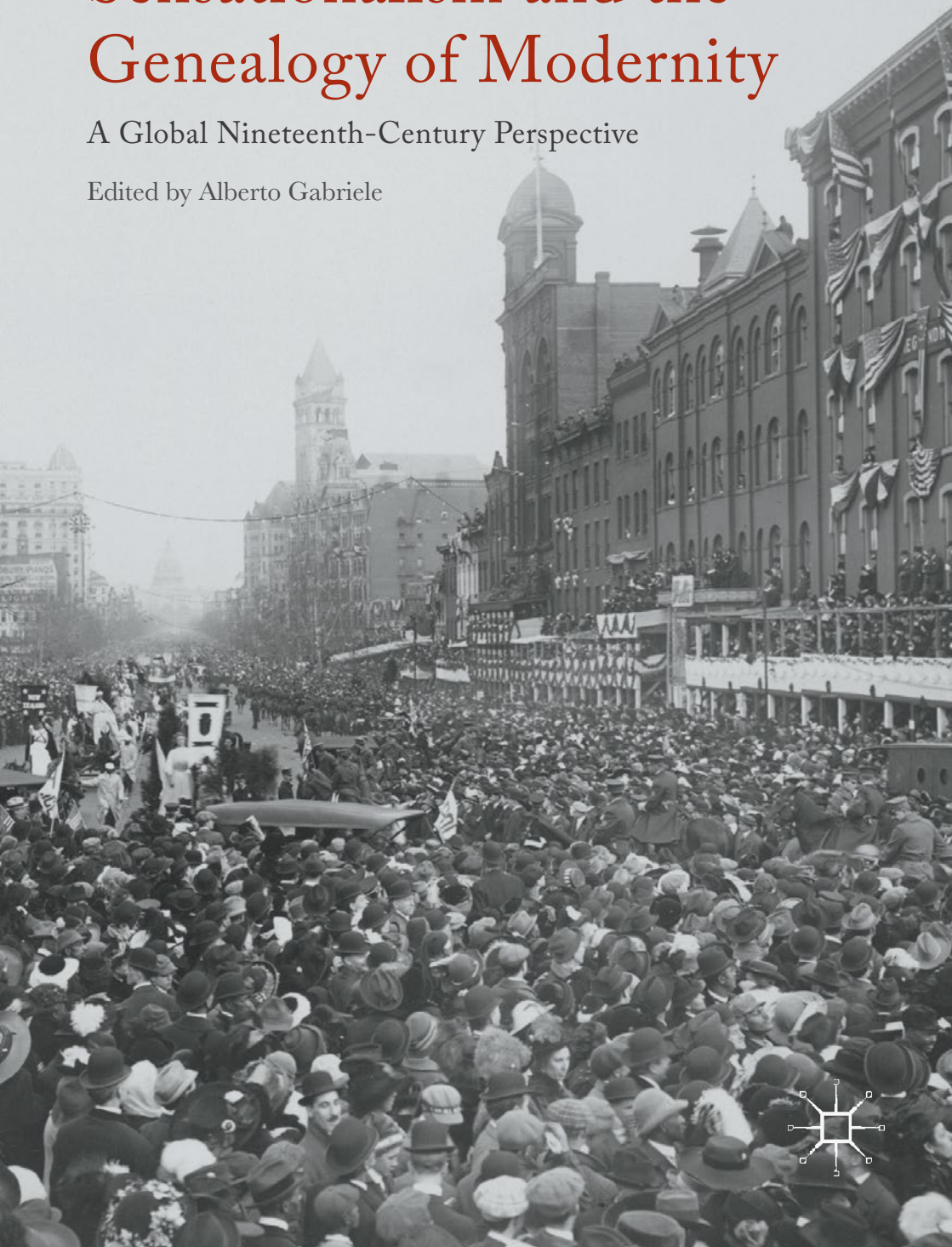


Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity

A Global Nineteenth-Century Perspective

Edited by Alberto Gabriele



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Alberto Gabriele
Editor

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Editor

Alberto Gabriele
Department of English and American Studies
Tel Aviv University
Tel Aviv, Israel

ISBN 978-1-137-60128-5 ISBN 978-1-137-56148-0 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-56148-0

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016957881

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Nature America Inc.
The registered company address is: 1 New York Plaza, New York, NY 10004, U.S.A.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincerest thanks to all the authors who contributed to the collection and to the anonymous peer-reviewer at Palgrave. The final revisions have been completed during a residency at the University of Melbourne sponsored by a Macgeorge fellowship. I wish to thank Rachel Fensham, Head of the School of Culture and Communication, and Ken Gelder from the English department for his hospitality within the Australian Centre. The Macgeorge family needs to be acknowledged for making available their 1911 mansion on a hill descending toward an affluent of the Yarra River where the invisible song-lines of the Aboriginal first nation could still be detected and honored. I am particularly grateful to everyone else at the School and at the University who welcomed me there with exquisite kindness and generosity, in particular my neighbors Jeff and Sam Haynes who promptly shared top-notch technology of every conceivable practical usefulness to make my stay even more pleasurable. My sincerest thanks to the staff and managers of the State Library of Victoria and of the University of Melbourne library, particularly Philip Kent, for granting me access to all their resources, and to the staff of the New York Public Library, British Library at King's Cross and Columbia University Library for their help when I was writing the first draft of the introduction.

CONTENTS

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction: Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity: Transnational Currents, Intermedial Trajectories—A Global Nineteenth-Century Approach | 1 |
| <i>Alberto Gabriele</i> | |
| Part I Sensational Tactics in the Nineteenth Century | 27 |
| Irony and Popular Politics in Germany, 1800–1850 | 29 |
| <i>James M. Brophy</i> | |
| The Horror of Clothing and the Clothing of Horror: Material and Meaning in Gothic and Sensation Fiction | 49 |
| <i>Stefanie Lethbridge</i> | |
| Adelaide, Sensationalism and the Development of New Journalism in the Early History of the South Australian Press | 69 |
| <i>Anthony Laube</i> | |

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Urban Perils and the Sensational Bicycle: Text-Image Dynamics in the Victorian Magazine <i>Cycling</i>, 1894–1896 | 95 |
| <i>Efrat Pashut</i> | |
| Part II Transmedial Trajectories: The Vanishing Act of Performance | 119 |
| Destructive Re-Creations: Spectacles of Urban Destruction in Turn- of-the-Century USA | 121 |
| <i>Hélène Valance</i> | |
| The Magician’s Box of Tricks: Fantômas, Popular Literature, and the Spectacular Imagination | 143 |
| <i>Matthieu Letourneux</i> | |
| Sawing People in Half: Sensationalist Magic Tricks and the Role of Women on Stage in the Early Twentieth Century | 163 |
| <i>Katharina Rein</i> | |
| Sensational Voices: Premodern Theatricality, Early Cinema, and the Transformation of the Public Sphere in Fin-de-siècle Vienna | 193 |
| <i>Sabine Müller</i> | |
| Part III Visualizing the Space of Industrial Modernity | 215 |
| The Whole Thing (and Other Things): From Panorama to Attraction in Stephen Crane’s “The Open Boat,” Ashcan Painting, and Early Cinema | 217 |
| <i>Michael Devine</i> | |

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Urban Metaphysics versus Metropolitan Dynamisms: The Italian Vision Before the First World War | 239 |
| <i>Ester Coen</i> | |
| Spatiality and Temporality in Benjamin and Adorno | 257 |
| <i>Anat Messing Marcus</i> | |
| The Sensibilities of Semicolonial Shanghai: A Phenomenological Study of the Short Stories by Liu Na'ou | 277 |
| <i>Aubrey Tang</i> | |
| Index | 297 |

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

James M. Brophy is the Francis H. Squire Professor of Modern European History at the University of Delaware. He is the author of *Capitalism, Politics, and Railroads in Prussia, 1830–1870* (1998) and *Popular Culture and the Public Sphere in the Rhineland, 1800–1850* (2007) as well as co-editor of *Perspectives from the Past: Sources in Western Civilization* (1998; 5th ed., 2012). In addition, he has published numerous essays on the social, economic, and political history of nineteenth-century Germany. He is working on *Markets of Knowledge: Publishers and Politics in Central Europe, 1770–1870*, a book project that examines dozens of German publishers as cultural brokers and political actors. He has recently been a Berlin Prize fellow at the American Academy in Berlin.

Ester Coen is Professor of Contemporary Art History at the University of L'Aquila. An expert on Futurism, Metaphysical art, and Italian and International avant-gardes of the first half of the twentieth century, she has curated and contributed to numerous exhibitions: *Pittura Metafisica* (with Giuliano Briganti, Palazzo Grassi, Venice, 1979), *Umberto Boccioni* (with Bill Lieberman, the Metropolitan Museum of New York, 1988), *Italian Art in the Twentieth Century* (Royal Academy, London 1989); *Memoria del Futuro* (Centro Reina Sofia, Madrid 1990), *Metafisica* at the Scuderie del Quirinale (Rome 2003), and, more recently, *Matisse Arabesque* (Scuderie del Quirinale, March–June 2015). In 2009 she was one of the three committee members of the Futurism centenary exhibition (Centre Pompidou Paris, Scuderie del Quirinale Rome and Tate Modern London).

Michael Devine is Assistant Professor of English at SUNY Plattsburgh. His first book project on American poetry, early cinema, and the visual arts was a finalist for the Zuckerman Prize in American Studies. His articles have appeared in *American Literature and Adaptation*, and has forthcoming essays on the literature of attractions in the 1890s and on early cinema in post-9/11 literature and film.

Alberto Gabriele is the author of *Reading Popular Culture in Victorian Print: Belgravia and Sensationalism*. He has been a visiting scholar at the School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University, and a visiting fellow at the University of New South Wales at ADFA, Canberra, and at the University of Sydney in 2014, and a fellow in residence at the University of Melbourne in 2016. He has completed two monographs on *Precinema and the Literary Imagination* (volume I *The Emergence of Precinema: Print Culture and the Optical Toy of the Literary Imagination* and volume II *Fragmentation, Movement and the Modern Episteme*) and was awarded a major grant to complete his research project on the nineteenth-century Leipzig publishing industry.

Anthony Laube is Curator of the Newspaper Collection at the State Library of South Australia. He is the author of a number of historical studies of the early settlement of the south coast of South Australia as well as a biography of the nineteenth-century traveler and authoress Agnes Grant Hay, *A Lady at Sea*. He is a member of the Australian Newspaper Preservation Plan working group (ANPlan). He is the author of over 200 online histories of South Australian newspaper titles on the State Library website.

Stefanie Lethbridge is Senior Lecturer in English Literature and Culture at the University of Freiburg, Germany. Her research interests are mainly in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century print culture studies, British poetry, and popular culture. She has completed a monograph on British poetry anthologies in their print culture context, *Lyrik in Gebrauch: Gedichtanthologien in der englischen Druckkultur 1557–2007*. Her current research projects focus on hero cultures and publishers' series in India.

Matthieu Letourneux is Professor of French Literature at the University of Paris Ouest Nanterre (Paris X, France). He is a specialist of serial fiction, popular literature, and media culture. His more recent books are *Cinéma, premiers crimes* (2015, with Alain Carou), *Fantômas, Biographie d'un criminel imaginaire* (2013, with Loïc Artiaga), *La Librairie Jules*

Tallandier, Histoire d'une grande maison populaire (2012, with Jean-Yves Mollier), and *Le Roman d'aventures, 1870–1930* (2010). He is chief editor of the international online peer-review *Belphegor* (<https://belphegor.revues.org/>) devoted to popular literature and media culture. He has edited works of Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain, Louis Forest, Eugène Sue, Emilio Salgari, and Gustave Aimard.

Anat Messing Marcus holds an MA from the Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas. She is currently a graduate student at the University of Cambridge's Department of German and Dutch.

Sabine Müller is a researcher and lecturer at the Department of German Studies of the University of Vienna and is working on her habilitation project “Kultivierte Latenz. Die anders Moderne in der österreichischen Literatur 1930–1960.” She specializes in modern Austrian literature, Austrian cultural history, and culture theory. Her publications include “Teststrecke Kunst. Wiener Avantgarden nach 1945” (Ed., 2012) and “Elfriede Jelinek: Tradition, Politik und Zitat” (Ed., 2009).

Efrat Pashut holds an MA from Tel Aviv University's English and American Studies track department, where she studied with Alberto Gabriele. Her research focuses on Victorian periodicals, and specifically on the periodical *Cycling*. She is interested in several aspects of the periodical, such as the trope of sensationalism, the culture of leisure, and gender.

Katharina Rein holds an MA in Cultural History and Theory, Philosophy, and Ancient History from the Humboldt-University Berlin, where she works on her doctoral dissertation concerning stage magic between 1862 and 1921. She works as a researcher and lecturer at the International Research Institute for Cultural Techniques and Media Philosophy (Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie) of the Bauhaus-University Weimar. Rein is a member of the international research project “Les Arts Trompeurs. Machines, Magie, Médias/Deceptive Arts. Machines, Magic, Media,” where she is currently responsible for the research axis “L'art magique, pratiques et discours.” In 2013 and 2014, she was a fellow of the Max Weber Foundation. Rein's publications include the German monograph *Gestörter Film. Wes Cravens, A Nightmare on Elm Street* (2012, Darmstadt) and various articles on stage conjuring, horror film, and television series as well as other topics of media and cultural history.

Aubrey Tang is a PhD candidate in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine. Her research interests include affective cinema, sensations and cinema, film and urban culture, phenomenology, as well as Chinese and Sinophone film historiography.

Hélène Valance is a graduate of the Université Paris 7 Diderot, and teaches American art and visual culture at Ghent University. She is the author of *Nuits Américaines: le Nocturne dans l'art aux Etats-Unis, 1890–1917* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, forthcoming in 2015). Her essays include: “Buffalo: The ‘Electric City of the Future’ That Never Really Was” in *Cities of Light: Two Centuries of Urban Illumination* edited by Sandy Isenstadt, Dietrich Neumann and Margaret Maile Petty; “White City vs. la Ville Lumière: Electrical Illuminations at the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893” *Is Paris Still the Capital of the Nineteenth Century?* edited by Hollis Clayson and André Dombrowski (forthcoming); and “Whistler’s Mother: An International Misunderstanding” in *Circulation. Terra Foundation for American Art Research Series* edited by François Brunet (forthcoming).

LIST OF FIGURES

| | | |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Fig. 1.1 | The Master applies himself to languages and the sciences, private collection | 36 |
| Fig. 1.2 | Rhine Crisis cartoon, private collection | 42 |
| Fig. 2.1 | Cover of the 1904 paperback edition of Wilkie Collins's <i>Woman in White</i> published by Routledge. © Andrew Gasson | 64 |
| Fig. 4.1 | "A Close Shave!," <i>Cycling</i> , September 1894. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne | 112 |
| Fig. 4.2 | "A Shock," <i>Cycling</i> , March 1896. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne | 113 |
| Fig. 5.1 | "Burning of the Peristyle, with Western View of the Court of Honor and Administration Building." From H.H. Van Meter, <i>The Vanishing Fair</i> . Chicago: The Literary Art Co., 1893: 8. Author's collection | 135 |
| Fig. 5.2 | "Cavalry Escorting Meat Train Protected by Infantry from the Chicago Stockyards during Strike." From H.H. Van Meter, <i>The Vanishing Fair</i> . Chicago: The Literary Art Co., 1893: 22. Author's collection | 136 |
| Fig. 7.1 | "Stone walls and chains do not make a prison—for Houdini," ca. 1898 (image: Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-53798 DLC) | 169 |
| Fig. 7.2 | Suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst being arrested after protesting in London on May 22, 1914 | 179 |
| Fig. 8.1 | Market women at Neuer Markt, Vienna, photograph by Emil Mayer, around 1900 © Bezirksmuseum Meidling | 202 |

| | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Fig. 8.2 | Barker in Vienna's Prater amusement park, postcard, photograph by Emil Mayer, around 1910 © IMAGNO/Austrian Archives | 210 |
| Fig. 9.1 | <i>Bucking Bronco</i> (1894), Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division | 222 |
| Fig. 9.2 | <i>A Street Arab</i> (1898), Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division | 227 |
| Fig. 9.3 | <i>In the Grip of the Blizzard</i> (1899), Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division | 232 |
| Fig. 9.4 | George Benjamin Luks (1867–1933). <i>The Spielers</i> (1905). Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, gift of anonymous donor, 36 1/16 in. × 26 1/4 in. (91.6 cm × 66.68 cm) oil on canvas | 234 |
| Fig. 10.1 | Giorgio De Chirico. <i>The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon</i> [1910], private collection | 244 |
| Fig. 10.2 | Giorgio de Chirico. <i>Le Voyage emouvant</i> [1913]. MOMA, New York. © 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome | 247 |
| Fig. 12.1 | Detail of Liu Na'ou's essay in <i>Women's Pictorial</i> , (<i>Furen Huabao</i>) 18 (May 1934): 16 | 289 |
| Fig. 12.2 | Illustration by Guo Jianying in <i>Literature and Art Pictorial</i> (<i>Wenyi Huabao</i>), 1: 1934 | 291 |

Introduction: Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity: Transnational Currents, Intermedial Trajectories—A Global Nineteenth-Century Approach

Alberto Gabriele

In the 1860s the British culture industry employed the adjective “sensational” to market the plot-driven, excitingly eventful narratives of popular fiction written by the likes of Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Mrs. Henry Wood and Charles Reade. The ubiquitous appearance of the term “sensational” in print culture wove a network of references that made the literary field a porous membrane, shaped by the social forces set in motion by the process of industrial modernity and in turn affecting them. Advertising, popular entertainment, debates on aesthetic taste and the senses at large all co-opted a rhetoric of strong, stupefying, not necessarily elevating, sensations to articulate a trope, that of sensationalism, which defined popular culture, and the protean experiments it encouraged.¹ The numerous uses of the trope of sensationalism provided the culture industry with a long-lasting power of reinventing

¹ See also Alberto Gabriele (2009).

A. Gabriele (✉)
Department of English and American Studies,
Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

itself, making it a methodologically questionable choice to limit it to the chronological demarcation of nineteenth-century/twentieth-century culture, and the at times hierarchical distinction of Victorian/modernist art and literature. A wide field of cultural production, therefore, echoed and multiplied the stimuli of the serialized *coup de theatre* that set the *tempo* of the serialized narrative installment of sensation fiction. These new modalities of cultural production shaped the style, syntax and format of several genres, literary and journalistic, painterly and performative, while deeply impacting the structures of psychological reception of the urban reader and observer.

The challenge to traditional forms of representation that accompanied this process lay in the desire to mediate the fragmentation of modernity into a manageable cogent unity. This aesthetic and normative imperative to retrace an increasingly elusive notion of unitary order appeared in several fashions. In literature, for instance, it surfaced as the overall teleological development of narrative structure meant to reaffirm the values of the dominant culture. In visual culture at large, this striving for unity, which circulated within a loosely Platonist discourse, whose semantic field migrated from philosophy to religion and culture at large, presented countless instances of symbolic condensation and of figurative representation. Many cultural forms reproduced this logic, shaping both the material fabric of culture and the intellectual after-image it left with readers. Journals titles attempted to imprint a sense of unity to their miscellaneous contents with their titles and editorial line. The medium of the bound book itself, moreover, gathered the scattered experience of reading periodical literature in a homogenous format; the “new” spectacles of precinematic entertainment, again, sought to reproduce the stabilizing visual regime of older models of painterly vision through the mechanical and industrial standardization of these new forms of entertainment, resulting in the emergence of the cinematograph first, and later, its industrial development in narrative cinema.

This new rhetoric of the modern with its recognizable tropes of structure and order meant to manage the dizzying multiplicity of industrial modernity that resurfaced whenever the history of modernization, in its uneven global dissemination, hit a threshold of formalization in the countries that followed the British model of industrial development. The well-oiled machinery of global trade, which was long in the making before the inception of the industrial age, enabled the transmigration of cultural products and the movement of cultural agents outside of the national borders. These transmigrations of cultural forms moved not only

in the direction of the colonial territories, but to and from neighboring European territories that absorbed and reinterpreted cultural novelties coming from neighboring centers of cultural production and industrial innovation outside of the respective national markets. *Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity* proposes to highlight this global dimension of popular culture in the course of the nineteenth century, while at the same time seeking to expand the scope of traditional histories and professional expertise that grew too attached to source materials that have been confined at times exclusively to one linguistic and cultural context.

Since the invention by Henry More of the term “sensorium” in 1650 within a philosophical debate that sought to articulate a reflective form of empiricism, or to salvage its spiritual component, the semantic field of sensationalism has been linked to a theorization of “moral sentiment,” as Adam Smith did in his work of 1759, linking it to the cultivation of refinement enabled by commercial culture, and by the visual component of the social interaction with others that might correct the excesses of the former.² With industrialization, as attested at least since Wordsworth’s *Prelude* Book 7 (in the 1805 version) and the empirical registering of impressions caught by the moving observer in the modern city, sensation is experienced outside of any intellectual structure, absorbed as sheer fragmentation resisting the normative force of logic and narrative that might articulate its meaning in manageable units. The spectacular interaction of the subject cultivating one’s moral refinement while dealing with the reality of the commercial city denies in *The Prelude* Book 7 the hypostatized stability of a clearly defined relation between the observer and the spectacle observed, which was posited in philosophical treatises and in a large tradition of painting. Sensation is reduced in Wordsworth’s *Prelude* to sheer fragmentation, vision to an endless movement of things caught by the observing subject *in movement*, perception of one’s subjectivity to a porous membrane with no definite boundaries.³ While the saturation of the capacity for absorbing sensory stimuli and the ensuing psychic implosion is clearly exemplified in the narrative of Wordsworth’s autobiographical poem, contemporary theorists such as Thomas Trotter similarly linked the modern “nervous condition” to the

² See James Chandler, xvii. For a thorough investigation of the relation between economic advancements and the theories of sentiment see Pocock, J.G.A., *Virtue, Commerce and History*.

³ See Alberto Gabriele (2008).

reality of urbanization, making it the symptom of modern city life, prone to possible pathological developments, which have been recognized later also by Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin.⁴

The semantic field of sensationalism, therefore, marked the emergence of a modern epistemic challenge, resulting from the immediate experience of perceiving reality in fragments, in isolated pieces to be rearranged into a sequence. A sense of cogency was instated either by means of new thought processes that symbolically condensed the new reality into larger ideas like that of the system (so crucial to the modern epistemes of philology, biology and the theory of value, as noted by Foucault in *The Order of Things*), or by means of new narratives that made reality more manageable. The literal movement of people, commodities and agents that inhabit the space of modernity, as well as the metaphorical movement of identities in and out of existing structures of power, reshuffled the traditional hierarchies and the narratives of causality that made sense of contemporary reality, thus inspiring writers as well as artists and theorists to engage with this new challenge.

Inextricably linked to the uneven emergence of industrial modernity in different geographical contexts, sensationalism becomes a constant transhistorical presence, a trope of the emergence of modernity, which can be charted over a very long period, from the early part of the nineteenth century in the British examples, and later in the century in France, the USA, Germany, Italy and Russia. In the latter areas modernization coincided also with the advent of newly redefined geopolitical entities. In structuring itself as a new language, sensationalism presented recognizable patterns and tropes, more or less visible in the contemporary landscape of competing discourses that reinstated intellectual categories of old, such as the notion of organic unity or structural order in aesthetic theory and in the sociological articulation of gendered, national and racial identities. The aesthetic and intellectual rupture provided by fragmentation in the experience of urban modernity coexisted with the desire to resort to a notion of order and structure, until the modernist avant-gardes of the early part of the twentieth century recuperated many of the experiments and intuitions of the previous century in a conscious embrace of a new aesthetics of visual, stylistic and intellectual fragmentation that ruptured the continuum of

⁴ See Trotter's *Nervous Temperament*, qtd. by John Brewer in "Sentiment and Sensibility," in *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, p. 26.

spatial and temporal conventions. The spatial and temporal dislocation that modernity brought since its inception became a shared language for artists and writers in the early part of the twentieth century, thus providing an easy narrative of rupture and innovation in opposition to the tradition of aestheticism that had only reinstated older intellectual formations such as the discourse of beauty, with different degrees of abstraction from figurative representation or the immediate reality of everyday life.

Mapping the temporal and geographic coordinates of the trope of sensationalism in the long, global nineteenth century, therefore, helps to reorient the temporal coordinates of the history of industrial modernity and to identify a continuum in its manifestation and representations. Such a continuum closely links modernist experimentations with the highlighting of materiality and the engagement with fragmentation and disruptive sensations in the course of the long nineteenth century. This calls for a comparative approach, not only by juxtaposing different geographical areas that might be viewed in clearer focus in opposition to other ones, but by dispersing this history over a *longue durée*. This is why *Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity* chooses to focus on cultural productions drawn from the whole time span of the “(very) long nineteenth century,” in order to allow to perceive the hidden and often unacknowledged continuities throughout a period that is often divided into separate disciplinary fields (Romantic, Victorian, Modernist) all reduced to the confines of the national disciplines of literature, art and cultural studies. The collection allows to see, through the prism of different geographical locations, in Europe, the USA, Asia and Australia, how the larger questions associated with the inception of modernity, ranging from the redefinition of the psychology of perception to the gendered structures of social organization, were articulated in each context, and to take note of invisible tangential points of cultural exchange, and of parallel developments that might have resulted from these contingencies. While the “Global Nineteenth Century” approach of the subtitle dispenses with an impossible encyclopedic thoroughness, it nonetheless aims to recognize the unavoidable necessity to incorporate such a global perspective in contemporary research, in order to better highlight the phenomena usually ascribed to only one cultural context. The collection *Nineteenth Century Worlds. Global Formation Past and Present* (2008), while choosing to address “the most pressing concerns of contemporary geopolitics,” presents studies that focus only on English-language texts. However critical such a perspective might be, it nonetheless reaffirms the structures and formations of one form of global

dominance, the British empire. I held a (partially) similar view in my understanding of the global—but actually, Victorian—networks of distribution of print culture identified in my doctoral thesis proposal defended in 2003. It is with the aim of mapping new synergies between approaches, specializations and agents that I put together this collection of essays, as a way to create new points of contact in the scholarly landscape.

A “Global Nineteenth Century” approach is even more necessary, and at the same time belated, when considering that the actual history of the development of modern economic systems has always been transnational, and fueled by the power of global trade, before it crystallized in the revered representatives of a national canon of artists and writers often extrapolated from this more complex history. The comparative, interdisciplinary dialogue that the essays in *Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity* enable, moreover, is much needed as, overall, they sharpen the perception of the historical specificity of each context, so that the task of theorizing and producing an argument within the boundaries of national history is constantly reshuffled by the concomitant development of similar realities elsewhere. The history of popular culture and the transmission of sensational forms, from news of wars and revolutions—an often unacknowledged sensationalism—to the evolving entertainment practices targeting the urban audience (with extension in the countryside, as we will see), is deeply transnational, not only in the obvious migration of cultural products, and through the impact of foreign ideas and practices, but as a filigree trace that helps to reconsider the intellectual horizons of the study of literature and culture in several locations throughout the long nineteenth century. Adopting a strictly nineteenth-century focus without questioning or reflecting on the arbitrary conventions of a periodization organized in centuries, moreover, runs the risk of offering partial, if not a “frozen-in-time,” perspective that does not advance the understanding of the reverberations of larger historical forms beyond the nineteenth century.

The interdisciplinary dialogue across borders, periods and disciplines situates the study of nineteenth-century culture in a global context, according to a trend, the study of “the global,” which is deeply transforming the cultural horizons of several academic fields, including the study of literature outside of the limiting focus on national literary traditions. While the global approach at times appears as the recasting of older methodological concerns with the notions of “translation,” “appropriation,” “exchange,” and with the dynamic interaction of

productive terms such as “center” and “periphery” (or the questioning of such a distinction), the local and the national (or international), which have always been the foundation of scholarly inquiry in many fields, this collection dispenses from limiting one’s scope to the debates of any one field, as is often the case of research tackling the question of the global, in isolation from the other ones.⁵ The dialogue between the essays published here proposes, therefore, interdisciplinarity on a global scale as an ongoing redefinition of critical tools and methods, rather than the application of a standardized methodological formula to one specific context. The cross-pollination resulting from engaging with different disciplinary fields and periods that the reader will be exposed to will be a means to redefine and reorient one’s own critical coordinates and to be inspired by different contexts, methodologies and scholarly styles. *Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity*, which grows out of the conference organized at Tel Aviv University in December 2013, with scholars coming from Ireland, France, Germany, Holland and Italy, but includes also six new submissions, seeks to advance the scholarly debate on sensationalism by taking a new approach to several methodological questions.

PERIODIZATION

The essays contained in *Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity*, far from focusing only on the most symptomatic representations, such as the sensational 1860s in the British Victorian context, expand the focus to encompass on one hand the precursors of sensationalism in the history of popular art forms such as political ballads (Brophy) or gothic fiction (Lethbridge), and on the other the later articulation of the trope of sensationalism in the fin de siècle culture of journalism (Laube, Pashut) and the early part of the twentieth-century entertainment through mass culture, periodical literature, early cinema and performance (Valence, Letourneux, Rein, Devine, Müller, Tang).

⁵ For a productive overview of the question of place in colonial and postcolonial studies see the introduction (Chap. 1) and the conclusion (Chap. 11) of *(Dis)Placing Empire* by Lindsay J Proudfoot and Michael M Roche.

GLOBAL CURRENTS

Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity seeks to understand the rise of industrial modernity and the workings of popular culture by creating a dialogue between American studies specialists (Devine, Valance), Australian (Laube), Austrian (Müller), British (Letheridge, Pashut, Rein), Chinese (Tang), French (Migozzi), German (Brophy, Messing Marcus) and Italian (Coen). Since the inception of industrial modernity in these areas happened at different times and in relation to different power structures, the juxtaposition of essays on different periods helps to build a narrative that will inevitably identify common patterns as well as recognize more historically specific responses to the culture of modernity. An essay such as Tang's stresses even more the need, in focusing on the global circulation of popular fiction, for an attention to what Arjun Appadurai calls the "radical disjuncture" between different sorts of global flows and "the uncertain landscapes created in and through these disjunctures" (Appadurai 3).

URBAN AESTHETICS: THE "MODERNITY THESIS"
REVISITED

A dominant paradigm in the study of industrial modernity harks back to the works of Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin, who insisted on the intense and shocking experience for the subject immersed in the synesthetic experience of urban modernity by crystallizing what nineteenth-century critics had already noted in countless examples. One among them is Margaret Hale's comment in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854–55): "It is the town life. Their nerves are quickened by the haste and bustle and speed of everything around them." While, on the one hand, expanding on this tradition through the discussion of intensely charged literary and theatrical works (Valance, Pashut, Letourneux, Rein), the discussion in *Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity* of the emotional responses spurred by nineteenth-century modernity, on the other hand, departs from this model when including, for instance, the humorous and ironic dimension of the reception of shocking news and sentimental rallying cries (Brophy), the aural dimension of a disappearing address to the audience in a long tradition of pre-nineteenth-century sensationalism (Müller), and the subjective reverberations that mediate the shock of the modern (Tang). Another way to reshuffle the categories associated with a study of modernity is to

question the canonical opposition between city and countryside in defining the spatial coordinates and the sensory apparatus associated with modernity. Studies such as Pashut's help to question this stark opposition by tracking the impact of the sensational trope, and its quickened tempo of fragmented intensified perceptions, in the late nineteenth-century leisure industry associated with the enjoyment of the countryside. Overall, *Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity* makes the study of the senses, so crucial in contemporary scholarship, the focus of several interventions, some of which more specifically address the question of visualization in popular forms of instruction and entertainment, and in the theory of modernity elaborated by Adorno and Benjamin (Messing Marcus, Tang, Devine and Coen), whereas others recuperate an often undervalued dimension of aural sensationalism in the experience of popular culture (Müller, Brophy). Benjamin, in particular, is a ubiquitous presence in the collection that reaffirms his enduring impact in contemporary historical and cultural studies.

What is called the "modernity thesis," and ascribed to Benjamin, is an approach to a study of modernity that is currently under attack, not only through the rhetorical move of phrasing it as a hypothesis, by a school of film and cultural theorists that in some cases rely on the findings of our contemporary psychological studies to contradict the view offered by Benjamin, while operating a curious dismissal of the very archival traces and the contemporary responses to the phenomena of modernity that best help to single out how nineteenth-century commentators first perceived it, as the quote of Elizabeth Gaskell, among countless others, can attest. These studies strangely ignore the massive evidence of nineteenth-century material culture and the insights from nineteenth-century texts that Benjamin collected in preparation of all of his essays, in a proliferation of quotations as if to attempt a philological reconstruction of an intuitive *stemma codicum* (a chart of the transmission of texts) of nineteenth-century culture at large.

INTERMEDIAL SYNERGIES: THE VANISHING ACT OF PERFORMANCE

One of the challenges in the study of the cultural productions associated with industrial modernity is the unstoppable proliferations of copies, adaptations and mediations, which imply a complex and often elusive lived experience of the contemporary consumers caught between different media. In the multiplication of stimuli accompanying the cultural landscape of industrial

modernity, and in the often unstoppable metamorphosis and transmedial migration of each product, the protean nature of these cultural productions often eludes a thorough scholarly scrutiny. They may be missed, unless they appear in the solid materiality of one medium (book, journal, painting, film) that may condense the multidirectional and synesthetic experiences of the modern city and reduce them to an observable object of analysis. What is lost in this translation is the multimedial and multisensory experience of modernity itself. The protean appearances of nineteenth-century cultural productions in a series of dizzyingly unstable reproductions make it almost impossible, and to some degree methodologically questionable, to focus on only one of them. Nicholas Daly has charted the transmutations of the cultural trace of the “woman in white” from novel to poster, theatrical adaptation, painting and popular culture through religious worship (the apparitions of the “woman in white” at Lourdes), allowing to expand the focus from one medium to a much more receptive and mimetic field of cultural production. Stefanie Letheridge in her essay in this collection reminds us, with Allingham, of Benjamin’s reference to the poster of the theater adaptation of Wilkie Collins’ sensation novel *The Woman in White* instead of the cover of the book itself, and that is a case in point of the dispersed and multimedial dissemination of any cultural product that may constitute a slippery path for the cultural historian.

While the difficulty of tracking the resourceful entrepreneurial exploitation of anything that caught the imagination of the public is not unsurmountable, and can be overcome through the methodological model of scholarship offered by Nicholas Daly, the lived experience of the modern city through the many forms of performance that artists and cultural producers were immersed in and interacted with becomes a lost text that may indirectly propagate the centrality of the more material media (painting, film) at the expense of their precursors in time-bound ephemeral forms. Futurism’s “Variety Theatre” was a programmatic embrace of a poetics of the direct, frontal challenge to the remoteness of the audience of spectators in traditional theater. It did so by adopting the poetics of attraction, articulated in the shocking and the sensational, which broke the separation between audience and public in the short-lived experience of the performance itself that mimics the sensory experience of modernity. The theory of attractions elaborated by Futurist performers has provided a memorable category to early cinema historians (Gaudreault 1978; Gunning 1995, among others), so much so that is now aligned to the filmic object and not to the experiments with spectatorship and audience participation

that were theorized and practiced at the same time. The famous “serate,” the happenings of the futurist avant-garde, harking back to the theatrical slaps in the face of traditional audiences of performances such as Jarry’s 1896 *Ubu Roi*, constitute a place for experimenting with novel perceptions and for practicing a dislocation of accepted signifying conventions. These perceptions became memorable stylistic features in the history of modernism only when fixed on a canvas or in another tangible artistic form by the performers-artists themselves, while necessarily dispersing the original experience of performance. The ephemeral origin of painting in performance is highlighted in the Futurist proclamation that “the gesture for us will no longer be a *fixed moment* of universal dynamism: it will be decisively the *dynamic sensation* made eternal” (Goldberg 2011: 14). The collaboration of modernist artists who designed props and costumes for the theater is a constant feature throughout the history of modernism, from the sets for *Ubu Roi* made by Bonnard, Vuillard and Toulouse-Lautrec, to the ongoing collaboration of avant-garde artists and filmmakers such as Malevich, Eisenstein, Rodchenko and De Chirico with the theater for the production of plays, ballets and operas (Goldberg 2011: 12; Bowlt 2014; Bellow 2013). The question of movement of forms and colors, as well as the dislocation of traditional meaning, was a central concern for all, but it was in the futurist “words-in-freedom-drama” performed in Rome in 1914 at the Sprovieri gallery, where paintings by Carrà, Balla, Boccioni, Russolo and Severini were exhibited, that Marinetti, Balla and Cangiullo themselves provided a live performance of the “words in freedom” written by Cangiullo, while enhancing the sensory dissonance of the visitors of the gallery by producing a series of noises (Goldberg 2011: 18).

Paris and the space of the Parisian café or of the theater have a central role not only in the history of performance and the emergence of modernist art and literature—the influence of *Ubu Roi* for the young Marinetti being a case in point—but as one of the earliest sites in which spectators were exposed, among other acts, to Lumière’s patented invention of the cinematograph. The café, the traditional site for the exchange of ideas in the newly constituted public sphere, was also a crucial place for the reinvention of modern forms of visual spectacle, in a fluid transition from lived performance to a material, and also mechanical, recreation of a spectacular attraction, as attested also by the countless monotypes printed by Edgar Degas registering the impressions of the café concert on paper (Hauptman). Vanessa Schwartz in *Spectacular Realities* has demonstrated that the first projections of the cinematograph in Parisian cafés was eyed

by cultural promoters as a new industrially produced spectacle that could equal, compete, both in production costs and in the rapidity of turnout, with the popularity of wax museums like the Musée Grévin, which reproduced episodes of sensationalized city life taken from the *faits divers* of the periodical press. A fascination with death was also the leitmotif of Le Cabaret du Néant, which offered the distinctive death-related decor of its ambience, but also the performance of macabre magic acts, so much so that Matthieu Letourneux redefines the task of the author of serial crime fiction in the early part of the twentieth century as a magician's act with a fascination with macabre details like the ones that attracted customers to the Le Cabaret du Néant. Ester Coen notes that Balla, another Italian futurist in Paris, visited the Cabaret and mentioned it in his letters.

The lived experience of these performance spaces, therefore, is a crucial intertextual trace that needs to be accounted for in an understanding of the reinvention of artistic and literary conventions operated by modernism. The novelty lies not in the groundbreaking use of artistic and literary techniques *within* the space of the canvas, or the printed book, nor in the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but rather in the hybrid form of textuality that the urban sensorium itself represented before these multisensory, at times dissonant, stimuli took material forms in book and painted forms. One whole section in the collection shall, therefore, stress the importance of this lived performance in the genealogy of modernity.

The collection is organized in three parts: I. Sensational Tactics in the (Very) Long Nineteenth Century. II. Transmedial Trajectories: the Vanishing Act of Performance. III. Visualizing the Space of Industrial Modernity.

I. SENSATIONAL TACTICS IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY

The essay collection opens with James Brophy's discussion in "Irony and Popular Politics in Germany, 1800–1850" of the rhetorical tropes permeating the often flimsy category of "the popular." Due to the protean nature of popular culture, the slippery taxonomy used to fix its categories, and its often untraceable reception, the sphere of the "popular" constitutes an almost formidable challenge to any systematization. The essay seeks to identify some fundamental rhetorical figures that shape the expression of popular culture, first the figure of the synecdoche animating the political sentiments gathered around the projected symbol of unity of the monarchy

in popular anti-Napoleonic songs. It then proceeds to discuss the power of irony “as a poetic and narratological idiom” that spells an eighteenth-century emergence of modernity through its ability “to accentuate difference, independence, and self-reflexive consciousness,” as a form of “oppositional citizenship” that neutralizes the imposed narrative of nationalism and redirects political response to domestic issues and the liberal causes of the early part of the nineteenth century. The range of materials discussed explicitly, from broadsheets to popular ballads, lithographs, periodicals, but also the objects of a broader material culture that includes “playing cards, porcelain plates, and you-shall-not-have-it nightcaps,” points to a Romantic sensorium that is far from confirming the typology of the passive and threatened subjectivity of the mid-nineteenth-century accounts of the flâneur and the badaud. The range of sources, which include police reports as unintentional ethnographic records of the oppositional moods of the crowds, as well as visual representations of social types through prints and vignettes—in parallel to the developments in France of genres such as the *Physiologie*—attests to the sophistication of contemporary culture in theorizing about itself in memorable ways that often echoed in twentieth-century scholarly discussions without being traced back to the archival material that explicitly articulated them. The often-invoked questioning of the imagined discursive boundary of the private sphere in opposition to the public one, so as to make the private sphere a complementary component of nation-building, and also of colonial ideology, needs to redraw its imaginary boundaries by seeing both, as the essay invites us to do, in relation to a transnational public sphere rife with sensational emotions of a political nature that reverberated all over Europe during the liberal upheavals of the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s.

Material culture and the question of modern agency fall within the discursive field analyzed also by Stefanie Lethbridge in the following essay, “The Horror of Clothing and the Clothing of Horror: Material and Meaning in Gothic and Sensation Fiction.” The essay weaves a wide range of references to literary narratives culled from sensation and gothic novels, which co-opt the semiotic power of clothing to articulate a fascinating phenomenology of the redefined relations, in the course of the nineteenth century, between object and subject in the new landscape of expanding markets and triumphant commodity culture. The attention to materiality present in the gothic and sensation novel’s elaborate descriptions of clothing points, for Stephanie Letheridge, to instances of “social order disruption” for male and female characters alike: “instead of expressing

the self, clothes here frequently indicate disjunctions between subject and object and on occasion a disquieting domination of the material over the spiritual." Horror results "when there is a loss of control over the individual's negotiations with their social environment, when the material surface observed by others changes or eliminates the subject beyond the subject's control." Most interestingly, the essay also links the material aspect of book production itself, "the cover of the book," to a similar concern with appearance, social status and the slippery sites of signification that social mobility and commodity culture enabled in the course of the nineteenth century. This section of the essay points to a rich variety of commodities disseminated by the publishing industry and in doing so, it prompts a parallel reflection on the question of agency that these objects enabled, albeit in disguise. Letheridge's opens up a whole set of questions for a cultural historical approach to the study of nineteenth-century book history. Can the narrative of the circulation and production of books be different and freer than the more overdetermined and teleological one that the plot of the novel imposes on the actions of its characters? The case of the material nature of books that reveal, expose or demystify the functioning structure of culture offers a distinctive and different typology in the history of commodity culture in the nineteenth century that can help redefine a notion of subjectivity built in relation to the material object. Could, furthermore, a freer agency be ascribed to the reader, one that can transcend the taxonomic imperatives of the age?

The following two essays take the discussion of the trope of sensationalism in the Victorian context outside of the limited scope of the "sensational craze" of the 1860s, by tracking the evolution of the trope in the history of journalism: Anthony Laube traces the genealogy of the emergence of "new journalism" in South Australian papers from the 1850s, whereas Efrat Pashut codifies the modalities of sensationalism in the text-image dynamics in the Victorian magazine *Cycling*, during the peak popularity of the manufacture and sale of the Safety model (1894–96). Methodologically, Laube's essay chooses to focus on the South Australian context (the colony that had Adelaide as its capital) in order to revise a model of dissemination of cultural innovation from the metropole to the colonial outposts. Laube distinguishes two phases: an early period of experimentation and entrepreneurial prowess on the part of the first newspaper editors, many of which anticipated some of the practices of New Journalism, and a later, profit-dominated development, defined by a less fluid structure of power within the management of the South Australian papers, in an attempt to

please the local political class and steer away, at least initially, from sensational elements. Laube identifies several important forces that shaped the development of journalism in Australia: the discovery of gold in the neighboring colony of Victoria, the technological advancements in communications between Europe and the colonies represented by the opening of the Suez Canal and the establishment of telegraphic communication, and the intercolonial and international mobility of the journalists that settled there after stints in Britain, America, South Africa, Hong Kong and Germany. He proceeds to investigate South Australian history of the press through specific genres, such as the alternative press, the illustrated press and the mainstream press, and also by identifying sub-genres in the ongoing shaping of the new language of journalism in the Australian colony such as sports reporting, the creation of a target audience of women and investigative journalism.

Efrat Pashut's essay "The Sensational Bicycle: Textual and Visual Narratives in *Cycling*, 1891–1896" expands the study of the sensational trope beyond the often studied period of the "sensation craze" of the 1860s to track the impact of the newly marketed "Safety" model with pneumatic tire, as represented in the British journal *Cycling* through fiction, non-fiction and illustrations between 1891 and 1896. The trope of sensationalism, with the thrill of exciting news and sudden discoveries it sustains, is both inextricably linked to the naturalization of consumption patterns and immersed in the logic of market economy at large, with which the genre of sensation fiction has often been associated. In choosing the macrotext of the complete run of the magazine in the years 1891–96, Pashut avoids a purely thematic reading of the digital archive of the Victorian periodical press, which can produce a "google-like" list of references on any topic at a click of a mouse, in order to conduct a more rigorous research aiming at retracing the experience of reading the magazine in its original format, incorporating stimuli and suggestions coming from the juxtaposition of several elements in the language of journalism at the end of the nineteenth century. In tracking the psychological effects of riding a bicycle in the city and, most interestingly, in the countryside, she is then able to dispel the ungrounded notion that the sensory overkill was only relegated to life in the city. The bicycle appears, therefore, as an agent of the ambivalence that modernity represents, and sometimes it becomes a symbol of the project of enlightenment that dispels superstitious notions associated with the rural folklore of the "undead." The latter mode is present in E. Douglass Fawcett's story "A Hand from the

Grave,” which was published in the magazine. The vitality of the narrative structures of the sensation novel illuminates the protean form of popular fiction at large, and the endless proliferation of new hyphenated forms of sensation science-fiction, for instance, E. Douglass Fawcett’s novella *The Devilry of Baron Krantz*. The visual and verbal narratives that Pashut selects and analyzes help to identify a new model of a moving observer in the landscape of modernity besides that of the *flâneur*. Most interestingly, these narratives help establish an analogy between reading and riding a bicycle and between the unstructured vagaries of a bicycle ride and the field of analysis of the contemporary science of psychology.

II. TRANSMEDIAL TRAJECTORIES: THE VANISHING ACT OF PERFORMANCE

The essays in this section overall instate transmediality as a methodological constant in any analysis of the hybrid textuality and lived experience of popular culture in the long nineteenth century; they prompt us to abandon demarcation between disciplines and to question the historiographical and linguistic usage of any cultural product in an isolated context, especially when at the expense of the other’s concomitant uses and sites of production and dissemination of culture. In all of the essays the archival trace points to the crucial lived experience and to the time-bound, ephemeral performative nature that can be identified at the heart of modernity (and modernism) before any aspect may be hypostatized in work of art or in any medium. Contextualization, therefore, means retracing multiple perspectives and unstructured genealogies, considering also the *longue durée* of typologies associated with a pre-nineteenth-century history that cannot be simply dismissed by means of the trope of the radical paradigm shift of the end of the eighteenth century/beginning of the nineteenth. No matter which path is taken, the archival trace awaiting the researcher is a detour from narrative linearity, and a departure from the conventions of genre theory and from the strict demarcation of disciplines whose methodologies, overall, constantly demand a new assessment.

Hélène Valance in her “Destructive Re-creations: Spectacles of Urban Destruction in Turn-of-the-Century United States” focuses on the spatial performance of the modern city in the mimetic reproduction of reinvented cities in world fairs and amusement parks, such as Chicago’s “White City” during the 1893 Columbian exhibition or New York’s “Dreamland” and “Luna Park.” She expands the interest in live performance to track the

history of the spectacularization of destruction, through recreations of recent disasters, like the Galveston flood at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase exposition in Saint Louis (and the earlier version at Coney Island), the Johnstown, Pennsylvania, flood of 1889 at the Pan-American exposition in Buffalo in 1901, or the repeated Coney Island acts of *Fighting the Flames* at the beginning of the twentieth century, which included a miniature version in the Midget village. While considering also examples of historical catastrophes, such as the destruction of Pompeii at Coney Island and *Nero, or the Destruction of Rome* at the Barnum and Bailey Circus in Chicago in 1890—or other natural disasters like the eruption of Mount Kilauea—Valance focuses on the “spectacular plasticity” of the American examples of reconstructed cities during world fairs as a symbol of the recovery of large metropolises, such as San Francisco and Chicago after massive disasters hit them, like the 1871 Chicago fire or the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. In doing so, she identifies, following the insights of scholars such as Sally Lynn, the symbolic power of reinstating a sense of manageable order in the reconstructed catastrophes. Valance’s own research in the archive of the periodical press proposes a more topical reading of some of these sensational episodes of spectacular destruction when considered in the context of contemporary events that made the news at the same time: the common act of *Fighting the Flames* at Coney Island is juxtaposed to the accounts of the Triangle shirtwaist factory on Washington Square in New York City; the burning down of the Chicago “White City” to the Chicago railroad workers strike of 1894, following in this Allen Trachtenberg. She finds interesting evidence for a comparative reading of these ephemeral spectacles in the comments to the *Johnstown Flood* show by contemporaries such as Rev. Helms who reflected on events such as the assassination of President McKinley by the anarchist Leon Czolgosz (on the fairgrounds of the Pan-American exposition), or the periodic financial crashes of 1837, 1857, 1877 and 1893.

Mathieu Letourneux, “The Magician’s Box of Tricks: Fantômas, Popular Literature, and the Spectacular Imagination,” charts the system of synergies in popular culture that made serial literature, newspaper reporting and, later, film, share the same techniques to attract readers capitalizing on the fascination with criminal characters such as Fantômas. The essay highlights the discovery the author made in the archives of IMEC (Institut Mémoire de l’Édition Contemporaine), while researching the Marcel Allain/Francis Lacassin files, of a veritable box named the “box of tricks,” full with newspaper clippings that would eventually become

the source of endless additions in every new title in the series the two authors issued monthly. In an interesting redefinition of the task of the popular author of serial fiction, the surprising turns in the narrative of the adventures centering on the metamorphoses of Fantômas are presented as “magic tricks” that the author-magicians had available in their repertoire at every public appearance with a new story. The distorted and aggrandized fictionalization of criminal episodes in the life of the city, with its mixture of surprise, horror and thrilling suspense, had the same riveting power to entice the audience that a magician had, or a performer of a macabre nature at the Cabaret du Néant. This self-fashioning of the authors as performers of tricks for an audience of a fun-fair, or a vaudeville theater, and the constant meta-literary incorporation of scenes from several performative practices of contemporary entertainment, un hinge fiction form the central axis of a nineteenth-century novel industry that spun stories revolving around the accepted norms of realism, sentimental insight and moral observation. The final result is to enhance the power of the spectacle. While the discussion is rooted in French sources, a transnational angle reveals how the migration of popular forms across the Channel was a common feature of popular culture in the nineteenth century, from the publication in French of sensation novels by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, such as *La Chanteuse des rues*, in the French paper *Le Rappel* in 1873, to the marketing of French popular fiction by Émile Gaboriau, William Busnach, Henri Chabrillat, Alberic Second, Jules Mary and Georges Grison in the Vizetelly series “French Sensation Fiction,” “The Gaboriau & Du Boisgobey Sensation Novels,” or simply “Popular French Novels” (Gabriele 2006, Chaps. 5–6).

Katherine Rein in “Sawing People in Half: Sensationalist Magic Tricks and the Gendered Space of Performance in the Early Twentieth Century” explores the culture of performance by focusing specifically on the art of the magician, one of the forms of attraction from which cinema emerged, notably providing also the figure of a magician-turned-director such as Georges Méliès. In her essay “Burned Alive and Sawed in Half! Sensationalist Magic Tricks and the Gendered Space of Performance in the Early Twentieth Century” she tracks first the professionalization of magicians in the course of the nineteenth century, away from the fun-fair attraction type of earlier illusionists, and then focuses on the popularity of sensational acts such as the “bullet-catch,” “the human cannonball” into the twentieth century, which she sees as a response to the challenge to live performance posed by cinema with its appropriation of melodramatic and sensationalist tactics.

The “Sawing a Woman in Half” act, which was first performed by P.T. Selbit on January 17, 1921, in London at the Grand Guignol Theatre, which was “modelled on the Parisian original”—famous for its “grotesque and gruesome horror plays”—constituted a new typology of spectacle, she argues, after the first performance at an audition at the Egyptian Hall. While recognizing traces of the Victorian dramaturgy of the disappearing act and the pioneering acts of Jean-Eugène Robert Houdin and his mentor Torrini, as well as the 1890s Sawing Illusion of the Hanlon Brothers, Rein points to the impact of WWI and its “unprecedented mechanization of violence,” as well as the parallel redefinition of the role of women in society during the war effort, as important factors in the invention—and, most distinctively, the popularity—of the act. Rein takes the discussion beyond the acknowledgement of the social anxieties projected on the victimization of a newly empowered female body, by recognizing in the narrative of the act a return of folkloric patterns such as the “death and rebirth” of the hero(ine), which imply a “new empowerment within the magic performance” and a fantasy of restoration of “mutilated human bodies” in the wake of the traumas of WWI.

Sabine Müller in “Sensational Voices. Premodern Theatricality, Early Cinema, and the Transformation of the Public Sphere in Fin-de-siècle Vienna” proposes to analyze the transformations of a persistent trace in the history of pre-modern popular culture, the “dialogic, carnivalesque” one, within the culture of industrial modernity whose emergence is often constructed by using the trope of the radical break with the past. The essay challenges such an assumption and proposes a narrative that makes transcending periodization a key methodological asset. More than that, it asks to shift focus from the dominant approaches to the visual in nineteenth-century culture by highlighting instead the ephemeral, aural component of the sensorium of fin de siècle Vienna.⁶ Tracing the history of an audible and dialogical model of social interaction in the pre-modern exchange structuring popular culture and the culture of trade (Bachtin, Sennett), Müller identifies a moment of transition between the pre-modern and modern

⁶For a similar approach to the culture of modernity that traces the self-reflexivity of earlier popular forms of entertainment that constitute an objective correlative of a reorganization of epistemic models, see Alberto Gabriele, *The Emergence of Precinema: Print Culture and the Optical Toy of the Literary Imagination* (forthcoming).

types of sensationalism in the brief appearance of an updated version of the street vendor, the barker directly addressing the audience at the entrance of the new entertainment of the cinematograph. The essay offers an insightful reading of the nineteenth-century restructuring of the public and private spheres in relation to the equally shifting notions of theatricality and authenticity and in relation also to the rise, in the earlier part of the twentieth century, of “charismatic ‘Party barkers’ inciting awe and self-abnegation.”

III. VISUALIZING THE SPACE OF INDUSTRIAL MODERNITY

An earlier tradition of studies of the relation between film and literature (Fell 1974; Spiegel 1976; Baron 1990) has attempted to retrace a history of the literary precedents to film narrative, in nineteenth-century authors such as Dickens, Flaubert, Zola or Balzac. The teleological narrative implicit in this approach disregards the history of the technological and theoretical advances in the history of the emergence of cinema; it also fails to see in nineteenth-century material culture the normalization of perception around the practice of *montage* that media such as the periodical press and urban aesthetics in general naturalized *before* the new medium of cinema became readable and increasingly prominent in the twentieth century. The other problem that speaking in literary studies of “film style” in abstract poses is the dismissal of the question of the emergence of film narrative itself and its genealogy, which pertains to a specific period, as the works of film scholars emerging from the Brighton conference of 1978 have shown by variously placing it in the years that go from the earliest productions of the new medium to the mid-teens (Gaudreault, Ed., 1978). Michael Devine’s essay “The Whole Thing (and Other Things): From Panorama to Attraction in Stephen Crane’s ‘The Open Boat,’ Ashcan Painting, and Early Cinema” develops his analysis of Stephen Crane’s “The Open Boat” (1897) from a study of the modalities of vision inaugurated by the panorama, to the alternative aesthetics of the kinoscope, early cinema and modern painting, demonstrating convincingly how Crane “inflects the panorama, instilling magical, surrealistic, or at the very least playful qualities of the attraction in his work.” Devine identifies a larger shift when the fantasy of visual mastery of the panorama, and its “original encyclopedic form,” “became a backdrop to something else entirely in the age of the attraction: a wish to give oneself over to the moving machine, and, by extension, the lived, material environment.” Emblematic of these intermediatic sensitivities at the turn of the century

is George Luks' *The Spielers* (1905) in which "turning meant attachment rather than detachment, attraction rather than panorama, and with it a pleasurable loss of control."

In an equally perceptive and insightful reading of the urban sensorium and the notion of "mnemonic collage" at the beginning of the twentieth century, Ester Coen's "Urban Metaphysics versus Metropolitan Dynamism: Italian Visions before World War I" focuses on De Chirico's urban aesthetics of the 1909–10 period and on the paradoxical structures of time and space they imply. In opposition to the well-known experiments of other Italian futurists depicting urban space, she focuses on other visible forms in De Chirico's art, as a source of an archeological revisitation of contemporaneity. Quoting Adorno, who in a letter to Benjamin of 1934 on dialectic at a standstill defines the category of the modern "the most ancient" and of the archaic as a "function of the new," Coen reads the "mnemonic collage" of De Chirico's squares, the "deceptively coherent and solid morphologies" as a "silent revolution of a spatiality that overturns the classical in the modernity of its opposite." She reads the shifting of the painter's themes from the early feral mythological subjects to the "metaphysical period" of 1909–10 by tracing the painter's philosophical interest in Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Heraclitus. The initial fascination in the painter's activity with the double nature of centaurs, tritons and mermaids, both instinctual and rational, attests to this intertextual trace, which is present also in the painter's writings, in particular the artists' reflections on civilization's evolution from monstrosity to a "clarified spirit," partly deriving from Heraclitus' "supreme reason," that can translate in his art's "paradoxical emptying out of the elements of style." This paradoxical clarity constitutes for Coen an element of continuity with De Chirico's later style and his striving for "clear painting," "transparent color," and "that dry sense of paint."

Anat Messing Marcus' "Spatiality and Temporality in Benjamin and Adorno" rereads the correspondence between Adorno and Benjamin, including the quote mentioned in the preceding essay, in order to reflect on "the intertwinement of temporality and spatialization as a dialectical movement registering the negation of time *in* the image." The essay tracks the "double image of nature and history" in both Benjamin and Adorno to refract the notion of "ur-history" in relation to the concepts of "spatial melancholy" and "spatial reification," tracing the oppositions but also the points of contact of the two thinkers. Her discussion rereads important references to nineteenth-century visual culture in the works of both, such as the ones

to the “second nature” of the panorama, capitalism’s appropriation of the natural world through commodities, and the delusional image-production function of modernity represented by the phantasmagoria.

Aubry Tang in “The Sensibilities of Semicolonial Shanghai: A Phenomenological Study of the Short Stories by Liu Na’ou” expands on the urban sensorium of semicolonial Shanghai to propose not a factual historical reading of the historical traces of modernity appearing in early twentieth-century literature influenced by Japanese and Western models, but rather to highlight a rediscovery of the defamiliarized perception of objects that resists conceptual and narrative understanding to the point of denying referentiality to language itself and a readability of the modern city. Taking Merleau-Ponty’s insights on the vibrant matter of Cezanne’s paintings, she argues that Chinese literature of the sensationist kind, in an experienced unmediated reality “beneath the cognitive and the analytical level,” liberates the understanding of urban space from the primacy of conceptual thoughts and narrative logic. In discussing the short stories of Liu Na’ou’ and others, she insists on the “gaps of perception” between characters and urban milieu, filtered through the “enigma of the perceiving body.” The sensational, therefore, appears without the connotations of the “shocking,” and the “startling”; it rather points to the embodied perception of fleeting notations that dissolve the fabric of subjectivity and of literary mimesis itself.

The contributions by scholars from several fields such as literary studies, art history, philosophy, history, sociology of literature and visual culture make the volume an interesting forum for the understanding of literary writing in relation to several other media and to material culture at large, thus making the study of literary specificity dependent on the close analysis of semiologic systems and practices of visualization in fashion (Letheridge), world fairs (Valence), the popular press (Brophy, Pashut, Letourneux, Valence), early cinema (Devine, Müller), performance (Rein, Letourneux, Valence, Müller) and commodity culture. While some existing studies and collection of essays focusing on sensationalism have chosen a transatlantic perspective (Daly, Phegley) this is the first collection providing a broader perspective on sensationalism in different geographical areas, in order to start shaping the field of “Global Nineteenth Century Studies.” While the study of visual culture deriving from the works of Walter Benjamin, Jonathan Crary and Vanessa Schwartz has proved to be inspiring for a whole generation of scholars, *Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity* offers new perspectives on yet unexplored aspects of industrial modernity.

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PART I

Sensational Tactics in the Nineteenth
Century

Irony and Popular Politics in Germany, 1800–1850

James M. Brophy

“Estrangement,” wrote Theodor Adorno, “shows itself precisely in the elimination of distance between people” (Adorno 41). Adorno’s aphorism focuses on modernity’s dehumanizing effects to reduce all communication to utilitarian exchange. He perceived an inherent danger in modernity’s unrelenting drive toward assimilation and sameness, whereby “anything different is simply no longer understood.” Paradoxically, the “clarification and transparency of human relations” obliterated difference and the “possibility of relations without purpose,” a condition that, for Adorno, defined humanity. Implicit in this meditation is the premise that human subjectivity

This chapter originated as a contribution to a two-day conference, “Sensationalism and the Genealogy of Modernity,” held at Tel Aviv University in December 2013, and has retained its character of a scholarly presentation. Much of the material is drawn from my earlier work on popular culture, although the material is used here to address an entirely new theme about the demotic idiom of irony and its political meanings. My sincere thanks to Dr. Alberto Gabriele for his kind invitation to think about sensationalism and its role in nineteenth-century popular politics. My gratitude also goes to Tom Prasch for his indispensable reading suggestions and to Susan M. McKenna for her careful editing.

J.M. Brophy (✉)
University of Delaware, Newark, DE, USA

requires social distance to realize free-thinking autonomy, judgment, and critical-rational deliberation. Without the linguistic idioms and protocols to achieve what Linda Hutcheon calls the “emotional ethics” of intellectual detachment, modern selfhood is erased (Hutcheon 37).

Writing this aphorism in the immediate years following the Second World War and looking back at a brutal twentieth century whose fascisms, capitalisms, and other communities of coercion threatened the difference of individuality and cultural expression, Adorno ruminated on the longer lineages of western subjectivity. A central feature of Adorno’s selfhood and its need for sociocultural distance is irony, a trope that enables a thinking subject to say one thing and mean another. Irony has, of course, many guises. It is a figure of speech, a critical idiom, an intellectual disposition, a rhetorical strategy, a disarming social behavior. And whereas Adorno deplored modernity’s tendency to reduce social distance and preempt critical reflection, this essay reverses that question: when did modern irony penetrate popular political culture and abet the development of autonomous publics?

Accordingly, this brief discussion sets the concept of irony in play with political sensations to explore the paradox of how shocking events elicited not only emotion and excitement but also critical reflection. Popular ironic expression, this essay argues, serves as a gauge of political competency. Textual traces of popular culture in early nineteenth-century Germany limn the intellectual and cultural structures by which popular publics evinced autonomous political subjectivity. Sensational episodes in politics are, arguably, key cultural moments to take a sounding for the maturity and depth of popular publics. The heightened response of such events allows historians to assess the thorny question of reception. A political sensation demands interpretive frames—and cultural and political constituencies rush to provide them. Typically for this period, political elites sought to elicit a response that assigned the interlocutor a subsidiary role in affirming and supporting a putatively unified and centered social order. Dynastic houses orchestrated the death of a monarch, for example, to reassert the unity and support of the nation for their royal families. Rulers and states presented wars as transcendent moments of strength and unity for the standing political order. The operative trope is synecdoche, a figurative expression that forms the social order into a preordained cohesive whole. But popular publics pushed back against preprogrammed messages with the critical idiom of irony. Evidence clustered around nineteenth-century political sensations provides highly suggestive material for thinking about the genealogy of popular political expression and partisan engagement.

Irony inhabits a long history of human communication. As a concept and as figurative language, irony has been around at least since antiquity. As D.C. Muecke and others have incisively informed us, it structured the Socratic method, inflected Homer's epics, framed Aristophanes's comedies, and informed Aristotle's poetics. Aesop is ironic, and Cicero and Quintilian brilliantly deployed irony as a rhetorical weapon; Romans praised to blame, and blamed to praise. Early Christianity put it to use, as did Paul in his letters to Corinthians. The Renaissance, of course, made it an art form. Cervantes features the dialectic between Sancho Panza and his master not only as allegories of body and soul but also as life's essential irony of mutual incompatibility. Rabelais similarly celebrated the ironic elements of carnival's social inversions and its capacity for critical self-reflection. Vico further viewed irony as a stage in humanity's development. Castiglione's courtier, too, is saturated with ironies (Muecke *Irony* 13–24; Dane 159; Holland 137). The examples are legion.

Yet, notwithstanding such lineages, irony as a poetic and narratological idiom recast itself in the mid-eighteenth century. In the hands of Shaftesbury and Fielding, Voltaire, and Diderot, the force of irony shaped and cultivated the needs of the enlightened modern self, and the term achieved a far broader philosophical role with Friedrich von Schlegel and his brother August Wilhelm, who expanded the term beyond instrumental irony, that is, someone using irony purposefully, to include the “observable irony” of situations and events, fates and characters, philosophical systems and artistic creation (Muecke *Irony and the Ironic* 18–25). All told, irony's multidimensional forms provided modern aesthetics with a voice and subjectivity to accentuate difference, independence, and self-reflexive consciousness. Turning to its role in political selfhood, irony is easily traced in Machiavelli, Montaigne, Hume, Burke, Hegel, de Tocqueville, and others. Jürgen Habermas's genealogy of the public sphere furthermore affirms the pivotal character of eighteenth-century irony, insofar as the novel and narrative fiction reconstructed the psychic interior of bourgeois readers to fashion both collective and atomistic notions of a “public” distinct from church and state. The reasoning individual, so goes the conventional storyline, spawned a new era of political modernity by renegotiating the social contracts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

But, crucially, irony depends on an interpretive community: something is ironic only if the listener infers inversion and winks at the ironic twist. This point is especially important for thinking about popular political culture. The performative space between expression and understanding

is unpredictable, unfixed, and therefore transideological. However unstable the politics and communicative practice of irony may be, viewed historically, the idiom was indispensable in the period between 1750 and 1850 in carving out a deeper social space for intellectual detachment and promoting new dispositions and subjectivities. Critics are largely unanimous in viewing “irony’s edge”—its ambiguities, its dialectic of difference, its ability to relativize power—as indispensable notions for understanding the construction of the modern self (Hutcheon 14–36). In reflecting on popular political discourse, irony also slices open textual space to transcend immediate experience, exert skeptical reflection, and demarcate a negational relationship. Irony seems, then, indivisible with political modernity, which poses the question: when and with which media did German popular publics encounter this linguistic protocol and respond to it favorably? For the early nineteenth century, irony is essential for thinking about how popular audiences reflected on their political condition and conceptualized political alternatives. Indeed, it forms a necessary and productive dialectic with the newly emerging ideological spectrum. When the French Revolution unleashed doctrines and ideals in conscious competition with other political programs, irony and ideology became closely entwined.

A question of this kind runs the great risk flattening out the past and suppressing the many earlier expressions of plebeian protest, which is certainly not my aim. Against the background of medieval songs against authority, Reformational broadsheets and woodcuts against ecclesiastical and temporal power, and a host of anti-military songs of the eighteenth century, it is clear that the political agency of non-elites at the communal and regional level has a longer history. Such impudence certainly included mockery and sarcasm (Steinitz, I, 3, 123, 165, 191; Blicke 98–101). One furthermore sees a sardonic irony in the popular voices of the French Revolution calling for the guillotine, just as the pre-revolutionary *pasquilles* and *libelles*, which contributed to the “desacralization” of the monarchy, celebrated the idiom. Hence, this essay modestly confines its task to trace irony’s role in developing popular political subjectivity in the immediate post-Napoleonic period.

Of course, the hunt for popular variants of this critical idiom also raises methodological problems about interpreting source material; after all, print matter is but one small corner of the larger canvas of popular culture. The broader arenas of popular social communication encompass not only oral communication but also rites, rituals, and an array of customs, speech acts, gestures, performativity, and other embodied significations (Chartier 50).

Distinguishing between print and popular cultures remains important, but a dialogical relationship between the two certainly arose, especially after the early modern period, when textuality increasingly informed oral tradition in western Europe. Furthermore, the closer one gets to the mechanics of print markets and the publishers and authors who developed new intellectual spaces and consciously marketed new critical idioms, the more one detects the role of reception in shaping supply. The agency of market demand changed the media landscape and therefore serves imperfectly as a barometer in popular attitudes.

Equally important, the agential claims of the linguistic turn should be tempered. Indeed, this author views the relationship between print media and popular attitudes more as corollary than causation. The documents studied here did not necessarily redirect or transform attitudes; rather, the popular irony was already an emerging ready-made idiom that writers and printers absorbed, exploited, and channeled into the materialized word (Farge 34–36). In this regard, discourse is less an autonomous force of cultural change but, instead, to invoke Roger Chartier, a process “by which discourse constructs interests or events are themselves socially rooted and determined and are limited, in varying degree, by the linguistic, conceptual, and material resources available to their producers” (Chartier 1997: 77). As Arlette Farge argued in her brilliant study on eighteenth-century *mauvais propre*, “popular opinion did not emerge from the cumulative reading of pamphlets and placards” but instead from a “plurality of phenomena” from which discussion flowed and opinions formed (Farge 35). In short, the emerging idiom of irony in the early nineteenth-century Germany signifies a broader “underlying tone of a cultural system” (Darnton 16).

To investigate the emergence of critical idioms in German popular print, I propose a basic periodization. Whereas the qualities of pathos and empathy generally dominate the decades of the Napoleonic era and the Restoration, strains of satiric irony emerge in German popular culture in the 1830s, which blossomed in the 1840s. A preponderant proportion of poems, pamphlets, market ballads, and other material printed during the military campaigns against Napoleon’s rule in 1813–1815, the Wars of Liberation, deployed emotive rhetoric to enroll mass participation to support rulers, inculcate national citizenship, and justify war’s higher aims. Market ballads, songs of freedom, and political verse generally articulate a romantic embrace for the nation, a mood that appealed to readers’ empathy and ennobled those who sacrificed their lives for the nation. The songs

of Ernst Moritz Arndt, Friedrich de La Motte Fouqué, and Karl Theodor Körner exhorted a people to arms, generating a national pathos that reframed the meanings of German patriotism for the nineteenth century. Among other pamphlets and fliers, Arndt's pamphlet, "To Prussians," marshaled the hatred of the French to construct national citizenry:

Only a bloody hatred of the French can unite German power, resurrect German majesty and bring forth all the noble drives and bury the baser instincts. This hate, as a guarantor of German freedom for children and grandchildren, will soon be Germany's most trusted border guard on the Shelde, in the Vosges mountains, and in the Ardennes forest.¹

Other song sheets and song pamphlets emphasized the hunger, lost sons, bone-chilling military campaigns, and the pitiful suffering of the people brought on by Bonaparte. Songs celebrated the rout of Napoleon's armies and his exile. Certainly there are touches of sarcasm and parodic irony in the ridicule and scorn. A woodcut illustrating one of the most widely circulated fliers, *Fünfschöne neue Lieder*, insultingly depicted Napoleon as a lowly organ-grinder crying out, "It couldn't always stay that way"—a moment of situational or cosmic irony, brought about by divine intervention.² One can also find isolated moments of situational irony in the voice of the common man. But more predominantly, one sees non-ironic emotions: bitter hate, as Karen Hagemann and others have argued, filled these texts (Hagemann 245–255). One song calls Napoleon a "fury," a "son of hell" and a "second Attila" (Sauer mann 120, 427–428). One of the most popular anti-Napoleon songs, "Ist es denn wirklich wahr?," ends with two final stanzas that piously recognized God's hand in Napoleon's defeat and sought his mercy to forgive the world's sins. In this way, lyrics mixed blood-thirsty revenge with justice. As one song proclaimed, "It means the happiness of humanity/ To give the Frenchman no peace/ Break the necks of them all/ Frenchmen, soon we'll be there!"³ There are positive songs of Napoleon, too, during this

¹ Ernst Moritz Arndt, "An die Preußen," (Königsberg, n.p. 1813), unpag. See original at: <http://ub-goobi-pr2.ub.uni-greifswald.de/viewer/image/PPN777146614/4/>: "Nur ein blutiger Franzosenhass kann die deutsche Kraft vereinigen, die deutsche Herrlichkeit wieder herstellen, alle edelsten Triebe des Volkes hervortreiben und all niedrigsten versenken; diese Hass, als Palladium deutscher Freiheit den Kindern und Enkeln ueberliefert, muss künftig an der Shelde, an dem Vogesus und den Ardennen Germaniens sicherster Grenzhüter sein."

² "Fünfschöne neue Lieder," Deutsches Volksliedarchiv VI 1144, vol. 4.

³ "Lied der Kosaken und Baschkieren," DVA VI 1147, Trowitsch Liedersammlung.

time, but the pathos is the same. To be sure, Germans' songs of Napoleon evolved during the 1830s and 1840s to engage current events, but the dominant moods remained sympathy and nostalgia, less so irony, for a lost political nation.

A similar spirit of pathos and divinely sanctioned nationalism infused post-Napoleonic songs of the Burschenschaft, the student fraternities that volunteered to fight Napoleon.⁴ There is, for example, precious little irony in the quasi-religious book burning that followed the Wartburg Fest of 1817 (Press 621–624). And the wave of songs that commemorated Karl Sand, the nationalist martyr of the student movement, only replicated the melodramatic pathos of the Wars of Liberation, although here the pathos was mobilized for political opposition. Indeed, Sand's motivation to murder August von Kotzebue, a leading playwright of the era who also reported to the Russian government, was grounded in a vision of nationhood wrapped in "pietist theology" that left little room for humor or ironic criticism (Williamson 917: 921–925). August Kotzebue's cosmopolitan sarcasm ran counter to the religiosity of the student movement's nationhood. The Sand execution was a political sensation, but one producing little irony.

Such nationalistic bathos should in no way hinder recognition of the richness of German letters or suggest an absence of irony in German elite literary culture. Novels, plays, and social commentary in the Romantic era are thick with irony, just as numerous examples of ironic *raisonnement* surface consistently in almanac and calendar literature of the early nineteenth century. Goethe's dramas, Heine's verse, and Börne's reportage attest the vigorous and masterful use of irony in this period. Observational irony furthermore abounds in the reworked fairy tales of the Romantic era. Middlebrow genres also smirked at the middle classes and the world around them. To offer a prominent example from this period, the leitmotif of "Krähwinkel" became a widespread motif for ironic self-reflection of the bourgeoisie (Fig. 1.1).

An imaginary town of parochial, blinkered burghers, Krähwinkel's political imaginary evoked and poked fun at the stuffy provincialism of German urban life. Jean Paul and August von Kotzebue were the first authors who deployed the motif of Krähwinkel in the Napoleonic era, but the theme took hold in bourgeois literature and through hundreds of lithographic

⁴Many of the songs in this period invoked a new citizenship. Ludwig Uhland's poems illustrate well the new attention to rights-bearing ideals, but such political deliberation is set in a register more of earnest, principled conviction than in ironic detachment.



Fig. 1.1 The Master applies himself to languages and the sciences, private collection

caricatures in the 1820s, which delivered social criticism with a light humorous hand (Ante 13–17). Johann Nestroy's *Freedom in Krähwinkel*, a play that premiered in Vienna in 1848, acts as a fitting bookend to the popularity of Krähwinkel as a political motif during the Restoration.

But other registers of irony redirected bourgeois print culture over the course of the 1820s and 1830s, which bled into popular readership. Moritz Saphir, Albert Hopf, and Adolf Glassbrenner are prominent examples of authors whose pens transformed the innocuous *Genrebild* into spritely, insightful ironic character sketches of the age. *Berlin wie es ist—und trinkt*⁵ is rightfully famous for its social portraits, but it should also serve here

⁵The humor of the German title turns on the wordplay of the homonyms to be (*ist*) and to eat (*ißt*): *Berlin, the way it is/eats—and drinks*.

as a marker for a much broader appetite for ironic social commentary (Townsend 47–52). Glassbrenner’s multiple booklets that celebrated the street wisdom of the Prussian capital spawned imitators and their pseudonyms in Hamburg, Munich, Stuttgart, and other towns.⁶ These social portraits provided a platform for a review of mores and behaviors, whose populist spirit of lionizing the common man’s shrewd grasp on life carried critical political overtones. Such ephemera, which were printed in fascicles and sold by both colporteurs and booksellers, attest irony’s widespread status as a popular idiom, and gives pause for thinking about the ways in which speculative publishers responded to popular taste by designing new print formats to draw even more readers.

The era’s experimentation in hybrid forms of journalism is noteworthy. In 1838, for example, the Mannheim publisher Heinrich Hoff published the *Rheinische Postillon*, a four-page flysheet that mixed humor, news, and political commentary in bold ways; its biting irony and cynical disbelief toward current events incurred the wrath of the Confederate Police. Metternich’s confidantes viewed this newsprint as “Germany’s worst paper.” Read in cafés by liberals, the report noted, the paper used “mockery and ridicule” to “gnaw at Legitimacy” and “has wreaked enormous havoc in the Rhineland” (Glossy 143). Hoff also printed the *Gasthofzeitung* in 1838–1839, a newsheet aimed at readers in inns and taverns; its witty, convivial, conversational style also interleaved critical remarks on politics and society. Written by Wilhelm Fischer, the paper enjoyed success in the Rhine-Hessen area until excessive censorship forced its closing (Brophy Hoff 94–96). Such publications offer a window onto the reciprocity of production and reception of texts, whereby authors and publishers tapped the social energies of users, whose reading habits and buying power shaped theme and tone.

In the 1830s, the idiom of ironic detachment increasingly articulated popular rights-bearing ideals. To be sure, sentimental pathos still sold. The so-called Polish songs after 1830 provide a prominent example of sentimental liberalism. Their empathy and anguish formed a righteous strain of Romantic nationalism that transformed the Polish insurgency into a

⁶ Cf. Adolf Brennglass [Glassbrenner], *Berlin wie es ist und—trinkt* (Berlin: Bechthold und Hartje, 1834); Peter Klooksnoot, *Hamburg wie es ist—und trinkt und schläft. Scenen aus dem Hamburger Volksleben* (Hamburg: B. S. Berendsohn, 1835); Adolf von Schaden, *München wie es trinkt und ist, wie es lacht und küsst* (Munich: Georg Franz, 1835); Gustav Schönstein, *Wien wie es ist und—trinkt* (Wien: Ferdinand Ullrich, 1844); Wilhelm Mannbach, *Schwaben wie es ist und—trinkt* (Leipzig: Ignaz Jackowitz, 1845).

pan-European impulse of cosmopolitan liberalism (Steinitz, II, 28–78). But a greater frequency of rhetorical dispassion emerged. In addition to intense emotional identification with subjects, one also sees texts soliciting reserved political judgment. A rash of market ballads responded to the political sensation of the July Revolution and Belgian Independence, and the Hambach Festival, all of which attest a more critical, ironic tone. “The Ballad of the Uprising in Brunswick on the 6th and 7th of September 1830,” for example, used the bold rhyming patterns of market criers to depict sardonically the Duke of Brunswick as a tyrant to his people and as a dupe to his mistress. The song trumpeted the events surrounding the torching of Duke Karl’s palace and celebrated the role of the people for bringing about the ruler’s abdication who had “plagued land and people long enough.” The song’s conclusion is particularly striking in its icy suspension of appraisal. It resists the genre’s formula of resolution, leaving the political crisis open and furthermore invokes the people’s right to judge:

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Es ist sein Bruder Wilhelm | Now it’s his brother William |
| An seine Stell’ gesetzt; | That has a royal mien; |
| Ob der es besser machet | Whether he’ll do better |
| Das wird sich zeigen jetzt. (Ditfurth, 31–33) | remains to be seen. |

This open-ended question, this resistance to closure, is new to popular balladry.

The degree to which irony penetrated the political sensibility of ordinary Germans is illustrated well by the Rhine Crisis of 1840. Rebuffed by the great powers in its attempt to alter the balance of power in the eastern Mediterranean, France looked for compensation by seeking “natural borders” on the Rhine and rattled its sabre against Germany in the summer of 1840. Although Metternich and other central European diplomats defanged the threat of French expansionism by the autumn of 1840, both the French and German press sensationalized the political episode, setting in motion public waves of indignation and popular chauvinism. For many German historians, this swell of jingoism marks the beginning of modern German nationalism as a mass phenomenon: a sensation that unified consciousness for German unity through a Francophobic, ethnically inflected nationalist impulse. Typifying and giving voice to this chauvinism was Niklaus Becker’s enormously popular song “They shall not have it, the free German Rhine.”

Sie sollen ihn nicht haben
 Den freien deutschen Rhein
 Ob sie gier'ge Raben
 Sich heiser danach schrien
 Sie lang' er ruhig wallend
 Sein grünes Kleid noch trägt
 So lang ein Ruder schallend
 In sein Woge schlägt
 Sie sollen ihn nicht haben
 den freien deutschen Rhein
 So lang' sich Herzen laben
 An seinen Feuerwein.

They shall not have it,
 The free German Rhine,
 Though they like greedy ravens
 Scream themselves hoarse after it
 As long as, peacefully flowing
 It still wears its green garb,
 As long as even one oar resounding
 Strikes into its waves
 They shall not have it,
 The free German Rhine,
 As long as hearts refresh themselves
 With its fiery wine.

The song achieved enormous popularity in the late months of 1840 and early 1841 in regions of Prussia and western Germany, confirming a pronounced jingoistic mood among many Germans. But this narrative of the song's reception is far more complex than the conventional assumption that Germans sang in one voice and with one intent. On the contrary, the song's reception produced dozens of responses that contested the anti-French sentiment and, equally important, challenged and reworked governments' attempts to tap nationalist emotion for popular political support (Brophy "Rhine Crisis" 11–17). In this regard, the event allows one to measure two waves of chauvinism: the anti-Napoleonic wars in 1813 and the war scare of 1840, with the latter producing a far more varied response.

The sensation's dense discourse in newspapers and journals highlights a fragmented response. The oppositional nature of the responses to the semi-official jingoism are particularly salient, because these ironic sallies redirected nationalist sentiments toward constitutional rights and domestic reforms. Most of all, dozens of songs and poems mocked the bathos of Becker's lyrics and reframed German nationhood in ironically critical forms. After January 1841, noted Robert Prutz, the German public sobered up and faced its foolishness (Prutz 306). And, indeed, an impressive cadre of writers and poets contested the shallow and manipulative patriotism. Ferdinand Freiligrath, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, Heinrich Heine, Adolf Glassbrenner, Franz Dingelstedt, Karl Gutzkow, Arnold Ruge, Karl Heinzen, and many other prominent authors wrote

political verse that enjoyed multiple printings. Von Fallersleben's *Unpolitical Songs*—note the irony—sold more than 20,000 copies, a runaway bestseller that denoted an ever-widening interpretive community of sophisticated readers. But more crucial to note here is this discourse's penetration into popular culture. In late 1840 and in 1841, there are numerous police reports from Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Berlin, Saxony, and the Rhineland that attest crowds resisting the official chauvinism, either refusing to sing the song, laughing at it, or merely putting sarcastic words to it. When an orchestra at a Frankfurt venue played the music for applause, the public hissed at it and reportedly called for the Marseillaise. A police report recorded the following sarcastic version sung by workers in the Frankfurt region:

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Sie sollen ihn nicht haben, | You shall not have him |
| Den freien deutschen Rhein; | The Rhine current, German and free |
| Das wissen schon die Knaben, | As long as the fat bellies blather |
| Die sieben Jahr alt sein | to the Confederate police |
| Solang im deutschen Lande | So long as in the German land |
| Nicht Einheit alles gilt, | Unity does not exist |
| Solang man Schmach und Schande | So long as the slander and shame |
| 'Fürstliche Hoheit' schillt. (Glossy 192–193) | Of princely sovereignty persists |

This sarcasm is broad and farcical, attacking the original message as infantile and patently obvious, while also mocking the current state of police informants and princely sovereignty. The light-handed inversion of the song's original message parodies, if not also negates, the original song's desire and manifests a self-knowing, self-reflective political position. The lyrics relativize authority and power, and as such they evince relational strategies between said and unsaid meanings between the targets of the irony, the ironists themselves, and the interpreters of this song (Hutcheon 58). More to the point: such texts rendered the relationship between governed and governors unstable. The song portrays a German nation divided politically and socially—thus scorning the official message of the nation's martial solidarity and its implied support for the current political order. A balladeer's version also deflated the nationalist message with its weak market presence, thereby questioning its legitimacy as a popular position:

| | |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Jüngst sangen blöde Knaben | Recently sang the silly boys |
| In tausend Melodei'n | in a thousand melodies |
| 'Sie sollen ihn nicht haben | 'You shall not have him, |
| den freien deutschen Rhein' | The free German Rhine |
| Jetzt ist die Glut erloschen | Now the ember is doused |
| Kein Leierkasten-Mann | No hurdy-gurdy man |
| Verdient mehr einen Groschen | will earn another penny |
| Stimmt er das Rheinlied an. (Faber 446) | when he intones that Rhine Song |

These popular versions obviously don't have the same artistic flair as those of Heinrich Heine, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, and Georg Herwegh, but they nonetheless illuminate the double-edged quality of the song's performative life. Equally important, they register an early popular mistrust of official nationalist accounts that readily exploited political commotion. The sarcastic lyrics distinguish the interests and needs of various constituencies. The political self of the ordinary German evinced a partisan identity that not only resisted a reflexive call to arms but also promoted political reform. Although scholars mostly associate sensationalism with mass publics that consume ready-made images and messages, this nineteenth-century media event occasioned varied reactions and layers of critical reflection.

Alongside text and oral performances, playing cards, porcelain plates, and you-shall-not-have-it nightcaps also pushed this issue in new communicative directions (Brophy "Rhine Crisis" 9). These practices of commodification and embodiment changed the nature of the discourse, dispersing the political crisis into spheres of leisure and domesticity. But perhaps the most common commercial ware of the Rhine Crisis were lithographs, whether of the poet Becker, the Rhine River, or allegories of the nation. Lithographic cartoons and caricatures offered political culture a highly effective and inexpensive form of intermedial circulation that entwined and crossbred elite and popular cultures.⁷ These politicized representations popularized a discourse that theaters, music halls, coffeehouses, newspapers, and journals had already set in circulation, thereby intermeshing popular visual culture more firmly with the public sphere. Such intermediality was not merely driven by commercial hucksterism; it also generated fresh, critical perspectives.

⁷ For an incisive discussion on intermediality, see Meike Wagner, *Theater und Öffentlichkeit im Vormärz. Berlin, München und Wien als Schauplätze bürgerliche Medienpraxis* (Berlin: Akademie, 2013), 19–34.

For example, the lithographic cartoon in figure 1.2 satirizes German nationalism.⁸ Whereas the accompanying captions of France and Germany both denote a readiness to fight, the illustration assigns different moods to France and Germany. On the Rhine's western bank, France is depicted as composed and civilized at a banquet; a small band plays in the background, and a tricolor flag carries the slogan, "We don't want it at all, the old German Rhine." The eastern bank, however, portrays a raucous crowd of German musicians and singers, whose disorderliness and lack of civility is manifest: a drummer is about to fall in the Rhine, and (to his right) a musician is sticking out his tongue. The general atmosphere is one of national cacophony lacking direction and purpose. The illustration clearly mocks the unbecoming bombast of the public clamor surrounding the motto "You shall not have it, the free German Rhine" (Fig. 1.2).



Fig. 1.2 Rhine Crisis cartoon, private collection

⁸The year 1840 is attributed to it by Remigius Brückmann, ed., *Politische Karikaturen des Vormärz 1815–1848* (Karlsruhe, 1984), 50, 53. Reproduced by permission of Dr. Dieter Ante, Ludwigshafen, Germany. The author acknowledges his gratitude to Dr. Ante.

By characterizing the French as uninterested and disengaged, the artist suggests the German agitation as contrived and detrimental chauvinism.

An even more pronounced form of irony can be seen with “Tschech’s Song” (*das Tschechlied*), a market ballad from 1844, whose irony toward the attempted assassination of King Friedrich Wilhelm IV in 1844 bordered on *lèse majesté*. Heinrich Ludwig Tschech was a former village mayor and disappointed civil servant, who, after failing to receive official help to correct local corruption, petitioned the king for redress. This plea, too, came to naught, and the unbalanced Tschech blamed him for his misfortunes. On 26 July 1844 Tschech approached the royal carriage in Berlin and fired two shots at very close range—and missed. The shocking act produced enormous sympathy for the king, but Prussians nonetheless expected the king to grant clemency to the disturbed mayor. When it did not come, and when, instead, the government quickly and secretly executed Tschech, Prussians’ sympathy divided between the assassin and victim. The song rode a wave of antipathy with a biting irony dripping in disrespect for the king’s welfare (Brophy *Popular Culture* 85). The song underwent eleven documented versions, ranging from one to nineteen stanzas (Steinitz, II, 120–128). The irony works on a number of levels. First, this song undermines the ballad’s narrative structure, especially its need for closure and reconciliation. The motif of murders and assassinations were standard fare for buskers’ shocking ballads and market criers’ melodramatic news. Yet this song inverts the genre by adopting a comic mock-tragic tone that transgresses the essential convention of invoking sympathy for rulers. It thereby resists the genre’s usual restoration of temporal and sacral order by song’s end. On the contrary, by asking the listener to pity the rotten luck of an assassin, the song’s real message lies in the patent disregard for the Prussian royal. The final stanza of one popular version ran (Steinitz, II, 126):

Hätt’ wohl je ein Mench so’n Pech
 Wie der Bürgermeister Tschech
 Dass er diesen dicken Mann
 Auf zwei Schritt nicht treffen kann!

Did ever a person have such rotten luck
 As the Mayor Tschech,
 Who from two paces could not hit
 This corpulent man!

Another version’s ending is perhaps even more derisively criminal in its ironic twist for the event’s moral lesson: an implied wish for a successful assassination (Ditfurth 79–80):

Wir kamen so bei einem Haar
 Um unser edles Königspaar
 Hieraus nun Jedermann ersicht:
 Trau keinem Bürgermeister nicht!

We came within a breadth of a hair!
 of our precious royal pair
 From this let everyman be instructed
 No mayor should be trusted!

The song's immense popularity and its many versions speak to a broad and deep current of ironic disposition. This attitude of sardonic humor invited popular publics to suspend their deep-seated respect for royal authority and view the matter from another side. The song's irreverence dissolves the patina of royal sanctity that renders the listener complicitous in judging the king with subversive detachment. Equally crucial, the song's broad and extensive reception checked the official spin with a countervailing ironic register. The improvised flysheets and street singing evinced a popular political vernacular that reveal skeptical publics pushing back.

The *Tschechlied*, it should be noted, was not the first instance of a song paying such blatant disrespect toward a king. In 1843, the song "Die Höllenmaschine" also depicted the attempted assassination of King Louis Philipp in July 1835 by Giuseppe Fieschi with an even more defamatory disregard for monarchy. The song's title refers to the self-made, multi-barreled weapon that contrived to shoot 25 rifles at once. Fieschi unleashed this firearm on the king during a public procession to the Chamber of Deputies, which ended up killing 12 persons but not the king. In a strikingly similar tone and structure, the song's irony throws in doubt the text's real message. It characterizes the assassin as "not a bad shot," mourns the wounded nose of a German named Haasen, and in the final stanza serves up the message:

O Fieschi grauser Boesewicht,
 Was that dir Haasens Angesicht
 O hoeret was ein Weiser spricht
 Schiest ja auf keinen Koenig nicht!

Oh Fieschi, you cruel knave
 What have you done to Haasen's face
 Oh hear what a wise man sings
 Don't shoot at kings!

It is only in the performativity of the speech act that the text's tone and sarcasm inverts the text's message, delivering the ironic thrust: republican disdain for monarchy.

The point here is not to focus exclusively on these particular songs but to view them as soundings of a shifting popular subjectivity toward governance against a nascent political landscape offering ideological alternatives.

Simply put, one sees enhanced competencies of political judgment among ordinary Germans. There are many reasons for this, to be sure: increased literacy, greater urbanization, thicker and deeper circulation of political knowledges through various media, speculative publishers marketing their wares—and more. Not least of these factors would be the unintended consequences of fairly rigorous censorship regimes in Austria, Prussia, and the German Confederation, which regulated press and literature on a wide array of political, religious, and aesthetic subjects. The unintended consequence, of course, was heightened interest in the forbidden, and irony became a critical vehicle for circumventing cultural regulation at the popular level. As one of Metternich’s spies noted in 1841 about the growing popularity of political songs:

This weapon is the satirical political song, which through wit, irony, humor, and coarse point of views influences the times through irresistible charm. External force can hardly suppress it. And its influence becomes all the more greater and riskier the more simple and down to earth the lyrics are. (Glossy 237)

Indeed, audiences became sharply attuned to spot innuendo and look for the double-voiced discourse of irony. In so many ways, censorship, with its paternalistic and politically repressive premises, promoted the subject position of a defensive and oppositional citizenship. Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* and Judith Butler’s *Excitable Speech* have explored the paradoxes of suppressed discourse, which axiomatically resurfaces elsewhere to produce other forms of expression. Not only does cultural regulation unwittingly deploy new voices in supplementary cultural arenas in an endless chain of subversive signification, but, following Roland Barthes, “writerly” reading practices transform an audience into a “producer of the text” (Barthes 4–5, 10–11). Censorship, then, was “productive” in generating new forms of knowledge, and we can use this insight to view the ironic mode of popular discourse in Vormärz Germany as a productive consequence of censorship. Indeed, censorship enhanced the skill set of readers and writers. By necessity, Germans became sophisticated observers, listeners, and readers, whose political literacies and competencies became vastly enhanced (Holquist 14). And for political scandals and events that could not be suppressed but, rather, framed for a mass public consumption through various media, irony was a first line of defense that, in turn, disruptively pushed back against political authority.

*

In 1848, the democratic Cologne artist Wilhelm Kleinenbroich painted “Hänneschen Theater, 1848,” a watercolor whose subject is a deeply self-reflective piece on popular political communication. It presents a puppet theater, a barrel organ, and a song of freedom (a *Freiheitslied*) as media of the street that announced the political self-consciousness of common people. The song title—“the freedom that I’m talking about”—refers to a song from the German Wars of Liberation in 1813, but its new context denotes an emphatic gesture toward an autonomous political consciousness quite distinct from the original text. Here the puppet theater has appropriated the claims of political freedom for a more full-throated Jacobinic embrace of constitutional freedom—an impulse of 1848/1849 that was ultimately not realized. For this chapter’s theme, the painting especially underscores how various media and extemporized ironies remolded sensational events to generate autonomous political subjectivity. Although Adorno was consistently pessimistic about the abilities of popular culture to resist and contest hegemonic messages, popular responses to political sensations of the 1830s and 1840s demonstrate otherwise. To be sure, irony’s protean and transideological nature precludes any consistent oppositional role (Hutcheon 10); it can adapt, neutralize, and domesticate radical oppositionality as much as promote it. That said, in the early nineteenth century irony nonetheless nourished a growing appetite for partisan ideological development.

Twinning irony with political sensations might run against the grain of sensationalism’s conventional connotations in literary criticism and cultural studies. Following Walter Benjamin, interpretations of spectacles and sensationalism during the *belle époque* and thereafter stress the dominance of mass behavior over individual agency. Arcade consumption and the frenetic noise and animation of modernity’s accelerated tempo occluded genuine subjectivity through the constitution of mass culture (Schwartz 202). Be that as it may, political excitement of the early nineteenth century—Bonaparte, war scares, royal assassination—belies the notion that media sensations necessarily trigger united and univocal responses, or that messages designed as commodities by elite opinion makers can orchestrate publics. As Dominick LaCapra and others have argued regarding “carnavalesque contestation,” one can also look for the insurrectionary elements of the discourse: the “creative undoings” of tropes in a dialogue between textual and social processes that constructs new meanings. The communicative exchange that swirled around political crises and other cultural sensations allows us to see

how ironic interventions broke apart any organic, self-evident perception of the political nation. Ironic resistance put Germany's polity in play as a discursive term, undermining any conceptual fixity (LaCapra 73). The tools of cultural studies and literary criticism challenge historians to apprehend the richness of the evolving media environment of the early nineteenth century. Exploring its idioms, tropes, and interpretive communities should inform future interdisciplinary discussions about framing and interpreting the evolution of modern citizenship ideals.

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The Horror of Clothing and the Clothing of Horror: Material and Meaning in Gothic and Sensation Fiction

Stefanie Lethbridge

I start with an observation by Silvia Bovenschen: “There are, among intellectuals, many who despise fashion. Fashion’s revenge is terrible” (10). Fashion, and for my purposes, clothing more generally, figures as a source of terror in the gothic and sensation novel in Great Britain in the long nineteenth century. Comparatively little critical attention has been bestowed on the function of clothing specifically in the gothic and sensation novel, though it does have a marked presence¹: characters are constantly putting on or taking off items of clothing, they muffle themselves in veils, cloaks and hoods, they are given clothes and have them taken away against their wills and so on. This article explores the potential of clothing to create horror or terror in gothic and sensation fiction. These novels emplot an increasingly problematic relation between subject and object or between surface and depth in a growing consumer culture where commodity has been turned into spectacle (Richards 1990) and anxieties about the spiritual dimensions of culture and individual proliferated. Textiles represent a nodal point in these negotiations between

¹A notable exception is C. Spooner.

S. Lethbridge (✉)
English Department, University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany

subject positions and object world. Sensationalism, as Alberto Gabriele has argued, functions as “a social form that intertwines ... the material and the ideological” (7). As such, the material forms deserve attention. I will first look at the function of clothing in these novels as narrative device and then I will relate that to the novels as objects in a consumer culture that come themselves clothed in various materials from precious vellum and enticing silk to cheap paper. While all novels routinely employ clothing as means of characterisation, in the gothic and sensation novel clothes are also used specifically to signal moments of social order disruption; instead of expressing the self, clothes here frequently indicate disjunctions between subject and object and on occasion a disquieting domination of the material over the spiritual. The threatening material dimension both inside and outside of these novels makes it seem necessary for contemporaries to develop strategies for controlling this proliferating material; both gothic plots and the contemporary discussion on book production offer such strategies, negotiated within remarkably similar frameworks of gender and class.

The gothic novel is a subgenre of fiction which combines aspects of romance and horror fiction, often including elements of the supernatural, the fantastic or uncanny; its beginning is generally placed with Horace Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* (1765). The sensation novels of the second half of the nineteenth century transfer the previously foreign setting to Britain and thus bring gothic horror closer to home. The gothic and sensation genre negotiates cultural boundaries, it engages with phenomena that are perceived of as transgressive, reprehensible or, to use Julia Kristeva’s term, it explores the abject, “engaging with and disengaging itself from ... its own inescapable materiality” (Hurley 11) and that means, in the end, engaging with the fear of death, the moment when the self falls inevitable victim to its materiality. Clothes, as I wish to argue, form an important interface in this engagement.

THE LANGUAGE OF CLOTHES

In cultural studies, clothing has been seen as dress, that is, simply as cover to protect against the elements and to preserve modesty (Flügel; Ebner 16–20). More significantly, however, clothing is seen as a form of communication, a sign system that relates “the biological body to the social being, and public to private” (Wilson 2). Through its cultural significance “fashion—both as clothing and as a commodity—can be regarded

as one of the fundamental signifiers in a complicated gender and cultural sign system” (Shannon 14). This is true for both male and female gender constructions, despite continued preconceptions that it is mainly women who are preoccupied with clothes. As in other novels, clothing in gothic and sensation fiction functions as expression of character and thus as narrative device. Unlike other genres, gothic and sensation novels frequently use garments, whether actually on the body of the wearer or discarded somewhere, as sources of horror or as central element in the sensational plot development. In such moments of horror or sensation, clothes start to exert control over identities frequently against the will of the wearer: objects take over the subject; they create an uncanny discrepancy between the self and its material extensions.

First for the more conventional and predictable aspect: “Dress bears the same relation to the body as speech does to the brain,” claims Mrs Haweis in *The Art of Dress* in 1879 (qtd Briggs 229). As in the realist tradition, in gothic and sensation fiction clothes serve to define characters both directly and symbolically: The servant’s child Anne Catherick in Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1860) asserts her affiliation with the admired Mrs Fairlie and also her independence as an individual by her insistence to dress in white. In fact, Anne’s preference for white becomes so much conflated with her being that she becomes “the woman in white.” She uses clothes as a mode of resistance; her deliberate (and obstinate) choice of clothes against the expectations of others becomes, in Dick Hebdige’s term, an “intentional communication” that deviates from the relative invisibility of “appropriate” clothing and “gives itself to be read” (101). Isabel in M.E. Braddon’s *The Doctor’s Wife* (1861) uses clothing to express mood and unfulfilled desire: she communicates her delight in the picnic by choosing her lavender-muslin, “fresh and crisp, fluttering in the spring breezes as she walked” (80), and her longing for romantic fulfilment is articulated in her longing for a ruby velvet dress.

As expression of character, clothes impact interpersonal engagements. In Matthew Lewis’s *Monk* (1796) two gentlemen construct Antonia as an object of desire via her dress: “Her dress was white; it was fastened by a blue sash, and just permitted to peep out from under it a little foot of the most delicate proportions ... her face was covered with a veil of thick black gauze” (9). White is of course the colour of innocence (though also the colour of death), blue is the colour of the Madonna, and the mixture of modest cover and teasing revelation here is typical of gothic preoccupations

with disguise and revelation, though arguably these “complementary dynamics of concealment and revelation ... characterize all forms of dress” (Cavallaro and A. Warwick 128). In Antonia’s case it is precisely her veiled innocence that leads to her rape and murder. The thick gauze covers both a desirable and a decaying body.

Clothes as expression also indicate when something is wrong with a character. The housekeeper Mrs Michelson in *The Woman in White* early on expresses her suspicions of the French nurse Mrs Rubelle: “I thought her dress, though it was of the plainest black silk, inappropriately costly in texture and unnecessarily refined in trimming and finish, for a person in her position in life” (363). Indeed, the nurse turns out to be fake. The chief villain in the novel, Count Fosco, shows a preference for colourful waistcoats which alerts Marian: “He is as fond of fine clothes as the veriest fool in existence; and has appeared in four magnificent waistcoats, already—all of light garish colours, ...” (221). With his flamboyant waistcoats Fosco cultivates a bohemian clothing style “espoused by the leisured metropolitan man of letters” like Charles Dickens and still acceptable in the 1850s—when the novel is set (Breward 29). The “Great Masculine Renunciation” however had shifted men’s clothing towards restrained colours and a loose cut (Shannon 23–26). Inconspicuous consumption, rather than open display, characterised especially middle-class male consumer behaviour in the nineteenth century, affirming associations between masculinity and simplicity (Kuchta 164). The standard “drab uniformity” of male clothing made flamboyant dress suspect and suggested that “there was something morally reprehensible in a man who paid too much attention to his own clothes” (Laver 80). Fosco’s showiness marks him as other in terms of both class and gender, carrying with it associations of feminine preoccupations with dress (Shannon 154). “A gentleman should always be so well dressed that his dress shall never be noted at all” is the advice of *Routledge’s Etiquette for Gentlemen*, first published in 1864 (qtd Shannon 28). Unlike Marian, Mr Fairlie’s servant describes Fosco as “dressed superbly” (347) which further indicates Fosco’s “ungentlemanly” tastes. We are given a similar class signal in the case of Walter Hartright, Laura Fairlie’s drawing master and admirer, who has neglected his appearance after Laura’s marriage to Sir Percival Glyde and who loses his status as gentleman when the family lawyer *observes* this neglect: “his dress, which I remembered as neat and gentlemanlike ... was so slovenly now, that I should really have been ashamed of the appearance of it on one of my own clerks” (155), linking him “through his clothing to the lower middle class” (Harrison 536).

In Braddon's *Doctor's Wife*, also set in the 1850s, the failed attempt to communicate exuberance through clothing indicates early in the novel that George Gilbert is an essentially inflexible character to whom aesthetic pleasures remain alien:

George plunged into the wildest extravagance in the way of waistcoats, ... Isabel, sitting opposite to him in the square pew, would contemplate him thoughtfully when the sermon was dull, and wonder, ... why his garments ... always retained a hard angular look, as if they had been originally worn by a wooden figure, and had never got over that disadvantage. (100)

To make matters worse, George has styled himself on the basis of an outdated fashion plate in a provincial shop window (79). His sartorial adventures disclose, rather than disguise, his complete lack of savvy and imagination. Isabel, to her cost, does not take the warning of this wooden angularity seriously and marries George despite her longing for (aristocratic) romance—with a man “in a long black mantle trailing over his king-like form” (73)—which would require a husband more imaginative and more sensitive to social status.

In all these cases clothes are used as symbolic forms of communication: *Through* their clothes, to use Anne Hollander's phrase, we see the persons—or we think we do. Marian explicitly conjectures “some hidden connexion between [Fosco's] showiest finery and his deepest feeling” (286). In gothic and sensation novels (no doubt elsewhere as well) things are more complicated than such straightforward symbolism, however. Fosco's waistcoats, for instance, not only reveal a slightly dubious gentleman but also cover his true identity as a treacherous member of a secret Italian brotherhood. Fosco makes himself highly visible *in order* to be hidden (Spooner *Fashioning* 64). Similar cover-up actions are characteristic of the gothic novel: Rosario's cowl in Lewis's *Monk* covers up the beautiful woman Matilda whose body in turn is the disguise of a demon. The slippage between body and clothes as “cover” for the subject further emphasises the function of clothing as part of the (social) self. The gothic and sensation novel thus explores not so much the symbolic representation of identity through clothes but the construction of identity in relation to social order, literally the fashioning of identity (to use this slightly hackneyed phrase). This is a process that involves frequent *disjunctions* between clothes and self. It is precisely such uncanny disjunctions that cause anxiety.

CLOTHING TRANSGRESSIONS

Fashion, as Christian Huck has noted, brings with it the observation of observation (12). Because fashion changes constantly it is necessary to observe what is currently fashionable if one wants to keep up. Dressing oneself fashionably (or not as the case may be) means to put oneself in relation to the style that one observes in others. When in turn we judge someone's dress as fashionable or not, we assess how this person has put him- or herself in relation to such observations; we observe other people's observations. Fashion in this sense stages the way an individual puts him- or herself in relation to his or her environment and the observation of this relation by others. Paradoxically, dress expresses social conformity *and* individuality at the same time. Closely related to this idea of fashionableness is the idea of appropriateness. Notions of appropriateness are usually aligned along parameters of gender and class. Like fashion, ideas of appropriateness in clothing involve observation in relation to social structures. In the complex and anonymous structures of an increasingly urbanised society towards the end of the nineteenth century, as characterised by Georg Simmel (541–558), clothing represents a generally valid order system which, though it allows for individual variations, encodes gender and class boundaries. When clothes are transgressive, they destabilise social or cultural norms and this is what creates horror in gothic and sensation fiction. Again, this can take the form of straightforward symbolism, but also of complex inversions of the relation between subject and object.

In gothic or sensation novels certain kinds of clothing are repeatedly employed to indicate violence or other forms of disruption in social order systems. Within the fictional framework these disruptions are employed specifically to cause excitement or a pleasurable kind of horror. Most prominent among such garments are the white gown, the veil, the dark cloak or garments that carry traces of violence. In the *Castle of Otranto*, for instance, it is a set of functional clothing, a helmet and an oversized gauntlet, that terrorise the inmates of the castle. As objects assume agency, they not only disrupt the power structures under the usurper Manfred but also reverse the domination of subject over object. In Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* a bloodstained piece of clothing nearly drives Paulo out of his senses with terror: “[I]n one corner of the vault lay an object, which seemed to tell the fate of one who had been confined here, and to hint his own: it was a garment covered with blood ... ‘It moves!’ exclaimed Paulo; ‘I see it move!’” (91). From an indication of violence the garment

here turns into a source of uncanny threat as it seems to come alive. While the actual or apparent agency of objects indicates disruptions of the status quo, this occurs in a regulated fashion here—the subject/object world is out of joint, rather like in Hamlet’s case, because there was a previous violation of the established order. While this represents a justifiable cause for terror—and several deaths in *The Castle of Otranto*—it is a disruption of the order of things that can be repaired and its terror contained, once the source of it has been located (the right heir reinstated as ruler, for instance). Such disruptions are the standard fare of gothic and sensation fiction. In *The Doctor’s Wife* Sigismund Smith, writer of sensation fiction, explicitly informs us that a “white-robed figure gliding in the gray gloaming” (47) is a staple of sensation serials. Thus, when little Jacob in *The Woman in White* is interviewed about the ghost he claims to have seen, he draws his proof from the clothing:

“You naughty boy, when did you see the ghost!”
 “Yester’een, at the gloaming,” replied Jacob.
 “Oh! You saw it ... in the twilight? And what was it like?”
 “Arl in white—as a ghaist should be,” answered the ghost-seer. (87)

Jacob is not particularly alarmed by this ghost. He is excited and he enjoys the importance he gains by having spotted the spectre but basically this ghost is as it should be, dressed entirely appropriately, according to ghost fashions as it where, in white, and making its appearance on a graveyard in twilight. Jacob recognises the code and reads it accordingly. In all these examples (murdering helmet, bloody garment, white dress) clothing serves as a recognisable sign of disruption. Interpretation codes remain stable: material indicates being, ghosts wear white. The situation becomes markedly more alarming when the clothes code is *mis*interpreted. In Lewis’s *Monk*, Agnes tries to escape from her aunt’s castle disguised as the castle ghost. Her lover Raymond is informed about this costume but mistakenly kidnaps the real ghost with near-fatal consequences as the horses take fright at the ghost in the carriage and he is nearly killed in the ensuing accident. In such dysfunctional decodings, the subject becomes the victim of the mistakenly read material.

The true horror of the situation in *The Woman in White* emerges when it becomes clear that Jacob’s ghost is not a ghost but Anne Catherick, the double of the rich heiress Laura Fairlie, who, just like Anne and the ghost, wears white. White in nineteenth-century Britain (as indeed at other times) had ambivalent associations. While it evinced innocence and

bridal purity, it was also aligned with the spectre, the shroud and with inappropriate unworldliness (Spooner *Fashioning* 66). Mrs Eric Pritchard remarks in *The Cult of Chiffon* (1902) that the “significant touch of ... purity associated with white” is not necessarily what is wanted for a young woman appearing in society: “The débutante should remember that it is the most exceptional thing in the world for the maiden emerging from the schoolroom to look anything else than ridiculous in white” (qtd Aindow 12). Both Anne and Laura dress inappropriately and thus transgressively. As the child of a servant, Anne dresses above her station; as heiress of a large estate and fortune, Laura is “too simple.” She refuses to fill her social position and “even as she focuses the snow-values of Wilkie Collins’s world, she is a figure to some extent faint and weak, and could be said ... to personate femininity as absence” (Harvey 206–208). As a result of their similar clothing and their family resemblance, the only outward difference between Laura and Anne is the absence of the traces of suffering in Laura’s face (97). It is the very blank of Laura’s face and dress that allows Fosco and Sir Percy to reinscribe her with a new identity and swap her for Anne (Spooner *Fashioning* 68). Once Laura’s face is changed by the lines of sorrow, her own servants no longer recognise her and her identity is established by the name on her clothes as the nurse in the asylum points out: “Look at your own name on your own clothes, and don’t worry us all any more about being Lady Glyde ... Do look at your clothes now! There it is, in good marking ink; ...—Anne Catherick, as plain as print!” (427). The name on clothes literally imprints identity. Accordingly, Laura very quickly loses her grasp on her own identity and never quite recovers that part of her experience which she lived through in another woman’s clothes.

In such instances clothes control the individual and not the other way around. Horror is thus created when there is a loss of control over the individual’s negotiations with his or her social environment, when the material surface observed by others changes or eliminates the subject beyond the subject’s control. This is a frequent topos in gothic and sensation fiction. Textiles can expose crime and the criminal against his or her will, for instance, the bloodstained sheets in the cottage in the woods which betray the evil nature of Don Raymond’s hosts in Lewis’s *Monk*, or the brass button in Braddon’s *Aurora Floyd* leading first to the yellow-striped waistcoat and then to the murderer. Material evidence rules supreme even when the perpetrator of the deed is unaware of his crime, as in Collins’s *The Moonstone* when Franklin Blake finally finds the nightgown to prove who the thief of the diamond was:

The nightgown itself would reveal the truth; for, in all probability, the nightgown was marked with its owner's name.
 I took it up from the sand, and looked for the mark.
 I found the mark, and read:
 MY OWN NAME. (314)

When in Radcliffe's *The Italian* Vivaldi is taken up by the officers of the inquisition for abducting a nun, it is again the clothes that serve as incontrovertible proof of being:

"You have stolen a nun from her convent," said the chief officer, "and must answer for the crime." ... Vivaldi observed, for the first time, that Ellena was shrouded in a *nun's* veil; ... though he knew not how to account for the circumstance of the veil, Vivaldi began to perceive others which gave colour to the charge brought against him. (218–219)

While this ascription is false, Ellena is only disguised as nun, social codes change her being (temporarily in this case). Clothes, in other words, transform persons. An article in Dickens's *All the Year Round* observed in 1865, "[t]he moral influence of dress" and concludes that in the past the "sober and rigid character" of ladies' clothes also made them "cold and stiff and artificial" (Halliday 62). Such connections are borne out in the contemporary sensation novel. When, in *The Doctor's Wife*, instead of the longed for ruby velvet, the practical George presents his bride with an eminently useful brown wedding dress, Isabel is forced into an existence of dullness and utility she does not want:

She wore her wedding-dress still; a sombre brown-silk dress, which had been chosen by George himself because of its homely merit of usefulness, rather than for any special beauty or elegance ... Her life had never been her own yet, and never was to be her own. (105)

Clothes force these characters into identities they do not feel are their own. The power of the material to subjugate identities becomes even more noticeable when characters lose their clothes altogether. In Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), for instance, Richard Holt is turned into a helpless slave when, except for his cloak, he is naked:

I do believe that if my tyrannical oppressor had only permitted me to attire myself in my own garments, ... that, had I been dressed as Englishmen are wont to be ... he would not have found in me ... the facile instrument which, in fact, he did. (32)

In the same novel Marjorie Lindon loses complete contact with herself the moment she is stripped of her clothes. The experience of self is thus inextricably bound up with the clothes in which the self presents him- or herself to the world. Clothes confer being. In extreme cases clothes replace being completely, for instance, when in Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903) Malcolm Ross identifies his fiancée Margaret by her white dress across the smoky room and when he eventually carries a woman's body in a white dress to safety he is left with the dress alone: "[I] hurried back to the hall where I had left, as I had supposed, Margaret. Her body was not there. But on the spot where I had laid her was Queen Tera's Bridal robe" (244).

But clothes not only take away being; in many cases they enable it. The sensation novel repeatedly explores the powers of mere external accoutrements to create status (Spooner "Modes"). Braddon's narrator remarks as much of the gardener in *The Doctor's Wife*:

If you had taken Mr Jeffson to a West-End tailor, and ordered a suit of clothes for him, you might have sent him straight into the House of Lords, and no member of that assemblage would have discovered that the intruder had been bred a market gardener. (57)

The same process is more sinister, for instance, in *The Woman in White*, where Anne's mother Mrs Catherick improves her social status through careful clothing choices financed by blackmail or in Collins's *No Name*, where the swindler Captain Wragge is able to style himself into a country gentleman. It seems that one does not need the substance as long as one has the right cover. It is in fact a critical commonplace that the ease with which people could change status via their clothes (which in a society without sumptuary laws are, after all, available to anyone prepared to pay the price) destabilised traditional class boundaries and questioned the very notion of "substance" in class status (Breward 77). Such perforations of class boundaries intersect with gender constructions. In Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) the poor and desperate Lucy fashions herself into a lady, "whether she trips around the house playfully wearing clothes that imply a game of dress-up or majestically dons 'her most gorgeous silk, a voluminous robe of silvery, shimmering blue, that made her look as if she had been arrayed in moonbeams'" (Montwieler 50). Sensation novels thus "critique assumptions of class ... as they suggest that it might be clothes, cosmetics, and a cultivated bearing that make a lady and gentleman, not birth" (Harrison 535).

Such class transgressions are by no means always condemned. In Collins's *The New Magdalen* (1873) the orphaned Grace Roseberry finds herself inscribed with a new—and unwanted—identity, when she wakes up after being presumed dead with clothes marked Mercy Merrick. When she arrives at her aunt's she finds that Mercy has taken up not only her clothes but also her identity and the affections of her aunt; Grace is reduced to "the woman in the poor black garments" (95). On the other hand, the new (and fake) identity conferred through clothes enables Mercy to flourish into what is presented as her true self: kind, caring and gentle, without the taint on her honour that her previous life on the streets has conferred and that society will not forgive her despite her repentance. Grace, from the very first remarkably ungracious and small-minded, does not deserve her aunt's kindness, while the generous and self-denying Mercy does—the stolen garments provide a space for her to become the "good woman" that she really is. Grace's accusation "You have no right to the [silk] gown on your back" (159) is only accurate in terms of her status as Lady Jane's niece. Mercy, on the other hand, has genuinely earned that dress by her kind devotion. Society's idolisation of female "honour" turns out to be the adoration of a merely superficial virtue. "Collins's preoccupation with problems of subjectivity and perception and with the instability of (modern) identity" (Pykett 15) works both ways: to deny what seem immutable rights and to provide new opportunities in clothes that enable the character to unfold.

The dependence of the self on its outward form is pushed to its extreme in gothic narratives where people do not only change or lose their clothes but where they change or lose their entire bodies, as in Mary Shelley's short story "Transformation," where the impoverished but beautiful young man changes bodies with the rich but monstrous dwarf, who then takes over his life and his bride. The basic problem is articulated, however, in the very marked dependence of the self on clothes that we find throughout the gothic and sensation novel. In each case, the outward material assumes such a powerful position that the self is incomplete without it. "Society ... is founded upon Cloth" as Thomas Carlyle observes in *Sartor Resartus* (45), and the self is dependent on social relations thus constructed. The borders of identity become porous and are in fact extended into a person's clothing. The uncanny disjunction between the self and its material extensions that the gothic and sensation novel dwells on creates moments of identity crises: subject-object relations are inverted and in places the material surface proves more dominant than the subject. With this, the gothic and sensation novel emplots a cultural concern in an expanding consumer

culture, expressed among others by Thomas Carlyle, that the material has replaced the spiritual, that clothing has replaced identity (Spooner *Fashioning* 53).

Gothic and sensation fiction thus explores a very basic human impulse to relate oneself to one's material surroundings, an impulse that in those novels is related to both women and men. This concern became more pressing in an expanding consumer culture from the late eighteenth century onwards, where the potential power of objects over subjects could be experienced as both threatening and destabilising. In this context we find that gothic and sensation narratives, "themselves products in an increasingly commercialized literary marketplace" (Harrison 529), are also positioned through their material cover, through their clothes. The perceived threat of commercialised literature is articulated in terms which parallel the discussion on clothing codes remarkably closely.

THE CLOTHING OF HORROR

According to Walter Benjamin, the first lithographic poster appeared in 1861 in London to advertise the *Woman in White*. "Still colorless, the first drops of a shower of letters ran down the walls of houses ... and was greeted like the plagues of Egypt" (122). In fact, Benjamin misidentifies the poster which is Frederick Walker's poster that announced the adaptation of the novel for the Olympic in 1871 (Allingham). It is probably not by chance, however, that Benjamin connects the ad for one of the most famous sensation novels of the nineteenth century with the visual noise of a consumer society. The "shower of letters" of popular literature was a general source of concern and the commodification of literature was particularly noticeable in the case of *The Woman in White* which was marketed with a range of matching merchandise, including cloaks, bonnets and perfume (Sweet xv). Much like people, books also depended on their covers for their social standing. The boundaries of good and bad reading were also laid out along the lines of class, gender and appropriateness. Montwieler's observation about Lady Audley has a more general relevance in the context of sensation publishing: "The insidious invasion of the upper-class sphere by poor women parallels the invasion of serious literature by the sensation novel" (60).

In his campaign against such cultural decline Matthew Arnold demanded decent dress for decent books:

A cheap literature, hideous and ignoble of aspect, like the tawdry novels which flare in the book-shelves of our railway stations, and which seem designed, ... for people with a low standard of life, is not what is wanted. A sense of beauty and fitness ought to be satisfied in the form and aspect of the books we read, as well as by their contents. (328)

Good books, like good people, also needed to have a decent cover. The material outside assumed control over the content; in the end you *could* tell a book by its cover because the cover authorised different readings of the book. “A classic,” as Mary Hammond observes, “to achieve its full effect, had to be more than a literary work; it must also be ... bound and marketed in the right way” (95).

Materials embody class as much as morality. Mrs Catherick is able to override her precarious moral status through material display: “The dress of Virtue, in our parts, was cotton print. I had silk” (534). She asserts at the same time the desirability of silk clothing and the latent moral ambiguities inherent in the costly material. Similar observations apply to book covers. It was only in the late 1820s that publishers’ bindings came to be a standard element of book production (McKitterick “Changes”). Amongst the earliest books to be produced and sold with a standard publishers’ binding were the extremely popular literary annuals (Altick 362). In 1828 Charles Heath presented the *Keepsake* in a binding of bright red watered silk with gold blocking on the front cover. This revolutionary choice of cover positioned the *Keepsake*, and other annuals that followed its lead, as an aesthetically pleasing and desirable object clothed in silk. “Although impractically fragile as a binding material, the silk lent an air of elegance and femininity to the volume and, as is true of today’s Valentines, scarlet was an evocative colour” (Feldman 15–16). As in clothing, silk as book cover carried attractions which simple cotton or paper did not achieve. If cloth could transform people, it could do the same with books.

It has long been a standard position in book history that the material presentation of a print product contributes to its meaning potential; it “construct[s] protocols of reading and provide[s] the grounds on which the text is authorized” (Wall 5). Considered in the light of its material presentation, gothic and sensation fiction comes with widely divergent authorisations ranging from valuable antiquarian object to disposable consumer item. The 1791 edition of the first gothic novel, Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto*, was printed by Bodoni upon vellum and bound in blue morocco (Dibdin 115). Both the vellum and the costly binding marked the book as an object of

antiquarian interest, if nothing else. Mary Shelley's gothic short stories, on the other hand, were published in the *Keepsake* and thus aligned with a feminised consumer culture in evocative silk covers. While the annuals were costly, "[t]he rise of commodification was paralleled by the rise in literacy," and as prices dropped, books "became accessible commodities, both constructors and constructions of consumer culture" (Montwieler 46).

When sensation novels presented the same text in very different material guises, they also seem to evoke different reading responses. *The Woman in White*, as many other sensation novels, appeared first in serialised form in Charles Dickens's paper *All the Year Round* (Sweet xix–xxi). In this publication format the novel could be accessed in 40 cheap instalments of 2 d each over a year and a half (a total of 6 s 8 d). In 1860 it appeared as an expensive three-decker novel for a guinea and a half (31 s 6 d). The weekly instalments position the narrative in the context of accessible but disposable and basically ephemeral consumer products and perilously close to readers which Collins himself had described as looking "to quantity rather than quality" (Collins "The Unknown Public" 218). In contrast, the three-decker hardback with a cloth binding and blind and gold blocking on front and spine established the novel as both valuable and permanent possession (Gasson). References to reading experiences of high-standing individuals always seem to be references to the *book* rather than the *serial*. William Gladstone, Prince Albert or William Thackeray, for instance, are said to have been engrossed by the *book* of the *Woman in White* (Sweet xv–xvi).² The material appearance of the novel thus seems to enable class-specific reading experiences and literally to class-ify readers by the look of the books they read. In theory, of course, properly bedecked reading material should enable readers to dress up their intellectual pursuits and offer the kind of class mobility that clothing did in the novels themselves. Fictional renderings of such undertakings, at any rate, seem distinctly doubtful about their outcome though: Leonard Bast in E.M. Forster's *Howards End*, for instance, not only fails to improve his social standing through reading; as the bookcase falls on him in the final showdown, he is eventually killed by the very tools of his aspirations.³

² Copies of the three-decker editions of sensation novels, for instance by M.E. Braddon, can be found in Gladstone's private library at Hawarden. I wish to thank Alberto Gabriele for reminding me.

³ The connection between the representative binding of books and the status of the reader is worth pursuing in more detail. I am not aware of any extensive work that has been done in that area.

In the 1860s improvements in colour printing technology also enhanced the visual appeal of cheap paper covers (McKitterick 102–103). In the case of *The Woman in White* various one-volume editions in lurid colours followed the initial three-decker, a typical instance of down-tranching to access broader markets—such as, the yellowbacks by Smith, Elder in 1872 and by Chatto and Windus in 1889 (Gasson). The cheap but eye-catching covers of the one-volume editions placed books like the *Woman in White* back in the context of disposable goods and thus essentially questioned consumerism. The connection between such reading material and consumer behaviour was driven home by the presence of advertising on the book covers, addressing mostly female consumption practices with ads for household goods, cosmetics or patent medicines (McKitterick “Introduction” 51, 60).

The site of consumption that came to be associated with basically indiscriminating and therefore questionable and again largely gendered consumerism was the railway, itself also a standard element of sensationalism (Daly *Literature, Technology and Modernity*).⁴ In 1848 the publishing firm Routledge had started their Railway Library, cheap reprints of established literary successes and specially designed to cater for consumer needs on long railway trips (Law and Patten 164). In 1851 Samuel Phillips conflated railway reading with trashy reading as he complained in *The Times* about “two young ladies and a boy” who “were amusing themselves and alarming us by a devotion to a trashy French novel, most cruelly and sacrilegiously misplaced.” The trashy fare is categorised in terms of its outward appearance: “[t]he cover of the books was light green, and we remembered to have seen a huge heap of such covers as we hastily passed the bookstall at the station on our way to the carriage” (Phillips 317). It is women and children who are thus accused of misdirected devotions while the gentleman only hastily passes the temptation. But railway reading also held dangers for gentlemen. A closer inspection showed that even otherwise serious or gentlemanly books were degraded amidst the rabble of the railway bookstalls. “Here and there crouched some old friends, who looked very strange indeed in the midst of such questionable society—like well-dressed gentlemen compelled to take part in the general doings of the Rag-fair” (317).

⁴ See, specifically, Chaps. 2 and 3.

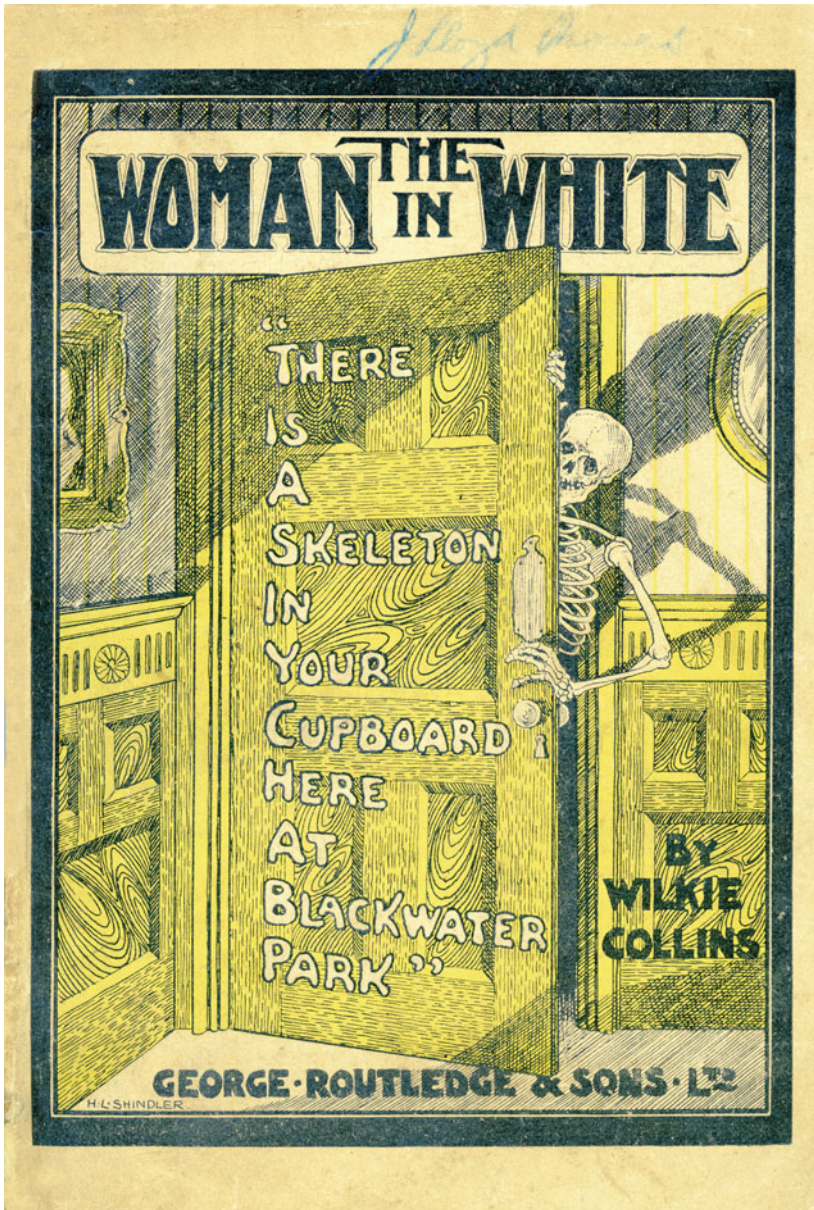


Fig. 2.1 Cover of the 1904 paperback edition of Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White* published by Routledge. © Andrew Gasson⁵

⁵ I thank Andrew Gasson for permission to reprint this image.

Books depended on their covers for their gentlemanly as much as for their moral status. Their material presentation as much as the questionable sales point of the railway bookstall and careless consumption by women and children reduced the symbolic capital of these books: The horrible clothing of tales of horror turned them into something doubly horrific. It is perhaps not surprising that Routledge, the firm who invented the railway novel, pushed the aspect of lurid sensationalism in *The Woman in White* to extremes. The 1904 Routledge edition no longer focused on the comparatively harmless “woman in white” but on a “skeleton in the cupboard” (see Fig. 2.1). Bereft of any decent covering, death, as the ugly kernel of a culture dominated by its material, exposes both clothing and body as only temporary disguise.

REGAINING CONTROL

A turning point in the development of consumer culture in Britain was the Great Exhibition of 1851 which put the material achievements of the world in general and of Britain in particular on show (Richards). Significantly, *The Woman in White* is set around the time and explicitly alludes to the Great Exhibition. In many ways the proliferation of objects which the Exhibition put on such triumphant display brought into focus the perceived challenge to conventions of class and gender which consumer culture represented. This challenge is taken up in the novels: “both the French and the British sensation novels dramatize an anxiety revolving around the notion of class mobility” (Gabriele 13). But material run wild could also rob people of their identities or force them into unwanted ones, a concern that was negotiated in the gothic novel long before the impact of the Great Exhibition. At the same time the gothic and sensation novels offer frameworks for managing this unruly object world. The collector, the detective, the scientist or the lawyer are all staple characters of gothic and sensation fiction and frequently it is these newly professionalised—and usually male—characters that manage to rein in and control an obstreperous material world: they find clues, collect evidence and resist the magic influence of foreign objects; in short, they are *not* controlled by the material. Instead, they (re-)introduce order through classification (Daly *Modernism*). Excessive consumption on the other hand is devalued as deviant, often as deviant femininity, though dependence on the material concerns male as much as female characters in the novels. Almost exactly parallel to this emplotment and

classification of the individual's relation to the object world, cultural critics of the time, like Matthew Arnold, divide print matter into decent or trashy categories and the material presentation of the book as object serves as prime indication for its high or low value. With such classifications the unruly object as well as unruly print matter is subdued again and the uncanny is forced back into the covers of stable systems.

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Adelaide, Sensationalism and the Development of New Journalism in the Early History of the South Australian Press

Anthony Laube

The press of late nineteenth-century Adelaide—capital of the small colonial outpost of South Australia on the very edge of Queen Victoria’s empire—was nothing if not well informed of movements and thought in the outside world. Even here, whether in the fledgling city or its surrounding bush, a lively interior life was possible, as the larger world of ideas and opinions was daily within reach through the pages of the colony’s prolific and diverse newspaper publishing. Although dominated by two conservative morning dailies, which also maintained control of the city’s evening and weekend newspapers, a lively alternative press existed and challenged the prevailing operatives. For many at the time, London was the centre and pinnacle of the civilized world—socially and intellectually, and it was from there in 1886 that the advent of the self-proclaimed New Journalism of W.T. Stead, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, spread. Imitated and broadcast throughout the western world, the main features of Stead’s journalism—popularism, sensationalism, human interest and investigative reporting—had in fact independently pre-existed. The South Australian press in its history throughout the nineteenth century exhibited all the criteria of Stead’s New Journalism, as this chapter will demonstrate.

A. Laube (✉)

State Library of South Australia, Adelaide, SA, Australia

Further, it was crusading individual journalists, unfettered by commercial constraints and motivated (like Stead) by idealism, who deliberately pursued the style, ultimately ushering in modern journalism. The name of Charles Chandler stands large amongst this pioneering group. His rise and fall will also be examined here.

South Australia and its press were uniquely founded. The colony's European settlement, unlike that of the other Australian colonies, followed the carefully devised plan of Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Wakefield's system encouraged the immigration of respectable British middle-class families and a carefully screened labouring class. Resting on ideals which notably included religious freedom, that is, freedom to worship outside the dominant Church of England, the colony attracted many religious dissenters and free thinkers, as well as hopeful commercial speculators. Wakefield's plan included the establishment of a newspaper as an integral component of his Utopia in the southern seas. A newspaper, he said, would build a sense of "concert" amongst the colonists and "show better than words, that a colony ought to be made, even before its departure, a distinct and well-regulated society" (Wakefield 140–141). Therefore, in June 1836, South Australia's first newspaper, the *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register*, was published in London, some months prior to the official foundation of the colony. This completely unique press birth was deliberately and actively promoted by the colony's founders, and installed prior to the existence of the colony's readership (Lloyd 18). South Australia's promoters saw the press as a practical means of attracting potential investment for the colony,¹ going so far as to finance a handful of purely promotional London-based newspapers specifically for that purpose.²

Fifty years after the idealistic founding of South Australia, W.T. Stead's New Journalism was conceived.³ This encompassed three broad newspaper components: intent, layout and content (Van Heekeren 8). But in particular, Stead aimed to draw his readers' attention to his underlying social and

¹ A handful of purely promotional newspapers were published in London during the 1830s and 1840s by the colony's wealthier investors with this purpose.

² These were: *South Australian Record* (1837–1841), *South Australian Colonist* (1840), *South Australian News* (1841–1852) and *South Australian Chronicle* (1852–1853).

³ The derivation of the term "New Journalism" is frequently attributed to Matthew Arnold in his critical article published in the *Contemporary Review* in May 1887. Tony Nicholson (Brake 677–8) points out that the term was in fact first used by Stead himself a year earlier in the *Contemporary Review* in November 1886.

political message through the use of sensationalism (Brake 22). His newspaper layout incorporated bold headlines, short paragraphs, illustrations and the stop press. The content was popularized, targeted at a broad section of the reading public, including new audiences of women and the working classes. The aim was to be entertaining, incorporating a style of language appropriate to the new readers, thereby expanding the audience and familiarize them with his underlying political messages. With such devices as parliamentary sketches, popular sports writing, columns for women readers, and an emphasis on crime and investigative reporting, the writing was racier and more personalized; it was “human interest” reporting (Wiener 156). In reality the majority of these techniques were not new at all, but independently pre-existing (Mayer 23; Denis Cryle, “Popular Journalism 1860–1930;” in Curthoys and Schultz 57–58.), even in a colonial outpost such as South Australia, where eventually the press came to be driven more by the mundane forces of profit, as well as by the impact of technological innovation, than by journalistic ideals.

South Australia’s earliest journalists, five decades before Stead, employed techniques and approaches which anticipated the New Journalism, some of which were in use since the inception of the press and even earlier. In its first years the colony was home to a group of outspoken, independent thinkers, not least including the founders of its press. South Australia’s first journalist and editor of its first newspaper, the *South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register*, was George Stevenson. The colony’s first (unofficial) female journalist was his wife, Margaret, author of various articles in her husband’s newspaper, including a series of Junius-style letters denouncing an incident of government nepotism in 1837 (Pitt 4, 16). These letters are arguably an early, crude version of sensationalism and “exposure”, or investigative reporting. More vital than the issue of nepotism was Stevenson’s sustained questioning of the initial colonial decision-making process. This almost certainly was a decisive force in the British government deciding to abolish the position of Resident Commissioner and recall the first Governor (Seaman 18). Stevenson’s successor as editor of the *Register* was an even more zealous missionary journalist, John Stephens, a radical and idealistic Christian previously employed by the London-based promoters of the colony in their press campaign. In 1850 Stephens, more outspoken than his predecessor, published an obituary of mine owner Samuel Stocks which referred to his alcoholism and hinted at other vices. The ensuing outcry and threatened libel charges from Stocks’ family brought a petition signed by 1700 of Stephens’ supporters, published in full through successive issues of his newspaper.

With such radical beginnings as these, the road to the development of press sensationalism and investigative reporting might have seemed a simple progression, but such was not to be the case. Certainly in the first half of the nineteenth century the typical Adelaide editor was a busy, pro-saic, outspoken individual, often being journalist, printer and office manager, in charge of a handful of printing and distributing staff. But from the 1850s he was far more conservative, heading an increasingly specialized staff, and answerable to a board of businessmen looking principally to consolidate their newspaper investment. Those who immediately followed the press pioneers were simply men with a good middle-class education and literary inclinations. This more “gentlemanly” approach of the second generation of editors, combined with a move to commercial press ownership, ended the widespread radical journalism of Adelaide’s early newspapers. The stage was set for the creation of a conservative Adelaide press, pushing experimentation to the fringes of the profession, except when it had distinct commercial advantages. The early sensationalism would now become a fringe activity.

COMMERCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL IMPACTS

Three events in the 1850s brought a complete change to the press of the young colony. Firstly and dramatically, a near economic disaster was brought by a gold rush to the neighbouring colony of Victoria which lured the majority of South Australia’s men—some 15,000 or almost one quarter of the population (Laube 21)—to the diggings. Adelaide’s businesses, importantly including its newspapers, ground to a halt for lack of labour and ready cash (*A holograph memory* 31).

Secondly, and contiguous with the gold rush, was the passing of provision for the colony’s first elected Legislative Council. With self-governing came political aspiration, and what better way to promote one’s political views and aspirations than through the press? In May 1853 eight Adelaide businessmen financed the establishment of the *Adelaide Examiner* as a vehicle for their election platforms. Within a few months the initial venture was wound up in favour of purchasing the *South Australian Register*, with its weekend country edition, the *Adelaide Observer*. What Stephens in all his outspoken idealism could not do, the eight wealthy new owners could, financing the inauguration of both steam-printing in Adelaide, and an expanded and increasingly specialized newspaper workforce. The *South Australian Register* led the way. It was closely followed by the newly founded *South Australian*

Advertiser, which was also propelled quickly forward with the impetus of commercial backing to become a strong competitor to the founding newspaper. A decade later, each company acquired an evening tabloid, so that, already having weekend/country versions, the *Register* and the *Advertiser* monopolized morning, evening and weekend newspaper production, assisted by the spread of the railway network, which provided timely delivery of city newspapers to country districts. A raft of “country correspondents” produced local news reports and allegiance, in return for free subscriptions. This concentrated press ownership encouraged uniformity in opinion and style, and squeezed out the possibility of any effective opposition. Essentially commercial ventures, the two companies were consequently conservative, both politically and in avoiding innovative reporting. So the early experimentation and outspokenness and the naïve sensationalism of the founding press of the colony ended with the social and commercial changes brought in the wake of the gold rush. The risks of applying what would be the signature tenets of the New Journalism were left to the adventurous, independent sections of the colonial press—the small enterprises and the outspoken crusaders—as we shall see.

A third transforming event of the 1850s also brought major changes to newspaper style and ethos. This was the coming of the telegraph, changing reporting across the world, and Adelaide was in the forefront of its effects. In 1858 Australia’s first inter-colonial telegraph linked Adelaide first with Melbourne, and then expanded to the other Australian colonies. In 1872, through a combination of geographical location and government foresight, the hub of Australia’s Overland Telegraph was inaugurated in Adelaide. Funding for the mammoth two-year task of laying a telegraph across the centre of the continent, linked by submarine cable to the British-Indian telegraph, was funded by a loan from the American-based Eastern Extension Telegraph Company (Livingston 26), a multinational corporation which helped maintain Adelaide’s resulting news monopoly. For the small British settlement of 185,000 souls on the furthestmost edge of the British empire, the telegraph brought a new diminution of distance between the far away outpost and “home.” In concrete terms, the telegraph brought a new speed to news reporting, with almost immediate publishing of events not only from Britain but also across the globe. In a stereotypically Australian way, the news first given close attention via telegraph was English cricket—sports reporting in Adelaide increased exponentially from the advent of the telegraph. Although part of the populist ethos of Stead’s New Journalism, technology and pre-existing demand

actually drove the arrival of the sports reporter more than the efforts of the New Journalism.

Because telegraphic news was costly, the advent of the telegraph brought pithy, factual reporting, with bold headlines and sub-headings to both summarize and dramatize the news (Van Heekeren 5). But the Adelaide mainstream press resisted much of New Journalism's attendant sensationalism and brisk reporting for as long as it could.

Through the second half of the nineteenth century South Australia was dominated by two newspaper companies best known by their signature morning dailies—the *South Australian Register* and the *South Australian Advertiser*. From this time, conservative commercialism came to dominate newspaper publishing, squeezing the existing outspoken press to the fringes.

In the first decades of settlement the press had been flexing its muscles. South Australia was home to the first free press anywhere in the British diaspora. Until this time the British press was under tight governmental control, and in the older Australian colonies the respective Governors exercised a firm oversight of newspaper content. While this situation continued for some time in the greater British Empire, in the experimental colony itself, the unique founding freedom of its press led, initially, to a confident, outspoken and strongly personal local journalism. The relatively low overhead costs of running a newspaper saw a rapid press proliferation, such that by the end of the first three years of colonization, six newspapers co-existed in the settlement. By 1851, 15 years after colonization, 10 newspapers were being distributed amongst a population of 63,000, and the lively and loud rivalry between editors brought a proliferation of libel cases—equally entertaining to readers (Pitt 46). For all that, this outspokenness was nevertheless a genuine seeking after the public good, regardless of the personal consequences.

The move to the staid dominance of the two morning dailies from the 1850s witnessed the end of risky editorial tirades, replaced by the mild bickering of commercial rivalry. In fact, while outwardly bitter rivals, the two companies privately collaborated on subscriptions, advertising rates and government tenders.⁴ The methodology of New Journalism was followed by the

⁴Numerous incidents of this collaboration between the rival newspaper corporations are recorded in the *Register* Board minutes and the *Advertiser* letterbooks, particularly from the 1890s. These are held in the Archival collections of the State Library of South Australia.

two newspapers only where profitability was safely predicted, most obviously in the introduction of special interest reporting for sports enthusiasts and women from the 1880s. Sensationalism, New Journalism's signature ingredient, was a far riskier experiment. In its simplest form it was always present in the crime reports—probably the most popular reading matter right across Australia's colonial press (Sturma 8). Despite the commercialization and gentrification of the Adelaide press dating from the birth of "quality" dailies,⁵ court reporting with its entertaining and thrilling detail remained a popular and "safe" feature within .

Pure sensationalism, which generally included references to sex, was downplayed on the rare occasions that it appeared in Adelaide's genteel morning press. The *Register* was at pains to point this out in a leader under the heading "The Anderson Divorce Case" in 1889.

One of the most unpleasant duties imposed upon a journalist as a chronicler of public events is to record the testimony given in a contested divorce case. The bond of marriage, the foundation of our social system, is so sacred that any thing which appears even to cast a blemish on the relationship so consecrated must cause pain to the delicate-minded reader, and this pain is much intensified when, as in the cause which ended yesterday, circumstances disgusting in themselves are brought prominently forward. It is only with much paraphrase, curtailment, and excision that, in such a case, the evidence can be published at all. In the interests of decency this expurgation is necessary; but publication is equally necessary in the interests of justice.⁶

This was actually disingenuous; the *Register* had already published full daily court reports with titillating detail throughout the two weeks of the hearing.

From the late 1890s the city's two dailies began to employ safer Stead stylistic techniques—detailed descriptions of people, scenes and events, taking a firsthand style which included interviewing. The personal interview began to appear in Adelaide's mainstream press from the 1890s, first as "scoop" interviews with visiting celebrities, such as General Booth of the Salvation Army in 1891. It was extended as a tool in more sensational reports such as the murder of the European wife of a Chinese

⁵Stephen 245 uses this term to distinguish the conservative and dominant morning press from the less fastidious titles.

⁶"The Anderson Divorce Case." *South Australian Register* 21 September 1889: 4. *Trove*. Web. 12 Aug. 2015.

man in 1893. The interview technique itself, while being a favoured New Journalism device, was not an invention of Stead either, but again derived from older techniques. British journalist William Howard Russell included soldier interviews in his Crimean War reports of the 1850s, while Henry Mayhew in the same period interviewed the poor to expose English social conditions (Koss 346). Adelaide's morning press had used interviews at least from the 1870s, and fictional interviews with public figures were for decades a staple technique of political commentary. But within Stead's New Journalism the sensational interview was central (Wiener 149).

The political sketch, another New Journalism technique, when used within Adelaide's mainstream morning press, was a mild satirical commentary on politics and politicians (Wiener 144). Perhaps its inclusion reflected a recognition of the origins of the press as political commentator and educator. The political sketch was also not unique to Stead, but reflected a movement away from formal political reporting (Koss 346). The *Register* from 1865 published "Talk on the Flags by an Idler," which evolved into the enormously popular "Echoes from the Bush by Geoffry Crabthorne." These columns and others like them were written in a mixture of prose and poetry. From 1889 the new comic paper *Quiz* took the form to a more advanced level with its "Telephone Talks" column, a mock-interview between the omniscient *Quiz* and various political figures.

EDUCATING ADELAIDE'S JOURNALISTS

By the second half of the nineteenth century, Adelaide's journalists had become a large and diverse group. In the 1880s, the city's two major newspapers each had literary staffs of 12 or 13 journalists,⁷ while the number of individual metropolitan titles rose to 19 in 1883, peaking at 23 titles in 1894. Between 1870 and 1890, it is possible to name some 250 men and women, including both full-time and "outside" writers or "penny-a-liners," working for the Adelaide press.⁸ The most significant feature of this army of journalists was their surprisingly high level of mobility. Tracking their employment histories shows that some 10 per

⁷"Death of Mr William Kyffin Thomas." *South Australian Advertiser*. 11 July 1878: 13 *Trove*. Web. 12 Aug. 2015; "Funeral of the late Mr Harcus." *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*. 19 August 1876: 9 *Trove*. Web. 12 Aug. 2015, and other references list staff by role.

⁸Statistical and other descriptive data relating to Adelaide's nineteenth-century journalists were compiled by the author from a number of sources, principally including but not limited to: newspaper articles including obituaries, reports of court cases, social notes and staff lists; sampling of Adelaide's residential directories, insolvency returns.

cent had spent time working for the overseas press in Britain, America, South Africa, Hong Kong and Germany. Additionally, and particularly among the Australian-born journalists, there was constant movement between Australian colonies, city and country, and between Adelaide's two rival morning newspapers—and a not unexpected tendency to seek independence by founding their own newspapers. Through all this movement and inter-connecting, the journalists of Adelaide must have been well aware of evolving techniques worldwide, although opportunities to actually experiment occurred only in risky fringe operations outside of the conservative readership, combined with the conservative press ownership, placed a firm brake on experimentation within the large companies—the editors being ever aware of the shareholders' concern for profit over journalistic innovation.

A significant proportion of the journalists who became prominent in Adelaide from the middle of the nineteenth century were the product of two academically prestigious boys' schools. A number of mid-century journalists had attended the Academy of John Lorenzo Young, whose pupils became prominent across a number of influential spheres from the 1870s onwards as explorers, scientists, a Premier of South Australia and notably included several prominent journalists. Young's Academy was the choice for thinking parents within the upper echelons of Adelaide Society. The school produced several editors and senior reporters. A second, later wave of journalists were graduates of John Whinham's school. Parents who chose Whinham College were from the aspirational middle classes, expecting their sons to be prepared for the business world of the late nineteenth century through an education that included a component of practical training. Practical training as preparation for the middle-class business world included Pitman's shorthand, a highly desirable journalistic attainment which enabled entry into the well-paid field of parliamentary reporting. This suggests a movement as the century progressed, away from the journalist as literary elite, from cultured wordsmith to prosaic pressman, and reflected journalism becoming a middle-class growth industry. The final two decades of the nineteenth century were a golden age for Adelaide journalists, and witnessed the rise of a brash, young, highly mobile group, using populist press techniques—usually regardless of any obvious social or political ethos. Against this pragmatic background, however, there rose a handful of idealists, consciously or unconsciously following the underlying intentions of New Journalism.

THE ALTERNATIVE PRESS

The dominant commercialism and conservatism of from the middle of the nineteenth century relegated the social and political ethos of the New Journalism to Adelaide's alternative and experimental press. Although some of the outspokenness of the early decades initially passed to the independent country presses, it soon re-surfaced in the city within this new experimental press. Here came to be exhibited the strongest flowering of New Journalism techniques, particularly exposure journalism—the forerunner to modern investigative journalism.

Country editor/owners had a large degree of autonomy. In 1860 George Allen founded a newspaper at Kapunda, a mining town in the mid-north of South Australia. The *Northern Star* was a blatant exemplar of “exposure journalism”—the exposing of unjust, immoral or illegal activities to the public eye with the intention of bringing reform. This was 30 years before W.T. Stead. Allen satirized the local political candidate, lampooned the town magistrate and lawyers as incompetent, charged a doctor with adultery and exposed a local brothel owner and illicit liquor supplier—and threatened to print the names of her clients. Surprisingly, none of his local targets brought libel charges. Rather, it was the manager of an Italian opera visiting Adelaide, whose company Allen described as “a superlative humbug” best amalgamated with “the crocodiles and the singing duck,” who took Allen to court.⁹ But Allen was forcibly made aware of the commercial effects of exposure journalism in other ways—entertaining as it may have been to those few not implicated—with the newspaper's loss of both local advertisers and ordinary subscribers.

In the city in 1884, George Barrow and Charles McMullen founded the *South Australian Times*. Filled with sport and theatre news, a few months into Barrow's editorship the subject of spiritualism was introduced. Although Stead himself was a firm believer in psychic phenomena this was not in itself a component of New Journalism (Wiener 173). The *South Australian Times* focused on the case of the German cello player and passionate spiritualist and Theosophist, Christian Reimers. In late 1884 Reimers instigated a number of séances in Adelaide. Kirkham Evans, a tailor, prominent member of the local YMCA, and most importantly, a reformed spiritualist, attended one of the gatherings. At a highly publicized public lecture attended by more than a thousand people, Evans revealed Reimers' séances were a hoax, the phenomena being orchestrated by two young men from the music store below the spiritualist's lodgings as a prank. The well-

⁹“The Italians.” *Northern Star*. 6 April 1861: 4.

known English medium, Catherine Wood, was brought from Sydney at the height of the debate, and expressed her disapproval, of the whole affair, but unfortunately caught typhoid fever, and died in Adelaide.

A lengthy press battle between Reimers and Evans ensued, fanned by a barrage of letters from the public. Even the German language newspaper the *Australische Zeitung* took up the debate, while the comic press threw in its usual dismissive comments about the daily press itself, complete with cartoons depicting Evans as the devil and Reimers surrounded by cherubs.¹⁰

The dailies soon tired of the subject. The *Register's* view was distant and disdainful, as befitted Adelaide's oldest morning newspaper, seeing spiritualism as an "epidemic" which lay "rather outside the range of ordinary subjects of journalistic criticism, and our chief reason for referring to it at the present time is that it seems to be engaging a large measure of attention."¹¹ The *Advertiser* more even-handed and open-mindedly wrote, "We have in this case not much sympathy either with Mr Reimers, the deluded, or with Mr Evans, the deluder ... The value of recent events, apart from their humorous aspect, consists of the emphasis which they throw upon the need of conducting spiritualistic investigations with care and caution."¹²

But the alternative press happily took the more controversial stance, and in true New Journalism form championed Reimers the underdog. Barrow and McMullen's *Times* gave much space to the debate, even to the extent of a two-page supplement of correspondence at the height of the controversy. In almost every issue were letters from Reimers, often accompanied by supportive correspondence from quarry manager and spiritualist sympathizer Thomas Glaister, while Kirkham Evans of the YMCA continued his onslaught. Reimers' letters were rambling and discursive, attacking the

out and out enemies of a reformation unhinging old orthodox notions, [who] try by foul means and unprincipled spies to poison developments towards progress and information of the real facts.¹³

"Alpha" was one of many believing spiritualists whose letters appeared in the *Times*.

¹⁰See "In the Rafters." *Lantern*. 27 December 1884: 15; and "Curiosity Criticisms by Sinnik: Ye Spirits." 10 January 1885: 23.

¹¹"The Spiritualistic Excitement." *South Australian Register*. 20 December 1884: 5.

¹²*South Australian Advertiser*. 24 December 1884: 4.

¹³"Truth against the World." *South Australian Times* 18 April 1885: 2.

Having had the opportunity ... to witness mostly all manifestations which occurred at the séances in Marshall's rooms, including the sittings with the late Miss Wood and the not-to-be-forgotten charming chatting with "Pocka" her controlling spirit, I feel bound to declare that no trickster, conjuror, or even not a Mr K. Evans could be able to reproduce phenomena like those shown by evidently intelligent agencies.¹⁴

There was much more in a similar vein. While Kirkham Evans and the clergy of Adelaide wrote angrily to the morning dailies, the *Times* with the rest of the alternative press gave all their sympathy to the spiritualists, attacking the attackers as "ungentlemanly, unchristian, and malicious."¹⁵

THE ILLUSTRATED PRESS

Adelaide's nineteenth-century illustrated press was the main home of popular journalism, and the earliest purveyor of true sensational reporting. This culminated in the final two decades of the century both in its signature print illustration and in the dissemination of stories of macabre deaths, scandalous divorces and violent crimes. By its very nature, the illustrated press was a well-placed purveyor of the sensational. This had been the case since the earliest "news" dissemination within sixteenth-century broadsheets. Adelaide's very first illustrated newspapers were also home to a version of early exposure journalism, which not infrequently brought the owners into court.

The first illustrated newspaper in the colony was the *Adelaide Independent and Cabinet of Amusement*, appearing in 1841 under the editorship of colourful auctioneer and humorist Nathaniel Hailes. The newspaper included crude cartoon-like lithograph inserts depicting local personalities. Its most dramatic, and technically best illustration, portrayed a drunken brawl which followed a celebratory dinner for explorer Edward Eyre. This depicted the Colonial Treasurer Osmond Gilles punching the bank manager Edward Stephens (Marquis 57–58). Editor Hailes reportedly lost his job over this incident.¹⁶

The colony's next illustrated periodical issued from the entrepreneurial and unpredictable James Allen, ever ready to diversify newspaper publish-

¹⁴ "Spiritualism in Adelaide." *South Australian Times*. 30 May 1885: 5.

¹⁵ "The Rev. Mr. M. Wood Green on Spiritualism." *South Australian Times*. 26 Dec. 1885: 2.

¹⁶ Marquis interview.

ing with a potentially lucrative novelty. In 1850 he published the *Monthly Almanac and Illustrated Commentator* containing both practical information and the compositions of budding local writers. Much of the content was apparently the work of William More Akehurst, hotel licensee and journalist at Allen's *Adelaide Times* (Marquis 58). With illustrations by Samuel Calvert, Akehurst created a small gem. The *Almanac* was filled with fine cartoons depicting prominent men—concentrating on the unpopular William Giles, manager of the South Australian Company, the prestigious private company which contributed substantially to the foundation of the colony financially and religiously. While not exactly exposure journalism, there was an irreverent cutting down of prominent figures and types through satire. Significantly, in the light of its prominence in later investigative reporting, the periodical contains the earliest reference to the shady denizens of Adelaide's Rosina Street. Located close to the city's brothels and Adelaide's Chinese community, Rosina Street became a byword for vice in all its forms. By the 1880s it was a frequent subject for journalists and indignant correspondents. The *Monthly Almanac's* fiction content included a type of satirical sensationalism. A fine piece described two "new chums," new arrivals in the colony from Britain, who were so completely unsuited to their new lives as farmers that they lost even their trousers—to the amusement of the Aboriginal onlookers.¹⁷

The mid-century illustrated newspapers, like of the period, were not adventurous. The *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, founded in 1862, published a South Australian edition (in name at least) and later financed talented local identity W.C. Cawthorne's *Illustrated Adelaide Post*. Both newspapers were based on the highly successful *Illustrated London Times*, including its sober tones. Less conventional and more successful were the long-lived productions of the Frearson brothers at the end of the century. The Frearsons became the foremost publishers of sensationalism in 1880s Adelaide. Young Samuel Frearson first worked as a printer for a well-known Adelaide bookseller. In 1868 he took over the business and, with his brother Septimus, enlarged its commercial printing arm.¹⁸ Later a third brother, Robert, joined the business. Frearson brothers were the printers of the comic paper *Portonian*, so it was not a great step to begin publishing their own newspaper, the *Illustrated Adelaide News*, in 1875.

¹⁷ *Monthly Almanac*. March 1850: 44.

¹⁸ [Advertisement] *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail*. 28 July 1877: 18. *Trove*. Web. 12 Aug. 2015.

Unlike its London model, the *Illustrated Adelaide News* soon came to voice political views. These were couched with a stereotypical political conservatism often (surprisingly) found linked to sensationalism. The newspaper placed the Chinese, Irish, members of the Salvation Army, working men and servant girls within a net of broad disapproval. Some of this opinion almost certainly issued from the pen of former police commissioner George Hamilton, a regular contributor to the newspaper, who eventually became its editor. One year after founding their first newspaper, the brothers branched out to publish a second, *Frearson's Weekly Illustrated: a journal for the people*. This was edited until 1882 by the colourful and impecunious George Loyau, who took a more satirical tone, included cartoons, and held a more liberal editorial policy, for example, supporting Chinese immigration because “in this broad territory there is room for all.”¹⁹ Loyau gave extensive coverage to Adelaide theatrical news.

From 1879 the Frearson newspapers moved into purely sensational reporting, with the very saleable inclusion of illustrations for their dramatic stories. Local tragedies such as the murder/suicide of a Goodwood housemaid and her lover were illustrated with simple “line process” drawings of the unfortunate pair and the house where the girl worked.²⁰ Events from further afield included running reports of the deeds of the Kelly gang, with illustrations and cartoons. Shootings, the shocking double-suicide of two men at country Gawler, disastrous fires, “baby farming,” the Anderson divorce case, a murder at Magill and the exploits of the infamous Serial killer Fred Deeming were amongst the best-selling stories. The increasing pages of advertisements give proof of the popularity and increased sales. Rosina Street was a perennial favourite for outraged exposure of the alleged prostitution, larrikinism and drunkenness of its residents. Dramatic assertions of “Dissolute Adelaide” in anonymous letters to the daily press in 1884 (actually written by the Rev. A. Turnbull of the Christian Crusaders Mission)²¹ prompted two journalists from Frearsons’ *Pictorial Australian* to make an evening tour of Adelaide’s reputed centre of debauchery. However, accompanied by the newspaper sketcher Edmund Harral and a “guide,” no particular depravity was uncovered. A double-page illustrated spread ironically described the quiet scenes the journalists encountered.

¹⁹ “The Chinese Question in Australia.” *Frearson's Weekly*. 1 February 1879: 1.

²⁰ “Mysterious Tragedy at Goodwood.” *Frearson's Weekly*. 2 August 1879: 193–194.

²¹ “Views of Adelaide Scribbled and Sketched by G. and L.: its Shady Side.” *Pictorial Australian*. February 1885: 30–32.

Although these stories generally appeared also in the mainstream press, the Frearsons felt less constrained in publishing intimate details, and had the distinct advantage of pictorial depictions of their protagonists and crime scenes. In the 1890s the newspaper followed Stead's motivating social concerns in a small way by sending Edmund Harral to accompany a journalist on visits to City Mission breakfasts for the poor, the 1890 Port Adelaide maritime workers' strike, a demonstration by blind workers and other similar assignments. Harral's charming character sketches were more condescending than conscience-stirring however.

By the end of the century, the Frearsons' final title, the *Pictorial Australian*, had come to consist solely of photographic illustrations and promotional material about Western Australian mining ventures. The newspaper closed in 1895 and the remaining two Frearson brothers moved to the west to found the *Norseman Pioneer*. Ultimately and surprisingly, despite the popularity of pictorial journalism, the Frearsons had not found sensationalism profitable.

POPULARISM AND SPORT

With the commercialization and growth of Adelaide's press came an increasing specialization in the profession. This saw firstly an internal division on the staff of the mainstream newspapers between literary (or reporting) staff and commercial (or office) staff. By the 1870s the literary staff of both the *Register* and *Advertiser* generally comprised one or two leader writers, the team of Hansard reporters and a larger group of journalists with diverse portfolios but including some specialist reporting. Spencer Skipper epitomized the experienced journalist of the mid-century, able to turn his hand to a range of subjects. In 1867 he began as a contributor to the political and literary journal *Pasquin*, moved on to become art and drama critic at the *Register* and finally its shipping reporter—and was all the while a prolific writer of humorous verse. He was also a sporting reporter, demonstrating the very old connection between the theatre and sport. Skipper wrote from his own interests, but no doubt reporting on rowing and yachting was a useful adjunct to covering the shipping news.²² During the course of his long career, sports reporting would emerge as an important form of journalism specialization.

²² "Death of Mr S.J. Skipper." *Chronicle*. 12 September 1903: 32. *Trove*. Web. 12 Aug. 2015.

If the content of the New Journalism ultimately came down to “crime, sport and sex,” (Wiener 6) the most ubiquitous of the three was sport. (Wiener 169). It appeared universally across Adelaide’s press both mainstream and experimental. Local sport as well as sporting news from the other colonies and from Britain was covered exhaustively. This was apparently a safe subject, the one component of New Journalism unreservedly embraced by. Moreover, it was lucrative. From the first, horse racing was given broad press coverage. This was the main content of *Bell’s Life in Adelaide* which appeared briefly in the 1860s based, like so many of the colony’s nineteenth-century newspapers, on the London original. From the 1870s a broadening range of sports was covered in the mainstream press, and by the 1880s sports journalism was a flourishing industry. When sports writer Charles Moody requested 6 months leave from the *Register* to accompany the Australian cricketers on their English tour in 1890, he was paid the princely sum of 20 Guineas to send back reports of the matches.²³

In the 1880s a gamut of specialized sports writers emerged, each with an obligatory pen-name. Politicians occasionally pushed for the use of by-lines for the sake of accountability, while journalists firmly resisted—except in the case of sports reporting. Here pen-names were a thin disguise for well-known identities in small-town Adelaide. A fan following grew around a raft of journalists with pen-names such as Vid, Tarquin, Trumpator, Mentor, Tatiara and Lancer. Yet Harry Cargill, “Doc” Carr, William Cook, Norman Malcolm, Clarence and Hadrian Moody, Marcus Waldrene, Martin Hocking and Frank Davis were household names through their respective sports writings; Sporting news was an obvious newspaper seller, and Stead used the genre to attract wider readership of his attendant political and social reporting. But sports reporting was a natural and pre-existing form, intimately influenced by the advent of the telegraph which made possible speedy delivery of sporting news.

BROADENING READERSHIP

New Journalism sought to broaden its readership base by targeting new audiences notably among the working classes and women, taking advantage of increased literacy rates across classes, gender and age. As the main-

²³ Minutes of the Board of the *Register*. 27 January 1890.

stream press took on more of the techniques of popular journalism, it also sought to be entertaining, in the manner of magazines. South Australia's first small magazine, the *South Australian Magazine* of 1841, utilized the popular device of a lady's letter. "Jane's letters" described life in Adelaide for female readers in other places. This chatty letter style remained the most popular version for women's columns. As early as 1844 the *Register* published a short-lived syndicated ladies' column, but it was not until the late 1860s that regular women's columns—often copied directly from American and British sources—appeared in Adelaide's weekend newspapers. Just as sports reporting appealed particularly to new readers amongst the male working classes, in the 1880s women's columns blossomed as more females found time for reading, and earlier disapproval of women reading newspapers disappeared. The *Register* published a chatty Ladies' Column and a Ladies' London Letter in its weekend newspaper, the *Observer*, from 1884, and the Frearson brothers introduced a Ladies' Column in the *Pictorial Australian* in late 1887.

Women reporters, however, were rare. In 1878 Catherine Helen Spence was invited to write leaders and other special interest articles for the *Register*. But this novelist, preacher and advocate of political and social reform was an exception. Women did not gain regular paid newspaper work in Adelaide until the 1890s, when Winifred Scott, Catherine McKain and Lucy Webb began writing about fashion, the household and social news. From 1899 the *Register* published articles commissioned especially for its "Lady Reporter." "Obedient to the Editor's instructions I stood in the office of the Destitute Asylum listening to strange life stories," began the Lady Reporter in an article titled "In the Destitute Asylum."²⁴ This was possibly Winifred Scott, daughter of Port Adelaide pressman David Scott.

The 1880s also saw the advent of locally written children's columns a further trend in the popularization of the press. As with the women's columns, the Adelaide press at this time moved away from simply reprinting articles from *Harper's Magazine*, *St Nicholas* and other American sources and commissioned local writers, such as Catherine Helen Spence who compiled a children's book column for the *Register* between 1879 and 1885. The *Observer* published a series of stories about Australian elves in 1880. These were moral tales involving characters such as King Dunce. By contrast, the fairy stories of "Atha" (Frank Westbury) in the *Pictorial Australian* in the same period were simply to be enjoyed. As with the women's columns, it

²⁴ "In the Destitute Asylum." *Register*. 21 October 1899: 8. *Trove*. Web. 12 Aug. 2015.

was the weeklies, the weekend press, which made most use of the new genre, taking advantage of increased leisure time for Sunday reading through the Eight Hours movement and other improvements in workers' conditions. From the 1890s the weeklies instituted children's letter clubs under Uncle Harry, Aunt Dorothy and the like, which eventually became the cartoon and puzzle pages which still appear in Sunday newspapers today.

Strong links exist between popular journalism and fiction (Wiener 30), and interestingly sensationalism in fiction was less shunned than sensationalism in real-life reporting. A vast number of budding local poets and writers had their work published in South Australia's nineteenth-century press, particularly in the evening and weekend newspapers. Serial stories were recognized as "a fine market for the illustrated papers,"²⁵ but were also popular content for the weekend and country press. Genteel widows such as Jessie Waterhouse were motivated to write, like many women in her position, by economic factors. Her 1890s serials (and novels) contained highly romantic plot lines, turning on the most improbable coincidences. Another hugely popular woman writer a generation earlier in the 1860s was "Maud Jean Franc" (Matilda Evans), widow of a clergyman and mother of popular journalist brothers Harry and William. Mrs Evans' highly religious stories were immensely popular. The smaller group of male serial writers included country policeman George Matthews. Matthews' stories at the end of the century almost always followed the same basic plot. Beginning with a loss of fortune by a young Englishman, the plot ingredients included a sea voyage (often against his will), shipwreck, meeting natives, kidnapping, discovering or making a fortune, return to England, re-purchasing the family home and marriage to a society lady. The protagonist always loses all his clothes at some point! Matthews' obvious sexual overtones were surprisingly ignored (seemingly) by his publishers, perhaps because his stories appeared in the less restrictive country press.

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

Modern investigative journalism grew out of early exposure journalism techniques. These were from time to time used within the mainstream press, and often in the early decades led to libel charges. Charles Chandler was arguably Adelaide's first investigative journalist in the modern sense, albeit in a fairly crude way in the light of what we now understand by this term, and certainly

²⁵ "Literary Chit-Chat: The *Critic* in the Library." *Critic*. 7 January 1899: 14.

in comparison to W.T. Stead. For several years at the end of the nineteenth century, Chandler shocked Adelaide readers with the revelations published in his experimental newspapers—exposés and allegations, sometimes so much in the style of Stead that it is difficult not to rule out a direct influence. It would appear Chandler was also influenced by the example of fellow Australian, the flamboyant and often outrageous editor of the Sydney *Truth*, John Norton.

In many respects Charles Chandler was typical of his journalistic generation. He had family connections in the press, in this case an older brother. Typical of journalists of their time and place, the Chandler brothers moved between country and city newspapers and across the Australian colonies, gaining a breadth of newspaper experience and coming into contact with a variety of styles and movements. The previous generation of journalists generally possessed higher levels of literary education, tended to be from upper- or upper-middle-class backgrounds, and often had experience working in the overseas press. The Chandler generation was more often from middle- and even working-class backgrounds, and had more technical expertise and broader local experience. These journalists of the 1880s and 1890s mostly had a solid middle-class private school education, were extremely mobile in their working lives and were in tune with W.T. Stead in at least one sense: they viewed the press as providing entertainment for its readers. They were the product of a complex mixture of a progressive employment-focused education, the constrained economic realities of the period and a numerically expanding and more competitive profession. They were optimistic and even “Bohemian.”²⁶ This later generation utilized many of the techniques of the New Journalism, including a more relaxed written style and a populist and even chatty tone. Few, however, moved beyond this approach from journalism as entertainment to follow the more indignant ideals of Stead, his over-statement and use of sensationalism to shock readers into action. Charles Chandler was a rare exception.

Older brother Alfred Chandler had an exemplary and lauded career. He began his working life employed on his hometown newspaper as a compositor, moved to Adelaide to work at the daily *Register* and quickly rose into the ranks of the “literary” (reporting) staff. He soon gained a more lucrative and prestigious position with the competing *Advertiser* Hansard (or parliamentary reporting) staff. Also a published and popular poet, by 1889 Alfred Chandler was a household name among the newspaper-reading public of the city, and in an ideal position to found his own newspaper in

²⁶ “Well-known Journalist.” *The Register*. 8 April 1926: 11. *Trove*. Web. 12 Aug. 2015.

partnership with the equally lauded Harry Evans. The result was the highly successful satirical/social/sporting weekly *Quiz* (1889–1930).

The younger Charles also worked first in the country press, before following his brother to Adelaide and the *Register*. After a stint in the rough and ready mining centre of Broken Hill and still in his twenties, he founded the *Port Pirie Standard* in the South Australian iron smelting town. Unfortunately the venture ended in bankruptcy. He then appears to have contributed freelance work to city newspapers, including satirical pieces for the Frearsons' newspapers, and was probably one of the army of country correspondents employed by the two Adelaide dailies. In 1893 he arrived in the city ready to enter a new sphere of journalism—the suburban press—and instigated the provocatively named *Eagle*. The title (perhaps appropriately) suggested the superior vision and ferocity of the bird, while probably alluding to a long-running American newspaper with a similar title. The suburban press was still in its infancy, but Charles Chandler's attempt in the prosperous inner city suburb of Norwood was moderately successful. Lauded in its coming,²⁷ surviving copies of the *Eagle* read as little more than scandal sheets. The content consists simply of advertisements and a series of single-line entries which are pure gossip. "It would be better for Mrs C.L. of Little William Street, to go back to her husband," and "How did Maggie M. like that smack in the head she got from big Mary M. of East Parade."²⁸ When Chandler later published the *Adelaide Truth* (1903–1907?), he charged sixpence to print single lines such as these, so possibly the *Eagle* operated under a similar arrangement. Gossip was indeed a technique of New Journalism, but it is difficult to see how the scandalous quips of the *Eagle* filled any useful role apart from perhaps extending readership. Yet even William Sowden, editor of the sedate *Register*, commended the *Eagle*.²⁹ Possibly issues which have not survived contained more meaty content.

Charles Chandler's next press foray has given us the period's most fascinating newspaper. There is no better example of experimental journalism in Adelaide than the *Free Press and Hindmarsh Free Lance*, which Chandler began in late 1894, and ran to just over 30 weekly issues. A few months before its inception, women in South Australia were the first in Australia, and second in the world (after New Zealand), to be granted the right to

²⁷ "A New Paper." *Bunyip*. 1 December 1893: 2.

²⁸ "Kensington Kinks." *Eagle*. 15 September 1894: 1.

²⁹ "Scratchings in the City by A. Pencil." *Kapunda Herald*. 14 November 1893: 2.

vote. It is therefore not surprising that women and their evolving place in society were the main focus of the *Free Press*. Here Chandler expressed an odd conjunction of attitudes towards women. While on the one hand making scathing satirical commentary about the legislative changes which gave women the franchise, he simultaneously focused on the issue which became his consuming press crusade, his fight against prostitution. Chandler's divided view reflected a broader contemporary confusion about the concept of "women in public," as across the British Empire women emerged into public roles as activists for political and social change. Previously "women in public" usually referred to prostitutes.³⁰

An unknown author taking the pen-name "The Gimlet" contributed articles to the *Free Press* which made the astounding assertion that Adelaide, with a total population of approximately 130,000, was home to more prostitutes than any of a number of European cities in which the author had lived. He claimed that, "an old and highly respected colonist, not long deceased, who took a leading position in religious matters ... [was] frequently enticing young girls into his office in Pirie-street at night for immoral purposes."³¹ A fictional story by the same author describes two wealthy Adelaide businessmen, regular visitors to "Tottie's Palace of Tranquil Delights" (a brothel), who plan a weekend in Melbourne ostensibly to attend horse races, but in reality to sample that city's prostitutes. The men's wives arrive unexpectedly and an accidental midnight swapping of spouses occurs.³² This was both grotesque burlesque and heady stuff for 1895 Adelaide.

The *Free Press* was Charles Chandler's springboard into crusading investigative journalism. However, the dearth of original copies of his later newspapers—through censorship by contemporary collecting institutions—obscures the full picture of his activities. Fortunately his work was sensational (and libellous) enough to leave a record in the reporting of the mainstream press.

Chandler's *Free Press* became the weekend *Freelance and Licensed Victuallers' Gazette* in 1896, with a concentration on popular sporting news. Here he conceived a series which ultimately became his signature work, "Darkest Adelaide." The title deliberately evoked both sensational and ironic connotations, most obviously with the 1890 travelogue biography of journalist/explorer Henry Stanley, *Darkest Africa*. It was also

³⁰For a full discussion of this phenomenon and male responses see Judith Walkowitz.

³¹"The Social Evil by The Gimlet." *Free Press*. 23 February 1895: 7.

³²"True Tales by The Gimlet." *Free Press*. 30 March 1895: 6–7.

similar to the titles standardly used in the mainstream press for letters from concerned citizens (most often ministers of religion) drawing attention to shocking instances of local debauchery or poverty. But perhaps most of all, Chandler was following in the footsteps of his exemplar, Stead's, own signature work, the controversial "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" of 1885. This was an exposé of child prostitution in London, based on investigative forays which included Stead's notorious undercover procurement of a young girl as proof of his assertions. The London editor, however, was motivated by a personal crusade to raise the age of consent. Concerted campaigning with the same object by Adelaide's first women's political groups had successfully raised the age of consent a decade prior to Stead, and 30 years before Chandler. In 1890s Adelaide, Chandler was simply driven to expose any instances of Society's powerful and responsible abusing the weak and the helpless.

In late 1900 Chandler published the shameful tale of an Adelaide woman who sold her two daughters into prostitution. He went further and named the women. He also attacked two of the city's social welfare agencies. Unfortunately, the tale proved to be just that, only a tale.

Although Chandler said he employed a team of investigators "to unearth these plague spots"—which included a variety of paid sources and a well-known private detective³³—when scrutinized more closely during the resulting Supreme Court trial the substance of the article could not be proved. Chandler had taken a risk in publishing the story, his defence lawyer stated in court, through "a sense of public duty, to cleanse an ulcer in the public life." While Chief Justice Sir Samuel Way agreed that the press was "the censor of public morals," and did well to "denounce flagrant public immorality," the seasoned old judge viewed Chandler's exposé as an unsubstantiated public defamation of three women, and a journalistic device "intended to attract readers who were looking for something spicy and mischievous, rather than something useful and true."³⁴ On this occasion Chandler was sentenced to three months in jail with a substantial £50 fine. Fellow journalist David Gordon reflected, "Mr C.W. Chandler ... is a man of considerable ability, and it is hard to understand the reason of the reckless journalism that has got him into trouble."³⁵ Just three months later

³³ "The Military Libel Case." *Register*. 20 June 1901: 3. *Trove*. Web. 9 Dec. 2015.

³⁴ "Law Courts." *Advertiser*. 13 March 1901: 8. *Trove*. Web. 12 Aug. 2015.

³⁵ "City Scratchings by Timoleon." *Kapunda Herald*. 22 March 1901: 3. *Trove*. Web. 25 Jan. 2016.

Chandler was back in court. This time, while the subject matter was similar, Chandler's assertions were seen by the court as far graver. The offending article had been published just prior to his earlier court appearance.

In 1899 South Australia became involved in the South African War. A training camp was established in the city and several contingents were duly raised and sent to fight with the British forces against the Boers. In February 1901 Private Detective Pawson visited the newspaper office with an unnamed man who claimed that 23 women, including a 9-year-old girl, had spent the night in the tents of the soldiers of the Sixth Contingent. Although Pawson warned Chandler to verify the story independently, Chandler's compositor wrote the article up and printed it as fact, adding that the *Freelance* would "use every fair means to probe this camp disgrace to the bottom."³⁶ Three months after his earlier appearance, Chandler again stood before the Supreme Court, and could do nothing but admit he had been negligent in neither stopping the printing nor the ongoing sale of the newspaper containing the offending article. The Chief Justice prescribed six months imprisonment and a second fine of £50.³⁷

Two years later, out of jail, Chandler embarked on a new venture, starting afresh by reviving an old title, *Adelaide Truth*, probably inspired by John Norton's notorious Sydney *Truth*. Norton's newspaper was in every sense a step beyond Stead's New Journalism. Norton roundly abused a range of public figures from Queen Victoria down, while exposing scandal and fraud, and campaigning for reform. The newspaper was extremely popular with working-class readers in the far larger Sydney population, and made Norton a millionaire while he cleverly extricated himself from a stream of libel cases (Cannon). But Chandler did not possess the resources of a large readership, the eye for balancing popular content with exposé or the business acumen to become a Norton or a Stead. Now, 30 years after Stead had deliberately created the New Journalism by drawing together a string of existing traditional journalistic techniques, Chandler, and Adelaide itself, were sadly swimming in a newspaper backwater. The small window of late nineteenth-century newspaper proliferation and experimentation in South Australia was at an end.

In 1907 Chandler was attempting to sell his *Adelaide Truth* to John Norton as the latter extended his reach by creating editions in a number of Australian capitals. In the meantime, Chandler obtained a local purchaser,

³⁶ *Port Pirie Recorder*, 27 April 1901: 2. *Trove*. Web. 22 Dec. 2015.

³⁷ "The Military Libel Case."

so legally he was not the publisher or editor when his resurrected “Darkest Adelaide” column again resulted in a court case, this time on the unsavoury charge of “obscene libel.” The Premier of South Australia received a complaint from the Lord Mayor and Corporation, and one of the state’s best-known detectives was put on the case, while the Crown Solicitor presided over the trial in the Adelaide Police Court. The offending article, referred to by the mainstream press in only the most veiled terms, evidently gave such intimate details of the workings of Adelaide brothels as to revolt rather than anger readers. It “savoured more of advertisement than of denunciation of the vices referred to, and could have no result but to corrupt good morals.”³⁸ Chandler’s once crusading journalism had descended into mere smut and titillation. The new owner of *Adelaide Truth* was fined and jailed. Chandler was out of a job, and his later career was limited mostly to fairly standard freelance journalism and job printing.

While the New Journalism with its inherent sensationalism is usually seen as the brainchild of W.T. Stead of the London *Pall Mall Gazette*, in reality the movement simply brought together a range of independent, pre-existing techniques. The bold headlines, short paragraphs, illustrations, the personal interview, the inclusion of popular reading matter for broader audiences including women and children, an increased emphasis on sporting news, employment of early exposure and investigative journalism, and most of all sensationalism, were all marks of the new methodology (Lee 118, 121) and the foundation of modern print journalism. However the adoption of these techniques by the mainstream press, from the mid-nineteenth-century was carefully filtered by editors with a strong commercial awareness based on the views of their conservative ownership and advertisers. Ultimately, it was the adoption of popular journalism, rather than the New Journalism per se, which was taken up by the mainstream press and became generally practised. Fiery investigative reporting was left to the fringe press, the independent newspaper publishers and individual journalists, with their visionary ideals of justice and reform. Unfortunately this was rarely sustainable, and always bordered on attracting charges of libel and worse. Sensationalism always had to be balanced with the ability to prove assertions, and most of all, with the commercial reliability of popular sports reporting and the like. Independent, outspoken journalists had to battle against social restrictions on their reporting and run the gamut of the law to survive, regardless of the justice of their crusading ideals.

³⁸ “An Obscene Print.” *Register*. 12 June 1907: 10. *Trove*. Web. 9 Dec. 2015.

Nevertheless drawing on the order styles, the influence of W. T. Stead, and technological and commercial factors, these bold journalistic crusaders gave rise to the newspaper style which was to be adopted most widely through the twentieth century. It remains to be seen whether the descendants of Chandler and Stead, the “citizen journalists” will re-invigorate newspaper journalism or assist its demise.

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Urban Perils and the Sensational Bicycle: Text-Image Dynamics in the Victorian Magazine *Cycling*, 1894–1896

Efrat Pashut

The mid-1890s saw the explosion of the bicycle boom, a time when “Everything is bicycle” (Herlihy 263). The bicycle model that started the revolution was the Starley Brothers’ “Rover” Safety bicycle which was presented at the annual cycling exhibition in London (the Stanley Show) in the beginning of 1885. This model was safer to ride than its predecessors, as its name indicates, and once it was fitted with the pneumatic tire¹ in 1889, it was also more accommodating for new groups of potential riders—kids, women and older gentlemen.² Realizing the success of the Starley Brothers’ model, other cycling companies started to mass-produce Safety bicycles (236) and in a few years “the bicycle business was no longer a cozy, shop-based trade catering exclusively to wealthy young men. Rather, it had developed into an impersonal international industry with bustling factories serving the demands of a broader population” (241).

The boom that swept over the industry reached other territories. The numbers of cycling clubs and of their members multiplied (Bijker 93);

¹ “[A] tire with an inner-tube filled with compressed air” (Herlihy 246).

² Until the Safety model’s invention, cycling was mostly practiced by young athletic men; since the Safety model improved the machine’s velocity at the same time that it made it more comfortable, that group of cyclists remained prominent (Bijker 84).

E. Pashut (✉)

Department of English, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

Track racing generated “unprecedented popular interest” (Herlihy 252). At least three major cycling papers were published in Britain alone—*Bicycling News*, *Bicycling Times* and *Cycling*—while non-cycling newspapers and periodicals circulated numerous cycling-related texts, unable to avoid the popular trend. Seeing that the bicycle awarded fin de siècle people with the ability to escape the commotion of the city, cycling tourism massively grew during these years.³ Herlihy concisely epitomizes the instrumental value of the new bicycle and the revolution it brought about:

Above all, however, the bicycle was appealing as a personal vehicle. To youths it gave speed; to women, freedom; and to many ordinary citizens it was simply a source of great pleasure and utility. To all, it offered exercise and adventure. For the new breed of cyclist was an independent sort, even if he or she belonged to a club ... On the open road, cyclists found tranquility, fresh air, good exercise, and even fellowship. For many, the bicycle was truly an eye-opener. Whether used alone or in conjunction with the local train network, it enabled the rider to reach and experience new landscapes, towns, and watering holes. (264)

I wish to explore in this paper the illustrated weekly *Cycling* periodical, which was published in London since 1891. Interestingly, the first issue’s cover presents a promise to prospective readers to be “the first wheel journal to fully illustrate the history/of the sport, pastime and trade week by week.” Indeed, the texts and illustrations published in the periodical mostly relate to the sensations of riding the bicycle and to the social experience of cycling. Like its contemporary literary periodicals, *Cycling*’s pages exhibit a mosaic of different types and modes of texts—news, essays, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, illustrations, comics and advertisements—all presented side by side in a fragmented layout.

One of the tropes that reverberated throughout *Cycling*’s discourse during the years researched (1891–96) is the sensational trope.⁴ Reading *Cycling*, it is apparent that a certain duality characterized the relation of the Victorians to the trend of cycling; a duality which is often linked to

³ See, for instance, Jerome K. Jerome’s *Three Men on the Bummel*, where the three famous friends indulge in a cycling tour throughout the Black Forest.

⁴ I chose to survey *Cycling*’s issues published between 1891 and 1896 since by the end of that period cycling began to lose its unprecedented popularity and the boom came to its end, following the industry’s excessive production (Bijker 96).

modernity and to its effects on cultural practices.⁵ One of these practices, as Ben Singer has shown, is sensationalism, which, like modernity that gave birth to it, is identified by its dual effect on the senses.⁶ This duality is amusingly revealed in a report published in one of *Cycling*'s first issues:

A Writer in the *Saturday Review* must needs disfigure an otherwise readable, if discursive article on golf, by inserting a sneering comment of the old, old style on the sport of cycling. He says, 'Football comes in when cricket goes out, and the frenzy for cycling threatens to become a nuisance to those who do not sympathize with feats of gymnastics on invisible saddles between phantom wheels. The driver of a skittish pair of horses or the rider of a quiet cob is being perpetually put in terror of his life, by the stealthy approach of the jingling alarm-bell, or the flashing of a ghostly lamp in the gloom of a shady lane.' Really, good *Saturday Review*, such flights of fancy are out of place in your usually dignified columns. ("Cycling a Nuisance")

On the one hand, city dwellers of the 1890s were essentially terrorized by the new machine; on the other hand, they were fascinated with it, as *Cycling*—here as the bicycle's defense attorney—so cynically conveys. This duality was not expressed merely in a cross-publications debate: *Cycling* itself published texts and illustrations that respond to the menace the bicycle poses, as well as texts and illustration that appreciate the thrills it offers its riders. I wish to argue that the duplicitous responses to the bicycle represent the adoption of the sensational trope by the periodical; when *Cycling* chooses to include the clashing representations of the bicycle it becomes part of the discourse of sensationalism. Further, as I will suggest, it crafts a reading experience that creates an identity between the bicycle and the periodical and thus contributes to the association of *Cycling* with the culture of cycling. In order to expose the workings of the sensational discourse within the periodical, I shall present sensational fictional narratives and illustrations that were published in it during the years researched (1891–96), analyze them in light of established theories of narratological and visual sensationalism, and explain how their sensational character affects the reading experience conveyed by the periodical as a whole.

⁵Walter Benjamin theorizes the experience of modernity as one that is terrorizing and shocking but also very exciting and inherently protective (85).

⁶Singer points out that sensationalism in the 1890s revealed the horrific aspects of modern reality at the same time that it represented them as fascinating, and even amusing, to use Singer's words (88).

In addition, I shall argue that while sensationalism is considered in research as a “side-effect” of the growth of urban modernity, the sensational trope in *Cycling* shows that as the city and the country grew closer thanks to the development of transportation, sensationalism invaded the rural sphere as well. The suggested similarity between the experiences of riding through pastoral sceneries and riding in the metropolis contributes to the experience of reading *Cycling*.

Before I delve into the sensational content of *Cycling*, I want to stress that sensationalism is a response to modernity, “the aesthetic counterpart to the radical transformations of space, time, and industry” (Singer 91) that modernity brought about and “a symptom of modern hyperstimulus” (94). This definition of Singer relates to the visibility of the modern public sphere, but its conception of sensationalism as an effect on the nerves of the subjects immersed in modernity reappears in theorizations of the sensation novel (Loesberg 125).⁷ Going back to Walter Benjamin’s iconic flâneur, the subject who experiences the multiple stimuli of modernity (37–39), I propose that even though fin de siècle cyclists were not the men of the crowd in the sense of being unobserved,⁸ they still observed and absorbed the urban (and rural) sceneries and experiences that surrounded them. Their senses were met with the same stimulations that the flâneurs on legs were subjected to, at an even intoxicatingly faster pace (and unlike public transportation’s passengers their point of view remained unlimited at all times). Hence, exactly like the flâneur, cyclists were exposed to modernity and responded to it.

I also wish to shortly pinpoint a specific feature of the aesthetic of modernity that characterizes *Cycling*. Since the nature of the experience of modernity is fragmented (Gabriele xiv), requiring a renegotiation of meaning through the practice of reading and its manifestation in different medias, fragmentation is one of the forms that sensationalism takes. In that sense, the popular “family periodicals” of the nineteenth century are sensational not just because their content generates sensational responses but also because they present a multiplicity of subjects and modes of communication. *Cycling* is the emblem of sensational fragmentation: a single page of the periodical could present an chapter depicting

⁷And see also Cvetkovich and Miller who both relate in their different theorizations of the sensation novel to its physical effects on the readers.

⁸The application of Benjamin’s ideas on cycling brought Nicholas Oddy to the conclusion that 1890s cyclists were not flâneurs because they were more interested in being seen on their bicycles than in seeing—and *experiencing*—the world around them (101).

a club meeting, a short note announcing the results of a cycling race, a notice in smaller font inviting the readers to consult *Cycling's* patent expert and a comic illustration. It could also include the last paragraphs of a fictional narrative (which is usually longer than one page), some unrelated news divided into several paragraphs, each titled, a poem and, of course, an illustration. This layout and amalgamation of subject matters evoke the same response that the hyperstimulus of the modern urban sphere evokes. In that manner, it is enough to sneak a glimpse at an issue of *Cycling* to comprehend how sensationalism works.

READING THE BICYCLE: SENSATIONAL FICTION IN *CYCLING*

Like other Victorian literary periodicals, *Cycling* circulated numerous fictional narratives. Many of these stories stress the suspenseful nature of cycling when they portray late-night bicycle rides through abandoned, unlit and dangerous country trails or encounters between solid middle-class cyclists and conspicuous characters (all end “well,” as sensational narratives usually do). Other stories depict the experience of riding the bicycle and represent it as exhilarating and thrilling, as a quote from “The Enchanted Ride” published in the 1893 Christmas issue exemplifies: “for I travelled now light as air, silently, swiftly, and without effort, with that peculiar flying sensation we have all experienced” (433). Another example—“The Parson’s Ride” (1895)—emphasizes the effects of riding on the body and mind: “He flew along, his nervous system focused into a concentrated ferocity of determination that no one could have suspected the gentle, mild-mannered young clergyman to be capable of” (479). Another group of stories revolve around the New Woman on the bicycle and appropriately (for the period and genre) present a domestication of the plot. Most of these stories are essentially sensational and testify to the persistent popularity of the sensational trope beyond the “sensation craze” of the 1860s, though they do not abide by the generic guidelines of the genre, as they were identified by scholars. I suggest that they are inherently characterized by their hybridity, and generically defined “through a hyphenated category” (Gabriele 106, 147), and accordingly I shall use their typification as hyphenated-sensational.⁹

⁹Taking Jacques Derrida’s approach to genre, as employed by Patrick Brantlinger, the sensation novel amalgamates certain peculiarities of other genres, specifically the realist novel, the romance and the gothic (2, 24), and so other subgenres or hybrids assimilate the sensation novel’s features.

I should stress that the sensation novel and its hybrids “offer[s] us one of the first instances of modern literature to address itself primarily to the sympathetic nervous system” (Miller 146). The workings of sensationalism on the human senses are emphasized—the sensation novel first and foremost projects the *experience* of modernity. It aims “to thrill and entertain, rather than educate,” “to attack the body of the reader by means of surprising plots and representations of jangled nerves” (Wynne 4–7). Akin to the manifestation of sensationalism in non-fictional modes like the illustrations that will be portrayed later, the sensation novel expresses the readers’ reactions to the hyperstimulus of modernity and to what they considered to be the horrors of it (8). Gabriele notes that the effect of the sensation novel on the readers’ senses is intensified when it is published periodically, as it usually was, and as some of *Cycling*’s stories that I will discuss were, due to the experience of reading through fragmentation (23). Not only are the novels fragmented into installments—which enhances suspense—but they are presented next to other modes of publication and types of content so that the readers’ senses are even more disoriented. Thus, the first structural feature we expect to find in sensational fiction is “emotional evocation” caused by the functioning of the plot (Loesberg 118); the distinctiveness of this sensational reaction is its dependence on the reality of the contemporary readers, its close relation to their experience of modernity.¹⁰

Other elements of the sensation novel that I shall relate to as I explore *Cycling*’s sensationals were detailed in Patrick Brantlinger’s canonical chapter “What Is Sensational About the Sensation Novel?”: (a) A mystery must be at the center of the plot, and it usually touches upon a domestic scandal; (b) the novel is absorbed with a particular case and does not point to anything outside the specific plot (*The Woman in White* is not interested in pursuing the theme of anarchism once it discovered the involvement of Count Fosco and Pesca with the Brotherhood); (c) the plot is structured around the disclosure of the mystery, subordinating the characters, and it ends with the resolution and diminution of the mystery and restoration of order (voiding the events of any true importance); (d) the narrator’s credibility is destabilized—it never holds more knowledge regarding the mystery than the readers, and more often than not it is a

¹⁰High levels of excitement and suspense were also registered while reading the gothic. However, Deborah Wynne underscores the difference between the sensation novel and the gothic: “Where it differed was in its rejection of supernatural appearances, promoting instead a realism in line with the middle-class domestic novel” (7).

character that takes the role of a detective, usually an incompetent one; (e) the solution of the mystery depends on chance, and the unfolding of the plot is constructed of an inevitable sequence of events, or rather one that does not rely upon the narrator or the other characters. Structurally, this method of plot telling is what allows suspense.¹¹

Without further ado, I wish to present the first sensational narrative published in *Cycling* that I shall analyze—*The Devilry of Baron Krantz*—written by E. Douglass Fawcett, an early science-fiction author. The prequel to this story, *Hartmann the Anarchist: or, the Doom of the Great City*, was published in 1892 as a novel. It is set in the 1920s and tells of a rich anarchist who bombs London from the air, using his airship. The narrative deals with anarchism more extensively than *The Woman in White* does, but it also focuses on the reaction of the masses of people in London to the air raid: “a shock never to be forgotten,” as the narrator describes it (133). The narrator emphasizes repeatedly the romanticism of the ordeal and regards it as “one of [history’s] more romantic corners” (189), even though he tries to persuade Hartmann to give up on his evil plan. The focal point of the novel moves between the opposite sensations that modernity brings about: while social reform and technological advancement are exciting, they are also dangerous and generate anxiety. In that sense, *Hartmann the Anarchist* should also be considered a hyphenated, sensation-science-fiction novel, since the emphasis it puts on the creation of a “novum” classifies it as early science fiction.¹²

The Devilry of Baron Krantz was published in *Cycling* in six installments during December 1894 and January 1895. The mystery of the story is the scheme of an anarchist, Krantz, a rich German Jew, to obliterate London, blowing it up from the underground. The narrator is a secret service detective, a middle-class man whose passion is cycling. Along with his colleague, Ross, the narrator gets on Krantz’s tracks and slowly unveils his evil plan which relies on a theory by Thomas Henry Huxley that holds that “the valley of the Thames is underlaid by an ocean of molten rock.” In order to fulfill his plan, Krantz employs anarchists as laborers to dig up

¹¹I should also note that the sensational narratives published in *Cycling* condensed the sensation novel’s features and commodified its standard structure so that it extended over the course of a short story or a brief novella, rather than a full-length novel.

¹²Suvin sets the fictional “novum”—the estranged secondary world portrayed in science-fiction works—as the distinctive property of the genre (10, 63). Therefore, Fawcett’s insistence in *Hartmann the Anarchist* on the creation of the “novum,” along with the sensational characteristics I presented, gives birth to a new hyphenated genre—the sensation-science-fiction novel.

an underground tunnel leading into this lava ocean. The tunnel begins next to the bed of the Thames, so that when the upper portion of it would be blown up with dynamite by Krantz, the water of the Thames would flow toward the lava, creating massive amounts of steam that would then stir earthquakes underneath London. The detective narrator finally learns the details of this plan when he infiltrates Krantz's headquarters, pretending to be an anarchist. What the detective does not know is that his colleague, Ross, who is the only one who knows his whereabouts, is an anarchist himself, and had let Krantz know the true identity of the narrator. Thus, after discovering the plan, the detective is locked up underground by Krantz. The last installment unfolds the story of the detective's escape from his prison, his failure at preventing Krantz from pursuing his plan and his flight from London with his wife on their tandem bicycle. In the end, the narrator appeases the readers and reassures them that in spite of the intense shocks, the destroyed London had managed to rise from the flames and re-constitute the same society.

Evidently, *The Devilry of Baron Krantz* reacts to modernity: the villain is an anarchist who questions the Victorian social order; his evil plot is built upon a modern scientific theory; and the modern bicycle is the means by which the narrator and his wife are saved. It also holds structural features of the sensation novel: it is suspenseful and the mystery involves a crime by an unsuspected perpetrator; the plot revolves around the unveiling of the mystery. The narrator is a detective, but his abilities are closer to those of Robert Audley than those of Sherlock Holmes and hence he does not discover the scheme relying on his intellect but thanks to mere chance; due to his limited knowledge and skills his credibility is undermined. Even though the narrative is told in retrospect, the readers unpack the mystery along with the narrator. The characters are people of the age, immersed in modernity (specifically—cycling and science) and their characterization is subordinated to the plot. And finally, the events of the plot control the characters and create the sensations they experience. Considering these features, alongside the scientific aspects of the plot, *The Devilry of Baron Krantz* should be generically defined as a scientific-sensational.¹³

¹³There is a generic difference between *The Devilry of Baron Krantz* and *Hartmann the Anarchist* since the former does not invest in the creation of the secondary world. Science does not serve as the anchoring of a "novum" that allows the readers to consider their primary world, but rather as the sensational agent that takes form and action in their primary world. This difference may be ascribed to the medium of publication. Other stories that Fawcett published in *Cycling* were even more structurally and thematically sensational than

I wish to further pursue the story's concern with modernity through an analysis of the bicycle, which was naturally the main interest of the platform that published it—*Cycling*. One might wonder if the choice of publisher affected the story and gave the bicycle its narrative role, though I want to claim that the bicycle is essential and could not have been replaced by other means of transportation, since it tips the scales of modernity when it suggests a modern solution to modern horrors. Furthermore, the bicycle allowed speed along with easy and independent operation like no other means of transportation available at the time, and the tandem used in this specific case protects the middle-class family-unit. Therefore, the bicycle contributes to the reassurance that *The Devilry of Baron Krantz* ends with, by promoting a feeling of wholesomeness in the readers who had just been confronted with the evils of modernity.

This representation of the bicycle goes beyond the confines of this specific story. As I will later show, *Cycling* circulated many sensational illustrations that portrayed the physical dangers associated with the bicycle, be it falling off or crashing into objects. When the discourse of *Cycling* places such illustrations next to the bicycle of *The Devilry of Baron Krantz*, it allows the resurfacing of the dual conception of modernity. Just as the menacing aspects of modernity question its liberating possibilities within the story, the threatening and appeasing representations of the modern bicycle reappear in the illustrations contributing to the composite discourse of *Cycling*. I wish to argue that the combination of the narrated and illustrated representations of the bicycle is even more significant: first, the duality of modernity appears in order to stimulate the reader reading the sensational narrative, but then it reappears when the bicycle encapsulates it within its own image, which suddenly becomes twofold. Thus, the sensational narrative generates the same reaction that the (sensational) bicycle does—both are frightening and exciting at the same time, both entail the dual experience of modernity. Finally, riding a bicycle and reading a sensational in *Cycling* are one and the same.¹⁴

The Devilry of Baron Krantz and none of them complied with the rules of science fiction like *Hartmann the Anarchist*, as they never delved into explanations of the “novum” or emphasized a sense of estrangement. Possibly, the reason is consideration of the reading public that looked for enjoyment similar to that gained by riding the bicycle rather than intellectual fulfillment, as I propose in this chapter.

¹⁴Nicholas Daly points to an analogy between the neurological reactions of 1860s Victorians to railway journey and to the sensation novel and suggests that the novel aims at creating a reading experience that resembles the train ride, as if that experience best captures the essence of modernity. When the railway's sensations became common in the 1890s they

The heightened emotions that stories such as *The Devilry of Baron Krantz* present are not limited to the perils of modernity but include also contemporary issues that fascinated the Victorians, such as the reshaping of the discipline of psychology and the treatment of mental illness. “A Hand from the Grave,” another one of Fawcett’s *Cycling* stories, is a narrative told retrospectively in the first person of an event that led to the institutionalization of an amateur cyclist in an asylum. The cyclist, on a bicycle tour with some friends (one of whom is the narrator), agrees as part of a bet to ride on a stormy night to the grave of a famous squire who expelled the cyclist’s uncle from his own lands, and to pluck a rose that grows on the grave. After the cyclist plucks the rose, his jacket gets caught on the railing around the grave and he imagines that the dead squire’s ghost got hold of him. His friends find him a few hours later attached to the fence, his hair all white, “screaming like a maniac” (310). The narrator, who is a man of science and does not believe in the “supernormal” that appears in “old wives’ tales,” quickly realizes what happened to his superstitious friend, but it is too late to save the cyclist from life in the asylum. Reflecting on the event, the narrator explains to a friend who did not witness it that there was no ghost involved in the story, though “the horror that drove O’Reilly mad, could not have been enhanced had the old Squire himself risen from the grave” (310). Like in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, the real mystery is madness and not the gothic ghost. In Foucauldian terms, the mad cyclist represents the delirious, abnormal discourse (described by the narrator as “the shrieks of a luckless maniac” (308)), in this case rooted in a conception which is the opposite of the modern scientific discourse represented by the narrator.

I will not analyze the story in depth; I shall only stress that the narrative is constructed along with the revelation of the mystery of madness independently of the actions and choices of the characters (the narrator is smart enough to realize what happened to his friend, but he did not stop the incident before it took place) (Brantlinger 18).

also lost their literary relevancy (477). I wish to propose that as the train left the platform of unfamiliarity, *Cycling*’s bicycle replaced it, preparing the awestruck people of the fin de siècle to the most sensational vehicle—the automobile. *Cycling* even went further than a mere equivalence as its fiction and illustrations incorporate the bicycle itself and weave its sensational image. At the same time, the periodical’s repertoire of fiction also produces the experience that is expected of this sensational bicycle. Thus, *Cycling* created a tight relation between riding the bicycle and reading the periodical.

As for the sensations generated by the story, I suggest that they arouse apprehension in the face of madness which is here related to modernity, given the scientific explanation of it. First, the narrator ends his story with a so-called true-to-reality account of what happened to his friend (note the reference to his own impressive mental capacity): “and now, as I took in every detail with lightning speed, there flashed in my brain the true explanation of this appalling mystery—I was face to face with a maniac *fastened by the belt of his own jacket to one of the spikes of the railings surrounding the Squire’s tomb*” (310). Then, he dwells on the events that could lead a fragile mind to mania, stressing that *shock* was finally the reason for O’Reilly’s state. The readers are encountered with the everyday possibility of becoming mad, though the solution implies that non-superstitious men—immersed in modern science—are not likely to experience such horrors. Madness is not modern in a sense, but the asylum and the narrator who enunciates the discourse of modern psychiatry are, and hence the fear of madness is directly connected to modernity. The bicycle in this case enables the plot—had it not been for the machine, the group of friends would not have been at the inn and the occurrence could not have taken place. It allows reaching far-off places where a susceptible mind could find itself deranged.

This brings to mind another distinctive characteristic of *Cycling’s* sensational fiction: while *The Devilry of Baron Krantz* clearly projects the fears of modernity in all its urban glamor,¹⁵ “A Hand from the Grave,” like most of the other sensational narratives published in the periodical takes place in the country, and undermines the expectation that cycling could be a cure for urban maladies. I wish to argue that in “A Hand from the Grave” the bicycle is the agent of modernity, transforming the rural sphere and making it more like modern urban sphere. Modernity is assimilated into the bicycle, making it another manifestation of urban perils. One expects nature to serve as medicine for an urban strained brain, but the newfound proximity between city and country works differently. All of a sudden, the rural sphere is filled with shocks, just like the urban sphere (and the illustrations that I will present later testify to the same conclusion).

¹⁵It even voices one of the modern conflicts Benjamin refers to when he thinks of the metropolis—the growth of cities on the one hand and the development of tools to destroy them, on the other (85).

The poor cyclist rode out to the country to escape the stresses of the city just to come back to the city's asylum.¹⁶

I want to present another sensational narrative situated in the country that is representative of many other stories that were published in *Cycling*. *Miss Hannabel's Lovers* is a novella-in-installments, published between January 30 and February 27, 1892. Each installment was written by a different member of the *Cycling* staff. The story takes place in the country, at a successful cycling inn, where two guests who are cyclists from the big city fall in love with the inn's owner's daughter. Unfortunately, the woman—Anne Hannabel—already has a country beau, whom her father disapproves of because he is a farmer. The first paragraph prepares us for the sensational occurrences that are about to rattle poor Anne's quiet life:

But for the advent of the humble bicycle into the quietude of Wigglesbury, it is extremely probable that Miss Anne Hannabel's life would have passed along its dreamy course in the manner we are led to believe is so characteristic of old-world English custom in our rural parishes. (25)

Even though the two cyclists are good friends, when one gets involved with Anne, the other schemes to murder him. He then poisons a stimulant beverage that Anne is supposed to serve his friend. Accidently, the farmer drinks the concoction and then leaves the inn—still alive. In the meanwhile, the conspirator becomes remorseful and decides to quickly ride back to the inn to get rid of the poison, hoping to get there before his friend does. Alas, he finds himself crashing into his friend and into what appears to be the dead body of the farmer on a forsaken country trail. Believing that his friend was killed by the accident, he rides back to the inn, but when he gets there he is traumatized and, except for blurting out that the other cyclist is dead, is unable to speak.

Back on the trail, the farmer wakes up. He rushes to the doctor, leaving the mortally ill cyclist to his mother, who nurses him back to health at the farm. When the news that Miss Anne Hannabel was arrested for the farmer's attempted murder (she was the one serving him poison) reach

¹⁶In this specific case, one may claim that the cyclist actually found the ghosts of the past in the country. In that sense, the rural sphere is still untouched by modernity and holds threats of old times. It is the rural scene that facilitates the imagination of the cyclist and leads to his madness. However, it is the bicycle that carried the group to the country and it is madness as theorized in the age of modernity that poses the real danger in the story. Thus, unlike the gothic, this story does not stir fear of the supernatural but rather sensations linked to modernity.

the farm, the good city cyclist collects what is left of his strength and goes to see his beloved Anne, who tells him the whole story. Finally—the mystery is revealed! Next, the cyclist visits his backstabbing friend who explains that he tried to fix his wrongdoings. Hearing that, the good-hearted cyclist forgives him. The readers are then awarded with the wedding of Anne and the cyclist, and the inn's owner is granted his wish to see his daughter marry up. The pardoned friend serves as the groom's best man. During the wedding, we learn that the farmer has sailed to Australia to seek his fortune by sheep farming.

Is this narrative sensational? First of all, aesthetically the story is sensational all along, in spite of the fact that each chapter was written by a different author. It is full of exclamation marks, fragmented sentences that convey the characters' excited speech and the ending of each installment is suspenseful (Gabriele 6). The mystery is known to the readers throughout the story, and yet each character only knows a few of the facts and the narrative follows their process of discovery thus enhancing suspense.¹⁷ The narrator is third-person omniscient; however, the readers are exposed at any given moment only to the knowledge held by the current focalizer. That sort of narration resembles *Lady Audley's Secret* and does not diminish the element of mystery revelation; nor does it strengthen the reliability of the narrator (Brantlinger 18). In fact, it seems that during the years that elapsed since the publication of Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Wilkie Collins' sensation novels the Victorians became accustomed to omniscient narration that gives the impression that it is the exact opposite. The narration also increases the sense that the progression of the plot is inevitable—once the jealous friend decides to murder the cyclist, the characters cannot control the events. And while it seems that what dictates the direction of that narrative development is the unveiling of the attempted murderer, it could be that the question of social class is the narrative's driving force, as Loesberg suggests, considering that Anne—who seems marginal but appears in the story's title—begins as a country girl, turns into a criminal and ends up the wife of a middle-class metropolitan man. More importantly, after forgiveness was granted to the criminal, the mystery is reduced and order à-la Jane Austen is restored.

¹⁷ As Alfred Hitchcock explains, the more information the addressee (in our case, *Cycling's* readers) holds, the more suspenseful the work could be (Truffaut 73). Information held from the readers may surprise them, but also prevent the feeling of suspense.

Thematically, the mystery has to do with a crime and takes place in the private sphere. The horrible deed is attached to the middle-class man, not to the farmer, like in many sensation novels. The trauma and its effects on the remorseful cyclist briefly point to the common sensational subject that appears in several sensation novels (such as *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Hard Cash*) and that we have already encountered in *Cycling*—madness. The contradiction between the city gentlemen and the farmer is accentuated throughout the story, especially when the *bad* cyclist becomes his friend's *best* man while the farmer who is only to blame for his rude—but expected due to his social status—behavior expels himself to the once penal colony Australia (Again, a popular theme of sensation novels—the force of middle-class normalization). Noticeably, all five writers of *Miss Hannabel's Lovers* want to emphasize the theme of social class, although the main events revolve around two middle-class men.

The bicycle in *Miss Hannabel's Lovers* is a characteristic of the middle-class men. There is not much the readers learn of the two, except for their metropolitan origin, their reputation as racing Safety cyclists and their ability to spend much time enjoying their pastime in the country; the bicycle is thus the main external sign of their class.¹⁸ Again, the bicycle is the hobby of the characters that *Cycling* presents. But there is more to the bicycle in this story: it is also the reason for the good cyclist's injury. Contrary to *The Devilry of Baron Krantz*, the Safety bicycle very simply conveys a physical hazard (and I shall later show that this characteristic of the bicycle appears repeatedly in *Cycling's* illustrations). Here, the duality of the bicycle, which mimics the duality of modernity, is expressed within the story.

Finally, *Miss Hannabel's Lovers*, like any other sensational narrative, works on its readers' nerves, keeping them on their toes for five weeks, until the long awaited catharsis reassures them that in spite of modernity, life as they know it goes on. The experience of riding the bicycle as the story represents it is quite similar to this experience of reading: it starts out as a hobby, pleasurable pastime, and ends up as the cause of a nearly fatal accident charged with strong sensations. Moreover, when the conspirator debates with his conscience concerning the attempted murder, he is riding the bicycle; when he tries to reach the inn before his victim does, he is also riding the bicycle. The ride itself becomes suspenseful; the sensations it generates even serve at times as a metaphor for the emotional process the rider goes through.

¹⁸And an experienced reader of the sensational novel should find such signs of class suspicious (Bachman and Cox 20).

The sensational narrative and the bicycle become one: not merely because both stir the same sensation of enjoyment and fear at the same time, but also since they may take each other's place. When the weather is fine, the reader can set out of the urban sphere on his or her bicycle; but during the winter, the Londoner should stay in, read the sensational novels *Cycling* publishes and feel as if he or she is riding the bicycle.¹⁹

As for the setting, the bicycle again manifests the dangers of the urban sphere carried into the rural sphere: the city men with their bicycles are solely responsible for the promotion of the sensational plot. The bicycle becomes the long arm of the modern city, bringing modernity into the country. When the bicycle transforms the rural sphere it emphasizes the multifaceted experience of reading that *Cycling* gives its readers: riding into the country becomes unexpected and stressful just like living in the modern cities and so is reading the periodical. The readers should not suppose that reading about country bicycle tours would be relaxed and pleasant; like the bicycle, it can be startlingly sensational.

DREADFUL IMAGES: VISUAL SENSATIONALISM IN *CYCLING*

As promised, I shall attend now to the sensational images that reappeared in *Cycling*. In his seminal chapter "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism" Singer states that "[T]he illustrated press offers a particular rich trace of the culture's fixation on the sensory assaults of modernity" (75). Besides the implied sensational and disorienting effects granted by the fragmented layout of the periodicals themselves (and *Cycling* is an outstanding example, as noted above), many periodicals circulated illustrations that represented modern urban perils and expressed the shock associated with the experience of contemporary metropolitan life. These illustrations stressed the sense that the modern public sphere is unsafe and guided by chance; hence, it is not surprising to find that many related urban traffic hazards (79). Similar illustrations circulated in *Cycling* and naturally depicted the threats that the bicycle engendered. The platform of publication is significant in this case: while non-cycling periodicals represented the experience of the urban scene in its entirety, *Cycling* represented the experience of riding a bicycle in both urban and rural settings. Moreover, the illustrations communicated the views of cyclists as observed

¹⁹ Indeed, the majority of the fictional narratives published during the years examined by this research were published through the winter, out of the cycling season.

by non-cycling flâneurs, thus questioning the usually self-centered point of view of the flâneur. These changes in perspective, as we shall see, also allow the implied reader—who is a cyclist—introspection on his or her own riding experience.

The first illustrations that I want to introduce are similar to sensational pictures recounted in Singer's chapter. Such illustrations depict an urban landscape and usually expose not only the dreadful incident but also the reactions of the people who witnessed it. One example of the sort was published in *Cycling* in October 1892 and presents a High-Wheel bicyclist crashing head first into a bus window. It consists of two illustrations: the first elucidates the scene outside the bus, where the driver's surprise and the shock of the passengers on top of it are visible. The second focuses on the reactions of the people inside the bus—the three passengers are just as astonished as the people outside, but the blasé conductor simply asks the bicyclist for the trip's fare (a reaction intended to make the illustration comical and possibly to assert that such occurrences were not rare, and hence do not surprise the man who spends most of his time on the bus) ("A Holiday Idyll"). Another illustration published in May 1892 also captures a terrible confrontation of a bicycle and another means of transportation—the horse. Unfortunately, the modern bicycle is not as forceful as the horse and the urban crowd watching the drama seems quite flabbergasted by the revelation ("A Little Fracas at Wigan").

Nevertheless, these illustrations set in the urban sphere are not as common as illustrations set against a rural background or of no background at all, so that their location is not intelligible. The latter instance underscores that the bicycle and the cyclist are the center of attention when it comes to *Cycling*, as mentioned above. For instance, an illustration published in November 1894 relates a scene that takes place inside a house where a cycling novice attempts to ride his new bicycle and to the astonishment of his housekeeper falls down, causing a great commotion ("Still Walks I-IV"). The scene seems to be taking place inside a town house and confirms cycling historians' claim that the bicycle typically belonged to the "smart" crowd of the cities (Bijker 93); however, even though the setting cannot be unmistakably decided it is irrelevant—the bicycle itself is enough to symbolize modernity. Another instance, published in November 1894, consists of four pictures that relate to a short narrative (probably non-fictional) of an unfortunate meeting between Juggins K. Juggins, a *Cycling* writer, and a dog, on the way from Surrey back to London. As the last figure reveals, the ordeal ends when the dog

smashes into the bicycle, making the rider fall off. The pictures present only shadows of the cyclist and the dog, with no background (“Two Men and One Dog”). Again—the bicycle is the marker of modernity and a symbol of city people, thus the setting is beside the point.

However, as we learn from the story that follows the images, the shadowy cyclist was actually riding outside of London, which takes us to the former type of illustrations—those that present rural background. While the bicycle should allow escaping the commotion of the metropolis, the illustrations of *Cycling* make clear that sometimes the sensational bicycle betrayed this designation and interrupted its riders’ pleasant ride with a tumble. Outside of the city, the cyclists were not even protected from other modern means of transportation, as a picture of a near accident that one cyclist had with a train somewhere in the country exposes (see Fig. 4.1). These illustrations are sensational even though they do not portray urban scenes because they depict encounters with the dangers of modernity; here represented by the bicycle in conjunction with another symbol of modernity—the train. The sense of alarm that these images provoke is similar to that stimulated by pictures of urban terror (such as Singer presents), and finally the experience of the bicycle is characterized as perilous, even when the cyclist portrayed rides a Safety model.

Thus far I presented illustrations that portray the physical dangers that the bicycle entails, against different backgrounds. The last group of sensational images that I wish to present point to a different aspect of modernity—the social and moral reforms it brought about. Specifically, this group responds to the effects cycling had on women. Cycling made it possible to question norms and values that used to be indisputable, for instance, by allowing women freedom of movement and comfortable attire that was not available to them before. Though *Cycling* offers many instances of debates on proper cycling clothes for women or suggestions as to what is suitable for a woman cyclist (where to ride, with whom, how fast, etc.), I shall not expand on the subject in this chapter. I only want to stress that illustrations, which respond to anxieties or distresses instigated by the changing social status of women, are similar to representations of the physical damage that the modern bicycle could cause, because both are byproducts of modernity. An illustration published in *Cycling* in March 1896, titled “A Shock I–II,” depicts a lower class man who sees two cyclists smoking, hidden behind a big sign. The poor man cannot hide his shock (as the title refers to it) when he finds out that the two cyclists are “gals,” wearing bloomers (which were used at the time as

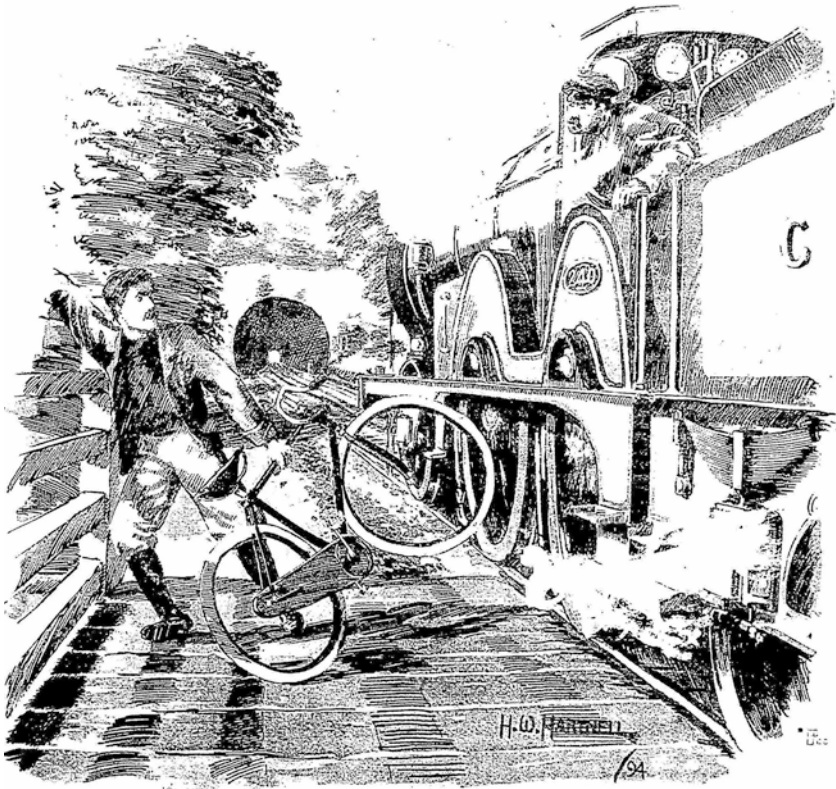
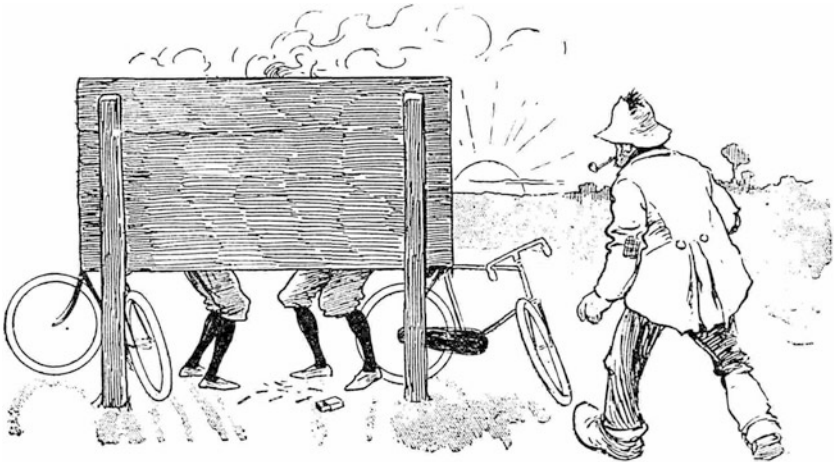


Fig. 4.1 “A Close Shave!,” *Cycling*, September 1894. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne

riding pants, and were commonly called Rationals) (see Fig. 4.2). In this example, the destabilization of the convention that trousers and smoking are associated with male identities is perplexing and threatening just as much as any other symbol of modernity.

The last sensational figure I want to present merges the first and the last groups of illustrations in a rather humorous manner: it presents two instances of women wearing Rationals and riding through a crowded street—one is slender and carries herself gracefully to the enjoyment of the men in the street; the other is heavier and creates mayhem in the street as the people,



A SHOCK—I.

WEARY WILLIAM (*who wants a light*).—"Hullo, here's some cycling fellers a-smoking here. I'm in luck, I am!"



A SHOCK—II.

"Say, gents, could yer oblige me wid a li--? Well! I'll be jiggered if it aint two gals." (*Y.s, it was the Misses Spokes wrestling with a smoky lamp.*)

Fig. 4.2 "A Shock," *Cycling*, March 1896. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne

horses and even dogs run away (“Two Styles of Rational Dress I–II”). This drawing is clearly more humorous and probably did not cause distress in its viewers, and yet it underlines the concerns of the implied readers when confronted with the transforming urban sphere and with the changing social norms that commodity culture and the mobility of women enabled.

The sensational illustrations I culled from *Cycling* touch upon the dreadfulness of the cycling experience. One may wonder if the representation of the threat of riding a bicycle would not counteract the periodical’s obvious aim to encourage bicycle riding; however, if we return to Singer, we find that sensational illustrated press of the latter part of the century participated in the hyperstimulus of modernity that it itself criticized (87). Sensationalism was employed by the periodicals to mimic the experience of modernity because it was a commercial success. “Modernity ushered in a commerce in sensory shocks” (88). Again, the duality of modernity is exposed. But the duality incarnated in *Cycling* as the generator of a discourse is sharpened when the representations of the bicycle in the narratives and in the illustrations communicate with each other, as I claimed above. The different aspects of bicycle riding come together to draw the dual nature of the modern vehicle. And finally, the reading experience of *Cycling* is affected: riding a bicycle is frightening yet thrilling, as the discourse explains to its readers; reading the periodical is shocking but also reassuring. The reading experience is equivalent to the riding experience.

CONCLUSION: THE READING EXPERIENCE OF *CYCLING*

The narrator of *Three Men on the Bummel* promises the readers that the novel would give them no practical instruction. Accordingly, it unfolds the experiences the three have as they ride their bicycles through the Black Forest, focusing solely on their pastime, adventures and reflections on the people they meet and the scenery they view. Finally, the novel turns out to be a “bummel” for its readers, just like bicycling is a “bummel” for the characters:

‘What is a “bummel”?’ said George. ‘How would you translate it?’

‘A “bummel”,’ I explained, ‘I should describe as a journey, long or short, without an end; the only thing regulating it being the necessity of getting back within a given time to the point from which one started. Sometimes it is through busy streets, and sometimes through the fields and lanes; sometimes we can be spared for a few hours, and sometimes for a few days. But long or short, but here or there, our thoughts are ever on the running of the sand. We nod and smile to many as we pass; with some we stop and talk awhile; and with a few we walk a little way. We have been much interested,

and often a little tired. But on the whole we have had a pleasant time, and are sorry when 'tis over.' (371–372)

Thus, the relation to the bicycle transforms the reading experience. Similarly, Yoonjoung Choi suggests in an analysis of Wells' *Wheels of Chance* that Mr. Hoopdriver's "romantic individuality is intimately associated with the constant movement and instability of bicycling" (110). The bicycle in 1890s novels could never remain a prop—once it became part of a textual representation it affected it immediately. The agent of modernity could either promote the exciting solution or bring forth the destructive event of the plot. The romanticism of Mr. Hoopdriver—which he borrows from his bicycle—is what saves the novel from becoming Realist or Naturalist, according to Choi. As for the literature of *Cycling*, it is the bicycle that rescues the detective and his wife from death in Krantz's destructed London; it is the bicycle that carries O'Reilly to the graveyard where he will meet his destiny as a madman locked up in an asylum and it is the bicycle that injures Anne Hannabel's lover even though he was saved from poisoning at the hands of his best friend.

As I hope that I have established in this chapter, the commitment of *Cycling* to the bicycle endows the illustrations and fictional narratives published in it with sensationalism. I carefully picked several illustrations and stories and presented them in detail in order to allow my readers a taste of the sensational experience of reading *Cycling*, which I believe is similar to the experience of riding the bicycle as it is depicted by these representations.

I suggest that the discourse of the periodical employs sensationalism in order to become more than an accompanying product of bicycling. By creating this tight correspondence, *Cycling* becomes a proxy for cycling, an integral part of the culture of cycling, independently of the machine itself. The periodical is so successful in producing the same sensations that riding a bicycle does, that it creates the problem of "The Submerged Tenth,"—readers who enjoy reading *Cycling* but avoid practicing cycling—as it notes, and congratulates, itself.

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PART II

Transmedial Trajectories: The
Vanishing Act of Performance

Destructive Re-Creations: Spectacles of Urban Destruction in Turn-of-the- Century USA

Hélène Valance

While the first modern metropolises came to being and began to be acknowledged as such in the mid- to late nineteenth century, they also became an object of entertainment in themselves. Baron Haussmann imposed spectacular transformations on Paris, bursting open the streets of the old capital to let the new “City of Light” emerge (Schwartz). In the USA, cities like New York or Chicago developed at a breathtaking pace, springing up into a wild, fascinating jumble of skyscrapers. Technological innovations such as steel frames in architecture, efficient urban transportation, or electric lighting at night turned the city into fantastic visions of height, speed, and light (Isenstadt, Petty and Neumann). Such visions were immediately captured in photographs, illustrations, movies, and postcards, which acted as a repetition of the spectacle offered to the urban dweller. Yet the fascination expressed in turn-of-the-century visual culture for the expanding urban landscape was not without ambiguities. Along with the outspoken admiration of commentators for its dazzling sights came an uncanny insistence on its vulnerability. Sensational accounts of fires, explosions, earthquakes, and floods rapidly made their way into the representations of the modern city. Repeatedly, writers and artists

H. Valance (✉)
Université de Frandre- Comté, Ghent, Belgium

imagined the passing of the city they beheld, or reminded their audiences of the catastrophes undergone by metropolises in the past. From the great fires that destroyed New York in 1776, Chicago in 1871, to the earthquakes which turned most of San Francisco and Messina to ruins in 1906 and 1908—and the previous disasters known through pre-cinematic media and print culture, such as the destruction of Lisbon in 1755—history had proved that cities, though overwhelming in their imposing presence, were as fragile as colossi with feet of clay (Gabriele 119; Hoffer 64–184).

On the margins of great American cities grew spaces that were shaped on the model of these spectacular metropolises: world fairs and amusement parks imitated the ever-changing landscape of the modern city through an accumulation of attractions that rose like new landmarks every few months. These fake cities gave architects and city planners the opportunity to experiment with new and daring ideas. At the 1893 Columbian exposition, for instance, Chicagoans were invited to admire the “White City,” its monumental architecture, bleached facades, and blinding electric illuminations, and encouraged to read it as the ideal city of the future. On Coney Island in the late and early twentieth century, New Yorkers could wander in the streets of “Dreamland” and “Luna Park,” finding in these fantasized cities a respite from their everyday urban environment. In 1904, when Coney Island reopened to the public after renovations and extensions, crowds gathered in Luna Park’s oriental city of dreams, a “reproduction of the glittering Durbar of Delhi, whose “magnificence ... was such as to make those who witnessed it imagine they were in a genuine Oriental city.” But the most popular “city” was Dreamland itself:

Dreamland opened its gates for the first time yesterday, and scarcely at any time were there less than 20,000 persons visiting its wonderful features. Illuminated at night, it resembled a city in itself. But the visitor who went there yesterday found that after getting in it contained many miniature cities. (“New Coney Island Dazzles Its Record Multitude”)

Here too, however, the spectacle of the city included phases of destruction. World fairs and amusement parks not only acted as the doubles (or multiples) of real cities, but they also recast urban disasters as lucrative spectacles. It even seemed to matter little how recent and tragic the real events they imitated could have been: in 1904, visitors of the Louisiana Purchase exposition in Saint Louis attended a reconstitution of the Galveston flood, which had claimed more than 5000 lives only four years earlier. The daily perfor-

mance of *Fighting the Flames*, one of the major attractions on Coney Island in the 1900s, displayed an entertaining and tamed version of a scene with which city dwellers were unfortunately too familiar: the burning of a tenement building. Yet another show in the Midget village, the daily alerts of the Lilliputian Fire Department, literally minimized the catastrophes that regularly hit the headlines of every city's newspaper.

Analyzing the mixture of fear and excitement at work in these sensational displays, this chapter attempts to highlight some of the ambivalences that governed the perception of the modern city from its very beginnings. What were these stage re-enactments aiming to achieve, and did they succeed? What exactly did it mean to re-tell disasters and catastrophes, and what were the ideological issues at stake in this discourse? How were these shows connected to their economic, social, and political environment? What type of "recreation" did they really offer in that context? The examples of sensational accounts of urban destruction analyzed here are all taken from the late and early twentieth-century American context. The motif of the city in ruins is not exactly a modern invention—think only of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible, or that of Troy in the Iliad. These earlier scenes of destruction actually appeared among the themes chosen for popular shows: in Luna Park, visitors could relive the annihilation of Pompeii ("New Coney Island..."), and in Chicago in 1890, showman Imre Kiralfy presented *Nero, or the Destruction of Rome* at the Barnum and Bailey Circus, a show involving, among others, 1200 performers, two herds of elephants and two droves of camels (Kiralfy 2). But in the second half of the century, industrialization and urbanization produced destruction on a much larger scale. As Marshall Berman has shown, destruction and dissolution were essential to the experience of modernity (Berman 98–105). If Baron Haussmann was nicknamed the "Attila of expropriation" and "Georges the Ripper" by his Parisian contemporaries (Chaudin 19: 165), it is because he reactivated these old nightmares with the tools of modern city-planning. And if Kiralfy could advertise such enormous processions of actors, dancers, and tamed animals, he owed it partly to more efficient transportation and communication systems and the development of a leisure society where an ever larger audience could consume the products of faraway lands. Though examples of similar shows can be found in Europe, the focus here is specifically on productions presented in the USA. Entrepreneurs like P.T. Barnum, Imre Kiralfy, and Henry Roltair fully exploited modern management and advertising methods to create shows that quickly surpassed their European

counterparts (Harris). But most importantly, American cities, with their recent history and fast growing pace, offered a vaster space to destruction and reconstruction than, for instance, Haussmann's Paris, confined by the centuries-old boundaries of the *faubourgs*. Where cities grew bigger and faster, they also fell harder.

What elicited the admiration of most commentators on American cities at the turn of the twentieth century was, indeed, the apparently infinite plasticity of the urban landscape, always seen with a mixture of fascination and apprehension. A mock dialogue between European travelers about Chicago translates the impression that anyone's knowledge of the American city was constantly threatened by obsolescence: "When were you in Chicago?" "Last week." "Oh, well! Then you know nothing about it. The city has been entirely changed since then" (Grandin xi). In his *Delirious New York* Rem Koolhaas asserts that destruction and creation cannot be dissociated from one another, and belong to the very essence of the city. Watching workers burst open the roads to reshape the streets, buildings being torn down to be replaced by even higher ones, electric wires and streetcars railways spread like webs over the city, urbanites learned that destruction was not simply to be conceived as an apocalyptic end, but more as an everyday presence, and that American metropolises, rather than a fixed landscape, were to be understood as a never-ending process (Page 1–20).

Tellingly, world fairs were themselves systematically admired for their capacity to emerge in an instant out of shapeless landscapes. The official historian of the 1893 Columbian exposition in Chicago, Hubert Howe Bancroft, notes the surprising transformation of Jackson Park into what became the famous "White City":

Six or seven miles from the business quarter of Chicago, on the southern verge of its park system, there lay a sandy waste of unredeemed and desert land, in its centre a marshy hollow, and without trace of vegetation, save for a stunted growth of oak, and here and there a tangled mass of willow, flag, and marsh grass, which served but to render its desolation still more desolate ... Here was the chosen site for the grandest achievement of artistic skill and mechanical ingenuity, the site of a group of buildings gigantic in plan and structure, a city of palaces arising from a network of gardens and pleasure grounds, all on a scale such as had never before been devised for such a purpose, such as few believed it possible to complete within so brief a period. (Bancroft 47–48)

Building a monumental city in the space of merely two years required, however, special techniques and technologies. Bancroft discusses the mate-

rials used to construct what he calls the “unsubstantial fabrics of the Fair,” the buildings destined to be torn down when the exposition would end:

For the framework of such huge, if temporary buildings, iron and wood must of course be largely used; but for the casings, the mural decorations, and other ornamental and accessory work, a substance must be found which would be at once inexpensive, plastic, and durable. All these qualities were united in a combination of plaster of Paris with jute or other fibre, resembling a stucco and commonly known as staff, one readily manufactured and handled, easily moulded and colored, and such as enabled the architects to complete their designs at small expense, while giving to their structures all the stability required. (Bancroft 61)

Inexpensive, easy to make and use, but of an inferior quality—in other words, a typical example of the technological and industrial progress that characterized mass production—staff became the stuff out of which the dream of the White City was made, the perfect material to create an illusionistic cityscape. H.C. Bunner described the somewhat preposterous scenes he witnessed during the construction, where the imposing architecture revealed its actual weightlessness:

You watch two or three workmen moving apparently aimlessly upon the face of what seems a stupendous wall of marble. Suddenly a pillar as tall as a house rises in the air, dangling at the end of a thin rope of wire. The three little figures seize this monstrous showy shaft and set it in place as though it were a fence-post. Then a man with a hand-saw saws a yard or two off it, and you see that it is only a thin shell of stucco. (Bunner 408)

This artificial and ultra-light material instantly conveyed an impression of fragility. Robert Cantwell notes the elegiac interpretation that upper-class commentators immediately provided when faced with the White City’s transient architecture. Thus did poet Richard Watson Gilder anticipate, even before the end of the fair, the “Vanishing City” that the White City would be:

Thou shalt of all the cities of the world
 Famed for their grandeur, ever more endure
 Imperishably and all alone imperled
 In the world’s living thought, the one most sure
 Of love undying and of endless praise
 For beauty only,—chief of all thy kind;

Immortal, even because of thy brief days;
Thou cloud-built, fairy city of the mind!

Instead of reading the White City's "unsubstantial" substance as the direct result of new developments in the system of production, writers like Gilder insisted on separating the White City from its immediate environment, projecting it into the sphere of the ideal. Pushing dematerialization further, they forced themselves to accept the ultimate dissolution of what they saw: Gilder's poem ends on this resignation: "Then vanish, City of Dreams, and be no more" (689).

But the perception of the vulnerability of the White City was not just the privilege of a few enlightened visitors; on the contrary, the idea of destruction appears to have been intimately woven into the fabric of the whole exposition. Like any world fair, Chicago's Columbian exposition was meant to celebrate the city of Chicago itself, a celebration that included the commemoration of its worst moments: October 9, 1893, the anniversary date of the 1871 fire, was thus chosen as "Chicago Day" at the fair. Along with concerts and processions, gigantic fireworks reproduced the conflagration that had devastated the city some twenty years earlier. Similarly, the 1915 San Francisco world fair marked the opening of the Panama Canal, but also celebrated the city's reconstruction less than ten years after the earthquake that had left it in ruins. Posters and postcards illustrating the event almost systematically included, among symbols of the city's triumph, a vignette of the rubble on the streets after the catastrophe. In both cases, the spectacular plasticity that presided over the construction of the fairgrounds only reduplicated the miracle of the host city's phoenix-like restoration. In 1893, a *Chicago Daily Tribune* journalist dismissed the possibility that the 1871 fire itself could be the center of the show, denouncing the idea as "shockingly bad taste." Yet, almost in spite of himself, the editorialist drew a troubling parallel between the present triumph of Chicago and its earlier devastation: "Never since the day of the Chicago fire, when every one was in terror and hastening to save life and property, had the business of the city been so absolutely suspended. Once it was for stern danger and necessity. Now it was to rejoice over the progress of the world, shared in so full a degree by that once-stricken city" ("What the Day Means"). Repeatedly playing on the idea of resurrection after destruction, commentators developed a contrasted rhetoric intertwining the two concepts, making the ephemeral cities in the exposition and the devastated real cities the two sides of the same coin.

Indeed, world fairs insisted on reaffirming the possibility of progress and order, but to do so they repeatedly returned to a dialectics of destruction and creation suggestive of an ambivalent dynamics that seemed dangerously capable of veering out of control. In Chicago for instance, the Administration building, the central building of the White City, was decorated with Karl Bitter's gigantic sculptural groups representing the elements controlled and uncontrolled. Allegories of earth, air, fire, and water framed each entrance of the building: on the one hand, mankind was shown suffering under the sway of unchained elements, the victim of tides, storms, conflagrations, while on the other hand, man was presented as the master of nature, brandishing lighted torches, reaping the earth's fruits, or steering boats on the sea. But elements were also unchained on the exposition's Midway Plaisance, where fairgoers could see less dignified, more entertaining shows. They could, for instance, attend a reconstitution of the eruption of Mount Kilauea, an immersive spectacle where the public was standing in the middle of the volcano's crater, admiring electric illuminations combined with panorama paintings. A visitor's guide describing the show explains, in a characteristically sublime tone, that "language utterly fails to adequately describe the awful grandeur of the vast crater and the terrible fascination of the mighty forces constantly in action within its frowning walls." Yet the author then proceeds to a lengthy description:

The distinctive characteristic of the crater is perpetual change. Each day and each hour works a more or less radical change in the landscape. The lakes of liquid lava are found in no other volcano. They are actual lakes of boiling, hissing, seething lava ... within which the liquid blood-red lava surges against the imprisoned walls in great breakers of fire, dashing its red hot spray into the air, while from its depths masses of molten rock burst upward in mighty billows, jets and fountains, flinging the molten metal aloft in a wild confusion of scintillating fireworks. (Smith 41–42)

What would attract the spectators was the very instability of the scene. While the White City drew its sublime impressiveness from its majestic fixity, here the thrill came from watching nature in an uncontrolled state. While the White City dazzled visitors with straight lines and marble-like whiteness, here bright red colors and shapeless materials in movement made the show. The contrast between the White City and this wild, exotic landscape prolonged the then well-accepted opposition between civilized order and primitive chaos, in a distribution that could at once be thrilling and reassuring to visitors.

At the next American world fair, the 1901 Pan-American exposition in Buffalo, visitors could watch the reconstitution of another elemental disaster that struck closer to home: the flood that had devastated the city of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, in 1889. To visitors of the Pan-American exposition in 1901, this re-enactment must have recalled, by displacement, a more recent and even more tragic event, the Galveston flood of 1900. In September 1900, a few months before the world fair, the commercial harbor of Galveston, so successful it was nicknamed “the wall street of Texas,” was almost entirely swept away by a hurricane. Thus audiences would have been doubly familiar with the theme presented. According to the account written by Rev. Helms in the *Indianapolis Journal*, the scenographic production started with a landscape with which, unlike Kilauea, many Americans would recognize as their own:

As the curtain rises and there nestles before you in the lap of the valley Johnstown, the iron queen, nothing can be more beautiful ... Day is full when the curtain lifts. Up and down west mountain the inclined railway climbs with its human freight. The strains of “America” from fife and drum strike your ear, and see! Tramp, tramp, the boys in blue are crossing the bridge on their way to the cemetery to scatter flowers on the graves of their dead. It’s Decoration day. The busy day draws to a close. The sun is sinking behind the distant hills. The soft hush of evening broods over all nature. There is a crimson glow everywhere.

The long prologue to the catastrophe, halfway between pastoral and industrial progress, allows turn-of-the-century American spectators to identify with the scene and to feel personally engaged with its contents. Whereas in the Kilauea show the immersion was physical, here it rests on socio-cultural landmarks. Some details and formulations chosen by the author already prefigure the incoming disaster: the crimson glow of dusk and the visit to the cemetery add a morbid note to the description, and the mention of the “human freight” of the train lets readers imagine bodies being carried away by powerful forces and alien. As the electric illuminations carry the audiences into the night, the forges—according to Karl Bitter’s imagery, a controlled form of fire—take on the aspect of a volcano, bringing spectators back to the imagery of Kilauea:

The twilight shadows lengthen, night creeps upon you, the candles of the skies are lit and the soft blue light of the moon throws shadows of mountain and hill across the valley. One by one home and shop shine out with

“the light in the window.” A sea of flames and sparks and lava pour from a hundred fires in the great Cambria iron works. The red glow of the coke ovens paints all the southern sky.

Compared to this relatively slow introduction, the depiction of the catastrophe, with the dam breaking and flooding waters sweeping the town away takes just a few lines:

The terrible catastrophe is retold so true to nature that hundreds have felt themselves gasping before the awful scene. The crashing homes, the railroad trains and bridges and rocks with thousands of human souls piled into one awful dam against the great bridge. The horror of darkness and leaping flame that licks up hundreds of pleading, praying men and women. All this, too horrible for sight, when like magic out of the darkness and the storm stands the new Johnstown—Johnstown of today, greater, grander.

The syntax becomes as chaotic as the event itself, and description becomes mere allusion, the actual event being “too horrible for sight” as well as for retelling. What is striking here, too, is the rapidity with which order is reinstated, as one sentence begins in horror and ends on the reaffirmation of the greatness of Johnstown. The show cannot end on the scene of destruction, on an open, wasted landscape, and the staging of the catastrophe must be kept in check. Paradoxically, the return to stability and order requires, however, to impose a violent twist to the order of things. Abandoning the relatively realistic temporal development used to depict the slow transition from dusk to night before the day of the catastrophe, the show jumps forward into the future as though by “magic,” artificially speeding up the cycle’s closure.

Johnstown was quickly replaced by Galveston on the stage. The Galveston catastrophe had already been turned into consumable imagery in the very hours that followed it. Images of Galveston’s ruins rapidly circulated in journalistic accounts, but also, thanks to the development of techniques that were not available at the time of the Johnstown flood, in photographic illustrations that covered the front pages of newspapers across the country. The Edison Company even created a short movie showing the surviving inhabitants of the city searching the rubble for dead bodies. It took less than two years for the disaster to become the theme of a spectacle on Coney Island. The *Galveston flood* show appeared to be very derivative of the first scenographic staging of the Johnstown flood, only bringing the sensational display to a larger scale. Fifty employees ran

electrical and mechanical devices, using more than twelve slide projectors to create variegated backgrounds seen in changing lights. Spectators who had paid their 25 cents to see the *Galveston Flood* watched the sun go down on the prosperous, busy city of Galveston, and admired the twinkling effects of electric lights over the bay, until the disaster happened. Then the show engaged the audience's senses with violent light effects and a variety of noises, crashes, cries, and explosions:

A sudden darkness falls upon the town and descends. The waters become more and more agitated. They lash and beat. Then the horrible, the awful hurricane the sea tornado ripping up the bay sending it into a white seething mass pouring over the wharves up into the very town announces the doom of Galveston. Horrible crashes are heard. Before the waves reach the factories an explosion is heard. A flame leaps forth but soon disappears. The roar of the wind, the booming of the water, the crash of buildings is vivid realism. The picture of the waters teeming and seething in their work of destruction is one of the most magnificent electrical effects ever produced. ("From Flooded Galveston to the Blue Mediterranean")

Unlike the re-enactment of the Johnstown flood at Chicago's world fair, the staging of Galveston's disaster at Coney Island did not end on a positive note: "As the fury of the flood abates the waters gradually subside, but when the light again breaks upon Galveston, it is a city of the dead with its former prosperity a pitiable wreck." Because this was Coney Island, and not an international exposition where even the amusement concessions strove to conform to the dominant discourse on progress, the audience could be left to contemplate the final chaos of Galveston in ruins, re-experiencing the images that were so profusely circulated in the press in the immediate aftermath of the flood.

This open-endedness was not deemed appropriate for the version of the same show presented at the Saint Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition. This was, so to speak, almost a reduplication of this initial re-enactment, except for the last scene, which showed "the city as it is to be with its new sea wall" (Kurtz 115). Here, as in Chicago, the emphasis was shifted to include an optimistic vision of the future of civilization, unfolding a narrative that reasserted man's control over the elements. The same magic that made the White City surge out of the swamps of Jackson Park, and let the San Francisco fair rise over the ruins the earthquake would, the narrative confidently asserted, allow Galveston to be restored to its previous state of prosperity. Destruction could be reversed into creation. Indeed,

the Saint Louis re-enactment of Galveston's devastation can also be read in conjunction with another show that focused on beginnings rather than ends. A few moments after they had witnessed in the *Galveston* show an awful example of the destruction of man's accomplishments, fairgoers could relive the entire story of humanity's progress in *Creation*. The show, which would then settle permanently on Coney Island, was undeniably the most ambitious production put together by Henry Roltair, whom art historian Michael Leja describes as "a popular and successful dime museum illusionist who gradually expanded his illusions into sensational world's fair and carnival spectacles." *Creation* brought spectators back and forth in time through a dizzying display of moving panoramas, electrical illusions, and grandly orchestrated narratives, showing them "scenes illustrative of the beginning and end of all things" (Walker 514): starting with views of prehistoric times, the audience was then taken through scenes of various successive civilizations, from Egypt to Rome and Venice, before being thrown into a final depiction of Genesis. Leja underlines the contradictions at work here, situating the show in the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scientific debates on the origins of our world: "Roltair's ambitious history of the world and humankind was based on a difficult reconciliation of biblical and scientific revelations, and his strategy was to set the disagreements in a realm of disorienting illusions." Like the reconstitutions of the Johnstown and Galveston floods, *Creation* betrays an anxious need to manipulate the course of time so as to maintain an ordered narrative. Yet in both cases, this effort fundamentally undermines the stability of the spectacle, creating a confusing experience. If chaos figured in the shows, framed by images of control, disorder and instability really acted at the level of the shows' own structures. Ultimately, as Leja suggests, the very confusion of the shows contributed to their success, providing both a thrilling experience of disorientation while containing disorder in the safe boundaries of visible artificiality. What made the shows so popular was their ability to satisfy contradictory impulses, allowing at once for the excitement and awe of chaos and for the reassuring completeness of familiar narratives.

This reordering effort did not just involve narratives of biblical amplitude or recent national events, but was also applied to scenes that were more familiar to American audiences. The last examples considered here, the stage re-enactments of city fires, are more indicative of the deeper dynamics of sensational disaster shows. If reconstitutions of the Johnstown and Galveston floods were almost systematically praised for their "realism," the events that inspired them remained extraordinary

ones. Firefighting performances, on the contrary, re-enacted events that made the headlines almost every day in American cities. Luna Park had its *Fire and Flames*, Dreamland its *Fighting the Flames*, and there were a number of intermittent, smaller shows such as the *New York Fire Fighters*, all of them counting among the most popular of the shows to be seen on Coney Island. A year after it opened at Dreamland, *Fighting the Flames* was already recognized as a leading feature of the park:

Fighting the Flames proved to be so popular as to warrant extensive elaboration of last year's scheme and construction and recasting involving an expenditure of \$40,000. An entire block of buildings will be fire-ravaged at each performance. At the "fire lines" will be a crowd of 600 spectators. Taking part in the exciting illustration of department excellence and intrepidity will be 120 firemen. ("Great New Dreamland at Coney This Year")

As Sally Lynn demonstrated in her study of these shows, there were many overlaps between reality in the city, and fiction on Coney Island. The firefighting performances' creation roughly coincided with a reconfiguration of the fire departments in the city, which had been mostly run by volunteers up until the late nineteenth century (9–31), at a time when fires remained an everyday menace for city dwellers, especially among the unsafe tenement neighborhoods crowded by an ever-increasing stream of immigrants. Precisely because of their strong connection to reality, these controlled, repetitive re-enactments of events that by definition were unpredictable and uncontrollable, struck an essential balance between order and disorder. In Lynn's words, the shows "allowed pleasure seekers to celebrate the growth of the metropolis, the heroism of fire fighters, and the advent of modernity at the very same moment they were invited to succumb to their anxieties surrounding these very same phenomena" (97).

Indeed, most of the disaster shows were dominated by containment strategies, allowing space for the catastrophe to unfold under the eyes of the audience while keeping it in safe boundaries. The physical space of the concession, with its imposing gates marking the entrance into a themed environment, a distinct enclave within the world apart that amusement parks and world fairs claimed to be, signaled to the visitors they were about to experience something not quite of this world, a reality at one remove. The very principle of the re-enactment distanced reality, while superimposed narratives reduplicated the disaster time and again, at once making it real and diluting its substance. Most shows included

narrative voiceovers performed by actors which directed the attention of the audience and locked the meaning of what they saw. Manipulating the course of events in the staging, although often awkwardly and somewhat paradoxically, participated in this impulse to frame the visual disorder within a more rational, and often moralizing, discourse. The repetition of the shows, which changed an exceptional, unexpected event into a routine spectacle one could return to as many times as wanted, added banality to the consideration of the disaster.

Yet, almost inevitably, these containment strategies failed: Ironically, Dreamland, after years of success owed in part to *Fighting the Flames*, succumbed to the flames in 1911. As fire came back with a vengeance, the firefighting squad that successfully rescued actors from their burning tenement building every day was unable to save the fake city. The destruction of Dreamland, like that of the White City, actually demonstrates how porous the boundaries between the outside and the inside, between the real and fake cities, could be. The burning of Dreamland and the White City was only the more spectacular version of the fires and tales of violent destruction which often made the headlines of the daily press. For instance, the disaster in Dreamland happened only two months after the Triangle shirtwaist factory fire one of the most tragic events in the history of New York City. One hundred and forty-two workers in this textile factory, mostly women, perished in a fire from which they found no other escape than the elevators, as the stairways were either blocked or unsafe. Newspapers gave sensational accounts of the catastrophe, retelling how the human bridge stretched out by three heroic men broke under the weight of rushing people, sending all to their fall, or lingered on the desperate fights of women trying to get into the elevators:

The scenes when each elevator rose to the eighth floor again, after carrying down a previous load of human freight, were frightful. Women would cling to the wire netting with hands and even with their teeth, determined not to give way for those behind. Their clothing was torn from their bodies, yet they would not give up their positions until forced to by sheer weight of numbers behind them. Several dead and mutilated bodies were stretched about the entrance of the elevator shafts, not killed by fire, but torn to pieces, almost, by frenzied human hands. It was a mad fight for life, and some of those who managed to make their way to the elevators never lived to reach the first floor. ("More Than 140 Die")

If slum landlords and company managers were unanimously blamed by the press, this short passage almost explicitly accuses the victims of aggravating their own fate because they gave in to the general chaos and became unable to control themselves. Social and gender biases dominate the text, opposing self-controlled men operating the elevators to their “human freight,” crowds of maddened females reduced to their naked bodies, hands, and teeth. Two months later, the fire on Coney Island had the appearance of a rather happy re-enactment: “There were about one hundred men and women employees and concessionaires asleep in their various quarters in Dreamland when the fire started at about 2 o’clock in the morning, and so far as was known last night every one of them escaped in safety” (“Dreamland Destroyed”). The sober tone employed here, contrary to the lurid descriptions of the Triangle factory fire scenes, asserts that social order is maintained through the disaster. Here, Dreamland is presented as a peaceful community where employers and employees, if they do not exactly share the same space (sleeping each in their “various quarters”), face the same dangers, and survive together. Even through disaster, Dreamland was shown as the idealized fiction of a city.

By comparison, the fire that eventually destroyed the White City in 1894 deeply questioned the social ideals the Columbian exposition had tried to embody. Alan Trachtenberg has explored the continuities between the White City’s rigid social model, which marginalized non-whites, women and working classes, and the crisis that shook Chicago during the Pullman strike, barely a year after the fair ended. In his view, the railroad workers’ strike, one of the most violent clashes the country had known since the Civil War, only expressed the contradiction inherent to the White City. The fair was the pendant to the industrial town Pullman had designed for its workers, a city shaped to discipline workers and enforce a social harmony favorable to capitalist interests (Gilbert, Smith). By striking against their employer and landlord, railway workers also attacked the conservative social order promoted by the White City (Trachtenberg 221–224). Though the causes of the fire remain unknown to this day, contemporary commentators were quick to draw a link between the disruption caused by the strike on the streets of Chicago and the final conflagration that took over the White City:

The burning of the Manufactures building was a sight that will never be forgotten by those who witnessed this tragic climax in the destruction of the White City ... It was at the time of the railroad strike, and as the conflagration reflected in the sky was seen by neighboring cities inland and on

the shores of Michigan, messages of inquiry came pouring in by hundreds. Fresh in the minds of many was the great fire of 1871, and with anarchy and lawlessness still unchained, it was feared that the rabble was inflicting on Chicago a repetition of that dreadful disaster. (Bancroft 690–691)

In this context of social conflict, laboring classes were “unchained” just as fire became again uncontrolled, one catastrophe resurrecting the memory of another. Published shortly after the events, *The Vanishing Fair*, a booklet combining elegiac poems with full-page illustrations (announced as “decorations”), connected the fire and the strike in one genteel lament. Pictures of the Court of Honor were presented side by side with images of fights between the federal army and railroad workers, with fire as a common element (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2).



Fig. 5.1 “Burning of the Peristyle, with Western View of the Court of Honor and Administration Building.” From H.H. Van Meter, *The Vanishing Fair*. Chicago: The Literary Art Co., 1893: 8. Author’s collection



Fig. 5.2 “Cavalry Escorting Meat Train Protected by Infantry from the Chicago Stockyards during Strike.” From H.H. Van Meter, *The Vanishing Fair*. Chicago: The Literary Art Co., 1893: 22. Author’s collection

The author called for a general reconciliation, aspiring to a time “when no more with martial measures / troops shall tramp ... where the miser hoards his treasure / and mad misery hides her dead” and “when no more wants frenzied minions / shall break forth with blood and flame” (Van Meter 16). Yet the abundance of illustrations representing destruction and violence inside and outside the fairgrounds shows how fragile this ideal can be. Cantwell highlights the tendency of the elite to read this literal destruction as an ominous foreboding of social crisis, reinforcing the moral lessons already at play in their elegiac praise of the White City.

If the anxiety Cantwell uncovers in the elite's discourse is undeniable, I would go further and argue the destruction of the fair elicited a deeper fascination among a larger audience than just the most privileged commentators, as the danger feared was not simply for the elite to be dislodged from its comfortable position under the assaults of proletarian crowds. The implicit connection suggested by the juxtaposition of fire and strike images hints at a deeper, more widespread unease. Contemporary commentators of disasters and of their re-enactments occasionally drew parallels between spectacles of conflagrations and ruins on the one hand, and the destructive potentialities of the capitalistic economy that was gradually reorganizing the everyday lives of Americans. In his account of the *Johnstown Flood* show, for instance, Rev. Helms puts the disaster and its aftermath in perspective with contemporary political and economic events. Listing the good deeds accomplished by compassionate citizens to help the victims, Helms contrasts them with the event that darkened the last days of the Pan-American exposition, the assassination of President McKinley by anarchist Leon Czolgosz on the fairgrounds in September 1901: "Ah, there is hope for the race. Humanity has a heart. The Anarchist that struck down the President is not a representative of the American race, nor the human race. The human race has a heart."

Like in 1894, anarchy threatened the balanced rhetoric of the fair and its proclaimed faith in progress and order. With McKinley's assassination, the fiction of the fair was once more assailed by the outside reality. Though Helms reasserts an optimistic view of humanity, his claims sound slightly contrived. The following paragraph shows even deeper ambivalence, even more explicit doubts. Here Helms compares the accident at Johnstown with the disasters imposed by the corporate and financial entities that dominated the social and economic environment of the time: "While the Johnstown flood was appalling, yet it is not the only terrible flood in the history of the world. What an awful flood that was in 1837, 1857, 1877, 1893—a deluge financial. What floods of domestic infelicity have swept down thousands of homes. What floods of crime and sin and degradation. Floods, floods." The cycles of economic crises punctuating American socio-economic history since the 1830s were the real catastrophes, so destructive that morals could not resist them. While the Johnstown flood spurred acts of courage and charity, the financial floods, on the contrary, could only send their victims to sin and depravation.

This is perhaps one explanation for the dramatic scenes that took place during the Triangle factory fire. The accident, in this case, was just the epiphenomenon of a more insidious disaster, one that forced individuals to work in inhuman conditions in order to increase profit for a few investors. Journalists reporting on the Triangle factory fire often explained that the building was one among hundreds of tenement buildings unsafe for their tenants, and that “a repetition of this disaster [was] likely to happen at any time.” One employee who had survived the fire explained this was the third fire the factory had known since he had been employed there, “a matter of six years” (“More than 140 Die”). The motives that made landlords and employers overlook safety also applied to amusement parks: according to an article published after the 1911 fire, there had been eleven serious fires between 1893 and 1911 (“Island Often Fireswept”). Pressure for profit resulted in crowded spaces, inappropriate structures, and flimsy, highly flammable material meant for cheaper, faster construction, such as the staff used at the Columbian exposition in Chicago. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had predicted, destruction was part of the inherent logic of capitalism, a view prolonged in Marshall Berman’s analysis of their *Manifesto*’s claim that “all that is solid melts into air”:

“All that is solid”—from the clothes on our backs to the looms and mills that weave them, to the men and women who work the machines, to the houses and neighborhoods the workers live in, to the firms and corporations that exploit the workers, to the towns and cities and whole regions and even nations that embrace them all—all these are made to be broken tomorrow, smashed or shredded or pulverized or dissolved, so they can be recycled or replaced next week, and the whole process can go on again and again, hopefully forever, in ever more profitable forms. (Berman 55)

Destruction and creation form one never-ending cycle, in which every catastrophe brings its own benefit. In the words of the journalist applauding the resurrection of Chicago in 1893, the 1871 fire was deplorable but also profitable:

But for the fire thousands of old frame and cheap brick buildings would have remained standing for years, many of them till now ... The fire did in a few hours what would otherwise have taken years to accomplish and forced the erection of better buildings. The ground being swept clean it became possible to raise the grades in the business streets without putting property-owners to the expense of raising their buildings. (“What the Day Means”)

In this permanent revolution, spectacles acted as a pretty efficient form of recycling, in line with the dynamics of creation and destruction Joseph Schumpeter defined as the leading force of capitalism (Schumpeter 81–87). The fairs and amusement park's exceptional plasticity allowed them to reshape the catastrophes and repurpose them to lucrative ends. In 1906, exactly four weeks after the San Francisco earthquake, the *New York Times* announced that in less than a month "*The Destruction of San Francisco* [was] to be produced at Dreamland, Coney Island, on June 16, where *Fighting the Flames* used to be seen. The spectacle will have 150 people in it. It will be dreadfully sensational, the Dreamland people say" ("The Quake to Be a Coney Spectacle").

In one last ironic twist in the cycle, if world fairs and amusement parks could restage disaster and make a profit out of it, when they themselves were subject to destruction, the scenes of their demise were immediately turned to profit. Crowds of gawkers gathered to watch the White City and Dreamland burn, as if that, too, was meant to be a spectacle. On the morning after the fire on Coney Island, Stubenbord's restaurant on Surf Avenue reopened on the smoking embers of the fire, and, according to one journalist's report, "good business was done," which in itself attests to the number of people who had come to see the ruins of Dreamland ("Dreamland Destroyed"). *The Evening World* calculated that 350,000 visitors came to see the ruins, and humorously transcribed the patter of a man who proposed to sell debris rescued from the disaster: "Suvenir-r-rs of the great fire—great 'p'tunity vu lifetime—all that's left of Beayutiful Dreamlan'—ten cen's—right dis way, ladies and gents—the only genoow-ine relicts of de fire—picked out o' the roons red hot" ("350,000 See Ruins of Dreamland"). Thus the cycle came to a close. As they fully channeled destruction into recreational purposes, Coney Island's entrepreneurs, from the street peddler to the restaurant owner to the show concessionaire, revealed one essential aspect of their activity. Sensational shows did not simply tame reality's most threatening aspects by forcing them into controlled narratives and restricted spaces; they also fully participated in the cycle of creation and destruction that is essential to capitalism. Shows like *Fighting the Flames* prefigured, in a way, Guy Debord's critique of modern alienation in a capitalistic, spectacle-dominated society, and adequately illustrate the palindrome Debord picked as the title of one of his movies: *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* "we go in circles through the night, and we are consumed by fire" (Debord 1978). Disaster and creation would

continue to take turns, but together they had one common feature: they were the perfect embodiment of a society whose primary activity was to consume—and be consumed in the same process.

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The Magician's Box of Tricks: Fantômas, Popular Literature, and the Spectacular Imagination

Matthieu Letourneux

Monsieur Fandor, he went on, you do not know me, but I know you very well, that I do ... I read your articles every day in *La Capitale* newspaper. They are jolly good! So I say to my lady: 'Monsieur Fandor, the stories and the crimes he tells, that is pure serial fiction!'

Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain, *Fantômas*, III, *Le Mort qui tue* [*The Killing Corpse*], 1911

Published between 1911 and 1913, the 32 novels of *Fantômas* written by Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain are one of the most famous French crime fiction series of the Belle Époque. Distributed and translated in all of Europe, adapted to cinema in 1913, two years after the release of the first novel, the series inspired some of the most important artists of the French Avant-Garde and Surrealism: the poets Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob, André Breton, Robert Desnos and the painters Yves Tanguy and René Magritte are only some of the artists who provocatively claimed the influence of this pulp literature (Walz). They saw in these vulgar and irrational series "écrit n'importe comment" ("written in a slapdash way"), as Guillaume Apollinaire stated, a radical attack on academic culture, and a way to rejuvenate literature and art by instilling in it irrational imagination

M. Letourneux (✉)
University of Paris Ouest, Nanterre, France

and inconsistent style. The publishing rhythm (Souvestre and Allain had to write each month a 400-page-long novel), the taste for a flashy modernity (with cars, cameras, and electric devices), the relationship with the news, the novelty of transmedial imagination, the quasi-synchronicity with the First World War slaughter, all these elements combined to present *Fantômas* as a flagship of modernity.

We can find a document in Marcel Allain's archives which lets us understand how this relationship with modernity worked not only as a diegetic condition but also as a statement of poetics related to new industrial practices. In a huge folder called "l'armoire aux trucs" ("the tricks cupboard"), the authors collected hundreds of press clippings, plot drafts, ideas of narrative tricks (which they called the "trucs et ficelles policières," "crime fiction tricks and schemes"), and sketches of criminal devices that they sought to use in their novels.¹ As a testimony of the genesis of the novels, these documents can help us to understand how these pulp writers invented a poetics of modernity, using media texts as a material to *describe* reality and to convert it into a fantastic spectacle.

THE OBSESSION WITH THE NEWS

To understand why press clippings were so important for the genesis of *Fantômas* novels, it is necessary to recall how these books were written. Souvestre and Allain were contractually required by their publisher, Arthème Fayard, to deliver one full novel a month. To be able to perform this writing *tour de force*, they had to part the book in two, and write the chapters in parallel. This process, however, was not fast enough. To go faster, they decided to dictate the text of the stories to a recording machine, thus inventing new industrial and technological ways to create stories (Loïc Artiaga and Matthieu Letourneux).² The plot itself was initially only loosely defined, and most of the ideas came during the daily recordings. This can explain the importance of the references to news reports, to the Parisian places where the authors lived and spent their time, the jokes of the day, and some of the most mediatized events of the time. Avant-garde writers were struck by the strong resemblance these delirious stories bore to

¹This folder is held at the IMEC (Institut Mémoire de l'Édition Contemporaine), in Marcel Allain/Francis Lacassin archives, and can be consulted with the authorization from Allain's heirs.

²Some of the wax cylinders they used are still preserved by the heirs.

the real world. Guillaume Apollinaire wrote that “from the imaginative standpoint *Fantômas* is one of the richest works that exist, and the descriptions are almost always exact,” and the poet Robert Desnos wrote that “at every corner of Paris, we rediscovered an episode of this terrific work; and, in the depths of our dreams, we re-envisioned the bend in the Seine where, under a red sky, a barge exploded, right next to a newspaper with headlines telling of the latest exploits of the Bonnot gang.”³ Both Apollinaire and Desnos stressed the collision between the incredible crimes of *Fantômas* and their familiar background. This dialectic imagination can be described as a conversion of the familiar setting into an uncanny space (producing a kind of Freudian *unheimlich*). It must be noted, however, that the fantastic imagination—encompassing the delirious *coups de théâtre*, the oddball cruelty of *Fantômas*, and his constant shifting of identity—is associated with a realistic aesthetics, as the novel cycle affords a panoramic view of Parisian social settings, a lowbrow *Comédie Humaine*. As a whole, the 32 novels offer an array of social types: aristocrats, bourgeois, politicians, lawyers, bankers, industrialists, shopkeepers, artists, officers, showmen, and, above all, thugs. The novels pay special attention to the tramps of the Parisian underworld: chiffonniers, con-men, prostitutes, pimps, crooks, and especially those bad boys known as “apaches” who frightened the Belle Époque imagination. There is a taste for the slums in the series, which not only recycles the stereotypes of the nineteenth century genre of the *mystères urbains* (“urban mysteries”) but also tries to depict the changes of its own time and to expose the hidden face of society in a realistic fashion. Themselves a product of French nineteenth-century modernity, Souvestre and Allain provided a whole new range of urban settings: a new social geography, new districts of leisure, new urban transports (such as underground trains and cars), and new types of jobs. All of these characteristics rejuvenated the heritage of the nineteenth-century urban imagination.

One of the characteristics of this realism is how it deals with actual events: we know the sinking of the *Gigantic* in the 32nd volume is a retelling of the *Titanic*, that Mr. Havard is a reference to the chief of police, Octave Hamard, and that Loincaré is a mock version of Raymond Poincaré (Dominique Kalifa). But we probably miss most of the contemporary allusions. Sometimes, the references are just contemporary jokes, as in a vaudeville comedy. In one adventure, the reporter, Fandor, pursues the arch-criminal but takes the wrong train because of the delays of the

³The Bonnot gang was a group of anarchist terrorists.

Paris Ouest (a running joke in comic newspapers). In another, a character cannot use matches because they are produced by the “Régie française” and don’t work, and so on.

The literary technique of referencing, embedding, and otherwise playing with newspaper culture was already common in nineteenth-century serial novels (the French “roman-feuilleton”). However, with their “Armoire aux trucs,” Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain went further than their predecessors. They intentionally piled up an incredible amount of press clippings to use them as a source for the stories. To understand how this practice works, we can turn to some examples of the adventures modeled after pieces of news. Fantômas, disguised as Doctor Chaleck, is arrested by Juve and Fandor, but when the latter try to bring him to the Police Office, he escapes by leaving fake arms in the hands of the two heroes.⁴ As unrealistic as it seems, in the “box of tricks” we find a press clipping offering the anecdote of a pickpocket who used the same prop, suggesting this absurd trick was taken from the press. In another episode, Juve shoots someone he assumes to be Fantômas, but his victim is in fact an actor playing in a movie. This episode is inspired by the mistake of a German tourist who alerted policeman of a kidnapping that was in fact part of a movie shooting.⁵ We can multiply delirious examples to underscore the paradoxical logic dominating this principle of journalistic intertextuality. The episode in which Fantômas liberates madmen who run through the city creating panic is a cross between an article presenting lunatics living freely in a French town and the story of a gas leak in a police station, which forced policemen to free all prisoners. And when Juve decides to wear spiked armbands to fight a boa, he uses the same devices chosen by Liabeuf, the famous cop killer.⁶ The goofier the inventions of the books, the more likely they are to be derived from a purportedly true newspaper story.

Le Pendu de Londres (Fantômas VII—The Hanged Man of London) offers a striking example of these fantastic rewritings of newspaper articles. The novel is inspired by the famous Crippen case (1910). Crippen was a British doctor suspected of having murdered his wife, and he was arrested while trying to flee with his mistress on a boat to America. Fantômas

⁴“But how the enchantress, who did not move the arms, had committed her crimes? The people guessed she had fake arms.”

⁵The article was called “A Kidnapping at Place d’Iena; It was a tragic episode ... for the cinematograph.”

⁶Some of these press clippings are reproduced in Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain, *Fantômas*, I, Paris: Robert Laffont, “Bouquins,” 2013.

replaces Crippen as the murderer, but the fictional machine adds new twists to this plot: *Fantômas* is one of the policemen too, and the British police is described as a secret society dominated by five detectives.⁷ These additions are adapted from other articles, as is the subplot in which a woman is murdered with a mattress criminally stuffed with arsenic (the original article told, under the title “The Poison bed,” the story of a family killed by a mattress *accidentally* stuffed with arsenic). As these details show, the novel can be described as a patchwork of news articles transformed and exaggerated to produce a monstrous world of complicated and perverted crimes.

To re-read the *Fantômas* stories in light of the press clippings of “the box of tricks” is to discover that novels we typically read as a series of fantastic plots are saturated with authentic news references. These news stories were freely rewritten, and sometimes it is difficult to know whether a press clipping is actually the origin of a *Fantômas* tale. But this uncertainty itself gives us important information. The choice to use press clippings as a source for their fiction illustrates the fact that these twentieth-century authors were still abiding by a realistic aesthetics. This realist technique, however, is associated with horror and monstrosity so that the news and press clipping gathered in “the box of tricks” become a sort of “horror cabinet,” a freak-show replete with hoaxes, humbugs, sensational news, and pulp stories that radically contradict the mimetic logics of realism. The paradox is that the source documents offering a patent of realism to these books are themselves unrealistic and extraordinary.

For the contemporary reader, these choices would have given a specific meaning to the novels, which may be slightly different from how we read them today. Although these anecdotes went through an important work of transformation, the contemporary readers may have perceived, in this maelstrom of intertextual references, the relationship with their own readings in the press. For them, *Fantômas* was likely saturated with the continuous but muted noise of media narratives. This created the paradoxical feeling that these stories were simultaneously familiar and totally incredible, the latter because of their masked arch-criminal, their portrayal of dramatic changes of identity, their extravagant *cliffhangers*, and their outrageous twists. This tension between a realistic atmosphere and the unreality of fantasy is lost on the readers of today, but it constitutes one of the

⁷This was inspired by another press clipping, but the original article, “La Sûreté à Londres” (“Police in London”), described a “council of the seven” as a special group of detectives.

most radical characteristics of *Fantômas*'s modernity. The world it refers to is not the real Belle Époque society, but its *alter ego*, a textual world produced by the mass of press articles and discourses. In this sense, *Fantômas* expresses the power of the mass media culture of the Belle Époque as a new paradigm of representation of the world.

The mimetic transposition, from realistic referent to media referent, however, is less a process of duplication than a process of deformation. The news stories transformed by the writers become unrecognizable, and this process of rewriting tells us something about the logics of fictionalization in the series. The character of Fantômas is a key function in this process, since he is the one who converts news into fiction. He transforms the news of a plagued ship into a mass bacteriologic crime, the accident of the *Titanic* into the voluntary sinking of the *Gigantic*, the collapse of a street after the digging of the metropolitan tunnels into the ingenious plot of a money transporter.⁸ Concentrating most of the events into his hands, converting accidents into mischief, Fantômas is the one who unifies intertexts of the press (representing reality), giving them the consistency of a novel. Disguise, all-important to the diegesis, is the metaphor for Fantômas' function of fictionalization and unification. In some novels, Fantômas plays five or six different characters (men or women, old and young, rich or poor), so that he seems to absorb all events and characters. Becoming at once an aristocrat and a criminal, or a judge and a janitor, he crosses class boundaries, concentrating the whole of social reality in his fantasized self. And above all he is the master of deception, the one who turns familiar objects into fantastic criminal devices: an office is changed into a deadly elevator; a living room is charged with electromagnets to immobilize his enemies; a character is smothered with a deadly mask. Fantômas appears as a grinning force of fictionalization.

FICTION AS SPECTACLE

The role played by the press clippings in the creation of the books can help us to understand this process of fictionalization. The titles of the folders and files ("box of tricks," "tricks and twists") indicate that these articles were used by the writers as props for their tricks: many of them were devoted to events associated with the techniques of a conjuror.

⁸The real incident happened in 1899 between the Avenue Friedland and the Champs Élysées.

In addition to the aforementioned case of the pickpocket's fake arms, we find one article describing how to rebuff burglars by plugging a phonograph to the doorknob and another explaining how the spiritualists created fake spectral photographs. Further, the collection contains a series of handwritten notes by the authors listing the addresses of houses with two exits, sketching mechanical apparatuses designed to trap or kill, and describing a technique to conceive a "window-grid made of wood with electroplating; it looks like iron, but can be cut with a knife."⁹ All these documents can be seen as proofs that the authors conceived their books the same way a magician would prepare his show, with false bottoms and trapped mechanisms. It is no surprise to find in the "box of tricks" a complete catalog of the "Maison Horace Hurm et Prevost," a shop that specialized in prestidigitation, offering the "prices of magic devices" such as "Siamese handcuffs," an "articulated skeleton," a "holder for flying candles," an "obedient padlock," and a complete set of traps (circular or square, with or without lever, etc.).¹⁰ The presence of this catalog among the press clippings and notes shows us the importance of prestidigitation in the writers' imagination. The deceptions conceived by Fantômas, whether a fake hanging with an ingested tube, a real decapitation for an actress on stage, or corpses used as dummies, are the macabre props of a magical show.

Like the other devices and tricks gathered in the authors' folder, the Horace Hurm's catalog can be interpreted as a symptom of the specific relationship between the novels and their referents. They adhere to a form of paradoxical realism. As do the realists Gustave Flaubert and Emile Zola, Souvestre and Allain document themselves and base their fiction on authentic materials; however, their materials are collected from the fields of spectacle and illusionism, in a way that contradicts the very idea of realism. This contradiction can be seen as a form of dialectics between a dominant aesthetic (even if declining in highbrow culture, realism was still a strong model in popular culture) and new manners of understanding and consuming fiction, producing a new relationship with reality. This is the reason why the authors gathered documents from prestidigitation, riggings, and spectacular events. Their cultural references are not the ones of legitimate literature, but those of show business, vaudeville, and circus. A critic from the Catholic

⁹The trick will be used in *La Fille de Fantômas* (*Fantômas VIII, The Daughter of Fantômas*).

¹⁰"Liste rectificative des prix de nos appareils de prestidigitation, fabriqués et vendus par Horace Hurm et Prevost, ancienne maison de Vere," 1911.

press identified early this specific element of their work. Two years before *Fantômas*, he described *Le Rour*, their first novel, in *Revue des lectures* as “absurd, immoral, and as far from literature as the nonsensical spiel of a circus conjuror.”¹¹ But if, for this critic, Souvestre and Allain created something different from *literature* (and by this he meant legitimate literature), what does “spiel literature” or “circus literature” mean?

The first thing we can notice is the fact that the culture of entertainment is central in *Fantômas*. From flea circus showmen to Barzum Circus (a clear reference to Barnum, the American entertainer), via movie actors, theater comedians, stage managers, singers, dancers, and boxers, the references to spectacle have a strong metatextual dimension, particularly if we compare them to the relative scarcity of references to established and revered art forms. Some stories give priority to spectacle: *Le Train perdu* (*Fantômas XXI, The Lost Train*) narrates the crimes of Fantômas on a circus train; *L'Assassin de Lady Beltham* (*Fantômas XVIII, The Murder of Lady Beltham*) describes the atmosphere of the popular theater in Paris' Northern districts; and one of the main tricks of the first novel resides in a theatrical inversion, with the decapitation of the comedian Valgrand, a Fantômas impersonator, on stage. In a spectacular finale, the last volume of the series, *La Fin de Fantômas* (*XXXII, The End of Fantômas*), offers no less than four episodes playing with the entertainment culture. In one, all the actors in a theatrical performance turn out to be henchmen of Fantômas and assault the audience; in another, a tricked amusement at a funfair is used to fleece the customers; yet another shows Fantômas attacking the czar at the opera; and in the last, when Juve shows a film of an actor impersonating Fantômas to a policemen assembly, Fantômas literally bursts through the screen and shoots the audience.

A scene from the second volume of *Fantômas* adventures (*Juve contre Fantômas, Juve Against Fantômas*) expresses the intersection of novels and spectacle in the popular culture of the Belle Époque. Walking along the street, Juve and Fandor, the nemesis of Fantômas, come across a Montmartre fair. After passing barracks offering “the prettiest woman in the world and also the fattest, who weighs a trifle over 600 pounds and possibly more,” “the rare and weird sight of a black from Abyssinia whose splendid ebony hide has been tattooed in white” and “a young girl of scarcely fourteen summers” who “will astound you by entering the cage of the ferocious beasts,” they hear this metaleptic announcement:

¹¹ (*Revue des lectures*, 1909 05).

You will also see, reproduced in the most stirring and life-like manner, all the details of the mysterious murder which at this moment engages public interest and keeps the police on tenter-hooks. The crime at the Cité Frochot, with the murdered woman, the Empire clock, and the extinguished candle: all the accessories in full, including the collapse of the elevator into the sewer. The show is beginning! It has begun!

We can read this scene as what Dominique Maingueneau calls a paratopy: a space, *inside* the novel which is a metaphor for the dialectic position of the writers, that is, how they see themselves at the margins of the established value system of literature of the time (Maingueneau). If Souvestre and Allain represent the events of their novel in a sideshow, it is because they see themselves not as writers but as entertainers. The poor setting of the “Montmartre Fête” expresses their conscious participation in a popular culture far away from any legitimate field of culture. In an inscription to Henriette Kistler, his lover, on one of the volumes of the series, Pierre Souvestre wrote, “may this modern engraving! ... and all that is behind it, let you buy a lot of ... ancient engravings,” emphasizing the difference between his industrial work and established art.¹²

Recognizing their illegitimacy, Souvestre and Allain represented themselves as a cheapjack of the Montmartre Fete, promising murders and horrors, and transforming the lurid news into a dreadful spectacle—which is exactly what they offered in their books. The style of the book itself evokes something of a claptrap, with its depictions of Fantômas as “Genius of Crime” and “King of Slaughter! Master of Terror!” The famous opening of the novel series, *Fantômas*, can be described as a series of catchphrases from an advertisement:

- “Fantômas!
- What did you say?
- I said ... Fantômas.
- What does it mean?
- Nothing ... and everything!
- But, what is it?
- Nobody, and yet somebody!
- But finally, what does this somebody do?
- He terrorizes!!!”

¹²2 février 1911 (Archives Bernard).

This humbug style, close to the advertising aesthetics of the Belle Époque, shows how the authors considered popular literature as commercial entertainment, borrowing techniques from advertisement, sideshows, and claptraps. Such inflated sentences promised to give the readers the thrills they expected when they bought the book. The spiel associates the aesthetics of the novel with a culture of entertainment and consumption. This is why the novels so often described their world as a theater. When Juve and Fandor are trapped in the office-turned-lift of the fake Doctor Chaleck, Juve exclaims “We are in a house tricked like the scenery of the Châtelet theater” (II, *Juve contre Fantômas, Juve Against Fantômas*). In other books we read sentences such as, “I am not the kind of man to build theatre plots!” (IV, *L’agent secret, The Secret Agent*) and “this part of the wood had something unreal, fantastical, as in a theatrical prop” (VI, *Le Policier Apache, The Gangster Policeman*). These references to the theater make explicit the specificity of the writer-reader pact that sustains the series. Authors do not hide the artificiality of the plots, their “Grand Guignol” logics. But they, too, offer the consistency of the aesthetics of attraction and spectacle. Maybe the reader does not really believe in these fictions of crime and underworlds, but he takes pleasure in the skills of the artists—and by this we mean at the same time the originality of the writers, Souvestre and Allain, and the criminal ingenuity of Fantômas.

The writer-reader pact transforms the suspension of disbelief. The reader’s interest in the text is not a question of verisimilitude (in realistic terms) but of spectacular thrills and pleasure. He agrees to play the game of fiction, not because it is convincing but because it is astounding or dazzling. This is the reason why the narrative structure is relatively indifferent to the superstructure of a coherent overarching plot, but concentrates on the sensational episodes and the accelerated rhythm of the events. The logics here is of a series of showstoppers, and the writers don’t care if there are weak parts or plot holes between these cliffhangers. This narrative structure gives the feeling of a vaudeville show with its series of numbers ordered with a principle of variation and gradation. And the efficiency of these effects is more important than any question of rationality or consistency. Robert Desnos had perfectly understood it when he adapted *Fantômas* to a radio drama in 1933, *The Great Lament of Fantômas*, offering 32 terrible peak-scenes which summarized the spirit of the whole series as a somnambulistic nightmare.

These events reveal a propensity for sensational stagings and a delight in eccentric props: one character is literally killed on stage, another wakes

up in a room full of decomposing bodies; a cab driven by a corpse rolls over the streets of Paris, an innocent girl is scalped alive with an ironer, and another one is killed by a *boa constrictor*. There is something of a horror-show spirit here, horrifying and inventive at the same time. The event does not have to be verisimilar; it has to be extraordinary, which is the contrary to realistic verisimilitude.

Now we can understand the references to theater as a way to emphasize the unrealism of an event. They do not break the suspension of disbelief but produce suspense on a spectacular, non-realistic basis: the pleasure of the reader is in trying to guess what will be the next horrific attraction, and this expectation produces thrills.

“I KNOW WELL, BUT NONETHELESS”

Fantômas produces a shift from illusion as *make-believe* to illusion as a spectacular pleasure. This is why he is a kind of magician. When we see a magic show, we don't *believe* in the tricks of the prestidigitator, and we know that they are only illusion. But we admire the fact that he is able to produce illusion and that he can hide the trick. What we like is the technical *tour-de-force*. Nevertheless, the perfection of the trick (the multiplication of the doves, the disappearance of the woman from the box, etc.) gives us the feeling of the quasi-possibility of the event, and even if we know there is a deception, we are stunned by the illusion and want to believe in it nonetheless (Simon During). To describe this effect, Octave Mannoni uses the sentence “je sais bien mais quand même” (“I know well, but nonetheless”).¹³ He insists on the fact that in many cultural activities, our relationship with the event and the belief associated with it obey to the logics of the “I know well, but nonetheless” statement. When we perform superstitious actions, when we read a horoscope, and even when we watch a theatrical performance, we acknowledge these things to be fake, but we partially believe in them “nonetheless.” For Mannoni, the mechanism is often associated with a third party who is supposed to really believe in it—the janitor reading the horoscope, the children frightened by the Big Bad Wolf, and others. They play the part of our own belief, exteriorized in someone else, however, this credulity becomes recognizable as *naïveté*.

¹³See also Robert Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture; Illusions Without Owners*, London, New York, Verso, 2014.

The way *Fantômas* simultaneously plays with realistic techniques and reveals its artifices seems to produce something of a mechanism of “I know well, but nonetheless.” Souvestre and Allain try to provoke terror, but they exhibit the artifices with exaggerations and fictional metaphors, insisting on a ludic dimension. This produces an effect of the *grotesque*, inviting the reader to participate in and at the same time to keep his/her distance from the story at the same time. The series creates a literary show, and *Fantômas* is a devilish entertainer. The pleasure of the game of fiction, however, does not destroy totally the relationship with reality. The exhibition of the make-believe mechanisms is associated with horrific events and realistic Parisian settings. The delirious tricks of the magician *Fantômas* are rooted in authentic events, and the game of fiction expresses its relationship with the familiar reality of the reader.

We recognize here, again, settings that were typical of the culture of the Belle Époque, such as the Grand Guignol, the Parisian theater where people witnessed horrifying plays, with mad scientists, bloody slaughters, and tortured females. People went there to be frightened and laugh at the same time, and couples often came together to play the game of the frightened girl and the protective male (“I know well, but nonetheless”). Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain seemed to have a taste for this kind of entertainment. For example, Marcel Allain kept a series of documents and souvenirs about the *Cabaret du Néant*, a cabaret where people were invited to take *bières* (French word for both beers and coffins) on coffin tables in a place full of skeletons and corpses, while watching a magic show in which ghosts appeared and one spectator was transformed into a skeleton. Here again, the public was there to enjoy a spectacle of prestidigitation, but some room was left, through this mock-gothic atmosphere, for trouble and anguish.

There are clear connections between the aesthetics of *Fantômas* and this mock-gothic *Cabaret du néant*. Souvestre and Allain converted true crimes into a spectacle of prestidigitation and the familiar settings of Paris into a huge Luna Park of terror. In their work, the modern city can become a place for fun, and criminal settings can be converted into props for entertainment, because the real referent of the series is not the world but the mass of journalistic intertexts: popular journal articles, true crime papers, “faits divers,” and so on. These journalistic productions interact with other genres, such as crime fiction, the nineteenth-century urban mystery, the *romans-feuilleton*, the theatrical melodrama, and comic stories of gendarmes and lads. And yet, they are constructed discourses with their own conventions, and their discursive world is partially autonomous

from the reality they describe, because it is built according to their own discursive rules. *Fantômas* is a byproduct of media culture and inherits media culture's tendency to obtrude on reality itself and convert it into a net of discourses. To read about a crime in a newspaper is not to learn the truth about this event but to follow something which is half information and half spectacle and which is meant as daily entertainment.

The exaggeration of the crimes committed is made possible by this massive circulation of discourses in the media and their increasing detachment from reality. They can be overdone because they are perceived as autonomous materials, textual conventions, and can be used as props for fiction. Now we can understand the relationship with fiction, terror, crime, and spectacle in the series. "I know well, but nonetheless:" "I know well" that the crimes of *Fantômas* are just an exaggeration of journalistic texts and criminal discourses, far away from any real referent, "but nonetheless" his crimes and his world resonate with mine, and my pleasure is to feel that the delirious acts of the "master of terror" are not totally disconnected from reality. And if Surrealists used *Fantômas* as a *kitsch* counterculture tool and championed its naive expression of the unconscious, it was because they insisted on the "I know well," thinking that popular readers were carried by the "but nonetheless" side—the terror, the thrills—even if these readers were probably less naïve than they thought.

FANTÔMAS OR THE SPECTACLE OF MODERN CONSUMPTION

There is no contradiction in the association of realistic techniques with an aesthetics of the spectacular. In fact, this tension characterized an important part of the culture of the time, such as "théâtre de machine," "théâtre à trucs," and other spectacular theaters, with their sets reproducing perfectly impressive panoramas or monuments, with their animals and machines on stage, and their extraordinary machineries: the public did not attend these attractions to see mimetic perfection, the illusion of truth, but for the pleasure of admiring their technical prowess (Isabelle Moindrot). It was the same pleasure felt by the first spectators of cinema, when it was still an attraction, and even later, when it was perceived as a media dispensing thrills (Ben Singer): the spectators liked the tension between the hyperrealism of the moving pictures and the possibilities cinema offered for unrestrained imagination to unfold. A filmmaker such as Victorin Jasset, in his cinematographic series devoted to characters such as Nick Carter or Zigomar, aims to recreate the exact same relationship to

fiction. In his spectacular cinema, spectators can admire the tricks of the criminal and those of the filmmaker in the same way the reader looked at those of *Fantômas* and its authors, and she is interested simultaneously in the thrilling plot and the way in which this illusion is produced. This proximity may explain why *Fantômas* was adapted to cinema by Louis Feuillade in 1913 when Gaumont decided to produce a crime series. The success of nineteenth-century spectacular culture has often been associated with the rise of an urban and industrial society and the values it carried: technology, speed, visual and audible stimulation (Crary). These tastes of the Belle Époque emerged from the nineteenth-century *flâneur* culture that determined a new set of leisure and consumption practices associated with the new mass culture (Schwartz). The mimetic medias are multiplied as commodities: photography,¹⁴ the kinoscope, the cinematograph, the phonograph, and wax cylinders (as the ones used by Souvestre and Allain to write their books) were all used in sideshows, vaudeville, music-hall, and so on. Now we see the relationship existing between *Fantômas* and this culture of the distraction (as *sensory* distraction), as the fast rhythm of the story, the paratactic structure of the plot, and the logic of the cliff-hanger are closely related with the new urban culture.

With its use of newspaper sources and its interest in current events, *Fantômas* highlights the conspicuous signs of modernity. Its world is characterized by a picturesque modernity, with a fight on the Eiffel tower, car chases, or a shadowing in the subway. And, like many other popular stories of the time, the series is associated with an *ostensive* modernity. Electricity, new technologies, fast vehicles, and extraordinary consumer goods blend together in an image of a gilded age, inviting readers to marvel at this era filled with new commodities. *Fantômas* shares this enchantment with other criminal or adventure series of the Belle Époque: the “eccentric travels” of Paul d’Ivoi with their fantastic planes, submarine and death rays; the snobbish adventures of Arsène Lupin, the “Gentleman robber” created by Maurice Leblanc; the electric world of Tipp Walter, (one of) the “French Nick Carters.” In all these series, we discover the same association between wealth and modernity that characterizes the world of *Fantômas*.

Combining an image of modernity and leisure, the world of *Fantômas* seems to be devoted to fantastic entertainment. *Fantômas* explores all the spaces of bourgeois leisure: casinos (X, *La Main coupée*, *The Severed*

¹⁴There are of course references to photography and photographers appear in *Fantômas*, for example, in *Le Pendu de Londres* (VII, *The Hanged Man of London*).

Hand), cruises (VII, *La Fille de Fantômas, The Daughter of Fantômas*, and XXXII, *La Fin de Fantômas, The End of Fantômas*), hippodromes (XXIV, *Le Jockey masqué, The Masked jockey*), nightclubs (V, *Un Roi prisonnier de Fantômas, A King Kidnapped by Fantômas*), and so on. Each time, however, Fantômas blows up the place and converts the party into a huge mass slaughter. The novel, *Le Fiacre de nuit* (IX, *The Night Cab*), gives a striking example of this particular relationship with spectacular modernity. A large part of the novel takes place in a *Grand Magasin*, the *Paris-Galleries*. Even if these luxury stores had existed for a long time (the first, *Le Bon Marché*, was built by Boucicaut in 1872), in this period they had become the central place of Parisian consumption, one of the main attractions of the commodified culture that rose as the main paradigm of the new consumer society of the beginning of twentieth century. In *The Night Cab*, Fantômas believes that the Director of the *Paris-Galerie* kidnapped a saleswoman (who is, in fact, the daughter of Fantômas) to seduce her. The “Messenger of Evil” thus decides to force him to set her free by trapping all the Grand Magasin: he puts razor blades in shoes, vitriol in perfume bottles, poison in gloves, and throws down a huge crystal chandelier on the consumers and, at the end, breaks down the monumental marble double stairs, killing dozens of people. We see how the novel plays at the same time with the fantasized pleasure of consumption in a place where goods are displayed and desired. And in destroying everything, Fantômas expresses the pleasure of consumption as consummation. The burst of violence is not an aggression against commodity culture: Fantômas is not a revolutionary (he kills in *Le Magistrat cambrioleur* [XII, *The Burglar Judge*] one of his henchmen because he has become too socialist for him). On the contrary, if he steals and destroys goods it is because the pleasure of consumption is related here to a dynamics of predation and destruction. A desire for the goods mingles with the pleasure of squandering, which is associated with the act of buying. When Fantômas tries to steal the gold from the dome of the Invalides monument, when he steals all the money from the Monaco casino, when he commits crimes in Biarritz Hotels or uses the identity of a banker to take as much money as he can, he appears as the repressed (and frightening) expression of modern consumption.

SERIAL FICTION, CONSUMPTION, AND MAKE-BELIEVE

If the *Fantômas* series can express new modes of consumption and entertainment, it is because it appears at a turning point in the history of popular fiction and publishing. Before *Fantômas*, most popular stories were published in installments in newspapers. This stopped with *Fantômas* and other fictions offered by the publisher Arthème Fayard. Novels came in full length, but were grouped in publishers' series. This change of publishing practices transformed how fictions were produced, read, and how they referred to the world. Published in newspapers, the fiction in installments interacted with other texts of the media (news, chronicles) and was read as a journalistic rubric between others. The logic of installments facilitated generic mixture, because of the size of the stories and their need to seduce different readerships. The complete novels published in books adhered to radically different aesthetics: the publishers' series needed to retain their consumers and invited them to buy new items. So they strove to produce serial consistency through standardized formats and prices (corresponding to specific modes of consumption), generic unities (adventure, romance, crime fiction), types of readers (children, women, male readers), and reoccurring characters. All of these practices produced serial consistency, influencing how texts were written and read. Writers obeyed to structural and thematic constraints, and readers had specific expectations which determined their reception of textual meanings and hierarchies. This movement toward consistency can be interpreted as a process of standardization of texts and production. With the rise of publishers' series and uniform formats, authors became more and more executants obeying the publishers' rules. In their contract with Arthème Fayard, Souvestre and Allain agreed to write one book a month, with no guarantee that they would keep the series if the publisher was not satisfied with it. Even the idea of a recurring character seems to have been decided by Arthème Fayard with the goal of retaining consumers. Souvestre and Allain belonged to a new generation of authors working within a standardized culture: they followed the format of the "Livre Populaire" (the publisher series), obeyed the rules of the criminal fiction, and accepted the principle of a recurring character as a way to inscribe this principle of standardization in the diegesis.

In accordance with this process of standardization, the authors were encouraged to adapt to the serialized conventions associated with the media context and to refer principally to intertextual and architextual reali-

ties (Genette).¹⁵ The consumer reads these standardized novels with the rules of the series in mind. The extratextual world is mediated by the serial conventions of the architexts on which the text is built. The paradox of this serial logic is that it establishes the verisimilitude of the text and, at the same time, exhibits its artifice. The pleasure of the regular reader is increased by his/her capacity to recognize the rules of the game and the stereotypes associated with it (Baroni): he knows that some characters can, in fact, be Fantômas, because he is accustomed with the principle of disguise and deception. He guesses the moment when Fantômas will commit a crime and takes pleasure from one crime by comparing it with the others. In the serial game of make-believe, his position is at the same time *outside* of the game (he constantly identifies recognizable serial features, intertextual scenarios,¹⁶ and stereotypes as the rules of the series) and *inside* of it (the purpose of the interpreting process is to produce suspense and thrills). "He knows well," and it is *because* he knows well that "nonetheless" he takes pleasure in discovering each new horrific act of Fantômas and each new fiction by which Souvestre and Allain offer a caricatured version of actuality.

The process of standardization, however, did more than influence the authors' and the readers' relationship with stereotypes and architexts. It engineered a new value for the text, a new function for the media, a new way to read, and a new mimetic logic. Extremely cheap (65c, some 2.30 dollars of today), the book became a disposable good. The consumer could buy it only for fun. Being standardized, the publishers' series presented itself as a product line with an illustrated cover offering promises of variations. In other words, the books themselves express the rise of the consumer society and its redefinition of culture. These throwaway books offered disposable pleasure, indifferent to any cultural or moral benefit. Becoming pure entertainment, popular fiction lost the political, moral, or educative function it still kept in many serial fictions of the nineteenth century. It did not even *pretend* to offer any benefits, any analysis of the manners of the time (as in the "roman de moeurs"), of the movements of the heart (as in the melodramatic and sentimental novel), of the underworld of the urban society (as in the urban mystery or the "fictions judiciaires"), or of faraway places (as in adventure fiction). It offered simply the crimes of a fantastic and

¹⁵For Gérard Genette, the architext refers to transcendent categories (literary genres, types of discourse, generic structures, etc.).

¹⁶For Umberto Eco, an intertextual scenario is a stereotyped narrative structure of the text which let the reader infer the subsequent sequence. U. Eco, *Lector in fabula*, Paris: Le Livre de poche, 1985.

impossible arch-criminal converting reality (press clippings, new technologies, and new practices of consumption) into a fun playhouse. As we can see, the process of serialization transformed the relationship between text and reality. Real events became raw material for entertainment, because the series produced its own intertextual and architextual referents and because the media was conceived to produce not news or knowledge but disposable fun. This can explain the process of exaggeration and fictionalization of real events, as a way to insist on the rupture from the previous forms of fiction and to illustrate the logic of entertainments and thrills.

Fantômas initiates a new era of popular fiction, an era of pleasure and entertainment without any alleged political, educative, or moral value associated with the text. Rather than hide its nature as a disposable good, the book embraces its lowbrow, ephemeral status and therefore changes radically how fiction is supposed to refer to the world. At the peak of the popularity of *Fantômas*, the referent of the novel shifts from reality to its textual recreation through the intertextual webs of serial genre fiction and that spun across sensational newspapers. The referents of the novels are these texts, offering only a mediated relationship to reality. The consequence is that the contemporary world is at the same time close to the reader (because it plays with news, familiar events, and actual places) and distant from him (because it is entirely rebuilt by intertexts and serial conventions). This explains the logic of exaggeration that characterizes the series in its dynamic portrayal of competition, seduction, and showmanship. For the consumer-reader, what is important is the pleasure of the game of terror and thrills, like in a Grand Guignol play or a magic show. And if the use of stereotypes, props, and tricks of the magician weakens the realistic verisimilitude, they do not decrease the reader's pleasure. On the contrary, that pleasure is produced by the reader's identification of the serial conventions and the writers' playful reinvention of them, an interplay of repetition and innovation that produces suspense and surprise. The grotesque episodes of *Fantômas*, the overdone reformulation of press events or crime fiction stereotypes, are a way to play with the expectations of the reader. Like a game with rules, the novel insists on the logics of entertainment, play, and surprise. It is very close to some spectacular practices of the time, such as Grand Guignol or spectacular theater and cinema.

Nevertheless, this substitution of a fictional and spectacular logic for reality does not mean the disappearance of all extratextual significance. On the contrary, the poetics of *Fantômas* can be seen *in itself* as a discourse on modernity. It emphasizes the fact that for a fiction related to a global media culture, the perception of reality is mediated by a series of

discourses and that, like a textual and spectacular building, actual events can be used as materials for entertainment. Thus, the fear and thrills the reader feels are only indirectly related to reality, because they are mediated by the logic of seriality and its production of expectations and surprises. It reveals that objects of these new media are the dynamics of consumption. These cheap books were disposable goods, consumed to produce pleasure, and they represented a society of consumption and pleasure. This explains the characteristics of the *Fantômas* universe: it is a world of ostentatious signs replete with machines, cars, electricity, new technologies, and media. The stories are set in exotic places of wealth and entertainment, such as casinos and Grands Magasins. These places are opposed to those of the underworld, where pleasure is always transgressive. And if all of these pleasures are regularly destroyed, it is also because the books themselves are throwaway goods and consumption is perceived as a process of waste. If *Fantômas* can describe the rise of these new practices that would dominate the twentieth century—consumption, entertainment, and media culture—it is because the series is, in its own industrial and creative processes, in its own poetics, a symptom of these cultural changes.

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Sawing People in Half: Sensationalist Magic Tricks and the Role of Women on Stage in the Early Twentieth Century

Katharina Rein

Magic has always had a place in human societies as a form of entertainment: in ancient temples, priests employed hydraulic, mechanical and optical devices to let gods and demons appear; itinerant jugglers entertained audiences with the cups and balls and swallowed swords in public squares in the medieval and early modern period. “Jugglers,” as performers of sleight-of-hand were called from about the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries,¹ were traditionally members of traveling fairs, along with acrobats, fortune tellers and other show people. It was in the mid-nineteenth century that magic became modernized, as significant changes in the magicians’ social status as well as in their performance practices occurred. A new kind of illusionism developed, which revolutionized theatrical conjuring in Europe as well as

¹At that time, the terms “conjurer,” “magician,” “necromancer,” and “wizard” were negatively connoted. They were used more or less synonymously to refer to a person practicing black magic in alliance with the devil, not a sleight-of-hand-performer (Clarke, *Annals of Conjuring* 57–58).

K. Rein (✉)

International Research Institute for Cultural Techniques and Media Philosophy
(Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie)
of the Bauhaus-University Weimar, Berlin, Germany

in the USA, and which marked the beginning of what is today remembered as stage magic's "Golden Age." Performers actively shook off the image of the dubious carnival conjurers of earlier centuries, who were regarded as charlatans or associated with uncanny supernatural powers. Now, magicians explicitly stressed the illusory character of their performances,² while appearing as eloquent entertainers, charming their bourgeois audiences on elegantly decorated stages in theaters and opera houses. They preferred to call themselves "prestidigitators"³ and relied on comparatively minimalist stage sets and equipment—a marked change from the dazzling arrays of shiny apparatuses used by magicians of earlier times. Dropping the lavish, often historical, costumes sported by their predecessors, magicians in the Victorian era appeared as gentlemen and ladies—although female magicians were rare—wearing formal evening dress.⁴ At the same time, a heightened self-reflection of theatrical conjuring commenced as magicians began to write about their trade, publish exposés of illusions and explore magic history. By doing so, they created and addressed a more magic-savvy audience, and no longer claimed to fool uneducated spectators. However, having established their profession's good reputation, conjurers soon faced another challenge as new forms of evening entertainment emerged. Most notably, cinema quickly grew into a form of art as well as into the twentieth century's most popular form of entertainment, ushering in the beginning of the "Golden Age" of cinema and ending that of theatrical conjuring. Partly in response to this strong competition, magicians of the early twentieth century increasingly embraced new, sensational feats, often inspired by circus acts. These focused on the creation of suspense by staging a (mortal) danger for the performers and its subsequent relief in their miraculous restoration to good health.

²Despite these claims, magicians kept referencing the occult, exotic and supernatural in their performances. Magic practice is therefore not to be regarded as opposed to or free of these themes. The abandonment of claims of supernatural abilities, however, is an essential difference to magicians of earlier centuries.

³The grandiose term "prestidigitateurs" was coined by French illusionist Jules de Rovère in 1815, in an attempt to improve the image of his profession. While Stefan Alzaris associates it with the French terms *prestige*, from Latin *praestigium*—"artifice, illusion" (34), it is more commonly regarded as a combination of the Italian *presto*—"quick" and the Latin *digiti*—"fingers." The latter etymology is given by Bart Whaley (2: 534) and is also found in O. Fischer (58) and Robert-Houdin (*Comment on devient sorcier* 146). The term was used in the French- and English-speaking countries until about 1900, when it was discarded as being too pretentious (Whaley 2: 534).

⁴The German magician Wiljaba Frikell (1817/1818–1903) is credited with being the first to wear formal evening dress onstage around 1830 (Price 75).

In this chapter, I will first give an overview of the sensationalist and daring acts in the entertainment business of the early twentieth century. Second, I will focus on a specific illusion, which became a sensation in the 1920s and is, until today, the most popular as well as the most copied magic trick: the one commonly referred to as “Sawing a Woman in Half.”⁵ The feat is particularly interesting in terms of cultural history within the context of the First World War and the Women’s Rights Movement—two world-changing events, which, as I argue (building on Steinmeyer’s claims), both had an impact on the illusion itself as well as on its immense, surprising success. According to magic historian and illusion designer Jim Steinmeyer, “Sawing Through a Woman” (as the illusion’s first version was called) can be regarded as the beginning of a new era in the history of stage magic (*Hiding the Elephant* 295). It popularized the combination of technology and violence spread by the First World War and broke with the gentler kind of magic of the Victorian era—a time of greater stability and continuity than the early twentieth century. In addition, “Sawing Through a Woman” seized upon motifs established in the genre of the melodrama on theater stages (Steinmeyer, “Above and Beneath the Saw” 94–98), which were at the time also picked up by the young and rapidly growing Hollywood film industry. Finally, I will introduce the ethnographic concept of initiation rites and show why the sawing illusion as well as other daredevil acts can be interpreted as modern derivatives of initiation rites. I will demonstrate that, being one of the first illusions featuring a female assistant in a very prominent—and violent—role, “Sawing Through a Woman” can be understood as an initiation of women into society because it re-enacts the symbolic death and resurrection described by Arnold van Gennep as an essential component of initiation rites. It can also be linked to Joseph Campbell’s hero’s journey, and can thus be interpreted as an act of female empowerment onstage as well as outside the theater. Roughly coinciding with the introduction of women’s suffrage (1920 in the USA, 1918 in the UK),⁶ “Sawing Through a Woman” was part of a larger-scale change of the social status of women, of which the equalization of voting rights was a political manifestation. This change was also visible in entertainment business in general, as will be demonstrated by selected examples from show business.

⁵ Although “Sawing a Woman in Halves” would be the correct designation, I am using “Sawing a Woman in Half,” which is the common name for this illusion in magicians’ jargon.

⁶ In 1918 limited suffrage was introduced in the UK. Ten years later the vote was given to all women over the age of 21, so that men and women gained equal suffrage.

ESCAPE ARTISTS AND BULLET-CATCHERS—SENSATIONALIST ENTERTAINMENT

Illusions in which performers were seemingly burned or otherwise injured, swallowed swords, stones, hot tar and other not digestible items existed long before the nineteenth century. For instance, the “decapitation” illusion dates back to antiquity, allegedly performed to illustrate John the Baptist’s beheading in 876 AD (North 36). Its first detailed description is found in one of the first conjuring books, Reginald Scot’s *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* from 1584. To name a more recent example, the Frenchman Ivan Chabert, alias The Fire King (1792–1859), climbed into an oversized oven during his London show in 1818, holding two raw steaks in his hands. When he came back out after a while, the steaks were well done, while he himself was still “raw,” as Ricky Jay put it (Jay 259). The Fire King’s show also included the ingestion of boiling oil, melted lead, burning charcoal and other such substances. The popularity of illusions “which dismembered, disappeared or distorted human bodies” (North 36) persisted throughout the nineteenth century. However, I want to argue that the kind of perilous acts that developed after the First World War were distinctly different in nature.

The experiences of the First World War seem to have heightened the amount of sensationalist violence in entertainment in general: Silent film picked up the melodrama, a genre that had enjoyed popularity on Victorian theater stages, and reproduced its stereotypical pattern of putting the female lead character in danger, and having her male lover save her in the last moment so they could pose as the stereotypical romantic couple. For example, David Wark Griffith’s *Way Down East* (USA, 1920), an adaptation of Lottie Blair Parker’s melodramatic play written in 1897, culminates in the heroine lying unconsciously on an ice floe, drifting toward a waterfall. Her lover then rescues her, jumping from ice floe to ice floe in order to reach her just in time to prevent her from falling into the abyss. In the final scene of the film, he marries her despite her questionable social status as an outcast single mother. The promotional poster showed the hero carrying a lady in a scarlet dress away from the waterfall, thus evidencing that there were no concerns about spoiling the suspense because a climactic scene like this was typical of the genre.

About the same time, spectacular and daring feats enjoyed high popularity in the circus: The famous “human cannonballs” re-emerged in the circus ring—an act consisting of an acrobat being ejected from a large

cannon, accompanied by a bang and smoke effects, catching a trapeze below the tent-roof or landing in a safety net. The first person to undergo this procedure was the acrobat and parachutist George Loyal, using a catapulting system devised and patented by the daredevil The Great Farini (William Leonard Hunt, 1838–1929). But it was a young woman who became the first star on the firmament of “human cannonballs:” Zazel, The Human Projectile (Rosa Richter, 1862–1922), was first catapulted out of a suspended cannon by Farini at the Royal Aquarium in London in 1877, at the age of 14. She later appeared in P.T. Barnum’s circus in the USA. After falling from a high wire and suffering a spinal fracture, Zazel retired from show business in 1891 (Jay, *Celebrations* 59). At first, the popularity of “human cannonballs” decreased around 1900, when a new sensation, the “Looping the Loop” stunt on a bicycle, appeared. In this act, the performer rode a bicycle along a track, which formed a loop, rendering the cyclist upside down for a moment (Jando 490). Performers did not hesitate to spice up this stunt by the use of automobiles—an act first performed by another woman, the Parisian Mlle. Mauricia de Tiers in the Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1905 (Jando 490). Dominique Jando wrote about this “extraordinary stunt in more than one aspect: It was spectacular, it was modern, and it was performed by a thoroughly modern, ‘liberated’ woman” (490). This was a woman pursuing interests with a male connotation—daredevilry and technology—thus representing female emancipation from traditional roles. In the post-war period, the “human cannonball” returned to the rings, reintroduced by the Zacchini family, whose name became synonymous with circus daredevilry in the twentieth century, using larger, louder and more powerful cannons than ever before, some of which could even eject two people at once.

Daredevilry also found its way into magic shows of that time.⁷ For instance, inspired by its success in circuses, the “human cannonball” was also performed by magicians: around 1920, Howard Thurston (1869–1936) shot a girl out of a cannon and into a nest of three boxes suspended above the spectators’ heads (Thurston 121). He was subsequently sued by his colleague Horace Goldin (Hyman E. Goldstein, 1873–1939) (prior to their collaboration on the “Sawing a Woman in Half,”) who had acquired a patent on a similar illusion (Steinmeyer, *The Last Greatest Magician in the World* 240). Starting in 1924, The Great Leon (Leon Levy, 1876–1951), who claimed to have

⁷ On daredevil acts on the magicians’ stages, see Steinmeyer, “Chains, Blades, Bullets, and Fire.”

invented his own version of the “Sawing a Woman in Half” (Zweers 40–41), performed his “Silent Weird Gun” illusion. His equally female “human cannonball,” Lillian White, a Hollywood stuntwoman and a well-known daredevil, was shot from a “giant steel monster” of a cannon (Caveney, *The Great Leon* 84) and seemingly penetrated a thick metal plate in flight before landing in a canvas net at the end of the building.⁸

In addition, another kind of sensational performance became highly popular in the early twentieth century: the escape act. After a relatively unsuccessful career start as a card manipulator, Harry Houdini (Erich Weiss, 1874–1926, (Fig. 7.1) won fame by presenting increasingly sensational acts from around 1900 on: He escaped naked from jail cells, jumped manacled into rivers and freed himself from an oversized water-filled milk can. A variation of this act, the “Chinese Water Torture Cell,” premiered in Germany in 1912: his feet fastened to its lid, Houdini was lowered upside down into a tall water tank, made of metal and glass. The curtains were drawn around it. An assistant dramatically stood by with an ax, ready to break the glass if Houdini should run out of air.⁹ After some time, Houdini reappeared outside the box, free and dripping wet.¹⁰

In 1917, Houdini staged a spectacular, promotionally effective stunt, in which he escaped from a straightjacket while being suspended from a crane, hanging upside down above Times Square (and later other squares). Houdini’s close friend The Great Lafayette (Sigmund Neuberger, 1871–1911) had become famous with his magical sketch “The Lion’s Bride” which featured a female assistant being trapped in a cage together with a lion. This inspired

⁸ Magician Les Levante (Leslie George Vante-Cole, 1892–1978) bought the illusion from The Great Leon. In 1938, his “human cannonball” Hilda Waterworth experienced a tragic accident during the performance on December 16. In Mike Caveney’s words: “The cannon fired as usual but on this night, the tremendous force of the human projectile striking the net caused one of the metal support poles to pull loose and fly through the air.” It struck Hilda Waterworth on the head. She died shortly thereafter in the hospital (Caveney *The Great Leon* 117–118).

⁹ George L. Boston recalls a show in which Houdini’s assistant Jim Collins was forced to drain the tank by means of an outlet installed for that purpose (Boston and Parrish 112–113). This shows that the bystander with the ax served dramatic purposes only and the ax was not meant to be employed in a case of emergency.

¹⁰ In the bio-pic *Houdini* (USA, 1953, dir. by George Marshall), he drowns during a performance of the “Water Torture Cell.” Although Houdini performed it successfully for 13 years without any serious accidents, before dying from the consequences of a ruptured appendix, this fictionalization evidences the dramatic potential of the act as well as the success of Houdini’s self-staging as a larger-than-life character.



Fig. 7.1 “Stone walls and chains do not make a prison—for Houdini,” ca. 1898 (image: Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-53798 DLC)

other magicians such as Howard Thurston,¹¹ Servais Le Roy and Horace Goldin to feature dangerous, exotic animals in their shows. These more specialized and more sensationalist feats also targeted a broader audience, no longer addressing only middle- and upper-class spectators but “more inclusive mass audiences of modern commercial entertainment” (Solomon 2).

The infamous “bullet catch,” which has been performed at least from the seventeenth century onward, injured or killed a surprisingly high number

¹¹ In his autobiography *My Life of Magic*, Thurston recalls his “Lady and the Lion” illusion and describes security measures taken by him and the performers: While he kept a pistol in his pocket throughout the act, his assistant oiled the cage doors every night, through which she had to slip quickly when the lion entered the cage. He also narrates an incident in which the lady did find herself in the cage with a life lion because the workmen neglected to secure a hinge (Thurston 122–123).

of performers in the early 1900s: In his *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Magic* Bart Whaley lists one case of death and seven of injury occurring during “bullet-catching” performances between 1631 and 1900. In contrast, in the first three decades of the twentieth century, he counts two injured and four dead performers (1: 111–112). Even if we assume that earlier stage accidents may have not been documented as well as those in the twentieth century, these numbers cannot be accounted for. Rather, something about this feat seems to have demanded more victims at that time. As neither the methods nor the causes for the misadventures had changed significantly,¹² the heightened accident rate can be explained by a higher frequency of performances, indicating an increase in the popularity of the act. Most famously, the pseudo-Chinese magician Chung Ling Soo (William E. Robinson, 1861–1918) was shot onstage in London on March 23, 1918, and died of his injuries on the next day. Never to miss a good opportunity for sensationalist press, Soo’s friend Houdini announced a performance of the “bullet catch” only a week after his tragic death (which occurred on Houdini’s 44th birthday). Whether or not this performance ever took place is still a topic of discussion among magic historians: Allegedly, star magician Harry Kellar (Heinrich Keller, 1849–1922), who had become something like a father figure to Houdini, talked him out of it, pointing out that “[t]here is always the biggest kind of risk that some dog will ‘job’ you. And we can’t afford to lose Houdini” (letter to Houdini of May 1, 1918, cited in Christopher, “Magic Letters” 340).

It is not surprising that illusions implying the survival of deadly procedures, such as a shooting, gained popularity after an event as cataclysmic as the First World War. Not only were there many soldiers and prisoners of war who never returned from the frontlines, leaving behind penniless widows and orphans. Those who did return often displayed hitherto unseen mutilations—most of the injuries caused during the war resulted from exploding shells. In a time before aesthetic surgery, these mutilations often lead to amputations and permanent deformities, which were a

¹²The four performers who died catching the bullet between 1906 and 1930 are: Prof. Blumenfeld aka Bosco who had forgotten to remove the genuine bullet from the gun and was shot dead in Basel, Switzerland. Chung Ling Soo died due to one of his tricked rifles malfunctioning and firing a real bullet. The Black Wizard of the West was shot by his wife: As part of the act, she used to shoot him in the head with a fake bullet. Apparently, she got sick of having to endure this procedure every night and decided to put an end to it by shooting him dead, before killing herself. H.T. Sartell’s death onstage was possibly a suicide (Robinson 24–30).

continuous presence in post-war everyday life. As Von Arx (Charles Albert Nicol, 1871–1958) demonstrated in a performance of the “bullet catch,” magicians could suffer injuries quite similar to those of war veterans: He was employing bullets composed of a mixture of soap and graphite, which literally dissolved upon being fired and produced an impressive dark cloud. However, during a performance in Australia in 1914, a particularly densely pressed trick bullet failed to disintegrate. It was fired at the magician and tore off a part of his jaw (Dexter 145; Robinson 28–29).

“SAWING THROUGH A WOMAN”

A much less dangerous act is the illusion most commonly referred to as “Sawing a Woman in Half.” It was first presented to the public as “Sawing Through a Woman” by the young British magician P.T. Selbit (Percy Thomas Tibbles, 1881–1938) on January 17, 1921, in London, where the Grand Guignol Theatre—modeled on the Parisian original, famous for its grotesque and gruesome horror plays—had recently opened its doors (Hand and Wilson 16). Within the context of an increased representation of (apparent) violence and danger on European and US-American stages, “Sawing Through a Woman” fit into the picture. Magic historian Jim Steinmeyer identified it as “the perfect product for the decade which would be later said to roar: impulsive, aggressive and thrilling” (“Above and Beneath the Saw” 78). As Selbit’s illusion was somewhat different from the version today’s spectators may be familiar with, I am going to describe it first, drawing on Sidney W. Clarke’s review of his show at the Finsbury Park Empire in London on January 20, 1921:

In the beginning, the stage displayed “a plain, unpolished wooden stand” and “a white wood packing case or box [...] standing on [its] end on [the] prompt side, with [its] hinged lid open showing [the] inside of [the] box to [the] audience.” Selbit commenced the act by delivering some remarks on the penetration of matter, demonstrating the idea with the “Magic Bricks,” three bricks in different colors, which seemingly passed through each other. Next, a female assistant entered, while four volunteers from the audience were asked to examine the equipment onstage. They then tied ropes around the assistant’s wrists, ankles and neck and marked the knots for later identification. As the assistant took her place inside the wooden case, standing upright, the ropes were passed through correspondent holes in it, knotted on the outside of the box, and held by the volunteers to make sure her movement inside the box was restricted.

Then, the case was shut with a lid, padlocked and laid down on the stand. “As some sceptics may think the lady has vanished,” Selbit asked her “to speak and knock,” which she did. The magician subsequently pushed a number of glass and steel plates, each about four feet long and nine inches wide, vertically and horizontally through the box so that they seemed to cut the assistant into several pieces. Although this ordeal seems a little excessive for today’s spectators, one can practically hear the 1920s audience gasping as new plates were slid into the box, one after the other, wondering what may be going on inside. “Now the thrills culminate[d]—to appropriate music the sawing of the box” began, using “a nasty looking twohanded [sic!], ugly toothed, atrocity that set the audience shrieking in pleasant anticipation. The two assistants took the instrument and deliberately cut through box [sic!] from top to bottom,”¹³ sawdust falling everywhere, the heavy saw finally coming through the bottom board, tumbling to the ground with a loud shatter. Selbit then cut the ropes the volunteers were still holding with a pair of scissors; the remaining glass and steel blades were removed and the wooden case taken apart. Inside, the assistant was found unharmed, the sealed knots at her wrists, ankles and neck still intact.

I argue that, unlike later versions of this illusion, “Sawing Through a Woman” relied, to a large extent, on the anticipation of a disappearance. The tying of the assistant, the sealed knots, which are later found untouched, and the moment when she is asked to give a sign of her presence from within the box built up the expectation that the crate would be found empty in the end of the act. This was, in fact, typical for Victorian disappearing acts, such as John Nevil Maskelyne’s “Box Trick” (1873), Buatier de Kolta’s “Vanishing Lady” (1886) or Charles Morritt’s “Oh!” (1891). These involved people vanishing from boxes, cabinets and so on and reappearing somewhere else on stage, among the audience, or at the back of the theater. Although “Sawing Through a Woman” is not a vanish, its dramaturgy was guided by that of a disappearing act as P.T. Selbit was still thinking within the familiar framework of popular Victorian illusions. According to Jim Steinmeyer, “Sawing Through a Woman” ushered in a new era in magic, breaking with the preceding, gentler kind of illusions dominated by the Maskelyne family and David Devant (David Wighton, 1868–1914), whose motto was, tellingly, “all done by kindness” (*Hiding the Elephant* 295).

¹³ In contrast to this description, most photographs of the performance show Selbit sawing himself, with a one-handed saw. This indicates that the act was probably changed over time.

From 1873 to 1905, John Nevil Maskelyne (1839–1917) ran The Egyptian Hall, an entertainment venue in London, which became world-famous for its innovative magic shows, stringing together sleight-of-hand and mechanical illusions, dissolving views, comedians and other popular acts of the time. Victorian grand illusions focused on the disappearance, transformation and levitation of persons. Magicians came from all over the world either to work for Maskelyne or to try to copy the illusions presented in his shows. P.T. Selbit was among the aspirants auditioning at the famous magic theater, which had moved to St. George’s Hall in 1905 and was run by Maskelyne’s son, Nevil, at that time. Here, Selbit performed “Sawing Through a Woman” at an audition in December 1920. His show, however, failed to impress Nevil Maskelyne. Like many others, he failed to see the potential of the act. The reason may have been that the grisly, violent illusion represented a break with the earlier magic tradition. Yet, at the same time, it reflected a change that, as demonstrated above, was occurring throughout the entertainment business. Selbit was booked by agents of Moss Theatres, who were also present at the audition. His sawing illusion became an immediate, surprising success. It was quickly copied by other magicians, and by November 1921 Thayer Magic Company of Los Angeles advertised its secret in their magicians’ trade journal (Steinmeyer, *Hiding the Elephant* 290). Selbit spiced up his performances with matching publicity stunts: He had ambulances parked in front of the theater, and men carrying buckets from the stage entrance to the front of the theater between performances, pouring “a murky red liquid into the gutter” (Steinmeyer, *Hiding the Elephant* 281).¹⁴

“SAWING A WOMAN IN HALF”

Horace Goldin was the first to present the feat in the USA, at the seventeenth annual banquet of the *Society of American Magicians* in New York City on June 3, 1921—less than four months after Selbit’s first public performance. Goldin claimed to have invented the illusion independently in 1917 for Bert Le Blanck (“Goldin Hurls Strong Challenge at Selbit”, Steinmeyer, “Above and Beneath the Saw” 87). A contemporary issue of

¹⁴In the 1920s, Selbit devised a number of torture illusions, such as “The Elastic Girl” (1922), “The Human Pincushion” (1923), “Through the Eye of a Needle” (1923) and a forerunner of Robert Harbin’s famous “Zig-Zag Girl” (1963) called “Man Without a Middle” (1925) (Lewis and Warlock 142–164).

Billboard reports that Selbit believed so, too. However, he also stated that Goldin's version was "a copy of the trick presented by carnival fakers in Europe many years ago, [...]" (see below). Selbit continues to point out the differences between his and Goldin's illusion: Not only did he publicly declare that Goldin used two women for the performance, "while he finds but one necessary to its accomplishment." The British magician also noted that, in his own version, the sawing was performed by a volunteer from the audience, and that "the saw might be applied in any part of the box in performing the operation" ("Selbit Here to Fight for Illusion Rights"). While the remark about the two women clearly serves to expose Goldin's method, the latter one is an equally effective piece of PR: While Selbit may well have staged the assistance of a random spectator, there is no way for any other audience member to determine whether or not this "volunteer" is in fact a confidant. Notably, Selbit did not actually point out any significant differences between the two illusions, while merely stressing the supposed superiority of his own.

In fact, the two acts indeed differed from each other in some regards: Goldin's male assistant's hands and feet protruded from the box, and were held by volunteers from the audience, while the box was sawn in two—providing a control element equivalent to the ropes used by Selbit. The two parts of the box were then pulled apart and put together again, before the assistant re-emerged unharmed (Burgess 131). Just as Goldin's performance was an unscheduled addition to the banquet's program, the passage describing it came as a postscript to the official report on the event, written by Clinton Burgess for *The Sphinx. An Independent Magazine for Magicians*. Apparently, he had forgotten to mention it in the article. Although the illusion seems not to have made an impression on Burgess, star magician Howard Thurston recognized its potential as well as its failures. He offered Goldin a collaboration to improve the illusion in exchange for the right to include it in his own show. Together with Thurston's trick engineer Harry A. Jansen (1883–1955, later to become the magician Dante), they turned it into one of *the* iconic theatrical illusions. Jansen constructed a slim, decorated box to replace the crude wooden one used by Goldin. Employing "both mechanical and optical illusions," the new box allowed for the feet, hands and head of the assistant to be seen during the act (Steinmeyer, *The Last Greatest Magician in the World* 242–243). In addition, the two halves could be pulled apart and moved or turned around independently in order to prove they were indeed separated. Moreover, Goldin's male "victim" was replaced by a woman.

The trio filed a US patent on the illusion, which they named “Sawing a Woman in Half.” They gave out licenses to colleagues who toured vaudeville theaters under Goldin’s flag, having as many as six companies presenting it in smaller cities in the USA, while Goldin himself performed it in the larger ones. At the same time, Thurston introduced the illusion in his great evening show, giving it the important spot as the grand finale (Caveney 363). Each of the magicians who performed it added his own touch to the act. For instance, Thurston cut off the tip of the lady’s stocking so she could wiggle her toes to rule out the use of dummy legs (Leech 15). Horace Goldin extended and systematized the publicity stunts already employed by Selbit: He hired uniformed “nurses” to stand in the lobby; placed advertisements in newspapers to seek local carpenters and surgeons to assist, and brave girls to offer their bodies, guaranteeing \$10,000 for their heirs “in case of fatality” (Goldin’s ad is cited in Christopher, “Horace Goldin ‘Saws a Woman’”). Sometimes there even was a solemn procession of undertakers, carrying a handsaw through the streets and to the theater before the performance, thereby leading curious spectators directly to the box office. Not surprisingly, P.T. Selbit sued Goldin for the appropriation of his effect. However, he lost the case as the court determined that Goldin’s version deviated enough from his to be considered a different act altogether. Further, Goldin had registered not only the name “Sawing a Woman in Half” but also a number of other attractive titles with the Vaudeville Manager’s Protective Agency. Selbit was thereby forced to change his illusion’s name for US performances, and chose the only available fitting one: “The Divided Woman” (“News from Jay Ess Eff”). Eventually, he returned to England, “sad and disappointed” (Johnstone 51), his version being regarded as a copy of Goldin’s, which US-American audiences had seen first.

Ten years after the original “Sawing Through a Woman,” Goldin introduced another innovation to the act by using a gigantic, circular saw, slicing through the assistant in full view, without the box. Harry Blackstone Sr. (Harry Bouton, 1885–1965) later added even more terror by having a motorized table slowly move the lady, who was strapped to it, face-down, toward the saw. This procedure is reminiscent of industrial sawmills,¹⁵ in which the circular saw was introduced and popularized in the first half of the nineteenth century. Here, logs of wood were moved automatically toward and past the saw, while it cut it into pieces. Blackstone’s illusion

¹⁵ I am grateful to Alberto Gabriele for this observation.

not only treated the “victim” as a log; it also conjured up a picture familiar from popular melodramas: the helpless lady in mortal danger. In contrast to the melodramas, however, there was no last-minute rescue. Moreover, this illusion exhibits a combination of brute force, mechanized labor and mutilation of human bodies, characteristic for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when occupational safety was still in its infancy. The “Buzz Saw” spectacle reached its gory peak in the 1960s, when South American illusionist Richiardi Jr. (Aldo Izquierdo, 1923–1985) sliced through his assistant with a circular saw, the process being accompanied by a fountain of blood staining his white hospital robe. He then pulled the two halves of the lady apart, her intestines spilling out a little, and invited spectators to step on stage and take a look at the divided body, which, in his version, was not restored in the end (Leroy).¹⁶ Another remarkable variation was performed by David Copperfield in the 1980s and 1990s, entitled “The Death Saw.” Drawing on earlier versions, Copperfield staged it as an escape feat gone wrong when he placed himself face-down under a large circular saw, descending from a tower, and was “accidentally” sawed in halves because of his failure to free himself in time.

Also, illusions similar to the “Sawing a Woman in Half” seem to have existed before. French magician Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin (1805–1871), a highly influential figure in modern magic, recounts a version of it in his memoirs, *Confidences d'un prestidigitateur, une vie d'artiste (Memoirs of Robert-Houdin)*, first published in 1858. He describes a performance given by his mentor Torrini in the early nineteenth century, during which a boy was put inside an elongated, narrow box and sawed in halves, while the screams heard from the inside at first turned silent. Next, the magician covered the two halves with a wicker cone and a cloth. After he had said his incantation, two voices started to sing a duet underneath the cone, whose removal revealed two identical boys (*Memoirs of Robert-Houdin* 88). As Torrini is regarded as a fictional character by most authors,¹⁷ it is unclear whether Robert-Houdin described an illusion of his

¹⁶Richiardi seems to have changed the illusion over time, and apparently started to restore the assistant later, after recognizing the original version was too disturbing (Furst 36–37). Richiardi’s “Buzz Saw” and its employment of aesthetics anticipating splatter film are discussed in detail in the chapter on the “Sawing a Woman in Half” of my upcoming book on stage magic.

¹⁷After having failed to find any reference to Torrini or de Grisy, his real name given by Robert-Houdin, anywhere outside of Robert-Houdin’s writings, Jean Chavigny was the first to assume that Torrini was a fictional character, (Chavigny). Most magic historians share this

own design (if so, there is no evidence that he ever performed it) or one that he had seen another magician perform. Moreover, there were at least two other versions: From 1865 onward, an illusion called “Paradoxe,” which seemed to be similar to the “Sawing a Woman in Half,” was offered for sale in the catalog issued by the French magician and magic apparatus maker Charles de Vere (B. W.; Merry and Ciocca 137). Comical versions of the sawing illusion were relatively common in circus shows from the mid-nineteenth century onward (B. W.). In a show performed from 1878 on by The Hanlon Brothers, a troupe of acrobats, a clown lying on a sofa was sawed in halves (Hopkins 50; Lewis and Warlock 132). Interestingly, none of these versions created a sensation like Selbit’s. Steinmeyer identifies two elements of the latter as responsible for its enormous success: First, the use a female “victim,” and second, the performance within the specific historical context of 1921 (“Above and Beneath the Saw” 96). A third aspect is the change in the mode of staging: while the illusion described by Robert-Houdin is playful and romantic, and the circus versions comical, Selbit’s performance had an earnest character. Not only did Goldin’s version—influenced by American vaudeville as much as Selbit’s illusion was by the Grand Guignol and British music halls—emphasize visual aspects; it also “substituted a horrifying suggestion (Sawing Through a Woman) with blatant demonstration (Sawing a Woman in Half)” (Steinmeyer, “Above and Beneath the Saw” 89–90). In combination with the described promotional measures, it thus shifted the focus to black humor, playing with the illusion’s implied morbidity.

MAGICAL WOMEN

In Victorian magic shows, both male and female assistants were present: John Nevil Maskelyne’s main assistant was his partner George A. Cooke (1843–1926), other magicians, such as Buatier de Kolta (Joseph Buatier, 1847–1903), performed together with their wives. Jim Steinmeyer observed that, in the late nineteenth century, female magicians’ assistants were primarily intended to suggest grace or to invoke associations with goddesses. In David Devant’s magic play “The Artist’s Dream” (1893), the painting of a woman came to life and descended from the picture frame; in Hecat’s “The Mystery of She” (1888), a lady rose from a pile of

opinion (Clarke, *Annals of Conjuring* 439; Christopher, “One Wizard’s Wanderings” 42; Steinmeyer, *Hiding the Elephant*, 143).

ashes. Most prominently, from 1900 onward, women figured in the famous levitation illusion.¹⁸ However, such illusions, in which “ladies were valued for their decorative and poetic effect” (Steinmeyer, “Above and Beneath the Saw” 79) stand no comparison with a young woman being cut in two with a large saw. I argue that this shift reflects a change in the public perception of women in the beginning of the twentieth century.

From a practical point of view, women’s fashion of the Victorian era, with its voluminous long skirts, bulky flounces and restrictive corsets, was simply unsuitable to be squeezed into confined spaces such as the box used in the “Sawing a Woman in Half.” The fashion of the 1920s, on the other hand, was far more practical in that respect. Influenced by the women’s liberation movement, it introduced shorter skirts and loose garments, thus becoming even less bulky than the tuxedos or suits men wore onstage. More importantly (here I pick up and expand one of Steinmeyer’s arguments), the emancipation movement began to change women’s role in society on a larger scale. From the late nineteenth century on, women’s organizations fighting for the right to vote formed in various countries. In Britain, the suffragette movement reached a new, more radical, violent and sensational stage prior to the First World War. The activists now used militant tactics, smashed windows, stormed government buildings and detonated bombs. They were arrested repeatedly and staged hunger strikes in prison to procure release (Fig. 7.2). With the beginning of the war, however, the militant activities were reduced as the leaders of the suffragettes shifted the focus to the support of the war effort. With large numbers of men missing from everyday life in time of war, women increasingly started doing work previously performed exclusively by men (in addition to traditional women’s professions such as maids or textile workers). Inter alia as a result of this assumption of male roles, the perception of women’s place in society changed. Although women were still far from achieving legal equality, at least their presence in previously male working context was accepted as an example of female independence (at least as long as working women were yet unmarried).¹⁹ To oversimplify, we can say that, among other factors, this

¹⁸The levitation, too, was first performed with male assistants; see Ewing; Steinmeyer (*Hiding the Elephant*, 159–176) and Teale.

¹⁹Female employment was regarded as an intermediate stage before marriage, when she would assume her “natural” place, taking care of her husband, children and the household. Women still had very limited educational as well as career opportunities and earned significantly less than their male colleagues (Frevort 175–180).



Fig. 7.2 Suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst being arrested after protesting in London on May 22, 1914

led to the wide introduction of women's voting rights during and after the First World War.

One of Selbit's publicity stunts was offering £20 per week to Christabel Pankhurst, a prominent suffragette and daughter of Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of the British suffragette movement, with whom she co-founded the Women's Social and Political Union, to work as his permanent "victim" in "Sawing Through a Woman." While Sidney Clarke, editor of the *Magic Circular*, congratulated Selbit on this promotional measure, Pankhurst, naturally, declined the ironic offer. This episode enforces Steinmeyer's argument that Selbit's ladies sawed in halves aroused associations with the suffragettes: "[H]e reminded the public of the women who had challenged society by frightening it, faced off with the government, and achieved their goal. The very act of victimizing a lady in 1921 was to victimize the newly enfranchised lady, [...]" ("Above and Beneath the Saw" 86). Accordingly, the "Sawing a Woman in Half" can be seen as a re-subjugation to male control, if you will, in revenge for obtaining the right to vote, which is also the right to divide (between those who are elected and those who are not). Even though this is without a doubt more than just a subtle component of this illusion, I argue that a more complex reading is possible, which allows for the illusion to be interpreted in the opposite sense, namely, as an empowerment.

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, magicians' wives often appeared as the main assistants in the show. This put them into a privileged position as they had to be familiar with the secrets of their husbands' illusions. Moreover, occasionally, they became magicians themselves, for instance, in times of war when women had to sustain themselves or if their husbands passed away. For example, Adelaide Herrmann (1853–1932), main assistant and wife of Alexander Herrmann, one of the most famous US-American magicians of the late nineteenth century, continued with her husband's show after his sudden death in 1896.²⁰ At first, she engaged his nephew Leon, whom she trained to act as his uncle's successor, but after three seasons, they split up and, in 1899, Adelaide started a very successful career with her own vaudeville show. The "Queen of Magic," as she was called, was not only a dexterous manipulator of billiard balls; she also performed the notorious bullet catch, sawed a woman in half and remains

²⁰ Among other famous illusions of the time, the Herrmanns performed "the cannon act." Adelaide Herrmann compared her sensation before being shot from it to "somewhat [...] as a condemned man must feel as the fatal hour approaches" (Herrmann 85).

until today one of the best known magiciennes (Solomon 3; Steinmeyer, *The Glorious Deception* 167, 195). Nevertheless, female magicians remain an exception, and women mostly appear on magicians' stages as assistants. An inversion of gender roles only recently occurred with female illusionists such as Sophie Edelstein (*1971), artistic director of the French circus Pinder, who works with male assistants only. Nonetheless, women like Adelaide Herrmann, Olive "Dot" Robinson or Bess Houdini were not only their husbands' main assistants and show managers; often they were also the only members of the company who knew the illusions' secrets. Furthermore, it is often overlooked that, in grand illusions such as the "Sawing a Woman in Half," it is the assistant who is fulfilling the task necessary for the illusion to work. Because its success depends on her abilities, she bears a larger responsibility than the magician himself, who, in turn, takes up the role usually performed by scantily clad women, primarily serving decorative purposes and misdirection. The woman inside the box is the actual star of the act. This is why, in his *Mercury Wonder Show*, film maker, actor and magician Orson Welles made a spectacle out of the sawing in halves of various Hollywood stars like Marlene Dietrich or his future wife Rita Hayworth (Jacquinot 4177; Solomon 126).²¹

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE MECHANIZATION OF VIOLENCE

As for other European countries, for Great Britain, the homeland of "Sawing Through a Woman," the First World War marked the end of a stability stretching back to the Victorian era. The Great War had displayed a new, mechanized form of violence, for the first time widely using armored cars, aircraft and wireless communication as well as the automatic rifle, the flamethrower and poisonous gas. The unprecedented industrialization of warfare led to extremely high numbers of casualties and invalids. Millions of military personnel as well as civilians were killed—the estimated numbers of total deaths go up to 15 million—went missing or were taken prisoner and never returned. In addition, directly after the war, the 1918–1920 influenza pandemic, one of the deadliest natural disasters in human history, killed over 50 million people worldwide. Moreover, many of the soldiers who returned from the front or captivity had suffered severe injuries, fre-

²¹ The performance with Marlene Dietrich can be seen in *Follow the Boys* (dir. by A. Edward Sutherland, US 1944, Universal Pictures, 122 min.).

quently resulting in permanent disability and mutilation. One way in which this found expression in popular entertainments was a decrease of the freak and monster shows that have been highly popular throughout the nineteenth century. Instead, as cultural historian Thomas Macho has noted, beauty contests emerged. The first one took place in January 1920 in France, a country that had suffered particularly high casualty rates during the war, and made the winner, 17-year-old Agnès Souret, a star.

Modern weapons had left behind such an unbelievably vast number and range of variation of wounds, mutilations and injuries that no one had to visit a freak show anymore to see unique and deeply frightening human figures. Under such circumstances, beauty could really appear as an exception: as a temporal, almost random form, which was not contradictory to monuments and allegories, to the national virgins and goddesses of victory, the emblems of a longed for impeccability and political integrity. (Macho, *Vorbilder* 186)²²

At about the same time as women acquired political voting rights, they started electing other women as beauty queens, whose unimpaired looks were now valued as particularly extraordinary, as well as becoming the object of election themselves. Political emancipation apparently went hand in hand with objectification and the vying for an essentially insignificant title, which required solely aesthetic qualities. This is why Macho links beauty queens and models to First Ladies: “First Ladies are the models of politics: the Queens of Hearts, who always risk being reduced to a playing card (the queen of hearts) or a paper mask” (Macho, *Vorbilder* 208).²³ An interesting connection of beauty queens and P.T. Selbit’s torture illusions is his “Buried Alive” act (1927), in which alleged beauty queens were locked inside an airtight stone coffin, with the lid being cemented on. The coffin was put inside a water tank in which the “beauty queens” remained for more than an hour before being released again (Lewis and Warlock 170).

²² “Die modernen Waffen hatten eine so unglaubliche Vielzahl und Variationsbreite an Verletzungen, Verstümmelungen und Versehrungen hinterlassen, dass niemand mehr eine Freak-Show besuchen musste, um einzigartige und zutiefst erschreckende Menschengestalten zu sehen. Unter solchen Bedingungen konnte die Schönheit geradezu als Ausnahme erscheinen: als temporäre, fast schon zufällige Form, die nicht in Widerspruch stand zu Monumenten und Allegorien, zu den nationalen Jungfrauen und Siegesgöttinnen, den Emblemen ersehnter Makellosigkeit und politischer Integrität” (translation: KR).

²³ “First Ladies sind die Models der Politik: die *Queens of Hearts*, die ständig riskieren, auf eine Spielkarte (Herz Königin) oder eine Papiermaske reduziert zu werden” (translation: KR).

In another illusion, “The Indestructible Girl” (a variation of the 1923 “Human Pincushion”), Selbit explicitly referenced the war by introducing his assistant as a former nurse who has served the Red Cross during the First World War and “had been strangely immune to destruction” (Lewis and Warlock 143).

The contrast of beauty and violence was also an explicit motive in the post-First World War popular culture. It is treated, for instance, in H.F. Maltby’s horror play *The Person Unknown*, which premiered at the London Grand Guignol on the same night Selbit first performed his “Sawing Through a Woman” for the general public. It involves a traumatized and defaced returning soldier—not just without a face but without an individual identity, this character is simply referred to as “the person”—killing a young starlet. His victim, who was involved in wartime propaganda, has performed a song, promising: “We will love you, hug you, kiss you, when you come back home again” to the soldiers. Having experienced nothing but rejection instead, the defaced veteran murders the singer in place of all women who refused him despite the military service he performed for the country (the play is reprinted in Hand and Wilson 150–159, quote: 159).

PATTERNS OF FOLKLORIC RITUALS IN MAGIC PERFORMANCE

The aforementioned, infamous “bullet catch,” having claimed numerous victims over the centuries, indicates that a real danger existed onstage, even if all precautions were taken. The same is true for circus acrobats who walked on tightropes or acted as human cannonballs. The reality of the danger the performers exposed themselves to was often stressed in publicity material and underlined in the addresses preceding the acts. In fact, the risk constituted the central attraction of such feats, to which audiences were drawn by the desire to see performers submit themselves to *real* dangers and come up smiling, thereby demonstrating “victory of life over death, proof of our ability to survive the most challenging circumstances” (Jando 488). Dominique Jando therefore sees daredevil acts as “a modern incarnation of ceremonial rituals of survival and resurrection [...] as entertainment” (488). He alludes to the motif widespread in fiction and folklore of the hero dying—symbolically or literally—in order to return strengthened and to gain ultimate victory over the villain. For instance, ancient Greek mythology often requires heroes to enter the land of the dead in order to obtain some required information or quality. Ancient Greek initiation rites

practiced by religious associations such as the Eleusis mysteries and others as well as in shamanistic rituals in Asia, Australia and the Americas included the initiate's symbolic death by indulging in ecstatic dance and/or drugs until collapse.²⁴ The initiate was then considered dead, while lying unconscious, his or her soul traveling to the land of the spirits, where it acquired secret knowledge and skills. Sometimes this process was accompanied by a symbolic action of dismemberment, such as an older shaman purportedly removing and replacing the initiate's intestines, cracking his skull and so on. The same has been reported for secret societies in Africa, where the initiates often left the settlement for a period of time, in which they underwent a symbolic burial and a resurrection, after having been "dead" for a certain time (Peuckert 355–365; van Gennep 84–85).

French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep famously identified separation, transition and reincorporation as the three stages of such rites, which he called *rites of passage* (*rites de passage*). They mark an individual's transition from one phase of life into another, accompanied by a change of social status, such as coming of age, marriage or death (van Gennep 21–23). Initiation rites usually contain some element of bearing and controlling pain, stretching from standing or sitting exercises lasting several days, to circumcision, to pulling teeth, piercings or tattooing (van Gennep 79). Drawing on van Gennep's notions, US-American mythologist Joseph Campbell identified death and resurrection as part of what he called the *monomyth* (a term borrowed from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*), a universal pattern which, he claimed, can be found in numerous mythological and folklorist narratives throughout all cultures. This

standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation—initiation—return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. *A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.* (28, Campbell's emphasis)

Campbell identified 17 stages of the hero's journey as subdivisions to the main threefold structure of departure, initiation and return. Without going into too much detail, I will name a few of these stages: There is the

²⁴ On shamanistic initiation rites see Eliade, esp. 43–76.

call to adventure, which is at first refused by the hero. Her mind is subsequently changed by a meeting with a mentoring figure or by contact with a supernatural phenomenon, causing her to leave the ordinary world to pursue an adventure. An ensuing number of trials eventually culminate in a final one, after which the hero experiences a catharsis through resurrection and eventually returns to the ordinary world, in which she can take on the role of a liberator.²⁵

According to Thomas Macho, while initiation rites as such have faded away in modern societies, their cultural residues can be found in various social places and institutions of education, work and religion, in the shape of examinations and ritualized honorings, such as the first communion or graduation ceremonies (*Todesmetaphern* 355–356). Thus, initiation, as it were, has been neutralized, becoming detached from experiences of pain and death, and, in a way, occurring behind the adolescents' as well as their parents' backs. For children and adolescents, exams and tests in the context of institutionalized learning are no longer justified by personal gain but rather by demands of the world of work to be entered in the future. At the same time, in modern, secular societies, the social and personal orientation previously implemented by initiation rites is postponed. Initiation rites and the societal structures they enforced provided clear instructions regarding individual behavior as well as possibilities of identification with and reflection on role models. Moreover, they established an acceptance of the various stages adolescents went through, providing freedom to develop an individual personality within and in relation to the surrounding social environment. According to Macho, the lack of initiation rites generates a disorientation and instability, which is reflected in modern societies' high rate of teenage depressions and suicides—as he puts it, the initiation rites' (symbolic) death thus returns to the adolescents through a back door (*Todesmetaphern* 356).

Daredevil acts such as the “bullet catch” or Houdini’s “Chinese Water Torture Cell” constitute enactments of death and resurrection and can therefore be regarded as another one of modernity’s substitutes for initiation rites. Alexander Herrmann and Chung Ling Soo staged the “bullet catch” as an execution performed with several guns at a time, fantasizing of the ability to survive a shooting. As noted before, there is always a real danger; if it is not mortal as in case of the “bullet catch,” it is at least one

²⁵ Campbell’s work has had a great influence on movie script writing in Hollywood and elsewhere, most famously adapted by George Lucas in the *Star Wars* franchise.

of injury: Houdini repeatedly received bruises, compressions or even fractures during his shows. These minor injuries, as well as the symbolic death during the “bullet catch”—some performers, such as Ted Annemann, even collapsed on the ground before getting up again and producing the bullet—can be seen as fulfilling a function analogous to the injuries and death in initiation rites and the hero’s journey. Having undergone this public test, the performer reemerges, cheered at by the spectators, having gained their respect and admiration. Drawing on this effect, Harry Houdini was especially apt at staging himself as an invulnerable larger-than-life character in his public life.

Similarly, “Sawing a Woman in Half” can be viewed as a female protagonist undergoing a symbolic death and resurrection. After the existent danger of the feat had been established by the publicity stunts described above, the woman was isolated and exposed to a potentially mortal trial. She underwent a procedure that was bound to kill her—at least that is what the illusion suggested—yet she came up smiling. Her emergence from the situation alive and unharmed suggests some kind of superhuman power to either escape the saw, or to regenerate. In this light, the illusion can be regarded as an empowerment, rather than as a subjugation of the woman. It appears as her symbolic emancipation on stage, a manifestation of the historic female emancipation. Moreover, as noted above, an illusion like “Sawing a Woman in Half” fully depends on the assistant’s skills because she is the one performing the essential work. To put a woman in that position means to acknowledge her professional skills and to give her responsibility for the success of the performance.

CONCLUSION

In Christopher Nolan’s *The Prestige*, the fictional magician Robert Angier (Hugh Jackman) remarks: “If people actually believed the things I did on stage, they wouldn’t clap, they’d scream. I mean, think of ‘Sawing a Woman in Half’.

This demonstrates that illusions implying extreme violence such as “Sawing a Woman in Half” are enjoyable only when the audience is aware of their deceptive nature. This is accomplished by the frame setting of a magical performance—which is why street magic performed by Alexander Herrmann for publicity in the 1880s sometimes got him arrested. Without the theatrical setting, the sleight-of-hand artist is indistinguishable from a pickpocket. However, the publicity stunts mentioned in connection to

“Sawing a Woman in Half” play very heavily on the suggestion that it is in fact not an illusion. They suggest that the ambulance comes too late, the ladies are really sawn in half, the byproducts of this process are spilled into the gutter after every show and a new victim has to be found for the upcoming performance. Moreover, this morbid promotion is what makes the feat more enjoyable! It helps to engage in the ambiguous play of believing something the spectators know is not true. Philosopher and psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni has famously expressed this phenomenon in the formula “Je sais bien ... mais quand même” (“I know very well ... but nevertheless”), describing the simultaneous coexistence of certain knowledge and an illusion which is opposed to this knowledge. This concept is connected to the epistemological gap created in magic tricks: If we saw what goes on inside the box, there would be no doubt about what really happened to the woman. But because the workings of the illusion are withheld, the spectators cannot know what really happens during the performance. This creates a gap in knowledge, serving as a space in which deliberate self-deception can flourish. In case of “Sawing a Woman in Half,” this encompasses two parts of the illusion: First, the violent disruption of the “victim’s” bodily integrity and second, its impossible restoration to its previous state. If the spectators willingly choose to pretend to accept that the illusionist has the power to heal an injury as severe as this, they also accept that he really saws the woman in half in the first place.

In all cases described above—from human cannonballs to Houdini’s escape stunts to the Hollywood melodrama—the aim is to escape the real danger and to stay unharmed. Thus, the general cultural tendency toward sensationalism in the first decades of the twentieth century reflects a need for a reassurance of the power and integrity of individuals. This need expressed itself in the popularity of forms of entertainment in which human beings demonstrated their ability to survive extreme situations. The stereotypical happy ending of the melodrama—like the outcast single mother’s marriage, allowing for her social rehabilitation in *Way Down East*—as well as the daredevil stunts on circus artists’ or magicians’ paths to glory and wealth show that the act of submitting oneself to danger, pain or a symbolic death, followed by a triumph, increases a person’s social rank. Analogous to initiation rites, these feats are accompanied by the acceptance within a group, by the spectators’ admiration and the status as a larger-than-life character. Daredevil acts were what enabled Harry Houdini, the son of a poor Jewish family who migrated to the USA in order to escape the anti-Semitic wave in 1870s Europe, to become one of

the first superstars—an icon of the US-American self-made man, capable of escaping all binds, defying death and always returning triumphantly. Just as Houdini's stunts, other daredevil acts described above represent hero's journeys, reproducing the structure of initiation rites. As noted above, they were often performed by women, just as the "Sawing a Woman in Half," which can also be seen as a symbolic death and resurrection.

As argued above, this illusion also reflects historico-cultural circumstances of the early twentieth century, among others the change of women's role in society. In contrast to common readings of magic tricks involving the supposed injuring, vanishing and so on of female assistants, I argued that the "Sawing a Woman in Half" can be seen as her empowerment. First, she is taking up the part of the most important person onstage, the one on whose skills the effect depends most—this happened in other illusions before, for instance, the famous "Vanishing Lady," which has been interpreted as an exertion of male dominance (L. Fischer). Second, she, who has just gained a political voice of her own through radical protests, is no longer the delicate, untouchable creature of the Victorian era. She can handle violence and come out smiling. She, too, can survive the hero's journey and return empowered. Although the voting right for women had been introduced in Great Britain 3 years before P.T. Selbit started performing his feat, it was limited to women over 30 who met certain property requirements. Women still had (and still have) to fight for respect and equality, and were far from being men's equals in society. On the magicians' stages, they underwent initiation rites, consisting of a symbolic death and resurrection. This procedure empowered them within the theatrical framework. The sawing illusion is thus not primarily an objectification or victimization of women onstage—although this is certainly more than a subtext of the performance—but can also be regarded as their heroine's journey and a new empowerment within the theatrical setting.

Moreover, this act mirrors not only the beginning female emancipation but also the desire for miraculous restoration of heavily mutilated bodies awakened during the First World War, which was ensued by unparalleled numbers of disabled and injured veterans as well as casualties. It fantasizes of a completely restorable human body that can be taken apart and reassembled without consequences. The same is applicable to the bullet catch, which suggests the ability to withstand a shooting. Thus, these illusions can further be interpreted as a kind of wish-fulfillment, a magical restoration after the destruction by or the resistance to the weapons of modern warfare. At the same time, the general amount of danger in the entertainment business grew, boosting daredevil acts in circus and theatrical conjuring as well as the popu-

larity of the Hollywood melodrama. Within this context, “Sawing a Woman in Half” is an exemplary milestone, marking the end of the relatively peaceful, romantic and elegant Victorian stage magic, and ushering in a new form of theatrical conjuring, characterized by speed, danger and sensationalism.

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Sensational Voices: Premodern Theatricality, Early Cinema, and the Transformation of the Public Sphere in Fin-de-siècle Vienna

Sabine Müller

Recent investigations into the history of sensationalism have often highlighted the role of a specific experience of modernity that emerges in Europe's metropolises over the nineteenth century, its hallmarks being a new culture of visibility and the rise of the mass-circulation press and of mass entertainment (Singer; Gabriele). Sensationalism, in this context, has been defined as a technique of sales promotion aimed at sparking "excited feelings" or "strong" emotional "impressions" in a "broader public" or in a "body of spectators" and hence considered to be a phenomenon "particularly related to viewing and spectatorship" (Melman 31; Wiltenburg 1378). The rise of vision as the "master sense of the modern era" (Martin Jay) goes, of course, hand in hand with another transformation of the public sphere that is crucial to the history of sensationalism. The growing importance of all things visual in the urban public sphere is accompanied by a gradual silencing of the modalities of social interaction. As reconstructed by Richard Sennett, interactions between strangers are less and

Translated from the German by Wilfried Preinfalk.

S. Müller (✉)

Department of German Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

less taking the form of theatrical interplays; instead, people meet silently, *reading* each other's gestures while preserving their mutual anonymity (Sennett). What increasingly prevails and displaces spoken dialogues is an anti-theatrical ideal of disciplined silence, an ideal that spawns characters like Walter Benjamin's flâneur strolling silently through the new consumer worlds. Sennett, however, believes that this new culture of silent anonymous spectatorship, having started out as a genuinely bourgeois culture, greatly contributes to the demise of a "public culture" that is indispensable for the life of vibrant democracies.

Looking at the history of modernity and factoring in this emergence of a new visual culture and a marked silencing of social interactions in the public sphere, it becomes apparent that the history and sociology of sensationalism requires an important distinction to be made. One should realize that the rise of modern sensationalism is linked to the displacement of a tradition that may be termed "premodern sensationalism." The nature of that spoken dialogue, which is now increasingly banished in public, may be traced to the language of carnival and grotesque realism, as analyzed by Mikhail Bakhtin, thus allowing us to predate it to the premodern era.¹ Similar to modern tabloid sensationalism with its rhetoric of sex, crime, and catastrophe, the focus of this premodern sensationalism is on extremes; it cherishes hyperbole and dwells on motifs related to the body, death, and sexuality. It combines these elements through the principles of ambivalence and by recurring to a dialogical exchange that is coupled with bodily contact.

Modern sensationalism exhibits its typical outlines, as noted by existing scholarship, by selectively addressing an increasingly detached sense of sight. Vision is structured by means of a disruptive logic of serial impressions coming in bits and pieces. These isolated bits of perception come across as "shocks" (Walter Benjamin) whose cumulation precludes any attitudes of contemplation and prefigures both the principle of montage used in motion pictures and its potential for voyeurism. In the course of the chapter I shall thus distinguish two types of sensationalism: one being a modern sensationalism that is "monologic" and increasingly detached from social interaction and the other one a premodern sensationalism that may be labeled "carnavalesque" or "dialogically polyphonic" (Bakhtin). Despite a strong and long-standing tendency to banish spoken carni-

¹For a discussion of premodern folkloric traditions in pre cinematic spectacles see Gabriele 126–129.

valesque traditions from the public sphere, which has been observable throughout Europe since the mid-sixteenth century, the advent of modern sensationalism in the nineteenth century still involves a period during which premodern and modern sensationalism overlap. Both traditions compete with each other, but they also engender hybrid forms, thus forming two distinct strands rather than separate entities.² We should speak, therefore, of two distinct strands rather than two separate entities, and retrace how the sociopolitical function of each differs, instead of rashly dismissing all the esthetics and rhetoric of sensationalism as manipulations of a “culture industry” (Adorno/Horkheimer).

The following discussion is organized in two sections. The first shall elaborate on the (perceptual, media, and social) history behind the hypothesis structuring the chapter, which derives from the works by Michel Foucault, Richard Sennett, and Mikhail Bakhtin. The second part shall focus on the storefront cinema barker, as a character whose appearance in Vienna’s urban history around 1900 exemplifies the process discussed in a significant way. This character is interesting for it embodies both a final flicker of the premodern tradition of sensationalism and an amalgam of modern and premodern sensationalism that is revealing precisely because of its ephemeral appearance. Cinema barkers are rooted in the very culture of urban attraction (circus, vaudeville, early motion picture, etc.) that are important steps in the process of transformation of the premodern form of sensationalism. The cinema barker is interesting not only because he makes his appearance on the threshold between attraction and narration (Tom Gunning), but also because he represents a hybrid sensationalism which, interestingly enough, antagonizes conservative circles. Progressive circles, like the “Cinema Reform Movement,” decry the esthetics of the cinema-barkers as an inordinate form of sensation-mongering. Attempts to update the cinema-barker by substituting canned voices (from gramophones or “gloriphones”³) for real people ultimately failed. By around 1910, cinema-barkers are vanishing, and with them goes the tradition of premodern voice-based sensationalism in urban public life. The demise of

²The focus of this chapter is on one specific segment of premodern sensationalism, which is doomed by around 1910. It does not imply that premodern sensationalism became extinct as a whole; other segments of this tradition might survive in Western societies to this very day.

³Gramophones suitable for street advertising.

this specific sensationalism, of course, also puts an end to the important tradition of active, dialogically involved audiences.

PREMODERN VERSUS MODERN SENSATIONALISM: THEATRICALITY AND PUBLIC LIFE

Michel Foucault, in the study *Discipline and Punish*, argues that the emergence of modern individuality around 1800 is due to a specifically modern “panoptic” logic of power (Foucault). Less overtly, he also engages in the debate on the bourgeois dialectic between inwardness and public life—or on the relationship between theatricality and public life—discussed by Jürgen Habermas. Foucault does not believe that the theater has disappeared from a modern society where “the principal elements are no longer the community and the public life, but, on the one hand, private individuals and, on the other, the state.” Rather, the theater has moved into the bodies and minds of actors being their own audience in isolated cells: “We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism” (Foucault 279), and this machine consists of “many cages” or “many small theaters” (Foucault 257). In fact, the panoptic machine works like a theater, but it is the logic of writing that governs this modern theatricality: the mechanism of observing self and others involves a steady workflow of reading-writing in which even the tiniest movements of people get watched and registered (Ginzburg). Due to this slippage of theatricality into the text paradigm, the threshold between public and private life becomes both nonexistent and ubiquitous.⁴

Richard Sennett, in “The Fall of Public Man,” similarly calls attention to the key role that ideals of transparency play in the rise of an “ideology of intimacy” jeopardizing democracy. His main point is that embourgeoisement and secularization bring forth a new and passive form of spectatorship, which also restructures the political domain over the course of the nineteenth century. While during the eighteenth century it is still common practice to comment aloud what is happening on stage and to call for well-done scenes to be repeated (or for poor performances to be cut short), nineteenth-century audiences increasingly regard talking and shouting

⁴This blurring of borders between private and public life also prepares the ground for a development allowing private, and yet quasi-public, domains of shopping arcades, department stores, and malls to become the standard mode of urban experience.

as improper behavior (Sennett 242). Meanwhile the auditoriums, which used to be brightly illuminated, sink into darkness and leave the muted spectators detached from visibility. This completes the division between actors and spectators toward a new culture of visual experience, in which detached and muted watching becomes a substitute for participation.

Sennett focuses on the emergence of the new department stores to exemplify this transformation of public life. Sennett regards as a turning point in this context the introduction of a fixed-priced system in the Paris “Le Bon Marché” department store in 1852. To him, the new policy of attaching tags with fixed prices to articles shows how the “public realm as an active interchange” gives way to “an experience of publicness more intense and less sociable”:

In a market where retail prices float, sellers and buyers go through all kinds of theatrics to up or lower the price. In Middle Eastern bazaars, displays of outraged feeling, impassioned declarations of pain and suffering occasioned by the loss or purchase of this so beautiful rug, are part and parcel of the sale. In the Paris meat markets of the eighteenth Century, hours could be spent on maneuvers to up the price of a side of beef by a few centimes.

Haggling and its attendant rituals are the most ordinary instances of everyday theater in a city, and of the public man as an actor. The end of the line of production and distribution in a society without fixed prices is posturing, jockeying for position, the ability to notice chinks in an opponent’s armor. The stylized interplay weaves the buyer and the seller together socially; not to participate actively is to risk losing money.

[The] fixed-price system lowered the risk of not playing a role. [The] notion of free entrance made passivity into a norm. (Sennett 186–187)

With this, Sennett first introduces his key premise: the assumption that a vibrant public sphere, defined as communication between strangers who accept each other *as strangers*, is based on a capability of role playing—on an “everyday theater” taking the form of playacting. This theatricality, with its appreciation of set roles, conventions and ritual gestures, is “the very stuff of which public relations are formed” (Sennett 48). Hence, the quintessential loss in the nineteenth century is not one of *reflective distance* but one of *playacting self-distance*. What is lost is people’s willingness to enter into a “stylized interplay,” using “canonized” postures and rhetorical modes to express pros and cons, and to voice praise or criticism. This “interplay” continues a pre-bourgeois tradition, in that both the human body and its gestures are understood not as expressing an authentic inner self but as

a reality of its own. To Sennett, therefore, what makes for a vibrant and critical-minded public is not the contemplative reflective attitudes of a small minority but the ability of (ideally) all members of a society to playact with public “me-masks.” Sennett believes that it takes this specific theatricality of premodern descent, which is based on the principle of a “public role” and on a theatricality that links actors and spectators, to prepare the ground for a political sphere in its own right to be vibrantly active.

By observing that the new fixed-price system lowers the “risk” for those not wishing to have an active role in the stylized interplay, Sennett offers an explanation for the success of the new model of publicness. The modern public life, offering more space for intimacy, comes with a new kind of liberty that is felt to be more “intense” and appealing as it entices not only by acknowledging a right to neither speak nor be spoken to, but also by conveying a new ideal of authenticity that holds the promise of an existence freed from artificial rituals. On the downside, these new bourgeois values of authenticity and transparency entail fears of becoming a *target* of those new inquisitive looks in public and, hence, of being watched or seen through. In this way, they also engender a new desire for a “safe” utilization of the public space—for anonymized, undiscovered, passive spectatorship.

Sennett does not, in fact, regret that theatricality and public life are developing into independent spheres and differentiating into a cultural public sphere and a political one. The gist of his argumentation is that theatricality and public life, and the relationship between both, undergo a restructuring over the course of the nineteenth century. Even though these older conventional types of communication are felt to be unnatural and alienating for the bourgeoisie, due to its aversion to both courtly and folk traditions of masking, appreciation for the theater nevertheless rises, rather than falls, with its advancement to an institutional foil providing the authentic bourgeois with self-assurance. Another paradoxical development is the parallel professionalization of playacting. The more acting is recognized as a profession, the more it is expected to commit itself to an authentic realistic performance, but at the same time it is also presupposed to be authentic in the sense of true (non-alienated) life being construed as a prerogative of art.

As a result of these contradictions, theatricality finds its way back to the (seemingly de-theatricalized) public sphere. As the displacement of the “everyday theater” is eroding the common ground shared by the theatrical stage and the public space (i.e. by arts and politics), politics can increasingly avail itself of the strategies used by the new and realistic stage

art. And as the theater is increasingly losing its function as a model for the public, a concept of authentic charismatic personalities as politicians can gradually replace the concepts of “public role” and political representation. Key issues of public interest are no longer negotiated by political criteria but are relegated into the scope of privacy. It is exactly this privatization of public life, coupled with a specific desire for decoding and revelation, that lays the foundation for scandalmongering as a key feature of the modern sensational press unfolding in the nineteenth century (Sachsman and Bulla). Even the sensationalist topics of sex, crime, war, and natural disasters serve not only to simplify the coverage of the world and to foster an ever-renewed demand but, once again, they also contribute to depoliticizing, privatizing, and naturalizing the public agendas, which are then sold back to the public readership in a jazzed-up, dramatized form and, at the same time, claimed to be authentic.

Sennett’s thoughts are, first of all, valuable for the cultural history of sensationalism for their engagement with the history of vision, as the nineteenth century sees a marked showcasing of all things visible and a simultaneous process by which vision becomes more dynamic, fragmentary, and eventually fleeting (Frisby; Crary). Another crucial point about some of Sennett’s thoughts is their overlapping with Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory and history of the carnival and the dialogical imagination. The most obvious example is Sennett’s discussion of haggling in Paris marketplaces, which connects almost seamlessly with Bakhtin’s thoughts in *Rabelais and His World* on the “language of the marketplace.” To Bakhtin, both the playacted haggling and the long-standing tradition of “hawking cries” (“*cris de Paris*”) are an expression of a specific “culture of laughter” which, being rooted in a carnivalesque folk tradition, reaches its heyday during the Renaissance, followed by a gradual decline over the further course of modern history. This culture of laughter is a theatrical “culture of the loud word spoken in the open” (Bakhtin 224), based upon a materialism that is linked to the human body and characterized by ambivalence, openness, and an egalitarian mode of contact. Its utterances in the carnival tradition are “double-voiced” in that they parody, travesty, or mockingly ironize the “monologic” discourse of the dominating classes. The capability of self-distance that Sennett regards as essential to maintaining a sustainable democratic culture of communication is ultimately rooted in this very tradition of a double-voiced laughing discourse.

The rhetorical practice that I refer to as “premodern sensationalism” is part of the culture of the marketplace described by Bakhtin,

more specifically the full-throated advertising by vendors, including both hawking in verse (“*cris*”) and a specific tradition of “*market crying*.” According to Bakhtin (187–237), “there are no neutral objective words” (201) in this form of marketing which employs superlatives, exaggerations, and obscenities, but never fails to keep laughing at itself. Sociologically, the only way to grasp this travesty-driven sensationalism is as a folk culture of back-talking, or a counterculture of the powerless, directed against the truths and modes of rhetoric harnessed by those in control, like the clergy, the courts, or the law enforcers. These latter groups, too, present themselves mainly through the spoken word in medieval and early modern history: the clergymen’s sermons, the ubiquitous voices of public criers proclaiming laws and decrees, announce states of war or siege, stoke fear, and call for obedience by invoking the Flood and Purgatory.

These official rhetorical modes are the very background that enables the duplicity characterizing the folk-cultural rhetoric used by marketplace hawkers. The practice of laughingly quoting from, and hyperbolizing, an untouchable lofty sphere of what is proclaimed to be true, eternal, and grand brings the unambiguous rhetoric of clerical and secular authorities down to a debased level of bodily functions (eating, devouring, digesting), sexuality (greed, lust, sex), and finiteness (birth, death, dismembering), which put all things in perspective. Paying mock-compliments to the audience and praising wares to the skies go hand in hand with the diametric opposite attitude of insult and curse of those present. This grotesque practice of blowing hot and cold is permeated by an unrestrained threatening to those daring not to believe the oaths of truth coming from these loudmouths. All known varieties of persuasive rhetoric are taken up and travestied, the key technique here being sensationalism in a double sense of the word. For one thing, much like in modern sensationalism, there is an all-out focus on the larger-than-life, extraordinary, tabooed, forbidden, excessive, erotic. For another, however, these extremes remain tied to the human body in a way that generalizes the unique, while taking advantage of the sensational to fashion a utopian space: a space of the generally human that interconnects all members of society and in which all social differences are relative. Hence it is an egalitarian logic that underlies the tactility of premodern sensationalism, that is, its focus on touch and the corporeal. Thus, the market crier, being rooted in the carnival tradition, “is one with the crowd; he does not present himself as its opponent, nor

does he teach, accuse, or intimidate it. He *laughs* with it" (Bakhtin 208). At its best, this tradition of laughter spares no taboo, hierarchy, or fear.⁵

There is a distinctive contrast between this carnivalesque sensationalism, which gets largely displaced over the course of modern history, and the modern sensationalism associated with the rise of the mass media, even though the latter, too, capitalizes on extremes, hyperboles, the submerged, and on motifs related to the body, death, and sexuality. Modern sensationalism is already evolving within the panoptic episteme of the decoding hermeneutic paradigm whose reading-writing of signs and identities gives rise to modern individuality. Being itself part and parcel of this paradigm, what characterizes the modern and monovalent sensationalism is that it confirms, rather than relativizes, the uniqueness of the conveyed sensations. This is also true on the receiving end, with spectators relating to unique pieces of serial information not as public but as private individuals in an anonymized and blacked-out audience. Even though the openness, vulnerability, and instinctiveness of the human body (now also of the mind) remain the key motifs even in modern sensationalism, it is nevertheless a wholly different tactility that underlies the modern rhetoric of sex, crime, scandal, and disaster. Unlike premodern sensationalism with its equalizing tactility that creates nearness, modern sensationalism avails itself of an isolating tactility of shocks to be experienced from a viewing distance. At the same time, these shocks disrupt contemplation and fragmentize observation, thus irreversibly changing what constitutes seeing and understanding over the course of the nineteenth century.

HYBRID SENSATIONALISMS: VIENNA'S CINEMA BARKERS AROUND 1900

The sources available to reconstruct soundscapes of voice-based premodern sensationalism in Vienna are sketchy, a common problem in studying the cultural histories of sound. Still, there is positive evidence that the carnivalesque tradition of haggling, with exaggerated praise and coarse invective going hand in hand, survives in Vienna's marketplaces way into the nineteenth century. Although the crudities and obscenities still

⁵ Bakhtin believes that precisely because of this egalitarian orientation, constant self-relativization, and appreciation of the polyphonic, the carnival tradition from early modern history could have offered stable support for a modern democratic culture of dialogicality, but this potential has largely been squandered also in Sennett's view.

prevalent around 1500 are gradually softening and becoming “more civilized” from the mid-sixteenth century onward (Burke), the fundamental structure of sensationalist playacting in marketplaces remains unchanged. Parodistic gambits characterized by hyperbolized flattery to attract potential buyers (addressed as “Your Grace”) were followed by jocular quarreling over prices. Long-standing major scenes of these events in Vienna’s Inner City are the food (“victuals”) markets at *Hober Markt* or *Freyung*, or the two largest produce markets *Schanzelmarkt* and *Naschmarkt* (Payer, “Versuch” 13–14). Markets in other city districts and dedicated meat-and-fish markets, too, provide the backdrop for scenes of vociferous hawking, haggling, joking, and quarreling until the mid-nineteenth century. Efforts to curb the intemperately rowdy communication in these venues will take much longer to impact this culture. One group rising to particular fame beyond the city’s borders are market women called *Fratschlerinnen*, known for their sharp wit, surefire retorts, and unrestrained verbal coarseness, as described repeatedly by Viennese feuilletonist Vinzenz Chiavacci (Payer, “Versuch” 14) (Fig. 8.1).



Fig. 8.1 Market women at Neuer Markt, Vienna, photograph by Emil Mayer, around 1900 © Bezirksmuseum Meidling

Countless mobile peddlers, whose hawking cries praising their wares or services are resounding through the streets of Vienna, are another well-documented variety of dealers continuing the tradition of premodern sensationalism (Payer, “Klang” 124). Most of these offer small articles like fabrics, clothes, foodstuffs, and household items. Craftsmen offering their services (e.g. knife grinding or wood chopping) are another group in this category. Yet sensationalist cries or declamations are also heard from entertainers specializing in legerdemain or mountebanking, as well as by animal tamers, musicians, or organ grinders (Kaut 6). Last but not least, junk men, wood-ash dealers, and rag pickers contributing to “Les Cris de Vienne” (*Zeichnungen*) add even more acoustic signatures. Given a scanty base of written records and no sound records, only sketchy evidence is available to confirm that carnivalesque sensationalist bargaining is accompanying these cries at all times. Yet the existing sources indicate that, much like in the USA (Dargan and Zeitlin), the participants in Vienna’s scenery of hawking peddlers, market criers, and storefront barkers are likewise rooted in a shared tradition of communication whose hallmark is a laughing, carnivalesque sensationalism.

As in other cities, the number of wandering merchants is steadily decreasing as the number of retail stores increases, a development that reaches a major turning point with the liberalization of trade regulations in 1859 (Payer, “Klang” 126). With most sectors of trade now de-regularized, the number of stores established at fixed locations is rising sharply, and the first branch networks begin to emerge (e.g. Julius Meinl delicatessen). Another blow to the livelihood of traveling merchants is dealt by the first Vienna department stores, which, modeled on their Paris predecessors, are opened in 1865. At the same time, the authorities increasingly impose restrictions on door-to-door peddling by greatly and continuously reducing the number of licenses granted (Payer, “Klang” 126). This banishment of door-to-door peddling from the city is not least an anti-Semitic phenomenon, as many of the peddlers are Jewish immigrants, who are increasingly perceived as a threat by the settled petty bourgeoisie. However, the more the traveling merchants and their cries are disappearing from the city, the more interesting they become to art and science. A Viennese china manufacturer (*Wiener Porzellanmanufaktur*) starts making the first crier figurines even back in the late eighteenth century. In 1775, Christian Brand issues a famous series of copperplate engravings “The Cries of Vienna,” manifesting a fascination with an idealized “Old Vienna” that is going to reach new heights in Vienna around 1900 (Kaut 11–18).

By approximately 1918, the wandering merchants have largely vanished from the town- and soundscape of Vienna, and the traditional hawking

cries have gone with them (Kaut 10). In their stead, however, new traditions of called-out advertisement, but also new traditions of sensationalism, have emerged. The most visible and audible example are those “newspaper barkers” whose memory famously lives on in the opening scene of Karl Kraus’ drama about World War I (and another example of Kraus settling accounts with sensational journalism) entitled “The Last Days of Mankind” (1915–1922):

A newspaper vendor: Extraaaa! Speciaaal! Heir to the throne assassinated!
Murderer arrested!

A visitor (to his wife): Thank God not a Jew.

His wife: Come on, let’s go home. (Pulls him away.)

2nd newspaper vendor: Extraaa special! Neue Freie Presse! The bloody crime of Sarajevo! Murderer a Serb! (Kraus: Prologue, Scene 1)

Later in the text, too, Kraus clearly shows that the newspaper barkers of the early twentieth century are rooted in a thoroughly non-playacting tradition of sensationalism: “Extraaa edition—! Neue Freie Presse! Big victory for the Germans in Galicia! Bloody repulse in close combat! Attack driven back all emplacements taken! Bloody repulse in close combat pleeeaaase—! Extraaa edition—! Great victory for the allied!” (Kraus: Act II, Scene 1). A genuinely modern version of sensationalism comes to the fore here. This is true not only of the exclamations per se, which (also as a function of fixed prices) differ from the carnivalesque hawking of the past in that they are consistently monologic, monotonous, reductionist, and redundant.⁶ It is also true of the new public space, which has been “purged” of theatrical interplay and of the vibrant counterculture against those in power. This space is now populated by isolated and anonymous onlookers who—contenting themselves with brief glimpses of the extraordinary, excessive, and abnormal witnessed from a safe consumers’ distance—hold on to the dominant order and their personal noninvolvement. One factor defining this new and modern mindset of reception are the innovations in the product being advertised, namely, the newspapers themselves, for which a new era of expansion can be seen at the turn of the century, following the introduction of a new general framework of press regulations (e.g. abolition of advertising tax in

⁶In this regard, the newspaper barkers continue the tradition of the magisterial public criers, albeit in a commercialized form.

1874 and stamp duty in 1899/1900 stamp duty).⁷ As a result, the years between 1900 and 1910 see a rapid rise of commercial mass-circulated press in the Habsburg monarchy, which also encompasses a yellow journalism here referred to as “boulevard press” (Melischek and Seethaler). Most importantly, newspapers may be sold in the streets now, which brings on a radical redesigning of formats toward an increasingly strident layout and content (Paupié 40).⁸ First issued in 1900, *Oesterreichische Kronen-Zeitung* soon becomes the most highly circulated paper in this new market, followed by *Die Neue Zeitung* as of 1907. While both newspapers draw from experience with *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt* and *Das Interessante Blatt* (established in 1872 and 1882, respectively) in developing their sensationalist techniques, they nevertheless come up with a totally new and modern type of yellow journalism (Paupié 165–169 and 179–197). Yet it is not until the Austrian First Republic after World War I that sensational journalism actually enters its golden age, with *Der Abend* and journalist-publisher Imre Békessy’s magazines (*Die Stunde*, *Die Börse*, *Die Bühne*) standing out by their aggressiveness and luridness. As may be expected, Karl Kraus reacts to this by launching fierce attacks, which, while forcing Békessy to leave Vienna in 1926, cannot stop the triumph of newspaper sensationalism in the 1920s and 1930s (Paupié 180–181 and 188–189).

Unlike the newspaper barkers, who should be considered as belonging entirely to the tradition of modern sensationalism along with the newspapers they advertise, the cinema barkers making their appearance in Vienna around 1900 take an intermediate position between premodern and modern sensationalism. This is true in several ways, and the first reason is to be found in the history of motion pictures. It is precisely the modernization of visual cultures that can be seen as responsible for the muting of the public space over the nineteenth century, which prepares the ground for the invention of motion pictures. On the other hand, however, the early motion-picture shows are still embedded in an urban amusement culture

⁷Well into the twentieth century, press regulations in the Habsburg monarchy were so highly repressive that they effectively amounted to censorship (mandatory security deposits, license restrictions, newspaper stamp tax, risk of confiscation by authorities, taxation of advertising, no street selling). Some of these restrictions were lifted late in the nineteenth century (advertising tax in 1874, stamp duty in 1899/1900), but full liberalization of the newspaper market was enacted only in the Austrian First Republic after the monarchy had ceased to exist (Paupié 3–13).

⁸For quite some time, the barkers are allowed to call out their newspapers’ names only, which gives rise to visual layouts getting even flashier.

that enters a new era at the end of the nineteenth century, as shown by the Copenhagen *Tivoli* gardens, Coney Island, or the Vienna *Wurstelprater* (popularly and hereinafter called *Prater*). These new centers of urban mass entertainment (with their vaudeville theaters, freak shows, or ghost trains) pick up where older premodern cultures of attraction (funfairs, touring theaters) left off, but they also increase the spectrum of these older cultures by adding mass capacities and a particular interest in technological innovation with electrically driven merry-go-rounds, roller coasters, phonographs, mechanical theaters, and eventually cinematographs (Mattl and Schwarz).

In all these urban cultures of attraction, the process of habituating audiences to silent spectatorship is already ongoing, and yet it is the ubiquitous barkers and their advertising who disclose the spectacle-based nature of these cultures, while still relying on loud dialogic words. Just how inextricably the barkers' cries continue to be interwoven with the carnivalesque culture of laughter in Vienna's *Prater* amusement park is illustrated by this account given by Adolf Glaßbrenner upon observing a duo of barkers: "One buffoon is hopping on stilts through the gawking crowd, scolding the other one; the latter, wearing a tall pointed hat and a grimacing makeup, tries to catch him, but the first buffoon tosses the stilts aside, climbs up the nearby tree, and keeps scolding down from the twigs. All at once, he cries out, pretending to lose his balance, and now, having clutched a branch, dangles between sky and earth. His fellow buffoon pulls him down, and they are having a fight, while crying out, 'Keep coming in, ladies and gentlemen. The show starts momentarily!'" (Glaßbrenner 93). By the late nineteenth century, such overstepping of the line between stage art and spectatorship is considered an indecent transgression or, for that matter, unlawful molestation. By 1897 at the latest, the amusement-park barkers are no longer permitted to engage in what was called "schmoozing," namely to leave their place or ramp mingling with the crowd to push their shows, let alone to address individuals directly in this way. Such promotion is henceforth considered obtrusive and punishable by fine or even arrest (*Arbeiter-Zeitung* 2).

As in other cities, the first public motion-picture shows in Vienna in 1896 take place within a framework of larger programs in places like vaudeville theaters, show booths, or circuses, which are rooted in the tradition of funfair entertainment, one example being the venue of *Veltées Panoptikum* at Kohlmarkt (Schwarz 12). Later in the year, numerous businesses in the *Prater* amusement park start upgrading to expand the scope of programs in their show booths. One novelty to amaze visitors

(alongside “strength machines,” “swing machines,” mechanical shooting ranges, panoramas, performances by gymnastics groups, jugglers, or animal tamers) were “live photographs” or “cinematographic theaters” (Büttner and Dewald 2728). Cinemas as separate businesses at fixed locations are, however, not documented in Vienna before 1903, which leaves a transition period of around seven years (Schwarz 12), during which the motion-picture shows are just one “sensation” out of many on the schedules of stationary or wandering entertainment businesses. Yet the movies increasingly gain importance within this spectrum of programs on offer and, before long, get announced as the “greatest attraction in modern history” (qtd. in Paech).

Cinema barkers’ (usually called “recommenders” [*Rekommandeure*] by this time) behavior changes as motion-picture shows are increasingly emerging as a self-reliant attraction, with dedicated venues becoming established at fixed locations, and cinema operators developing a growing desire to dissociate themselves from the funfair concept. Although the cinema barkers present in all of Vienna’s districts, just like their counterparts in the amusement park, undoubtedly continue the tradition of the carnivalesque culture of laughter, their manners have greatly improved as they are putting on a noble-minded air with a twinkle of self-irony in their eyes. As one cinema operator recalls, “good” recommenders “were important persons who got poached by competitors all too easily. Once I hired one who had been prayer leader in a temple. But when his nose turned red from drinking, making it look even longer than it was anyway, they gave him the boot. He was lucky, since his nose was great fun to look at; crowds would gather as he was standing before the cinema in his uniform crying out movie plots in nasal tones, and many of those people would come in” (qtd. in Schwarz 88 from *Kino-Journal* 1923 4).

The cinema barkers of the early twentieth century are still rooted in the tradition of carnivalesque sensationalism not only through their advertising techniques. At least in the early years of motion pictures, the “live photographs” they promote are perceived as sensations belonging to the same tactile world as roller coasters or giant swings; all of these are rooted in the same tradition of entertainment and premodern sensationalism dating back to the medieval funfairs. Tom Gunning refers to this as a “carnival of the early film” not yet dominated by narration but by the principle of attraction (Gunning). Yet the “cinema of attraction” and premodern voice-based sensationalism have more in common than being both offspring of funfairs and vaudeville theaters. Both forms are related for two

more reasons. Firstly, the “cinema of attraction”, like its premodern predecessors, rests upon a concept of exhibition that involves the audience in a mutually active relationship. This is accomplished, for instance, by movie actors looking squarely into the camera while spectators raise their voices commenting and criticizing plots, and talking or even singing along with scenes. Secondly, Gunning also characterizes the cinema of attraction as an “exhibitionist cinema” (Gunning 64) for co-exhibiting its own technologies of visibility—considering that the early cinema, much like the sensationalism of market criers in early modern history, shows off a promoted product (here the motion-picture technology itself) in a way that is self-reflective, ironic, and theatrical. The combination of both traits makes for a dialogic “face-off” kind of spectatorship, whose “accent on direct stimulation” (Gunning 66) still prevents exactly the voyeuristic self-oblivious immersion which is going to fuel the wide popular appeal of narrative cinema (and its modern sensationalism of action, epic and horror movies) from 1906/1907 onward.

Thus, in terms of film history, the cinema barkers of the early twentieth century make their appearance on the threshold between the early movies of attraction and the “embourgeoisied” narrative cinema to follow. However, they epitomize a marriage of two traditions that is likewise on the verge of falling into disrepute. A number of groups are increasingly bothered by this commingling of the vision-based sensationalism of the movies with the traditional voice-based sensationalism of the barkers—a *mélange* that also runs counter to the historical trend of isolating vision and hearing. As a result, several circles from very different walks of life increasingly speak out against the cinema barkers. One important group are cinematograph owners striving to raise the social status of the cinema by transforming “the refined show booth” to a “true” “theater of the people” also frequented by the “higher classes” (qtd. in Schwarz 115 from *Österreichischer Komet* 1–2). A crucial step in this direction is made in 1910, when the Association of Austrian Cinema Owners discharges “certain elements not conducive to the evolution of the cinema.” This is leveled against the outgoing chairman, a former “church-tower climber” who advocates a concept of carnivalesque show-booth cinemas. Under the new chairman, Karl Juhasz, the foundation is laid for “a new era of cinematography” to “take the cinema to a different, more modern level” (*Kino-Journal* 1926 1–2). What is meant by “modern cinema” becomes clear as *Tuchlauben-Lichtspiele* opens its doors in 1913: “They no longer use barkers” but “printed programs handed out by a distinguished usher with

an obliging movement of his arm” (*Kinematographische Rundschau* 1913 38–39). The facility itself is a “neat little theater” that appeals to a certain audience, with “a negro in the vestibule, dark marble and shiny gold” interspersed with “classy subdued ebony,” and waiting rooms “cosily lined with carpets, like a sumptuous Turkish boudoir” (*ibid.*). “The tacit law enforced in theaters defines also propriety in modern cinemas: not a sound from the genies, but mute letters on a black background politely requesting ‘The ladies are asked to take off their hats.’ In the past, the ladies would have protested. In today’s genteel cinema, the lady graciously reaches for her little hat without putting up the slightest resistance” (*ibid.*).⁹

In 1914, *Kinematographische Rundschau* proudly sums up how the silencing of encounters between people and between audiences themselves and the movies has been accomplished, at least in Vienna’s Inner City, by around 1913. As noted by the periodical, the “one and only” interest of today’s audiences is in “watching the silent movie”—neither in “singers nor accompanying voices,” nor in “so-called talking pictures” (*Kinematographische Rundschau* 1914 2–3). Attempts at modernizing the cinema-barker concept by substituting more advanced technological alternatives (in the form of gramophones suitable for street advertising, known as “gloriphones”) are ultimately doomed as well (Müller). Thus, the cinema is now pervaded by the same “right to silence” that was recently claimed for Vienna by Alfred Freiherr von Berger in the context of the international anti-noise movement, thereby putting an end to the molestation emanating from uncultivated people who are habitually “shouting creatures” (Berger).¹⁰

More surprisingly, a group made of champions of “Old Vienna” nostalgia also looks askance at the cinema barkers. Unlike cinema reformers turning against the barkers on behalf of modernity, this group defends an idealized notion of the typical Viennese crier from any contact with modernity. Around 1900, memories of “Old Vienna” hawking marketed in collections of drawings or photographs showing “Viennese Types” (*Wiener Typen*) bear witness to this mindset. This observation applies also to Felix Salten’s well-known 1911 tribute to Vienna’s *Prater* amusement park, a volume concisely entitled “Wurstelprater” and published in numerous editions, illustrated with photographs by the well-known Austrian

⁹The *Tuchlauben* cinema is one out of many expensively furnished and equipped cinemas to open their doors during the emerging boom in Vienna’s Inner City (Schwarz 115–116).

¹⁰Berger is director of the *Burgtheater* between 1910 and 1912.



Fig. 8.2 Barker in Vienna's Prater amusement park, postcard, photograph by Emil Mayer, around 1910 © IMAGNO/Austrian Archives

photographer Emil Mayer.¹¹ Even though barkers on duty before various establishments are the dominant theme here, no mention is made of cinemas or cinema barkers. Nevertheless, on comparing the photographs illustrating the text to other contemporary pictures of the area, it becomes clear that many of the barkers depicted are, in fact, cinema barkers—that is, representatives of the same technological modernity for which Salten allows no space in the world of harmony suggested by his backward-looking *Prater* image (Fig. 8.2).

That being said, Salten's account of gestures and verbal expressions used by those barkers is probably rather close to the historical truth, since a totally new style of contemporary *Prater* barkers is also reported by the Austrian writer Anton Kuh (1890–1941) a few years later. In 1923 Kuh writes that these barkers are now trying to come across as well-spoken

¹¹ Austrian writer Felix Salten (1869–1945) is best known for his authorship of “Bambi. A Life in the Woods” (1923).

gentlemen, comporting themselves with distinction, grandeur, or indeed with an air of aristocracy. They make it seem as though it was nowadays incumbent on them to impart the “splendor of a solemn, noble world” to all those “works of art” and “wonders and riches,” while most of them unintentionally fail in this effort (Kuh, “Praterausrufer” 1923). Kuh thinks of the modernized and aggrandized sensationalism of the new *Prater* barkers as part of a fatal alliance that has anti-democratic implications. In his view, the emergence of this sensationalism is related to the increasingly deep inroads made by totalitarian models of society, and to the rise of charismatic “Party barkers” inciting awe and self-abnegation (Kuh, “Praterausrufer” 1931).¹²

Elias Canetti (1905–1994) examines precisely this new type of “political barkers” in his “Comedy of Vanity” (1934) written under the impact of book-burnings in Nazi Germany. What is more, he aptly portrays their ideological program:

Now, we, ladies and gentlemen, yes, we, and we, and we, ladies and gentlemen, and we, and we, we are going to do something. What are we going to do? We are going to do something terrific, absolutely terrific, something unheard of, something fantastic, gigantic, terrific! And we, ladies and gentlemen, we are absolutely terrific and we are up to something. (Canetti 73)

Both authors concur that the careers of those new barkers became possible only after the ability to laughingly counter the discourse of those in power had been largely lost in society. This very ability was still preserved and alive in the premodern sensationalism of the “market criers” or *Fratschlerinnen* and, indeed, in the storefront cinema barkers of modern fin-de-siècle Vienna. Available evidence that the disappearance of these voices from the public scene could be exploited in an anti-democratic way adds one more reason why it is productive for historians of sensationalism to conduct joint studies of visual/auditory cultures and premodern/modern traditions.

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¹²In the first printed version of 1923, Kuh still uses the somewhat more candid epithet “persuasion barkers.” (Sincerest gratitude to Walter Schübler for providing relevant information and documentation.)

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PART III

Visualizing the Space of Industrial
Modernity

The Whole Thing (and Other Things): From Panorama to Attraction in Stephen Crane’s “The Open Boat,” Ashcan Painting, and Early Cinema

Michael Devine

In “The Open Boat” (1897), Stephen Crane short story of four men fighting for survival in a lifeboat, the narrator makes a startling aside regarding the possibilities and pleasures of certain kinds of spectatorship: “Viewed from a balcony, the whole thing would doubtless have been weirdly picturesque. But the men in the boat had no time to see it, and if they had leisure, there were other things to occupy their minds” (58). Startling, because in this classic tale of literary naturalism moored ostensibly to empirical realities (suggested by its subtitle: “A Tale intended to be after the fact”), the narrator’s quick shuttle between high (the “balcony” view) and low suddenly lands the text in the sphere of popular culture, spectatorship, and leisure time pursuits. Crane, of course, appears merely to be flaunting naturalist bona-fides in contrasting his grim tale of survival with the tastes of genteel land-lubbers, those of “average experience [who are] never at sea in a dinghy,” as he dryly puts it (58). While that is no doubt part of the calculus, it is not “the whole thing”—because there are “other things,” new ways of spectating and of knowing that Crane’s characters experience. As the very next sentence clarifies, unlike those in the balcony,

M. Devine (✉)
SUNY Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh, NY, USA

“[the men] knew it was broad day because the color of the sea changed from slate to emerald-green streaked with amber lights, and the foam was like tumbling snow” (58). The balcony view, we might say, is no longer the best one in town.

If Crane “create[s] textual spaces that enable new perceptual encounters,” as Nicholas Gaskill has recently argued, it’s worth noting how crowded these spaces are with all sorts of different perceptual encounters (722). To borrow the title of Nancy Bentley’s recent study of the literature and mass culture of this period, Crane takes pains to set “The Open Boat” in a kind of “frantic panorama.” While Bentley deploys this phrase from William Dean Howells to symbolize the new vistas and mass audiences unlocked by the exploding pop culture, “The Open Boat” suggests that we should treat these terms and their charged tension much more directly (1). Surprisingly, Bentley says little about Crane and even less about the history of panoramas in her otherwise wide-ranging work, even though there at the start of “The Open Boat” is the panoramic view (“the whole thing”) but something else as well, “other things,” perspectives that are frantic, anarchic, shape-shifting, and pleasurable precisely because they subvert the aspiration to visual control. In short, Crane’s work shows how the culture of the panorama was inflected in the age of the attraction, when the 360-degree promise of encyclopedic perception gave way to revelry in a very different kind of turn, early cinema’s celebration of a spinning world in which old hierarchies were giving way to new modes of affiliation—a truly popular culture. This inflection, as we’ll see, not only defines the birth of early cinema but also gives insight into the new sensations defining the literature and painting of this key period, a crucial juncture in the genealogy of modernism when “the whole thing”—the panorama—was not just resisted but reimagined across the arts.

Properly contextualized in the visual culture of this moment, naturalists like Crane begin to look much more like proto-modernists, or rather, less like naturalists and more like the early cinema showmen who unleashed upon unsuspecting audiences what audiences what Tom Gunning calls the “unbelievable visual transformation” of the “cinema of attractions” (“Astonishment” 119). Through the term “cinema of attractions”—a way of conjuring film’s fairground pedigree—Gunning shows how early cinema depended less on narrative absorption and more on audience solicitation and confrontation: films of train tracks running off into the horizon, and then suddenly a train rushing “towards you,” as early exhibitors promised—or, in the case of “The Open Boat,” Florida waters turning

into “tumbling snow” (“Astonishment” 120; Crane 58). Of course, the panorama did not simply disappear as the frantic century pivoted. As John Fagg reminds us in *On the Cusp* (2009), his aptly titled study of Crane and Ashcan painters, theirs was “a moment marked by transitions, uncertainties, and possibilities,” defined by “works that draw on and at the same time critique earlier modes of expression” (3). These works blur lines between participant and observer, as we will see in Crane’s own story; they remediate the balcony view by bringing it close up to the attraction, as we will see in panoramic city films such as *In the Grip of the Blizzard* (1899) and in the paintings of Everett Shinn and his contemporaries. Far from disappearing, in other words, the panorama became a key backdrop in the writing, painting, and films of this period for a richer, more complex visual syntax, by which spectators measured the risky pleasure of seeing, feeling, and knowing that which could somehow elude the comfortable dominion of contemplative perception, the panoramic sensation of grasping “the whole thing.”

FROM PANORAMA TO ATTRACTION: A WORLD AT SEA

In its own way, the panorama has always been treated as a kind of attraction, by audiences in the past and by visual culture scholars today. Indeed, ever since Robert Barker’s 1781 patent for the panorama, the promise of a visual survey through a 360-degree painting has often been punctuated with exclamation points. Nineteenth-century audiences were thrilled by the immersive experience of stationary and moving panoramas, and scholars such as Angela Miller, Alison Griffiths, and William Uricchio have read the hugely popular cultural form as an antecedent to early cinema and its emphasis on spectacle. And with good reason: John Banvard’s *Panorama of the Mississippi River* (1850), for example, was advertised as “The Largest Painting in the World,” its popularity spawning the term “Panoromania,” first used in the *Illustrated London News* the same year (Miller 59). If the transatlantic hysteria shows something of the panorama’s pop culture provenance and mass appeal, however, it is also evidence of how neatly the panorama fit into an age of nation building, when the very materials of art needed to keep pace with urban-industrial modernity to “satisf[y] the nineteenth-century craving for visual—and by extension physical and political—control over a rapidly changing world,” as Miller puts it (36). The spectacle of such big art was addressed to a sensibility in search of stability, and particularly the connection between political and visual stability.

Daphne Brooks reads Banvard's panorama politically "as an idyllic and peaceful trope of national uniformity and expansionism," offering spectators a lazy Mississippi River journey that makes totally invisible the "increasingly visible black abolitionist agitation" of the era (79). This illusion of political uniformity was bound up with the sensation of visual stability essential to the panorama's design: as Barker's first patent made clear, the panorama promised "a proper point of view," affording an encyclopedic sense of the world—of "the whole thing"—as something unbroken, continuous, and knowable (qtd. in Uricchio 226). Accordingly, when vision itself becomes whole again, the spectator—and, by extension, the political body—experiences a kind of giddy sense of expansion, what Alan Wallach has called the "panoptic sublime" in his work on American painting from this period (qtd. in Mazow 1).

Hazily enveloping the panorama and its massive popularity was a well-worn nineteenth-century premise: the balcony view promised spiritual ascent above contingency, above the material (and political) realm, above the bodily limitations of everyday vision—and, one might add, above unwashed bodies in general. Unsurprisingly, purveyors of this popular form were creative when it came to cashing in. Like churchmen selling indulgences, traveling panorama showmen made sure the gate to such transcendence could be narrowed. Miller describes efforts "to create a (literally) two-tiered audience structure, based on price": audience members could choose between "a compromised view of the panorama, with a slight distortion in the perspective of the viewer (since the panorama was grounded in a perspective system generated from a particular point)," or a higher platform "with a higher entry fee, which positioned viewers to receive the correct perspective, as well as allowing them to linger at their pleasure" (45). Although the word "panorama" derives from the Greek for "all seeing," exclusion has been just as important an element of the entertainment's long history.

The idea that the wide view elevates spectators and effaces difference in all sorts of troubling ways has long been recognized: the panorama, for Walter Benjamin, reflected the "city dweller's political supremacy," even making them feel like "masters of the world," according to Bernard Comment (qtd. in Jarenski 126). But where did this feeling of mastery come from, if, as Alison Griffiths argues, the panorama was an immersive technology, an overwhelming, potentially unsettling attraction that created "the sensation of the spectator's physical relocation into the center [of an illusionistically rendered] space"? ("Revered" 7). From the semblance of

narrative structure that, implicitly and explicitly, inscribed the visual welter of peoples and places into one visual plane; as Shelly Jarenski notes in her recent work on African American critiques of the panorama's "imperialist aesthetics" (134), "the spectator's responses to this ... immersive spectacle are guided through stabilizing narrative" (128), both explanatory lectures but also the way in which panoramas were experienced "spatially, as a kind of journey, a sensation heightened by the sensation of movement, either of a spooling panorama, or the movement of the spectator herself" (126). Simply put, rather than rendering the world illegible, there was meaning to movement within the confines of panorama.

This is a subtle but essential point: just as within a church, where believers move through Stations of the Cross, for example, purposeful, restrained, and orderly movement positioned spectators to relate to the world on similar terms. Thus crowned with an electric nimbus of sorts, panorama spectators for Griffiths are really on "a form of pilgrimage" ("Revered" 4), a far cry from Gunning's emphasis on the "agitating" nature of the cinematic attraction, which he compares to "an experience of assault" due to its penchant for "confrontation": "Through a variety of formal means, the images of the cinema of attractions rush forward to meet their viewers. These devices range from the implied collision of the early railroad films to ... when actors nodded and gestured at the camera" ("Astonishment" 116, 121). Narrative, in other words, gets replaced by titillating scopic pleasure, and spectators revel in a much different kind of 360-degree experience: the world of the film loop. By buffering against these kinds of distractions, the panorama, Miller concludes, allowed a "tame and domesticated bourgeois public [to be] present at catastrophes at sea, fires, scenes of battle," even while affording them "the illusion of mastery over random, distant, or otherwise incomprehensible events" (41, 46).

Clearly, then, "The Open Boat" was sailing watery ways that by 1897 had served as a well-traveled narrative space for the panoramic form, at least since *American Panorama of the Nile* (1849), a popular prelude of sorts to Banvard's *Mississippi River* (Jarenski 130). These entertainments were immersive but never *submersive*: the balcony view was precisely that, where you could always get narrative bearings and your story straight, unlike Crane's crew who argue in "disjointed sentences" over what they may or not glimpse on land (58). An elegant modernist equation of Crane's, this verbal disjointedness is in part the result of fractured vision, which itself results from the seemingly uncontrollable, scattered, anti-narrative direction of a dinghy at sea.

These are movements Crane is careful to render in metaphorical, kinetic terms: “A seat in this boat was not unlike a seat upon a bucking bronco”; “the craft pranced and reared, and plunged like an animal”; then suddenly it is “like a horse making for a fence outrageously high” after which “she would slide, and race, and splash down a long incline, and arrive bobbing and nodding in front of the next menace” (58). Bill Brown reads this image in light of Crane’s Asbury Park upbringing, particularly the Wild West shows that had become popular with the closing of the frontier in which “man repeatedly and expectantly triumphs over the natural world” (112). A more visually oriented reading might turn instead to the earliest films, like Edison’s *Bucking Bronco* (1894), a kinoscope film featuring a man shooting a gun at the ground where a bronco rears and plunges under a rider. The film is a strange revision of Muybridge’s motion studies of the 1880s, even in how the makeshift fencing constructed outside of Edison’s Black Maria studio sets Muybridge’s grids askew (Fig. 9.1).



Fig. 9.1 *Bucking Bronco* (1894), Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division

The horse enters and exits the frame at random, its movements as jerky and jumpy as the earliest peephole technology projecting it. Hemmed in but also at home in its filmic loop, the horse makes rotating movements capable of being played backward and forward, like so many of the earliest films of people sneezing, dancing, and flexing. Obviously, the kinetoscope's "circularity," to use Nicolas Dulac and André Gaudreault's word, was built into the very structure of the panorama (232); however, in the large-scale panorama, which Griffiths sees as descending from Gothic cathedrals, "circularity" was bridled by communal, pedagogical, which is to say, narrative obligations ("Revered" 9).

Unbridled, the kinetoscopic attraction differed from the panorama in other important ways: by putting control in the hands of the kinetoscope spectators—viewers operated the Mutoscope, for example, by cranking it—early cinema invited all sorts of surreal manipulations of speed that were simply impossible in the panorama, especially in films like *Bucking Bronco*, which culminates with a thrown rider (making for a conclusion of sorts). A child with a coin and an imagination surely would have been tempted to crank the machine backward to send the thrown rider back onto the bronco, a manipulation that became common practice for showmen projecting films in the following years. This brand of surreal motion—unavailable to the balcony crowd, not to mention churchgoers—seems to have been particularly appealing to Crane, who ultimately saves from drowning his narrative proxy the correspondent by a similar trick, lifting him all at once from the sea and into shallow waters, "an event in gymnastics and a true miracle," or at least a miracle of the machine age, the age of moving bodies and moving pictures (77).

Compared with Crane's dinghy that blurs all sort of lines between animal and object, agency and contingency (note how "bobbing" morphs into "nodding"), it's helpful to consider a sea panorama from this period, such as Hugo D'Alesi's "Mareorama," which premiered at the Paris Exposition of 1900. A network of pistons and motors pitched the ship, which, unlike Crane's, could hold nearly 700 passengers with a deck 230 feet long (Uricchio 230). Size really does matter here, especially when Crane is so careful to describe how small the dinghy is ("a man ought to have a bathtub larger") and thus how limited even the smallest movement, particularly the freedom—the panoramic right?—to turn one's head: the correspondent "could not seize an opportunity to turn his head" (61). More to the point, the size of the "Mareorama" reflects the fundamental communal stability at the heart of the panorama. Instead of jeopardizing

this stability, the rhythmic motions were designed to reinforce the sensation of making a “seamless ocean journey” (Uricchio 230). The motion is a reassuring part of “the whole thing,” in part because the pitching actually helps to reveal to audiences “the whole thing” in the form of the two panoramic paintings nearly 2500 feet long and over 40 feet tall scrolling past the spectators (Uricchio 230).

While the illusion of motion in the “Mareorama” made for a legible experience by helping patrons look high and low to grasp “the whole thing,” the dinghy’s performance on the water does exactly the opposite: ironically, one only gets an accurate “idea of the resources of the sea” not through the survey of the balcony view, but when “each slatey wall of water ... shut all else from the view of the men in the boat, and it was not difficult to imagine that this particular wave was the final outburst of the ocean, the last effort of the grim water” (58). On the one hand, it is tempting to open up the text to the culture of late nineteenth-century attractions more broadly here, to sense along with Brown how the “recreational asserts itself” even and especially at these moments of disaster, when the four men seem more like Coney Island patrons riding the Leap Frog Railway roller coaster promising the thrill of near-miss collisions (105). On the other hand, it’s critical to see that Crane again emphasizes sight as the chief sensation activated by a head-on crash into a “slatey wall.” Although the correspondent wonders “if none ever ascended the tall wind-tower, and if then they never looked seaward,” Crane formulates an answer as to why the balcony is empty: a new immersive experience (“shut all else from the view of the men in the boat”) here replaces the pleasure of “the whole thing,” a kind of shared blindness that is at once a common revelation about the limits of vision and knowledge (58). Michael North outlines this paradox when he describes how often the “inescapable specificity of the material world reinserts itself into the supposed transparency of the visual” in modernist works (*Camera Works* 12). Here, the particular (“this particular wave”) resists being effaced by the “weirdly picturesque” logic of the balcony view. What’s more, the recognition of the partiality of every point of view is enabled by the moving machine, the open boat, a recognition framed as both blinding and revelatory, terrifying and illuminating, and one simply not available to those of “average experience.”

Traditional literary histories would consider this blindness a secular-spiritual *via negativa* experience common to naturalist works, describing as Crane does in the very next sentence the “terrible grace” of the water’s movements (58). However, this risks forgetting how technologically

mediated Crane's tale really is. In fact, the movement governing "The Open Boat" is not the organic movement sending the boat up and down but rather the circular logic of the wheel spinning the tale into an allegory of the machine age and its new audiences who were consuming a visual culture of automatic, uninterrupted, and seemingly unending motion. To this end, what is perhaps most striking about "The Open Boat" is what happens on land: whereas the panorama, like museums, encouraged a type of "organized walking" (Griffiths, "Journeys" 54) among spectators who could grasp a "definable beginning, middle, and end" to the exhibit (Miller 46), Crane's spectators—and one in particular—who finally appear on the shoreline seem themselves to emerge from a much different tradition of 360-degree display: the tradition of optical toys like the phenakistoscope and zoetrope that culminated in the kinetoscope and early cinema. This tradition is one where circularity made for an a-narrative space of repetition and display, a space perpetually, one might add, *in media res* (as Crane's own tale begins). In fact, Crane quickly blurs spectators and participants as a "waving" man—a curious term for this maritime tale—takes center stage for an extended comic interlude:

"Now he's stopped. Look! He's facing us!"

"He's waving at us!"...

"He's running."...

"He's standing still again. He's looking, I think ... There he goes again—toward the house ... —Now he's stopped again."

"Is he waving at us?"

"No, not now; he was though." (66)

Doubly mediated and thus even more strangely framed for the reader, this vision relayed to the oiler (who cannot turn his head) of a man running, stopping, looking, waving, running, and stopping clearly connects with the late nineteenth century's "cultural series of animated pictures," for which "the attraction was the structuring principle" (Dulac and Gaudreault 228).

In fact, the oiler's question shows how at home he, his crewmates, and Crane were in this culture: by punctuating the description with a question—"Is he waving at us?"—the oiler is not just inquiring about help, but seems to be intuiting something fundamental about the circular movements of this new world at sea, industrial modernity, where "now" always promises another "irruption," as Gunning puts it, of action in the "pure present tense," a wave that by its very recurrence undermines the sense that meaning is motivated,

that we are in control of our actions, of our bodies, of anything at all (“Now” 77). On the surface, it seems a particularly grim diagnosis, until one is lifted by another sort of repeating wave to experience “the miracle” of the machine age; then one grasps the full force of the idea that nothing is truly fixed in the age of the attraction, when 360-degree stands less for detached contemplation and more for the peculiar way that “the mechanized life of the modern world dialectically overcomes itself,” as North observes about early animated films, “deriving from the machine a freedom from form and determination that is truly utopian” (*Machine Age* 60).

The waving man continues his starring turn, becoming an object of imitation, resentment, and ultimately wonder to the men in the boat:

“That ain’t a flag, is it? That’s his coat. Why, certainly, that’s his coat.”
 “So it is; it’s his coat. He’s taken it off and is waving it around his head. But would you look at him swing it!”...
 “What’s that idiot with the coat mean? What’s he signaling, anyhow?”...
 “He don’t mean anything; he’s just playing.”
 “Well, if he’d just signal us to try the surf again ... there would be some reason in it. But look at him! He just stands there and keeps his coat revolving like a wheel. The ass!”...
 “Say, he ain’t tired yet. Look at ‘im wave!”
 “Wonder how long he can keep that up. He’s been revolving his coat ever since he caught sight of us.” (67)

On the one hand, naturalist irony would seem to dictate a reading that likens, for example, these apparently meaningless movements to those of the waves, and more specifically, to the repetitive, alienating motions required to drive the machine; shortly after introducing the man Crane does consider the men in the boat: “In the meantime the oiler rowed, and then the correspondent rowed, and then the oiler rowed ... [T]hey mechanically, turn by turn, plied the leaden oars” (68). And yet, Crane seems careful both to link and differentiate the movements between labor and amusement, between repetition and the unceasing, untiring revolution of the “wheel.” A revolution in more ways than one: to read this untagged passage in light of Christopher Butler’s thoughts on style in *Early Modernism*, Crane’s comical wheeling, waving man signals what Butler considers the turn from “the project of representing the world through the narrative of historical development” toward a new language of “juxtaposition and the alogical ... the simultaneous and the collaged” (10).

More recently, Katherine Biers reads such innovations as part of the period's "virtual" turn, the formal techniques by which writers "compet[ed] with immersive multimedia experiences and spectacular amusements" (1).

In a pop-cultural light, the circularity of the waving man, finally described as so "damn cheerful" (68), is the cinematic body, industrialized modernity's dream of a body that, as Gunning puts it, "remains unchanneled, oddly purposeless, filled with nervous energy that discharges itself without effect" ("Chaplin" 8). While Gunning is writing about Charlie Chaplin, he could just as easily be describing any number of early films, ranging from *Fred Ott's Sneeze* (1894) to *A Street Arab* (1898), a film celebrating the wheel-like motions of the body, and about which the Edison Catalogue noted: "An exceptionally unique part of the performance is [the New York street gamin] standing on his head and twisting around like a top. It is safe to say he will be bald-headed at an early age" ("Edison Catalogue"). Of course, moviegoers knew very well that he would never age (Fig. 9.2).



Fig. 9.2 *A Street Arab* (1898), Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division

Indeed, in an age when the old pieties about freedom and agency were giving way to the gloomiest forecasts of scientism, the cinematic screen occupied a strange middle space between machine and magic, peopled by characters, as Dulac and Gaudreault observe, “like Sisyphus, condemned *ad infinitum* to turn about,” who were at once oddly figures of hope, or at least “eternal and unbreakable machines” (232). To borrow from James Buzard’s discussion of the revolving door, another spinning technology of this period, it is important to remember that this moment was one truly of “perpetual revolution,” when the screen offered a space, like that door, seemingly “independent of nature’s rhythms and constraints,” where spinning gamins never grew old (561). One is even reminded of Adam Gopnik’s description of a carousel, which in its rotation short-circuits the market forces powered by industry’s great wheels: “The reward is ... the simple continuity, the reality that the spinning will never get a prize, but that it will also never stop. After all, spinning is its own reward. There wouldn’t be carousels if it weren’t so” (39–40).

When Barker filed his patent for the panorama in which he described the movement of the spectator (“an observer turning quite around”), he had something more contemplative in mind than a head twisting like a top (qtd. in Uricchio 230). Not so for Crane, who celebrates a revolving, circular energy that blurs any line between attraction and spectator: the ease and speed by which such roles interchange recalls Gunning’s original observation that the “visible world” had become “a series of discreet attractions” (“Astonishment” 125). To extend this logic to the spectator, when everything is an attraction, the doubling becomes never-ending; as Rae Beth Gordon argues in her work on hysteria and early cinema, viewers were thought to be subject to automatic gestures, spreading a hysterical contagion of sorts, attractions begetting attractions (129). Something of this contagion is at work in “The Open Boat,” for even though it appears that the men imitate the waving man, using a bath towel that “by some weird chance” was in the boat (“the captain waved it”), it’s important to remember that they are the original attraction, having earlier rigged together a sail from the captain’s overcoat to “give you two boys a chance to rest” (62). The waving man, in other words, mirrors the sailing boat, an emblem of kinetic rest, or what might even be called “energized relaxation,” to use Lauren Rabinovitz’s word for the period’s pleasures (2). It is a state not available through the balcony view, but rather through the machine, one not of detached, bourgeois leisure but a peculiarly modern pleasure reveling in liberation from the machine through the machine.

Early film—as well as Crane’s own brand of literary attractions—rejected the “weirdly picturesque” panoramic view for a very different kind of weirdness, “weird chance,” contingency, or, most simply, play, the kind produced by the excessive automatism of the screen. This weirdness, we might say, is chief among the “other things” beyond genteel “leisure” occupying the men on the boat, a truly “open” machine in a tale that functions somewhat akin to the revolving, projecting machines of early cinema, which in their spinning enacted what Gunning calls “the vertiginous experience of the frailty of our knowledge” (“Astonishment” 122). This experience defined the culture of attractions at the time “The Open Boat” was written, and it’s evident particularly as the story ends, as the waving man becomes the “running and undressing, and undressing and running” man coming to the aid of the capsized men, running and undressing with such “remarkable speed” it’s as if “everything flew magically off him” (77). Crane’s tale reminds us that there was something truly magic in the appeal of the attraction, which, in reaching out for us, signals not only new modes of perception and imagination but also, perhaps most importantly, affiliation.

“TUMBLING SNOW”: BLIZZARDS AND OTHER PERFORMANCES

One need not look very far in the period to see the many strange ways that the panorama found itself not only surviving but thriving “within a world,” as Uricchio carefully qualifies, “far less serene and contemplative than that portrayed in the painted panoramas” (234). A glance at any catalog of films made in the late nineteenth century confirms the fact that the panorama truly proliferated as one of the most common titles. And yet, as in “The Open Boat,” there were many “other things” to experience besides balcony access to “the whole thing”—cameras swiveling, moving in all directions, tilting down buildings, strapped on to trains (as in the popular Hale’s Tours), and even on elevators. The popular practice of capturing the “balcony” view from the Eiffel Tower, for example, more often turned into a shot powered upward by the elevator, so that “our viewpoint of the city of Paris not only ascends precipitously, but is constantly and rhythmically bisected and reframed through the tower’s system of supports,” creating a sensation “not only [of] looking but *feeling*, sensing our passage through unaccustomed space kinesthetically” (Gunning, “Birth of Film” 14). That as much could be said about “The Open Boat” suggests

the extent to which the new panoramic experience was inflected across the arts, how, in other words, the original encyclopedic form became a backdrop to something else entirely in the age of the attraction: a wish to give oneself over to the moving machine, and, by extension, the lived, material environment. As Uricchio notes regarding the turn-of-the-century trend in making “series of ‘panoramic’ studies” of American cities (with titles like *Panorama of Third Street*, *Panorama of Fourth Street*), urban mapping was not so much the goal as was simply engaging with “the vagaries of urban traffic—halting at intersections, veering out of the way,” through tracking shots that penetrated space to make spectators into participants registering the impact of the physical world (232).

Bentley is no doubt right in arguing that Crane’s texts are “less like the absorbing canvas of an impressionist painting”; Crane himself was hardly avant-garde in describing his fiction as “pass[ing] before the reader like a panorama,” but the description reads differently in light of the dynamic, embodied state of the panorama at the end of the nineteenth century (296). Unsurprisingly, we find in Crane’s *Maggie* (1893) a rather different, negative version of this kind of tracking in the figure of Jimmie, Maggie’s violent “truck driver” brother whose sole pleasure is to set himself upon his horses with what might be called a poor man’s balcony view of New York City: “He fell into the habit, when starting on a long journey, of fixing his eye on a high and distant object, commanding his horses to start and then going into a trance of oblivion” (12). The balcony perch that his characters (and readers) seek, as is often the case in Crane, is remote, removed, unfeeling. Interestingly, this type of panoramic experience actually promised the opposite for early moviegoers; by subverting detachment, legibility, and often pushing them toward the vanishing point and “ever closer inspection of spaces first seen at a distance,” the panorama became an attraction in its own right, stimulating spectator curiosity, always confronting viewers with the contingency of a world flowing past (Uricchio 234).

Perhaps the most striking (and least commented upon) aspect of these city panoramas is the amount of “waving” men, to recall that prominent figure from “The Open Boat.” Spectators watching panoramic filming become at once attractions themselves, playful bodies transformed in and by the machine, signaling by their very movement—often in the form of a tipped hat, a wave—the promise of a new sociality enabled by visual technologies. In considering the visual culture of this period, traditionally thought to be defined by naturalism’s bleak interest in environment and disaster, one particularly fascinating cinematic example is *In the Grip of the*

Blizzard (1899) (also known as *The Blizzard*), a film that Bruce Posner describes in an intriguing introductory note for the *Unseen Cinema* DVD collection as “A circular panorama, weather report, and comic interlude all at once” (Posner). An “actuality” setting out to capture a New York City blizzard, the film becomes as complicated as Crane’s tale, where waves begin to transform into “tumbling snow,” which by the end playfully transport the correspondent from the grip of the ocean: “[the correspondent] whirled down the incline of a wave as if he were on a handsled” (76). Whither the weather of modernity, one is tempted to ask—pleasure or pain? Interestingly, a trace of the blurring between determinism and play, between spectator and participant even found its way into an early description of the film’s panoramic movement:

This is a very remarkable picture, showing Union Square, New York City, during the great March blizzard of 1899. The camera was stationed at the corner of Broadway and Fourteenth Street, *and was swept in almost a complete circle, showing the tremendous drifts of snow* and the blockade at “Dead Man’s Curve” in Fourteenth Street. This picture was taken during the busiest time of the day, and shows to what extent New York City was tied up by this tremendous fall of snow. (“AMB Picture Catalogue”; my italics)

Not only does the panoramic turn not sound detached, it actually seems triggered by the drifting snow, as if it were subject to the very environmental conditions it claims to index. In the age of the attraction, the panorama begins to “chart the texture of movement itself, in the process offering new pleasures and presences than had been available to the painted or photographed static panorama” (Uricchio 231). Pleasurably present, the camera turns, in other words, not to know but because that’s the way the wind blows. Crucially, as in Crane, this subjection is also a mode of play, a movement enabled by a sailing machine of sorts that, to some extent, frees us from being “tied up.” That is to say, it is a pleasure not entirely unlike riding in the open boat, which, Crane notes, they learned to ride “like circus men” (63). Aligned with the playful camera, the spectator in turn becomes the attraction begetting attractions, gazed at and followed, as the city puts aside its work to stop, look, and face us, like the men on Crane’s shoreline. One man in particular, as Posner points out, carries a shovel but appears more preoccupied with the pleasure of following the camera’s sweeping movement around the city; he is “revolving like a wheel” like Crane’s “waving” man and like the camera itself, tipping his cap, “cheerful” even, and anything but tied up by mere work or natural disaster (Fig. 9.3).



Fig. 9.3 *In the Grip of the Blizzard* (1899), Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division

The film is as good evidence as any of what Nancy Mowl Matthews considers early cinema's chief impact on realism in the visual arts of this period, unleashing as it did an "aggressive pictorial image that challenged viewers," in part by presenting subjects with a "self-consciousness [that] led to an array of poses and expressions that made for a more dynamic representation of reality" across the arts (117, 128). Her main point is that an unobserved observer's take on reality would no longer suffice, or, to put it another way, that the lure of "the whole thing" would give way to "other things." This finds perhaps its best cinematic iteration in the painting of John Sloan, particularly *Movies, Five Cents* (1908), which captures not only a movie screen but the audience as well, in which a female moviegoer turns her head to stare back at us, the viewers. Located at the center of the painting—which, in its own way, *feels* panoramic (halfway in the process of turning, it seems, from screen to audience, including both screen and spectator)—the woman's turned face is at once a statement about the magnetic energy of the cinema, but also, like *In the Grip of the Blizzard*, about a gripping world that turns as we do, that looks at us and waves, and by reaching out reasserts the power

and presence of the individual, as spectator and attraction. On the screen, it's worth noting, lovers embrace in the muted yet glowing grayscale of early film, its vision of communal promise free from genteel decorum, one that the muted painting clearly wants to make its own.

Just as it is easy to overlook how Crane inflects the panorama, instilling magical, surrealistic, or at the very least playful qualities of the attraction in his work, it's just as easy to miss these qualities in the Ashcan School's celebrated realism. Crane, for example, sees the theatrical even in a crowd gathered to ogle a man having a seizure ("When Man Falls, a Crowd Gathers"): as an ambulance whisks him away, "Their eyes expressed discontent at this curtain which had been rung down in the midst of the drama" (qtd. in Fagg 72). Writing on George Luks' most famous painting *The Spielers* (1905), the painter Everett Shinn (both were members of the Ashcan "Eight") refers as well to a tradition of theatricality and illusion far removed from the naturalist street corner: "As a magician sets a sulphurous stage and struts in Mephistophelean crimson to project a spell of supernatural power, so Luks ... conjures up mystery in so adroitly merging the gutter, sidewalk, and background, that the plane of support for the shuffling feet becomes the dance floor of the world. That is magic" (1). "Spieling," described by alarmed reformers as "a form of dancing requiring much twirling and twisting," pretty well stands for the turn of the twentieth century, when turning meant attachment rather than detachment, attraction rather than panorama, and with it a pleasurable loss of control (qtd. in Foutch 135). "Spieling," as a new form of urban play, stands for the age of attractions as well, and those films like *A Tough Dance* (1902) in which bodies spin into a brief climax of sorts, making a sexual heap upon the ground. Something of this turning, titillating quality is felt even in Shinn's description, which turns from magician to painter, from painter to a scene of kinetic motion that recalls the showmanship of the cinema of the attractions, couched as it was in the style of the magic theater—"Ladies and gentlemen, you are now gazing upon a photograph of the Black Diamond Express. In just a moment ..." (qtd. in Gunning, "Astonishment" 120). Chosen for the cover of Mathews' collection *Moving Pictures: American Art and Early Film, 1880–1910*, Luks' *Spielers* joyfully confronts the viewers, staring out at us, as do so many works from the period, suggesting that perhaps we have turned to see them—weird chance—while they have just turned to dance for us, an arresting attraction somehow devilishly choreographed by a painter attuned to an age continually turning, performing, watching (Fig. 9.4).



Fig. 9.4 *George Benjamin Luks* (1867–1933). *The Spielers* (1905). Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, gift of anonymous donor, 36 1/16 in. × 26 1/4 in. (91.6 cm × 66.68 cm) oil on canvas

It is hardly surprising that Shinn, of all painters, relates to Luks' work in such a theatrical way, seeing the street, for example, as a "dance floor," and the painter at the center of a monstrative act casting a spell on both

viewer and subject alike. As Sylvia Yount notes, Shinn was “heralded in his day as the paradigmatic artist of urban misery and urban gaiety” (107). Indeed, one need only look at some of Shinn’s street scenes to be reminded how closely related are misery and gaiety, actuality and attraction, as they are in *In the Grip of the Blizzard*, for example. In his drawing from 1907, *Windswept Street*, dresses are blown over heads, and shapely forms revealed, as weather rearranges pedestrians into a Martha Graham ensemble of sorts. For a film “actuality” affording some of the same pleasures and pains (mostly pleasures), see Edison’s *What Happened on Twenty-Third Street*, New York City (1901). Of course, if his contemporaries like George Bellows and Sloan were also known for investing a theatrical energy into the everyday, seeing attractions and their spectators everywhere (e.g., Bellows and his boxing ring, or Sloan’s own “bucking” boat, *The Wake of the Ferry II*), it was Shinn who actually made the vaudeville theater his special subject, reveling simultaneously in those on stage and those who pay to watch. As Robert Snyder and Rebecca Zurier note, his work “explores the interplay between performers and audience,” a titillating, confrontational interplay advertised with titles like *Footlight Flirtation* (1912) (“Picturing” 163). Outdoing even Sloan’s bifocal vision, Shinn’s wide-lens includes both actors and spectators turning to stare back at the viewer, as they do in *The French Music Hall* (1906). While the turning heads here suggest an almost panoramic sense of inclusiveness, yet something else is at play, too—a strange sense of embodiment, as if the viewer had done something to get this attention, to be for this moment, at least, on center stage.

While this shuttling between spectator and attraction so characteristic of the period’s literature and visual culture promised a new sociality, the price was a new exposure to risk: the turned head, the eyes penetrating the canvas, or the wave back at the camera all meant “breaking the spell,” as Uricchio puts it, of our illusion of “visual control” (234). In Shinn’s work this lack of control is everywhere indulged in, and roles are even reversed, quite literally in *Tightrope Walker* (1904), for example, where a rubbernecking audience is subjected to gazing upward at the tightrope walker who spins umbrellas and balances a chair precariously above. Who precisely are the “circus men” here, Crane might ask. If the performer’s unearthly, luminescent glow looks forward in its own way to the glowing, elevated screen couple of Sloan’s *Movie, Five Cents*, both works more simply are about turning heads, or, as Zurier notes, “the act of viewing itself”—its pleasures, risks, and even bodily strain in *Tightrope*

Walker (167). This pleasurable act is pleasurable because subject to a new, windswept environment of continual attractions; in fact, this idea informs even Shinn's most "journalistic" work, such as his illustrations accompanying Jesse Lynch Williams' essay for *Scribner's*, "The Cross Streets of New York" (November, 1900). While the article promises a rather troubling "imaginary tour of Manhattan organized on the basis of interesting views to be found away from the major avenues"—interesting as in picturesque, surveying squalor, the "thousands of city children"—Shinn's most famous illustration for the series, *Cross Streets of New York*, bears a more interesting imprint: that of the panoramic urge in the age of attractions (*Metropolitan* 72; qtd. in Yount 100). As Yount notes, Shinn "employed orthogonals to compress the space," pulling "the viewer into the vortex of the spectacle" (100). Shinn, who would in the following years move onto Hollywood set design, shows here a deep familiarity with the stereographic vernacular that film panoramas had made their stock-in-trade by the turn of the century, and which lend his urban mapping efforts a nearly expressionistic sense of drama.

This kind of compressed drama, of course, was present in Crane's work as well; indeed, it underlies the refusal of the balcony view and "the whole thing," preferring "other things," walls of water, like Shinn's towering tenements, that "shut all else from the view of the men in the boat." This blindness, as we've seen, allowed for all sorts of new visions—of a tumbling world, a world no longer picturesque but confrontational, transformative, kinetic, bodily. In short, this world was peopled and waved back. A world of attractions, a world of loops: sometimes, like Crane's waves, it made a "final outburst" (and then another and then another). A world of waving men (and women): these works capture a significant moment in the visual turn. Replacing "the whole thing" with "other things," they mark a revolution away from the old hierarchies of the traditional panorama. It is a revolution that invites us, ultimately, to embrace not only a world of seemingly unending motion but, more importantly, each other.

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Urban Metaphysics versus Metropolitan Dynamisms: The Italian Vision Before the First World War

Ester Coen

A surprising creative impulse reverberated in Europe, from capital to capital, on the eve of the first dramatic conflict that would involve the great economic powers in a war which, in its bitterness and virulence, was to redesign national borders and the geopolitical maps of the old continent. Attempting to sketch out graphically the origins and evolution of the arts of the period would lead to a treelike form with a thousand branches and its roots sunk in highly fertile soil. Poetry, literature, music, philosophy, in a word all the arts, nurtured by the extraordinary culture of entire centuries, at that particular moment spurred a great energy of lively and innovative languages. The youth of that generation, artists especially, caught between past and future, driven by a decisive and so often radical reaction against former poetics and by an equally powerful tension between spirituality and patriotism, expressed and symbolized that same ethical and moral conflict which lacerated Europe. But if those were the years of the threatening and in a certain sense prophetic interpretation of the future and the destiny of western civilisation, whose decline was foretold by Oswald Spengler in a book published at the end of the First World War, there were also contrary voices, such as that of Ernst Bloch, which

E. Coen (✉)
University of Aquila, L'Aquila, Italy

opened up to the mirage of a new humanity, a “different anthropological state” in the name of total rebellion. Written in the same period, *The Spirit of Utopia*, in the wake of Marxist pragmatism, manifested an anxiety common to entire masses of young people, and called for active forms of rebellion into which they might channel their élan vital, a subversive and revolutionary tempering of their energies. The aim was a new order, which would transform society and free it from the logic of authoritarian powers.

Many artists had promptly grasped the menacing and sinister aspect of this modern civilisation, taking refuge in the irrational intuition that freedom could be secured only through art and its language. But this anxious and exasperated tension towards colour or form, taken outside social or political themes, concealed the effort, behind the apparent obsession with chromatic notes or fixation on the “object”, of evading a direct relationship with the external world. The cubism of 1912–1914 unfolded simply on the surface of the canvas, with the insertion of fragments, and pieces of information like letters taken from newspapers, in such a way as to circumscribe the plane of reality with that of the work, idealizing and ennobling the object in pure phenomenological speculation. These signs taken from everyday life could bear witness to its own autonomy and thus interpose a decisive distance from the dramatic truth of the age. But if many artists removed themselves from the material world, cause of restrictions and miseries, and found shelter in an individual universe, there were others who reclaimed through art the need to elaborate those material ideas from the outside and use them as pure source of inspiration.

This age signalled the fall of positivist ideologies on which an entire middle class stood, and fought to consolidate them. Behind the marvels of science and all the epistemological categories that reshaped the very perception of the universe in positivist terms there was a concealed malaise of doubt and uncertainty. The tragic premises of the future remained veiled, hidden from the eyes of a world that celebrated the new urban spectacle with carefree lightness. It is not easy to ascertain how much awareness of this dramatic contrast was present in the young generation, apparently full of energy and inventive force. As in an orchestra improvising along the lines of discordant notes, many artists guided by a shared impulse of hope, taken by a *zeitgeist* inexplicably tuned to the same motif, would see in the city a place where aspects and forms of the modern were concentrated in their multiple manifestations. This is how the non-place of utopia paradoxically became very tangible territory of the most diverse expectations and reveries.

The physical place of the city was the site of the most strident contradictions which gave rise to powerful illusions of transformation and grandiose dreams of progress: the city of the industrial age with its antinomies enabled an experimental verification of a new dialectic that tied the work to the world and to modern technologies. And if Baudelaire had sung in *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* of the solitude of the city man, infinitesimal number of a formless multitude of uncertain and indefinable outlines, in that obscure mass, confused and indeterminate, just like the poet, so would the avant-garde artist find motifs of beauty and deep inspiration:

[...] pour l'observateur passionné, c'est une immense jouissance que d'élire domicile dans le nombre, dans l'ondoyant, dans le mouvement, dans le fugitif et l'infini. [...] L'observateur est un *prince* qui jouit partout de son incognito. [...] Ainsi l'amoureux de la vie universelle entre dans la foule comme dans un immense réservoir d'électricité. On peut aussi le comparer, lui, à un miroir aussi immense que cette foule; à un kaléidoscope doué de conscience, qui, à chacun de ses mouvements, représente la vie multiple et la grâce mouvante de tous les éléments de la vie. C'est un *moi* insatiable du *non-moi*, qui, à chaque instant, le rend et l'exprime en images plus vivantes que la vie elle-même, toujours instable et fugitive. (65)¹

In the spasmodic search for sensational effects, external collusions of objects and impressions, paradoxical thrills and clamorous declarations there was someone who, in a more silent manner, in the solitude of his studio and under the duress of a hypochondriac nature, would create new models of identification and knowledge in painting. This young man, having lived between the Greece of his birth, the Italy of his lineage, the Germany of his recognition as an artist, and the France of his first successes, would invent, in the composed and imperturbable alphabet of an ancient tradition, the forms of a reality which would prove paradoxically sensational and unimaginable. Simple in appearance, linear and clear, the paintings of the so-called metaphysical period would gradually reveal their

¹“For the impassioned observer it is a limitless joy to take up residence in the number, in the undulating, in the movement, in the fugitive and in the infinite. (...) The observer is a *prince* who enjoys anonymity everywhere. (...) Thus the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as into a great electric power station. It might be compared to a mirror as immense as the crowd, to a kaleidoscope with a conscience which, at each movement, depicts the multiple life and mutable grace of all the elements of life. It is an insatiable *I* of the *not-I* which, at every instant, renders and expresses it in more alive images of life itself, always unstable and fleeting”.

true essence, a disconcerting plunge into the labyrinthine ways of the unconscious, necessary and ineluctable source of inspiration, according to the protagonists of the first phase of Surrealism. In the chaotic confusion of signs, in the swirling search for new directions, the rigid and structured vision of architectures recomposed by De Chirico, in accordance with the logic of an illusory plane of reality, does not sink into a dialectic of negation, at least in its external appearance, nor into its contrary logic, which would presume the use of those self-same signs in a dynamic function, at the rhythm of modern innovations.

De Chirico's vision was instead firmly rooted in that perception of the world which a few years later Theodor Adorno imparted to his friend Walter Benjamin, with a sensibility rich in emotive tension: "just as the modern is the most ancient, so too the archaic itself is a function of the new: it is thus first produced historically as the archaic, and to that extent it is dialectical in character" (5 April 1934). Far away, then, from the hub-bub of the modern town—the city still representing an ideal paradigm—De Chirico rediscovered exemplary contemporary models in the passages and fragments handed down from distant epochs, marked with the greatness of a creative genius.

De Chirico's metaphysical cities are spectral cities crossed by shadows, landing on the canvas from distant and authoritative epochs to recompose in a kind of mnemonic collage the image of an apparently harmonious world, directed to the sources of the highest classicism. They are hermetic cities that nonetheless deeply belie their true semblance, cities to be cut out in their constituent elements held together by a perceptual act and by the adroitness of deception. It is an artifice founded on a vision that would appear to belong to the past, whose iconographic principles seem to take no part in modernity but refer to ancient or far-off exemplars. It is in the montage of fragments that the temporal dislocation comes about. In the spatial relocation of the architectonic or archaeological elements an immaterial inversion takes place, which makes the piazzas of Italy appear as habitable lands. Yet, in the perverse abstraction of the very concept of the city, this overturning of spatial and temporal categories is produced with the same "classical" means that ought to have drawn the eye to a single vanishing point. The ordered appearance of reality, instead of being concentrated in a single place, is first multiplied and refracted, and then reorganized in a single image of isolated fragments, like mosaic tesserae put together with extraordinary mastery. It is a sort of restructured collage, not dissected in the cubist manner, an exercise opposite to what has

been interpreted to date by the yardstick of a revolutionary language par excellence. The city, a theme of little interest to the cubists—excepting Delaunay who was highly influenced by Futurist thought—became for De Chirico (unlike his German contemporaries Kirchner and Grosz) the fulcrum of meditation around a new aesthetic. The assembled units of mass seem like a reversed telescopic view amplifying details and objects, occasionally reintroducing a perspectival view. This new aesthetic is also rooted in the literary city, which is present in a rich tradition from Verhaeren to Benjamin (right down to Calvino), but also in a maniacal technical precision, whereas the breaking up of perceptive planes derives to the language of modernism at large.

Everything in his paintings originates in a series of enigmas: *The Enigma of the Oracle* (1910), *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* (1910), *The Enigma of the Hour* (1911), three different moments that mark an itinerary, in successive steps, from a world tinged with irrationality and ferocity to a universe opened up to the logical clarity of remote and atemporal architectonic structures. The feral and violent world of primordial instincts in the *Dying Centaur* (1909), in *Triton and Siren* (1908–1909) and in *The Battle of Centaurs and Lapiths* seems to open up little by little to an awareness of an ordered reality, to reason and to the wisdom of great philosophers, in particular that of De Chirico's unconditionally beloved Heraclitus. Heraclitus had glimpsed with a boundless and infinite capacity of foresight at the design of a cosmic logos, seeking a unique and universal ordering principle. Heraclitus “the obscure,” the first to have intuited, behind the deep shadows of his aphorisms, the existence of a supreme reason that only superior beings were able to recognize. And if “nature loves to hide”, as the thinker of Ephesus declared, in that hiding was concealed all the truth of the absolute mystery of things and of creation, a mystery which only the elect might approach. “The wind rustles the leaves of an oak: it is the voice of a god making itself heard; and the trembling prophet listens with head bowed down” (qtd in *Il Meccanismo* 22–23) (Fig. 10.1).

This is key in understanding some of De Chirico's paintings. To quote from De Chirico's manuscript (qtd in *Il Meccanismo* 22–23):

Thinking of those temples consecrated to marine deities along the arid coasts of Greece and Asia Minor, I have often imagined soothsayers attentive to the lament of the waves retracting from the Adamitic earth in the evening hour; I have imagined them with head and body enveloped in a mantle, awaiting the mysterious and revelatory oracle. Thus I once also imagined the



Fig. 10.1 Giorgio De Chirico. *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* [1910], private collection

Ephesian, meditating at the first light of dawn in the peristyle of the temple to Artemis of the hundred breasts. [...] What is the tremor that the mystical priest feels when he approaches the sacred oak on a stormy night? In Rome the sense of prophecy is somehow deeper: there is a sense of infinite and distant grandeur, the same sense with which the Roman builder imbued his arches; a reflection of that stretching towards the infinite which the heavenly vault so often generates in man.

De Chirico's enigmas are masked by elements drawn from templar models of the ancient Greek architectural repertoire, initially put forward as subjects to glimpse at the concealed image through few revelatory signs. But here we are still in that pre-Socratic dimension which had inspired the young artist in his period of fascination with the great Swiss painter Arnold Böcklin. The combinatory element of De Chirico's poetics is drawn to those mythological figure towards which De Chirico had turned his initial curious glance.

If centaurs, tritons and mermaids lived a double nature, instinctive and animal together with a more deductive and logical rationality, in the same way the construction of the works, from 1909, would be based on a stylistic grafting of different elements—from human and animal worlds—and on the temporal superimposition of elements which over the ages have undergone various iconographic mutations. These are accidental signs of a contiguity between the human and the divine, although still appearing as universal archetypes and witnesses of an impenetrable truth. The first expression of this slippage, with *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* (1910) [Fig. 10.1], appears as the announcement of a transfiguration, the passage from perception of a real thing to the sensation which that vision may arouse and transmit: “The one resembles the other”—states De Chirico in *Que pourrait être la peinture de l’avenir* (qtd in *Il Meccanismo* 32–33)—“but in a strange way, as two brothers are similar or rather as the image of someone we know, having seen him in a dream, resembles the real person; yet at the same time it is not the same person; as if there had been a slight and mysterious transfiguration of the features”. It seems to be as if that vision, powerfully rooted in the domain of dreams, were the proof of the metaphysical existence of that same person and could simultaneously release an unexpected surprise and a sudden happiness. This hybridity also spells an anti-naturalistic metamorphosis in which illegitimate crossbreeds have given way to minute, disproportional figures at the foot of the gigantic statue in the centre of the deserted piazza. The sudden passage from a not yet revealed dimension, violent and human, to a representation built on right angles is juxtaposed on the far horizon, beyond a barrier of bricks, to the surprising appearance of a sail in the wind. Dissolved in comparison with the first full-bodied mythological images, these images take on the transparency of the glossy uniform surface of an ochre toned photograph.

Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are the spiritual ferrymen of this renewed iconographic trajectory. The philosophers, in line with the seductive Heraclitean oracularity, guide De Chirico towards the new perception of a world, which is still enigmatic but now comprised of objects and things that belong to the cosmogony of the real. It appears first and foremost as a universe of primary impulses, then in the sudden delineation of cities with schematic and rigid views, structures without volume, with the weight of papier mâché; then again in the epiphany of hyperbolic objects, dilated and without a clear relationship to each other. The artist retraced the steps of his own journey in search of a consolatory *topos* in an article published in *Valori Plastici* in 1919, “Sull’Arte Metafisica” [On Metaphysical Art] (qtd in *Il Meccanismo* 84):

A nation at the dawn of its existence loves myth and legend, the surprising, the monstrous, the inexplicable, and it takes refuge therein; with the passing of time, maturing into a civilisation, it tones down the primitive images, reduces them, molds them in accordance with the needs of its clarified spirit and writes its own history arising from the original myths. A European epoch like our own, which bears within itself the enormous weight of many, but many civilisations, and the maturity of many spiritual periods, is destined to produce an art which in a certain way resembles that of mythical apprehensions. This art arises at the hands of the few who are gifted with a special clairvoyance and sensitivity.

Those few, for young De Chirico, are poets, philosophers, those with the extraordinary faculty of seeing without looking, of turning their glance inwards, of glimpsing the vastness of the mystery of creation, of grasping “the profound non-sense of life.” But they are also gifted with the faculty of “seeing” how all this may be transformed into art and the ability to create the framework of a contemporary vision, “new, free and profound.” So it is precisely on the different perspective of seeing, on the overturning of spatial coordinates—apparently perfectly cohesive and logical—that the different idea of the very identity of the city plays out. Crowded, dynamic, full of life and lights, in continuous fibrillation for the Futurists, impending, hostile, tough and inhospitable for the German expressionists, for De Chirico the city conceals a threat. A threat subtended by the silent stillness of its piazzas.

If there was no longer any sense in the artificiality characterizing the traditional representation of reality—and all the avant-garde artists agreed on this point—it is to a metaphorical interpretation, similar to the language of mythology, that De Chirico shifted his point of view, mixed with the suggestions emerging from an unconscious abyss of bewilderment and perturbation. Stylistically, it is a matter of few traits, few elements, few colours, few tonal whims. The fullness of the idea is played out in the paradox of emptying out the elements of style. The visible realm held within itself the same secrets as the literary one, the hermetic dissimulation of what can never be said. In this absence the actors in the play are set: the scene evokes a sense of the antique in a formally classical language, the statues recall other statues seen in museums or print repertoires, the architectures flaunt spacious porticoes. But both the architectonic figures and the characters are spectral actors, actors that play a part where there is no drama and where there are no gestures. They are apparitions that return from distant worlds. Like the locomotive (Fig. 10.2), they are a bodiless presence that is limited to marking the confines of the composition by closing the view

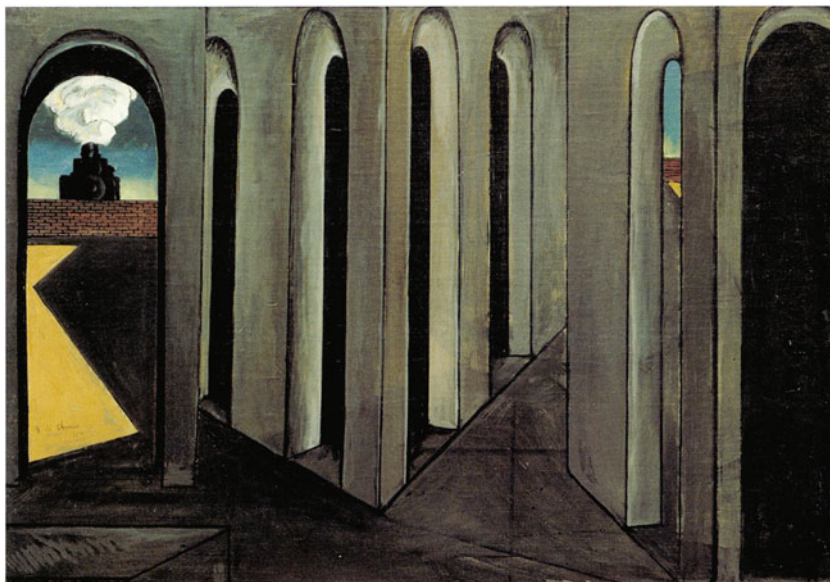


Fig. 10.2 Giorgio de Chirico. *Le Voyage emouvant* [1913]. MOMA, New York. © 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome

without opening up breaches to somewhere beyond the horizon. In the breadth of the deserted and sunny piazzas, in the vast backgrounds that define the planes of colour taken to the height of smoothness, where few diagonal signs allude to a chiaroscuro that does not mould volumes, the spaces get confused, complicated, they are thrown into disarray without apparent reason. Perspective becomes the painter's instrument for mounting the image, for defining an occasion of contact between the real and virtual spaces on the canvas.

The preparation of these pictures is carried out with the usual techniques. Beneath the skin of paint one makes out the traces of the pencil delineating an idea, and, further beneath, on the priming of the canvas, one glimpses at the squaring of a surface predisposed to accommodate the representation. In spite of this, the representation is not set out in accordance with the rules of construction by planes, nor of an ordered grading of distances. Perspective no longer serves to fix the illusion of the real and not even to focus on a conceptual point. There are no lines that lead into the picture. It is as if on the flat area the points of view were multiplied and, instead of

referring to a rationalized depth, each one independently overturned vision in an unexpected direction. So there is a form of trickery, but it is corrected and guided in a sense different from what one would expect to find. And contrarily to the exorcistical act openly staged by Picasso on the faces of the *Demoiselles*, De Chirico builds his exorcism in a deferred distancing of vision. The glance does not set on the object, does not seek inspiration or response there.

It is in this eccentric perspectival madness then, in these deceptively coherent and solid morphologies, that immoderation simulates a close interweaving between the objects and the other aspects of reality. Why, one may ask, those sunny Mediterranean piazzas bathed in light and in the same picture a sundial points to a time that does not coincide with the long projection of shadows in the picture? Why those walls and flat, crushed porticoes that suggest inexistent depths? Why that drying up of forms and energies in an unliveable scenario of classical appearance? Is this not perhaps a way of preserving the remains of an extraordinary civilisation built on the impossibility of understanding the deep meaning of existence? Or perhaps, a glance that betrays a feeling of profound alienation, as Walter Benjamin would write some decades later in his notes written between 1927 and 1940, in a fine text dedicated to Baudelaire's Paris, to the figure of the flâneur and his melancholic glance. And in this operation of decomposition and recomposition, deriving from the Paris "passages" and the artifice of citationism, the German critic in *The Arcades Project* took on the task of putting forward a new reading of history:

That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event. And, therefore, to break with vulgar historical naturalism. To grasp the construction of history as such. In the structure of comment. (461)

The above delineated system can bring, with a critical act, the past back to the lucidity of consciousness and identify in it new significant constellations. "Memory by itself adorns the aspects of forms", De Chirico declared, "it dilates them, so to speak, before and beyond their present state. Thanks to memory we, pondering on images, see what these images were and what they will be, it is the poetry of the glance. The images of dreams are instead naked: naked and without history". So memory is the means for penetrating the obscure inhabited profundity of things, to make

the terrifying emerge, so masterfully evoked by the ancient Romans with their aesthetics breaking the relationship with nature which was still so alive in great, solemn Greek architecture. But it is also the means for interpreting and feeling which still present the value of mystical and magical doctrines to which certain geometrical figures allude. And that frightening sense of the unknown is then aroused by the “dread nature of lines and angles.” De Chirico, in the guise of the deity of metaphysics, can state: “we who know the signs of the metaphysical alphabet know what joys and pains are enclosed within a portico, a street corner or, again, in a room, on a tabletop, within the sides of a box”. Images which might appear literary but which, with their clarity and precision of drawing, belong concretely to the universe of the visual. And yet, in their visionary nature, they remain far from the great pen of the labyrinthine Calvino.

In his *Journey in De Chirico's Cities* (1982), in the footsteps of Borges' temporal ramifications, Italo Calvino, like Kurosawa's Japanese art student who enters into the world of Van Gogh—in the episode *Crows*, part of the film *Dreams* (1990)—enters the metaphysical grids of painting without resolving the aporia between the interior and exterior of vision. “I don't know for how long I have been wandering through this city: I no longer know who I was when I entered its walls, nor how much I have changed since I learned to consider everything I see as a cast-off skin that I must leave behind me, wreckage of a world from which the mind must free itself to achieve exactness, impassibility, transparency” (405). But for Calvino, penetrating that world becomes an excuse for freeing himself of ghosts of the real and for reappropriating experienced reality. Almost an inverse itinerary in comparison with Baudelaire's apocalyptic vision of Paris or the lyrical bewilderment of Verhaeren's tentacular cities. For Calvino crossing these empty squares, passing through those maze-like architectures, represents an initiatory journey in which he follows a path, a paradoxical rational path which could certainly not be linear, if at all possible.

De Chirico accomplishes in a radical form a shifting, unhinged passage to a place fraught with threats and risks for the reconfiguration of vision. It is a silent revolution of a spatiality that overturns the classical in the modernity of its opposite. That spatiality harks back to the memory of a world of pure self-referentiality within which the sense of the classical is the foundational concept but it is paradoxically through the artifices of the classical that De Chirico dismantles its very principles. The best years of the “true” metaphysical period are proof of this manner, of this overturning of the mechanism set in motion: everything that is needed and

used for constructing an illusion of reality becomes, at the same time, a means for destroying a solidity closely related to the surface of the painting. Perspectives, depths, gradations, successions of planes, backgrounds and magnitudes are held together by an overall logic; if the plan were dismantled and each element analysed individually, the architecture would reveal a total incoherence.

It is no accident that De Chirico's first theoretical contribution to the first issue of the periodical *Valori Plastici* in 1918 was entitled *Zeuxis l'espploratore* [Zeuxis the Explorer]: a precise statement of intent and at the same time a personal stance taken up with regard to his own credo as an artist. Evoking Zeuxis, a great figure of the antique world who passed into history for his extraordinary precision in rendering the external forms of the real world in painting, denotes the same conviction of that metaphysical principle which he had followed in the previous decade. Questioning the very objects and forms of reality, while remaining committed to an exact and truthful technique, leads to a demonstration of the absolute unreasonableness of their being. In a place of the spirit not assimilable to the idea of immediacy De Chirico finds a place that invokes a superior mastery and an acute faculty of analysis proper only to those who do not wish to stop the flow of time by breaking it up or circumscribing it.

When Lucian of Samosata expresses admiration for the work of Zeuxis, which he knew only through copies, he nonetheless exalts the power of visual representativeness. Above all, he acknowledges the greatness of thematic invention, outside of all the more classical genres, in the amazing ability to render the various characters and the individual figures painted. So when Zeuxis himself realized that highlighting the novelty of the subject, which is what struck everyone, came at the expense of a consideration of the technical aspects of the work, with the result that the accuracy of the details took second place, he said to his pupil, to pack it up take it home: "These people praise only the raw material of my art, they don't care at all about how the lighting effects are rendered and whether they are masterfully done, but only the novelty of subject is praised more than the perfect execution of each detail" (25–27).

De Chirico built his conceptual substratum on that exemplarity, putting his faith in an immersion in the same matter of painting; knowledge and expertise would be drawn from the past for an in-depth enquiry into the foundations of reality. From metaphysical visions, benumbed and equivocally

logical in the tight construction of the perspectival lines, so irrational in the oxymoronic merging of heterogeneous objects and overlapping architectures that would clash if developed in a three-dimensional reality, the step towards what in the appearance of the picture is real—although actually illusory for its fallacy—is a very short one.

The model for this plunge into the concreteness of painting was once more the past, as in the earlier phase, more mysterious, more impenetrable, more enigmatic, more sensational. The past as instrument for a simulation of truth, but also as stimulus for scaling the meanderings of memory. Worlds reflected in the mirror? Phantasmal worlds stolen from a dreaming mind? Or rather relics of primitive memories; relics that suggest a point of contact, an encounter between subject and object? Evoking the image of that which has been and, now sedimented, rests at the bottom of an interiority without duration. Is De Chirico not attempting perhaps to give an interpretation of the unrepresentable, using as a tool the artifices of representation? And almost by an act of magic, maybe of predestination, a coherent link knits moments of a lifetime and resounds in the verse of a primary spell, nostalgic in the precision of manifesting itself. The “Clear painting”, “transparent colour”, “that dry sense of paint” to which the artist aspired in the twenties are technical precepts of the past. If reiterative logic did not belong to a different place of the spirit, it would be hard to understand that return to discipline, the desire for initiation, the will to enter the museum, the need to leave the territory of “painted images”² in order to penetrate—he was now over 30—the field “of the phenomenon” of true painting. Lorenzo Lotto, Michelangelo, Raphael

² De Chirico describes this interesting period in his book *Memorie della mia vita* (105–107). I cite the most significant passage (106): “I understood that something vast was taking place within me. Formerly, in museums in Italy, France and Germany, I had looked at the Masters’ pictures and had always seen them just as everyone sees them. That is, I saw them as *painted images*. Of course what was then revealed to me at the Villa Borghese Museum was nothing but a beginning; subsequently, with study, work, observation and meditation I made giant-step progress and, just as I understand now, painting is such a phenomenon that when I see others, those who still don’t know, those who are still plodding in the dark and toiling to save their face, to deceive their neighbour and themselves and not succeeding in anything are unhappy, and being unhappy are ill-natured, then, I say, when I see this sad and distressing spectacle I am taken by a great pity for those unfortunates and would like to be able to offer myself as a sacrifice, to bare my breast to those forlorn people and shout at them: ‘Strike me! Strike me! Let yourselves go!’, would like to embrace and kiss them and weep and sob with them, and between one sob and the next, to make them happy, solemnly swear to *paint no more!*”

and Mantegna, introjected for the purity of line, the tones and nuances of a prodigious depth, the ingeniousness and masterly invention, would thenceforth become his simulacra of fiction.

But in the “pure” years of metaphysical art, at the time of the drying up of painting and its very concept, when the choice was not yet fixed on the museum and the material had not yet touched that paradox of fiction for which he would become famous, this turn may not be simply random but rather an intellectual necessity, I want to argue, if one considers that the author who inspired the artist for iconographic sources, Salomon Reinach of *Répertoire de la statuaire grecque et romaine*, was also the interpreter-translator into French of Arthur Schopenhauer’s essay *Über die Freiheit des menschlichen Willens* (*On the Freedom of Human Will*), one of the formative philosophical texts for De Chirico. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are the genesis of those first perturbing images spelling his moment of awareness coupled with doubt.

Time and space, abstract notions around which to unite one’s intellectual faculties, were at the centre of the great scientific debate of those years. The intellectual and cultural world appropriated those terms to state a new logic in the visual arts. So if on the one hand Apollinaire could declare the overcoming of Euclidean theories themselves and artists’ intuitions of a fourth dimension—that of space, dimension of the infinite—on the other hand the Futurists, in the text of the 1912 exhibition at the Bernheim-Jeune gallery, had vehemently proclaimed the need for: “simultaneity of states of mind in the work of art: this is the intoxicating destination of our art.” And they, the Futurists, had made it explicit, recalling the idea of simultaneity pointed out by Einstein in his first theory of relativity, in relation to two events produced in the same space:

Once more we explain ourselves by way of example. Painting someone on a balcony, seen from indoors, we don’t confine the scene to what the square of the window allows us to see but, make the effort to give the overall plastic sensations felt by the painter at the balcony: sunny swarming of the street, double row of houses extending to right and left, flowery balconies etc., which means simultaneity of environment and therefore dislocation and breaking up of objects, scattering and fusion of details, freed from ordinary logic and independent one from the others. [...]

To make the beholder live at the centre of the picture, in accordance with the expression of our manifesto, the picture must be the synthesis of *what is remembered* and *what is seen*.

One must render the invisible that acts and lives beyond the depths, what we have to the right, left and back of us, and not a little slice of life artificially closed as if in a stage set.

In our manifesto we stated that the *dynamic sensation* must be given, meaning the special rhythm of each object, its tendency, its movement or, to put it better, its interior force.³

The revolutionary spirit of the Futurists certainly resounded with new ideas, but, for all the vehemence of the words, in painting this ideological and speculative restlessness was softened in the filaments of colour or in the force lines of trajectories. The “revolutionary” force hinged on the hypothesis of a space-time crossing of the image in view of opening up horizons to the incommensurable dimension of consciousness. How then to represent reality in continuous becoming by painting in one and the same space the dynamic concreteness of being and the intangible truth of interior worlds and feelings? And if modern physics, and in parallel philosophical speculation, altered the very system of thought and its coordinates, the Futurists pursued the illusion of redesigning the landscape of aesthetic doctrines at the rhythm of denial of what had been, the rhythm of refusal of an obsolete historical past lacking all vitality. To the élan of creative energy, to temporal abstraction, to time and duration experienced in consciousness, in accordance with the new Bergsonian principle, the Futurists, and especially Boccioni, reacted by pursuing a visual synthesis of reciprocally dissonant fragments, yet without discrediting the plane of a sensorial perception deeply rooted in the objectivity of things.

Modernism clashes with the past but cannot ignore the human dimension. So if the cubists, in particular Picasso in his years of analytic exploration, decomposed and dismantled systems and genres of painting from within, the Futurists were still moving rather in the direction of echoing the intimate resounding of the forces of nature. The aim was to couple sensitivity and emotions with frenetic signs of cities in their rapid mutation and with convulsive traces of metropolises pierced by the dynamic flow of tramlines and new means of locomotion.⁴

³From the programme text published in the catalogue of the exhibition of Futurist painters, signed by the same artists, at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in Paris, February 1912.

⁴With the years and a greater lexical and stylistic mastery the Futurists’ interest in a new dimension of reality extended to hypothesizing actual construction projects, as in the case of Boccioni’s 1914 *Manifesto of Architecture*, while leaving the same revolutionary intentions concerning architectonic discipline to seep amply through: “We have said that in painting we

That chaotic interlocking of fragments in sharp jumbles is in keeping with the infinite stimuli that hark back to the inseparability of consciousness and psyche, to an interaction between the universes of mind and matter. The aim is to raise motion to a pure category of the spirit. These images appear, for instance *Forme uniche della continuità nello spazio* [*Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*], at that precise historical moment in the wake of what was already in the air, elaborated in Henri Bergson's philosophical theories on vitalism, in the epistemological studies of Henri Poincaré, in scientific investigation and in the spread of occultism and spiritualism, right down to the astonishing repercussions they had in the field of literature.

If experimentation drew the Futurists towards the thresholds of the impossible, and with them innumerable other artists, particularly Russian

shall place the spectator at the centre of the picture, making him the centre of emotion rather than simply a spectator. Also the city's architectonic environment will be transformed in an enveloping sense. We are living in a spiral of architectonic forces. Until yesterday building took place in a successive panoramic sense. One house was followed by another house, one street by another street. Today we are beginning to have around us an architectonic environment that develops in all directions: from the bright basements of the great stores, from the various levels of tunnels of the underground railways to the gigantic rise of American skyscrapers". But it was still and above all in the perceptual dimension that these images of irrepressible dynamism and laceration of the static nature were being carried out and taking form. In Mario Sironi's work of those years, close to the programmatic tensions of the Futurists, the city instead appears gloomier, plastically constructed in accordance with a solitary and meditated dimension. It would be Antonio Sant'Elia who recalled and interpreted the sense of movement and speed as a vital subject, as against the tradition of the monumental and heavy, in the manifesto he signed on 11 July 1914, published in the August number of the magazine *Lacerba* the same year: "We must invent and rebuild the futurist city like an immense tumultuous site, agile, mobile, dynamic in every part, and the futurist house like a gigantesque machine". And the new metropolis rises in his projects: cities with gigantic interconnections between one building and the next, in an exceptional thrust of upward verticalism. Mere semblances of a dream transposed in the calculations and in its balances without seeing them transformed into inaccessible heights. From that magical moment on, there was a flourishing of proposals that replaced the sensitive vision, the extraordinary pictorial representations of the early years. Mario Chiattoni's "proto-rationalism" was echoed by the imaginary and lively propositions of Balla or, again, of Fortunato Depero (1916) in his plastic-mechanistic conception, or of Enrico Prampolini (1913–1914) more aimed at dynamic decomposition. Towards the end of the 1910s the architecture of Virgilio Marchi's visionary city would approach expressionist models and typologies and, in subsequent decades, new proposals would follow after the inevitable intermingling of languages (Fillia [Luigi Colombo], Prampolini, Alberto Sartoris, Tullio Crali, Nicolaj Diulgheroff, Nicola Mosso and Angiolo Mazzoni) until they wholly consumed the original utopian tension to become fully immersed in reality or, with the second generation of Futurists, until they raised and lost themselves in the dimension of a new aerial mythology.

ones, the theme of a succession of movement and its repercussion in space would captivate Marcel Duchamp, fascinated by Balla's linear sequences, and lead to his ingenious invention of the *Bicycle Wheel*, synthesis and concreteness of dynamic representation in an object that could potentially be set in motion in accordance with a logic based on the progress of a sequence. For Balla, however, the simplification of a surface in straight lines, diagonals, curves, and geometrical sketches, punctuates a space multiplied to the infinite by the diffraction and reflection of light, the echoes of sounds, the transfiguration of volumes and simple abstract quantities of energy. It is a matter of forceful lengths in horizontal, vertical and undulating progression. It is a measurement of the real, not a simultaneous analysis of the interpenetration between figure and space, but rather a stragic survey of the elementary entities of the tangible. It is a purification of primary sounds and colours as a synaesthetic verification of painting pictures, of representing the world. It is a world built up through the glance, a selective eye that scrutinizes the prime causes of the perceptible, a glance increasingly lenticular, like a powerful lens aimed at the intersections of space, at the appearance of the image in the spectral interval of the visible.

If for Balla the visible is in the flow of a force and in the scanning of its pauses, and for the Futurists in general it lays in the different perception of the very concept of motion, for De Chirico—in the midst of the climate of the international avant-gardes—this visible is instead the source of an archetypal revisitation of contemporaneity. And the city celebrated by many as expression of enchantment and marvel, of growth and progress, seems, in the tight control of segments and passages staged by De Chirico, to block and retain all the tensions of a conflict that has not yet exploded. His paintings offer subjects charged with presages, beyond which is concealed the threat of nothingness, where only the presence of a cannon, a ponderous figure in an increasingly decomposed yet ordered foreshortening, would mark the beginning of the battle in that age of enthusiasms and sensationalisms.

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Spatiality and Temporality in Benjamin and Adorno

Anat Messing Marcus

Just as the modern is the most ancient, so too the archaic itself is a function of the new: it is thus first produced historically as the archaic, and to that extent it is dialectical in character and not “pre-historical,” but rather the exact opposite. For it is precisely nothing but the site of everything whose voice has fallen silent because of history: something that can only be measured in terms of that historical rhythm which alone ‘produces’ it as primal history (*Urgeschichte*) [...] And perhaps it will represent not such a remote counterpart to your *Arcades* as initially appears to you as you complete them: at least as a counterpart: a counterpart to the primal history of the nineteenth century as presentment of the essential and categorical historicity of the archaic: which is not historically the most ancient, but rather something which first emerges from the innermost law of time itself. (Adorno to Benjamin, 5 April 1934)

According to Walter Benjamin’s formulation of the dialectical image, it is the intertwining of temporality and spatialization that registers the negation of time in the image. In *The Arcades Project* Benjamin comments

This chapter is based on my MA dissertation completed at the University of Tel Aviv (2014) under the supervision of Prof. Moshe Zuckermann.

A. Messing Marcus (✉)

Department of German and Dutch, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

that the Parisian arcades work “as a past become space” (*raumgewordene Vergangenheit*) (5: 1345, 923). Covered by iron construction and glass panels and illuminated by gaslight, the arcades were created at the beginning of the nineteenth century as places for commodity display. They were, according to Benjamin, liminal temporal-spaces. Neither inside nor outside, these urban passageways signified the “modern” while being already on the verge of disappearance, as Haussmann’s grand boulevards swallowed up most of the arcades by the end of the century. In one of his first sketches for the *Arcades* Benjamin notes: “Architecture as the most important testimony to latent ‘mythology.’ And the most important architecture of the nineteenth century is the arcade. The effort to awaken from a dream as the best example of dialectical reversal. Difficulty of this dialectical technique” (5: 669, 834). And in an early text titled “The Arcades of Paris” he writes:

All this is the arcade in our eyes. And it was nothing of all this. The arcades radiated through the Paris of the Empire like fairy grottoes. For someone entering the Passage des Panoramas in 1817, the sirens of gaslight would be singing to him on one side, while oil-lamp odalisques offered enticements from the other. With the kindling of electric lights, the irreproachable glow was extinguished in these galleries which suddenly peered from blind windows into their own interior; it was not decline but transformation. All at once they were the hollow mould from which the image of “modernity” was cast. Here, the century mirrored with satisfaction its most recent past. (5: 1045, 874)

Benjamin’s ‘spatial-photographic’ construction is striking here. First, there is the abandoned useless empty interior space that functions as a negative template. The latter conjures up in one stroke previous artistic practices of reproduction, such as casting or printing, and, the “new” photographic vocabulary of light and shutter. Second, the windows’ blind gaze turned inward renders the movement between being and non-being, between sensual perception and recollection, for “all this is the arcade in our eyes. And it was nothing of all this.” In this double exposure, an image of a space and a space in its own “reproducibility” as an *image*—converge. It is as though Benjamin’s notion of “transparency” between “material content” (*Sachgehalt*) and “true content” (*Wahrheitsgehalt*) becomes palpable, hence demanding exactly the “exposure of that material content in which the true content can be historically deciphered” (Adorno & Benjamin

Briefe 380, *Correspondence* 292). The “now of a particular recognisability” wherein “truth is charged to the bursting point with time” (5: 578, *Arcades* 463) emerges here at the moment in which the image is set apart from the object. Within the arcades, time and space are discovered in their own non-identity; architectural space invokes (Freud’s) *Das Unheimliche*, and history (or modernity) discloses a frozen, timeless image.

“Actually in the arcades it is not a matter of illuminating (*Erbellung*) the interior space, as in other forms of iron construction, but of damping the exterior space” (5: 669, *Arcades* 539). Benjamin’s aphorisms intertwine exterior and interior into a continual surface of interiority, abruptly bursting forth as a site of “reception,” as they at once dissipate (*zerstreuen*) into the famous “state of distraction” (*Zerstreuung*) of the “Artwork” essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.” There, Benjamin notes that architecture “has always offered the prototype of an artwork that is received in a state of distraction and through the collective. The laws of architecture’s reception are highly instructive” (1: 465, 3: 119–120).

The German word *Zerstreuung* can signify either a *temporal* mode of distraction or entertainment, as well as a *spatial* mode of dispersal and fragmentation, and therefore, it encapsulates the “spatial” unconscious of the modern subject (Weber 94, Vidler 89). Its origins are rooted in a double movement of time and space rendering the German baroque’s dramatic setting. According to Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*,¹ this double movement corresponds to the “decisive factor of the baroque” which is “not the antithesis of history and nature” but rather the complete “secularisation of the historical in the state of creation” (1: 271, 92).² It is with the setting (*Schauplatz*) of the baroque mourning plays and their spatial devices, exemplified by the staging of the reproduced architectural ruin, that “history becomes part of the setting” (1: 353, 177). Benjamin notes that these theatrical props could be defined (quoting the baroque researcher Herbert Cysarz) as “panoramic,” a term that stands for the era’s conception of history as “a collection of everything memorable” (1: 271, 92, Vidler 94).

¹ Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* was written between 1924 and 1925 and published in Berlin in 1928.

² “In the secularization or spatialization of historical time, in the ‘setting to stage’ of history, Benjamin located one of the profound innovations that marks the mourning play, and, by implication, modernity (...) the instauration of modernity implied a fall from historical time into an inauthentic form of spatialization” (Hanssen 54–55).

Thus the “image,” in both instances of the nineteenth century and the baroque, demonstrated by the arcades in the former, and by the figure of ruin in the latter, is understood as a force field of dispersal and assembling, of “already” but “not yet” completeness and incompleteness. And so, it will serve here as a possible entry point to the debate between Adorno and Benjamin regarding Benjamin’s effort to formulate the “dialectics at a standstill,” the “quintessence of the method” of *The Arcades Project* (5: 1035, 865). Taking into account Adorno’s critique of the dialectical image as “regressive” and “undialectical,” I will aim to draw a spatio-temporal interpretation of the image out of Adorno and Benjamin’s entangled works and correspondence.³

SPATIAL DREAM IMAGES

There are good reasons why (Benjamin’s dialectic) is a dialectic of images rather than a dialectic of progress and continuity, a “dialectics at a standstill”—a name, incidentally, he found without knowing that Kierkegaard’s melancholy had long since conjured it up. (Adorno, *Notes to Literature* 228)

Chaque époque rêve la suivante (“Each epoch dreams the one to follow”).
Michelet: Avenir! Avenir! (Quoted by Benjamin, “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century”)

In a significant passage in “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” the *exposé* for the projected *Arcades* book from 1935, Benjamin articulates his dream theory as an expression of new forms of modern sense of space and time:

Corresponding to the form of the new means of production, which in the beginning is still ruled by the form of the old (Marx), are images in the collective consciousness (*Kollektivbewußtsein Bilder*) in which the new is permeated with the old. These images are wish images (*Wunschbilder*); in them the collective seeks both to overcome and to transfigure the immaturity of

³That is, within the limits of what can be said in a limited space. My reading will focus on Adorno’s response to Benjamin’s first *exposé* (1935), a response underlying Adorno’s reading of Benjamin’s baroque book, also formulated in Adorno’s lecture “The Idea of Natural History” (delivered in 1932), and in his *Kierkegaard Construction of the Aesthetic* (published in 1933).

the social product and the inadequacies in the social organization of production. At the same time, what emerges in these wish images is the resolute effort to distance oneself from all that is antiquated—which includes, however, the recent past (*Jüngstvergangene*). These tendencies deflect the imagination (*Bildphantasie*), which is given impetus by the new, back upon the primal past (*Urvorgangen*). In the dream in which each epoch entertains images of its successor, the latter appears wedded to elements of primal history (*Urgeschichte*) that is, to elements of a classless society. And the experiences of such a society—as stored in the unconscious of the collective—engender, through interpenetration with what is new, the utopia that has left its trace in a thousand configurations of life, from enduring edifices to passing fashions. (5: 46–47, *Arcades* 4–5)

Responding to Benjamin's condensed *exposé* and particularly to this passage,⁴ it is the formulation of the dialectical image⁵ as a wish image—the epoch's explicit desire for its own non-identity—that Adorno's critique is aimed at.⁶ For Adorno, the notion of the epoch's will to create new forms, confronted with its own inadequate technical means of production, rests upon ideologically underlined *concepts* such as linear history and progress rendered by Michelet's motto. *Wish images* or *dialectical images*? This is the separation Adorno would keep insisting upon. From Adorno's perspective, what is missing is a theory that would dissipate Benjamin's everlasting semblance, what he also terms *das Immergleiche*. That is, a theory that would

⁴ A passage interspersed, apart from the explicit reference to Marx, with references also to Hegel, Freud, Jung and Bloch. It is Marx's historical materialism that is rendered here through Hegel's dialectics of development; the collective can experience Bloch's "darkness of the lived moment" only within the darkness of ideology's "camera obscura" (5: 497, 393). "Not-yet conscious knowledge of what has been" entails repetition and circular time, thus invoking Jung's archaic images and the collective unconscious (5: 590, 471). "Freud's doctrine of the dream as a phenomenon of nature (*Naturtraum*). Dream as historical phenomenon" (5: 1214, 908), a formulation prefigures the "inadequate" "reflections of the base by the superstructure," "not because they will have been consciously falsified by the ideologues of the ruling class, but *because the new, in order to take the form of an image*, constantly unites its elements with those of the classless society" (5: 1224, 893, italics mine).

⁵ The phrase "dialectical image" first appeared in print in Adorno's book on Kierkegaard, half a century before it appeared in the German edition of *The Arcades Project* in 1982 (McLaughlin 204). This will be cited later in this chapter.

⁶ As Adorno writes, "For the proposition seems to imply three things: a conception of the dialectical image as if it were a content of some consciousness, albeit a collective consciousness; its direct – and I would almost say developmental – relation to the future as utopia; and the idea of the 'epoch' as the proper self-contained subject of this objective consciousness."

allow things to fall apart and reveal their own non-identity with a world dominated by rational identity. For Adorno, charging Benjamin's "dialectics at a standstill" for its dangerous undialectical formulation, the (theory of the) dialectical image *dissipates* into delusional images (*Bildphantasie*) or *phantasmagorias*, a term that would replace the dream terminology in the later *exposé* of 1939 (Cohen 89). Therefore, he calls on a theory that would eliminate their immersion within the imaginary dream images of modernity and remove the phantasmagorical spell of their own immediately reception.⁷ It is the formulation of the past's lost future that undialectically weakens the "catastrophic" side of the dream state of the present. For, as Adorno charges, "the archaic [...] becomes a complementary addition to the new instead of actually being the 'newest' itself, and is therefore rendered undialectical (...) the image of classlessness is projected back into mythology" (*Briefe* 141, *Correspondence* 106). Alluding to Benjamin's baroque study, Adorno stresses the following correction:

Thus the category in which the archaic fuses with the modern seems to me more like catastrophe than a Golden Age. I once remarked how the recent past presents itself as though it had been destroyed by catastrophes. *Hic et nunc*, I would say that this is how it presents itself as pre-history (*Urgeschichte*).

Adorno's response seems to interpret Benjamin's construction of the then and the now through the notion of natural-history. Adorno introduced the latter in the lecture "The Idea of Natural History" originally delivered in 1932, and published posthumously. Drawing upon Benjamin's theory of allegory and Lukács' "image of the charnel house" in the *Theory of the Novel* (1916), Adorno is seeking, as he writes, to "push this idea further." At issue, for Adorno, is the temporal ambiguity conjured up by Benjamin's formulation of the "allegorical way of looking at things." As Benjamin writes, "an appreciation of the transience (*Vergänglichkeit*) of things, and the concern to rescue them for eternity, is one of the strongest

⁷ Adorno's critique dwells on the conflict inherent in Benjamin's reading of historical practices exceeding their ideological content, as Benjamin notes: "On the doctrine of the ideological superstructure. It seems, at first sight, that Marx wanted to establish here only a causal relation between superstructure and infrastructure. But already the observation that ideologies of the superstructure reflect conditions falsely and invidiously goes beyond this" (5: 495–496, *Arcades* 392).

impulses of allegory” (1: 397, 223).⁸ Informed by the category of transience, Adorno claims that Benjamin’s notion of the present’s (illusionary) disconnectedness from its past,⁹ formulated by “the utopia that has left its trace,” should allude to the fact that what lies in ruins, the “not yet” congealed residues of a dream world, always at the same time disavow that loss by perpetuating it. And thus, to use here Rebecca Comay’s remark, “the occlusion of the traumatic past equally cuts off any relation to a radically (indeed, traumatically) different future” (“Perverse history” 5).

A phrasing Benjamin had deleted in an early draft of the passage quoted above, in which he reflects upon “the experiences of such a society—as stored in the unconscious of the collective,” reads: “[these experiences] never come to rest on the threshold of the most ancient cultures, but take up elements of *natural history* (*Naturgeschichte*) into their movement” (5: 1226, 894, my emphasis), or, into their standstill. What is at work, then, is a double image of nature and history that interplays with the peculiar “ambiguity” of “the social relations and products of this epoch” (5: 55, *Arcades* 9) defined by Benjamin. In Benjamin’s early note, the “natural historical” elements transfigure a spatio-temporal ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeiten*) rendered both by the disrupted temporality of repetition structuring the collective consciousness¹⁰ and by the image marking its own *spatial* non-identity. For “image is dialectics at a standstill,” and as such, that image, as Benjamin famously puts it, is at once “utopia” (i.e. “non-place”), “dream image,” and, the place where one can find “commodity in itself, as fetish.” Adorno’s emphasis on the optics of “natural history” which could perhaps also be called *spatial melancholy* or *spatial reification* renders history as repetition *and* catastrophe, an overwhelming image of fragmentation and decay.

⁸ Benjamin’s notion of allegory is based on its relation to the symbol. If the symbol premises a unity of form and content, of worldly and the divine, allegory exposes this arbitrary connection. “The unity of the material and the transcendental object, which constitutes the paradox of the theological symbol, is distorted into relationship between appearance and essence [...] whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape” (1: 336, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* 160).

⁹ For “the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical (...) not progression but image ... only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is Language” (5: 577, *Arcades* 462).

¹⁰ “The collective consciousness is then invoked,” Adorno writes to Benjamin, but “it cannot be distinguished from Jung’s conception of the same” (*Briefe* 141, *Correspondence* 107).

INWARDNESS, “WILL TO EXPRESSION,” “SECOND NATURE”

Benjamin’s Paris is all about interiority. One of the convoluted notes of his unfinished project is dedicated to the “windowless rotundas, the panoramas” (5: 1008, *Arcades* 840). The emergence of the pre-cinema panoramas coincided, as Benjamin remarks, with the construction of the arcades. As part of the new visual time-space technologies of the nineteenth century, the constructed interior space of the panorama set out the dialectical relations between inside and outside, between city and landscape, or—history and nature. “The interest of the panorama is in seeing the true city—the city indoors” (5: 661, 532). Within the panoramas, the city unfolds as a landscape, “what Paris becomes for the *Flâneur* [...] the city neatly splits for him into its dialectical poles: it opens up to him as a landscape even as it closes around him as a room” (*Arcades* 880).

Importantly, as Benjamin notes, it is within the panoramas’ “dim perspectives” that the “epoch’s will to expression (*Ausdruckswillen*)” resides (5: 183, 124), since “one sought tirelessly, through technical devices, to make panoramas the scenes of a perfect imitation of nature” (5: 48, 5). The sensations of time and space reproduced within the panoramas transfigured literally and transparently the temporalization of space and the spatialization of time, for “an attempt was made to reproduce the changing daylight in the landscape, the rising of the moon, the rush of waterfalls.” Transcending painting and anticipating photography and film due to their phantasmagorical temporality, as well-known lighting tricks were used to produce the succession of time, according to Benjamin, *the panoramas disclose the peculiar temporality of the historical image*. For, “what lies hidden in the art of the panoramas” is the “particular relation of this art to nature, but also, and above all, to history” (5: 657, 529). Benjamin stresses the dialectical nature that is at work within the artistic forms of the panoramas. For here, just as it is rendered by the baroque drama’s ruin—*transitory nature is historically reproduced*. These new experiences of time and space that are literally yielded by new means of production outline the dialectical reversal of nature and history, that is, Adorno’s notion of the “retransformation of concrete history into dialectical nature” (1: 354, “The Idea of Natural History” 117).

As set out in Adorno’s “The Idea of Natural History,” the notions of “nature” and “history” dialectically constitute one another by their temporal manifestations as two opposed modes of historical time. That is, the mythical-archaic, a figure of repetition, identity, and timelessness, vis-

à-vis a “movement that gains its true character through what appears in it as new” (1: 345, 111). According to Adorno, natural-historical thought is the critical ability to interpret “concrete history as nature and to make nature dialectical under the aspect of history” (1: 360, 121). It is the synthesis of these concepts that pushes them to an “indifferent point (*Indifferenzpunkt*)”¹¹ in which they “are mediated in their apparent difference.” Therefore, the delusional identity between nature and history is constructed by the paradoxical experience of their extreme expression—when nature appears as history and history appears as nature. That is, just as in the case of the panoramas’ produced *second nature*.¹²

In the *Arcades Project* Benjamin writes: “Capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream-filled sleep came over Europe, and, through it, a reactivation of mythic forces” (5: 494, *Arcades* 391). These mythic forces portray the immediate world of commodities that has solidified into the human world of conventions vis-à-vis nature, but also *as* nature, that is, second nature, “the world of things created by man, yet lost to him, the world of convention” (Lukács, quoted by Adorno, “The Idea of Natural History” 117). In the *Dialectics of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer locate the origin of the separation between the subject and the object, being also the separation of the subject from nature, in myth:

Enlightenment has always regarded anthropomorphism, the projection of subjective properties onto nature, as the basis of myth. The supernatural, spirits and demons, are taken to be reflections of human beings who allow themselves to be frightened by natural phenomena. According to enlightened thinking, the multiplicity of mythical figures can be reduced to a single common denominator, the subject. (*Dialektik der Aufklärung* 12, *Dialectics of Enlightenment* 4)

It is the drive to preserve material life which forms subjectivity’s relation to its other (organic or non-organic) nature (Cook 271) and that separation, as an expression of the subject’s horror facing the powers of nature,

¹¹ In the *Arcades* Benjamin writes: “All categories of the philosophy of history must here be driven to the point of indifference (*auf den Indifferenzpunkt zu treiben*). No historical category without its natural substance, no natural category without its historical filtration” (5: 1034, 864).

¹² In his response to the *exposé* Adorno points out to “Hegel’s extremely important concept of second nature, which has since been taken up by Georg (Lukács)” and its relation to the panoramas (*Correspondence* 110).

is the origin of language and conceptual thinking. “If the tree is addressed no longer as simply a tree but as evidence of something else,” accordingly, thought, in its attempt to control outside nature by setting itself apart from it, is already immersed in it by the concept. This, as Adorno and Horkheimer write, was “the primal form (*Urform*) of the objectifying definition, in which the concept (*der Begriff*) and thing (*Sache*) became separate” (*Dialektik der Aufklärung* 21–22, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 11). And thus, as Adorno notes elsewhere, “objects (*Gegenstände*) do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder” (*Negative Dialektik* 15, *Negative Dialectics* 5), rendering “the remembrance of nature within the subject” (*Dialektik der Aufklärung* 47, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 31). First nature is interwoven into and can be perceived only from *within* second nature, for, as Adorno would write to Benjamin, “all reification is a forgetting” (Adorno & Benjamin, *Correspondence* 321, *Briefe* 417).¹³ It is “the mythical character itself” as Adorno stresses (and also Benjamin) that “returns in the historical phenomenon of semblance” (1: 365, “The Idea of Natural History” 124).

Resulting from Lukács, as Adorno writes in “The Idea of Natural History,” is the question “how it is possible to know and interpret this alienated, reified, dead world,” an answer to be found, as already mentioned in Benjamin’s theory of allegory, according to Adorno. Natural history, invoked by historical conditions or “historical rhythm,” is an *expression* or rather a “historical relationship between what appears—nature, and its meaning—transience,” as explained by Adorno.¹⁴ Converged at the point of transience, “allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things” (1: 354, 178), as Benjamin writes in the baroque book. Thus, read as an allegory of modernity as such, “allegory means precisely the non-existence of what it presents.” This was, according to Benjamin, the baroque’s fundamental state of mourning, for “allegories are not real [...] they possess only in the subjective view of melancholy; they are this view” (1: 406, 233). And Adorno quotes Benjamin’s well-known formulation:

¹³Adorno in a letter to Benjamin 29 February 1940 writes: “Objects become purely thing-like the moment they are retained for us without the continued presence of their other aspects. When something of them has been forgotten” (*Correspondence* 321).

¹⁴Adorno quotes Benjamin: “The worldly, historical breadth ... of the allegorical intention is, as natural history, as the original history of signification or of intention, dialectical in character” (1: 357, 119).

“In nature the allegorical poets saw eternal transience and here alone did the melancholic vision of these generations recognize history [...] ‘History’ is writ across the countenance of nature in the sign language of transience.” According to Benjamin, history is a depthless surface still “death digs most deeply the jagged demarcation line between *physis* and signification,” for, as he notes, “allegory is not free from a corresponding dialectic” (1: 343, 166). The “allegorical way of seeing” is the immersion of oneself into the depth of an external surface, a threshold wherein meaning keeps withdrawing from its object. This is also Adorno’s point when he reflects upon the archaic that is conjured up in the now. As he writes, “for radical natural-historical thought everything existing transforms itself into ruins and fragments, into just such a charnel house where signification is discovered, in which nature and history interweave and the philosophy of history is assigned the task of their intentional interpretation” (1: 360, “The Idea of Natural History” 121). The idea of “natural history,” then, proves an *image* of spatio-temporal double-meaning, that of an object *as* meaning (what Benjamin calls “ur-history of signification and intention”). A meaning that stands, instead of one concept infusing its object, for their paradoxical mutual decomposing and interweaving. In this way, as Adorno sees it, the natural is a sign for the historical, and history, when it is most historical—appears as a sign of nature. In as far as “eternal transience” dialectically spatialized time or history, it is through allegory that nature is fleetingly revealed in its temporality *and* timelessness. Put differently and in the context of Benjamin’s dialectical image, nature’s dialectic defers historical dialectics (Hegel’s, Marx’s) as a dialectical image, or, as dialectic at a standstill.

ENDURING EDIFICES, PASSING FASHIONS: GRANDVILLE’S PENCIL

Under Grandville’s pencil, the whole of nature is transformed into specialties. (Benjamin, *exposé* of 1935)

Let us consider the *exposé* and Adorno’s response again. If, as Adorno argues, the image discloses “not decline but transformation,” consequently, “the subjective side of the dialectic vanishes under an undialectically mythical gaze, the gaze of Medusa” (*Briefe* 146, *Correspondence* 110). For,

from the perspective of “natural history,” what appears to be a timeless image can be that *image* only under the sign of transience. Still, where Adorno calls for a theoretical unveiling of the image, Benjamin, projecting time into space, is engaged in an intensification of appearances.¹⁵

Spatio-temporal or natural-historical displacements comprise Benjamin’s “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century.” To name but a few, just like the transfiguration taking place within the interior space of the panoramas, the crowd in the Parisian streets is “the veil through which the familiar city beckons to the *Flâneur* as phantasmagoria—now a landscape, now a room” (5: 54, 10). Inside the domestic space “to live means leaving traces,” (a formulation praised by Adorno), and private space itself is transformed into a theatre of illusions, as it “brings together the far away and the long ago.” This is also the domain of the collector. In his world “things are freed from the course of being useful.” The collector acquires tactile nearness to his articles, “taking possession of them” he “divests things of their commodity character” (5: 52, 9), a mirror image as it were to the urban phantasmagorias of the world exhibition which “propagate the universe of commodities” and “create a framework in which its use value recedes into the background” (5: 50, 7). The latter, as the “newest” itself, is transpired “under Grandville’s pencil,” as a second nature of fashion, habit and use. Here again, like in the German baroque’s drama, history is integrated into the setting. For precisely, in Grandville’s drawings, the realm of commodity casts the universe itself, as the latest technology of gas lamps and iron construction—modernizes it (5: 51, 8). This is an extended image as it were of Fourier’s phalanstery, as it is spreading and unfolding inside out,¹⁶ from the arcade’s interior to the entire universe. Or alternately, this is a satire image of Saint-Simon’s “second nature” of planetary industrialization (5: 65, 18). What is at stake, for Benjamin, is commodity’s double nature, expressed in its fundamental logic, that is, the withdrawal of use value. For use value is at once liquidated as it keeps coming back, like fashion, as reiteration.

Fashion is, according to Benjamin, the mythic, spatially congealed dimension of modern time (“Fashion: Madam Death! Madam Death!”

¹⁵And therefore “method of this work: literary montage. I need say nothing. Only show” (5: 574, *Arcades* 460).

¹⁶“Fourier saw, in the arcades, the architectural canon of the phalanstery. Their reactionary metamorphosis is characteristic: whereas they originally serve commercial ends, they become, for him, places of habitation” (5: 47, 5).

[Leopardi quoted by Benjamin 5: 66, 8]). It is fashion that precisely embodies the perceptible surface of “real time’s” (*reale Zeit*) “smallest gestalt” (*kleinsten Gestalt*) what Benjamin calls “time differential” (*Zeitdifferential*) (5: 1038, 867). And it is Grandville’s masking of nature that “lets history, in the guise of fashion, be derived from the eternal cycle of nature” (5: 267, 200).

In Benjamin’s text “The Ring of Saturn or Some Remarks on Iron Construction” (1928), “phantasmagoria” and “progress” which are “figures of historical semblance” (5: 1251, 918) are traced in an illustration taken from Grandville’s book *Another World*, describing the adventures of a fantastic little hobgoblin as he tries to find his way around outer space. As Grandville writes:

A bridge—its two ends could not be embraced at a single glance and its piers were resting on planets—led from one world to another by a causeway of wonderfully smooth asphalt. The three-hundred-thirty-three-thousandth pier rested on Saturn. There our goblin noticed that the ring around this planet was nothing other than a circular balcony on which the inhabitants of Saturn strolled in the evening to get a breath of fresh air. (Quoted by Benjamin, 5: 1060, *Arcades* 885)

With Grandville, “history is being secularized” (5: 267, 200), and distracted historical experience is captured into a dream image: “Saturn’s ring becomes a cast-iron balcony on which the inhabitants of Saturn take the evening air,” as Benjamin remarks in the *exposé*. Embodying the “latest” technological inventions (cast iron and gas lamps again) the ring of Saturn is discovered to be a product of second nature of industrial world. And here, according to Adorno, lies Benjamin’s blind spot: “I well remember the enormous impression which the Saturn quotation once made upon us (*Briefe* 146–147, *Correspondence* 111). Adorno, who seems to reinstitute here the “shocking” perspective of natural history, suggests that “the ring of Saturn should not become a cast-iron balcony but the balcony should become the real (*leibhaftig*) ring of Saturn.”¹⁷ Grandville’s spatial imaginary elicits “semblance” or the mimetic exchange between history and

¹⁷ “Grandville ends in madness”—this is how Benjamin ends the section “Grandville, or the World Exhibitions” in the *exposé*. Adorno comments in his letter: “I recalled something you once said about the *Arcades Project*: that it could only be wrested from the realm of madness. That it avoided this realm, rather than subjugating it to itself, is revealed by the interpretation of the Saturn quotation, which has rather recoiled from it.”

nature, and thus precisely Adorno's notion of "concrete unity of nature and history" is transpired against the background of "material reality" (1: 361, "The Idea of Natural History" 122).

For Adorno, insofar as commodity transfigures the organic as inorganic, as petrified nature, an *image* (or indeed "dialectical image") of experience of a not-yet, imminent capitalist culture must disperse that image, being in itself "a nature of semblance that is historically produced" (1: 364, 124). Therefore, it must strike the observer as a ruin, and not be incorporated into a space overspread with (already) intentional meanings and projected fantasies.¹⁸ It should "reveal (commodity's) nature" but that is to say—as broken-down matter, for undialectically nature is unable to encipher the very notion of transience.

And so, as Adorno writes to Benjamin, "if the dialectical image is nothing but the way in which the fetish character is perceived in the collective consciousness, the Saint-Simonian conception of the commodity world might well reveal itself as Utopia, but hardly as the reverse—namely as a dialectical image of the nineteenth century as *Hell*. But it is only the latter which could place the idea of the 'Golden Age' in proper perspective" (*Briefe* 140, *Correspondence* 105). Inasmuch as "the crucial 'ambiguity' of the Golden Age is under-emphasized" (*Briefe* 141, *Correspondence* 107) as Adorno claims, it can only be unfolded by commodity's double nature, that is, its simultaneousness of use value and exchange value as rendered in Marx's definition of the commodity as "material immaterial thing" (*sinnlich-übersinnlich*) (quoted by Benjamin, 5: 262, *Arcades* 197). Therefore, as Adorno remarks, "the commodity is, on the one hand, an alienated object in which use-value perishes, and on the other, an alien survivor that outlives its own immediacy (*Unmittelbarkeit*)" (*Briefe* 141–142, *Correspondence* 107). That is to say, whereas social second nature transposes by the allegorical optics of natural history into a fetishized dead object deprived of its use value, it is *negative* temporality that makes it possible to reverse "hellish" solidified second nature. For here, according to Adorno's reading, exchange value is transmuted into use value, as (double) nature in decay—the waning of exchange value itself. Thus "true content" or indeed "ur-history of signification" comes forth—the

¹⁸ "This epoch was wholly adapted to the dream, was furnished in dreams" (5: 282, *Arcades* 213).

subject's illusionary dominance over the object,¹⁹ the (ideological, instrumental, rational) "identity thinking" that weakens it as a subject.

It is in this constellation that transitory use value conjures up the "now of recognizability," for, as Adorno aporetically asserts in "The Idea of Natural History," "as transience all ur-history is absolutely present" (1: 360, 121). Writing to Benjamin, Adorno draws attention to the fact that "commodity as the substance of the age becomes hell pure and simple, yet negated in a way which would actually make the immediacy of the primal state appear as truth [...] nowhere does your draft contain more remedies than at this point. Here would be the central place for the doctrine of the collector who liberates things from the curse of being useful" (*Briefe* 142, *Correspondence* 107).

"THE TRUE RESIDENT OF THE INTERIOR"

The liberation of things from the bondage of utility as the brilliant turning point for a dialectical salvation of the commodity. (Adorno to Benjamin)

Mirror and mourning belong together. (Adorno, *Kierkegaard*)

Commodity and allegory are conjoined in the fleeting figure of the collector as it appears in the *exposé*. Detaching the object from its original function, collecting, according to Benjamin's definition, relates to the "peculiar category of completeness. It is a grand attempt to overcome the wholly irrational character of the object's mere presence at hand through its integration into a new, expressly devised historical system: the collection" (5: 271, *Arcades* 204–205). The collector, as Benjamin notes, "takes up the struggle against dispersion [...] the same spectacle that so preoccupied the men of the baroque," a struggle that is the collector's "hidden allegorical motive," "for his collection is never complete; everything he's collected remains a patchwork" just as "things are for allegory from the beginning." Thus, the collected object is exactly the "object in its allegorical existence" (5: 466, 369), polarized into what Benjamin terms "fore-and after-history" (*Vor- und Nachgeschichte*)—"always anew, never in the same way" (5: 587, 470). It is allegory's spatial dispersion that

¹⁹That is, Adorno's notion of the primacy (*Vorrang*) of the object (10: 742, *Critical Models* 246).

transfigures the collector's specific (melancholic) temporality—(already) not-yet always to come.

And the collector, remarks Benjamin, is “the true resident (*Insasse*, also prisoner) of the interior” (5: 53, 9).

Interiority as *space* and images of the interior space, namely, the bourgeois *intérieur* of the nineteenth century, comprise the dialectical image standing at the centre of Adorno's study of Kierkegaard.²⁰ Drawing on the experiences of the domestic interior in Kierkegaard's works, Adorno states that in the interior space the “self is overwhelmed in its own domain by commodities and their historical essence. Their illusory quality (*Scheincharakter*) is historically–economically produced by the alienation of thing from use-value” (*Konstruktion* 65–66, *Construction* 44). Reflecting on the “window mirror,” a popular device that was used in the domestic space (and appears in “The Seducer's Diary”), Adorno comments that sediments of “social and historical material” act counter to “Kierkegaard's intention.” Projecting the endless row of apartment buildings into the isolated bourgeois living room “the living room dominates the reflected row at the same time that it is delimited by it” (*Konstruktion* 62, *Construction* 42). In Adorno's reading, dominated materiality is at once coming back and overturning while spatio-temporal concreteness transfigures what he calls “objectless inwardness (*Objektlose Innerlichkeit*).” Yet, evoking Benjamin's dialectical image, for Adorno, “in the image, lost objects are conjured”:

Dialectic comes to a stop in the image and cites the mythical in the historically most recent as the distant past, nature as ur-history. For this reason the images, which like those of the *intérieur*, bring dialectic and myth to the point of indifferentiation, are truly ‘antediluvian fossils.’ They may be called dialectical images, to use Benjamin's expression. (*Konstruktion* 80, *Construction* 54)

Against Kierkegaard's “construction of the aesthetics” timeless repetition, the eternal recurrence of the same within a society dominated by exchange value, is distorted into spaceless(ness) reified subjectivity. Therefore, “in the *intérieur* things do not remain alien. It draws meaning out of them. Foreignness (*Fremdheit*) transforms itself from alienated

²⁰ “The contradictory elements in Kierkegaard's formulation of meaning, subject, and object are not simply disparate. They are interwoven with one another. Their figure is called inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*)” (*Konstruktion* 45, *Construction* 29).

things into expression; mute things speak as ‘symbols’ [...] archaic images unfold: the image of the flower as the organic life [...] the image of the sea as that of eternity itself” (*Konstruktion* 65–66, *Construction* 44). In Adorno’s analysis, it is precisely nature’s non-identity of transience and timelessness that prefigures expression and the structure of language as such.

These reflections lastly lead back to Adorno’s response to Benjamin’s *exposé*. Ending his letter Adorno writes: “the attempt to reconcile your ‘dream’ moment—as the subjective element in the dialectical image [...] has led me to certain formulations”:

In so far as the use-value of things perishes from them, the alienated things are hollowed out [...] In so far as these relinquished things now stand in as images of intentional experiences, they present themselves as still present and eternal. Dialectical images are constellations between alienated things and injected meanings, resting in a moment (*Augenblick*) of indifference between death and meaning. Whereas the things are roused to the appearance of the newest, death transforms the meanings into the oldest. (*Briefe* 151–152, *Correspondence* 114–115)

Within the transitory moment resting upon the semblance character of second nature and allegory,²¹ or indeed, nature and history, dialectic at a standstill emerges when the self-same mythical nature is identified as something that just happened, and reversibly, when the historically new is recognized as constant becoming scattered with death.

Copying Adorno’s remark into his *Arcades* notes, Benjamin added the following: “With regard to these reflections, it should be kept in mind that, in the nineteenth century, the number of ‘hollowed-out’ things increases at a rate and on a scale that was previously unknown, for technical progress is continually withdrawing newly introduced objects from circulation” (5: 582, 466). Here Benjamin stresses objects’ spatial registration as time becoming space; it is as though the content of the *intérieur* overflows “external” history. Not only that mass production hollows out

²¹ This is also Adorno’s claim in “The Idea of Natural History”: “Second nature is illusory because we have lost reality yet we believe that we are able to meaningfully understand it in its eviscerated state, or because we insert subjective intention as signification into this foreign reality, as occurs in allegory” (1: 364, 124).

commodity's use value and thus exposes "second nature" as "petrified primordial landscape," but at the same time, objects are hollowed out from their inner essence by the historical-temporal process, persistently returning as they present themselves in their own absence.

In "The Idea of Natural History" Adorno notes that history is "most mythical where it is most historical" and this "poses the greatest problems." This seems to be also the danger that lurks in Benjamin's "dialectical image." If for Adorno, the object dissolves and what is left is its "trace"—the temporal negative mark of transience, that is, the very sign of the (non-)identical; for Benjamin, the object is never completely gone. Commenting on Benjamin's later text on Baudelaire ("Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire"), the *Arcades Project's* "miniature" according to Benjamin, Adorno writes to Benjamin that "if ever there was a case of spatial distance (*räumliche Distanz*) claiming to be an objectively disruptive factor, it is to be found in your theory of commodity soul" (*Briefe* 396, *Correspondence* 304). And here perhaps Adorno and Benjamin's "hall of mirrors" might seem to collapse into a tactile nearness. "Ambiguity is not the translation of the dialectic into an image, but the 'trace' of that image" (Adorno); "the dialectic, in standing still, makes an image. Essential to this image is semblance" (Benjamin), two opposed yet secretly complementary formulations that could perhaps conjoin into Adorno's two fundamental questions: can spatialized time of the phantasmagorical second nature constitute negative temporality? Can the imaginary new prefigure discontinuity and loss? "Dialectics at a standstill" would be then a double exposure of *mortification*. First, when historical rhythm or capitalism's drive to produce emerges as the terrifying image of the self-same, as static nature or spatialization of time, and second, when withering (second) nature transfigures *temporal* nature of decay and hence—meaning in ruins.

Adorno's dialectical construction of nature, that is, nature in its very moment of *divisibility* into first and second nature, is clarified wherever material human space presents itself in its most semblance. That is, the panoramas' second nature, the ambiguity of the arcades, the setting of the baroque drama or the bourgeoisie interior. For only then, the "self-same" can be dispersed as an inverse image of the temporal or the historical, or at least, as "something which first emerges from the innermost law of time itself."

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The Sensibilities of Semicolonial Shanghai: A Phenomenological Study of the Short Stories by Liu Na'ou

Aubrey Tang

In the histories of Chinese and Sinophone literatures, there is no direct equivalent of mid-nineteenth-century Victorian sensationalism. However, the notions unavoidably related to “sensationalism,” such as “sense,” “sensation,” “sensibility,” “sensuality,” “sentiment,” “the sensory,” “the sensorial,” and “the sensuous,” are all useful for examining some groups of literary texts that focus on the nature of perception. The Shanghai new sensationists in the late 1920s and early 1930s were not the first to do this. Shanghai new sensationism was indebted to Japan’s 1920s new sensationism as well as to the French author Paul Morand, but the rise of a kind of writing highlighting an apprehension of the narrated world derived from sense-perception appeared in Chinese and Sinophone literary histories long before their time. It is, furthermore, mistaken to assume that other contemporaneous literary movements did not write about perceptual experience. The reason why the short stories of Liu Na’ou 劉呐歐 are chosen in this study is not that he was one of the leading authors in the literary movement of Shanghai new sensationism, but that these stories present a dilemma for the reader: typically based upon urban experiences,

A. Tang (✉)

Department of Comparative Literature, University of California,
Irvine, CA, USA

these stories reveal the impossibility of apprehending the city through its experience, rendering the city an elusive subject. The more exhaustively they portray the city, the more perceptual knowledge the reader seems to have of the city; but paradoxically, the less she knows the city itself. These sensationist texts ultimately constitute an enigmatic genre that reveals the very problem of perception, which hinders, rather than helps, the representation of urban reality. At the same time, however, these texts also suggest a different epistemological framework to understand the city in terms of sensations.

China's semicolonial modernity in the 1920s was not only a sociopolitical phenomenon, but also a sensorial one. It made new sensations possible with sound technologies, silent cinema, lighting technologies, as well as with imported goods and foods. For instance, in the short story "Games" ("Youxi") 遊戲 in the collection *Scène* 都市風景線, Liu Na'ou begins with a multisensorial experience of the male protagonist, Buqing 步青, this way: "In this 'Palace of Tango,' everything is shaking in a kind of rhythm: the bodies of the men and women, colorful lighting, shiny wine glasses, liquid in red and green colors, delicate fingertips, pomegranate colored lips, blazing eyes" (3).

As the quote attests there were sensations that Shanghai's semicolonial context specifically made possible. The asyndeton in this quote lists a variety of sense perceptions: sight (lighting, pomegranate), aurality (Tango), tactility (the dancing bodies, fingertips), and gustation (red and green drinks). They existed along with the introduction of sound technologies (to play Tango music), silent cinema (to watch Tango dancing), lighting technologies, and imported goods (wine glasses, Western alcohol) to Shanghai. The availability of these technologies and goods was a result of Shanghai's semicoloniality. Shanghai was forced by Great Britain to open itself for foreign trade in 1843, and by the USA and France in the following year (*All* 3).

Although this kind of semicolonial modernity brought by the increasing availability of technology, products and information directly contributes to Shanghai's prosperity as the "sixth city of the World" and "the Paris of the East," it is obviously problematic: it mandates the idea of modernity based on a universal and secular point of reference originating from the West (*All* 1; Chakrabarty 4, Sakai 155). Moreover, historians found that Shanghai's prosperity was deceptive; it did not mean China's economy improved (Chow 37). Many critics have discussed how colonialism manifests itself in the relatively more easily discerned discourses

of religion, classical music, and philosophy (Urban 44–45, Weidman 111–149; Sakai 163–176); but how does it work in the realm of the urban sensorium? How does the colonial context affect the representation of the modern city in the writings of the sensationist kind, or how much is it effaced by the style?

To answer these questions, it is essential to first consider the problem of perception in philosophy, because, as explained above, writings of perceptual experience cannot represent social reality directly. Heidegger suggests that when one perceives, one is essentially establishing a closeness with the sources of sensations outside of one's experience. To explain this, he uses the example of how one describes one's experience of sound: "We never ... originally and really perceive a throng of sensations ... in the appearance of things ...; rather, we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-engine aeroplane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen. *Much closer* to us than any sensations are the things themselves" (emphasis added) (Heidegger 151–152). In other words, one rarely thinks of sounds as vibrations of different frequencies, speeds, and so on. One thinks of sounds as objects or phenomena, such as the airplane, the Mercedes-Benz, the Volkswagen, and the storm. For most people, sounds are the objects in which vibrations originate, although sounds are actually sensations, not objects. In other words, in one's thought process, there is no room for one to differentiate reality from experience, which is a problem of perception (Crane 2.1.1).

It does not matter if Heidegger is generalizing how most people habitually think of sound; what matters is that he has highlighted the significant notion of closeness, which is useful for the discussion of the semicolonial context of urban experience here. In applying Heidegger's theory explained above, which addresses the perceiver's conceptual fabrication of closeness with the perceived objects, to the experience of the city dwellers in Shanghai, when they sensed the sensations originated from the colonial imports, it is notable that there was little possibility of mediation between colonial experience and colonial reality. The more sensory stimuli there were, the less mediation between the semicolonial experience and the semicolonial reality there was. For the urban subject, there was minimal room to develop a kind of mindfulness. It became difficult to reflect on their own status of experiencing the semicolonial reality they were immersed in. Their day-to-day contact with the city foreclosed the possibility of mediating between feelings and the objects/phenomena that caused them. In their urban culture of sensory overload, contact with

the city was close and immediate. The semicolonial urban experience was overwhelming and instantaneous. In Shanghai's setting, when sensations were so excessively produced, there was limited possibility to develop an awareness of the very process of perception. Unlike other mental activities which are cognitive, such as thinking and memorization, perceiving is usually direct and instantaneous (Deleuze 36).¹ As a result, a place with an active production system of sensations, such as urban Shanghai, is susceptible to colonial culturalization in the sense of perception.

The issue of closeness/immediateness of the 1920s Shanghai experience can be found in Liu Na'ou's repeated use of the trope of someone being swallowed by the city, as seen in two of the stories in *Scène* (Shih 287). In the first example, in the story "Games," he uses the hungry ghost as an image of Shanghai to reveal the urbanites' predicament of being exhausted when the city overwhelms the individual: they get devoured without mercy by the city like a hungry ghost. The urban subjects cannot distance themselves from the city and get drained by an inexorable power—the hungry ghost. As the story of "Games" progresses, we discover that the female protagonist, Yiguang 移光, a femme fatale who uses men for money and sex, sleeps with the male protagonist, Buqing, and then abandons him. As he walks in the crowd in the city, "the city swallows him like a hungry ghost" (17). Different characters, regardless of their gender, class, and education, all, in experiencing the city, get swallowed and eventually lose themselves. In the second example, in the story "Ruin" ("*Canliu*") 殘留, the female protagonist, Xialing 霞玲, an amorous woman whose husband has just passed away, wanders streets of Shanghai at night. She loves the beautiful skyline of Shanghai, but she does not belong in the city and submits herself to "be swallowed by the dark night" (160–161). The city dwellers' fate of being devoured strongly suggests that the city is an overwhelming power that the individual cannot handle: eventually it overwhelms the psychological unity of the individual.

The reference to the hungry ghost can be traced back to Eastern religions. In Buddhist terms, the hungry ghosts are the kind of sentient beings trapped in the samsara. Hungry ghosts are beings constantly looking for food and drink. Not only are they unable to find food, they cannot even hear the word "food." They have huge stomachs but tiny throats, so they

¹The cognitive/cognition here refers to the mental activities such as thinking, learning, and memory. See Wang 21.

can never swallow enough to satisfy their hunger (Gyatso 7). A hungry ghost has a big appetite but no way to fulfill herself, so she is always on the hunt for food, a synecdoche for all other physical satisfactions, such as drink, comfortable shelter, nice clothes, pleasant music, beautiful scenery, sex. However, Liu Na'ou does not imply only that the urban dwellers are insatiable, but also that the city itself becomes a hungry ghost that devours its inhabitants, as in "the city swallows him like a hungry ghost" (17).

This type of social annihilation of individuality Liu Na'ou portrays, such as the city as an inexorable power swallowing the urbanites like its prey, has a long history within the field of urban studies. In the classic 1903 essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life," the sociologist Georg Simmel suggests that the loss of the urbanites' mentality is a result of the peculiar conditions of the modern city, such as the prevalence of money economy, and the division of labor (14, 18–19). Another important essay written in 1938 on the same topic but rather with a historicist approach by Louis Wirth, a scholar of the same intellectual genealogy, concurs that the individual loses his/her selfhood in order to adapt to the social order of a modern city for a utilitarian reason dictated by the production process: "The premium put upon utility and efficiency suggests the adaptability of the corporate device for the organization of enterprises in which individuals can engage only in groups" (101). Similar theories and theses in different fields, such as urban social ecology and urban planning, have since called into question the processes by which capitalist modernity subjugates individuals.

While predominantly using a sociological approach, many of these works of criticism scrutinize the problems by pointing to different types of social formations that contribute to the subjugation of the individual. Relatively fewer concern the senses, like the issue of closeness with the perceived objects/phenomena Heidegger suggests. It is worth noting the problem with perception that philosophers have focused on in order to explore other perspectives of the overpowering pressure of the city on the individual, because the primary "medium" to feel the city is always the sensory apparatus of the perceiver. The production of bodily sensations determines how a person perceives the modern world.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes of how the utilitarian understanding of the world misleads people to interpret the objects and phenomena in the city. He states, "We live in the midst of man-made objects, among tools, in houses, streets, cities, and most of the time we see them only through the human actions which put them to use. We become used to thinking that all of this exists necessarily and unshakably" (*Sense* 16). "The human actions which

put them to use” may refer to the city dwellers’ habits of understanding the objects and phenomena in the city within this logic. The ideas the city dwellers have about these man-made objects are therefore limited. In many cases, city residents only think of them going by their use values, but never consider what they really are, such as how they feel, look, sound. In other words, urban culture makes it hard for the city dwellers to accomplish an honest understanding of the objects and phenomena without prejudice. The city dwellers are constantly conditioned by the status quo to misunderstand the objects and phenomena in the city and to assume their interpretations of them as indisputable.

To demonstrate a way to counteract this problem of perceiving the objects and phenomena in the inevitable reduced perspective that the city may force upon each of its inhabitants, Merleau-Ponty cites Cézanne’s unusual artistic techniques to “[recapture] and [convert] into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things. Only one emotion is possible for this painter—the *feeling of strangeness*—and only one lyricism, that of the continual rebirth of existence” (emphasis added) (*Sense* 17–18). Against the standard of using colors for artists of his time, Cézanne applied more colors and used them differently from his contemporaries (the Impressionists) to make his subject matters look lively and vibrant, offering a chromatic sensation (*Sense* 11–12). This is why Merleau-Ponty praises him, for, by employing these unusual artistic techniques, he was able to restore the primordial and pure state of objects (*Sense* 13–14). His paintings show the original and unprocessed visual sensations of the objects. Conceptual thoughts are minimized in these sensations. His paintings do not conform to the customs of society or any particular artistic movement on a consistent basis. The objects are shown “not as spread out before us,” which will be the city’s customary ways of understanding them, but instead, “as an inexhaustible reality full of reserves,” which is lively (*Sense* 15). This is why Merleau-Ponty appreciates Cézanne for resurrecting the misconstrued objects from the mundane logic of modern life. As Merleau-Ponty points out, this type of resurrection of the misconstrued objects/phenomena in the city from the mundane gives a feeling of strangeness in art.

The same thing occurs in Liu Na’ou’s writings. The feeling of strangeness is omnipresent in almost all of Liu Na’ou’s works. His language is arguably foreign to native speakers of Chinese, if not downright awkward. For instance, he writes, “Miss Luk’s hips started

swaying from side to side,” while the literary critic of his time, Chen Qiyu 沈綺雨, thought that he should write “Miss Luk stood up and left.” He also writes “the school spat out groups of students” while Chen thought that he should write “Groups of students walked out from the school” (65). One of the explanations of the foreignness of Liu’s language is his upbringing: he was born and raised in colonial Taiwan (under Japanese occupation) and Japan (Shih 270). The diction, style, and grammar he learned outside of China might therefore be quite different from those of the literati in the Mainland. However, besides explaining the strangeness of language from a predictable biographical point of view, one can also conduct a sensory investigation: Liu’s unusual literary expressions are evidence of his attempt to revert one’s experience of Shanghai to a pure and primordial state as a sensational literary response, much like the way Merleau-Ponty explains the case of Cézanne. “Sensational” here does not necessarily mean shocking, startling, scandalous. A sensational response can also be a response largely constituted of sensations as opposed to processed thoughts.

The case with the strangeness of Liu’s language has something similar in the context of Western literature. It is similar to the case of the Russian formalists who employed the literary technique of defamiliarization. By using a defamiliarized language, these authors problematized the familiar. Viktor Shklovsky explains, for instance, that Tolstoy’s use of defamiliarized language is “[to make] the familiar seem strange by not naming the familiar object. [Tolstoy] describes an object as if he were seeing it for the first time, an event as if it were happening for the first time. In describing something he avoids the accepted names of its parts and instead names corresponding parts of other objects” (13). Shklovsky’s explanation almost resembles Merleau-Ponty’s point about Cézanne’s style: the Russian formalists undermined the socially accepted concepts, the familiar ideas, and the customarily written objects, as well as suggested a primitive, innocent, open-minded way of writing about the objects. By innocent, it does not mean this approach of painting/writing is unintelligent; it is highly sophisticated but undefined. Both Cézanne’s artistic and the Russian formalists’ literary traditions sought the mind of the painter or the author like a child’s. This kind of spiritual pursuit tries to redeem the often ignored sensations Heidegger calls into question. Similarly, in “Games,” Liu Na’ou beautifully demonstrates his own way of accomplishing a bare description of the objects in the city with minimal conceptual thinking:

There were some people in the park during sunset. Two hookers walked by him. A priest in a secular outfit was reading a book under the tree. Two bats flew out from the vines. They circled a few times in the air at quite a low height, then flew towards the willows near the pond. He found an empty bench and sat down by the fence where the roses all bloomed. The breeze and the smell of the moist soil brought a sweet fragrance to the air. Maybe it was the ripened fruits in the trees. Sunset was gradually crawling in, but the people didn't seem to want to leave. It was as if they were trying to seize another moment of this lovely last bit of sunlight. Suddenly, under the dim light, these fragile beige colored women's feet appeared before his eyes. (19)

This quote shows how Liu Na'ou offers a bare description of a moment in the city without excessive conceptualizing or contextualizing, like in a snapshot. The narrator describes first the sunset, the people, the animals, the plants, and then what he can smell in the air, see under weak lighting, and so on in a park. The hookers and priests, two moralistically opposite occupations, are juxtaposed and regarded equally within the bigger picture of the city. These people, objects, and phenomena play no particular role in the story. They neither facilitate the progress of the story nor work as any literary devices, for example, simile and metaphor, to convey any meanings. They are described exactly the way they are for minimal cognitive or organizational purposes. They constitute a setting of the story, but the meanings of these objects and phenomena are indirect and dubious. The objects and phenomena are sensibly parts of the setting, because they are common things present in a city, but they are described in a way that serves minimal rhetorical function of conveying any intelligible beliefs, concepts, or structures of feeling. They are unrelated to the focus of the story. They do not constitute a structure. It is not obvious why this quote as well as other similar descriptions of the objects and phenomena have to be in *Scène*, especially in such an extensive length, but this is the literary characteristic of sensationist literature. Literature tells a relatively unprocessed, unanalyzed, and original version of the actual sensations one feels and does not consciously decipher them. It lays out the bare and unevaluated perception of the city like a foreigner, a child, or someone who has little idea about a place.

This kind of sensational, minimally conceptualized response to the reality of the city Liu Na'ou demonstrates is different from established patterns of understanding in literature, art, and film, like realism or structures of feeling in opposition to sensationism. Realism presumes a processed, thought-through, and accepted conception of reality, while

sensationism does not. Sensationism is about the experience beneath the level of the cognitive or the analytical. Although in philosophy it is still under dispute whether perceptions are nonconceptual, it is at least safe to say that perceptions derived from sensations must be pre-conceptual.² They are not or have not become products of logical thinking (yet). Likewise, structures of feeling are “[sets] of [affective] elements [of consciousness], with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension” (Williams 132). They presume an underlying logic which explains the production of feelings in culture, while sensationism does not. Sensations are not feelings operated within a structured framework of recognizably interconnected relations, regardless of how flexible the structure is. Sensations are beyond structures, so they are different from structures of feeling.

Instead of being conceptual, the urban sensations Liu Na’ou describes open up an opportunity for appreciating the city from square one, feeling it at the most personal level, with the sensory apparatus. This attempt redeems the writing about the city from being overtly literal despite the subject matters of his writings, which are all clearly “decadent” phenomena in an exorbitant semicolonial city, for example, materialistic lifestyles, promiscuity, Western orientalism. It allows for an apprehension of the city in exactly the way its objects and phenomena appear, sound, smell, and feel. With this sensational style of writing, Liu Na’ou develops an egalitarian message about the equally important presence of the prostitutes and the clergy in a modern city, which contrasts with some feminist interpretations of his attitude toward women. Often based on both his portrayals of the “sluts” and his biographical history, some critics believe that he was misogynous (Peng 120).³ However, by looking closely at his characters’ immediate sensations of—not concepts about—the people, objects, and phenomena, I suspect his writing is an experiment of transliterating a spontaneous bodily response to the exorbitant city beyond representations of gender.

The shift of emphasis from the conceptual function of language to the sensational in literature that Liu Na’ou exhibits does not deny the cognitive realm, such as concepts, ideas, logic, analysis. What it does is create

² For a general outline of the current theories of mental activities with nonconceptual content, see Gunther 3.

³ See also another response to this argument in Hsu 93–95.

a different framework of understanding by including both sensations and concepts, in order to question the conceptual as the pre-conceived. When sensations have become a given condition in the narrative, it is then obvious to tell that the concepts, such as metaphors, are also mediated in sensory terms and therefore subjective. As a result, the narrated reality of the city becomes subject to the mediation of sensory functions. For instance, in "Games," when Buqing sees Yiguang in the dance club, he says to her:

I came out from my friend's home in the morning today. When I passed by a busy street, I felt everything in this city had already died. Cars stuffing the whole street, the trains on the rail, passersby right next to me who rubbed my shoulders and cut me off, advertisement signs, glass, messy decorations of the storefronts. They were no longer in my sight. In front of my eyes, I only saw a big desert. It was as silent as it was during prehistoric times. The loud noise in the street turned into whispers of the breeze in the woods. I thought the sound of the running cars on the rail was that of the bells of a camel team. (4-5)

This quote shows how Liu suggests a historical perspective to understand modernity by an interruption of seeing the objects in the city. The things in the city, including the cars, the trains, the passersby, the signs, glass, and storefronts, are all products of modernity. Their relationships with the individual are essentially the same as those of the objects of nature: Liu Na'ou writes that Buqing suddenly feels them turning into things in a desert. The sound of the street turns into the sound of the wind in the woods. The sound of the cars turns into the bells of a camel team. Liu Na'ou makes it clear that this illusion of Buqing's is a perceptual experience: Buqing hears these things that morning and sees a big desert when he closes his eyes on the busy street, imagining that the city has come to an end. The modern world reverts to prehistoric times when there are only woods and people riding camels. The purpose of this imagery, apparently, is a comparison between the modern and the prehistoric, between the cultural and the natural. But Liu Na'ou does not compare these two contrasting historical times as ideas; he uses hearing and seeing perceptions to connect them as perceptive varieties, literally in the blink of an eye. This means that both the modern and the prehistoric must be constructions humans feel to a certain extent. The current reality he is supposedly in, i.e. Shanghai, is not necessarily as it really appears. What he knows about Shanghai is only what the city appears like to him. The

city is virtually an illusory and a mesmerizing phenomenon its inhabitants cannot totalize but can only continuously experience as an origin of ever-changing sensations.⁴ In other words, sensational writing works as a call to question the quasi-unshakable conceptual foundation of language/constructions in literature.⁵ It does not deny them, but by emphasizing on perceptual knowledge, it changes the epistemology of the city in literature by putting into question the representation of the city itself through direct sensations.

While in “Games,” Buqing’s illusion questions the construction of Shanghai’s modernity, in “An Attempted Murder,” another example of a character’s illusion questions a stereotype of the city—promiscuity. “An Attempted Murder” is a story about Mr. Luo 羅君, a customer who goes to a bank where he keeps his valuables in a safe deposit box. He always sees the same female worker there, who helps him sign in and open the safe deposit box. At first he thinks of her as cold and unapproachable, but after he sees her on a date with an attractive man in the city, he thinks of her differently. He starts imagining that she is another sexually permissive woman—a “modern girl.” The next time he takes things out of his safe deposit box, he strangles her and tries to have sex with her. She screams and he ends up being arrested.

What arouses Mr. Luo’s desire for the bank worker in “An Attempted Murder” is thermal sensation. Contrary to the common trope of using hotness as an indication of sexual desire, coldness is used in this example to describe the feeling that makes Mr. Luo crave sex. Liu Na’ou writes about the place where Mr. Luo and this bank worker always meet, the

⁴ Buqing’s perception of the modern as comparable with the prehistorical has a counterpart in the theory of urban studies. The beginning of Simmel’s “Metropolis” essay coincidentally suggests the same situation the individual has to face in the city just like in the natural world: “The fight with nature which primitive man has to wage for his bodily existence attains in this modern form its latest transformation” (13). In other words, modernity, in the case with both Buqing and Simmel, is not an independently new, stable, and separate stage of history. It is a (sensorial for Buqing, or sociological for Simmel) transformation from the time past. The world, either when it is in the form of the primitive or the modern, is still a battleground for the individual to struggle for survival. This idea is a challenge to the assumption of modernity as enlightenment and progress.

⁵ Back in Liu’s time, critics immediately noticed the merit of using bare descriptions of objects to revitalize clichéd philological constructions in literature, such as to describe a monk coming out of a barber shop, one can write, “The light green monk’s head flows in the spring breeze” as opposed to “The monk walks out of the door.” See Xie 8.

safe deposit box area, as “steel-like, icy, guarded, fossilizing all people and objects.” The “big mirror in the middle” of the room “reflects the glare of all the metal” (14). This eroticized cold environment makes him want to take off all of his dirty clothes and masturbate in the midst of the metallic reflection (15). Because the bank worker is also perceived as an “icy cold” woman, almost like “a robot made of steel,” she becomes a sexualized object he wants to acquire (14–15) (Fig. 12.1). When he has some trouble opening the safe deposit box, she “cracks a bit of a smile, like a building made of steel,” so he thinks she wants him, too (15).

“An Attempted Murder” subverts the logic of the mundane reality of the city by doing justice to sensations, even if they lead to delusion. Although the plotline indicates that Mr. Luo is deluded about the modern girl, the story illustrates the rich sensations he experiences in the city that mislead him to believe that the woman is sexually open to him. He is fully aware of the illusion he gets from seeing and hearing the woman, yet he completely accepts it. When the bank worker is quiet, he can initiate some conversation with her, but he chooses not to, because he does not want “an external uneasy voice to disturb his feelings [for her]” (13). He chooses to indulge in a fantasy created by the enclosed and cold spatial setup of the safe deposit box area as well as the quiet woman, as opposed to actually hearing her speak—getting to know her. He knows that his fantasy about this woman is a “horrible daydream,” but he allows himself to continue to imagine that the attraction is mutual (15). All these hints are evidence that the protagonist knows the sensations delude him, but he is willingly fooled. After committing an attempted murder of the bank worker, “he does not seem like he feels he has done anything wrong. He neither has any remorse nor shows any usual gestures of most criminals” (17). While the modern girl is often “associated with dating, romantic love and the legitimization of premarital sex” by the mass media (Barlow 264–265), he is actually a self-reflective man with some awareness of the fallacy of sensual images prevalent in Shanghai, despite his failure to overcome his craving. As a matter of fact, he is not only a fictional character created in a short story, but also a representation of Liu Na’ou’s own voice in an essay. In Liu Na’ou’s 1934 essay contributed to the popular magazine *Women’s Pictorial*, he writes that women often dare not say they want the men but would rather show their passion with their closed lips and big open eyes, like the Hollywood actress Joan Crawford (Lee 196)



Fig. 12.1 Detail of Liu Na'ou's essay in *Women's Pictorial*, (*Furen Huabao*) 18 (May 1934): 16⁶

⁶Liu Na'ou, "An Attempted Murder," *Wenyi Huabao* (Literature and Art Pictorial) 1:2 (1934), 24–28.

(Fig. 12.2). This essay explains why the character of Mr. Luo misinterprets the bank worker—he thinks he is “helping” her to unfold her repressed passion.

All these examples of sensational writing help to disrupt the representational relationship between reality and literature about the city. In the examples in both “Games” and “An Attempted Murder,” sensations are used as a literary strategy to simultaneously recognize the impossibility of access to the narrated reality in the city and to suggest an alternative reality solely according to the conditions of perception. The objective quality of the reality in the city is not what causes its inhabitants’ understanding of the city, but, as Heidegger notes, their perceptions do, which are often forgotten as the link between the object and the perceiver. This idea about the obstacle to fully understand the narrated reality is crucial for analyzing literature about city life, because sensory stimuli characterize the conditions of the city.

Different thinkers have questioned the stable relationship between the representation and the represented (of any kind of reality). Merleau-Ponty reminds us that “we are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in detaching ourselves from it in order to shift to the consciousness of the world” (because we are deluded by our perceptual experience constituted of sensations) (*Phenomenology* 5). Gilles Deleuze further argues that it is violent to produce a “figuration,” like representation or (Saussurean structuralist) signification upon something by means of a narrative or symbolic act (xiv). Spinoza thinks our idea of reality and reality itself are always different: ‘as long as we are engaged in an enquiry into real things, it will never be permissible for us to draw a conclusion from what is abstract, and we shall take great care not to mix the things that are merely in the intellect with those things that are in reality’ (25).

While all these anti-representational arguments may make it sound like sensationist literature denies the possibility to understand the city, they do not; they, instead, open up an opportunity to understand the city in light of the problem of perception. As discussed above, Merleau-Ponty uncovers a new way of portraying the nature in Cézanne’s paintings which is “a form of art ... valid for everyone” (*Sense* 11). What he refers to is not some over-simplistic idea like “music is a universal language.” He also does not mean everyone sees or feels the same way regardless of language, culture, beliefs. What he refers to is Cézanne’s unique style of “[depicting] matter

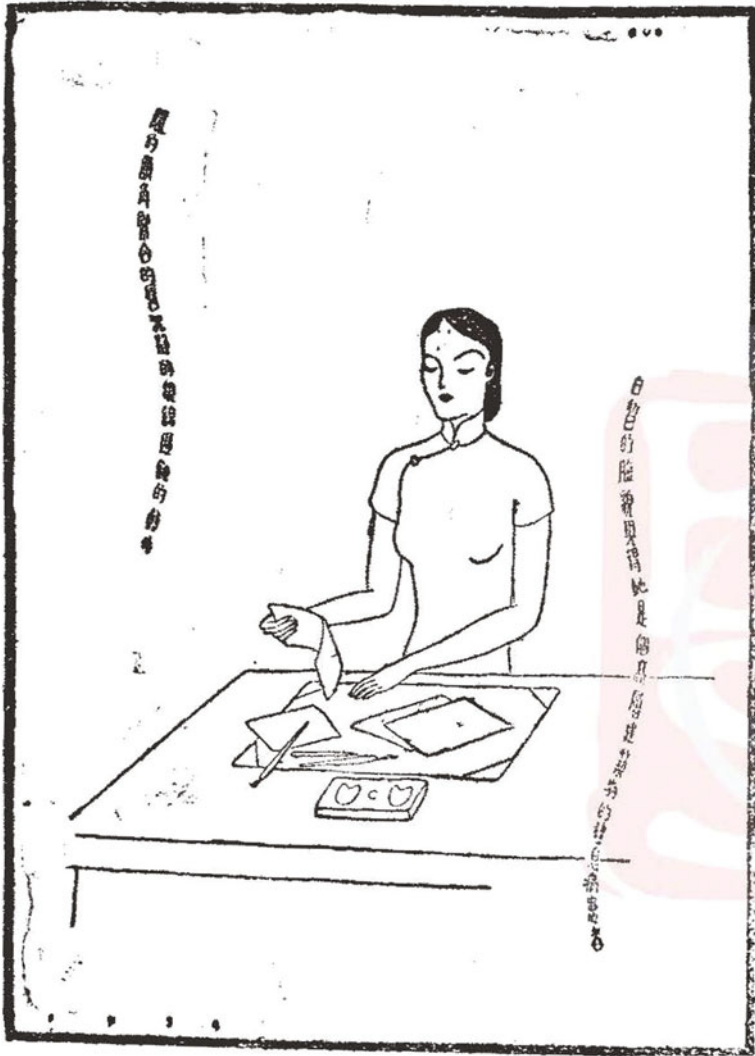


Fig. 12.2 Illustration by Guo Jianying in *Literature and Art Pictorial* (*Wenyi Huabao*), 1: 1934

as it takes on form, the birth of order through spontaneous organization” (*Sense* 13). Cézanne’s impromptu style he identifies here is similar to Rainer Maria Rilke’s idea about the way an artist should follow: “Ideally a painter (and, generally, an artist) should not become conscious of his insights: without taking the detour through his reflective processes, and incomprehensibly to himself, all his progress should enter so swiftly into the work that he is unable to recognize them in the moment of transition” (75). In other words, Merleau-Ponty’s and Rilke’s consensus is that art reflecting reality should be unpremeditated.⁷

There is a historical merit in this pursuit for unpremeditated perceptions of the objects and phenomena in art and literature. Merleau-Ponty thinks that by stepping back from the metaphysical understanding of the objects and focusing on the artist’s bodily relations with them, it helps “make the event [of painting] into a durable theme of historical life and have a right to philosophical status” (179). The same goes for sensationist literature about the city. Unpremeditated perceptions historicize the events of writing by showing the unexpected sensibilities arisen in the short stories. They make the relations of the writer with the objects and phenomena transparent and inviting historical contemplation. As opposed to the way literature about the city, in using conceptual thoughts, forecloses the possibilities of appreciating familiar images of modern life, sensationist writing encourages a new understanding of them. For instance, in her 1927 masterpiece “Miss Sophia’s Diary,” one of Liu Na’ou’s contemporaries, also a famous female writer in the May Fourth Movement, Ding Ling 丁玲, describes the face of Ling Jishi, a handsome young man the narrator has a crush on, in a hackneyed way: “How can I describe the beauty of this strange man? His stature, pale delicate features, fine lips, and soft hair are quite dazzling enough” (55). Whereas Ding Ling uses predictable and generic literary constructions, for example, “fine” for describing lips and “soft” for describing hair, Liu Na’ou goes for the eccentric and specific. His way of describing the face of a young and attractive woman whom the male protagonist, Ranqing 燃青, meets in a train, in the story “Scenery” (*Fengjing*) 風景, is inventive: “But the most special was her little tiny lips, neurotically cracked open like a pomegranate too ripe” (*Scène* 28).

⁷One may ask what they were actually cautious about and trying to align art to their historical contexts. These thinkers were, perhaps, trying to locate art against the prevalence of premeditated thoughts according to modern science (*The Primacy* 159–161; Potts 213).

Unlike Ding Ling's description of the pale, delicate features, fine lips, and soft hair in "Miss Sophia's Diary," which are historically not specific, Liu Na'ou's description of female neurotic demeanor in "Scenery"—"little tiny lips, *neurotically* cracked open like a pomegranate too ripe" (emphasis added)—clearly reveals an emergence of psychoanalytical terminology and a particular Western aesthetic of female beauty in early twentieth-century China. Through an unpremeditated and intuitive description of the sight of a woman's face that is supposed to be attractive for her time period, the reader is then able to understand the sensibilities of the flâneur in the semicolonial context. The writing is not as much a representation of the reality of Shanghai's semicolonial society but as a historical artifact by itself. It is not an artifact of the thoughts of the time in a cognitive sense, but of the sensibilities in an affective sense. It carries a historical significance and allows room for further reflection on affect and aesthetics during China's semicoloniality.

To sum up, sensationist literature offers an opportunity to understand the sensory culture of urban life. Paradoxically, among the burgeoning body of the study of Shanghai new sensationism, the topic of sensation does not seem to be getting the kind of attention it deserves.⁸ Numerous examples of scholarship treat new sensationist literature as representations of something, such as of the city of Shanghai, the women during its time, and so on (Peng 70–72; Ceng 483–487, 495–501, 510–511; Rosenmeier). While scholars have published extensively on new sensationism as well as organized academic conferences on the topic, with one solely dedicated to the study of Liu Na'ou, the majority of the works use a sociopolitical, historical, or narrative approach (Jin, Peng, Ceng). The study of new sensationism has been about politics, history, and narrative in this movement, but not exactly about the theory of perception. Few examples take into account perception as a strategy of writing about the city but not in a representational sense. An important exception to this scholarly attitude is an earlier article by Yomi Braester on the new sensationists' "[abandoning of the] realistic conventions in favor of stylistic experimentalism that resulted in texts permeated with visual, indeed spectacular, imagery" (49).

As I argued, sensationist literature is a specific genre that resists a direct connection between the perception and the object, between the literature

⁸ For a genealogy of the study of Shanghai new sensationism, see Hsu 82–87.

and the reality of the city, between the text and the historical context. Sensationist writing poses a dilemma of interpreting the narrated reality for the reader, which Merleau-Ponty refers to as the enigma of the body. The perceiver's body is enigmatic because when it senses and is sensed at the same time, the perceptions are always caught up with confusion, narcissism, self-consciousness, or all kinds of emotions because of one's attachment to one's own self (*Primacy* 162–163). While it is impossible to diminish all emotions entirely, it is possible to write differently, such as in an unpremeditated way, in order to unfold the original and intuitive sensations evoked by the objects and phenomena in the city. By focusing on the spontaneous bodily responses to these objects, sensationist writing highlights the inclusion of the perceiver's body and therefore also the derivatives of sense faculties in different narrated situations.

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INDEX¹

A

- Der Abend*, 205
Adelaide Examiner, 73
Adelaide Independent and Cabinet of Amusement, 81
Adelaide Observer, 73
Adelaide Truth, 89, 92
Adorno, Theodor W., 21, 29, 242, 260, 261n5, 262, 265
 correspondence with Benjamin, 257–74
 and Max Horkheimer, 195, 265–6
Aesop, 31
Aindow, R., 56
Albert, Prince of Saxe-Cobourg and Gotha, 62
Allain, Marcel, 17, 143–61
Allen, George, 78
Allingham, P.V, 60
Altick, R.D., 61
Alzaris, Stefan, 164
Amusement parks, 16, 121–41, 205
 Coney Island, 17, 122, 224
 The Creation, 131
 the destruction of Pompeii, 123
 The Destruction of San Francisco, 139
 Dreamland, 122, 133–4
 in *Fantômas*, 150–2
 Fighting the Flames, 132
 Fighting the Flames act, 123
 Fire and Flames, 132
 Galveston flood, 129–30
 Midget village, 123
 New York Firefighters, 132
 orientalism, 122, 150, 206, 208
 funfairs, 150, 163
 Tivoli gardens, Copenhagen, 205
 Wurstelprater/Prater, 205, 206, 210f
 cinematograph, 206
Annemann, Ted, 186
Ante, Dieter, 36
Apollinaire, Guillaume, 143, 145, 252
Appadurai, Arjun, 8
Arbeiter-Zeitung, 206
Aristophanes, 31

¹Note: Page numbers with “n” denote endnotes.

Arndt, Ernst Moritz, 34
 Arnold, Matthew, 60, 66
 Artemis, Ephesian, 244
 Artiaga, Loïc and Matthieu
 Letourneux, 144
Australische Zeitung, 79

B

Bachman, Maria K., 108n18
 Bakhtin, Mikhail, 194, 195, 199–200
 Balla, Giacomo, 11–12, 254n5, 255
 Bancroft, Hubert Howe, 124, 135
 Banvard, John, 219
 Barker, Robert, 219, 220, 228
 Barlow, Toni, 288
 Barnum and Baily circus, 17, 123,
 150, 167
Nero, or, the Destruction of Rome, 123
 Baron, Anne-Mari, 20
 Baroni, Raphael, 159
 Barrow, George, 79
 Barthes, Roland, 45
 Baudelaire, 241, 248, 249, 274
 Becker, Niklaus, 38, 41
 Békešsy, Imre, 205
 Bellow, Juliet, 11
 Bellows, George, 235
Bell's Life in Adelaide, 85
 Benjamin, Walter, 4, 8, 21, 22, 46, 60,
 97n5, 98, 105n15, 194, 220,
 243, 248
 collecting, 271–2
 correspondence with Adorno,
 257–74
 dialectical image, 257, 260, 262,
 263n9, 267, 270, 272
 Bentley, Nancy, 218, 230
 Berger, Alfred Freiherr von, 209
 Bergson, Henri, 254
 Berman, Marshall, 123, 138
 Biers, Katherine, 227
 Bijker, Wiebe, 95, 96n4, 110

Bitter, Karl, 127, 128
 Blackstone, Harry, Sir [Harry
 Bouton], 175–6
 Blicke, Peter, 32
 Bloch, Ernst, 239, 261
 Boccioni, Umberto, 11, 253, 253n5
 Bodoni, Giambattista, 61
 Bonnard, Pierre, 11
 Booth, William, 76
 Borges, Jorge Louis, 249
 Börne, Ludwig, 35
Die Börse, 205
 Boston, George L., 168n9
 Bovenschen, Silvia, 49
 Bowlt, John, 11
 Braddon, Mary Elizabeth, 18
Aurora Floyd, 56
The Doctor's Wife, 51, 53, 55, 57, 58
La Chanteuse des rues, 18
Lady Audley's Secret, 58, 104
 Braester, Yomi, 293
 Brake, Laurel, 71n7
 Brand, Christian, 203
 Bratlinger, Patrick, 99n9, 100, 104, 107
 Brennglass, Adolph [Glassbrenner],
 36, 37n6, 39
 Breton, André, 143
 Breward, C., 52
 Brewer, John, 4n4
 Briggs, A., 51
 Brooks, Daphne, 220
 Brophy, James M., 37, 39, 41, 43
 Brown, Bill, 222
 Brückmann, Remigius, 42n8
 Brunswick, Duke of, 38
Die Bühne, 205
 Bulla, David B., 199
 Bunner, H.C., 125
 Burgess, Clinton, 174
 Burke, Edmund, 31
 Burke, Peter, 201
 Busnach, William, 18
 Butler, Christopher, 226

Butler, Judith, 45
 Büttner, Elizabeth, 206
 Buzard, James, 228

C

Cafés, 11–12, 17, 37
 Café du Néant, 12, 18, 154
 Calvino, Italo, 243
Journey in De Chirico's Cities, 249
 Campbell, Joseph, 165, 184,
 185n25
 Canetti, Elias, 211
 Cangiullo, Francesco, 11
 Cantwell, Robert, 125, 136–7
 Carlyle, Thomas, 59, 60
 Carrà, Carlo, 11
 Castiglione, Baldassarre, 31
 Cavallaro, D., 52
 Caveney, Mike, 168, 175
 Cawthorne, W.C., 82
 Ceng Yueqing, 293
 Cervantes, Miguel de, 31
 Cézanne, Paul, 22
 Chabert, Ivan, 166
 Chabrillat, Henri, 18
 Chakrabarty, Dipesh, 278
 Chandler, Alfred, 88
 Chandler, Charles, 70, 87, 89
 Chandler, James, 3n2
 Chartier, Roger, 32, 33
 Chatto and Windus, 63
 Chaudin, Nicolas, 123
 Chavigny, Jean, 176
 Chen Qiyu, 283
 Chiattonne, Mario, 254
 Chiavacci, Vinzenz, 202
 Choi Youngjoun, 115
 Chow, Rey, 278
 Christopher, Milbourne,
 170, 175, 177
 Chung Ling Soo [William
 E. Robinson], 170, 185

Cicero, Marcus Tullius, 31
 Ciocca, André, 177
 Clarke, Sydney W., 163, 171, 177,
 180
 Cohen, Margaret, 262
 Collins, Wilkie, 51, 62
The Moonstone, 56–7
The New Magdalen, 59
No Name, 58
The Woman in White, 51, 52, 55,
 58, 60, 62, 63
 Comay, Rebecca, 263
 Comment, Bernard, 220
 Cook, Deborah, 265
 Cooke, George, A., 177
 Copperfield, David, 176
 Cosmopolitan liberalism, 38
 Cox, Don Richard, 108n18
 Crali, Tullio, 254n5
 Crane, Stephen, 217–36
 “The Open Boat,” 20,
 217–36
 “When a Man Falls, a Crowd
 Gathers,” 233
 Crane, Tim, 279
 Crary, Jonathan, 22, 156, 199
 Crawford, Joan, 290
 Crippen case, 146
 Curthoys, Ann, 71n9
 Cvetkovich, Ann, 98n7
Cycling, 95–115
 illustrations, 109–14
 periodical fiction, 101–6
 women cyclists, 111
 Cysarz, Herbert, 259
 Czolgosz, Leon, 17, 137

D

D'Alesi, Hugo, 223
 Daly, Nicholas, 10, 22, 63, 65,
 103n14
 Dane, Joseph A., 31

- Dante, the magician
[Harry A Jansen], 174
- Dargan, Amanda, 203
- Darnton, Robert, 33
- Debord, Guy, 139
- De Chirico, Giorgio, 11, 21, 242–52
The Battle of Centaurs and Lapiths,
243
Dying Centaur, 243
The Enigma of an Autumn
Afternoon, 243, 244f
The Enigma of the Hour, 243
The Enigma of the Oracle, 243
Le Voyage emouvant, 247–9
Triton and Siren, 243
- Degas, Edgar, 11
- Delaunay, Robert, 243
- Deleuze, Gilles, 280, 290
- Depero, Fortunato, 254n5
- Desnos, Robert, 143, 145, 152
- Devant, David [David Wighton],
172, 177
- Dewald, Christian, 206
- Dexter, Will, 171
- Dibdin, Th. F., 61
- Dickens, Charles, 20, 52, 57, 62
- Diderot, Denis, 31
- Dietrich, Marlene, 181
- Dingelstedt, Franz, 39
- Ding Ling
“Miss Sophia’s Diary,” 292–3
- Ditfurth, Franz Wilhelm, 38, 43
- Diulgheroff, Nicolaj, 254n5
- Duchamp, Marcel, 255
- Dulac, Nicolas, 223, 225, 228
- During, Simon, 153
- E**
- The Eagle, 89
- Ebner, C.C., 50
- Eco, Umberto, 159n16
- Edelstein, Sophie, 181
- Edison Company, 129
Bucking Bronco, 222, 22f, 223
A Street Arab, 227f
What Happened on Twenty-Third
Street, 235
- Egyptian Hall, 19, 173
- Einstein, Albert, 252
- Eisenstein, Sergei, 11
- Eliade, Mircea, 184
- Evans, Harry, 87
- Evans, Matilda, 87. *See also* Franc
Mause, Jane [Evans, Matilda]
- Ewing, Thomas, 178
- Expressionism, 246
- F**
- Faber, Karl-Georg, 41
- Fagg, John, 219
- Fallersleben, August Heinrich
Hoffmann von, 39–41
- Fantômas, 17, 143
cinema adaptation, 143
- Farge, Arlette, 33
- Fashion, 13, 49–67, 86, 268–9
in gothic and sensation fiction, 49–67
- Fawcett, E. Douglas, 15–6, 101
“A Hand from the Grave,” 104–6
The Devilry of Baron Krantz, 101–4
Hartmann, the Anarchist, 101
- Fayard, Arthème, 144, 158
- Feldman, P.R., 61
- Fell, John, 20
- Feuillade, Louis, 156
- Fielding, Henry, 31
- Fieschi, Giuseppe Marco, 44
- Fiji, Walter Grovers, 106–9
- Filia [Luigi Colombo], 254n5
- Fischer, Lucy, 188n3
- Fischer, Ottokar, 164n3
- Fischer, Wilhelm, 37
- Flâneur, 156, 248, 264, 268
on a bicycle, 98, 110

semicolonial context, 293
 silent, 194
 Flaubert, Gustave, 20, 149
 Flügel, J.C., 50
 Forster, E.M., 62
 Foucault, Michel, 4, 45, 195, 196
 Fourier, Joseph, 268
 Foutch, Ellery, 233
 Franc Mause, Jane [Evans, Matilda], 87
Fratschlerinnen [women market-barkers], 202f
 Frearson, Robert, 82, 89
 Frearson, Samuel, 82, 89
 Frearson, Septimus, 82, 89
Frearson's Weekly Illustrated, 83
Free Lance and Licensed Victualler's Gazette, 90
Free Press and Hindmarsh Free Lance, 89
 Freiligrath, Ferdinand, 39
 Freud, Sigmund, 261n4
 Frevert, Ute, 178
 Frikell, Wiljaba, 164n4
 Frisby, David, 199
 Furst, Arnold, 176n16
 Futurism, 11, 21, 243, 246, 252–5
 simultaneity, 252–3

G

Gaboriau, Émile, 18
 Gabriele, Alberto, 19n6, 50, 65, 98–100, 107, 122, 193
 Galveston flood, 17, 122. *See also* Natural disasters; World fairs
 Gaskell, Elizabeth, 8
 Gaskil, Nicholas, 218
 Gasson, Andrew, 62, 63
Gasthofzeitung, 37
 Gaudreault, André, 10, 20, 223, 225, 228. *See also* Dulac, Nicolas
 Genette, Gérard, 158
 Gilbert, James Bukhart, 134
 Gilder, Richard Watson, 125

Ginzburg, Carlo, 196
 Gladstone, William, 62
 Glassbrenner, Adolph [Brennglass], 36, 37n6, 39, 206
 Glossy, Karl, 37, 40, 45
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 35
 Goldberg, Rose Lee, 11
 Goldin, Horace [Hyman E Glodstein], 167, 173–5
 Gopnik, Adam, 228
 Gordon, David, 91
 Gordon, Rae Beth, 228
 Gothic novel, 13, 49–67, 100
 Grand Guignol Theatre, 154, 160
 London, 19, 171
 Grandin, Madame Léon, 124
 Grandville, J.J. [Jean Ignace Isidore Gérard], 267–71
 Great Farini [Hunt, William Leonard], the, 167
 Great Lafayette [Sigmund, Neuberger], 168
 Great Leon, [Levy, Leon], 167
 Griffith, D.W., 166
Way Down East, 166, 187
 Griffiths, Alison, 219, 220, 223, 225
 Grison, George, 18
 Grosz, George, 243
 Gunning, Tom, 10, 195, 207, 218, 225, 227–9, 233
 Gunther, York, H., 285
 Guo Jianying, 289f
 Gutzkow, Karl, 39
 Gyatso, Tenzin, 281

H

Habermas, Jünger, 31, 196
 Hagemann, Karen, 34
 Hailes, Nathaniel, 81
 Halliday, A., 57
 Hamilton, George, 83
 Hammond, Mary, 61

Hand, Richard J., 171, 183
 Hanlon Brothers, 19, 177
 Hanssen, Beatrice, 259n2
 Harral, Edmund, 83
 Harris, Neil, 124
 Harrison, K., 52, 58, 60
 Harvey, J., 56
 Hauptman, Jodi, 11
 Haussmann, Georges-Eugène Baron,
 123
 Hayworth, Rita, 181
 Heath, Charles, 61
 Hebdige, Dick, 51
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm, 31, 261,
 265n12
 Heidegger, Martin, 279
 Heine, Heinrich, 35, 39, 41
 Heinzen, Karl, 39
 Helms, Rev. Elmer, 17, 128, 137
 Heraclitus, 21, 243
 Herlihy, David V., 95, 96
 Herrmann, Adelaide, 180, 185, 186
 Herrmann, Alexander, 180, 185, 186
 Herweg, Georg, 41
 Hitchcock, Alfred, 107n17
 Hoffer, Peter Charles, 122
 Hoff, Heinrich, 37
 Hollander, Ann, 53
 Holland, Glenn, 31
 Holquist, Michael, 45
 Homer, 31
 Hopf, Albert, 36
 Hopkins, Albert, 177
 Houdini, Bess, 181
 Houdini, Harry [Erich Weiss], 168,
 169f, 170, 185–7
 Howells, William Dean, 218
 Huck, Christian, 54
 Hume, David, 31
 Hunt, William Leonard. *See* Great
 Farini [Hunt, William Leonard],
 the
 Hurley, K., 50
 Hutcheon, Linda, 30, 32, 40

I

Illustrated Adelaide Post, 82
Illustrated Melbourne Post, South
 Australian edition, 82
Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt, 205
Interessante Blatt, Das, 205
 Isenstadt, Sandy, 121

J

Jacob, Max, 143
 Jacquinet, Marcel, 181
 Jando, Dominique, 167, 183
 Jarenski, Shelly, 220, 221
 Jarry, Alfred, 11
 Jasset, Victorin, 155
 Jay, Martin, 193
 Jay, Ricky, 166, 167
 Jefferson, R.L., 106–9
 Jerome, Jerome K., 96
 Jin Li, 293
 Johnstone, George, 175
 Joyce, James, 184
 Juhasz, Karl, 208
 Jung, Carl Gustav, 261n4

K

Kalifa, Dominique, 145
 Kaut, Hubert, 203
 Keepsake, 61–2
 Kellar, Harry [Heinrich Keller], 170
 Kierkegaard, Søren, 260, 261n5, 272
Kinematographische Rundschau,
 208, 209
Kino-Journal, 207, 208
 Kiralfy, Imre, 123
 Kirchner, Ernst Ludwig, 243
 Kleinenbroich, Wilhelm, 46
 Klooksnuut, Peter, 37n6
 Kolta, Buatier de [Joseph Buatier],
 172, 177
 Koolhaas, Rem, 124
 Körner, Karl Theodor, 34

Koss, Stephen, 76n23, 76n27
 Kotzebue, August von, 35
 Paul Demetrius, 35
 Kraus, Karl, 203–5
 Kristeva, Julia, 50
 Kuh, Anton, 210
 Kurosawa, Akira
 Dreams, 249
 Kurtz, Charles, 130
 Kuchta, D., 52

L

LaCapra, Dominick, 46, 47
 Lacassin, Francis, 17
 Laffont, Robert, 146
 Laube, Anthony, 72n21
 Laver, J., 52
 Law, G., 63
 Leblanc, Maurice, 156
 Lee, Alan J., 93n67
 Leech, Al, 175
 Leja, Michael, 131
 Leopardi, Giacomo, 269
 Leroy, Arthur, 176
 Le Roy, Servais, 169
 Les Levante [Leslie George Vante-
 Cole], 168n8
 Levy, Leon. *See* Great Leon, the [Levy,
 Leon]
 Lewis, Eric, 173, 177, 182, 183
 Lewis, Matthew
 The Monk, 51, 53, 55, 56
 Liabeuf, 146
Literature and Art Pictorial [Wenyi
 Huabao], 289n6
 Lithography, 35, 37, 41, 60, 81–4,
 109–14, 151. *See also* Cycling
 Liu Na'ou, 22, 277–94
 “An Attempted Murder,” 287
 “Games” “Youxi,” 278, 280
 “Ruin” “Canliu,” 280
 “Scenery” “Fengjing,” 292
 Livingston, Kevin, 74

Lloyd, Clem., 70
 Loesberg, Jonathan, 100, 107
 Lotto, Lorenzo, 251
 Loyal, George, 167
 Loyau, George, 83
 Lucian of Samosata, 250
 Lukács, György, 265, 266
 Luks, George, 21, 233
 The Spielers, 21, 233, 234f
 Lumière brothers, 11
 Lynn, Sally, 17, 132

M

Machiavelli, Niccolò, 31
 Macho, Thomas, 182, 185
Magic Circular, 180
 Magritte, René, 143
 Maingueneau, Dominique, 151
 Malevič, Kazimir, 11
 Maltby, H.F., 183
 Mannbach, Wilhelm, 37n6
 Mannoni, Octave, 153, 187
 Mantegna, Andrea, 252
 Marchi, Virgilio, 254n5
 Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso, 11
 Market criers [Fratschlerinnen], 38,
 43, 202, 203
 cinema barkers [Rekommandeure],
 205–7
 and attraction, 208
 newspapers barkers, 203–5
 party political barker, 211
 Marquis, Leonard Stanley, 58
 Marshall, George, 168
 Houdini, 168
 Marsh, Richard, 57
 Marx, Karl, 260, 261n4, 262n7, 270
 and Engels, Friedrich, 138
 Mary, Jules, 18
 Maskelyne, John Nevil, 172, 177
 Matthews, Nancy Mowll, 232, 233
 Mattl, Siegfried, 205
 Mayer, Emil, 209

- Mayer, Henry, 71n9
 Mazow, Leo G., 220
 Mazzoni, Angiolo, 254n5
 McKain, Catherine, 86
 McKinley, William, 17
 McKitterick, D., 61, 63
 McLaughlin, 261n5
 McMullen, Charles, 79
 Méliès, Georges, 18
 Melischek, Gabriele, 205
 Melman, Billie, 193
 Melodrama, 154, 159, 166
 Merisi, Michelangelo, 251
 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 22, 281–3, 290
 Merry, Jean, 177
 Metternich, Klemens von, 37, 38, 45
 Michelet, Jules, 261
 Miller, Angela, 219, 220, 225
 Miller, D.A., 98n7, 100
Miss Hannabel's Lovers [by Walter Groves Fiji, R.L. Jefferson, Charles P. Sisley and the Rank Outsider], 106–9
 Mnemonic collage, 21, 242
 Modernity
 ambivalence towards, 101, 103, 121, 131–3, 278
 as lived experience, 10, 222, 277–94
 new media
 cinematograph, 146, 150, 278
 gramophone/ phonograph, 149, 156, 195, 209
 kinetoscope, 20, 156, 222, 223, 225
 zoetrope, 225
 performance and modernist
 aesthetics, 10–12, 222, 226
 Moindrot, Isabelle, 155
 Montage effect, 20, 194, 242, 268n15
 Montaigne, Michel de, 31
 Montwieler, K., 58, 60, 62
 Morand, Paul, 277
 More, Henry, 3
 Mosso, Nicola, 254n5
 Motte Fouquet, Friedrich de La, 34
 Muecke, D.C., 31
 Müller, Sabine, 209
 Mutoscope, 223
 Mybridge, Eadweard, 222
- N**
- Napoleon, 33–5
 Natural disasters, 199
 eruption of Mount Kilauea, 17, 127, 128
 Galveston flood, 128–9
 Johnstown flood, 17, 129–30
 San Francisco earthquake, 1906, 17, 122, 126, 130, 139
 Nestroy, Johann, 36
Die Neue Zeitung, 205
 Neumann, Dietrich, 121
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 21, 245
 Nolan, Christopher
 The Prestige, 186
 North, Dan, 166
 The Northern Star, 78
 North, Michael, 224, 226
 Norton, John, 87, 92
- O**
- Oddy, Nicholas, 98n8
Österreichische Kronen-Zeitung, 205
Österreichischer Komet, 208
- P**
- Paech, Anne, 207
 Page, Max, 124
 Painting, 10–12, 20, 232–6, 239–56
 Pankhurst, Christabel, 180
 Emmeline, 179f, 180

- Panorama, 20, 22, 127, 206, 218–20, 223, 264–5, 274
In the Grip of the Blizzard, 219, 231, 232f
 Mareorama, 223
 moving, 131, 219
Panorama of the Mississippi River, 219
- Parker, Lottie Blair, 166
- Parrish, Robert, 168n9
- Pasquin, 84
- Patten, R.L., 63
- Paul, Saint, 31
- Paupié, Kurt, 204, 205
- Payer, Peter, 202, 203
- Peng, Xiaoyan, 285, 293
- Performance, 10–12, 32
 circus, 150, 164, 166–7, 206
 magician's act, 18, 163–91;
 female assistant, 165, 171–2, 177, 188
 initiation rituals, 183–8
 magician as author function, 17, 144
 Maison Horace Hurm et Prevost, 149
 secularization, 164
 puppet theatre, 46
 rodeo, 222
 theatricality, 152, 193–4, 196–200
 of urban space, 121–40
- Periodical press, 35–9
 German, during the Rheine crisis, 35–9
 illustrations (*see* (Lithography;
 Popular culture, caricature))
 mobility of journalists, 77
 press clippings and popular serial
 literature, 144
 reading practices, 100, 103–4, 108
- South Australian
 investigative journalism, 87–93
 New Journalism, 70–88
 provincial experimentation *vs.*
 urban mainstream, 87, 88
 sensation fiction, 87–8
 sports reporting, 84–5
 training of journalists, 78, 88
 women writers, 85–7
- Petty, Margaret Maile, 121
- Peuckert, Will-Erich, 184
- Pfaller, Robert, 153n13
- Phantasmagoria, 262, 268, 269, 274
- Phillip I, Louis, 44
- Phillips, Samuel, 63
- Physiologies, 13, 37, 145, 203
 Wiener Typen, 209
- Phlegley, Jennifer, 22
- Picasso, Pablo., 248, 253
- Pictorial Australian, 86
- Pitt, George H., 71n10, 75n16
- Pocock, J.G.A., 3n2
- Poincaré, Raymond, 145, 254
- Polish insurgency, 37, 45
- Popular culture
 anti-theatricality, 193–4, 205
 caricatures, 35, 37 (*see also*
 (Lithography))
 carnivalesque, 46
 censorship, 37, 45, 205
 élite *vs.* popular audiences, 41
 material culture, 41, 203
 nationalism, 33–5, 37, 38, 42,
 219–20, 239
 orality *vs.* print culture, 33, 38
 performativity, 32, 40, 44 (*see also*
 Performance
 police reports, 40
 popular songs, 33–5, 37–8, 43
 pre-modernist visuality, 10–12,
 218
 rhetorical figures of, 12
 irony, 29–31, 43, 44
 paratopy, 151
 synecdoche, 30
 silencing of, 197, 204, 208
 transmediality, 9–11, 41, 129, 143,
 151

Popular literature
 advertising tropes, 151
 realism *vs.* illusionism, 100, 149, 153
 remediation of spectacle, 150, 152,
 156, 159–60
 self-reflexivity, 146, 148, 207–8
Port Pirie Standard, 88
 Posner, Bruce, 231
 Potts, Alex, 292
 Prampolini, Enrico, 254n5
 Press, Steven Michael, 35
 Price, David, 164n4
 Pritchard, Eric, 56
 Proudfoot, Lindsay J., 7
 Prutz, Robert, 39
 Pyckett, L., 59

Q

Quintilian, 31

R

Rabelais, François, 31
 Rabinovitz, Lauren, 228
 Radcliffe, Ann
The Italian, 54, 57
 Reade, Charles, 1
 Reimers, Christian, 79
 Reinach, Solomon, 252
Revue des lectures, 150
 Rheine Crisis, 38–9
Rheinische Postillon, 37
 Richards, Th., 65
 Richiardi, Jr. [Aldo Izquierdo], 176
 Richter, Rosa. *See* Zazel [Richter, Rosa]
 Rilke, Rainer Maria, 292
 Robert-Houdin, Jean-Eugène, 19,
 164n3, 176, 177
 Robinson, Ben, 171
 Robinson, Olive “Dot,” 181
 Robinson, William E. *See* Chung Ling
 Soo [William E. Robinson]

Roche, Michael M., 7n5
 Rodchenko, Alexander, 11
 Roltair, Henry, 123, 131
 Rosenmeier, Christopher, 293
 Routledge, 52, 63, 65
 Rovère, Jules de, 164n3
 Royal Aquarium, 167
 Ruge, Arnold, 39
 Russolo, Luigi, 11

S

Sachsman, David B., 199
 Saint-Simon, Henri de Rouvroy, 268
 Sakai, Naoki, 278, 279
 Salten, Felix, 209
 Sand, Karl, 35
 Sant’Elia, Antonio, 254n5
 Sanzio, Raphael, 251
 Saphir, Moritz, 36
 Sartoris, Alberto, 254
 Sauer mann, Dietmar, 34
 Schaden, Adolph von, 37n6
 Schlegel, Friedrich von, 31
 August, Wilhelm von, 31
 Schönstein, Gustav, 37n6
 Schopenhauer, Arthur, 21, 245,
 252
 Schübler, Walter, 211
 Schultz, Julianne, 70
 Schumpeter, Joseph, 139
 Schwartz, Vanessa, 11, 22, 121, 156
 Schwarz, Werner Michael, 205–8,
 209n8
 Scot, Reginald, 166
 Scott, Winfred, 86
 Seaman, Keith, 71
 Second, Alberic, 18
 Seethaler, Joseph, 205
 Selbit, P.T. [Percy Thomas Tibbles],
 19, 171–4, 177, 180,
 182–3
 Sennett, Richard, 19, 193–8, 200n4

- Sensationalism. *See also* Amusement parks; Natural disasters; World fairs
 anarchism, 101–3, 137, 145n3
 aural dimension of, 8, 195, 201
 and book covers, 14, 60–1
 cinematograph, 206
 city and countryside, 15, 109, 111
 in *Cycling*, 15, 95–115
 dichotomy fragmentation-unity, 2, 4
 and irony, 8, 41, 43, 44
 periodical fiction in the South
 Australian press, 87
 pre-conceptual sensations, 285
 premodern, 194, 200–1
 in the public sphere, 13, 17, 19,
 121–37, 159–60, 193–214
 sensational overload, 3, 279–81
 in the South Australian Press,
 14–15, 70–84
 transmediality, 9–11, 41, 143–4
 as a trope, 1
 urban disasters, 122, 133
- Sensationism, 285
 Chinese, 277–94
 Japanese, 277
- Sensorium, coinage of the word, 3
- Severini, Gino, 11
- Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 31
- Shannon, B., 51, 52
- Shelley, Mary, 62
 “Transformation,” 59
- Shih, Shu-mei, 280, 283
- Shinn, Everett, 219, 233–5
 Cross-Streets of New York, 236
 Footlight Flirtation, 235
 The French Music Hall, 235
 Tightrope Walker, 235
 Windswept Street, 235
- Shklovsky, Viktor, 283
- Simmel George, 3, 8, 54, 281,
 287n4
- Singer, Ben, 97, 98, 109–11, 114,
 155, 193
- Sironi, Mario, 254n5
- Sisley, Charles P., 106–9
- Skipper, Spencer, 84
- Sloan, John, 232, 235
 Movie, Five Cents, 232, 235
- Smith, Adam, 3
- Smith, Carl, 134
- Smith Elder, 63
- Smith, Frank H., 127
- Snyder, Robert, 235
- Solomon, Matthew, 169, 181
- Souret, Agnès, 182
 South Australian Advertiser, 73–4,
 75n17, 76n20, 77n28, 80, 84,
 88, 91
 *South Australian Gazette and Colonial
 Register*, 70–6, 80, 84–6, 88, 89,
 91, 93
 South Australian Magazine, 85
 South Australian Register, 73
 South Australian Times, 79
- Souvestre, Pierre, 143–61
- Sowden, William, 89
- Spence, Catherine Helen, 86
- Spengler, Oswald, 239
- Spiegel, Alan, 20
- Spinoza, Baruch, 290
- Spiritualism, 79–81, 149, 255
- Spooner, C., 49, 53, 56, 58, 60
- Stanley, Henry, 90
- Stead, W.T., 69–93
- Steinitz, Wolfgang, 32, 38, 43
- Steinmeyer, Jim, 165, 167, 171, 173,
 174, 177, 178, 181
- Stephens, John, 72, 73
- Stevenson, George, 71
- Stierle, Karlheinz, 162
- Stocker, Bram
 The Jewel of Seven Stars, 58
- Stocks, Samuel, 72
 Die Stunde, 205
- Sturma, Michael, 75
- Surrealism, 143, 155, 242
- Suvin, 101n12
- Sweet, M., 60, 62

T

Tanguy, Yves, 143
 Teale, Oscar S., 178n18
 Thackeray, William, 62
 Thayer Magic Company, 173
 Thurston, Howard, 167, 169, 175
 Tiers, Mauricia de, 167
 Titanic, accident of the, 145, 148
 Tocqueville, Alexis de, 31
 Tolstoy, Leo, 283
 Torrini [Edmond de Grisy], 19, 176
 Toulouse-Lautrec, Henri de, 11
 Townsend, Mary Lee, 37
 Trachtenberg, Allen, 17, 134
 Trotter, Thomas, 3
 Truffaut, François, 107n17
 Tschsch, Heinrich Ludwig, 43

U

Uhland, Ludwig, 35n4
 Urban destruction, 16, 121–41
 Chicago fire 1871, 126
 in Fantômas, 156
 Lisbon earthquake 1755, 122
 Messina earthquake, 1908, 122
 San Francisco earthquake, 1906, 122
 Triangle shirtwaist factory fire,
 17, 133
 Urban, Hugh B., 279
 Uricchio, William, 219, 220, 223–4,
 228–31, 235

V

Valori Plastici, 245, 250
 van Gennep, Arnold, 165, 184
 Van Heekeren, Margaret, 74n15
The Vanishing City (Van Meter, H.H.),
 135–6
Veltées Panoptikum, 206
 Vere, Charles de [Herbert Shakespeare
 Gardiner William], 177

Verhaeren, Émile, 243, 249
 Vico, Giambattista, 31
 Vidler, Anthony, 259
 Viennese markets, 201–2
 Vizerelly, 18
 Voltaire, François Marie Arouet, 31
 Von Arx [Charles Albert Nicol],
 171
 Vuillard, Édouard, 11

W

Wagner, Meike, 41n7
 Wakefield, Edward Gibbon, 70
 Walker, Frederick, 60
 Walker, John Brisben, 131
 Walkowitz, Judith, 90n57
 Wallach, Alan, 220
 Wall, W., 61
 Walpole, Horace
 The Castle of Otranto, 50, 54,
 55, 61
 Walz, Robin, 143
 Wang, Sam, 280
 Warlock, Peter, 173, 177, 182,
 183
 Waterhouse, Jessie, 87
 Warwick, A., 52
 Webb, Lucy, 86
 Weber, Samuel, 259
 Weidman, Amanda, 279
 Weiss, Erich. *See* Houdini, Harry
 Welles, Orson, 181
 Mercury Wonder Show, 181
 Wells, H.G., 115
 Whaley, Bart, 164n3, 170
 White, Lillian, 168
 Wiener, Joel H., 71, 76, 78, 84, 86
 Wilhelm IV, Friedrich, 43
 Williamson, Goerge, 35
 Williams, Raymond, 285
 Wilson, E., 50
 Wilson, Michael, 171, 183

- Wiltenburg, Joy, 193
 Wirth, Louis, 281
Women's Pictorial [Furen Huabaoi],
 288
 Wood, Catherine, 79
 Wordsworth, William
 The Prelude, 3
 World fairs, 16, 122
 Columbian exposition, Chicago, the
 White City, 122, 124
 Luisiana Purchase exhibition, San
 Louis, 17, 122, 129–31
 Pan-American exhibition, Buffalo,
 17, 128
 San Francisco exhibition 1915, 126
 Wynne, Deborah, 100
- X**
 Xie Liuyi, 296
- Y**
 Yount, Sylvia, 235, 236
- Z**
 Zacchini family, 167
 Zazel [Richter, Rosa], 167
 Zeitlin, Steven, 203
 Zeuxis, 250
 Zola, Émile, 20, 149
 Zurier, Rebecca, 235
 Zweers, John, 168