souls*. The moment of the heroine's fall is more dramatic here than in *Sister Carrie*, and the seduction scene seems to have been copied from Samuel Richardson's rule book.[140] Although Jennie is a victim, Judith Kucharski reads the novel as promoting a feminist agenda, arguing that "In Dreiser's fictional world, everyone is victimized to a greater or lesser degree; victimization is the leveling force" (18). As a result, Kucharski argues, one can read Jennie as a strong woman because she overcomes adversity "to carry on" (20). Lawrence Hussman opposes such readings of the novel, noting that Dreiser's depiction of Jennie basically falls into line with his belief that "men were supposed to be the thinkers, and women ideally would

[139] Florence Dore would dispute this reading of Carrie as lacking sexual desire. Dore challenges both Fredric Jameson's and Walter Benn Michaels's readings of Carrie as an expression of capitalist consumption, instead, she insists that everything about Carrie, "even her materialist urge, is sexual" (23).

[140] In her essay, "Chill History and Rueful Sentiments in *Jennie Gerhardt*," Valerie Ross connects the novel to a sentimental tradition that includes both Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*.

do the feeling" (48). He argues that the novel "fails" (43) because Dreiser depicts Jennie as "a plaster saint, her every action (and far too many of her thoughts) devoted to serving others" (44). Given Dreiser's demonstrated ability to portray a woman who "carries on" without becoming "a plaster saint," Jennie's narrative would seem to call for a reading more nuanced than arguments about whether Jennie is believable, admirable, or likeable. Instead, given Dreiser's concerns about feminine production and his disinterest in traditional forms of morality, Jennie is better evaluated in terms of her output. Early in the novel, Jennie falls for wealthy Senator Brander, who earns her trust, seduces her, and dies before he can marry her, leaving Jennie pregnant and alone. Following the seduction, the narrator explains: "It cannot be said that at this time a clear sense of what had happened—of what social and physical significance this new relationship to the senator entailed, was present in Jennie's mind. She was not conscious as yet of that shock which the possibility of maternity, even under he most favorable conditions, brings to the average woman" (74). Although in this description Jennie is naïve beyond belief, she is almost from the beginning marked as a mother. Jennie is as fertile as Carrie is barren.[141]

Pregnancy is notably absent from both *Sister Carrie* and *A Traffic in Souls*, and despite references to bourgeois family structures, no children populate these narratives. In *Jennie Gerhardt*, pregnancy acts as a visual index of Jennie's change from innocent girl to woman. But at the same time, it becomes clear that Jennie's pregnancy is also the reason that Dreiser never condemns his heroine. As Eby notes, "Jennie Gerhardt is perhaps of all Dreiser's women characters the most difficult for modern readers to understand. She asserts little agency; she embodies power without controlling it" (149).

[141] Jennie's foolishness is perhaps intentional. Dore suggests that in his attempts to create a new model of womanhood, Dreiser replaces female innocence with female ignorance, or stupidity (27).

Jennie's power in the novel is the power of biological reproduction—the power of motherhood. Like Carrie, Jennie wants a life different than that of her poor and provincial family. However, Jennie's desires are far simpler than Carrie's—she just wants to be loved, and her pregnancy results from this aspiration. Jennie's primary difficulty in the novel seems to be her excessive fertility. Her pregnancy comes directly upon the heels of her seduction. Following Jennie's confession that she has become pregnant by the recently-deceased Brander, Jennie's father disowns her. Commenting on the unraveling of Jennie's life that follows her disclosure of her embarrassed state, the narrator notes:

> The incidents of the days that followed, relating as they did peculiarly to Jennie, were of an order which the morality of our day has agreed to taboo. Certain processes of the All-mother, the great artificing wisdom of the power that in silence and darkness works and weaves—when viewed in the light of the established opinion of some of the little individuals created by it, are considered very vile. (92)

In this passage, what Tucker might call morality, Dreiser specifies as the "morality of the day," thus linking those who might judge Jennie to urban modernity. In contrast, the narrator compares Jennie, fallen as she is, to the forces of nature, the "All-mother." In this passage, although Jennie is contaminated by her contact with modernity, the processes of motherhood maintain a part of her that is pure and unspoiled. If the city in *Jennie Gerhardt* functions as seducer and judge, then Jennie represents productive womanhood and the natural, which Dreiser indicates are both risk for contamination from the city.

In contrast to Tucker's film, *Jennie Gerhardt* reserves its nostalgia for biologically productive sexuality and positions moral pronouncements as the troublesome outgrowth of modernity. Throughout the narrative, Dreiser repeatedly links Jennie to nature; she is too much of the fertile earth for life in the city, which, in addition with putting the country girl at risk for seduction, in turn judges her for giving in. As John

Humma argues, throughout the narrative, Dreiser frames moralistic judgments of Jennie and her daughter as unnatural conventions associated with the artificiality and superficiality of urban life (164). In his description of the society that has produced Jennie's weak-willed second lover, Lester Kane, Dreiser explicitly connects urban living and false piety:

> The white light of publicity, which is as much the flaring-out of new church dogmas and architectural forms as it is the little news-item from which the expression has been borrowed, is too white…Our hearts and souls no more than our brains can stand it. (125)

Here, Dreiser connects the church's messages of condemnation to the equally shriek moral pronouncements of the newspaper—which unravels Jennie and Lester's relationship by announcing her status as a single mother—both are artificially white. Although Yoshinobu Hakutani Argues that, in contrast to Crane's Maggie, "Jennie found…not only privacy but the gay, enegetic spirit of life that freed her from stifling social conventions" in the city (148), this reading focuses solely upon Jennie's improved economic condition and ignores the fact that Jennie ends up in the country at the novel's end. Instead, it seems more plausible to read the novel as a celebration of Nature—which Jennie's fertile person embodies.

At the end of the novel, the narrative quite literally returns Dreiser's heroine to a state of nature. Abandoned by Lester, Jennie and her daughter Vesta move to the secluded town of Sandwood, a "lake-shore" community with "quite a grove of pines" (361). In the country, Jennie arrives at the truest iteration of her personality, the natural mother. It is also at this point that Jennie's daughter dies. Following her daughter's death, Jennie adopts two orphans and raises them in the idyllic countryside. And while Vesta's death might seem to cut against Dreiser's emphasis on the beauty and naturalness of

Jennie's motherhood, Vesta is a child of the city, and her death reveals the hostility of the modern city towards mothers and children. The fact that Jennie eventually adopts serves as yet another revelation of her metaphorical status—her motherhood transcends biological and genealogical connections; it is her "essence."

Despite Jennie's return to a place of purity by the novel's end, the narration in *Jennie Gerhardt* repeatedly registers fears that such a return to nature is no longer possible in the twentieth century, which in turn, suggests the impossibility of a return to older narrative forms. Following Jennie's seduction by Lester, the narrator moves from third person omniscient to a form of free indirect discourse: "Her whole body hurt as she walked, to say nothing of her mind. She stepped back into the house—weary, discouraged, ashamed. What had she done? There was no denying *she had compromised herself irretrievably*" (135, emphasis added). Whether Dreiser means us to attribute this assessment to Jennie or to the narrator, the word irretrievably, and its variants, haunt Jennie's story, and the stories of the other women she represents. Like Tucker, Dreiser is interested in salvaging something that has passed. While Tucker seems to long for a time and moral system that have passed, Dreiser mourns for modes of production—biological and narrative—that have passed.

Conclusion: Private Matters, Public Women

If Sister Carrie represents the public woman, and Jennie Gerhardt represents the pregnant woman, the court case that opened this chapter argues that the two women are functionally the same. When Justice Brewster delivered the Supreme Court's decision in *Muller v. Oregon*, he admitted that while the opinions British doctors cannot be used to

determine the constitutionality of Oregon's act, the "widespread belief" in the importance of women's bodily "functions" stands as evidence that women are not on equal footing with men and are in need of "special legislation." Furthermore, Justice Brewer goes on to explain that this legislation is meant to protect far more than the working women in question. He states, "That woman's physical structure and the performance of maternal functions place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence is obvious." He then reaches the conclusion that this remains the case even when women are not pregnant or have no intention of becoming pregnant: "the physical well-being of woman becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race." In *Muller v. Oregon*, women's potential to become mothers justifies restricting their right to contract their labor: "The limitations which this statute places upon her contractual powers, upon her right to agree with her employer as to the time she shall labor, are not imposed solely for her benefit, but also largely for the benefit of all." The effect of *Muller v. Oregon* is to say that because all women have potential to become mothers, their bodies and their labor can be regulated in ways that men's bodies cannot. *Muller v. Oregon* justifies the special regulation of women's bodies by claiming that all women's bodies are essentially public property. Whereas Dreiser fears that women's public circulation will negatively impact their biological productivity, *Muller v. Oregon* insists that women's potential to be productive means that women's bodies are always a matter of public interest.

Both *A Traffic in Souls* and Dreiser's novels attempt to solve the problem of female circulation in modernity by producing narratives that are temporally progressive and linear. For Tucker, who was concerned about morality and was a pioneer in an

explicitly modern medium, women's circulation represented a moral problem that caused him to distance himself from modern technologies by reasserting a traditional narrative model. Because of Tucker's anxiety that his medium might participate in the production of immoral women, *Traffic in Souls* asserts human agency over technology during the narrative's conclusion—even as it uses innovative editing to showcase masculine physical potential. Through its narrative disavowal of machine technologies, Tucker's film disarticulates forward narrative movement from historical progress, using the cinema's storytelling capabilities to champion regressive moralist ideologies. In contrast, Dreiser's interest in narrative caused him to see female circulation as a problem of production, which bridged the economic, biological and narrative. Whereas for Tucker, the problem with the New Woman seems to be that she has sex at all, for Dreiser, the problem with Carrie is that she disaligns sex and reproduction. In *Sister Carrie,* Dreiser connects the naturalist idea of determinist temporal progress to a discourse of technological determinism, in which the "decisions" of machines, rather than the decisions of people, drive the narrative. Dreiser's invocation of naturalist forces reveals the difference between his conception of the New Woman and Tucker's: If one is interested in production, as Dreiser is, then sexuality becomes a narrative problem not a moral one.

Although the presence of women working suggests the possibility of masculine economic failure, both Dreiser and Tucker displace concerns about male inadequacy onto the body of the New Woman. As Silverman suggests, "not only is woman made to assume male lack as her own, but her obligatory receptivity to the male gaze is what establishes its superiority, just as her obedience to the male voice is what 'proves' its

power" (32). Whether registered by the omission of children in *Traffic in Souls*, the death of a child in *Jennie Gerhardt*, or the apparent barrenness of Carrie—whose relationships with men bear no biological fruit—these New Woman narratives suggest that the ultimate consequence of modernity is the biologically non-productive New Woman. In other words, new women narratives echo Justice Brewster's concern that the progress of history—which entails greater economic autonomy for women—threatens the progress of the human race. However, as the next chapter will argue, feminist authors framed concerns about the relationship between modernity and biological reproduction much more optimistically, suggesting that women's work and women's reproductive capabilities could be synthesized in a manner both biologically and economically productive.

CHAPTER V

SYSTEMS, NOT MEN: REPRESENTING EFFICIENCY AND PRODUCING PEOPLE IN CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN'S *HERLAND* AND EARLY FACTORY FILMS

Unlike Sister Carrie and the other new women discussed in the previous chapter, Lillian Gilbreth had no problems with fertility. The foremost motion study experts of the early-twentieth century, Lillian and Frank B. Gilbreth raised twelve children together. *Cheaper by the Dozen* (1948), written by Frank Gilbreth Jr. and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey, recounts the motion study and efficiency experiments to which the Gilbreths subjected their family. In their memoir, the two Gilbreth children write that their father once experimented with using two razors to shave, but complained that the forty-four seconds he saved using this dangerous technique was negated by the "wasted two minutes" he spent bandaging his throat. Frank Jr. and Ernestine explain that "It wasn't the slashed throat that really bothered him. It was the two minutes" (3). Lillian and Frank Gilbreth also applied their efficiency experiments to their children, "apportioning work on an aptitude basis" with "the smaller girls…assigned to dust the legs and lower shelves of furniture" and "the older girls [assigned] to dust the table tops and upper shelves" (40). Although *Cheaper by the Dozen* primarily focuses on Frank Gilbreth's charismatic figure, his wife Lillian is perhaps an even more compelling individual—a key proponent of the efficiency movement and the producer of the Gilbreth dozen.

As a mother and an efficiency expert, Lillian Gilbreth bridges the topics I examine in this chapter. I argue that factory films, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's writings on family planning and economics, and discourses of industrial organization all share an

account of the human as too individualistic and inefficient. As a corrective, the narratives and films I examine offer systems for the production of efficient human subjects—the Gilbreth children serving as a particularly charming real life example. These systems were utopian to the extent they imagined well-ordered worlds in which neither waste nor human suffering existed. However, the darker side to these ideal systems of production is the erasure of human individuality and spontaneity required for their smooth functioning.

In the first section of the chapter, I examine the motion studies conducted by Frank and Lillian Gilbreth alongside a series of industrial films. Drawing upon Mary Ann Doane's argument that the cinema is a prosthetic technology, I argue that factory films take this tendency to an extreme, producing industrial landscapes in which human bodies are the only irregular features. By opposing the regularity of technological representation and industrial machines to the inefficiency of human individuals, factory films, as well as the Gilbreth motion studies, produced an aesthetic of organized efficiency. Within the totality of these industrial systems, the human can never be anything but a liability. This was particularly the case in the factory films, in which the camera itself drew out highly individualized behavior from the occasional laborer who looked up from his task to smile for the camera.

In the chapter's second section, I argue that in Frederick Winslow Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) and Gilman's *Herland* (1915) the authors denaturalize biological reproduction and posit that the production of people requires systems. Taylor claimed the application of his system was the only way the nation could be assured a regular supply of great men. In contrast, Gilman applies Taylorist ideas to motherhood to show that biological reproduction is an inefficiently functioning system.

By denaturalizing motherhood into a system of production, Gilman naturalizes the position of women in the workplace. She argues that it is only through the systematic production of people that the position of women in society, and the health of society more generally, will improve.

Drawing upon works from the cinema, literature, and engineering, I argue that efficiency represents a specifically *modern* manifestation of both spatiality and temporality. To achieve their goals, the Gilbreths, Taylor, and Gilman needed to make efficiency (and inefficiency) visible. For the most part, contemporary scholars writing on Taylor and Gilbreth have emphasized the negative aspects of their technologies of control.[142] And while I will examine the "costs" of efficiency for the laborers in the films and photographs discussed below, I also want to suggest that examining efficiency as a representational problem allows us to see the pervasiveness of discourses of efficiency in the period.[143] Furthermore, by broadening definitions of labor, it becomes possible to see that feminists like Gilman subverted discourses of industrial efficiency originally intended to control bodies in order to grant certain bodies greater freedom. Although it may seem paradoxical for Gilman to use an industrial system of control in the service of women's empowerment, Taylor's and the Gilbreths' work on visualizing inefficiency are mirrored by Gilman's attempts to make domestic labor visible, organized, and efficient.

Building upon Jennifer Fleissner's work on feminist naturalism, this chapter argues that female authors occupied a far less ambivalent relationship to progressive

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[142] See Martha Banta's *Taylored Lives*, and Cecelia Tichi's *Shifting Gears*, and Mark Seltzer's *Bodies and Machines*.

[143] For example, the "statistical persons" Mark Seltzer describes in his chapter on *The American* represent one type of subject that emerged in response to the standardization and systemization of Taylorist efficiency (84-5).

temporalities than their male peers. Whereas artists like Dreiser, Griffith, and Tucker, looked at the past with nostalgia and gazed into the future with trepidation, feminists like Gilman saw in the progressive march of time the promise of political progress for women. Fleissner's insistence on *not* separating the work of women writers from the context of "manly naturalists" is a challenge to studies of naturalism that is long overdue, particularly in the context of Gilman scholarship (Fleissner 16). However, Fleissner's thesis, that women writing in the naturalist tradition used domestic tales to produce a version of the bildungsroman that centered on female characters (23), does not seem to fully account for Gilman's representations of female production, which reject the domestic entirely by insisting that *all* labor and production should be considered an economic and, therefore, public act. By tying biological reproduction to economic production, Gilman revised accounts of timeless or nostalgic motherhood and instead emphasized the necessity of women's participation in the progressive time of industrial modernity.[144]

Representing Efficiency

Taylor opens *The Principles of Scientific Management* with a quotation from Theodore Roosevelt: "The conservation of our national resources is only preliminary to the larger question of national efficiency."[145] However, Taylor also notes that the country

[144] Fleissner's account of masculinist wilderness narratives corroborates this view. She claims that "the celebration of unfettered nature, while it might have looked like the usual American male rebellion against the mother's world, really demanded that women *resume* their 'natural' role as mothers" (17, emphasis original). In contrast, Gilman worked against this kind of nostalgia by tying motherhood to industrial progress, and insisting upon the *un*naturalness of "unfettered nature."

[145] Sharon Corwin also mentions this address, as well as a later address by Franklin D. Roosevelt, which also named waste and inefficiency as enemies of American society. Corwin cites these examples as

has primarily focused its efforts on decreasing the waste of natural resources, rather than addressing problems of human efficiency. Taylor suggests that the nation's success at conserving resources but utter failure when it comes to human efficiency results from the visibility of the first and the relative inscrutability of the latter. He explains, "We can see our forests vanishing, our water-powers going to waste, our soil being carried by floods to the sea; and the end of our coal and iron is in sight…Awkward, inefficient, or ill-directed movements of men, however, leave nothing visible or tangible behind them" (5). To design his system of scientific management, Taylor had to make an imaginative leap: How could one render the expenditure of man's energy visible? How could one make manifest wasted time? Taylor's solution would align him very nearly with the technologies of the cinema. By measuring the time of human movements through space, Taylor insisted that he could make accessible the inefficiency that left "nothing visible or tangible behind." In his attempt to make efficiency visible, Taylor would produce the system of industrial control that has since become infamous.

Since Eadward Muybridge's and Étienne-Jules Marey's motion studies, the cinematic mechanism has offered revelations of physical movements previously invisible to the human eye. In their 1911 *Motion Study: A Method for Increasing the Efficiency of the Workman* and later photographic studies, the Gilbreths drew upon Taylorism and the photographic work of Marey in their efforts to measure and analyze human movement. While Taylor's experiments metaphorically rendered workers' movements "visible" by tracking their motions against the time they took, his studies still depended upon the subjectivity of a human manager's gaze. As Doane suggests, in comparison to the new

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evidence that "the efficiency craze was woven deep into the cultural fabric and found applications outside the obvious realms of business and labor" (141).

and seemingly objective technologies of photography and the cinema, human eyesight began to seem deficient:

> The suspicion that lingers about the relation between technology and the body is that there may indeed be a connection between the two and that this connection can only be thought of as a form of compensation. This is the idea of technology as prosthesis—an addition to or supplementation of a body that is inherently lacking, subject to failure, ontologically frail. ("Technology's Body" 532)

In the context of industrial efficiency, which required making wasted human movements as visible as "forests vanishing" or "water-powers going to waste," Doane's arguments gain additional resonance. In *The Principles of Scientific Management*, Taylor presents a dilemma that hinges on the insufficiency of human bodies: not only were working bodies in need of regulation, but managers needed help seeing and correcting labor inefficiency. If film was the supplement to flawed human vision—to which "the afterimage points" (Doane 532)—it is no wonder that the early-twentieth century's theorists of work used the cinema to render efficiency visible.

The Gilbreths appear to have taken the problem posed in the beginning of Taylor's *Principles* literally, taking it as their mission to render inefficiency visible. Their motion studies attempted to produce a visible record of the worker's "path," or movements, as he conducted his regular factory labors. They did this by lighting the worker's hands and darkening the room. They then used an adaptation of Marey's chronophotography so that the worker's movements produced a line of light that represented his expenditure of energy. In her study of Precisionist painters, Sharon Corwin argues that Taylorism produced not only "*social* effects but also…*visual* effects" (140, emphasis original). Corwin connects the Gilbreths' motion studies to Precisionist paintings, arguing that both the Gilbreths and the Precisionists gave industrial

productivity a visual form, the aesthetics of which emphasized efficiency and conservation, and effaced labor—whether the photographed laborer's or the painter's (140). As Corwin notes, because the Gilbreths "construed efficiency in visual terms… Inefficiency was thus seen as a tangle of 'ragged lines'" (144). In contrast, efficient movements produced smoother, more aesthetically pleasing paths of light. Through motion studies that transcribed labor into effulgent lines, the Gilbreths tied industrial efficiency to aesthetic pleasure.

If the Gilbreth experiments aestheticized industrial processes, this transformation was not without a cost. As Corwin suggests, one of the more menacing implications of the motion studies was the photographs' erasure of the laborer's body: "These rigorously simplified forms are not only fully abstracted from the worker who first produced the depicted motion but also wholly decontextualized from the production line itself" (Corwin 144). The light paths that remain are "abstract representations of labor in which the worker is wholly excised from the act of work, leaving only a reified trace of labor in its most efficient form" (Corwin 146). Corwin suggests that these aestheticized motion paths represent the ultimate triumph of the reification of labor, in which, as Marx explains in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, "men are effaced before labor…the balance of the pendulum has become the exact measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives" (57). However, it seems that this reading can be taken even further. It is not so much that the Gilbreths' pictures present labor as alienated from the worker, but rather, that they present the worker as an obstruction to a pure representation of labor. Or, as Lukács suggests, "In consequence of the rationalization of the work-process the human qualities and idiosyncrasies of the worker appear

increasingly as *mere sources of error*" ("Reification" 89). If lights and cameras make visible paths of greatest efficiency, the human body can only be a roadblock in the industrial age's progress towards a beautiful and wasteless economy. The Gilbreth studies reveal that a picture of efficiency, whatever else it might be, is not a picture of the human.

Siegfried Kracauer discusses the dehumanizing aestheticization of factory processes in the context of the cinema by drawing a connection between the synchronized gymnastic routine of the Tiller Girls and capitalist production. Like factory workers under Taylorism or, more extremely, the erased laborer in the Gilbreth motion studies, "the Tiller Girls can no longer be reassembled into human beings after the fact…Arms, thighs, and other segments are the smallest component parts of the composition" (78). Here, Kracauer describes one of modernity's more disturbing shocks: the radical fragmentation of the subject in the face of industrial capitalism. The lost wholeness further corresponds to an increased alienation from production:

> Everyone does his or her task on the conveyor belt, performing a partial function without grasping the totality. Like the pattern in the stadium, the organization stands above the masses, a monstrous figure whose creator withdraws it from the eyes of its bearers, and barely even observes it himself. (78)

Kracauer's analysis of the Tiller Girls provides a lens for understanding the appeal of factory films. These films gave meaning to particularized factory labor by connecting it to the other steps in the process—organizing it into a seamless totality. In contrast to the very compartmentalized and disconnected version of labor workers experience in their day-to-day lives, the films subsume the shocking experience of fragmentation under a larger, and more meaningful total experience.[146] However, as Kracauer notes, because

[146] Ben Singer lists the rationalization of labor as one of his defining characteristics of modernity. Citing Max Weber and Marx, he notes that one of the most prevalent critiques of capitalism in modernity was "the central observation that modernity had brought about an impoverishment of experience as rationale systems

cinematic properties such as editing and camera distance create the sense of wholeness, the experience remains a purely aesthetic one—the wholeness only exists from the perspective of the camera's eye or the film spectator.

As an explicitly modern technology, the cinema shared an at least homological relationship to the factories it represented. These representations, while sometimes commissioned by the factory owners, also worked to the cinema's advantage. From its beginnings, the cinema represented both factories and workers.[147] Industrial films emphasized the cinema's relationship to and participation in the advanced technological processes it represented. For example, Cricks and Martin's 1906 *A Visit to Peek Frean & Co.'s Biscuit Works* documents the various steps of biscuit production, from the arrival of the flour to the moment when the Peek Frean carts depart from the factory with the finished product. The film shows the Peek Frean workers at their labors, operating machinery, inspecting biscuits for quality, and weighing biscuit tins. The processes are orderly, producing neat rows of biscuits (Figure 20). The film heightens this order by organizing and sequencing shots, and labeling them with appropriate intertitles: "rolling out the dough," "soldering tins for export," etc.

But biscuits are not the only things the *Peek Frean* film organizes. The workers are also subject to the organizing processes of both industrial systematization and the gaze of the camera. In keeping with Taylorist organization, each man or woman has his or her own rigidly delineated job. The film shows biscuit sorters and mechanics, as well as the women who package the biscuits into tins. This regimentation reflects capitalist

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compelled each worker to perform just a small, monotonous, personally meaningless part of the production process" (23-4).

[147] Here, I mean to invoke the Lumière's *La Sortie des usines Lumière* (1895).

division and specialization of labor in service of maximized efficiency, and the film's system of representation undergirds the factory system's strategies of organization by visually echoing the separate jobs in intertitles and organizing the bodies within shots. Like Kracauer's Tiller Girls, the organization of workers in the *Peek Frean* film simultaneously represents "Division of labour within the workshop" and the "undisputed authority of the capitalist over men, that are but parts of a mechanism that belongs to him" (*Capital* 219). With its emphasis on timing, organization, and editing, the film produces itself as the media equivalent to the factory system. As we see in the context of both the Tiller Girls and the *Peek Frean* film, the cinema acts as a representational version of a closed system, offering a space to visualize efficiency and industrial processes from a seemingly neutral and scientific view.

This is not to say that the cinematic medium shares an ideology with Frederick Winslow Taylor. Indeed, as Steven J. Ross has demonstrated, several labor movements in the 1910s exploited the cinema to further their causes and combat anti-labor films that supported the Open Shop movement, such as *The Molly McGuires, or, Labor Wars in the Coal Mines* (1908) and *Tim Mahoney, The Scab* (1911) (Ross 338). However, unlike anti-labor films, or even progressive but still problematic films like Griffith's *The Song of the Shirt* (1908) and *The Lily of the Tenements* (1911), as nonfiction films about factory processes, the industrial films and motion studies occupied a very different relationship to the human bodies they represent.[148]

Griffith's *The Girl and Her Trust* (1912) exemplifies the way fiction films from the transitional era treated the human relationship to time and space. The intertitle at the

[148] Ross notes that progressive-leaning films like Griffith's were problematic for the labor movement because in these films "Individual capitalists are lambasted but never capitalism" (340).

beginning of the film introduces viewers to "Grace, the telegraph operator [who] is admired by all." The film then follows Grace as she moves through both space and time. However, in contrast to the factory films, *The Girl and Her Trust* organizes space and time in the service of Grace's narrative. The film cuts between spaces to show their temporal relation as well as their spatial proximity as they relate to Grace and her adventures. We see a shot of the robbers standing outside the train station and peering into a window, followed by a shot of the girl inside the station office with the faces of the robbers visible in the window behind her. This editing creates a narrative situation (espionage and plotting) and also communicates to the viewers something about time: these things are happening simultaneously. The intercutting of space and time continues as Grace contacts another telegraph operator to ask for help.[149] Her message sparks the race to the rescue—a trademark of Griffith's narrative style—in which Grace and the robbers hurry down the railroad track on a handcar pursued by a train carrying Grace's lover. By crosscutting between the rescuing train and the runaway handcar, the film creates sense of suspense that builds upon the relationship between the characters separated by time and space. The editing must make time legible so that audiences can understand the train and the handcar as operating in the same temporality, and so that the train can "gain on" the handcar until they occupy the same shot. At this point the film offers a resolution in narrative as well as spatial and temporal terms, with a final shot of girl and boy picnicking on cowcatcher. By bringing the relevant characters (boy and girl) back together into a single shot, the film communicates its ending. In contrast, we might understand space and time as the relevant characters in the factory films. These industrial

[149] For an account of telegraphy and its centrality to narrative cinema, see Paul Young's "Media on Display: A Telegraphic History of the Early American Cinema."

films tended to downplay individual workers and foreground factory space and the efficiency of production processes. As I will suggest in the context of Gilman's novel, adventures like Grace's connote excessive aberrations in smoothly functioning systems. While aberrations—in this case, a hold-up—make for exciting fictional works, they do not make for very efficient factory works.

Whereas fictional films about the working class tended to lionize heroic individuals, non-fiction industrial films subsumed workers' bodies into the factory works or industrial processes the films represented (Figures 21 and 22). The Gilbreths represented labor as a series of white lines on a black background. And while the labor of the filmmaker is perhaps effaced by the seemingly objective view of the movie camera, in its representations of factories, the cinema produces an account of labor that is anything but decontextualized. Rather, the industrial films represent a triumph of industrial context over the human laborer with the camera foregrounding the assembly lines and factory machines in the diegesis of its representations of efficiency.

Taylor's system of scientific management, through which he observed, timed and recorded laborers' movements, shares many practices with the cinema. [150] The cinema also observes and records the bodies it represents, and, through its editing practices, organizes them across time, so that the factory films may be said to echo Marx's pronouncement that: "Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most the incarnation of

[150] Here I owe a great debt to Derek Nystrom, whose talk on Working Class spectatorship has done much to clarify my thinking about connections between the gaze of Taylor's managers and the gaze of the cinematic spectator. Nystrom builds his arguments in part upon Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking work "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in which she argues that the cinema is an observational technology that does violence to the object of its gaze.

time."[151] In his reading of *Capital*, Lukács explains that in industrial capitalism "time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things;' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of a worker, wholly separated from his total human personality): in short, it becomes space" (*History* 90). The series *Westinghouse Works* (1904) demonstrates these principles repeatedly. Filmed by the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company over the course of two months, the film debuted in Pittsburgh, which was home to the Works, and played again at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. The films in the series include views of the Westinghouse Air Brake Company, the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company, and the Westinghouse Machine Company.[152] In "*Panoramic View Aisle B*," the camera is mounted on an overhead crane and moves over the space of the factory floor, seemingly disembodied. Mounted on the track that runs through the factory's center aisle, the camera is disconnected from the fallible human body of the filmmaker and, through its mounting, has become quite literally part of the machinery it records. In this instance, the cinema appears to be truly objective, totally dependent upon the world of machines, rather than the world of humans. Although small human figures move below the camera, the machinery is the real attraction (Figure 23). The generators are enormous, huge hunks of metal beautiful in their regularity. On its overhead track, the camera echoes this regularity as it moves smoothly through space above the monstrous generators (Figure 24). Because the camera is so thoroughly enmeshed with the machine world of the film, it produces an account of the cinema as

[151] As quoted in Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness (89)*.

[152] The *Westinghouse Works* films and information regarding them are available through the Library of Congress's online American Memory project.

both totally objective and totally efficient, unlike the scurrying figures below, whose movements constitute the only irregular motions in the film.

The *Westinghouse* series is also notable for its representations of female laborers. In *Girls Winding Armatures*, the women appear arranged in three rows with a vertical aisle separating them. First, two female overseers walk down the aisle, observing the working women. Then, male overseers enter, confer with the two women, and check on the workers themselves (Figure 25). Corwin's claim—that in the Gilbreth pictures, "workers are pictured with little regard for their corporeal integrity and are at times violently cropped by the picture frame" (152)—holds doubly true for images of working-class women. Films from this period chop up women's bodies as a matter of course, whether in the scopophilic presentation of an ankle in a "peeping tom" film, or the fetishistic and close-ups of Griffith's heroines. In the case of this *Westinghouse* film, however, it is not so much the case that the women are cut up in the service of a scopophilic erotics as it is that as component parts of the system of production they have become metonymically merged with the works.[153] Making the little light bulbs at the end of their rows glow as the male supervisor inspects the armatures, the working girls become "things" both through the reification of their labor, and also through the film's organization of their labor in what it renders aestheticized factory space. In this particular film, the managers are the only real link to the human spectator. Like the viewer, they supervise the machine processes, producing a version of the neutral spectator position the film encourages for its viewers. In addition to the aisle patrolled by the managers, the

[153] Although it could be persuasively argued that cutting bodies up is simply characteristic of modernist representation—as Linda Nochlin argues in *The Body in Pieces*—within the context of industrial systems of representation, films treat bodies like things in solidarity with capitalist reification of labor and discourses of efficiency.

film also includes a second row for observing the girls—the space of the "fourth wall," from whence the camera and the spectator assume a position of observation. The Westinghouse films are not anomalous in their treatment of human laborers as things. *Making Chewing Gum from Chicle* is a film that, like *Peek Frean*, represents a factory process from beginning to end. In it, the frame typically cuts the working men off at the neck, so that only their bodies, engaged in the manufacturing process, appear on the screen.[154] The visual enactment of the reification of labor that occurs in this film is quite startling: In addition to making men into things by metaphorically killing them with the decapitating frame, the film also erases the usual marker of identity and personal expression—the face.

Industrial films, as well as the white slavery films discussed in the previous chapter, position the cinema as the most innovative technology for regulating unruly bodies, whether female or working class. If "soldiering" factory workers and promiscuous women threatened social norms in the early-twentieth century, the cinema offered itself as a representational technology capable of controlling them—and a uniquely modern technology, at that. In her discussion of films that made fun of female spectators—portraying them as fools who misunderstand the nature of the cinema, as demonstrated by their poking at figures on the screen—Doane argues that the cinema's relationship to modernity is an explicitly male one:

> the figure of the woman is here defined as *excentric* to the real drama of the body being staged by and through the cinema. Such discourses indicate her marginal status in the male's epistemological confrontation with the technologies of modernity. For what is at stake in the early stages of development of the cinema is

[154] I encountered this film in the Harry Wright Collection at the Library of Congress; the date and company are unknown.

> very much the body, but it is a body that is preeminently masculine. ("Technology's Body" 531)

The films Doane discusses, including the 1915 comedy *A Photographer's Troubles*, draw upon the tradition of *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (1902) and other country "rube" films, in which a country bumpkin attends the cinema and fundamentally misunderstands the medium—trying to kiss the pretty girls, fight the boxers, and hide from oncoming trains. Miriam Hansen has noted that the Uncle Josh film had the effect of letting audience members feel superior to the Uncle Josh figure at the same time that it schooled them in proper modes of spectatorship.[155]

The films Doane examines position women in a similar manner, as spectators who do not appropriately understand the cinema, as opposed to actual audience members, whom the films figure as male. But at the same time the cinema positions the woman's body as outside its system, as Doane claims, its representation of the misunderstanding female spectator reveals a certain anxiety about the person the film means to mock. Although the woman is outside the cinema's smoothly running system, she also threatens to disrupt it by poking her finger through the screen—a masculine, penetrative act that disturbs gender norms. In the context of the *Peek Frean* and *Westinghouse* films, the worker's body also acts as a disruptive force that requires visual organization and regimentation.

Despite the problematic gendering of cinema audiences and modernity that Doane notes, the cinema's ability to make issues both visible and public held a special appeal for

[155] Hansen asserts that this mode of address indicates that "The viewer addressed by *Uncle Josh* is certainly not yet the classical spectator" (*Babel* 28). However, as Young notes in *The Cinema Dreams its Rivals*, Uncle Josh's action—and the persistent representation of the unruly spectators across multiple films from the period—bears witness to the persistently social character of exhibition" (40). Or, as I would have it, these films register the persistently *human* character of the figures on the screen.

women who wanted to make the "private" problems of reproductive inefficiency and family planning matters of public concern. In "Taking Precautions, or Regulating Early Birth-Control Films," Shelley Stamp analyzes three social problem films that specifically addressed the birth control movement: *Where Are My Children* (1916), *Birth Control* (1917), and *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1917). Stamp notes, "Something of cinema's newfound stature can be seen in the fact that Weber, one of the most respected filmmakers of the day, brought her reputation for high-quality feature films to this contentious issue [birth control], and that Sanger, one of the era's leading radicals, turned to motion pictures to promote her cause" (270).[156] Because the cinema's representation of these issues brought them into the public sphere, it granted previously private concerns like conjugal relations and family planning legitimacy as issues of public concern, thus making it easier for women reformers to speak publicly about birth control. As Kay Sloan argues: "While the cinema suggested that the public problems of labor conflict or political corruption could be solved with private romantic solutions, the private conflicts in the domestic sphere required public solutions, such as legislation dealing with temperance, birth control, or prostitution" (80).

Popular female director Lois Weber directed both *Where Are My Children* (1916) and *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1917)—in which she portrays a fictionalized version of birth control advocate Margaret Sanger, who was then on trial for violating the Comstock laws that regulated the dissemination of sexually explicit materials. The film *Birth Control* (1917) was written and directed by Sanger herself, and included footage of

[156] Stamp notes that, "birth-control films highlight struggles over motion picture regulation in the late 1910s, when ideas about the educational and interventionist role cinema might play in society clashed with its evolving role in the entertainment sphere" (272).

Sanger distributing birth control information. In *Where Are My Children,* Weber promotes a class-based form of eugenics. As opposed to Sanger's promotion of family planning for all classes, Weber's opinion on birth control differs depending on class (Stamp 275). In the film, Weber presents preventative birth control as a positive intervention into the lives of working-class women, whom she depicts as over-fecund and unable to regulate their production of babies. The result of this overproduction is a strain on family finances, and a related inability to meet their children's needs. In contrast, the film depicts wealthy women as selfishly having abortions, despite their ability to provide for their young. In other words, the upper-class women are not producing as much as they should, and they are perverting their roles as consumers by purchasing abortions rather than goods for the families they should be having.[157] By focusing on their excessive consumption of fashion and entertainments, Weber's film criticizes society women for a misapplication of their energies. Rather than focusing on production, they excessively consume the abortions that allow them to maintain their over-the-top lifestyles.

While the cinema's status as both public entertainment and educational tool attracted feminist reformers in the late 1910s, the efficiency of the cinema as a machine may have held an additional appeal for women concerned with "excessive" female bodies. Nor was Margaret Sanger the only female reformer to see in the cinema a great potential for reformist goals. As Sloan notes, Jane Addams revised her original position on the cinema as "debased" and "primitive," and in 1913 starred in a melodrama called

[157] Apparently the National Board of Review noticed this discrepancy in the film's message as well; they moved to censor the film on the grounds that "the film confused contraception and abortion, and that it contained mixed messages about the use of both" (Stamp 274)

Votes for Women (11).[158] And feminist socialist Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote, "For every reason which justifies a public library of books we should also have public libraries of motion pictures" ("Public" 145). Gilman in particular found in the machine-age ideals of progress, organization, and conservation of energy, a model for expressing her utopian hopes for improving women's lives.

The 1911 Pathescope film, *Manhattan Trade School for Girls*, exemplifies the uplifting qualities feminist reformers hoped industrial efficiency would serve. The film documents a vocational training program for working-class girls, which arose out of wealthy New York philanthropists' sense that working-class girls needed training to earn a reasonable living. The film changes the pattern established by other industrial films by singling out individual girls working at distinct tasks. However, as Jennifer Bean comments, the scenes begin by identifying a particular girl learning a skill but then move out into a longer view to show many girls working at the same task, be it "straw hat operating," "novelty box" making, or "machine embroidery."[159] Although this generalization from individual girl to girls echoes Dreiser's and Tucker's treatment of young women, in this non-fiction film, the organization of working-class women's bodies serves an important function for the girls. Training schools like this worked to help girls avoid horrendous factory conditions and earn better wages. Furthermore, as Bean notes, given that this film appeared later in the same year as the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, these goals were no insignificant matter. In addition to vocational training, the film also

[158] Sloan cites Addams' *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*. In her study, *Loud Silents,* Sloan uses the growing popularity of the cinema with reformers to track its movement from disreputable entertainment to respectable media form.

[159] Bean's commentary accompanies the film in the recently released *Treasures III: Social Issues in American Film, 1900-1934.*

includes views of lessons about exercise and diet that reflect the desire of reformers to improve the health of female bodies through the systematic application of nutrition and physical fitness.

Gilman's suggestions for improving childbirth and motherhood in her utopian novel *Herland* and her political and economic essays draw upon the industrial ideals of standardized and efficient human bodies espoused in Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* and represented in the industrial films. In her 1913 article, "The Waste of Private Housekeeping," Gilman begins with the statement: "The principal waste in our 'domestic economy' lies in the fact that it is domestic" (91).[160] Gilman's criticism of the "domestication" of domestic labor largely refers to the fact that women conduct this work in private without the structure of a system. Because women's work is not only privatized, but also private, this labor is essentially invisible. Her call to industrialize domestic labor is Gilman's version of Taylor's call to make visible wasted energies. Addressing the changes brought about by Taylor's and other systems of industrial management, she notes:

> Industrial efficiency grows along lines of specialization, organization and interchange. In the stage of industrial evolution when each man provided for himself by his own unaided exertions we find the maximum of effort with the minimum of product. Domestic industry is the only survival of that stage in our otherwise highly differentiated economic system. (91)

For Gilman, the first step in making domestic labor more productive and efficient is to move women's work from the private sphere into the public sphere, where it can be organized and managed in the same ways that other, more traditional forms of production had been for many years. Because women perform undifferentiated, unspecialized labor

[160] Gilman's article appeared in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*.

within their homes, "domestic industry" represents the last holdout against the efficient differentiation of labor. In *Herland*, Gilman's attempts to relocate women's work outside the home extends to the reform of biological reproduction. Because Gilman sees economic labor as an essentially human endeavor, she argues that biological reproduction *must* become efficient so that women can become as economically evolved as their male counterparts.

Producing People and the Problem of Personality

In *The Principle of Scientific Management*, Taylor frames industrial efficiency as the solution to human deficiencies. Quality men, Taylor argues, are dangerously lacking: "The search for better, for more competent men, from the presidents of our great companies down to our household servants, was never more vigorous than it is now. And more than ever before is the demand for competent men in excess of the supply" (Taylor 6). Taylor describes the dearth of great men as a problem best understood in market terms. In this depiction, the consumer represents the nation, and the products desired are competent men. Missing from the equation, Taylor suggests, are the means of production—the system. However, consumers have not yet come to the understanding that work is required in the making of great men; he explains, "What we are all looking for, however, is the ready-made, competent man; the man who someone else has trained" (Taylor 6). Taylor disparages the laziness of an American populace that expects great men to appear fully formed, "ready-made." Instead, Taylor suggests that all citizens must participate in the training of men, and that his new system for measuring efficiency is just the tool needed for producing consistently great men. If one takes Taylor at his word, if

one believes that his system is meant to make better men, then Taylorism begins to look not just like a managerial system for controlling factory production, but also like a system of production itself, the products of which are men.

Gilman also positions efficient systems as the solution to producing better people. However, while Taylor focuses on the production of great men and more efficient laborers, Gilman proposes efficiency as a means for producing both women as economic citizens and babies. Although arguments for economic equality between the sexes run through *Herland* and Gilman's other essays, her vision is much larger in scope. While Gilman is interested in getting women into the public sphere by casting their domestic labor as economic, this goal reflects her much larger interest in elaborating a radical compatibility between people and systems. Upon arriving in Herland, the male explorers, whose adventure frames the narrative, encounter three young natives. The women run up into a tree, just out of reach, and look down upon the intruders. Gilman's representation of a misogynist man, Terry, describes these women as food for his consumption: "'Girls! Whispered Jeff…'Peaches!' add[s] Terry, scarcely louder. 'Peacherinos—Apricot-nectarines! Whew!'" (17). Although the narrative ultimately condemns Terry for his assumption that women are objects intended for his enjoyment, his exclamations are not *entirely* wrong. In *Herland,* Gilman describes motherhood and childbirth in terms of production. The Herlanders plan for and cultivate children as carefully as they tend to their agricultural produce, leaving nothing to chance. However, neither the production of peaches nor the production of people is entirely natural in *Herland*. Instead, *Herland* gives an account of standardized production and reproduction that serves as a radical extension of discourses and practices of mechanized efficiency. From Gilman's

perspective, it is clear that the world is already in the business of producing people, but her writings reflect her concern that it is doing so haphazardly and inefficiently.

Similarly, by Taylor's account, systems, not mothers, should be responsible for the creation of men. He argues that the nation will only be able to produce the best men by privileging systems over individuals:

> In the past the man has been first; in the future the system must be first. This in no sense, however, implies that great men are not needed. On the contrary, the first object of any good system must be that of developing first class men; and under systematic management the best man rises to the top more certainly and more rapidly than ever before. (7)

His emphasis on systems implies that in the past great men have been flukes, but that by organizing nature, putting the system first, Americans may be able to insure the consistent and rapid reproduction of great men. On the other hand, Gilman argues that motherhood *is* already a system and, for this reason, the *system* of motherhood must become as efficient as possible to produce a class of great women. By suggesting that great men require a system, Taylor grows a system out of the need for great men. In contrast, Gilman produces an account of biological reproduction that aligns the production of people with the functioning of systems. Like Taylor, Gilman names the primary problem of the twentieth century as the unpredictable and disorganized production of people. By organizing nature, the Herlanders restore its efficiency and productivity, "retrieving lost abundance by the elimination of undue waste" (Banta 30).Whereas Taylor's system imposes order from the outside, Gilman's text produces an account of the world in which the world's primary business is the systematic production of people. By both accounts, lack of an efficient system results in the shoddy production

of people (no great men and unevolved women) or the production of people in excess of market demands (too many babies).

What might it mean for babies to be discussed as waste? From Gilman's perspective, humanity that outstrips the economic resources of the land and the demands of the labor market becomes a form of waste. The excessive breeding Gilman sees as symptomatic of her era's chaotic version of motherhood produces children that are unsustainable, malnourished and diseased, and therefore, unnatural. When he learns of the Herlanders' parthenogenic reproduction, through which every woman, descended from an original mother, reproduces five children over a lifetime, Vandyck asks how it is possible that the women have not experienced poverty and overcrowding. In a moment of unsentimental pragmatism, Ellador explains:

> They sat down in council together and thought it out. Very clear, strong thinkers they were. They said: "With our best endeavors this country will support about so many people, with the standard of peace, comfort, health, beauty, and progress we demand. Very well. That is all the people we will make." (*H* 69)

In this passage, Gilman moves beyond the family planning associated with birth control to thinking about what the planet can sustain. This move emphasizes the position of the individual mothers' bodies within much larger system—almost an ecosystem. Gilman suggests that if the world is in the business of producing people, individual women's decisions to conceive or not to conceive must be thought of within the context of systems of production. The statement, "Very well. That is all the people we will make," is equivalent to Taylor's assertion that "in the future the system must be first." Like Taylor, Gilman dissolves the distinction between biological and mechanical reproduction through her insistence that the proper way to understand a person is as both product and part of a system.

Besides the glee with which Gilman seems to have written Ellador's ultra-practical explanation of Herlander birth control, this explanation also stresses the importance of putting the reproductive female body under a system of self-management. Whereas Taylor's workers and great men require an external manager, Gilman's women have internalized the engineer's stop watch and notepad. Unlike "soldiering" workers, the Herlanders are fully integrated into the system. After thinking through Ellador's explanation, Vandyck pinpoints the difference between the regulated biological reproduction of Herland and the chaotic motherhood he has seen: "they were Mothers, not in our sense of helpless involuntary fecundity…but in the sense of Conscious Makers of People" (*H* 69). Indeed, consciousness plays a large role in the production of children; when a Herlander wants a child, she thinks it and it is so. If she knows it is not time, she "put the whole thing out off her mind, and fed her heart with other babies" (*H* 72).[161] By planning and regulating childbirth, the Herlanders produce at utmost efficiency: because motherhood is organized, the women of Herland have the time and energy to be economically and socially productive. Although controlling pregnancy with thought may seem to run counter to Gilman's participation in projects to visualize labor and efficiency, she establishes that mind control as birth control is only viable after much public discussion about biological production—"That is all the people we will make." Public discussion about reproduction makes possible the Herlanders' healthy society, and

[161] Shishin reads the family planning in *Herland* as the exertion of the "power of will over…biological functions" (110). I would like to complicate this reading slightly by arguing that Gilman sees the power of will as integrally related to *proper* and *efficient* biological functioning. Fleissner takes this somewhat further, arguing that in *Herland* Gilman all but eliminates "the potential gap between individual desires and social demands" (96).

Gilman's polemical utopian novel offers itself as a fictionalized version of such discussions.

Gilman asserts that when women control population growth, they also are able to grow the economy—both forms of production reside within the efficient female body. In *Herland*, Gilman identifies two types of excessive female bodies: the hyper-feminized body of the bourgeois woman, and the overly productive body of the working-class mother. An inappropriate expenditure of productive energies links these bodies, which Gilman describes in the economic terms of the day. As Martha Banta explains, Gilded-Age engineers had aims much broader than the organization of the workplace; they saw themselves "bringing order, rationality, and efficiency out of the disorder, the irrationality and the wastefulness of the times" (IX). For Gilman and Taylor, waste is always both economic and social and, as Taylor worries, problematically invisible.

Both writers faced the task of making the costs of inefficiency visible. To do so, Gilman invokes the narrative logic of the essay in her novel. *Herland* contains little to no narrative conflict. In a metafictional moment, Vandyck comments: "It is no use for me to piece out this account with adventures…There were no adventures because there was nothing to fight" (51). Instead of describing narrative "adventures," *Herland* acts as a hermetic system in which Gilman can frame her arguments. In his reflections on the essay, Adorno describes it "as a constructed juxtaposition of elements, more static than traditional thought. In that alone rests the essay's affinity to the visual image; except that the essay's static quality is itself composed of tensions which, as it were, have been brought to a standstill" (170).[162] In Gilman's case, the affinity Adorno notes between the

[162] "The Essay as Form" is in part a critique of Lukács' thoughts on the essay from *Soul and Form*.

essay and the visual image is of central importance since her project is to make visible both the inefficiency of domestic labor and the efficient society to which she aspires.[163] While Adorno argues that the essay rejects the systematic (165), I argue that Gilman, herself an essay writer, uses the essay's logic in *Herland* in order to make the systematic efficiency of the Herlanders' lives most visible, without the distracting trappings of character and "adventures."

Deciding whether or not to return to a two-sexed society, the Herlanders query the male explorers about reproductive and economic practices in the United States. The men's answers, which feebly defend poor conditions, act as Gilman's critique of American society in the 1910s. In one attempt to justify their society, the men describe a blissful motherhood in which a woman's only "job" is the loving care for her offspring. Surprised, the Herlanders ask if it can be true that American women have no other work, at which point the men sheepishly admit to the presence of a female underclass. The Herlanders assume that this lower class is not biologically productive: "'about one-third, then, belong to the poorest class,' observed Moadine gravely. 'And two-thirds are the ones who are—how was it you so beautifully put it?—'loved, honored, kept in the home to care for the children.' This inferior one-third have no children, I suppose?'" (64) Both Gilman's readers and the male explorers know otherwise. Moadine's assumption reflects the division of labor in Herland: if one class of women acts as mother to the society, the rest must have their labor freed up to pursue other work. She makes the assumption that

[163] Thomas Peyser reads Gilman's style as emerging from the tradition of sociology (67), noting her focus on "norm and aberration" as evidence (69). I find Peyser's reading persuasive, and would suggest that we might see norms and aberrations as yet another way for describing human subjects in terms of efficiency.

motherhood in the United States operates as it does in Herland, according to a system that allows for the best and most efficient production of future generations.

Jeff clarifies the situation by invoking a seemingly perverse "natural law." He explains, "on the contrary, the poorer [the women] were, the more children they had. That too, he explained, was a law of nature: 'Reproduction is in inverse proportion to individuation'" (64). I will later account for the topsy-turvy account of nature and natural law in *Herland*, but for now, what seems unnatural to the Herlanders and to Gilman is the over-fecundity of the working-class female body. Implicit in this exchange is the concern that a combination of physical factory labor and excessive breeding exhaust working-class mothers' energies. Gilman's concerns echo broader cultural worries about the fatigued modern body, weakened by the pressures of industrial living.[164] To combat this dissipation of human energy, Gilman calls for a regulatory system to direct the productive capacities of working-class women who cannot efficiently control the expenditure of their own energies. Because of Gilman's interests in biological production as *actual* childbirth, as well as metaphor, she opposes sustainability to overproduction.[165] The mother who overproduces floods the labor market, thus producing class after class of unemployable workers who exceed the demand for labor. This possibility disturbs Gilman because it links poverty to the natural, thus suggesting that when the working mother gives birth, she generates human strife. Gilman's attitude towards lower-class motherhood aligns her with Weber's position in *Where are My Children*, which promotes

[164]Carolyn de la Pena gives a more thorough explanation of the popularity of theorizing the body as an electrical entity. Of particular interest to Gilman scholars may be the believed connection between electricity and neurasthenia (101).

[165]Mark Seltzer's *Bodies and Machines* usefully pinpoints the male naturalist's (Frank Norris's) anxieties over "thermodynamic" reproduction, which, Seltzer argues, is for Norris female and conservative, as opposed to male and creative (Seltzer 27).

birth control for the poor by showing slum scenes of poorly treated children and a birth control pamphlet that reads, "When only those children who are wanted are born, the race will conquer the evils that weigh it down." By contrasting Jeff's explanation of working-class motherhood with the efficient and "evil" free society of the Herlanders, Gilman foregrounds the need for a system in order to insure a more moderate production of babies.

Gilman does not limit her critique to working-class mothers.[166] She finds upper-class women's energies to be likewise exhausted, not through the excessive expenditure of energies in the workplace, but instead through the wasteful cultivation of what Gilman refers to as "sex-distinctions" (*WE* 28). Gilman differentiates biological and cultural sex markers in an attempt separate those that are necessary to human reproduction—and therefore natural—from those that are socially prescribed and, in Gilman's terms, "pathological."[167] Upper-class women with no work outside the home devote their energies to cultivating their femininity, which Gilman finds to be not only wasteful, but unnatural. In his attempts to understand what differentiates the Herlanders from the women with which he is familiar, Vandyck realizes:

> These women, whose essential distinction of motherhood was the dominant note of their whole culture, were strikingly deficient in what we call "femininity." This led me promptly to the conviction that those "feminine charms" we are so fond of are not feminine at all, but mere reflected masculinity—developed to please us because they had to please us, and in no way essential to the real fulfillment of their great process. (*H* 60)

[166] For an overview of Gilman's radical political and economic theories, see Naomi Zauderer's "Consumption, Production, and Reproduction in the Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman."

[167] For more on this distinction, see Bernice Hausman's "Sex before Gender: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Evolutionary Paradigm."

The excessive femininity that Vandyck locates in American women represents wasted energy that is not expended in either economic labor or the "great process" of reproducing human life. In *Women and Economics,* Gilman suggests that the excessive "sex distinction" of American women is not only *non*-productive, but also *counter*-productive. Contrasting the progress of the human male with the human female, Gilman invokes a popular electric-age metaphor, the battery: "human development thus far has proceeded under the force of male energy, spurred by sex-stimulus, and by the vast storage battery of female energy suppressed" (67).[168] Here Gilman describes female energy in industrial terms; with this metaphor, she converts women's natural energies into wasted mechanical resources.[169] In the context of upper-class women, Gilman casts inefficiency not in terms of excessive labor, but in terms of underuse, or rather, use in the wasteful pursuit of femininity. In this passage, we hear echoes of Taylor's ministrations to "eliminate all false movements, slow movements, and useless movements" (117).

Furthermore, the sex-distinctions developed by these upper-class women represent an individuality that runs counter to Taylor's valuation of smoothly running systems over men. As I argued earlier, in the industrial films, the human body represents the raw material to be transformed by the cinema's organizing vision. However, human personality was a potential liability, threatening to "act out" and produce meanings excessive to the smoothly-running system of the factory or film. Paradoxically, the

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[168] In *The Body Electric* De la Pena gives and account of the pervasiveness of battery metaphors in discussions of human energy during this period (92, 93).

[169] Given the popularity of "the Yellow Wallpaper," it may be useful to think of this project's connection to the problem of neurasthenia. In *Herland,* Gilman opposes the strained energies of American professional women to the healthy exertions of the Herlanders: "College professors, teachers, writers—many women showed similar intelligence but often wore a strained nervous look while these were as calm as cows, for all their evident intellect" (24).

presence of the cinema camera brings out precisely the kind of unruly human behavior that industrial systems attempted to suppress. Although the *Peek Frean* film, like the *Westinghouse* series, is a model of both cinematic and factory efficiency, it also contains several instances of human misbehavior performed for the benefit of the camera. In the scene entitled "Washing Returned Empty Tins," several of the men look up at the camera, breaking the implied fourth wall. One of these men maintains eye contact with the camera the entire time, never glancing down at his tin (Figure 26). The man is clearly more interested in making eyes at the camera than he is in his biscuit tin. The man's behavior is doubly disruptive. First, he disrupts the process of labor. Although he manages to keep up his scrubbing at an impressively rapid pace, he physically differentiates himself from the other workers with his more upright posture and his physical orientation towards the camera. By asserting his individuality and humanity in this way, the man subverts the aesthetic of industrial regularity and sameness that the film and the factory work to produce. Secondly, because he makes this assertion with a *look*, the man violates the fourth wall, calling attention to the camera, the spectator, and the staged nature of the scene. The handsome man grinning at the camera undercuts both the film's and the factory's attempts to naturalize and aestheticize Taylorist efficiency. He claims himself as human, with all the irregularity that entails.

Such mugging for the camera would have doubtless maddened Taylor, whose *Principles* were at least in part a campaign against "soldiering." Rather than seeing individuality as a defense of the human in a machine age, Taylor reads this kind of irregularity as dangerous to the future of the nation and the race. Efficiency, even when

promoted in service of humanity, casts personality as excessive to its functioning—a kind of waste that must be extracted for the good of the system.[170]

Gilman also treats individuation as excessive, to human society and to the novel. In part, her dismissal of personality grows out of *Herland*'s narrative logic. Beyond their abilities to exemplify social trends or voice her arguments, characters are extrinsic to Gilman's narrative. Norris enacted a similar move in *The Octopus*, by asserting the irrelevance of individuals compared to forces. But beyond the formally disruptive nature of human individuality, Gilman suggests that what popular opinion terms "personality" is in fact a response to the inefficient system of sexual individuation that wastes female energies. In *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1903), Gilman argues that "confined to the home, [the woman] begins to fill and overfill it with the effort at individual expression" (35). Upper-class women's poorly managed energies lead them to produce "personality"—a concern Dreiser shares in the context of working-class women—rather than economic products.

For Gilman, the cultivation of sexual difference is perverse and pathological precisely because it is *non*-productive. In her characteristically unsentimental mode, Ellador asks Vandyck to explain something she finds confusing about conjugal relations: "'Do you mean,' she asked quite calmly, as if I was not holding her cool firm hands in my hot and rather quivering ones, 'that with you, when people marry, they go on doing this in season and out of season, with no thought of children at all?'" (125). Ellador's confusion stems largely from the idea of having sex "out of season": in the world of

[170] This phenomenon is related to, although not identical to, Lukács' description of man's bifurcated personality under capitalism (*History and Class Consciousness* 99-100).

Herland, intercourse without procreation is not only unnatural, it is wasteful.[171] Vandyck's "hot and rather quivering" hands suggest the wasted energy given off by eroticism that arises from excessive differentiation between the sexes. Ellador—who sees herself possessing human traits, as opposed to female ones—is the one with "cool firm hands" in this passage. Although he may seem an unlikely ally for Gilman, William Acton's study *The Functions and Disorders of Reproductive Organs in Childhood, Youth, Adult Age, and Advanced Life,* originally published in 1857, decries any non-reproductive sex, even within the bounds of marriage, as excessive and damaging to individuals' "vital forces."[172] For Gilman, restricting women to the realm of motherhood produces two related problems: the reduction of women to "mere egg sac[s]," and the possibility of exhausting the process of biological reproduction (*WE* 30, 16).[173] Gilman argues that by diverting women's energy towards sexual distinction, and away from biological and economic reproduction, American society perpetrates a nearly criminal act. Because excessive femininity wastes reproductive power, the American system of sex distinction suspends the possibility of women exerting economic and political agency as producers of future generations.

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[171] Alex Shishin confirms this reading in his essay on trees as metaphor for reproduction, "Gender and Industry in *Herland*; he writes: "Gilman stated explicitly in her 1904 book *Human Work* that nature intended sex to be for reproduction only, and that once we understood it we would be a lot happier; she also said humanity progressed despite male sexual excesses" (109).

[172] Although this particular passage refers specifically to Acton's male patients, like Gilman, he sees any non-reproductive sexual activity as inherently damaging and pathological. Other 19th Century reformers who spoke out against male masturbation included Henry Beecher and Sylvester Graham (De la Pena 143).

[173] In *American Nervousness, 1903*, Tom Lutz argues that Gilman links neurasthenia to wasteful disuse of female energy: "In outlining the relationship between women, work, and ill health, Gilman validated her own decision to write, validated women's intellectual labor in general, and helped, finally, to invalidate neurasthenia as a role option. She represented neurasthenia as poisonous, as a mark of leisured affluence and what was poisonously wrong with such affluence" (231).

In contrast to the pathological, excessive female body, *Herland* showcases a system that would produce healthy, efficient female bodies, as well as a healthy, well-apportioned crop of babies.[174] In both *Herland* and *Women and Economics,* Gilman describes the ideal society as a kind of well-oiled machine, the proper function of which depends on both the cooperation *and* the specialization of its component parts. In her characteristic shuttling between the mechanical and the natural, Gilman describes the progress of this social machine in biological terms: "Social evolution tends to an increasing specialization in structure and function, and to an increasing interdependence of component parts" (*WE* 52). In other words, the biological machine functions best when it is organized. However, far more so than Taylor, Gilman recodes this systematization as natural: everyone has her own specific place and task which arises from her natural interests. This specialization is as commonsensical as it is natural. As Vandyck explains: "To do the best work they had to specialize, of course; the children needed spinners and weavers, farmers and gardeners, carpenters and masons, as well as mothers" (*H* 68). To the extent that Herland is a society of mothers, it is natural for the mothers to have other specialized tasks because these tasks arise from the children's needs. In a society that realizes the "it takes a village" adage literally, it becomes clear that for an efficiently functioning village, women must be weavers and masons, not just mothers. Or, put another way, mothers owe it to their children to be weavers and masons, as well as "egg sacs." Returning to Gilman's agricultural metaphor, a society whose women are only defined by their biologically reproductive capabilities can never be "ripe."

[174] Gilman was not alone in using an industrial model to structure reform efforts. As John Jordan notes, "In response to technological innovation, the rational reformers all tried to invent industrial-strength tools of 'social control'…to replace contentious and apparently impotent political devices with more 'scientific' arrangements" (Jordan 9).

Conclusion: The Threat of Pure Representation

It was essential to Gilman's feminist project that nature be rewritten in the terms of machine-age industrial organization. In her attempt to reform both motherhood and the economic position of women, Gilman fought two battles: she needed to demythologize traditional motherhood at the same time that she needed to prove the possibility of an economically productive womanhood. To do so, Gilman renders the first unnatural and pathological. Through her radically unsentimental rhetoric, Gilman invokes the language of industrial efficiency to emphasize the problems with uncontrolled breeding. By then naturalizing industrial systems, describing them in evolutionary terms, she casts the contemporary woman's position as both unnatural and subhuman, writing, "In the growth of industry, commerce, science, manufacture, government, art, religion, the male of our species has become human, far more than male" (*WE* 22). In Gilman's dialectical move between the natural and the mechanistic, the economically evolved male achieves humanity through his ties to industrial advancements. If what it takes to be human is to be mechanized, then through their strenuous systematization of childbirth, the Herlanders have become more natural than nature itself.[175]

Returning once more to Gilman's metaphor of agricultural or economically cultivated nature, we see that Gilman fuses the economic and the biological in the bodies of Herland's children: "Those nation-loved children of theirs compared with the average in our country as the most perfectly cultivated, richly developed roses compared with—

[175]In *The Machine in Garden*, Leo Marx describes the tendency in American literature to describe industrial machines as more natural than nature itself. In his description of the railroad, Marx argues that Americans saw the train as allowing them access to nature—though mediated by a machine—as never before: "Armed with this new power, mankind is now able, for the first time, to realize the dream of abundance" (191-2).

tumbleweeds. Yet they did not *seem* 'cultivated' at all—it had all become a natural condition" (*H* 73). By comparing the rose to the tumbleweed, Gilman argues that people must manage biology to achieve natural perfection. Through her insistence that a radical compatibility between people and systems is necessary to the continuation of the human race, Gilman is able to argue that there is no real difference between the hearth and the shop floor, since all labors are for her connected in service of a great system that generates human life.

However, Gilman's comparison of the rose to the tumbleweed suggests a final problem for representations of efficiency. In contrast to the novel's opening metaphor of children as peaches and apricots, this metaphor emphasizes an aesthetic superiority. Neither roses nor tumbleweeds are particularly useful; one is simply more attractive than the other. In her description of children as flowers, Gilman reveals a weakness in the systems of representation that I have discussed throughout this chapter. Gilman's and Taylor's assessments that the production of people required efficient systems led them to focus on representing efficiency and inefficiency to render visible wasted time and energy. If the first problem with the industrial age is that human bodies labor inefficiently or—in this chapter's terms—if the industrial age has produced inefficient bodies, then the writers, filmmakers, and engineers discussed in their chapter took it as their task to make this waste visible. The industrial films and Gilbreth studies addressed this task by creating images of efficiency against which human irregularity appears jarring and strange. Gilman attempted to "visualize" the inefficiency of women's domestic labor by bringing it out into the open, making it public. Gilman then produced her own utopia of efficiency in which planning and organization indicate healthy nature, and the expression

of either sexuality or individuality appears wasteful and excessive. However, in their attempts to visualize efficiency, the texts examined in this chapter reveal the flaw inherent in such depictions.

By visualizing efficiency, Gilman and the industrial films ran the risk of turning efficiency into merely another system of representation. In his discussions of the Augustinian theory of time, Ricoeur notes that "time cannot be directly observed, that it is properly invisible" (84). As a result, Ricoeur argues, the phenomenology of time is necessarily aporetic in nature (84). The problems associated with representing efficiency echo this dilemma. By making efficiency a beautiful ideal, Gilman, the Gilbreths, and Taylor also lessened its practicality as a system of production. Comparing Gilman's novel and industrial films thus highlights the documentary aspects of utopian novels and the utopian aspects of factory efficiency—both of which depended upon making expenditures of time and energy visible. In their attempts to organize time, Gilman's and Taylor's writings, the industrial films, and the other texts I examine in this dissertation reveal that attempts to organize time will always register both the utopian hopes of their age and aporetic concerns about the power of representation.

CHAPTER VI

CODA: WHITHER NATURALISM?

In this project, I have demonstrated that time, in its varying incarnations, was the conduit through which silent film and the naturalist novel asserted their abilities to represent the most pressing issues of the early-twentieth century. As the nineteenth century turned to the twentieth, time became increasingly associated with the machine, whether through the cinema's self-conscious references to itself as a mechanized technology, or through the frequently ambivalent relationship of novelists working in an older and highly individualized medium to machine age technologies that frequently undermined both the coherence and importance of the human individual. Over the course of this study, I have traced the increasingly precarious relationship of individual human agency to time, whether the material time of the early cinema, the irreversible and deterministic time of narrative history, the gendered time of New Woman narratives, or the highly systematized time of Taylorism and Gilman's utopian feminism. At the center of all these temporal accounts is a deep concern about individual agency in relation to time that acts as an invisible force—only becoming legible through the external device of a representational system, whether filmic or novelistic.

In a recent review article in *American Literary History*, Lisa Long assesses three recent studies of American naturalism; her survey of these texts—which largely uphold naturalism's status as a white, masculine genre—prompts Long to ask: "What are the

costs and benefits of continuing to nurture naturalism?" (160).[176] By way of an answer to Long's challenge, I offer a few brief thoughts about where I see naturalism operating today. In her 2004 *Exposés and Excess*, Cecelia Tichi suggests that America is in what she calls "the second Gilded Age" (3). Adding further evidence to her claims, the United States' economy now appears to be entering a recession—one that the historically-minded might fear will echo the depression of 1893, which ushered out the first Gilded Age. The ending of the first Gilded Age and transition into the Progressive Era inspired naturalist novelists to imagine a world in which individuals were buffeted about by forces beyond their control, with the passage of time being, as I have argued, the most significant of these forces. Where, it now seems appropriate to ask, is this era's naturalism?

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated that naturalist novels and silent films apprehended time as a force requiring systematic representational management. However, as films increasingly drew upon "realist" representational approaches that focused on character psychology to drive plot movement, the kind of naturalist plotting found in Griffith's films would begin to appear too heavy-handed.[177] Similarly, as literary modernism developed, critics began to dismiss literary naturalism as clunky and awkwardly written. As Pizer notes, from the perspective of New Critical approaches to

[176] Long's provocative question derives from her astute reading of John Dudley's *A Man's Game* and Jennifer Fleissner's *Women Compulsion, Modernity*, both of which depend, as Long argues, upon treating naturalism as an "*a priori* category…that they are working within and/or against" (170). As Long explains, the problem with treating naturalism this way is that it allows white men like Norris, Dreiser, Crane, and London to remain the "natural" naturalists, while African-American and women naturalists can only perform the genre in relation to the men who define it. Although Fleissner's study specifically focuses on women in naturalist novels and female naturalists, Long notes that "Ironically, Fleissner's book at its best seems not to be about naturalism, per se, but rather about bridging the critical dualism that she sees as fixing women's fiction and female characters disadvantageously" (168).

[177] In her readings of *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*, Hansen suggests that Griffith may not have been the realist forefather that many assume him to be (*Babel* 166, 177).

literary scholarship, "the assumed crudity and stylistic incompetence of Norris or Dreiser...rendered their work suspect" (*Cambridge* 12).[178] However, as films diversified and coalesced around distinct genres, select films maintained an interest in time as a driving force—a force that cannot be simply dismissed as a social construction. Or, as Gunning says of the cinema of attractions, naturalism in film and literature "went underground" (57). In closing, I will look at a two recent texts that invoke naturalist style. It is my hope that this final discussion prompts further thought about the place of naturalism in the twenty-first century.

Two recent works that exemplify naturalist style are Sidney Lumet's *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* and Andre Dubus III's novel *The House of Sand and Fog* (1999).[179] Similarly to Norris's *The Octopus*, *Devil* and *House* engage in problems of temporality and agency through their opposition of characterization and plotting. Dubus' and Lumet's works suggest that characterization is a holdover; personality in their narratives carries with it an air of belatedness. In part, Dubus and Lumet establish this feeling of belatedness through the kind of parallel editing I discuss in the context of *The Octopus* and *A Deal in Wheat*: they subsume characterization under plotting. In her study of Ken Loach's naturalist tendencies, Deborah Knight notes, the "emotional force of these [naturalist] narratives is the result of…inexorable narrative structuring" (75). Lumet in particular heightens this structuring by retelling the central crisis and falling action of

[178] Furthermore, because later works of naturalist literature, notably the novels of Dos Passos, Steinbeck and Wright—had ties to the communist movement of the 1930s, many scholars disparaged naturalism as a form of literature with ties to fascism and totalitarianism (Pizer, *Cambridge* 12).

[179] I am not looking at Vadim Perelman's filmic adaptation of *House of Sand and Fog* (2003) because many of the stylistic choices Perelman makes in the film work to undercut the novel's naturalistic tendencies. In particular, the film's use of flashback and Perelman's choice to open the film with what turns out to be an image from the film's final scene work to dilute the driving temporal movement that defines naturalist style.

the film three times, tracking the individual tragedy of each main character separately. In Lumet's film, two brothers, both deeply in debt, decide to hold up their parents' jewelry store in a last ditch attempt to retain their middle-class status. The film fragments itself between the stories of Andy, who has been embezzling from his real estate firm to pay for his drug addiction; Hank, who is increasingly unable to pay child support; and their father Charles, who seeks revenge for the crime committed by his sons. The choice to fragment the narrative and to repeat the violent act that precipitates the narrative's disastrous outcome highlights the impossibility of any individual saving himself—the three men are irrevocably tied together by their dysfunctional family, their precarious position in the middle class, and their threatened masculinities. By repeating the events leading up to the violently botched robbery and its tragic outcomes, Lumet's film suggests the futility of any characters' attempts to save himself from the inexorably unfolding chain of events.

To see the naturalist bent of *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead*, it may be useful to invoke Deleuze's argument that naturalist filmmakers simultaneously invoke both historically situated and, what he calls, "originary" worlds, and that these two worlds coexist within naturalist films and novels (129). Deleuze's reading makes sense of the jewelry dealer's statement, "the world is an evil place," which *New York Times* reviewer A.O. Scott calls "the grim lesson" of the film. The grim lesson that frames the film can be said to derive from naturalism's "originary world"—a world that contains the "beginning of the world, but also an end of the world, and the irresistible slope from one to the other" (Deleuze 126). In naturalist film, this originary world encompasses the world of the real. For example, in *Devil*, the relatively pathetic and insignificant suburban

lives of Andy and Hank, which we might ascribe to the "real" world, are ruled by the jeweler's statement, which derives from the laws of the "originary realm." However, this is not to say that there is no motive behind the film's seeming fatalism. In his review of *Devil*, Scott also writes that although the movie is "full of losers, liars, killers and thieves…behind the camera is a mensch." Dubus writes in a similarly sensitive manner, treating both the autocratic Colonel Behrani and the weak Kathy Nicolo with sensitivity, even as he shows the inevitability of their disastrous endings.

While Dubus does not repeatedly retell events, his oscillation between the three main characters' experiences reveals the impossibility for any individual to extract himself or herself from the narrative's unfolding tale of violence and misfortune. Although in the twenty-first century we may no longer believe in the kind of metaphysical forces Norris describes at the end of *The Octopus*, we are again at a moment when American ideals of individuality and opportunity appear to be crumbling in the face of nonhuman forces.

The House of Sand and Fog and *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* illustrate Knight's claim that "Whatever we might hope for naturalist characters, and whatever they might hope for themselves, the audience realizes that these hopes will likely go unrealized, or [are] only to be realized at a cost to the characters involved" (75). These works are particularly interesting given Tichi's claims about the United States' place in a second Gilded Age. Both works focus on the seemingly inexplicable failure of the American middle class; both track the personal and economic crises that lead to the inevitable destruction of their central characters' lives. Dubus takes on the issue of middle class instability through Kathy Nicolo, a divorced woman who cleans houses for a

living, and who is eventually evicted from her own home for failing to pay taxes. While Kathy finds herself trapped by her economic circumstances and her alcoholism, the novel's other protagonist, ousted Iranian Colonel Behrani, struggles with his past (the force of history) and his attempts to make a new home in a culturally and economically inhospitable America. The novel's central conflict emerges when Colonel Behrani buys Kathy's house at a foreclosure auction, and she begins harassing him in a fatal attempt to regain her childhood home. At this point, Dubus introduces a third character, Sheriff Burdon, a man whose marriage and career slowly dissolve as he becomes tragically wrapped up in Kathy's struggle.

As in the work of nineteenth-and-early-twentieth-century naturalists, economics play a central role in *The House of Sand and Fog*. Building on Michaels, who focuses on naturalism and realism as *reactions* to changes in market capitalism at the turn of the century, I would argue that the structure and economic concerns of *House* and *Devil* derive from a sense that the market operates in such a way that it is difficult for middle-class individuals to maintain their class position and that its changeability suggests that the market's temporal habitat is one difficult for individuals to comprehend or manage. In addition to the forceful, forward-moving plotting that Lumet and Dubus deploy, their discussions of debt and investing raise the concern that time in late capitalism has become all encompassing, simultaneously accounting for pasts (debts) and futures (investments), and frequently combining the two. For example, we might read the central conflict in *The House of Sand and Fog* as a conflict between one character who engages only with the past aspect of the market and another who focuses solely on the future. Kathy Nicolo loses her home because she fails to address business taxes the government

claims she owes. Willed to her by her father, the house represents Kathy's past; when she tries to buy her home back, she finds that she is too late—Behrani has already raised the asking price. In contrast, Colonel Behrani purchases the house as an investment, hoping to quickly resell the house for nearly three times the price he paid at auction. Moreover, for the Behrani family, this potential sale means a better future in America, a chance for Colonel Behrani to stop working multiple low-paying jobs, and the opportunity for his family to regain some of the financial stability to which they were accustomed in Iran. But as the plot unfolds, it becomes clear that neither character will end up with the house, and by the time the novel reaches its end, it seems that the state will most likely auction it off once more. The human figures in this work are doubly disadvantaged: not only does the force of time sweep them along from one crisis to the next, but as mere mortals—existing only in the present—they cannot possibly understand the vicissitudes of the market, which simultaneously engages past, present, and future.

To answer Long's challenge about the benefits of retaining naturalism, I offer two answers. The first is a matter of practicality: naturalism has never gone away. Secondly, as Deleuze writes, naturalists "deserve the Nietzschean name 'physicians of civilization'" because "[t]hey diagnose civilization" (125). As long as naturalism serves this function, it seems unlikely that it will be going away any time soon. Naturalism's lasting influence, even as it "goes underground," can be explained by the ability of naturalist style, characterization, and narration to track feelings of helplessness at moments of great change in American history. As I have argued, it is through naturalism that filmmakers and novelists reflect on both time and its relation to human events. As we head into the

twenty-first century, naturalism in literature and film continues to remind us of the central role the temporal plays in shaping human experience.

FIGURES

Fig. 1

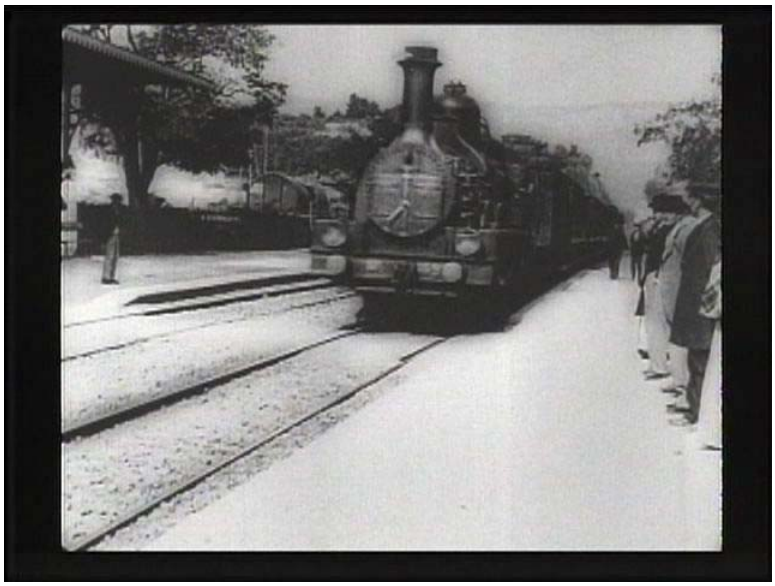

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4


Owing to the
advance in the
price of flour
the usual 5lb loaf
will be 10
Fig. 5


Owing to the
advance in the
price of flour
the usual 5lb loaf
will be 10
Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

Fig. 11

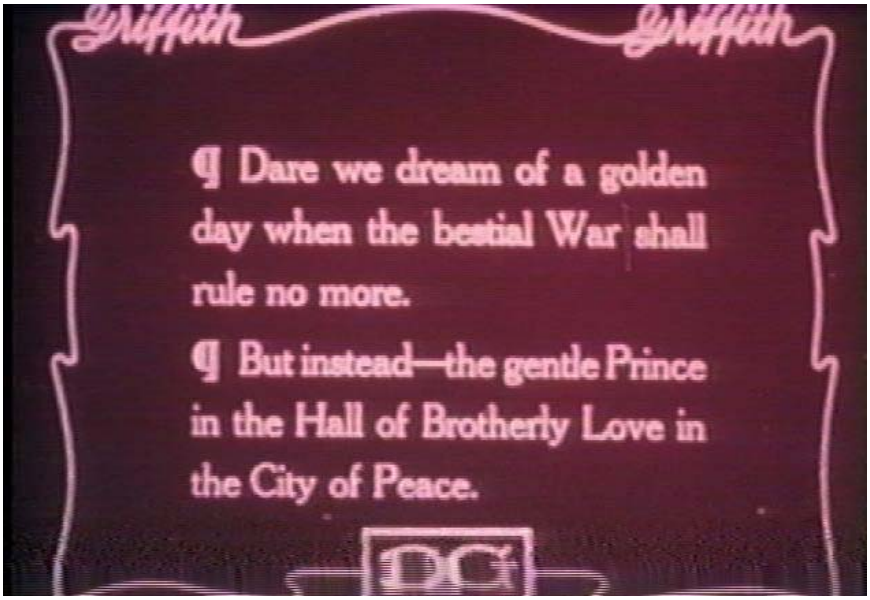
Griffith
Griffith
¶ Dare we dream of a golden day when the bestial War shall rule no more.
¶ But instead—the gentle Prince in the Hall of Brotherly Love in the City of Peace.
DG

Fig. 12

Fig. 13

Fig. 14

Fig. 15

Fig. 16

Fig. 17

Fig. 18

Fig. 19

Fig. 20

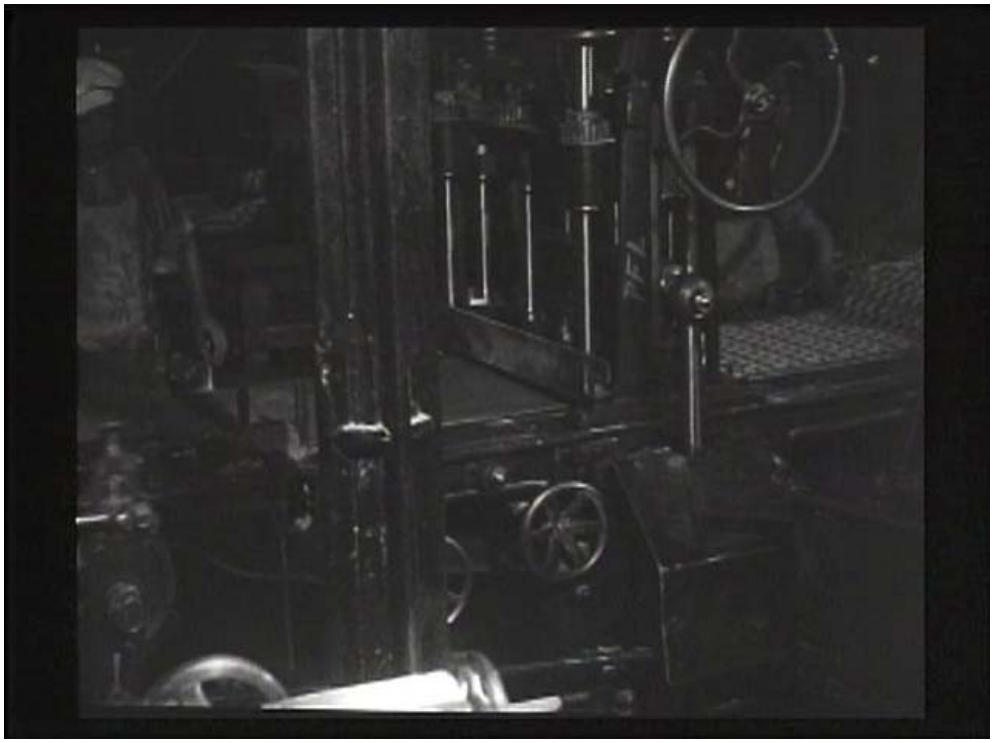

Fig. 21

Fig. 22

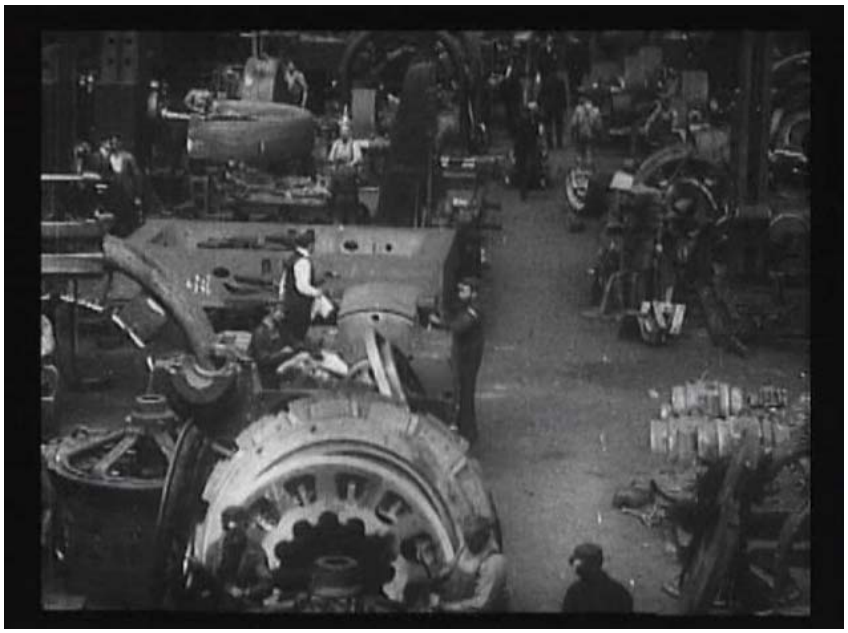

Fig. 23

Fig. 24

Fig. 25

Fig. 26

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Before the Devil Knows You’re Dead. (Sidney Lumet, 2007)

The Birth of a Nation (D.W. Griffith, 1915)

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Démolition d'un mur (Lumière Brothers, 1896)

The Girl and Her Trust (D.W. Griffith, 1912)

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Intolerance (D.W. Griffith, 1916)

Making Chewing Gum from Chicle

Manhattan Trade School for Girls (Pathescope, 1911)

Onesime, Clockmaker (Pathé Frere, 1912)

Repas de bébé (Lumière Brothers, 1895)

Traffic in Souls (George Loane Tucker, 1913)

Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show (Edwin Porter, 1902)

A Visit to Peek Frean & Co.'s Biscuit Works (Cricks and Martin, 1906)

Westinghouse Works (American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1904)

Where are My Children (Louis Weber, 1916)