

The Perfect Order of a Canadian Crowd:

Cinema in Ottawa, 1894-1896

by

Charles Tepperman, B.A.

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Abstract

When projected moving pictures appeared for the first time in Ottawa during the summer of 1896, they were not greeted with the sort of uncomprehending astonishment suggested by some historical accounts. Nor were they received and comprehended in the same way as might have been the case in major American or European metropolises. This study will examine the “horizon of experience” that informed the reception of cinema when it arrived in Ottawa. Among those contextual factors discussed include the city’s social fragmentation, attitudes towards leisure, experience with modern technologies such as electrical illumination and street cars, and appreciation of commercial and visual entertainments. This study will draw on primary materials, particularly newspaper reports, in order demonstrate how unique factors present in Ottawa contributed to a localized comprehension of moving pictures. In doing so, it is hoped that this thesis will demonstrate the value of local reception analyses for Canadian film studies.

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Introduction: "Improvement the Order of the Age"

In August 1892 Ottawa entrepreneur George Holland wrote to the Canadian federal Department of Agriculture: "With the phonograph you have an expert stenographer always at hand."¹ The local agent for Edison's phonograph, as well as an official Senate reporter, Holland had already succeeded in introducing phonographs into the Federal civil service in the Department of the Interior. In a later reminiscence, Holland recalls that one Senator even proposed that the phonograph be used to give the sessional prayers, thus reducing the costs of the Senate by the salary of its resident Chaplain.² In this particular letter, perhaps only one of many government pitches, Edison's invention is presented as a modern innovation which could improve office efficiency. A far cry from the predominantly leisure-driven uses for the phonograph which are far more familiar to us now, the early business applications of this invention hint at the more general trend of the modernization of life.

Although ostensibly an agent of Edison's North American Phonograph Company, Holland's letter to the department of Agriculture was written on the letter-head of another

¹George Holland to John Lowe, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, 8 August 1892, Department of Agriculture, RG 17, vol. 731, Docket 84263, National Archives of Canada.

²George Holland, "My Ottawa Memories, 1860-," *Macleans Magazine*, 1 June 1922, 22.

purveyor of modernity: the Smith Premier Typewriter. George and his brother Andrew Holland also acted as the local agents for this company, publicly endorsing the machine in local and trade newspapers. Most striking about this technological crossover is the company motto printed at the top of the letter: "Improvement the Order of the Age." Although trite by the standards of today's advertising, the motto seems to encapsulate not only the entrepreneurial stance of the Holland Brothers, but also a high degree of institutional self-awareness. This is the sort of comment about late nineteenth century positivism one would expect from a historian or theorist, but not from participants in the history itself. The motto reveals a great deal more agency than historical actors are generally attributed with. Consider, for example, the story of the first film exhibition in Paris in December 1895 when the audience members were reported to have recoiled in terror of the oncoming train projected on the canvas in front of them. The story presupposes a naive audience unprepared for the new technology that was being presented to them, rubes knocked over by the force of technological innovation. Could they really have been so unprepared, so unsuspecting? Many historians have argued that they were not.³ If improvement was, indeed, the order of the age, if people lived in an age of novelty, they may have been impressed, but surely not bowled over.

The project of this thesis is to examine how a particular Canadian audience was prepared for the arrival of cinema in 1896. Specifically, when the Holland Brothers brought Edison's projected moving picture machine, the Vitascope, to Ottawa on July 21 1896, how did that local audience comprehend it? Within what context was it placed?

³ Tom Gunning rehearses this debate in his article "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," *Art & Text* 34 (Spring 1989): 31-32, 43n1.

Similar studies have been conducted in major European and American cities and found that citizens there were well prepared by many of the transformations of modern life taking place: electrification, commercialization, mass culture. But it seems unsatisfactory to assume that the citizens of a mid-sized Canadian city would have had the same experiences and reactions as those living in major metropolises.

In one sense, this thesis is a case-study, showing how conditions specific to Ottawa may have coloured its citizens' comprehension of motion pictures. There has been little examination of the early years of cinema in Canada which could provide a methodological model for this study.⁴ Two recent studies which focus on similar periods demonstrate some of the pitfalls which must be avoided. Robert Gutteridge's *Magic Moments: First 20 Years of Moving Pictures in Toronto (1894-1914)* is impressive in its accumulation of details, but fails to frame this material in any sort of compelling manner. With little attention to the social or historical *meaning* of cinema in Toronto, Gutteridge's study is ultimately more pedantic than insightful. At the opposite extreme is Matthew Smith's essay, "Film Reviews and Announcements from 1896: Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto." Lacking critical distance, Smith holds up newspaper accounts of the cinema as reflecting the genuine experience of the first viewers of cinema: "All of the reviews/articles discussed in this article, and indeed every review from 1896, must be seen not only as journalism, but also as genuine audience reactions. . . . Reviewers' perceptions, like those of their readers, were fresh and untainted by prior experience with

⁴Long the only study of early Canadian cinema, Peter Morris' *Embattled Shadows* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1978) remains the most authoritative work in this field. As a survey history of nearly five decades, however, this book does not present itself as a plausible model for a local reception study.

film; reviewer and audience alike began at page one and had similar experiences.”⁵ It is only through insufficient supporting research that Smith could arrive at such a conclusion. As this thesis will show, a careful examination of Ottawa inhabitants’ attitudes and experiences of technology and leisure reveal that early spectators were well prepared for the arrival of cinema.

A more helpful model of local reception studies can be found in Gregory Waller’s *Main Street Amusements*, an examination of the introduction and exploitation of cinema in a mid-sized American city. Here, Waller sets out to examine the exhibition and reception circumstances of Lexington, Kentucky, which set it apart from larger cities. To accomplish this, Waller broadens his object of study to include a more general contextualization of experience. Waller writes:

[M]y ambition has been to remain attentive to both the specifics of theatre design, programming policy, and marketing schemes, and also to more general questions about the fear of amusement, the filling of leisure time, the uses of high and low culture, and the public articulation of values and goals as Lexington moved into the twentieth century. This aspiration towards social history requires that the movies be seen in the context of other cheap amusements, special events, and public recreational occasions. As with all contextualizing, though, the problem –

⁵Matthew Smith, “Film Reviews and Announcements From 1896: Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto,” *Loneragan Review* (Concordia University) 6, (2000): 1.

or maybe the opportunity – is deciding where to draw the line. How much is enough?⁶

For Waller, the answer to this question is to limit his contextualization to those events which appear in the “Amusements” section of the newspaper, alongside the advertisements for moving pictures. This is appropriate to his study which spans twenty years and must, necessarily, progress chronologically and avoid becoming mired in the details surrounding particular circumstances. This thesis, however, has a much less chronological structure, functioning more as the description of an historical moment than a chronicle of sequential events.

So while Waller must cut short his discussion of various contextual factors in the interest of brevity, I will examine them at greater length. In particular, this thesis will look at the social topography of Ottawa, conflicting attitudes towards leisure activities and commercialization, the popular amusements available to the city’s inhabitants, local uses of imaging devices (photography, lantern slides, etc.), and the emergence of modern technologies such as the electric light and the street railway. Contrary to a teleological history of cinema, such as Smith’s, which posits 1896 as “The Beginning”, this thesis proposes that moving pictures were comprehended by audiences as belonging to a variety of pre-existing traditions or discourses; “amusement” may certainly be one of these, but so also were popular science, educational pastimes, and electrification. Indeed, while it is convenient for Waller to confine his study to the “Amusements” column of the

⁶Gregory A. Waller, *Main Street Amusements* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), xiv-xvi.

newspaper, that luxury is not available to this researcher. Articles and advertisements for the Vitascope, and its predecessor the Kinetoscope, appeared in all parts of Ottawa newspapers, suggesting the highly mutable nature of these inventions. On their first appearances, they were not to be pigeon-holed, but appealed to a variety of viewer situations; this thesis will try to reflect that mutability and complexity of conceptualization.

Beyond examining the context of the arrival of cinema to Ottawa, this thesis will also attempt to address the issue of Ottawa film spectators' "modernized subjectivity". In his highly influential work on Baudelaire and the urban *flâneur*, as well as his studies of cinema, Walter Benjamin proposed that modern life – industrialization, urbanization, commodification – profoundly changed the way late nineteenth century city dwellers viewed their world. Overstimulated by the world around them, these spectators experienced their surroundings in a state of perpetual and mobile distraction, punctuated by shocks of attention, a mode of perception perfectly suited, according to Benjamin, to the cinema. He writes, "In a film, perception in the form of shocks was established as a formal principle. That which determines the rhythm of production on a conveyor belt is the basis of the rhythm of reception in the film."⁷ Cinema both presupposes and reflects the altered subjectivity formed by urban life, accounting for its great popularity and making it the modern entertainment *par excellence*.

⁷Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire, A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 132. Benjamin also addresses cinema in his famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969).

Drawing on the work of Benjamin, many others have examined links between cinematic perception and modern perception.⁸ Discussing his well known concept of the “cinema of attractions”, which outlines the aesthetic quality of early films, Tom Gunning writes: “The cinema of attractions not only exemplifies a particularly modern form of aesthetics but also responds to the specifics of modern and especially urban life, what Benjamin and [Siegfried] Kracauer understood as the drying up of experience and its replacement by a cult of distraction.”⁹ Although different in very many respects, the factor in common between nearly all of these studies is the prominence of *urban* experience. Benjamin himself was most interested in the history of Paris, but others have examined New York, Chicago and additional metropolitan centres in a similar light. It is likely that a much smaller city, like Ottawa, did not share these qualities of urban crowding and over-stimulation, but does that mean that spectators there would have perceived cinema differently? This thesis will draw attention to those instances which reflect modernized spectatorship among the audiences in Ottawa.

There is a final consideration in this project which is more general and, perhaps, more contentious. I would like to suggest that there is a history of film in Canada that has yet to be written. This is the history of film reception. For many years now, scholars have defined Canadian film studies in terms of an examination of films made in Canada or by Canadians. But an important supplement to this is an examination of how Canadians respond to films made elsewhere, by non-Canadians – after all, statistics suggest that this

⁸Charney and Schwartz’s anthology *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) offers a representative sample of this research.

⁹Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment,” 41.

makes up something like 95% of screen time in this country today.¹⁰ Perhaps the reason for this neglect lies in the siege mentality that has so permeated Canadian cultural thought in the last century: it is taken for granted that Canada is inundated by foreign (usually American) culture, and is at constant risk of losing its own. While I would not dismiss this argument completely, I do think it requires some modification. Mainly, it presupposes a passive or vacant audience, a mass of anonymous viewers who are simply vessels to be filled, or children to be brainwashed.

An examination of a Canadian audience may help to counter this attitude. In recent years, studies of early film audiences have acknowledged that although it may not be possible to construct an audience which takes into account all of the complexities of its viewers' lives, it is still useful to examine audiences as particular groupings which highlight commonalities of experience and interpretation. Miriam Hansen, for example, does this in her study of the position of women in audiences of silent cinema, *Babel and Babylon*. Here, she calls for an examination of a "specific social horizon of understanding that shape the viewer's interpretation." More than just an examination of the context within which cinema was experienced, Hansen's approach provides space for the analysis of the "public dimension" of cinema, or those "formations not necessarily anticipated in the context of production."¹¹ Beyond acting simply as vessels of narrative or entertainment commodities, films can also facilitate groupings of spectators based on

¹⁰Charles R. Acland, "Popular Film in Canada: Revisiting the Absent Audience," in *A Passion for Identity*, eds. David Taras and Beverly Rasporich (Toronto: ITP Nelson, 1997).

¹¹Miriam Hansen, *Babel & Babylon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 7. Elsewhere, Hansen uses the phrase "horizon of experience" which I use interchangeably with "social horizon of understanding" in this thesis.

other qualities: interest in a particular star or the peculiarities of local audience composition, for example.

Just as context can be significant in an examination of the reception of cinema among women or ethnic groups, so it can be for an examination of locally defined Canadian audiences. As I will show, a localized “horizon of experience” produces a reception of cinema in Ottawa which stands out from what is understood as the normative experience: that which took place in major American cities. In other words, imported culture is mediated by local experience, and is not necessarily the monolithic colonizing force we feared it to be. This may not be the case for all films at all times, but the issue is worth examining.

In what follows, I will try to present a depiction of what cinema meant when it was introduced to Ottawa in 1896. This will be examined from the point of view of those exploiting it as well as those viewing it. Ottawa has been chosen for both pragmatic reasons (I happen to be living there) as well as the social complexity it offers. My research dwells more on cinema as an instrument, or novel technology than on the films that were shown. As a result, I have looked to other types of evidence: a day-by-day examination of local newspapers (with all the problems this entails) provides the foundation of my study. This is supplemented by a variety of other archival and documentary sources.

The first chapter of this study will examine aspects of the city of Ottawa as they appeared in the mid- to late-1890's. In addition to a general discussion of the commercial and social topography of the city, particular attention will be paid to leisure activities during this period. As the population of Ottawa grew, and the end of the nineteenth

century neared, leisure activities gradually shifted from primarily community-based and participatory pastimes to non-local, commercial entertainments. For some segments of the population, this shift was cause for grave concern, as plays and other theatrical events were potentially immoral influences which had to be closely scrutinized. Others, however, embraced commercial entertainments and new venues were constructed to keep up with growing demand. These are some of the conditions which would bear on the reception of cinema when it was eventually introduced.

The second chapter of this thesis will discuss the appearance and exhibition of Edison's Kinetoscope in Ottawa, the first time in November 1894 and then one year later in November 1895. A direct precursor of projected moving pictures, the Kinetoscope was successfully exploited in the United States by Ottawa entrepreneurs George and Andrew Holland. The machine appeared in Ottawa much later, where it played in a downtown store-front. This chapter will examine contemporary press coverage in an attempt to construct a descriptive and critical account of the machine's visits to Ottawa

Chapter three will continue this examination of the conditions in Ottawa prior to the arrival of cinema, but with a greater emphasis placed on the changing role of technology in society. Thanks to the availability of ample supplies of hydro-electricity and the presence of a few important inventor-entrepreneurs, Ottawa was quite technologically advanced for a city of its size. Electric lights and electric street railway lines proliferated during the period up to the appearance of cinema, and were a source of great civic pride. When Ottawa held a winter carnival in 1895, lighting combined with entertainment to make thrilling spectacles which impressed visitors to the city. Technology also changed the shape of the city quite literally, as streetcars expanded out

to new suburbs and entertainments venues. Even as the social permissibility of commercial entertainments remained a contentious issue, pre-cinematic imaging devices, such as the magic lantern, occupied a neutral position. Sometimes used for commercial ends, these devices were also found in socially redeemable settings such as women's meetings or educational lectures. While some of these developments were technological pre-figurations of the cinema, others directly affected where and by whom cinema would eventually be seen.

The fourth chapter of this study will address the exhibition of Edison's Vitascope at West End Park, near Ottawa, during July and August 1896. In addition to providing a thorough description of the venue, accompanying acts and films shown, this chapter will analyze the audience's reception of the device. By examining newspaper accounts through the lens of the preceding chapters, it is hoped that a full and compelling appreciation of the audience's reception will be arrived at.

1. Rational Recreation and Commercial Culture in Ottawa

“Apropos of the ‘hilarious,’ I must commend the perfect order of a Canadian crowd. It is never boisterous, and consideration for others is the rule.” So wrote American author Anson Gard in his amusing travelogue of his trip to Ottawa, *The Hub and the Spokes*. This particular comment was in reference to a band concert which took place at Rockliffe park during the summer of 1903. Gard adds, “As I stood in that crowd of perhaps ten thousand people, I might shut my eyes and easily imagine that there were but few around me, so little the noise, and yet the cheerful faces all about showed that pleasure was general.”¹ While Gard’s comments are certainly those of a writer offering compliments wherever possible, it is interesting that he should choose audience behavior as something worthy of a compliment. Were the audiences Gard found at home, in the United States, so rowdy that this crowd in Ottawa was *really* remarkable? Perhaps. But it may also be the case that Ottawa simply offered a more limited selection of mass entertainments to a more limited segment of society than American metropolises did.

This chapter will explore the social and leisure settings of fin de siècle Ottawa. Who were those well-behaved audience members who saw the band performance at

¹ Anson Gard, *The Hub and the Spokes* (Ottawa: Emerson Press, 1904), 86.

Rockcliffe park in 1903? Were they the same people who might have attended the first exhibitions of the Vitascope half a decade earlier? What did they think of public or commercial entertainments? The “social horizon of understanding” of those members of the first Ottawa motion picture audience could be determined by examining a wide range of factors, more than can be taken into account here. At a very general level, common sense would dictate that Ottawa was not as cosmopolitan and its audience not as sophisticated as major American and European centres like Paris, London, or New York. But what sort of criteria and evidence can be used to support such an assumption? Beyond simple statistical information, which is far too general and vague, how can one establish a clear sense of the context into which cinema was introduced?

This chapter will address basic issues of setting: the social make-up, leisure activities and popular attitudes of the citizens of Ottawa. Containing this rather vast subject will, no doubt, require generalizations and tend to highlight certain experiences simply by virtue of their prominent representation in the evidence. But although the middle-class perspective may appear dominant I have tried where possible to be attentive to alternate experiences based upon class, gender or ethnic determinations. Indeed, some of these distinctions are what make Ottawa such a tantalizing city for examination: in particular, how audiences were distributed between Franco- and Anglo-Canadians offers some unique local reception circumstances.

By the eighteen-nineties, Ottawa was a city of undeniable importance for Canada but which remained, nonetheless, marginalized in many ways. A detailed history of

Ottawa's triumphs and failures can be better told by others,² but a general understanding of the city's commercial and social position in Canada is relevant to our discussion about the introduction of cinema. At the very least, Ottawa's status as a major city, but one without the well defined commercial and social identities of Montreal or Toronto, occupies a significant position on the city's horizon of experience. Historian John Taylor sets out the character of the city most clearly:

If the city could claim to have an image, it was that imposed by the large, corporate-like entities that over-arched the fragmented society. Ottawa was successively a canal town, a timber town, a lumber town, and a federal capital. But these dominating elements, and the image they carried with them, were more artificially "stuck on" the community than the product of its own activity.³

Ottawa had become an important place without really being an important, or well established, city; there was little in the way of local social cohesion that might be found in Toronto, for example.

The social geography of the city reflected this fragmentation. In the eighteenth-nineties the city proper was divided into distinct sections: Lower Town, to the east of the Rideau Canal, was inhabited by predominantly lower and middle income Franco-Catholic citizens; Upper Town, to the west of the canal, was where the lower and middle income Anglo-Protestant population was to be found; Sandy Hill, south of Lower Town, was

² See John Taylor's *Ottawa* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Co., 1986), for example.

³ Taylor, *Ottawa*, 21.

inhabited by higher income citizens of various religious and ethnic persuasion, many of whom worked for the federal Government. Through the mid 1800's, the business centre of Ottawa was located in Lower Town along Sussex and Rideau Streets. Towards the end of the century, however, the relative improvement of the fortunes of Anglophone citizens was reflected in a shift of the city's commercial centre to Upper Town, along Sparks Street.⁴ As might be expected, conflicts frequently emerged between these different sections of the city; beyond simple economic competition, however, a discourse of social difference emerged. In August 1896, the *Ottawa Free Press* reported: "The ambulance for contagious diseases is out almost every day. Nine out of ten calls come from Upper Town, notwithstanding the popular impression that nearly all the infectious sickness emanates from Lower Town."⁵ This "popular impression" suggests a fear of contamination (literal and metaphorical) from the cultural Other found in the predominantly French-Canadian Lower Town.

On the edges of the city were found communities of unskilled workers living near the lumber mills: in Dalhousie Ward to the East, LeBreton Flat to the West, and Hull to the North. The majority of these workers were Catholic, of either French or Irish descent. Cultural mixing led to occasional conflicts, as was the case on 31 July 1896, when a "squabble between some of the elite of Mechanicsville" took place. Two women were called before the County Magistrate following "an oratorical combat in which religious and national prejudices seemed to figure extensively. It was English and Protestant against French and Catholic. . . . Mrs. Williams was charged with calling Mrs. Diatte

⁴ Taylor, *Ottawa*, 82-84.

⁵ *Ottawa Free Press*, 4 August 1896, 7.

naughty names reflecting on the legitimacy of her progeny. . .”⁶ The incident demonstrates that when conflicts emerged, protagonists could easily draw on social and cultural prejudices.

Marginalized geographically, the poor in Ottawa were also at a considerable social remove from the downtown middle-classes. The 1890s were particularly hard for the working class as a depressed lumber market reduced their seasonal employment even further. During the winter, rising prices stretched workers’ low incomes to the limit, leaving little left over for diversions. James McCrostie finds that even contemporary estimates placed the cost of living far above the average labourer’s wage of between \$1.00 and \$1.35 per day: “On December 17, 1890, the *Daily Citizen* quoted a philosophy professor from the University of Ottawa who estimated that \$1.50 a day was the minimum salary required to “suitably clothe, feed and educate a family”.”⁷ Although documentation about the lives of Ottawa’s working class is scarce, their organization reflects some sense of communal interest. In 1891 approximately 2,400 mill workers went on strike, and labour activity in the capital increased steadily throughout the decade.⁸

In 1894 there were five daily newspapers being published in Ottawa: *The Citizen*, *The Journal*, *The Free Press*, *Le Canada* and *Le Temps*. The differences between these papers offer additional insight into social divisions in the city. Beyond the obvious language differences between some of the papers, each had different political allegiances,

⁶ *Ottawa Free Press*, 1 August 1896, 3.

⁷ James McCrostie, *Being Poor in Ottawa in the Winter of 1891*, Bytown Pamphlet Series, 57 (1997): 7.

⁸ Taylor, *Ottawa*, 84.

editorial style and target audiences. Ottawa's oldest newspaper, *The Citizen*, supported the Conservative party and presented a relatively serious attitude to its readers. In contrast, the *Free Press*, which supported the Liberal party, contained many more illustrations, and seemed to appeal to a more popular readership. Somewhere between these two, in terms of populism, was *The Journal* which was ostensibly Independent, but swayed to the Conservative side more often than not. All three of these papers covered local happenings thoroughly, and also included news from the wire, serialized novels, sports pages and many advertisements. The two French dailies were quite different in appearance from their English counterparts. With very few illustrations and long serialized stories and essays, the newspapers appear much less populist. And although there is some coverage of local happenings, much more space is devoted to news from Quebec and France. The papers are principally differentiated by their political stance: *Le Canada* supported the Conservative Party and *Le Temps*, the Liberals. It is from these newspapers, keeping their differences in mind, that much of the research in this study is drawn: they provide a blueprint of local current events and also offer another example, perhaps complementary to cinema, of a mass medium.⁹

The greatest repository of daily happenings in the city, these newspapers are highly significant for this study, but they are also problematic in many ways. Just as films were understood in a much different way at the turn of the century than they are now, so

⁹ Note on methodology: this researcher conducted a day-by-day and page-by-page examination of one newspaper (approx. September 1894 to September 1896) and then compared coverage of key events with reports in the other daily papers. For mostly pragmatic reasons (clear microfilm copies), the *Ottawa Journal* was selected as the primary newspaper.

also was the daily press. What we might read as a news story today could have been observation, opinion or thinly veiled advertising for a reader one hundred years ago. And, far from a straightforward depiction of the news and concerns of the citizens of Ottawa, the newspapers reflect the ideology of a fairly small fraction of the society. Indeed, while the combined population of Ottawa and Hull was approximately 60,000 in 1894, the average circulation of daily newspapers was only about 17,000.¹⁰ So, while looking to them for insights about the city, they will often be approached sceptically. Having said this, however, the newspapers reflect some of the thrill of progress which is also part and parcel of the novelty of cinema: “The daily press popularized, above all, a particular dogma of modernity cobbled together out of the clichés of the editors’ world. The dogma was built upon three apparent certitudes, the ideas of progress, nationality, and democracy, accepted (if sometimes reluctantly) by journalists of nearly every stripe.”¹¹ So although the newspapers certainly weren’t read by the majority of Ottawa citizens, we should not dismiss the possibility that those who *did* read them were the most prepared, perhaps even the intended audience, for cinema.

Leisure and Commercial Entertainment

While it may seem that cinema was a logical continuation of nineteenth century theatre, in terms of both formal construction and commercial organization, this may not

¹⁰ *Ottawa Journal*, 21 January 1895, p. 3; Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 75.

¹¹ Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority*, 156-157.

have been the case. There were many leisure activities at the turn of the century for Ottawans to choose from, some of which proved just as significant to the reception of film as the theatre. From October to May pleasure seekers could participate in winter sports (skating, hockey, snow shoeing), belong to musical, literary, photographic or scientific societies which held frequent concerts or lectures, or attend the theatre. During the summer months, those without the means of escaping the city, as the more affluent did, could visit parks where band concerts were held, join in various athletic activities (lacrosse, baseball, swimming) or, go to the circus, if one happened to be passing through town. Clearly there was a range of options available to citizens, depending on their social or economic position. To assume that the cinema was understood as a new development in theatre, and immediately appealed to its audience, might be inaccurate. To grasp how the cinema was comprehended, we must examine some of the different leisure activities present in Ottawa.

Leisure activities of the middle and upper classes in Ottawa at the end of the nineteenth century were centred, for the most part, in community-based and participatory associations. The daily newspapers announced and reported upon many meetings, from educational and literary associations, to church groups to amateur athletics. The principle that unified these disparate activities was the notion of 'rational recreation': that the increasing amount of time not spent at work be devoted to morally and socially redeeming activities. Bruce Kidd describes this impulse with respect to amateur sports: "Along with others from the middle and working classes who established voluntary associations to promote public libraries, gardening clubs, and popular science lectures in

the interest of purposeful leisure or 'rational recreation,' the middle-class amateurs hoped that sports would encourage good citizenship, social harmony, and nationalism."¹²

In contrast to these voluntary associations, professionalism in either sports or entertainment was treated with caution. Boxing, for example, was tolerated as an amateur sport, but prize fights were viewed as brutal and indecent and were outlawed in Ottawa. Any distinction between these two categories may seem arbitrary today, but the language used to describe them in the newspapers is quite telling. The 'rational' quality of acceptable activities is reinforced by their description as scientific: "The Capital Athletic Club put up last night a fistic tournament that was in every way satisfactory. They had a full house, the Grand [Opera House] being filled, floor and gallery, and the various bouts, most of which were for medals and carried decisions, developed enough of both science and hitting capacity to please everybody..."¹³ Although organized by an amateur athletic club and civilized by decisions and medals, as opposed to knockouts and prize money, it seems dubious that the thousand or so people who packed into the theatre were more interested in science than "hitting capacity".

Two months later, the mayor of Ottawa stopped a boxing match organized by the same club, having warned them that "they had better not collect fees for boxing entertainment, as it would not be permitted." The newspaper reports that the audience of 300-400 people was subsequently entertained by a mixed program, including club swinging, bar bell exercises, a xylophone solo, and step-dancing.¹⁴ The fight was re-

¹² Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 28.

¹³ *Ottawa Journal*, 18 February 1896, 1.

¹⁴ *Ottawa Journal*, 15 April 1896, 6.

scheduled, however, and took place one month later at Paris Park in Hull, under the watchful eye of Chief of Police Genest. The audience of approximately 400 was made up “largely of Ottawa people, and included doctors, lawyers, business men, and sports of the ‘dead game’ variety.” The newspaper declared the match “one of the fiercest ever seen in these parts,” and stated that “both men were disfigured”.¹⁵ With little pretence that the match was amateur in nature, it could only be concluded that Hull city officials were under less pressure from their citizens to suppress such events. After this, no sanctioned boxing matches took place in Ottawa, but fights were held occasionally in Hull. While the newspaper article suggests that interest in prize fights transcended class, Ottawa was clearly dominated by conservative, middle-class morality, forcing those interested in more racy diversions to cross the Ottawa River (a tradition which has continued to this day).¹⁶

The convergence of boxing with science and moving pictures will be discussed later, but there were many other instances of objectionable commercial amusements. In the case of entertainment, acceptability was often related to quality, but it was generally taken for granted that the moral and artistic quality of popular amusements was low. One Methodist minister warned against attending the commercial theatre, but stressed the redeeming qualities of amateur participation:

¹⁵ *Ottawa Journal*, 16 May 1896, 7.

¹⁶ In her book *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) Lynne Marks points to fraternal orders as “cross-class bastions of masculinity” (109) which were often criticized for their rough culture. Fraternal orders abounded in Ottawa and may have been subject to similar criticisms.

The theatre at its inception in Greece and India was good in intention and fairly good in actuality, but [Rev. Elliott] claimed that modern playwrights are hardly as a rule actuated by motives of elevation. He regarded the theatre as now tending to the degradation of humanity, rather than its elevation. He claimed, however, if theatricals can impress the worst, then they can impress the best. He urged that the church should give her young people theatrical performances in which every character is ideal and breathes equity, truth, love, purity and refinement.¹⁷

Other moralists were much more extreme in their rejection of commercial entertainments, but Rev. Elliott's position captures the popular concern that although art and literature were redeeming in principle, they became degrading when contaminated by commerce. The attendance of young people at entertainments was a particular cause for concern. The Ottawa Local Council of Women, at a meeting attended by Lady Aberdeen, passed this resolution: "That in the opinion of this Council the publicity, the self-consciousness and the late hours involved in public entertainments render participation in them by children and young girls detrimental to their physical, mental and moral development."¹⁸

As much as the immorality of commercial entertainment was criticized, so also was inartistic quality. One *Citizen* columnist complained about the coarse nature of popular theatre fare, and echoed the solution offered by a magazine article, suggesting that "the play-going public are prepared to pay double and treble the price for the

¹⁷ *Ottawa Journal*, 20 December 1895, 3.

¹⁸ *Ottawa Journal*, 4 February 1895, 5.

privilege of witnessing a good performance of a good play.”¹⁹ Certainly this was not the case for the *entire* play-going public, perhaps only applying to the most affluent for whom ticket prices were no consideration. Instead of allowing the quality of popular entertainment to be determined by the market, the writer promotes a manner of patronage which, although not exactly amateurism, has the result of excluding those with lower disposable incomes.

But opposition to commercial leisure activities was by no means universal; not everyone shared the middle-class aversion to self-indulgence. Discussing turn-of-the-century entertainments in Toronto, Keith Walden writes: “Traditionally, commercial attractions had flourished in and around the strongholds of sporting male culture. From saloons, pool rooms, gyms, dance halls and theatres, an increasing number of clerks, apprentices, and labourers with money to spend forged an aggressive masculine culture organized around gambling, alcohol, and sex.”²⁰ The Ottawa newspapers abound with disapproving references to the activities of this group. Their activities included the staging of clandestine, bare-fist boxing matches, cock fights and degrading behaviour in parks. During the summer months, articles in the *Journal* repeatedly complained of the presence of “loafers” on downtown corners:

Fifty young men were observed loafing on Sparks street between Bank

¹⁹ *Ottawa Citizen*, 6 November 1895, 4.

²⁰ Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 249-250.

and the post office last evening and this is only a percentage of the number that have been seen on the same street many evenings this summer. Not only on Sparks street are these loafers to be found. They are plentiful on Bank, Rideau and Wellington. Every respectable person knows what a loafer is and despises him.

. . . . He cares nothing whether he spits tobacco on the clothing of passers by or not and is not backward in using the most insulting language in the way of comment on pedestrians along the street. Respectable women are insulted nightly, not to speak of the horrible profane language they are forced to overhear.²¹

Since the newspapers reported the activities of “sporting male culture” in only the most critical terms, it is difficult to determine how representative these activities were of general working class amusements. For many working class people, though, amateurism wasn’t an attractive option, as it required investments in equipment, space and time, as well as a social hierarchy whose interests opposed their own.²²

Entrepreneurs were also less critical of commercial entertainments than other members of the middle and upper classes, who were more morally conservative. The shortening of the work-week and a growing urban population provided a new area of life to be commodified: sports and entertainment venues could be developed and then admissions charged. Networks of theatres or leagues of teams could be organized and provided with professionals to ensure high qualities of performance. As we will see, entrepreneurs in Ottawa were heavily involved in the commodification of leisure

²¹ *Ottawa Citizen*, 19 June 1895, 5.

²² Kidd, *Canadian Sport*, 27-29.

activities, but frequently in a qualified manner. Businessmen often balanced profit with charity, and worked to show how particular contexts of entertainment or sport could excuse their commercialization.

An examination of newspapers and city directories reveals a variety of venues which were devoted in some respect to leisure or commercial entertainment. Under the heading of “Amusements” in the Ottawa city directory for 1894-95 appear Dey’s skating rink, Lansdowne, Ottawa Electric and Kettle Island Parks, the Metropolitan Athletic Grounds and Mutchmor Driving Track along with the Grand Opera House.²³ To these might be added Grant’s Music Hall, the Rideau Skating rink and Rockliffe Park at the East end of the City which housed a merry-go-round and held band concerts several times per week during the summer of 1895. The following year, West End Park, where the first exhibition of the Vitascope took place, opened and replaced Rockliffe Park as one of the city’s foremost summer resorts. By including both parks and skating rinks with the Grand Opera House, under the subject of “Amusements”, it is clear that boundaries between commercial entertainment and more traditional leisure activities like skating and other sports were somewhat blurred.

Commercial entertainments in Ottawa were presented most regularly in the Grand Opera House or Grant’s Music Hall, although lectures or concerts charging admission were sometimes held in churches or community halls. It is difficult to ascertain exactly how the entertainment fare available in Ottawa compared to that of other cities that were approximately the same size. Some newspaper articles lamented that Ottawa could not

²³ *City of Ottawa Directory*, 1894-95, 424.

draw the biggest stars and performances because of the size of its theatres: “We see nothing of the New York attractions that Montreal gets a share of; we are simply sidetracked and entered as a one-horse town.”²⁴ Since Ottawa was not on an established theatre circuit or syndicate, theatre managers had to book their own acts, often travelling as far as New York for that purpose.²⁵ (When the Russell Theatre was constructed in 1897 and managed by a regional circuit, Ottawa was more able to attract first rate performers.²⁶) Sometimes local entrepreneurs arranged performances as well; P.D. Ross, owner and editor of the *Ottawa Journal*, was one of four investors who brought the famous singer Albani to Ottawa in February 1896. While this concert was a highly respectable event, and Albani was greeted by the cream of Ottawa society, it should be noted that Ross made a profit of \$321 on his endeavour.²⁷ Clearly, for individuals of Ross and Albani’s pedigree, acting as impresarios and professional performers, respectively, carried no moral or social stigma.

Those commercial entertainments which did appear in Ottawa varied a great deal in price, and therefore intended audience. At the high end of the scale were operatic repertory companies. An example of the most sophisticated type of entertainment to appear in Ottawa during the season before the arrival of cinema was the Roberti Opera Concert Co., which featured singers from the best opera companies in the world and a grand orchestra. Prices for this event ranged from 50c to \$1.50. An indication of the

²⁴ *Ottawa Free Press*, 19 January 1895, 5.

²⁵ *Ottawa Journal*, 15 May 1895, 1

²⁶ Mary M. Brown, “Entertainers of the Road,” in *Early Stages*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 131.

²⁷ P.D. Ross, Diary entry, 19 January 1896, Philip Dansken Ross fonds, MG 30 D98, vol. 4, National Archives of Canada.

social prestige of such concerts is found in their mention in weekly society columns, such as the *Journal's* "Entre Nous". Mostly concerned with the parties and gossip of the city's elite, this column rarely made any reference to commercial entertainments, making those occasions that it did so, such as the Roberti or Albani concerts, exceptional. Some concerts were also shown to be sophisticated by their association with a patron; in the case of the Roberti concert, this patron was Sir James Grant, a famous doctor and Member of Parliament.²⁸

Less prestigious artistically, but still appealing to a high class audience were grand travelling spectacular shows. Among these attractions which appeared in Ottawa some were plays with large companies and elaborate special effects, and many were magic shows, such as "Hermann: The Napoleon of Necromancers". An advance notice of this show made a special note of "novel electrical effects, special scenery and spectacular embellishments."²⁹ Prices for this event were the same as for the Roberti Opera Company. The latter certainly took precedence in terms of sophistication, but 'spectaculars' should not be discounted, particularly in view of the emphasis placed on electrical and special effects in these shows and their potential similarities with the cinema.

More reasonably priced shows also appeared in Ottawa, usually in the form of variety or comedy troupes. These groups, such as the Marks Bros. troupe or Harry Lindley's Company, were well-known in the city, having, apparently, appeared there before. They advertised inexpensive entertainments (10, 15, 25 cents) with a change of

²⁸ *Ottawa Journal*, 28 October 1895, 7.

²⁹ *Ottawa Journal*, 17 September 1895, 7

program every night to encourage return patronage. If there is a general distinction to be made between the different theatres in Ottawa, it is that Grant's Hall offered inexpensive shows, while the Grand Opera House featured more pricey entertainments: 25 cents would generally buy the best seats in Grant's Hall but only the poorest in the Grand.

Even less expensive were the burlesque houses which appeared occasionally in Ottawa. Neither the *City of Ottawa Directory*, nor any of the written histories about this period consulted, refer to such theatres operating in the city during the 1890s. Newspaper reports, however, prove that burlesque and 'musée' theatres met with some measure of success in Ottawa. The Wonderful Musée Theatre, also called the Wonderland, openly advertised Burlesque entertainment during the spring of 1894, presenting acts such as rifle shooting, boxing bears, freaks, skirt dances and young ladies "in marches and classic statuary".³⁰ Clearly directed towards a male audience, this sort of variety theatre was often criticized for its coarseness and open display of female sexuality.³¹ Ottawa press coverage, however, was generally positive. The *Journal* reported: "The stage performances are of much merit, while the price of admission, 10c. to all, places the Wonderland within the reach of all. Continuous performances all day to-morrow from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m."³² The fate of this theatre remains a mystery, as reports simply stopped appearing in the newspapers. Several months later, in November 1894, the Eden Musée opened on Rideau street in Lower Town and presented wax figures and stage

³⁰ *Ottawa Journal*, 19 April 1894, 7.

³¹ Gerald Lenton-Young, "Variety Theatre," in *Early Stages: Theatre in Ontario, 1800-1914*, ed. Anne Saddlemeier (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 194-195.

³² *Ottawa Journal*, 22 March 1894, 7.

performances; perhaps this was a new incarnation of the Wonderland, but as documentation is scarce, this is impossible to determine.

The range of different amusements and ticket prices offered in Ottawa suggests audiences of varying interests and affluence, but there were also cultural divisions in Ottawa which must be taken into consideration. While it is not surprising that little reference to francophone leisure activities in Ottawa appears in the English newspapers, there is a startling scarcity of such references in the two French dailies. There was no theatre in Ottawa or Hull devoted solely to the presentation of French entertainment; the only venue which seemed devoted to a primarily francophone audience was the Parc Perras in Hull, which offered mixed programs and novelty shows at relatively low prices (5-15 cents) during the summer of 1896. Advertisements for this park did not appear in the Anglophone dailies, and many of the performers' names were French.

Advertisements for Anglophone entertainments, however, did appear in the French papers quite frequently. In particular, performances at West End Park, including the Vitascope, were advertised regularly in *Le Temps*; the possibility of a francophone audience at early cinema performances will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. In general, however, it appears likely that middle- and upper-class Franco-Ottawans attended some popular amusements in the English theatres. If there were francophone commercial entertainments, aside from Parc Perras, they evaded the attention of the newspapers.

Patriotic Commerce

Clearly, the terrain of leisure and popular amusements in Ottawa was very complicated. Although quite varied in quality and cost, many people remained cautious about the contamination of leisure by commerce. In some circumstances, criticism was directed towards those who seemed to be profiting from events and activities that were once available for free. For Dominion Day celebrations in 1895, for example, some complained that the Electric Railway Company was gouging the public. One citizen wrote to the *Journal*:

People have to pay to see the sports in the afternoon, and then must travel out again at night to Lansdowne park if they wish to see the fireworks, and the word is pay again.

Why not have given the fireworks on Cartier Square? There is to me a very suspicious smell of the electric railway about these frequent excursions to Lansdowne Park.³³

Not only were sporting events being charged for, but a patriotic event had become a pretence for commercial gain. Another writer was much more direct in his criticism of this turn of events:

³³ *Ottawa Journal*, 26 June 1895, 5.

I understand that the fireworks on the evening of the 1st July are to be let off at Lansdowne Park and an admission of 10 cents charged.

Is this meant as another sop to the electric street railroad? It looks very like it

The electric railway people have nearly control of the city streets and apparently there is no other reason for not having the pyrotechnics on Cartier Square save to put money in the pockets of the electric railway company. . . .³⁴

These writers' criticisms went unanswered, at least in the *Journal*, but it is significant that the role of the Electric Railway Company as a purveyor of commercial entertainments for profit, rather than simply as a public service, was noted. Patriotic celebrations are of a slightly different class of entertainment than theatre or sports, but there is definitely a blurring of the boundaries here between commercial and non-commercial amusements. What is striking in this example is that the 'contamination' comes not from below – with 'male sporting culture' providing a demand for new and more daring entertainment – but from above, as entrepreneurs explicitly commodified amusement by eliminating qualitative distinctions between all sorts of entertainment. Why should entertainments be free on this particular day, when they were not on any other?

But even as distinctions between commercial entertainment and free leisure activities were increasingly eroded, patriotism and other special contexts were

³⁴ Ibid.

increasingly called on as mitigating circumstances in the pursuit of profit. One example of an event which had allegedly both commercial and socially redeeming elements was the Ottawa Winter Carnival, which took place in January 1895. While few would object to an event which was *actually* designed for patriotic ends, even fewer seemed to believe that this was the case with the carnival. Just beneath the justification of civic pride was another one: commerce. It was possible for some quarters of the community to justify the winter carnival, and all the excess that accompanied it, in terms of both immediate and future rewards. In the short term, local businesses would profit from the influx of tourists; in a longer view, the carnival would raise Ottawa's reputation as a burgeoning entrepreneurial and electrical centre, hopefully attracting capital and investors in the process. Other groups in the community, however, were less comfortable with the promotion of distracting entertainments purely for pleasure and profit.

A brief look at a couple of the events leading up to the winter carnival should completely dispel any doubts about its status as primarily a business venture. It is important to note right away that the capital required to organize and publicize the carnival was raised by subscription; that is to say, interested parties donated funds on the expectation that they would profit from the business generated by the event. The only public money used for the event was \$1000 contributed at the last minute for public lighting. The bulk of the rest of the money was raised by hotels, restaurants and small businesses. One vocal opponent of the carnival was Rev. Dr. Armstrong who objected to this manner of investment: "The subscription list showed who wanted the carnival most. The licensed victuallers and hotel keepers were being urged to pay more than they were

doing because they were the people to benefit most from the carnival.”³⁵ This observation is in spite of the fact that many of the subscribers declined having their names included in the publicized list for fear of drawing this exact criticism; while they may have avoided direct and personalized criticism, they were still subjected as a group to the disapproval of Armstrong and others like him.

A more emphatic example of the interests being promoted by the carnival (commercial *not* patriotic) is supplied by the debate over its possible cancellation following the sudden death of Canadian Prime Minister Sir John Thompson, on 12 December 1894. It was feared by some that the carnival would follow more closely on the late Prime Minister’s Funeral (which took place 3 January 1895) than was proper. One circulated petition stated: “It would be unseemly for any city in Canada to have a carnival this winter; but, of all places, Ottawa is the last city in the British Empire where high holiday should be held almost immediately after the solemn obsequies of one of its most illustrious citizens.”³⁶ This petition gained the support of Canada’s Governor-General, Lord Aberdeen, who urged the carnival committee at least to postpone the event. The carnival decided, after holding a public meeting, that this solution was neither popular nor financially feasible: “\$2,000 had been spent and very few were against the carnival.”³⁷ Lord Aberdeen withdrew his patronage of the event.

The disagreement with Lord Aberdeen, who was not only the ceremonial head of state but also, in many respects, the actual head of Ottawa ‘society’, indicates a

³⁵ *Ottawa Journal*, 10 December 1894, 5.

³⁶ *Ottawa Journal*, 19 December 1894, 8.

³⁷ *Ottawa Journal*, 27 December 1894, 8.

significant social division. Lord Aberdeen, and many other representatives of the government in Ottawa, could afford to value patriotism more highly than a business venture. For small businessmen in Ottawa, making a patriotic gesture of postponing the carnival in honour of Sir John would have had a tangible and significant cost. In the bitter aftermath of this dispute, Aberdeen proposed organizing (at a later date) a “grand entertainment” in Montreal, the proceeds of which would be distributed among the poor. The *Ottawa Journal* responded directly to this backhanded swipe at Ottawa businessmen: “The expenditure and proceeds of Ottawa’s coming winter entertainment will be distributed, not as pauper relief, but as respectable earnings among people who work for their living, and some of whom at present, need the work badly.”³⁸ Clearly, the winter carnival was, for many, first and foremost a commercial venture, and one of which they could be proud.

As we have seen, Ottawa at the end of the nineteenth century was a city with complex and contradictory attitudes towards leisure activities and their rapid commercialization. Entertainments and their audiences no doubt reflected the social and cultural fragmentation of the city as a whole. Middle and upper-class citizens patronized high class entertainments as well as their traditional amateur and voluntary associations; they displayed concern over the moral degradation of popular amusements that seemed to them to accompany professionalization and commodification. At the same time, entrepreneurs drawn from those same classes saw popular amusements as a business opportunity that they could exploit. Wary of the stigma accompanied by commercial entertainment, they couched their endeavours in terms of patriotic and (as we will see

³⁸ *Ottawa Journal*, 9 January 1895, 4.

later) scientific pursuits. For working class citizens, commercial entertainments, when affordable, were a welcome respite from work and domesticity. Francophones were both separate from yet implicated in middle class values and commercial entertainments. Smaller in population and commercial clout, French-speaking citizens had few options besides attending Anglo-Ottawan amusements. How moving pictures fit into this complex horizon of understanding remains to be seen. The next chapter will examine this question with respect to exhibitions of the Kinetoscope in Ottawa.

2. The Scientific Wonder of the Age

By 1894, citizens of Ottawa had been exposed to a wide range of commercial and scientific entertainments. From grand theatrical entertainments at the Opera House to the variety burlesque shows at the Wonderland Musée, to the electrical illumination of parks and other public places, the way leisure, commerce and technology combined was changing. Like the complex and contradictory opinions people held about these experiences – educational and uplifting or base and degrading – the new inventions themselves were advertised and exploited in multifaceted ways. This was the case with the Kinetoscope, as the combination of respectable, local entrepreneurs, the well-known name of ‘Edison’, and racy subject matter in films produced complex public responses. This chapter will examine the exploitation and reception of the Kinetoscope in Ottawa.

While a detailed account of the history of the Kinetoscope lies outside of the scope of this study, a brief description of important facts and events may be useful.¹ The principle of the Kinetoscope – a strip of photographically reproduced images, illuminated and animated to reproduce motion for a viewer – is basically the same as modern cinema.

¹ See Musser’s *The Emergence of Cinema and Edison Motion Pictures, 1890-1900: An Annotated Filmography* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997); Hendricks’ *Origins of the American Film*; and, Ray Phillip’s *Edison’s Kinetoscope and Its Films* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997).

The primary difference is that while cinema, as we know it today, consists of images that are projected upon a screen for many people to view simultaneously, the Kinetoscope was a peepshow device which viewers experienced individually, peering through the glass slit of a wooden cabinet. Of course, there have been other significant advances, such as increased length of films, and the introduction of synchronized sound and natural colour, but there can be no doubt that the Kinetoscope was a very close predecessor of projected moving pictures. Generally speaking, the Kinetoscope experienced a brief but very intense popularity; introduced in April 1894, its popularity was already waning by the end of the year.

The history of the Kinetoscope in Canada is all but unwritten. In Gordon Hendricks' history of the machine, dates are given of some Canadian exhibitions: Montreal (15 November 1894), St. Thomas, Ontario (24 November 1894), Halifax (11 December 1894), and Ottawa (7 February 1894).² Although drawn from archival records, there is reason to doubt some of this information. In Ottawa, an exhibition took place starting on 3 November 1894, but there is no evidence of the Kinetoscope appearing there in February. Completely excluded is any reference to exhibitions in Toronto. Robert Gutteridge provides evidence that Kinetoscopes *may* have appeared in Toronto as early as September 1894, but were certainly there in December of that year and then again several months later.³ Omissions and brief references aside, there is certainly no thorough examination of the exploitation and reception of the Kinetoscope in a Canadian city.

² Hendricks, 64-69.

³ Robert Gutteridge, *Magic Moments*, 3-5.

Although the Kinetoscope first appeared in Ottawa on 3 November 1894, the Ottawa connection to Edison's Kinetoscope began much earlier; in fact, it probably represents the best known example of Canadian involvement in early film history. Andrew Holland, of Ottawa, was a partner in the Kinetoscope Company, a consortium of entrepreneurs hired by Thomas Edison to manage the commercial exploitation of his new invention.⁴ On 14 April 1894 Andrew and his brother George C. Holland, opened the first commercial Kinetoscope parlour at 1155 Broadway in New York. The enterprise was an instant success and Edison complimented the brothers on their work, writing on 1 May 1894, "I am pleased that the first public exhibition of my Kinetoscope has been a success under your management, and hope your firm will continue to be associated with its further exploitation."⁵

The Holland brothers did, indeed, continue to be associated with Edison through the Kinetoscope era and, as we will see later, up to the introduction of the Vitascope. As the Kinetoscope grew in popularity more parlours were opened. Norman C. Raff and Frank R. Gammon controlled the Kinetoscope Company, which in August 1894 was granted exclusive rights for selling Kinetoscopes in North America.⁶ The Holland Bros. acted as agents, operating some parlours themselves, but also selling equipment and films

⁴The organization of the Kinetoscope Company was somewhat convoluted; the most coherent and persuasive account of their activities, which I rely on here, is in Charles Musser's *The Emergence of Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 81-82.

⁵ Edison to Holland Bros., 1 May 1894, Thomas Alva Edison fonds, MG 29 B 8, National Archives of Canada.

⁶ Musser, *Emergence*, 82.

to individual entrepreneurs.⁷ They were familiar with this type of enterprise because they had acted as Edison's agents in Canada for the North American Phonograph Co. since at least 1891.⁸ It was in this capacity that they introduced phonographs into the federal civil service, where they had already championed the use of typewriters. Extremely active entrepreneurs, the Holland Bros. were, in addition to those interests mentioned above, at various times owners and editors of the *Ottawa Citizen*, official Senate reporters, real-estate speculators, and Jersey bull farmers.⁹

First Exhibition: November 1894

The Kinetoscope's first appearance in Ottawa passed with little attention from the English newspapers, and no comment at all from the two francophone dailies. Whether this is an indication of its failure in the city or simply that it appealed to an audience which did not read these newspapers is difficult to determine. From those pieces of information which are available – reviews, venue, films shown – along with contextual information already discussed, it may yet be possible to deduce what sort of audience attended the Kinetoscope exhibitions and how they comprehended them.

“The Kinetoscope is here,” pronounced the *Ottawa Citizen* on 2 November 1894.¹⁰ The article reveals that a “well-known citizen,” – one of the Holland Bros. no doubt – had received one of the devices from New York and would begin exhibiting it the

⁷ Gordon Hendricks, *The Kinetoscope in Origins of the American Film* (New York: Arno, 1972), 64-65.

⁸ *Canadian Electrical News*, Vol. I, 8 (Aug. 1891): iii.

⁹ *Ottawa Journal*, 27 February 1923, 7.

¹⁰ *Ottawa Citizen*, 2 November 1894, 8.

following day. The exhibition took place at “the new Perley block”, 55 Sparks street, near Elgin in the heart of Upper Town’s commercial district. The building was named for George Perley, an Ottawa lumber dealer and the president of the Journal Printing Company.¹¹ This was a good location and a logical choice since the Holland Bros. had previous business dealings with Perley when George Holland had helped in the founding of the *Journal* in 1885.¹² Near one of the busiest corners in the city, the Holland Bros. could rely on pedestrian traffic to patronize their exhibition, which perhaps explained the lack of newspaper advertising.

According to the reports, a viewer could pay 10 cents to see a single scene on the Kinetoscope, which was a rather high price for such a brief entertainment.¹³ At the original Kinetoscope parlour in New York, one 25 cent ticket entitled a patron to a row of five Kinetoscopes.¹⁴ With this set-up, a variety of different films could be seen, or a single long subject broken into several parts; in either case, the entertainment was prolonged. At the Ottawa exhibition, only one machine was available – with four different scenes to choose from – and a dime would purchase at most three minutes’ entertainment.¹⁵ What does this indicate about the Kinetoscope’s patronage? To those searching for affordable entertainment, the Wonderland Musée had provided two hours

¹¹ *Ottawa City Directory* (1894-1895).

¹² Lucien Brault, *Ottawa Old and New* (Ottawa: Ottawa Historical Information Institute, 1946), 203.

¹³ *Ottawa Journal*, 3 November 1894, 7.

¹⁴ Hendricks, *Kinetoscope*, 58.

¹⁵ See Appendix for list of films and length.

worth for the same price of 10 cents.¹⁶ Perhaps customers were willing to pay a premium for the thrill of seeing part of a famous boxing match, or simply witnessing the new Edison invention, but it is certainly tenable to suggest that the Kinetoscope was directed primarily towards a middle-class audience.

The *Citizen* article claimed that the Kinetoscope in Ottawa was the first one to be exhibited in Canada, and would be the only one for several months, but there is ample reason to question these statements. Evidence of other exhibitions in both the Gutteridge and Hendricks studies certainly casts doubt on these claims; nor was exaggeration and hyperbole out of keeping with the advertising style of the period. The description of the invention that appeared in this article is also conspicuously brief (and erroneous). Referred to as “Edison’s latest invention,” the article explains that, “the Kinetoscope is able to take 47 photographs in a minute, and thus reproduce in detail a whole round of a prize fight.”¹⁷ Was the writer presuming that his reader had heard or read of this invention before, and therefore no further description was required? Although this is the first specific reference to Kinetoscopes I have located in an Ottawa publication, it seems likely from the language of the article that readers were assumed to have been familiar with the device already, and therefore be excited about its introduction to Ottawa before any other Canadian city.

The only film-subject matter described in this article is also highly telling. Who would be interested in a machine’s ability to reproduce in detail a “whole round of a prize

¹⁶ *Ottawa Journal*, 22 March 1894, 7.

¹⁷ *Ottawa Citizen*, 2 November 1894, 8. The description is obviously incorrect; more likely, it was supposed to say that the Kinetoscope took 47 photographs per *second*.

fight” if not those same men who attended the “amateur” and “scientific” boxing matches discussed in Chapter One? Like the language of those reports, this article veils the commercial entertainment quality of this attraction by describing it in scientific terms as the “marvellous new invention of the ‘Wizard of Menlo Park’”. By attributing the Kinetoscope to this famous inventor of phonographs and electric lights, the author implicitly associated this new invention with technological progress and electrification.

An article appearing in the *Journal* the following day described the Kinetoscope and its subject matter in much more detail.¹⁸ More of a review than the *Citizen* article, this report allegedly described the journalist’s own impressions of the machine. Like the *Citizen* article, however, the *Journal* review begins by associating the machine with Edison and technological progress: “Edison’s Wonderful Kinetoscope is Here. The latest and greatest of the electricity wizard’s inventions is now within reach of all Ottawans.” But even as these newspaper descriptions invoked a rational program of technological progress, they also subtly undermined it, with their reference to Edison’s “wizardry”. The *Journal* reporter goes further in his description: “Outwardly it looks simply like a prettily finished stand. All the magic is within.” But the author later returns to the rational mode in a fairly thorough description of the workings of the Kinetoscope, prefaced by the remark: “The Kinetoscope is admitted by all to be the scientific wonder of the age.”

In addition to those articles which directly promoted the exhibition taking place at 55 Sparks Street, a story discussing the Kinetoscope appeared in the “Science and Progress” column of the *Journal* on the 13 November. Here, Edison is praised for his

¹⁸ *Ottawa Journal*, 3 November 1894, 7.

technological triumph of combining sound with moving pictures. By publishing this article during the Kinetoscope's exhibition in Ottawa, the promoters were able to ensure that the public continued to associate Edison and his projects with the cutting edge of technological innovation.¹⁹

Seemingly contradictory, this vacillation between the scientific and the magical reveals the destabilizing influence of commodification and the fear of social change felt at the end of the nineteenth century. More than simple hyperbole, these descriptions of Edison and his new invention tapped into what has already been shown to be caution among many over the commercialization of leisure. Without an obvious utilitarian value, viewers had no choice but to accept the promoter's word that their expenditure qualified as rational recreation. Keith Walden discusses this concern in terms of "confidence": "For masses of people who no longer knew who produced what they used, what they wore, what they ate, questions of confidence arose at every turn. Advances of the modern age seemed to multiply uncertainties. . . . With the exploration of remote corners of the globe, who knew what wonders were being discovered? Who could predict what secrets were being unlocked by science?"²⁰ To alleviate this crisis, Walden suggests, people turned to recognizable brand-names; in science this meant Edison. Although purportedly a "magician" and obviously an entertainer, Edison's reputation as an inventor-

¹⁹ There is no direct evidence that the Holland Bros. planted this article, but the coincidence is highly suspicious. In addition, nearly identical articles appeared in the *Journal* and *Free Press* only a few days before. It was quite common for promoters to provide 'puff' pieces about their show to the press, and the Holland Bros. long involvement with Ottawa newspapers certainly would have provided them with even more privileged access to this sort of promotion.

²⁰ Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, 87.

entrepreneur generally assuaged the public's fear of being taken advantage of.²¹ In a world of confusing social, cultural and economic changes, the public could count on Edison to present perplexing scientific discoveries in comprehensible and consumable (and entertaining) ways.

Ironically, one of the Kinetoscope films exhibited in Ottawa played on that very fear of being duped. Edison's film "The Barber Shop" was among the films mentioned in the *Journal* review, and according to Charles Musser it poked fun at the viewer himself. The film shows a barber shop with a customer in the chair and the barber pointing to a sign which reads, "The Latest Wonder: Shave and Hair Cut for a Nickel". As Musser points out, the sign creates an affinity between the shave and the Kinetoscope, which is promoted using the same language and in many places also cost only a nickel. The film then shows the complete action of a man being shaved: "Yet if the man has been relieved of his whiskers, the viewer has also been relieved of his cash. The viewer can recognize himself as a kind of "lobster" – that is he has been "burned" or outwitted in a P. T. Barnum kind of way."²² The joke points out that in contrast to getting a shave at a barber shop, spending money on the Kinetoscope is not particularly productive: the machine is entertaining, not utilitarian. But as it is formulated ironically, this joke doesn't necessarily overturn the scientific claims made by the machine's advertisements. The reviews would

²¹ Of course to some, Edison was the ultimate confidence man; in *The Edison Motion Picture Myth* (1961), for example, Gordon Hendricks argues that Edison's assistant W. K. L. Dickson was the actual inventor of motion pictures.

²² Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 26-27. Unless otherwise specified, descriptions of the films are drawn from this filmography.

suggest that the particular subject matter of the films was secondary in importance to the impressive nature of the machine itself.

But even if the films were less important in the machine's exploitation, their subject matter is striking and deserves a brief examination. In addition to the barber shop scene discussed above, the films named by the newspaper reviews include: "Blacksmithing Scene", "3 Girls Dancing" and "The Corbett-Courtney Fight".²³ It is immediately apparent that all of these scenes imply a masculine audience. The barber and blacksmith scenes both depict exclusively male domains. Set primarily in working spaces, both of these films show elements of socializing as well; the blacksmiths take drinks from a bottle before starting work and, in the barber shop, two additional men are present in the frame, lounging while they wait to be shaved. The "Corbett-Courtney Fight" raises those issues around male sporting culture and amateurism already discussed; extremely famous at the time, these two men were both prize fighters and commercial entertainers. Edison himself was investigated for holding an illegal boxing match in order to produce this film, but the charges were dismissed.²⁴

The film of the girls dancing may seem the least homosocial of the films here, particularly from the reviewer's description in the *Journal*: "The reporter saw a ballet dance. There were three figures in the view and every motion of the dancers was perfectly reproduced. Even the slightest folds of the dancers' fluffy skirts were shown. The view was quite as good as a ballet at an opera house."²⁵ But even as this writer

²³ Drawn from *Ottawa Journal*, 3 and 8 November 1894, and identified in Musser's filmography.

²⁴ Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 120-122.

²⁵ *Ottawa Journal*, 3 November 1894, 7.

praised the realism and artistic quality of the film, it should be noted that the girls were not permitted to perform this way in the burlesque show, 1492. The mayor of New York decided that these child actors could perform a series of poses, but that it would be indecent for them to dance.²⁶ Obviously, the mayor's ruling was not applied to the Kinetoscope film. Burlesque shows which catered primarily to a male audience, such as those presented at the Wonderland, often presented scantily clad women in tableaux or dance and constantly pushed the boundaries of public acceptability in the interest of sexual titillation.²⁷ A week after the Kinetoscope arrived in Ottawa, the *Journal* published an editorial calling on the banning of "florid posters of scantily clad female figures put up to herald some travelling theatrical companies."²⁸ The author complains that the posters were "generally intended to give people the idea that the show will be as near indecency as the law will allow. The usual effect is to draw a certain class of the public to the theatre hoping to see indecency or the nearest legal approach to it." Edison's film evidently had much in common with those posters described in the *Journal*; perhaps readers attuned to variety theatre would have inferred this from the review.

Although the films themselves seemed to appeal primarily to a masculine audience and perhaps even pushed the boundaries of moral entertainment, no criticism of the Kinetoscope appeared in the newspapers. Articles which appeared in both the *Journal* and *Free Press* even went so far as to claim that "These dancing views are especially attractive to ladies and children, large numbers of whom have already admired them."²⁹

²⁶ Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 112-113.

²⁷ Lenton-Young, "Variety Theatre," 194.

²⁸ *Ottawa Journal*, 10 November 1894, 4.

²⁹ *Ottawa Free Press*, 10 November 1894, 7.

While the exact duplication of this remark in two newspapers calls its objectivity into doubt, it is possible that women and children were patronizing the Kinetoscope. Musser suggests that women experienced the films in a unanticipated way: "Female voyeurism was unexpectedly mobilized, within a socially acceptable framework. . . They gained access, however limited, to the male homosocial world from which they had either been excluded or kept at the periphery."³⁰ In this manner, women were able to witness boxing matches or skirt dances without the stigma and moral peril of appearing in the venues which presented these entertainments live.

Musser goes on to argue that "the powers of photographic mediation took the "curse of presence" off many types of amusements when shown via motion pictures." But perhaps this breaking down of the barriers between male sporting culture and respectable middle and upper-class values did not extend to the most conservative elements of society discussed in the previous chapter. Although there is no evidence of mobilized opposition to the films in Ottawa, a series of newspaper articles discussing Lady Somerset and the American Women's Christian Temperance Union appeared shortly after the Kinetoscope exhibitions. Lady Somerset denied that she was visiting the United States to assist in a fight against motion pictures: "I will allow the American women to fight this matter out on their own ground," said she. "I shall only hope to sympathize with and help them as I can. Members of the WCTU have already begun to battle against the exhibition in Washington, Cleveland and Pittsburgh."³¹ Given this movement, it is somewhat surprising that women in Ottawa did not mobilize in a similar way. Maybe the

³⁰ Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures*, 36-37.

³¹ *Ottawa Journal*, 30 November 1894, 5.

scientific language of the Kinetoscope reviews and advertisements were successful in deflecting criticism from the machine's racy commercial amusements.

It is unclear how long the Kinetoscope stayed in Ottawa and how many viewed it on its first appearance. Almost identical articles appeared in the *Journal* and *Free Press* after the machine had been on display for about a week, which claimed that thousands had seen it. The writer urged the public to hurry and see the Kinetoscope as it would be on exhibition only a short time longer.³² This may have been a trick to boost sales while the Kinetoscope lingered in the city for weeks longer, but without any further references to its exhibition in Ottawa it is impossible to tell. Perhaps this is the Kinetoscope machine that was taken to Montreal where Hendricks suggests it was displayed on 15 November.

Second Exhibition: November 1895

The Kinetoscope reappeared in Ottawa on 2 November 1895, almost exactly one year after its first appearance in the city. During this second visit, the Holland Brothers exhibited ten machines in a store at the corner of Sparks and Elgin streets. Although they received more regular press attention than the previous year, it was of a different quality in some respects. Articles and advertisements continued to emphasize the scientific quality of the machines, but they made absolutely no reference to the content of the films themselves. Whether this was a self-conscious strategy intended to reduce public criticism or simply an indication of the greater significance of the device itself is

³² *Ottawa Free Press*, 10 November 1894, 7.

impossible to determine. Once again, however, it is worth examining the articles and advertisements in detail.

Unlike the previous year, the Kinetoscopes were advertised by one-line announcements with a fair amount of regularity during their return to Ottawa. On 2 November 1895, similar statements appeared in the *Journal*, *Citizen* and *Le Canada*. The *Journal* wrote: “Messers. Holland Bros., agents for Edison's Kinetoscope, are exhibiting ten machines at the corner of Elgin and Sparks streets, prior to shipping them to India and Japan. Do not fail to see Edison's latest novelty. It's perfectly wonderful.”³³ It is striking that the Kinetoscope is still referred to as a novelty; does this imply that most people were unfamiliar with the device, or was it simply a slogan used by Edison to cement his reputation as a purveyor of progress? The brevity of description certainly implies familiarity with the invention on the part of the reader. While this knowledge could refer only to the newspaper-reading public, particularly those who had read about or attended the exhibition the previous year, it may have a wider significance. Since no reference to the Kinetoscope appeared in francophone dailies during its visit in 1894, the brief announcement here implies a circulation of ideas between different segments of Ottawa's population and beyond.³⁴ While this may seem a self-evident point to make, it is an important reminder of the extremely incomplete picture of events provided by the newspapers themselves. Rather than reading daily papers as an incontestable narrative of

³³ *Ottawa Journal*, 2 November 1895, 7.

³⁴ The announcement which appeared in *Le Canada* on 2 November 1895, 2, reads: “Dix Kinetoscopes, la dernière invention d'Edison, ont été mis en place hier, pour le bénéfice du public, au coin des rues Sparks et Elgin.”

events, they should be viewed as indexes to the more general “social horizon of understanding” present among groups of the city’s inhabitants.

Although these announcements, which were repeated occasionally throughout the next two weeks, were brief, more detailed descriptions of the Kinetoscope exhibition appeared elsewhere: “In the Kinetoscope parlour at the corner of Sparks and Elgin streets, are ten machines, each of which reproduces a scene. You pay five cents for a ticket, which entitles you to a view of any one scene of the ten. You hand it to the young lady in attendance, who turns an electrical switch.”³⁵ As the article notes, the ticket price for the Kinetoscope was only 5 cents, half of what had been charged the previous year. With ten machines available, the parlour also presented more variety, either for viewers to choose one film out of a greater selection, or to view several and enjoy a longer amusement.

This same article discusses some of the (quasi-)scientific qualities of the Kinetoscope, describing it as “the most popular scientific toy of the age”. This portrayal of the machine would seem to undercut any suggestion that the Kinetoscope represented a genuine contribution to science, in much the same way the language of Edison’s “magic” had done. Perhaps the “scientific toy” was much like the “scientific boxing” described in the previous chapter; “science” implied no particular rigour on the part of the spectator, only that the application of rational intellect at some stage of the amusement’s development redeemed what would otherwise be brutish or bawdy entertainment.

But the writer also describes the Kinetoscope in terms of “Edison’s failure” to join together reproduced moving images with synchronized reproduced sound, despite

³⁵ *Ottawa Journal*, 5 November 1895, 8.

repeated – and one would imagine “scientific” – experiments. (This is a striking subject for an article since the opposite claim appeared in an article during the Kinetoscope’s visit to Ottawa the previous year. And Edison had released the kinetophone, which combined, but didn’t synchronize images and sounds, for commercial exploitation in spring 1895.)³⁶ The article describes the workings of the device in detail and urges the reader, despite the fact that the machine is a ‘failure’, to see it for himself. The following day an anonymous writer disputed the claim that the Kinetoscope was a failure, providing yet another opportunity to plug the exhibition taking place.³⁷ Although it is possible that these articles were genuine news, it is also plausible that they were encouraged, or even supplied by the Holland Brothers themselves.

Another story about the Kinetoscope in the newspapers could be interpreted as an attempt on the Holland Bros. part to convince the public of the scientific and educational value of the Kinetoscope. On 12 November the *Citizen* reported: “Yesterday was a great day for the orphans of the Protestant and St. Patrick’s homes. They were treated by Messers. Holland Bros. to a view at the Kinetoscope in the parlour at the corner of Sparks and Elgin streets, and the way the youngsters appreciated the entertainment can only be imagined by those who were present to hear their exclamations of joy and delight.”³⁸ This action not only provided another occasion for newspaper coverage, but also showed the educational value of the machine and the community concern of the exhibitors.

At the same time the Kinetoscope was being exhibited – and the Holland Bros.

³⁶ Philips, *Edison’s Kinetoscope*, 76.

³⁷ *Ottawa Journal*, 6 November 1895, 7.

³⁸ *Ottawa Citizen*, 12 November 1895, 8.

lauded for exposing the city's orphan's to such an educational experience – another entertainment in the city was defending its own uplifting nature. The “Holy Land Panorama Show” was fined for unlawfully giving an exhibition of pictures, and charging an entrance fee.³⁹ The exhibitor, however, “contended that [the show] is a religious institution just as much as a church where holy relics are exposed to view for a consideration, or like the Salvation army barracks at some times and places on Sunday where an admission fee of ten cents is collected by the tambourine holders at the door.”⁴⁰ Ottawa's magistrate was not convinced that this was the case, and informed the exhibitors that they would have to pay two dollars a day for a license to remain open. Outraged, and unable to afford the license fee, the exhibition left the city, complaining “that this is the most inhospitable place they have ever struck, for in other towns where they exhibited and lectured in churches no license fee was asked or given.”⁴¹ Ottawa, like many cities, was concerned about the appearance of travelling entertainers and confidence men, and obviously imposed license fees which made it extremely difficult for such performers to operate profitably. It is impossible to determine how much, if any, the Holland Bros. had to pay in order to display the Kinetoscope in Ottawa, but they no doubt benefited from being well known and respectable local businessmen. While there was certainly a fine line between what was considered uplifting or educational and what was not – or indeed, what constituted an entrance fee – the exploitation of the Kinetoscope in Ottawa was more successful than the Holy Land Panorama Show in reassuring local citizens and

³⁹ *Ottawa Free Press*, 1 November 1895, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ottawa Free Press*, 31 October 1895, 7.

⁴¹ *Ottawa Free Press*, 5 November 1895, 7.

lawmakers.

There can be no doubt that those who saw moving pictures in Kinetoscopes would have been well prepared for the projected films eventually shown at West End Park. Audience members well acquainted with electrical and visual novelties such as the Kinetoscope were unlikely to have been shocked by the Vitascope. Rather, they had a variety of experiences within which their film viewing could be contextualized. By the time the Vitascope arrived in Ottawa, in 1896, it is likely that even if only a small proportion of the population had seen a Kinetoscope film (one article suggests that about one tenth of Ottawans had seen it at the beginning of November 1895), most had read about them in the newspaper or magazines and so were familiar with the concept.⁴²

But determining how the Kinetoscope was understood as a popular amusement is somewhat more problematic. Although described as a “scientific toy”, we should not forget that the subjects shown in the films were often drawn from the world of theatre and burlesque. This does not mean, however, that the audience imagined the Kinetoscope as a narrative medium. In an article called “The New Picture Play: An Absolute Novelty in Fiction and Photography”, syndicated columnist Arthur Stedman described a novel attempt to depict an entire fictitious narrative using photographic illustrations in the form of dissolving stereopticon views. The director, Alexander Black, planned for dialogue to be read while the views were projected on a screen at the rate of about three per minute. “In fact,” Stedman wrote, “he wanted to illustrate art with life, using artistic devices very

⁴² *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 November 1895, 8.

sparingly, and always thinking first of simple, natural effects.”⁴³ While this relationship between cinema and artistic realism has been noted by many theorists, most famously by André Bazin, it is important to note that this was not the attitude towards the Kinetoscope in 1894.

The attraction of Edison’s new machine did not lie with its capacity for delivering narrative information so much as with its novelty and its ability to reproduce famous and shocking theatrical acts. Perhaps the wax reproductions that arrived in Ottawa in 1894 about a week after the Kinetoscope were close to this genre of entertainment. When they appeared at the Eden Musée, along with a number of stage performances, the wax figures were praised for their artistic quality. But the figures depicted were of a sensational, even gruesome quality, “including among others Criminal execution in Spain, and hanging in Canada. The guillotine of France is also shown.”⁴⁴ The multinational quality of the figures on display could conceivably have provided promoters with the respectable pretense of offering spectators both a historical and ethnographic education. Vanessa Schwartz points out that “[t]he [wax] museum offered its spectators the ability to travel...to colonial settings – compressing space in keeping with other modern technologies such as the railway and the telegraph.” Reproducing events realistically, wax displays presented “a sort of ‘instant and living history’.”⁴⁵ Like the Kinetoscope, elements combined in the wax figures to produce an unstable association between scientific and commercial representation.

⁴³ *Ottawa Free Press*, 10 November 1894, 11.

⁴⁴ *Ottawa Journal*, 12 November 1894, 8.

⁴⁵ Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 135.

Although these two qualities – the scientific and commercial – may have been in conflict for the public viewing the Kinetoscope films, ‘rational’ representation and persistent salesmanship on the part of exhibitors successfully deflected criticism in Ottawa. Another aspect of Kinetoscope viewing to take into consideration is that spectators were isolated subjects, individuals rather than members of a mass audience. Jonathan Crary writes: “Edison saw the marketplace in terms of how images, sounds, energy, or information could be reshaped into measurable and distributable commodities and how a social field of individual subjects could be arranged into increasingly separate and specialized units of consumption. The logic that supported the Kinetoscope and the phonograph [was] ... the structuring of perceptual experience in terms of a solitary rather than a collective subject...”⁴⁶

In Ottawa, this solitary experience could have enabled the co-existence of a variety of viewing experiences among spectators who weren’t forced to rub shoulders in the same audience. For some, the Kinetoscope may have been a new educational discovery, while for others it provided access to racy or forbidden subject matter. When projected moving pictures came to Ottawa during the summer of 1896, individual spectatorship was replaced with a more collective experience. How the conflicting public discourses of science, commerce and leisure adapted to this new collective scenario in Ottawa will be the subject of the next chapter.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 31-32. Crary is likely referring to the popular coin-in-slot phonographs which were used by individual patrons wearing earphones.

3. Stolen From the Realm of Night

“The citizens of Ottawa and of Rat Portage are boasting of their enlightenment – there being, it is said, in each of these places, one incandescent lamp in operation for every unit of population.”¹

Many film historians have remarked on the powerful forces of modernity (industrialization, urbanization, mass culture) that swept the west in the last decades of the nineteenth century, changing people’s experiences of urban life, work and leisure. Although these are often seen to be somewhat monolithic forces – which crossed space in a flash, radiating out from London, Paris and New York – “modernity” can also be seen in terms of small and localized trends. While each place, each city, was forced to come to terms with many of the same influences, its own idiosyncrasies shattered the monolithic forces into infinite instances of the specific. In each city, the citizen’s “horizon of experience” differed slightly in some respects and drastically in others. In each place,

¹ *Canadian Electrical News*, Vol. V, 10 (October 1895): 170.

business factors and social relations combined in unique ways to colour the way new inventions were received.

The diffusion of projected motion pictures took a route similar to other examples of the modern. From its invention (more or less simultaneous) in New York, Paris, London and Berlin, this new technological wonder radiated outward, to smaller cities and more provincial audiences. While the films these exhibitors carried with them may have been the same as those shown to metropolitan audiences, we can expect that the experience of citizens in smaller cities was quite different. The suggestion that a technology's use or reception can vary from place to place is by no means unique to the cinema. "The telephone, in its own curious way, held up a mirror to its adoptive society. It was introduced in different but quite fitting ways in various places."² For example, it was first introduced to and used by bankers and businessmen in Hamilton, while in Montreal, a group of Roman Catholic bishops and priests listened to a musical program. In Nova Scotia, the first telephone line connected a mine with its office. How then was cinema tailored to its adoptive audience in Ottawa?

It has already been noted (in Chapter One) that Ottawa's business and social organization was rather fragmented, given shape by the "stuck on" identities of the lumber trade and the federal government. A corollary to this remark is that while the dominating elements of the city were "stuck on", the underlying aspirations of the city and its "permanent" citizens were often frustrated. Ambitious schemes (often centred around canal or railroad development) which were intended to boost Ottawa's economic

² Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *Monopoly's Moment*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 67.

significance in the Dominion found powerful opponents in Montreal and Toronto business leaders. The lumber barons and parliamentarians who resided in Ottawa often found their interests at odds with those of the local business elite.³ Perhaps this is one reason why some citizens of Ottawa often made bold forays into the exploitation of modernity itself; with each new invention or commodity that arrived came an opportunity for Ottawa entrepreneurs to seize control of a market not yet monopolized by Montreal or Toronto. With modernity, came another chance for Ottawa to distinguish itself as a city from the inside rather than have another distinction imposed upon it from outside. Certainly, many new technologies were found in Montreal or Toronto first, such as tramways and gaslights, but they soon found their way to Ottawa. In fact, thanks to the industriousness of two electrical entrepreneurs in particular, Thomas Ahearn and Warren Soper, Ottawa soon gained a reputation as being technologically progressive. This pair installed one of the country's first electric streetcar systems in 1891 and, along with other local capitalists, notably the M.P.P. Erskine Bronson, by the mid-1890s had gained control over almost all of the electrical utilities in the city.⁴

Although cinema and its precursors differed in significant ways from public utilities and communications inventions such as electrical lights, streetcars and telephones, their exploitation shared certain things in common. Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles point out:

³ Taylor, *Ottawa*, 75-81.

⁴ *Ibid*, 102.

The new technologies did not have to begin *de novo* in a primitive, indifferent, or unreceptive environment. The press and the theatre of science had already prepared public opinion and cultivated a taste for these symbols of modernity among private individuals, corporate bodies, and municipal corporations; existing institutions provided the footings for the new structures to be erected. We have observed, too, a certain amount of cross-ownership between the new utilities as individual capitalists became involved in more than one sector or more than one city.⁵

All of these claims held true for cinema. The Ottawa Electric Railway company played a very direct role in the introduction of cinema, which will be examined later. This chapter, however, will examine how street cars, electric illumination and other modern innovations reflected or even transformed the way Ottawans saw the world around them.

Modernity and Mental Life in Ottawa

The effect of modern technologies upon the psyche of citizens in crowded urban metropolises has been noted by sociologists and film historians alike. Ben Singer writes, “Amid the unprecedented turbulence of the big city’s traffic, noise, billboards, street signs, jostling crowds, window displays, and advertisements, the individual faced a new intensity of sensory stimulation. The metropolis subjected the individual to a barrage of impressions, shocks and jolts. The tempo of life also became more frenzied, sped up by

⁵ Armstrong and Nelles, *Monopoly's Moment*, 91-92.

new forms of rapid transportation, the pressing schedules of modern capitalism, and the ever-accelerating pace of the assembly line.”⁶ It is easy to imagine how this may have been the case in large metropolises – New York, Paris, London – which had populations in the hundreds of thousands, or millions, but it seems less plausible in Ottawa.⁷ With a population of only 45,000 (60,000 including Hull), Ottawa was obviously an urban centre, but not of the same class as these others mentioned.

There were, however, some indications of nervousness and over-stimulation in reaction to the introduction of modern technologies in and around Ottawa. This anxiety often took the form of confusion at the un-known (and un-knowable?) nature of electricity itself. Stories about nervous or disastrous encounters with electricity appeared frequently in daily newspapers, and were often reprinted in a trade magazine, the *Canadian Electrical News*. One such anecdote appeared in the May 1891 issue: “A Pembroke lunatic started out to shoot a citizen of that town the other day for the alleged offence of exercising undue influence upon him by means of a galvanized battery or other electrical apparatus. The would-be murderer was “switched off” to the county jail.”⁸ Although the tone of this article is clearly tongue-in-cheek, the possibility of technology overtaking one’s sanity and turning them into a “lunatic” may have reflected a genuine concern: electricity exercising some sort of unknown or “undue influence”.

⁶ Ben Singer, “Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism,” in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Eds. Charney and Schwarz, 73. Singer is paraphrasing the writings of Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin.

⁷ Indeed, anyone who has had dealings with the federal bureaucracy in Ottawa would find the characterization of the tempo of life there as “frenzied” extremely implausible.

⁸ *Canadian Electrical News*, Vol. I, 5 (May 1891): iv.

Electricity was, in many respects, an unknown quantity; Edison himself famously described it as “a mysterious fluid about which nothing is known.”⁹ The conflation of science and magic which accompanied the exploitation of the Kinetoscope highlighted this uncertainty (“All the magic is within”). On the one hand, electricity was seen to be some sort of natural, beneficial and perhaps even healthful force, while on the other, it was the source of many a dangerous shock or fatal electrocution. Evidence of this first position can be found in another anecdote from the *Ottawa Free Press*, reprinted in the *News*: “An amusing episode occurred on the electric railway on Thursday. An old lady hailed a car at a crossing and told the conductor she wanted to cure her rheumatism by having an electric ride. She got on board, sat down and proceeded a block. She then stopped the car declaring she was cured and expressed her gratitude to the conductor as she left the car.”¹⁰ Once again, the protagonist of the anecdote is somewhat removed from the average reader, this time by virtue of her age, allowing for the possibility of senile eccentricity. The underlying supposition of the story, however, may have been entirely valid for a contemporary reader; electricity was presented under many circumstances – particularly newspaper ads – as a cure to ailments or an agent for vitality.¹¹

In contrast to these healthful applications of electricity were those depictions of a force out of control. The June 1891 issue of the *News* reports the death of Joseph Pelletier who fell from the top of a pole in Ottawa while working for the Standard Electric Co. Some months later, an Ottawa electric streetcar collided with a lumber train: “The five

⁹ *Ottawa Journal*, 14 August 1895, 5.

¹⁰ *Canadian Electrical News*, Vol. II, 2 (February 1892): 31.

¹¹ Wolfgang Schivelbush, *Disenchanted Night* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 71.

passengers were badly shaken, but nobody was seriously hurt.”¹² Although neither of these examples refers to electrocution specifically, they are a sample of the type of news item that appeared with increasing frequency in the 1890s and suggests a latent unease with modern technologies. Electricity was seen as a chaotic force which could be harnessed, but which occasionally broke free from its controls with lethal consequences. This attitude was not limited to electricity but extended to many other modern inventions including gas (which threatened silent suffocation) and steam power (which threatened disastrous explosions). Indeed, there were enough real accidents to warrant a certain degree of caution towards these technologies among the public. The prevalence of newspaper reports of relatively minor occurrences offers some indication of anxiety about the modernization of life.

There were, no doubt, other experiences of modernity besides those offered up as the norm by the newspapers; we can only speculate on how the ‘loafers’ discussed in Chapter One encountered modern urban existence. Many historians have suggested that the public lives of women underwent a profound transformation during this period, as work and leisure liberated them from their traditional domestic sphere. As Anne Friedberg writes, “The flâneuse was the nineteenth-century version of a female observer, whose gaze was mobilized in these new public spaces of modernity. The female flâneur, the flâneuse, was not possible until she was free to roam the city on her own. And this was equated with the privilege of shopping on her own.”¹³ There are some hints that this

¹² Canadian Electrical News, Vol. I, 12 (December 1891): 176.

¹³ Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 36.

was taking place in Ottawa. Advertisements for department stores and fashion columns in the newspapers constructed women as shoppers. Window displays were also increasingly noted, and must have played an important role in the pedestrian experience of women and men alike. One recurring ad noted: “A panorama of beauty. See Shaw’s window to-night and all next week.”¹⁴

Jonathan Crary contrasts the “ambulatory observer shaped by a convergence of new urban spaces, technologies, and the new economic and symbolic functions of images and products,” as proposed by Walter Benjamin (and reiterated by Singer) to some of the “epistemological and institutional conditions of the observer in the nineteenth century.”¹⁵ In Ottawa, the activities of a relatively small business elite (Ahearn, Soper, Bronson and others), which directed the modernization of the relatively small urban space, resulted in a much more rational cityscape than in major metropolitan centres. Rather than contributing to the over-stimulation of its citizens, many modern technologies introduced to Ottawa tended to reinforce the dominant social organization by imposing regimes of visibility and order. While Singer points to the clutter of signs and advertisements in cities, Ottawa specifically combatted these stimuli; the city council ordered the removal of overhanging signboards in March 1895.¹⁶ When Anson Gard described the city in 1904 in *The Hub and the Spokes*, he wrote:

“Colonel,” I asked one day, “what do you notice as peculiar in looking up

¹⁴ *Ottawa Journal*, 10 November 1894, 7.

¹⁵ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 19-20.

¹⁶ *Ottawa Journal*, 28 March 1895, 4.

or down an Ottawa business street?” “You mean what do I not notice. The absence of the over-hanging sign is what helps to give the streets of the Capital the bright, clear appearance we have so often remarked.”

The Colonel had guessed it. Not an over-hanging sign is to be seen in Ottawa, and if you have never seen a city without them you would not believe the pretty effect it gives to a street.¹⁷

If Ottawa was somewhat exceptional in this respect, the removal of overhanging signs is only one example of attempts to make the city “bright and clear”.

Like many other cities, Ottawa introduced electrical lighting to its public parks and places of evening recreation as a safeguard of decent behaviour. On the opening of the Ottawa Electric Park in 1891, the *Ottawa Journal* reported: “This new summer park will be run on a first class scale and kept perfectly in the same manner as similar resorts in other of the chief cities. No suspicious or disorderly character will be admitted, and police patrols will be maintained round the grounds during the evening to see that order is enforced.” The reporter’s description of the park notes: “Around this lovely scenery a carriage drive has been made and the whole is well lighted by electric lights.”¹⁸ While Ottawa Electric Park only remained in operation for a couple of years, Rockcliffe Park was, according to newspaper reports, one of the city’s most popular summer amusement sites during the summer before the Vitascope’s arrival in Ottawa. When this park opened for the summer of 1896, the *Journal* reported: “owing to slackness of supervision by the

¹⁷ Gard, *The Hub and the Spokes*, 38.

¹⁸ *Ottawa Journal*, 28 September 1891, 1.

authorities, the place last year became a less desirable resort in the evenings than it had been in the beginning, and that consequently citizens were growing more shy of patronizing the park with their families in the evenings. . . . The preventive is simple – a score more electric lights, and a couple more policemen.”¹⁹ Far from disorienting citizens, these uses of electrical illumination ensured the safe orientation and behaviour of city dwellers. Well-lit parks enabled the controlled mixing of different classes of citizens: “The park was a means of undermining the street culture and saloon culture of working people. It was intended to erode centres of community relatively immune to respectable influence and replace them with ones where middle-class values were deeply embedded and enforced.”²⁰

The use of urban technological utilities to reinforce industrial power relations has been well noted by Michel Foucault. He likens the organization of social and state apparatuses which emerged in the 19th century to Jeremy Bentham’s design for a prison, the ‘panopticon’. Here, the behaviour of private individuals is regulated by virtue of their ‘visibility’.²¹ Whether in the form of police surveillance, illuminated parks or regimentation by factory whistle, modern technologies placed individuals as objects under the constant gaze of the state. Armstrong and Nelles suggest that streetcar systems introduced to modern cities a similarly regimented way of viewing divisions of space and time. They write:

¹⁹ *Ottawa Journal*, 11 May 1896, 4.

²⁰ Walden, *Becoming Modern*, 226.

²¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon, 1979), 216-217.

To the extent that the street railroad disciplined both its workers and its riders, it was a harbinger of the emerging social order. The trams, plainly visible on city streets, offered a glimpse of similar organizational forms taking shape less obviously in shops, offices, and factories. A uniformed contingent of unskilled workers, closely watched by inspectors and controlled by a hierarchy of managers, marched steadily to the clock, day in and day out. Soon all the world would resemble a street railway.²²

This is the world into which the cinema was introduced, regimenting leisure and visual experience in a similar way. The over-stimulation experienced by citizens of metropolises, brought on by the introduction of new technologies, was tempered by the smaller and more manageable scale of Ottawa.

“Fair Ottawa’s Dark Side”

There were some groups in Ottawa which were explicitly concerned with social organization and the regimentation of leisure, and which often made use of photographic media. If a bleeding of the borders between traditional diversions and commercial amusements was taking place in Ottawa, the same could be said of the division between entertainment and more explicitly educational and scientific activities in the city. Another branch of ‘rational recreation’ was participation in voluntary groups with goals of either scientific, educational or moral improvement. As we have seen, the Kinetoscope occupied

²² Armstrong and Nelles, *Monopoly’s Moment*, 54.

a space between the educational/scientific and the commercial, making it rather difficult to understand how those who viewed it might have understood it. Perhaps easier to gauge is the experience of those who attended religious slide shows or amateur photography meetings.

There were a great number of groups or activities in Ottawa that might fall under the heading of “Educational” and “Scientific” pursuits. Many organizations – the YMCA/YWCA, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), societies for Christian Endeavour, and l’Institut Canadien-Français – sponsored lectures, debates and the like. Although they may have used techniques such as lantern slides, which were also associated with commercial entertainments, the subject of their discussions, and the fact that often no admission was charged, set these events apart from commercial amusements. Typical of this sort of leisure activity was the illustrated lecture about a trip to the Holy Land, offered by Rev. R.G. Botville in December 1894. This event provides an interesting contrast to the sort of entertainment offered to Ottawans in the form of the Kinetoscope just over a month before. The *Journal* reported, “The lecturer who is a fluent speaker, carried his audience with him. For two hours he held the interest of the audience as he rapidly conducted them over the route of travel to Mount Sinai.” While Rev. Botville spoke, lantern slides displaying places he had visited were projected on a screen: “Among the many places of interest shown on the canvas, were the Convent of St. Catherine, the Chapel of the Virgin, Elijah and the Burning Bush, and many views of Mount Sinai. The lecture throughout was illustrated by about 100 views shown through

the powerful lantern of Mr. G.R. Blyth, jr.”²³ Unlike the Kinetoscope, this sort of entertainment had a very important auditory element, and a much more extended narrative. And, as the newspaper coverage of these events demonstrates, the chief interest of Botville’s lecture was not the technology – though the “powerful lantern” is referred to – but the subject matter itself. While the Kinetoscope offered an individual viewer a brief technological ‘attraction’, the illustrated lecture provided an audience with visual accompaniment for an otherwise familiar narrative experience.

But not all illustrated lectures directed their attention to far away lands. Amateur photographers in Ottawa could benefit from the experience of a number of professionals in the city. Best known among these was W.G. Topley, who had hosted Botville’s lecture and worked both privately and for the federal Department of the Interior. Topley’s photographic feats attracted the attention of the press frequently, including an occasion with definite panoptic resonance. In October 1892, the *Journal* warned “Mind Out Now!” in an article about the photographer’s development and use of a telephoto lens.²⁴ A few years later, Topley helped amateur photographers train their sights on Ottawa when he organized an amateur photographic society. Officially formed in December 1894, this group arranged special lectures on topics that included developing film and making lantern slides.²⁵ Given the membership fee of one dollar, in addition to the expensive equipment required, it is fair to assume that amateur photographers were drawn from the

²³ *Ottawa Journal*, 27 December 1894, 8.

²⁴ *Ottawa Journal*, 1 October 1892, 1.

²⁵ *Ottawa Journal*, 11 December 1894, 1.

middle- to upper-classes. To economic mastery of the city, this segment of the population could now add its visual mastery.

One subject for which Topley provided photographic slides was an illustrated lecture called “Ottawa's Submerged”.²⁶ Here Miss Bertha Wright discussed Ottawa’s jail and Home for Friendless Women and provided images from these places. Although obviously about a respectable and charitable subject, and presented at Bank Street Presbyterian Church, Wright's lecture had elements that were certainly shocking or sensational. Wright framed her lecture as a journey into the dark underside of Ottawa and used lantern slides to display the “scenery” of the place. The lecture was inspired by the work of General William Booth of the British Salvation Army, whose study *In Darkest England and the Way Out* was a bestseller in the 1890s. The allegorical language of light and darkness permeated the writings of social reformers in the late nineteenth century. Although drawn from a long and well known rhetorical tradition, the use of the light and dark symbolism is not inconsistent with Foucault’s panoptic regime; indeed, the social reformers’ invocation of modern technologies and their organization of urban spaces demonstrate a close affinity with this project. Mariana Valverde describes the social reformers’ rhetoric: “[Truth] is a “searchlight,” held by someone in control in order to illuminate something else, namely “the social evil,” which would hide away in the city’s dark corners but for the intervention of the searchlight of surveillance (possibly embodied

²⁶ *Ottawa Free Press*, 18 January 1895, 8.

in the policeman's flashlight)."²⁷ In her lecture, Wright is interested in illuminating one segment of Ottawa society in a similar manner.

Ottawa's anglophone newspapers all carried detailed accounts of Wright's lecture. While introducing her subject, she showed an image of the city of Ottawa: "It may not have occurred to many of our citizens that our beautiful city with its crown of towers, its magnificent buildings, its wealth and sunshine and pure air should have a dark side, but though it compares most favourably with other cities of its size, as regards its moral status it is only too true that the clouds of sin and suffering and want have cast their shadow over many a home in this beautiful picture."²⁸ After this dramatic opening, Wright conducted her lecture while showing images from the county jail and the Home for Friendless Women, "as it were, the penumbra of the social eclipse". The newspapers were particularly impressed with the way the photographs shown were obtained: "Camera in hand, Miss Wright leads the way into woman's quarters of the gaol, and there proceeds to describe the subject of the sketch, dressed like the other female prisoners, in a 'loose-fitting brown wrapper, with the letters C.C.P. on the left sleeve.'"²⁹ It is hard to resist comparing Wright's illustrated lecture with direct cinema documentaries (particularly those of Frederick Wiseman which investigated similar institutional settings) and the reality-T.V. programs which have sprung from them. Although originally justified as serious reportage, this tradition of documentary has always – increasingly more so – positioned its spectators as voyeurs of a social spectacle.

²⁷ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991), 35.

²⁸ *Ottawa Journal*, 18 January 1895, 1.

²⁹ *Ottawa Citizen*, 18 January 1895, 7.

If there is a sensational element to Wright's lecture, aside from the premise itself, it is in her display and description of some of the inmates of these institutions. The *Journal* reported: "Views of old Polly, an imbecile Indian woman, who had her toes frozen off; Isabel, a poor imbecile girl, whose brother and father had 'tried to beat the stupidity out of her,' and others who have been befriended by the home, were shown on the canvas. Miss Wright also showed a number of views of apartments in the home, and gave several other pathetic incidents of work in [the] jail and police court."³⁰ While Wright's lecture may have been quite descriptive, and went some way to evoke the pathos of her audience, there can be no doubt that the images themselves provided the principal shock and emotional appeal of the event. The impulse here is the same as that which Tom Gunning points out in the 'cinema of attractions', one which "directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself." In fact, Gunning points to the Biograph films *Photographing a Female Crook* (1904) and *Hooligan in Jail* (1903) as exemplary of this sort of attraction.³¹ In contrast to *Miss Jerry*, the photoplay discussed in the previous chapter, images are used here by Wright less as narrative devices than as attractions in their own right.

Bertha Wright's lecture about "Ottawa's Dark Side" provides an example of how even the most socially acceptable of all leisure activities was subject to multiple and contradictory discourses of meaning. While clearly engaged in a panoptic and social

³⁰ *Ottawa Journal*, 18 January 1895, 1.

³¹ Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions," in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, Ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 58.

reformist project of rendering the city's evils visible, the sensational element of the presentation undercut its serious objective. The presentation of sensational images gave Wright's lecture elements in common with entertainments those in her audience would likely have objected to as debasing, such as burlesque, curiosity or musée shows. The exhibition of the Kinetoscope ("the most popular scientific toy of the age") displayed a similar conflation of rational and sensational discourses. It was Edison's latest invention and a "scientific wonder" but the device was also the purveyor of risqué entertainment, perhaps no more than a conjuring act itself ("all the magic is within").

Factors determining the acceptability of different entertainments were clearly to be found in their context of exhibition. Where the Kinetoscope positioned each spectator as a solitary viewer who could draw his or her own conclusions about the subject matter, most visual displays (including limelight views, burlesque, cinema, etc.) involved a collective reception and production of meaning. Among some audiences the possibility of multiple interpretations of the subject matter was prevented by shared values and social interests. This was possible when religious or community associations arranged exhibitions and thus ensured a fairly homogeneous audience. Ensuring that spectators would 'correctly' understand entertainments and new technologies when they were presented commercially to a mass (and socially mixed) audience was much more difficult

Exhibitions and Carnivals

One of the greatest collections of new technologies in Ottawa took place at the annual Central Canadian Exhibition. Here, the most recent scientific innovations were displayed alongside the best of the fall harvest and livestock competitions. As Keith

Walden writes, “by putting goods on display, in or out of competition, producers gave the impression that they were encouraging the most searching examinations and comparisons. Despite the retreat from competition, an aura of confidence about material progress and increasing technical competence continued to permeate the fair. After all, the evidence of advance was there to be seen, year by year.”³² Although there were amusements and commercial entertainments at the fair, some of which pushed the boundaries of decency and acceptable behaviour, new products and technologies were carefully tailored to appeal to middle- to upper-class tastes. One popular invention which appeared for several years running in the 1890s was “a full-sized demonstration of Mr. Ahearn’s bake oven heated by electricity.”³³ Here, electricity was shown in a functional and attractive manner as the oven provided breads and sweets to fairgoers. This demonstration was made even more eye-catching the following week when the Chaudière Electric Company expanded their display to include “a parlour, which is beautifully furnished, lit all the time by a hundred or more lights, while electric ventilation fans, hot water heaters, etc. are kept going in full view.”³⁴ There could be no display directed more clearly towards bourgeois spectators than one staged in ‘a parlour’.

An even greater conflation of science, amusement and local enterprise was evident in the 1895 Ottawa Winter Carnival. Here, Ottawa’s self-promotion as a centre of electrical development was used to encourage tourism and help lift the city out of a recession. Although there was nothing remarkable about winter carnivals in Canada *per*

³² Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, 107.

³³ *Ottawa Journal*, 19 September 1892, 4.

³⁴ *Ottawa Journal*, 23 September 1892, 4.

se, the organization and execution of the Ottawa carnival clearly placed an emphasis on certain types of display: specifically, electrical illumination. The program of the carnival, published in newspapers over a month in advance, revealed the central role which was to be played by electrical illumination during the carnival. Each night sights in the city would be illuminated, including the Chaudière and Rideau Falls, ice palaces and a number of arches.

Indeed, according to contemporary reports, the illuminations provided some of the most striking attractions during the winter carnival. Decorations provided by private businesses combined with elaborate designs organized by the carnival committee to light up the major streets and sights of Ottawa for the duration of the week. The *Journal* reported: "The ice castle was illuminated; the Mackenzie avenue arch shown out in all its liberality of incandescent beauty; the search light on Parliament tower flashed here and there over the river and Major's Hill park; the Parliament buildings were lighted up; Sparks and Bank streets were ablaze with electricity and gas. Sparks street from the post-office to Bank literally glowed. A number of the private illuminations were very bright. Taken all round, the illuminations were such that they must have favourably impressed visitors with the energy of the citizens of Ottawa."³⁵ Intentional or not, the double entendre on the word 'energy' in this last sentence reveals a great deal about the city's aspirations and its relationship with electricity (similar double entendres are made using the words 'illuminate', 'blazing', 'bright', etc.). Should visiting citizens have been impressed by the sheer quantity of hydro-electricity required to power these lights?

³⁵ *Ottawa Journal*, 23 January 1895, 5.

Perhaps, but it is more likely that the elaborate lights represented the city's combination of scientific and commercial ingenuity. The 'energy' of Ottawa was like the 'energy' of Edison: an ability to discover, harness and commercially exploit natural forces.

Even more than these astonishing street illuminations, it was the staged spectacles of the winter carnival which most anticipated the arrival of cinema. One example of these was the illumination of the Chaudière Falls on the opening night of the carnival. Here, projected lights transformed the normally striking scenery of the falls into a genuine spectacle. An *Ottawa Citizen* journalist wrote poetically:

The murky darkness of the night and the driving sleet if anything added to the beauty of the scene; for the waters lit up by the electric streams were thrown all the more into relief by the sombre background of the night and the glistening drops of hail shone like falling gems in the dazzling light of the reflectors.

...

When the light was turned full upon the mass of water rushing madly from under its brilliant capping of frozen foam, falling into the abyss below, and throwing up its clouds of silver spray high in the air, the whole framed in pitchy darkness, the view was weirdly beautiful. Again would the brilliant beam shoot out and some wild billow of rapids would be caught tearing down to the precipice, its crested waves tossing themselves free from the frost's grasp and burling down, down to the smooth river. Again would the light be shot in another direction, and out of the darkness would spring crystal caves and grottos, festooned with draperies of icicles, and whose recesses even the electric stream could not pierce.

Innumerable strangely beautiful scenes, impossible of description as the revelation of the kaleidoscope, and scenes that will live in the memory for a long time, were stolen from the realm of night and shown to the delighted gaze of hundreds in a couple of hours.³⁶

This display revealed some distinctly proto-cinematic qualities. Instead of being positioned in a static manner and illuminating the falls generally, the spot-lights moved about, directing the spectator's attention to different points of interest. The scenery became organized, though not narrativized, as the viewer's look was directed by the projected light. The flashing lights (some in colour) contributed a decorative element to the falls, elevating it from the natural world to the spectacular: an 'attraction'.

Outdoing even the illumination of the Chaudière Falls, the storming of the ice castle was a spectacular blending of the technologies of illumination with display. This event was much anticipated in the press and was planned as the carnival's grand finale. The ice castle had stood as an illuminated attraction for the entire week. Plans for its attack were published in detail, so visitors to the city had ample opportunity to visit and familiarize themselves with the terrain. The castle was on Nepean Point, a high cliff located across the Rideau Canal from the Parliament Buildings (to the West) and across the Ottawa River from Hull (to the North). The attack was to come from the direction of Hull, much of the action being staged on the frozen Ottawa River. Because the battle was to take place at night, illumination played a key role and was perhaps the main attraction of the event.

³⁶ *Ottawa Citizen*, 22 January 1895, 5.

The plans for the storming of the ice castle printed in *The Journal* emphasize the central role played by illumination: “As [the troops] advance they throw up defence works of snow on the Hull side of the river, and throw troops out onto the river. Up to this point operations on both sides of the river will be in entire darkness. Suddenly a search light will be directed onto the Hull side and will discover the attacking party in three formations in masses of quarter-columns.”³⁷ Once again, the use of projected, artificial light to draw attention to and order events is conspicuous. Even more so, however, is the emphatically white backdrop; like a film projected on a white canvas, the activities taking place at a distance from the spectators were shown against a white screen. This staging foreshadowed the spectacular battles of the sort which would appear in D.W. Griffith’s films almost two decades later. Satisfying demands of scale denied by theatre, but without the technology to project the figures themselves, the siege of the ice castle reveals the next best solution, by providing actual figures at a distance, illuminated by artificial light. Because the events of the siege took place so far from the viewer, the appeal of the event could not possibly have been in watching the facial expressions of the ‘troops’. Nor was there any suspense regarding the battle’s outcome, since it had already been published. Rather, it was to watch the bursts of spectacular effects and an elaborate mass choreography as enabled by electrical illumination.

This viewing experience is different from how we are used to watching films today where one’s attention remains fixed towards the screen and absorbed in narrative events, but it has much in common with the viewing practice of early cinema. According

³⁷ *Ottawa Journal*, 14 January 1895, 7.

to Gunning, “the scenography of the cinema of attractions is an exhibitionist one, opposed to the cinema of the unacknowledged voyeur that later narrative cinema ushers in.”³⁸ The very premise of the illuminations displayed during the Winter Carnival was that of *display*, soliciting the excited attention of viewers, hardly the sort of absorption or detached contemplation associated with the reception of paintings or serious theatre.

These illuminations also bring to mind nineteenth century panoramas or dioramas, which transformed tourist settings into consumable amusements and have often been pointed to as a precursor of cinematic perception.³⁹ In their most common variety, panoramas took the form of wall-to-wall or rolling canvases which allowed a spectator to place her or him-self perspectively within the represented scene. When standing a few feet in front of the screen, the large images filled the viewers’ entire field of vision. While part of the effect of panoramas was to recreate a realistic scene, performing a sort of imaginary travel through space or time to the city or battle depicted, these entertainments were more than simply scenes painted on canvas. Rather, as Vanessa Schwartz has pointed out, they made extensive use of the most recent depictive and mechanical innovations, impressing the spectator with the very act of displaying.⁴⁰ The siege of the ice castle on the final night of the Ottawa winter carnival positioned spectators in a similar way, providing a spectacular depiction using illumination and the Ottawa River landscape.

³⁸ Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment,” 38.

³⁹ See Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, for example.

⁴⁰ Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 176.

The staged carnival illuminations also resembled a slightly different variation on the panorama theme, which was the river tour. In the late nineteenth century, the rugged wilderness along the shores of many Canadian waterways (the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers, for example) was promoted as a “wilderness panorama” for the benefit of tourists. By the 1890s electric lighting had been added to create “Searchlight Tours” (some of which were advertised during the summer the Vitascope appeared in Ottawa). Historian Patricia Jasen writes: “The Search Light Tour... represented a still more curious transformation of the panorama theme, for the steamer St. Lawrence, equipped with ‘an electric searchlight of 1,000,000 candle power,’ and loaded with sightseers, wound among the islands and cast its blinding beam of light upon campers, cottagers, and socialites disporting on the verandas and grounds of hotels and private mansions, baring every secret to the tourist gaze.”⁴¹ Such illuminated panoramas as the searchlight tours and carnival attractions would have prepared viewers for the arrival of cinema in their organization of visual material. In them, sights were contained, offered up to visual mastery, but also punctuated with spectacular technological effects for the benefit of the viewer.

As we have seen, modern technologies and entertainments were well known in Ottawa, having been exploited in ways tailored to local audiences and geography. David Nye argues: “The streetcar and the institutions it fostered – advertising, the department store and the amusement park – were all instrumental in transforming the American populace into a mass society. . . . Between 1890 and 1930 the department store and the

⁴¹ Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 78.

amusement park stood like magnets at opposite ends of the streetcar lines. Both subverted the Victorian moral code, by providing stages for the enhancement of fantasy, one by day, the other by night."⁴² Was this true only for American cities, or was a similar transformation taking place in Ottawa? While there is some evidence of a shift in the city dweller's experience of the world towards a more ambulatory, kinetic type of perception, inhabitants also felt the influence of a panoptic regime of order and visibility. Just as the Kinetoscope had evoked contradictory discourses of science and magic, street cars, illustrated lectures and electrical illuminations presented applications of science which were at the same time rational and spectacular. Under some circumstances, the meaning of such technologies could be contained by their exhibition and reception context, but this was much more difficult when they were presented to mass audiences. It is with this "horizon of experience" in mind that we will now turn to the opposite end of the streetcar lines, and the exhibition of Edison's Vitascope which took place there.⁴³

⁴² David E. Nye. *Electrifying America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 132.

⁴³ Many thanks to Lee Carruthers for her helpful comments on this chapter.

4. This Week at West End Park...

Edison's Vitascope appeared in Ottawa at West End Park for the first time on 21 July 1896. As has been well established, this was not the first film exhibition in Canada, as it followed a Lumière cinematograph exhibition in Montreal by about a month – an event referred to in at least one Ottawa newspaper. Vitascope films were shown as a part of open air evening entertainments for six weeks, presented at various times with acts such as Belzac the magician, regimental bands, high-wire presentations and other specialty performers. This chapter will examine the reception of the Vitascope over the course of its six week run in Ottawa. A week by week inspection of newspaper reports illustrates that the process of reception was dynamic, as the Vitascope was understood in different ways in the course of its exhibition. By reading this analysis through the “horizon of experience” already offered in previous chapters in this thesis, it is hoped that an informative account of the first exhibitions of the cinema in Ottawa will be arrived at.

The summer of 1896 was exceptional for inhabitants of Ottawa. The national election on 23 June saw Wilfred Laurier swept into power, and nowhere did a new government cause as much immediate change as in Ottawa. A new session of Parliament opened in mid-August, and its preparations prevented the traditional middle- and upper-class exodus from the city. Summers in Ottawa were usually quiet as far as leisure

activities were concerned, but in 1896 this was not the case at all. The Electric Railway Company (OER), which managed West End Park and advertised extensively in the newspapers, endeavoured to fill the city's summer amusement void by offering respectable diversion. In fact, advertisements or reports for West End Park appeared almost daily in all of the city's newspapers, providing the most sustained advertising of commercial entertainments for this period this researcher has encountered.

As this thesis has demonstrated, by the time the Vitascope appeared in Ottawa, the city's citizens were already well acquainted with similar illuminations or lantern devices. In addition to these inventions, some Ottawans may actually have witnessed projected films on display in American cities nearby. The Vitascope's public debut took place in New York on 23 April 1896, and by the time it arrived in Ottawa, it had already appeared in many of the major cities in the North-Eastern United States.¹ The first warning of the Vitascope's pending arrival in Ottawa also remarks on a similar machine being exhibited in Montreal:

Mr. Andrew Holland has returned from New York, whither he went from Niagara Falls, where Edison's latest invention in photography was being tested. Mr. Holland has secured the Canadian agency, and will in a few days have the machine in operation at the electric railway park at Hintonburgh, giving views of Niagara Falls and other points of interest in such a manner as has never before

¹ Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 115-128. These cities included Boston, Hartford, New Haven, Buffalo, Portland (Me).

been witnessed. A somewhat similar machine has come from France, and is now to be seen in Montreal.²

The machine in Montreal was obviously the Lumière brothers' Cinématographe which was exhibited there starting 27 June.³ The unadorned writing of this article suggests more news reporting than promotion; the Vitascope is referred to as "Edison's latest invention" rather than "the newest marvel from the wizard of Menlo Park".

While this article does give the impression that the Vitascope was 'newsworthy' in some respect, it should be noted that Edison's invention did not receive the same sort of attention as *bona fide* scientific breakthroughs.⁴ It is tempting to draw a parallel between the Vitascope and Roentgen's x-rays, in particular, because they were both exhibited at the same venue in Toronto in September 1896.⁵ The newspaper reporting of these two inventions differed considerably in both quantity and quality. The papers abounded with news articles about x-rays and their newest application throughout 1896, without any commercial prompting. The same could not be said of moving pictures.

² *Ottawa Journal*, 3 July 1896, 8.

³ Germain Lacasse, *Histoire de Scopos* (Montréal: La Cinémathèque québécoise, 1988), 5. A letter from A. Holland to F. Gammon dated 11 August 1896 comments: "I hear very good reports of [the cinématographe] from people who have been in Montreal and have seen both machines." Raff & Gammon Collection, Baker Library, Harvard Business School.

⁴ Edison was not, in fact, the inventor of the Vitascope; he attached his name for purely promotional reasons. The Vitascope (previously phantoscope) was invented by C. Frances Jenkins and Thomas Armat and managed by Raff & Gammon. Edison's company was responsible for providing films and manufacturing the projectors. See Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 100-111.

⁵ *Toronto Daily Star*, 9 September 1896, 4.

There were intermittent references to them in “Science and Progress” columns in 1895 and 1896, but certainly nowhere near the sort of coverage devoted to the x-rays.⁶

In either a striking coincidence or a disguised advertisement, a scientific article about the Kinetoscope appeared in the *Ottawa Journal* only a few days before the premiere of the Vitascope. This article describes a lecture and demonstration given before the French Academy of Sciences which shows familiar processes – the growth of flowers, drinking a glass of water, etc. – animated in reverse by the Kinetoscope.⁷ This sort of motion study harkens back to the origins of motion picture technology in the work of Etienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge. But much in the same vein as Edison’s scientific claims, ‘rational’ applications of proto-cinematic devices should be viewed with some scepticism. As Marta Braun points out, Muybridge used the pretence of locomotion studies to reveal erotic images with little scientific value: “Like Marey, Muybridge used his camera to disclose those aspects of human activity that usually remained unseen: not because they were invisible to the eye, as in Marey’s case, but because social conventions and morality dictated that they remain concealed except in the imaginative world of private fantasy.”⁸ This subject matter recalls the risqué films presented in Edison’s Kinetoscope under the banner of “the scientific wonder of the age”.

⁶ *Ottawa Journal*, 16 March 1895, 8; *Ottawa Journal*, 21 September 1895, 6. These two articles reported on developments in motion picture technology; references to x-rays are too numerous to cite and are readily apparent in Ottawa papers beginning in February 1896.

⁷ *Ottawa Journal*, 18 July 1896, 4.

⁸ Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 249. Muybridge examined the locomotion of such ‘scientific’ subjects as “One Woman Disrobing Another,” and “Woman Pouring a Bucket of Water over Another Woman.”

Despite these contradictions, both Muybridge and Edison's work were popularly understood as scientific projects. Perhaps for a reader concerned about the prospect of viewing the Vitascope as commercial entertainment, this article about the French Academy helped reinforce the scientific pretence.

The promotional language of Edison's 'magic' was invoked a short time before the Vitascope arrived in Ottawa in an article describing the Electric Railway Company's preparations for the opening of West End Park: "The first event will come off next week when Edison's Vitascope which is without doubt the most marvellous of the wizard's achievements will be presented. The Vitascope shows on a large canvas objects in motion the same as seen in small scale in the Kinetoscope."⁹ As with the exploitation of the Kinetoscope, these remarks blend together the contrasting discourses of magic and science associated with Edison. The writer takes for granted, though, that the audience is already familiar with the Kinetoscope; the Vitascope may be different in some respects, but it is certainly of a kind with Edison's previous invention.

"Plenty of Vitascope"

Week One

Nearly identical advertisements for Edison's Vitascope appeared in each of the four Ottawa newspapers on Monday, 20 July 1896.¹⁰ "The machinery for the Vitascope arrived by express to-day," the advertisement reported, "and the first exhibition in

⁹ *Ottawa Journal*, 15 July 1896, 6.

¹⁰ The four newspapers were the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Journal*, *Free Press*, and *Le Temps*; *Le Canada* had folded in March 1896, but would reappear the following year.

Canada of this latest marvel of Edison's will be given at West End Park to-morrow, Tuesday night."¹¹ The advertisement made use of the by now familiar language of science and wonder around Edison: "It is safe to say that nothing has been brought out in the nineteenth century that has created anything like the enthusiasm caused by Edison's success in bringing the Vitascope to perfection." It is the "distinct realism" thrown on the canvas which is highlighted as the device's chief attraction, once again calling to mind the conflation of realism and spectacle found in Bertha Wright's lecture and some of the panorama entertainments found in Ottawa. Although some of the subjects of the films – "railway trains in motion, the falls of Niagara, incoming ocean vessels, and the ocean surf breaking on the shore" – are mentioned in the advertisement, it is again clear that the apparatus itself was the principal attraction of this entertainment.

The advertisement also capitalized on Ottawa's cosmopolitan aspirations by reporting that "in New York, Paris and London, where the Vitascope has been on exhibition for several weeks, the interest continues unabated, and the theatres in which it is exhibited are crowded nightly." As a typical advertising strategy, this was an unobvious challenge to Ottawa theatregoers to prove themselves just as "up to date" and fashionable as their metropolitan counterparts. And, as with the Kinetoscope, Ottawans could be proud that they were being given the first opportunity in Canada to witness Edison's invention; this time, however, the parties to thank for this honour were much more clearly

¹¹ *Ottawa Journal*, 20 July 1896, 1. Identical information appeared in the *Free Press* and *Le Temps*. The *Citizen* reported that the first exhibition would take place the same night as the advertisement – Monday. Since the *Citizen* was a morning paper and the others were published for the evening, perhaps this discrepancy is an indication that the Holland Brothers intended to begin the public exhibition on Monday, but subsequently decided – perhaps due to technical glitches – to wait until the following evening.

spelled out: “The sole right for exhibiting the Vitascope in Canada has been secured by the Holland Bros. with whom the Electric Railway Co. made arrangements for the first exhibition to take place in Ottawa.” It is difficult to be certain how familiar the general public was with the Holland Bros.’ reputation as purveyors of modern inventions, but it is possible that for many their names were immediately associated with typewriters, phonographs and the Kinetoscope. The Electric Railway Co., of course, was well known as both a technologically progressive, if at times monopolistic, home grown business success and as the organizer of many previous entertainments, including patriotic events and fireworks at Lansdowne Park and regular band concerts at Rockcliffe Park.

The advertisement went on to announce that along with the Vitascope, the OER had engaged Belzac, the magician, who was allegedly well-known in both American and Canadian cities. Beginning with the following night these two entertainments would appear every night that week – excepting Sunday, presumably. Admission would be 10 cents, half-price for children, or double-price for reserved seats. Tickets, priced at 25 cents, which included reserved seats and round trip transportation on the Electric streetcar were available for sale at Ahearn and Soper’s office on Sparks Street. If return streetcar fare for an adult was 10 cents, this 25 cent rate provided a savings of five cents, or only five cents more than unreserved seating.¹² As we have seen, this is not the least expensive entertainment available; for a single adult, an unreserved seat plus car-fare cost 20 cents, twice what one might pay for entertainment at Parc Perras or one of the variety shows at Grant’s Hall. Although not inaccessible to working-class patrons, the cost of

¹² *Ottawa Journal*, 22 June 1895, 1.

entertainments at West End Park eliminated the least affluent segment of theatre-goers by virtue of its location, a streetcar ride away from downtown.

The following day, the *Citizen* gave a review of the Vitascope based on what must have been a private screening or run-through the previous evening. The headlines pronounced: "Realism on Canvas. Marvellous Exhibition of the Vitascope at West End Park."¹³ After attributing the invention to Edison, the reporter continues, "With this wonderful invention spectacles in life and occurrences are reproduced in a most vivid and realistic manner, and those who witnessed the views projected last evening were not only pleased with the sight, but were enthused to a high degree over the creative genius which made it possible for life-like movements to be depicted on canvas with such extraordinary effect." As this report indicates, there was excitement at the sight of the Vitascope for a number of reasons: while the "realism on canvas" is significant, we should not interpret this as the sort of psychological realism or 'absorption' which was remarked on in the previous chapter. As the writer indicates, it is the "creative genius" of the inventor which is awesome as well; realism and artifice were not at opposite ends of some sort of phenomenological spectrum here, rather the latter was the precondition of the former, and both were appreciated by the spectators.

The review continues with examples of the Vitascope's impressive capacity to

¹³ *Ottawa Citizen*, 21 July 1896, 7. Some historians, such as Peter Morris in *Embattled Shadows*, have taken it to be important that the Vitascope was reviewed only on page 7 of the *Citizen*, suggesting that this was a measure of the device's public significance. I don't think it is tenable to attribute significance in this way; both the *Journal* and *Free Press* reported the first Vitascope screening on page one. The *Citizen*'s decision may have had more to do with the placement of local versus national news than any sort of evaluation of the importance of the new invention.

reproduce action realistically, including “every movement in a pugilistic encounter where the motions of the combatants, both in attack and defence, are of a lightning rapidity.” The Vitascope is praised for its ability to preserve “an accurate record of the most minute detail of every physical movement and even the facial expression.” There is no suggestion in this review that viewers were mystified by a process they were unfamiliar with or unable to understand. On the contrary, “the transfer of these *effects* to the canvas by means of the Vitascope gives a perfect *representation*...”¹⁴ The review relates the genuine delight, but also comprehension of the Vitascope; these were hardly rubes fleeing from an oncoming train as in the mythical first Lumière screening.

Reports of the first public screening, which took place the following evening, support the claim that those who witnessed the Vitascope were able to situate it among similar technologies or viewing experiences. The *Journal* reported, “The Vitascope is an improvement on the Kinetoscope, with which most are now familiar. Instead of objects being reproduced in miniature in a cabinet, they are thrown in life size on a large screen, just the same as lime light views. The difference from the lime light view is that life like motions are given to the pictures.”¹⁵ Far from being a complete novelty, incomprehensible to a general audience, the Vitascope is described as an “improvement” on a device already well known, and “just the same” as lime-light views, with only minor alterations. In spite of this familiarity with the device, the reporter remarks that during a film of the beach at Coney Island “as the huge breakers came tumbling in, the occupants of the front benches involuntarily moved back to prevent a shower.” Although this is

¹⁴ Italics mine.

¹⁵ *Ottawa Journal*, 22 July 1896, 1.

likely just exaggeration on the part of the reviewer, it still does not presuppose a naive spectator; rather, it indicates the impressive quality of the Vitascope's reality *effect*. Just as spectacular theatrical productions or panoramas created reality effects which could startle a viewer, so too the projected moving pictures could produce a similar shock or attraction.¹⁶ As the *Ottawa Free Press* reported, "These scenes are presented with wondrous life like motions, being taken in all their natural action, and when thrown on the screen in full size present a most interesting spectacle."¹⁷

Although reports were generally favourable towards Belzac the magician's performance, it was clearly of secondary importance to the novelty of the Vitascope. Many years later, John C. Green – Belzac's real name – reported that part of his role at West End Park had been to "lecture on 'The New Marvel – Moving Pictures'".¹⁸ While it is likely that someone introduced the views shown by the Vitascope, there is no reference to Belzac performing this role in the newspaper reports.¹⁹ Indeed, it seems more plausible that speaking, let alone lecturing, was kept to a minimum at West End Park; the regular advertisements in *Le Temps* imply that francophone spectators attended these amusements. Most of the acts staged at West End Park, including the Vitascope and

¹⁶ Indeed, Tom Gunning's terminology, the 'cinema of attractions' is drawn from Sergei Eisenstein's writings on staging in theatre, not cinema.

¹⁷ *Ottawa Free Press*, 22 July 1896, 6.

¹⁸ John C. Green, "Canada's Senior Exhibitor was 'Original Merry Wizard'," *Moving Picture World* 59 (9 December 1922): 529.

¹⁹ There are a number of factual discrepancies in Green's reminiscence, not least of which is his claim that the exhibition at West End Park took place in June rather than July. He also cites films which had not yet been produced as having appeared on the program. Since Green went on to spend many years as an itinerant moving picture exhibitor, it is likely that he confused some events which took place later with those from the first exhibition in Ottawa.

Belzac's magic tricks, were visual attractions which would have allowed for the equal enjoyment and comprehension of both English and French-speaking audience members.

Among those films shown during the first week of the Vitascope's exhibition in Ottawa it is possible to identify seven different subjects: "A corner in Prospect Park, Brooklyn", "The breakwater at Coney Island", "les trains de chemin de fer en mouvement", "l'armée en marche", "A view of the Whirlpool [Niagara Falls]", "The Widow's Kiss" and "A scene on Broadway".²⁰ The *Citizen's* review of the private Vitascope screening reports that a boxing picture was shown, but there is no evidence that this film was exhibited publicly during the first week. It is possible that in order to avoid the public criticism associated with boxing matches, the Holland Brothers decided not to exhibit this film. In a later week, however, we will see that they eventually did exhibit a boxing picture.

There was no published criticism of those films which did appear during the first week. "The Widow's Kiss" was described as "laughable" by the *Free Press*, but it is not hard to imagine how this single shot film clearly depicting a long kiss between two actors might have been objectionable to some. In fact, in a letter to F. Gammon, partner in the firm supplying films to the Holland Bros, Andrew Holland wrote, "One Methodist parson has taken me to task for exhibiting "the Widow's Kiss". Some people are too good for this world: they ought to be in heaven."²¹

The other films presented a variety of subjects which were either interesting in

²⁰ See Appendix for sources and likely Edison film titles.

²¹ A. Holland to F. Gammon, 10 August 1896, Raff & Gammon Collection, box 6, folder 7, Baker Library, Harvard Business School.

their own right, or demonstrated the representational power of the apparatus, or both. The rolling of waves, fluttering leaves of a park, or churning of rapids provided scenery with dynamic and fine details that could be impressively reproduced by the Vitascope but not by normal slides or still photographs. Films depicting transportation devices, such as trains or steamships, displayed movement in a similarly striking manner. In addition to illustrating the device's powers of realistic representation, some of the films' subjects reflected modernization in a manner similar to the Vitascope itself; trains or steamships were still revolutionary in their triumph over distance, and early cinema's preoccupation with the Niagara Falls resonated with contemporary hydro-electric generation schemes. Just as the Chaudière Falls in Ottawa was both a source of energy and spectacle, Niagara Falls was seen as a great natural and beautiful force, but one which was just then being harnessed by modern technology.

With regards to the physical properties of the films – brightness, silence, etc. – very little was reported during the first week, except towards the end, when the *Journal* announced that “A novelty in to-night's entertainment will be colored vitascopic views.”²² While the absence of sound and colour may seem to contradict the claims made by the newspapers that the Vitascope reproduced “realism on canvas”, this merely points again to the acknowledged artificiality of the device. As the reviews suggested, the Vitascope represented an improvement in image technology, adding scale to the Kinetoscope images and movement to limelight views. Since neither of these predecessors incorporated synchronized sound or natural colour, there was no reason for

²² *Ottawa Journal*, 25 July 1896, 8.

spectators to presume these qualities to be integral to the realism effect of the Vitascope. Another feature of the performance which went unmentioned in newspaper reports was the duration of the films themselves. Although each film view lasted only about twenty or thirty seconds, Charles Musser reports that the films were spliced end-to-end, and each “subject was usually repeated at least half a dozen times.” In some scenes this could make the action represented – dancing or waves on a beach – appear continuous, while in others a jump-cut would appear at the end/beginning of the film.²³ This looping technique no doubt called attention to the cinematic apparatus itself and highlighted its status as a visual novelty.

All of the newspapers reported that the Vitascope and Belzac were a success. The *Free Press* announced that “In providing a genuine and clean performance, the Electric company are meeting the desire of their patrons.”²⁴ There are no precise reports as to how many witnessed the entertainment, but *Le Temps* estimated that nearly two thousand people were present on the first evening.²⁵ As the week progressed, the papers reported that the amusements continued to draw large crowds. On Saturday 25 July, the *Journal* gushed, “The Vitascope is proving a greater attraction than even the most sanguine anticipated, and seems destined to have as successful a run in Ottawa as it is having in London and New York. Last night the largest crowd of the week visited the West End Park, where even standing room was not obtainable after 8.30.”²⁶ The *Free Press*, *Citizen*

²³ Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 117.

²⁴ *Ottawa Free Press*, 23 July 1896, 7.

²⁵ *Le Temps*, 22 July 1896, 4.

²⁶ *Ottawa Journal*, 25 July 1896, 8.

and *Le Temps* reported similar news, each stating that 1600 spectators had been present the previous night.²⁷

There is little evidence about the composition of the audience in terms of class or gender or social group, except for vague references to the high class of the audience, such as the following: “The efforts of the Electric Railway Company to provide a high class entertainment is meeting with the appreciative support of Ottawa’s best people. Last night all the reserved chairs were taken by an audience comprising the elite of the city. The entertainment is first class in every respect.”²⁸ While it may very well have been the case that the audience had a large number of middle- or upper-class spectators, there is no reference to the *Vitascope* in any of the weekend society columns which chronicled the fashionable parties and retreats each week. There is no doubt, however, that the Electric Railway Company was, in fact, very concerned with projecting (literally!) an image of wholesome entertainment. Less than a decade later the Electric Railway Company offered amusements at their new resort, *Britannia-on-the-Bay*, and guaranteed the quality of their entertainment: “The artists were booked through a theatrical agent in New York, but Ahearn, Soper, or J.E. Hutcheson personally attended the rehearsals of all new acts and paid the full expenses back to New York of any performers they found smutty or offensive.”²⁹ Although references to boxing pictures and “The Widow’s Kiss” offer a hint of the male sporting culture so closely associated with *Kinetoscope* films, most of the

²⁷ *Le Temps*, 25 July 1896, 4; *Ottawa Free Press*, 25 July 1896, 1; *Ottawa Citizen*, 25 July 1896, 7.

²⁸ *Ottawa Journal*, 24 July 1896, 1.

²⁹ Bruce S. Elliott, *The City Beyond* (Nepean, Ontario: City of Nepean, 1991), 183.

Vitascope views shown in Ottawa – or at least described in the press – were fairly innocuous.

The newspaper coverage of the Vitascope did not subside after the first couple of days of its exhibition. In fact, advertisements and articles about the entertainments at West End Park appeared in great numbers. On 25 July, for example, the *Free Press* carried the story about the large audiences visiting West End Park and a separate story announced new Vitascope views which were due to arrive shortly.³⁰ In addition to these stories, multiple – sometimes as many as a dozen – advertisements appeared in all of the Ottawa newspapers on almost a daily basis:

EDISON'S VITASCOPE

And Belzac, the magician, at West End Park tonight. Admission 10c. Children half price. Round trip tickets, including car fares, admission and reserved seat, 25 cents, at Ahearn & Soper's Office, 56 Sparks st.³¹

In regular typeface, these short advertisements were interspersed throughout the newspapers, appearing alongside stories of every kind.

While Belzac and the Vitascope were entertaining pleasure seekers at West End Park, there were other entertainments available in the city that week. The Parc Perras in Hull offered a variety of different types of entertainments over the course of the summer,

³⁰ *Ottawa Free Press*, 25 July 1896, 7.

³¹ *Ottawa Free Press*, 25 July 1896, 1.

ranging from comedians and variety shows to Professor Kuno and his boxing cats.³² During the week of 20 July, a troupe of Japanese actors was booked, and the park charged admissions of 5 to 15 cents.³³ At the same time, “Norris’ Bros. famous company of 100 Handsome and Highly Educated Shetland Ponies and Dogs” was on exhibition in a tent on Nepean Street. Just a few blocks south of Sparks street in Upper Town, these entertainers played to audiences for 10 to 20 cents.³⁴ The *Journal* reported that “their tent has a seating capacity for about 1,500 and was crowded. Everyone seemed pleased with the performance.”³⁵ Playing to “packed houses” for the entire week, the *Free Press* praised the show as “a place where ladies and children are entertained and courteously looked after.”³⁶ For those interested in sports, the Metropolitan Grounds held bicycle races on Thursday nights: “Bicycle riding by electric light is a decided novelty, and will be appreciated by all lovers of the wheel.”³⁷ Bicycling had become a popular pastime in Ottawa over the previous couple of years, and on 23 July nearly 500 spectators came out to see the races.³⁸ In fact, West End Park had 100 stalls built for bicyclists who wished to ride there to see the amusements.³⁹

Week Two

Towards the end of the first week of the Vitascope’s exhibition in Ottawa, the

³² *Le Temps*, 4 July 1896, 4.

³³ *Le Temps*, 18 July 1896, 4.

³⁴ *Ottawa Journal*, 18 July 1896, 7.

³⁵ *Ottawa Journal*, 21 July 1896, 5.

³⁶ *Ottawa Free Press*, 25 July 1896, 7.

³⁷ *Ottawa Journal*, 22 July 1896, 7.

³⁸ *Ottawa Journal*, 24 July 1896, 5.

³⁹ *Ottawa Journal*, 25 July 1896, 7.

focus of advertisements shifted from Edison's invention to the headline attraction of the following week, James Hardy, "the Hero of Niagara Falls". The advertisements, which were repeated in all the Ottawa papers throughout the week, read:

Hardy, the Hero of Niagara Falls

Who crossed Niagara on Dominion Day before an audience of 25,000 persons, will perform on the high wire at West End Park 3.30 each afternoon and 8.30 each night. Belzac and the Vitascope continued for this week only. New colored views. Round trip tickets 25 cents, including admission and reserved seats, at Ahearn & Soper's office, 56 Sparks street. N.B. -- The wire upon which Hardy performs is directly over the stage. The best view is to be had from the enclosure.⁴⁰

While it was still included in the advertisement, there is no doubt that the Vitascope was reduced to a supporting function during the second week.

According to the newspaper reports, crowds at West End Park grew even larger than the previous week, thanks to Hardy's "thrilling feats". Every day, the newspapers reported at length on the skill and daring of Hardy's high wire act. On Tuesday evening, the entertainment was enhanced by electrical illumination: "The searching rays were thrown directly upon him throughout his perilous performance, and by the aid of colored gelatine sheets produced a most brilliant effect."⁴¹ The *Journal* later opined that "[t]he

⁴⁰ *Ottawa Journal*, 27 July 1896, 1.

⁴¹ *Ottawa Free Press*, 29 July 1896, 8.

colored search light effects upon Hardy are alone worth the charge for admission.”⁴²

Hardy also received extensive coverage in the newspapers in the form of interviews and entertaining anecdotes. The newspapers once again reported on the high class of the entertainment and the quality audience who attended: “‘As fine looking an audience as ever graced the Opera House,’ was the appropriated comment upon the attendance at West End Park last night. . . . [T]he fact that the best people in Ottawa are nightly among the large audience is evidence that the company’s efforts are being appreciated.”⁴³ Hardy, Belzac and the Vitascope were also joined by the Orchestra of the 43rd Rifles.

Belzac and the Vitascope, however, received fairly little coverage while Hardy was performing. Most reports made only brief mention of them: “The Vitascope and Belzac were as interesting and mystifying as ever.”⁴⁴ The only exception to this shifting of the focus away from the Vitascope was in an article appearing in the *Citizen* towards the end of the week. Here, an entire paragraph is devoted to the Vitascope, building it up in the now familiar magical/scientific discourse: “It is not surprising that the latest and most wonderful achievement of science – Edison’s Vitascope – should prove a drawing card; for it is one of those things a person feels thankful for that he has lived to see. And truly the common consent of man has given this magic invention the foremost place among even the New York wizard’s greatest achievements.”⁴⁵ The author did not shy away from hyperbole here, perhaps because the Vitascope, unlike Belzac and Hardy, was being carried over at West End Park for another week.

⁴² *Ottawa Journal*, 30 July 1896, 3.

⁴³ *Ottawa Journal*, 1 August 1896, 7.

⁴⁴ *Ottawa Journal*, 28 July 1896, 7.

⁴⁵ *Ottawa Citizen*, 1 August 1896, 7.

As there was little specific discussion of the Vitascope during its second week of exhibition in Ottawa, there is little evidence of what films were being shown. A telegram published at the end of the previous week announced the impending arrival of “six new films including Annabelle and Muller, all Colored.”⁴⁶ The two films specifically mentioned refer to dance subjects. Although newspaper articles claimed that the Vitascope changed views frequently, it is evident that the Holland Brothers had some difficulty carrying this out. One article reported that “Mr. Holland has succeeded in procuring a new view for the Vitascope after much trouble. The reason of the difficulty in getting a change of views is that the factory cannot turn out a sufficient number to supply even the New York pleasure places that demand them.”⁴⁷ Presumably, the Holland Bros. continued to replay the same views shown the previous week. Although the coincidence was not remarked upon in the newspapers, it is interesting to speculate on the effect of the screening of a Niagara Falls film (“A view of the whirlpool”) on the same program with Hardy’s high wire act. As has already been noted, Hardy’s fame sprang from his famous crossing of the real Niagara Falls only a few weeks before. The potential for a spectacular restaging of this event at West End Park is tantalizing, but apparently went un-realized.

Other entertainments available to Ottawans during the second week of the Vitascope’s exhibition in Ottawa were less numerous than the previous week, but still worth noting. The Parc Perras offered no entertainment this week; indeed by the end of

⁴⁶ *Ottawa Free Press*, 25 July 1896, 7; reprinted in the *Ottawa Citizen*, 27 July 1896, 7.

⁴⁷ *Ottawa Citizen*, 1 August 1896, 7.

the week, the park had been seized by creditors for its inability to pay its performers.⁴⁸

The Wallace Circus appeared in Ottawa on Thursday, 30 July, and between afternoon and evening performances drew patronage in the neighbourhood of 9,000 people.⁴⁹ Despite these large numbers, the newspapers claimed that crowds at West End Park were undiminished; whether this was due to the large number of pleasure seekers present in the city, or simply different entertainments drawing upon different audiences is impossible to determine.⁵⁰ The report certainly supposes, however, that it would be natural to expect that the West End Park audience would be diminished by the visiting circus, thus implying a common audience for the two attractions.

An entertainment which seemed to appeal to a different audience was the Band concert offered at Rockcliffe Park. A “Lover of Rockcliffe” wrote to the *Citizen*, remarking, “The entertainment at West End Park is choice and is everything that the Electric Railway Company advertise, but the band concerts at Rockcliffe Park are much missed by many patrons of the company who like a simple outing in the beautiful walks around Rockcliffe, or a sail on the river to the strains of the band.”⁵¹ The author goes on to entreat the OER to give one concert a week at Rockcliffe, claiming, “I do not think it would interfere with the attendance at the West End.” The Railway company clearly agreed with

⁴⁸ *Ottawa Citizen*, 30 July 1896, 7.

⁴⁹ *Ottawa Journal*, 31 July 1896, 1.

⁵⁰ *Ottawa Free Press*, 31 July 1896, 7.

⁵¹ *Ottawa Citizen*, 31 July 1896, 8. This anonymous letter strikes me as a little suspicious; without offering any concrete evidence, I would suggest that it was planted by the Electric Railway company themselves as a means of announcing their concert. This is in keeping with the sort of promotional letters and articles which appeared surrounding the exploitation of the Kinetoscope.

this claim, as they announced that a band concert would be offered the following evening (Saturday).

Week Three

By the middle of the second week, the Electric Railway Company was already advertising the headline act for the third week of entertainment at West End Park. This was to be the Parisian Diantes Brothers, “the brightest musical and acrobatic clowns in the profession, [who] have played in London and New York throughout two whole seasons.”⁵² The Vitascope, with new views, was held over for another week, but seemed once again to take a supporting role to the main act. An article in the *Free Press* praised the Park for keeping the Vitascope, claiming, “Those who see it once go again. In New York it has been crowding the houses nightly for four months continuously.”⁵³ While there may have been some customers who returned to the Park each week, the authority of this claim is somewhat dubious; the great number of articles and reviews which appeared in the Ottawa papers – almost unanimously positive – suggest that many of these were ‘puffs’, or thinly veiled advertisements.

As had been the case the previous week, articles praised the high quality of the headline act, but made little reference to the Vitascope. The *Journal*, after describing the clever and skilful performance of the Diantes, said of the Vitascope only: “The Vitascope continues unfailing in its mystery and interest.”⁵⁴ An article in the *Free Press*

⁵² *Ottawa Free Press*, 29 July 1896, 7.

⁵³ *Ottawa Free Press*, 1 August 1896, 1.

⁵⁴ *Ottawa Journal*, 4 August 1896, 1.

commented, “The pictures of Annabelle and Amy Muller are most beautiful and realistic.”⁵⁵ Though this sort of brief remark was the norm during the Vitascope’s third week in Ottawa, there were some exceptions. The *Citizen* praised the fascinating motion pictures and reported, “If anything [the Vitascope] is running more smoothly and exhibiting more distinct views than last week and consequently attracts greater attention than ever.” Midway through the week, announcements appeared in all three anglophone newspapers listing five new films which had just arrived.⁵⁶ Though titles were given, the absence of descriptions for these films suggests that their primary attraction was by virtue of their being *new* material, rather than their subject matter.

The brevity of remarks about the films themselves also implies that the Vitascope views were easily consumable and comprehensible by their audience, perhaps thanks to their similarity to pre-cinematic representational practices such as limelight views and panoramas. One exception to this easy comprehension may have been caused by camera movement in some films: “The view of the gorge at Niagara Falls was one of peculiar effect that puzzled people at first due to the fact that the scene was taken from the front of a moving trolley car. It is understood the Electric Railway Co. have arranged with Mr. Holland to stay another week.”⁵⁷ While it may certainly be the case that the audience was, at first, unfamiliar with mobile framing, the report also symbolically aligns the moving trolley of the film with the Electric Railway company who would provide the entertainment for another week. Though perhaps unintentional, this report offers a potent

⁵⁵ *Ottawa Free Press*, 4 August 1896, 8.

⁵⁶ *Ottawa Free Press*, 5 August 1896, 7; see Appendix for list of films.

⁵⁷ *Ottawa Journal*, 5 August 1896, 5.

example of the parallel perceptual experiences between the representations offered by the Vitascope and the streetcar rides to and from the park which sandwiched this entertainment.

One article specifically about the Vitascope came in the form of a somewhat suspicious letter to the editor, with the headline: "Wants a "Vitaphone". The anonymous author wrote:

Editor Journal: The Vitascope is a wonderful instrument, throwing on canvas such scenes as take place in actual life with nearly all the power of realism. It lacks however one thing to fully complete the idea of realism, and that is sound. The phonograph would supply that.

Could it not be that when the instrument is taking the view for the Vitascope, a receiving phonograph be so arranged alongside that all sound which belong to that particular view would be recorded on the wax records.

When the Vitascope is then publicly exhibited the phonograph would be there too to throw out the sound belonging to that scene.

For instance. The Vitascope would give the view of a band with all the motions, the phonograph would supply the music to these motions and so with every other thing. Has this idea been thought of or attempted?

"VITAPHONE."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *Ottawa Journal*, 4 August 1896, 5.

This letter brings to mind the correspondence about “Edison’s Failure” which coincided with the exhibition of the Kinetoscope the previous November, although unlike that query, no response to “Vitaphone” appeared in the *Journal*. As before, however, this letter highlights the silence, and therefore the acknowledged artifice of the moving pictures, and calls attention to the way science – particularly Edison’s science – could solve the problem. But was the exhibition really silent? During the third week, the orchestra of the Governor General’s Foot Guard was advertised to “supply the music” for the program in general.⁵⁹ It is unclear if this music was played during the Vitascope views or just between the acts.

The amusements at West End Park during the week of 3 August faced less competition from other entertainment venues than they had in previous weeks. A band concert was once again offered on Saturday night at Rockliffe Park, but likely had little affect on attendance at the Railway company’s other resort. The greatest distraction from West End Park came in the form of Wilfred Laurier’s triumphant return to Ottawa on Wednesday the 5th. The *Journal* reported that 30,000 people witnessed as torches, bands and fireworks welcomed the new Prime Minister.⁶⁰ No reports of the previous night’s entertainment at West End Park appeared on Thursday, suggesting that the amusements were either deserted or cancelled outright.

Week Four

Three weeks after its premiere at West End Park, the Vitascope was a popular, if

⁵⁹ *Ottawa Citizen*, 3 August 1896, 8.

⁶⁰ *Ottawa Journal*, 6 August 1896, 1.

somewhat familiar, attraction. It was held over, once again, for the week of 10 August 1896, during which a Japanese acrobatic troupe, the Tukushimas, was scheduled to headline. On Monday afternoon, however, the city's evening papers printed a change of program:

PLENTY OF VITASCOPE

The managers of West End Park were notified late this afternoon that owing to illness the Royal Japanese family of acrobats would be unable to come to Ottawa to-day at least. To fill the gap the management of the Park have decided to put on double the number of Vitascope views, 18 in all, and the 43rd Battalion brass band will be present and render an interesting programme.⁶¹

The OER were indeed fortunate that the Vitascope was available to provide entertainment, but it must have been with some degree of trepidation that they advertised a program made up almost entirely of films. Even during its first week at West End Park, the Vitascope had been accompanied by a magic show to round out the bill. Certainly, band concerts were acceptable entertainment to many, but were typically offered to streetcar patrons for free at Rockcliffe Park. Were audiences still excited enough by the Vitascope's "realism on canvas" that they would pay to see eighteen films, many of which had no doubt been screened numerous times already?

The newspapers reported crowds at West End Park despite the cancellation of the

⁶¹ *Ottawa Journal*, 10 August 1896, 7.

main attraction. According to the *Journal*, “The Vitascope seems to be as good a drawing card as at first. . . Most of the views last night were intensely realistic, and there were encores for several.” The article goes on to announce that the Tukushimas would not appear the following evening either, but fortunately, “so far the people have not seemed able to get enough Vitascope.”⁶² The abundance of newspaper articles praising the entertainments at West End Park was much decreased during this week of the Vitascope’s exhibition, but some reviews still appeared. The *Citizen* reported on the large numbers of people who “took advantage of the programme at the Park to enjoy the fresh air of the country and revel in the music of the 43rd orchestra.” The article goes on to praise the Vitascope views shown: “The scenes are realistic and well chosen, every motion or change in nature being perfectly delineated. Scarcely a bubble in the earth’s greatest falls escapes the ever alert camera.”⁶³

While some scenes may indeed have been impressive for viewers, there is reason to be sceptical of the unanimous praise offered by the press (aside from the difficulties in distinguishing reviews from paid ‘puffs’ remarked on already). Newspaper reports only named two new films being shown: “Lee Richardson Fancy Bicycle Riding” and the “Knock Out Round in the Leonard-Cushing Sparring Match”.⁶⁴ This suggests that the rest of the program was made up of films which had already been exhibited in Ottawa, and were perhaps familiar to return customers. Indeed, in their correspondence with Raff and Gammon, the firm supplying their films, the Holland Bros. repeatedly complain that they

⁶² *Ottawa Journal*, 11 August 1896, 7.

⁶³ *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 August 1896, 7.

⁶⁴ *Ottawa Free Press*, 12 August 1896.

needed new films. Moreover, some of the films which they *did* receive were in poor condition and wore out quickly, if they could be shown at all: "I notice several of the thin films are losing the gelatine rapidly. One film, "Patterson Falls" was so bad that I cut out a piece and joined it. I find on looking at it again that the gelatine is rising along it a considerable distance. The film will be worthless. "The Widow's Kiss" though run every night shows no signs of wear. Other films, apparently the same as far as clearness and softness are concerned are showing patches."⁶⁵ While none of the newspaper reports remarked on this specifically, some of the films being projected must have been worn or damaged by this time.

Despite the praise heaped on the Vitascope by the press, the managers of West End Park must have had some misgivings about its ability to continue drawing a crowd. By Thursday evening, the Vitascope and band program had been supplemented with a well-known baritone, A.D. Sturrock. Advertisements highlighted the singer's appearance, and the Vitascope was again reduced to a supporting attraction.⁶⁶ Reviews for the remainder of the week focussed on Sturrock's performance, but also praised the Vitascope, if somewhat more briefly than before. A report in the *Journal* remarked: "The Vitascope has been engaged for another week. It seems to be a sort of fixture. Hundreds of people from the surrounding towns are coming specially to see it."⁶⁷ While it is impossible to tell how popular the Vitascope *actually* was, it is reasonable to conclude

⁶⁵ Andrew Holland to F. Gammon, 18 August 1896, Raff & Gammon Collection, box 6, folder 7, Baker Library, Harvard Business School.

⁶⁶ *Ottawa Free Press*, 13 August 1896, 1.

⁶⁷ *Ottawa Journal*, 14 August 1896, 3.

that it was not popular enough to provide a full program on its own after having exhibited for several weeks already.

Week Five

The OER's misfortunes with scheduled entertainers continued during the week of August 17th. They had advertised that Bartell & Morris, two instrumentalists or "Musical Mokes" from New York, would appear at West End Park all week, but once again, Monday brought announcements of program changes. The *Journal* headline read, "An Unprofessional Act. The New York Musical Mokes Break Faith with Their Ottawa Contract".⁶⁸ This time, there was no attempt to mount a full program surrounding the Vitascope; instead, the Park management booked Gordon McDowell and Elma Cornell, two Toronto "dramatic and comedy sketch artists."⁶⁹ Unfortunately, the week's entertainment was marred by poor weather, which forced the cancellation of shows on Tuesday and Friday evening.

Generally speaking, the fifth week of amusements at West End Park received much less attention from the press than did previous weeks. References to the Vitascope were brief and perfunctory, with only one exception. The *Journal* reported on Monday the 24th that a new Vitascope scene had "caused great amusement" on Saturday night when exhibited for the first time. The reviewer recounted the scene, which was about a "mischievous small boy who turned the hose on the old gardener [and then] received the

⁶⁸ *Ottawa Journal*, 17 August 1896, 7.

⁶⁹ *Ottawa Journal*, 18 August 1896, 7.

old-fashioned punishment across the knee of the gardener's wife."⁷⁰ This film was, of course, Edison's remake of the Lumière Brothers' *l'Arroseur arrosé*. But the review is striking in that it describes the subject matter of a film more thoroughly than previous articles. Perhaps this is because of the concise narrative provided by the film, which stood in contrast to the more simple representational films which had been shown before. Instead of being impressed by the Vitascope's ability to show "realism on canvas", the audience had been amused primarily by the story. Although this is only one example, the review does suggest that the novelty of moving pictures as a scientific wonder was already waning for spectators in Ottawa.

Week Six

By the beginning of the sixth week of entertainment at West End Park, newspapers had already announced that it would be Ottawa's final week to see the Vitascope, "as Mr. Holland is about to leave the city to fill other engagements."⁷¹ Only a few days later, it was announced that the week of August 25th would be the last of West End Park's season because of the cool evening temperatures.⁷² The Vitascope views were joined this time by Baldwin and Daly, who were described as "comedy acrobatic Zulus," and the Pantzer Brothers, "remarkable athletes and head to head and arm to arm balancers." The newspapers praised these entertainers highly, and once again made only passing remarks about the Vitascope: "The Vitascope views, as usual, were provocative

⁷⁰ *Ottawa Journal*, 24 August 1896, 5.

⁷¹ *Ottawa Journal*, 22 August 1896, 7.

⁷² *Ottawa Journal*, 26 August 1896, 5.

of admiration or of mirth.”⁷³ New films were advertised towards the end of the week, but were not described in the reviews.

With the end of summer came the beginning of a new theatre season in Ottawa. Grant’s Hall re-opened and staged a production of “Little Lord Fauntleroy” which could be enjoyed for 10, 15 or 25 cents.⁷⁴ The *Journal* congratulated the OER for their successful summer, noting the large crowds that had attended the park:

The performances were a decided boon to the city during the hot weather. In the dog days, when nothing else was going on, a cooling run on the cars to the West End Park, with a capital performance thrown in, was certainly to be appreciated. The cost of the evening’s amusement, too was so reasonable that very few were kept at home on account of the expenditure. When 25 cents would buy a reserved seat and return fare on the cars it is no wonder the performances were well patronized. The company provided the best attractions to be had in the market. Everything they gave was the best of its kind. The opening of evening performances was an experiment, but it has proved a success, and next year the company with its characteristic enterprise will likely do something even better.⁷⁵

It is difficult to say how important the Vitascope was to the Park’s successful experiment. There is no reason to doubt that it was a popular amusement, but it achieved sustained

⁷³ *Ottawa Journal*, 26 August 1896, 7.

⁷⁴ *Ottawa Journal*, 29 August 1896, 7.

⁷⁵ *Ottawa Journal*, 31 August 1896, 5.

success in Ottawa primarily as a supplement to headline performances. We should not equate – as perhaps film historians are wont to do – a long run with spectacular commercial success and sweeping public adulation.

In fact, one of the reasons for the Vitascope's extended run in Ottawa may have been the willingness of the Holland Bros. to take a loss on their investment. Andrew Holland wrote to Norman Raff: "With reference to the low rate at which I started the machine here, it was purely an experiment. I am glad now that I made the engagement, because though the rental we receive is small, our expenses are correspondingly low, and we have gained experience that I preferred to learn here amongst friends and electricians, who would, as a matter of friendship, do their best to help me out of a hole, than to be stuck amongst strangers."⁷⁶ By the end of his run in Ottawa, Holland was quite disheartened by the Vitascope's prospects for success in Canada: "I am completely disheartened by the Vitascope business in consequence of the wretched films we have been receiving of late. . . For my part, I would rather pitch the business to the dogs than continue under such circumstances."⁷⁷ Holland would later come to the conclusion that it was impossible to profit from the Vitascope in Canada and terminated his association with Raff & Gammon before the end of 1896, stating: "The fact of the matter is, there is no money in the Vitascope in a sparsely settled country, with the competition of half a dozen machines."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ A. Holland to Raff, 1 August 1896, Raff & Gammon Collection.

⁷⁷ A. Holland to Raff, 3 September 1896, Raff & Gammon Collection.

⁷⁸ A. Holland to Raff, 30 November 1896, Raff & Gammon Collection.

Moving Pictures and the Streetcar Suburb

While audience members were unlikely to have had the Holland Bros.' profit margin in their minds while watching the Vitascope, the business of West End Park is certainly worth examining. Edison's Vitascope was exhibited for six weeks in Ottawa, or perhaps it is more appropriate to say *near* Ottawa, since the exhibition took place at the newly completed West End Park in the suburb of Hintonburgh. Why this location? With a population of only about 500 families of a variety of classes and professions, proximity to a large audience could not have been the reason for building an amusement park in Hintonburgh.⁷⁹ Far from the commercial and entertainment centre of Ottawa, this park was intended as a new summer resort, similar to Rockliffe on the opposite side of the city to the East.

In fact, just days after the Holland Brothers brought the Kinetoscope to Ottawa for the second time, in November 1895, all of the city's newspapers, anglo- and francophone, carried similar articles announcing the Electric Railway Company's plans to open a new park. "Besides the pleasure afforded by the natural beauty of the park," the *Journal* reported, "the company intend to remove the merry-go-round there from Rockliffe, and give evening entertainments of a high class, for which only a nominal admission of 5 cents will be charged. The company will sell on the cars for 15 cents return tickets, including admission to the entertainments. The grounds proper will be free. The ride. . . will be even more attractive than to Rockliffe. It is a very pretty route and will be even longer than to Rockliffe."⁸⁰ At the end of a soon-to-be-completed streetcar line,

⁷⁹ Bruce Elliott, *The City Beyond*, 182.

⁸⁰ *Ottawa Journal*, 5 November 1895, 1.

constructed to convey tourists to the Experimental Farm nearby, West End Park would make a convenient and pleasant rural retreat for city dwellers.

Another fact highlighted by these articles is that long before the Holland Brothers exhibited the Vitascope at West End Park, their name was already associated with the place. One of the headlines of the *Journal* article read, "It will be in Grove Land on the Old Holland Property Back of the Experimental Farm."⁸¹ This was, in fact, land that Andrew Holland had contributed to a real estate venture called the Ottawa Land Association (OLA). Shareholders of the OLA, besides Holland, included Thomas Ahearn, Warren Soper and William Scott, directors of the Ottawa Electric Company (OEC) and the Ottawa Electric Railway (OER); William Hutchison, director of the OER and president of the Central Canadian Exhibition Association; and Robert Blackburn of the McKay Milling Company.⁸² It is not difficult to see how this group was able to use their influence to ensure that electricity and electric streetcars passed through land they owned, raising its value at the same time. Bruce Elliott writes of these investors: "As shareholders in the Ottawa Land Association they planned to sell building lots at Hintonburgh and Mechanicsville to working families lured out of the city by cheaper land and lower taxes. As shareholders in the Ottawa Electric Railway Company they stood to reap a second profit from the fares the suburbanites paid to commute to work."⁸³ But even before profiting from commuter's fares, the OER would exploit their new Park as a summer resort for urbanites forced to pay admission and car-fare both ways.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Bruce S. Elliott, *The City Beyond* (Nepean, Ontario: City of Nepean, 1991), 179, 419n.23; *Ottawa Journal*, 20 March 1896, 4; *Ottawa Journal*, 2 June 1896, 7.

⁸³ Ibid, 190.

Over the next several months, evidence appeared in the Ottawa papers indicating the development of a Hintonburgh infrastructure and suggestive of OLA involvement. On 19 November 1895, the *Journal* declared “More Westward Extensions”, reporting that “Messers. Andrew Holland, J.C. Brennan and Wm. Scott [had] purchased the Cowley farm at the west end of the city.”⁸⁴ Only a couple of weeks later: “The Grant property on the Richmond road has been purchased by Mr. A. Holland.”⁸⁵ The Hintonburgh electric railway line was officially opened on 1 May 1896 when a group of city officials were taken on a tour of the route: “It runs west through Hintonburgh and along Cedar street to the new West End Park and the land of the Ottawa Land Association, where it turns southward and a run of about three-quarters of a mile over Holland avenue, running through the park lands, terminates the line at the Farm grounds, about a quarter of a mile distant from the Farm offices.”⁸⁶ Certainly for those attentive to civic business affairs, the Holland name was closely associated with West End Park before the Vitascope ever appeared there.

The final step of the Ottawa Land Association, prior to the opening of West End Park, was the advertisement of plots of land along the electric streetcar route to Hintonburgh. Large, full-page advertisements appeared, and were repeated, in the *Journal*: “It is just 15 minutes’ run by electric car from the Ottawa Post Office to the West End Park.” A large map of the area detailed the plots of land available: “The ideal home site on the West Side of the city in the very choicest part of a rapidly growing

⁸⁴ *Ottawa Journal*, 19 November 1895, 8.

⁸⁵ *Ottawa Journal*, 4 December 1895, 7.

⁸⁶ *Ottawa Journal*, 1 May 1896, 5.

suburb. Lots purchased here are sure to increase in value and will prove – An opportunity for a family man to own his home – A chance for a young man to provide for the future – A savings bank for the young woman – A good investment for the capitalist. For full particulars apply to the Ottawa Land Association.”⁸⁷ The middle-class aspirations are immediately evident here, as is the OLA’s grand scheme of land development. Of course, it is nowhere detailed that the capitalists behind this plan were the same people who stood to gain from new customers of electricity, streetcars and West End Park, but we can safely deduce that this was their full intent.

West End Park was more than simply a new leisure resort; it represented the arrival of electricity in a growing suburb. Aside from the electric street car that customers would take out to the park, the company also erected “five electric swings in the grove...operated by an electric motor which also [operated] the new piano organ to be played during the movement of the swings.”⁸⁸ The electric company also installed arc lamps at the park, so that it could be used at night; one article even highlighted the attraction of this, noting that “the effect of the light among the foliage was very pretty.” In addition to these electrical additions, the OER built “an enclosure capable of seating 800 to 1,000 people ... for exhibition or show purposes.”⁸⁹

So, unlike the Kinetoscope, the venue itself was an important factor in the reception of the Vitascope. West End Park was far from the Opera House and commercial centre of the city along Sparks Street. Located near the suburb of

⁸⁷ *Ottawa Journal*, 31 May 1896, 6.

⁸⁸ *Ottawa Journal*, 22 June 1896, 3.

⁸⁹ *Ottawa Journal*, 15 July 1896, 6.

Hintonburgh, West End Park was at the end of a newly completed electric streetcar line and was intended as a new summer resort, similar to Rockcliffe Park on the opposite side of Ottawa. Once again, entertainment was being regimented by the growing public utilities, namely Ahearn and Soper who controlled the electric railway line and the electric light utility. In placing the Park at a distance from the downtown, the OER also excluded the least affluent theatre-goers from attending the Vitascope exhibitions. This result suggests David Nye's claim – that streetcar amusement parks contributed to the formation of a mass society – did not yet apply to Ottawa. Several years later, the streetcar company would subsidize the cost of visiting their suburban amusement parks on special days and “[t]he free excursion was praised for opening the park to poor families who could not afford the fares.”⁹⁰ There is no reference to any such promotions during the summer of 1896, however, so those who could not afford the fare – and thus were not likely to be prospective OLA customers – were prevented from seeing the Vitascope.

These details about land ownership might seem of little importance for viewers of the Vitascope. The participants in the Ottawa Land Company may not have been widely publicized – if they were, they did not seem to draw any criticism for their collusion with the electric railway to raise land values. But it *was* well advertised that the Holland Brothers were those in charge of exhibiting the films, and people who took the electric streetcar travelled along Holland avenue to reach the park. Many newspaper articles remarked on the pleasantness of the streetcar trip as part of the outing; on warm summer evenings, streetcar trips were increasingly popular as amusements in their own right

⁹⁰ Bruce Elliott, *The City Beyond*, 184.

during this time. So while the journey was an added attraction for the audience travelling to the park, we should not ignore the fact that much of the scenery the viewers were passing was for sale from the Ottawa Land Association. This motivation may go some way to explaining why the Holland Brothers were willing to continue running the Vitascope at the park for so many weeks at a financial loss.

Electrification and suburban expansion may not have been foremost in audience member's minds as they enjoyed the Vitascope and other entertainments at West End Park, but they certainly contributed to their general "horizon of experience". Projected moving pictures were a popular attraction, at first as a spectacular novelty and eventually as a welcome supplement to other mixed programs. While the conflation of 'science' and 'the marvellous' continued to structure reports of this sort of entertainment, the respectable setting and carefully selected audience was perhaps most influential in ensuring the social acceptability of Edison's new amusement. Above all, this analysis makes clear that the Vitascope exhibition in Ottawa belonged to a general project of modernization and suburban expansion. These factors informed the apparatus itself, as well as the venue and audience composition during its exhibition.

Conclusion: Early Cinema Reception in Ottawa

This thesis began with an evocation of the historical accounts of cinema's first exhibitions which highlighted the uncomprehending shock felt by audience members in the face of a marvelous new invention. Terry Ramsaye wrote in his famous history of cinema *A Million and One Nights* of the first Vitascope exhibition in New York: "The audience was deeply puzzled at this magic of the screen. When the waves at Dover came rolling in to crash in jets of spume and spray there was a flurry of panic in the front seats."¹ It is hoped that Ramsaye's account must now seem highly suspect, as this thesis has provided ample evidence that an early cinema audience was well prepared for the Vitascope's arrival. Even in Ottawa, far from the major cosmopolitan metropolises of the United States and Europe, previous experiences with commercial entertainment and modern technologies informed citizens' reception of projected moving pictures. This unique set of circumstances or "horizon of experience" in Ottawa also meant that film exhibition and reception took on a different meaning there than in other locations.

Spectators in Ottawa were perhaps more familiar with commercial entertainments

¹ Terry Ramsaye, "First Night on Broadway," in *Film: An Anthology*, ed. Daniel Talbot (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 378. Excerpt from *A Million and One Nights* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926).

than one would expect. Though looked on critically by some segments of society, many citizens demonstrated a healthy appetite for the most “up to date” amusements from New York or London. In this respect, Ottawa may have been similar to Lexington, Kentucky, which exhibited an “ambivalent desire for and fear of “imported” entertainment and a national (mass) culture in the making.”² As collective commercial leisure activities became more common in Ottawa, it was important that the composition and behavior of audiences be carefully scrutinized and controlled. Increasingly, it was through electrical utilities (lights, streetcars) and the techno-entrepreneurs who controlled them that this regimentation was accomplished. As a result, cinema and many other entertainments at the turn of the century were mediated in Ottawa by large public utility monopolies.

Though far beyond the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to speculate whether this institutional organization which provided the setting for cinema in Ottawa represented an early sign of a general tendency in modern Canadian media. As the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board demonstrate, it has often been necessary in Canada to coordinate media production using large over-arching structures in order to overcome the nation’s vast geography and unevenly distributed population. The Holland Brothers encountered these same obstacles when they left Ottawa and tried to introduce the Vitascope to other cities and small towns. Writing to Norman Raff, Andrew Holland complained:

Unfortunately for any outsider who has to deal with a New Yorker, the possibilities of a venture are gauged by what can be done in New York. You say

² Gregory Waller, *Main Street Amusements*, xviii.

that you have made over \$10,000 contracts in that city alone. No doubt: you have more available exhibition ground in one ward in that city than we have in the whole of Canada, without the expense of traveling or the difficulty of variable electrical currents to contend with.³

These problems of distance and technological incompatibility forced the Holland Bros. out of the Vitascope business, but they highlight the important role played by streetcars and electric current at West End Park. The Vitascope's success in Ottawa was accomplished in part thanks to the city's organization of modern utilities, a network not to be found coordinated at provincial or national levels until many years later.

The questions of entertainment, science and commerce discussed here informed the arrival of the cinema in Ottawa. It is difficult to determine what was in the minds of those first spectators, but we can see from this discussion that they were perhaps much better prepared for the event than has been generally believed. They were well accustomed to moving pictures and projected electric lights; and although sometimes contentious, commercial entertainments similar to the cinema were already well established in the city. Moreover, living in a centre of electrical experimentation and advance, Ottawans were unlikely to appear unprepared for something as discussed and touted as projected moving pictures

Perhaps more interesting than these facts, however, is the possible role played by the Vitascope in the expansion of Ottawa's suburbs. The cinema represented the move of modernity out of the city centre, along the route of an electric street car. Unlike the

³ A. Holland to Raff, 28 December 1896, Raff & Gammon Collection.

itinerant showmen and theatrical impresarios who introduced films elsewhere, the Holland Brothers' interests were informed by a corporate, or public utility business strategy. With electricity and high-class amusements at the city's west end, affluent landowners were hopefully soon to follow.

By drawing together a wide variety of events and experiences in Ottawa during the mid-1890s I have tried to piece together something of the "horizon of experience" of the city's first viewers of the cinema. This thesis suggests some of the potential value of a local study of film reception in Canada. The circumstances in Ottawa may not display opposition to an imported media so much as an appropriation and mediation of it. I do not expect that the experience of other Canadian cities would necessarily be the same as Ottawa, but they may provide other examples of mediation or appropriation. While not combining as a monolithic whole, a multitude of local experiences reveal that the forces of foreign cultural colonization are not necessarily so oppressive after all. At the very least, this sort of study restores a certain amount of agency to the Canadian film audience. So, let us not simply examine the *production of films* in Canada, but also the *production of meaning* surrounding films in Canada.

Appendix: Films Exhibited in Ottawa, 1894-1896

All films shown were produced by Edison or his agents. Titles in square brackets represent descriptions from newspaper accounts; where possible, these have been identified using Charles Musser's filmography, *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890-1900*. The original titles are presented in italics and accompanied by Musser's catalogue number, the year of production and film length. Question marks follow titles which pose a particular problem, but it should be understood that all of these identifications are somewhat tentative.

1. Kinetoscope, November 1894

[a barber shop] – *The Barber Shop* (#18: 1893, 50ft)

[a blacksmith's shop] – *Blacksmithing Scene* (#16: 1893, 50ft)

[skirt dancing of Rice's drama, "1492"] – *Fairies' Dance/3 Little Girls Dancing* (#51: 1894, 50ft)

[the big fight between Champion Jim Corbett and P. Courtney] – *The Corbett-Courtney Fight* (#54: 1894, 6 x 150ft)

2. Kinetoscope, November 1895

No films named or described.

3. Vitascope, Summer 1896

21/07/1896

[A corner in Prospect Park, Brooklyn] – *Parade of Bicyclists at Brooklyn, New York ?*

(#178: 1896, 50ft and 150ft)

[The breakwater at Coney Island] [les vapeurs océaniques sur la mer dont les lames défectent sur le rivage = ocean vapors rising from the sea whose waves crash on the shore]¹ – *Bathing Scene at Coney Island ?* (#177: 1896)

[les trains de chemin de fer en mouvement] – *Railway Smash-up ?* (#162: 1896)

[l'armée en marche] – *Firing of Cannon at Peekskill by the Battery of Artillery* (#194: 1896, 50ft)

[les principales chutes du Canada], [a view of the Whirlpool] – several films of Niagara falls were produced by Edison in 1896.

[The Widow's Kiss] – *May Irwin Kiss* (#155: 1896, 50ft)

[a scene on Broadway] – *Herald Square* (#158: 1896, 50ft)

¹ Thanks to Professor André Loiselle for helping me with this translation.

25/07/1896

[six new films, including Annabelle and Muller, all coloured] – *Annabelle Serpentine Dance*; *Annabelle Butterfly Dance*; *Annabelle Sun Dance* ? (#139-141: 1894); *Amy Muller* (#152: 1896, 50 and 150ft)

05/08/1896

White Wings (#160: 1896, 50ft)

Passaic Falls (#183: 1896, 50ft)

Little Jake and the tall Dutch Girl (#179: 1896, 150ft)

Fire Rescue (#106: 1894, 50ft)

The Goat Parade – ?

[the view of the gorge at Niagara falls...taken from the front of a moving trolley car] – *Niagara Falls, Gorge View from the Gorge Railroad* (#163: 1896, 150ft)

12/08/1896

Lee Richardson Fancy Bicycle Riding (#182: 1896, 150ft)

Knock out Round in the Leonard-Cushing Sparring Match (#40: 1894, 150ft)

24/08/1896

[the mischievous small boy who turned the hose on the old gardener] – *Bad Boy and the Gardener* (#187: 1896, 50 and 150ft)

25/08/1896

[Scene from the First Act of Hoyt's Milk White Flag] – *Milk White Flag* (#101: 1894, 50ft)

28/08/1896

Watermelon Eating Contest (#207: 1896, 50ft)

Holland Bros. letters

Cake Walk (#121: 1895, 50ft)

According to John C. Green (a.k.a. Belzac the Magician)

[May Irwin and John Rice in a kissing scene] – *May Irwin Kiss* (#155: 1896, 50ft)

[four coloured boys eating watermelons] – *Watermelon Eating Contest* (#207: 1896, 50ft)

[the Black Diamond Express] – *Black Diamond Express* (#262: 1896, 50ft)

[a bathing scene at Atlantic City] – *Bathing Scene at Coney Island/Surf Bathing at Atlantic City* (#177: 1896) or, *Sea Beach Scene* (#206: 1896, 50ft)

[Lo Lo Fuller's Serpentine Dance] – *Annabelle Serpentine Dance ?* (#139: 1895, 50ft)

Green's list should be treated somewhat cautiously. Two titles in particular show evidence of flawed recollection. First, *Black Diamond Express* was filmed on 1 December 1896 and so could not have been exhibited during the July or August previous. Secondly, though Loie Fuller was a dancer of the period, Musser's filmography contains no reference to her performance in an Edison film. All evidence suggests that the Holland

Bros. were only exhibiting Edison films (via Raff & Gammon) during this period, so it is likely that Green was misremembering the exact films shown at West End Park.

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