Cinema, Newspapers and the US Presidential Election of 1896

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The post-Brighton study of Early Cinema was an important moment of film historiographic achievement. The initial movement or intellectual formation sought to trace out the history of film form, of which Tom Gunning's formulation of the cinema of attractions to the cinema of narrative integration was one widely adopted articulation. This is not the place to re-examine the convergences and disagreements in our respective understandings. However, it would be fair to say that the study of early cinema rapidly expanded beyond this initial interest in form to include a wide range of concerns. One, which preoccupied John Fell and Robert C. Allen in the 1970s and became of increasing interest to scholars such as Andre Gaudreault, involving take an inter-medial approach. To some extent this conference—focused on the construction of news in early cinema—encourages us to do exactly this by examining relations between the fledgling film industry and the newspaper as industry and cultural form.

It is perhaps interesting to identify some of the first news film made in the United States. The Edison Company made a number of films of parades in 1896, starting with *White Wings Parade* in May 1896, which could be news films but also lose that specificity of timeliness and remain commercially viable. *The Arrival of Li Hung Chang*, shot on August 29, 1896, is perhaps more formally connected to a news-worthy, headline-type event. While such films recorded events that were also being reported in the press, this only begins to hint at a much more dynamic inter-media relationship between the cinema and the newspaper. Certainly this relationship dates back to the invention and early commercialization of cinema. Edison was a prominent media personality and his activities—including his work on the kinetograph and kinetoscope—were widely reported in the press. Sandow's visit to the Black Maria to perform for Edison's camera was widely covered in the press. Although one might say that this act of filming became a news event and that the resulting motion picture was a record of one part of it, we might more profitably think of *Sandow* as a promotional film. In many respects, one function of many early kinetoscope films was to promote per-

formers and theatrical subjects (musicals, plays, etc). Of course, newspapers through advertisements and its theatrical page performed this role as well. In any case, there was a very early synergy between motion pictures and newspapers that rapidly congealed around the idea that cinema was a visual newspaper. This involved something of a reciprocal understanding. Biograph, for instance, had a strong relationship with the *New York Mail & Express*, which sometimes reproduced frame enlargements of news films on its pages. Throughout the 1890s and arguably until 1903, cinema was firmly under the dominance of the newspaper. This continued to be a key association for many more years to come—though without the same centrality.

I would like to further shift perspectives in two respects and apply this approach to a specific case study focused on the 1896 US presidential elections. The first is to avoid treating cinema on its face as a new media form or art form—rather than seeing the introduction of motion pictures as a transformation of existing practices. Now there are numerous reasons to argue that cinema was something new, and one of them is certainly that it reconfigured and reimagined so many different cultural practices that its distinctiveness is beyond dispute. Nonetheless, we need to consider ways in which such an introduction transformed existing audio-visual practices. For instance, news photography preceded news films and these photographs were sometimes shown in theaters—projected on the screen using the stereopticon—during the second half of the 19th century. This suggests certain continuities as well as important changes. This, perhaps not surprisingly, returns to a long-standing interest of mine.

My study of early cinema found it heuristic to look at cinema within the framework of screen practice—of the projected image and its sound accompaniment, which served an effective means for re-examining the "beginnings" of cinema as one of intersecting transformations. That is, in tracing out the history of the projected image on the screen, which dates back to the mid 17th century, I was pursuing an approach that we might now recognize as platform studies. Practitioners—exhibitors, showmen and the like—used a variety of media in conjunction with the lantern/screen platform, and the application of emergent media such as photography and motion pictures to this platform contributed to rapidly changing screen practices that seemed to culminate in the cinema. News films were not simply a new practice—or part of a new practice. There were important continuities which is to say that the conjunction between motion pictures and the newspaper preceded the invention of motion pictures if we look at them within the tradition of audio-visual presentations.

This focus on the lantern/screen platform has provided a useful way to frame the use of cinema in the 1896 presidential election. By examining aspects of nineteenth century audio-visual media as they were employed

for political purposes during both the 1892 and the 1896 presidential elections, the historian encounters surprising continuities as well as changes that cannot simply be attributed to the introduction of a new medium. For those who know my work, I have been particularly interested in the ways that exhibitors were responsible for what we might call postproduction throughout the 19th century—and the shift in these responsibilities in the early 20th to the producer. Screen practice in both 1892 and 1896 was part of this earlier era.

The second point is to move beyond what might be seen as an intermedial approach –the relationship between newspapers and cinema—and look at cinema—and news films—as operating within a larger media formation, which is to say as part of larger cultural and social practices. My concern here is with a specific media formation that existed for presidential elections, and this vary considerably for other activities—such as boxing or sports. Or with the theater. Or medicine, where the uses of film had little news value and little relationship to the newspaper. Looking at the 1890s presidential campaigns in the way I propose results in 1) extending the study diachronically in ways that may potentially reduce the beginnings of cinema as a neat starting point—an aproach that has something in common with more recent assertions made by Andre Gaudreault though with a somewhat different orientation. And broadening the study synchronically by using a quite broad notion of media to include oratory and public performances.

Audio-Visual Media and the 1892 Presidential Election

To understand the shift in audio-visual media, which took place with the innovative (if limited) use of projected motion pictures in conjunction with the 1896 presidential campaign between Governor William McKinley of Ohio (the Republican) and former-Representative William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska (the Democrat), let us consider the previous presidential election in 1892: a period of so-called "pre-cinema" when "Bourbon Democrat" and former President Grover Cleveland was running against President Benjamin Harrison, a Republican. As it turned out, the key battle ground states for electoral victory were New York and to a lesser extent Illinois. The candidate who won New York had won the presidency in previous elections—and would do so again in 1892 and 1896. Moreover, the Democratic margin of victory in New York City was crucial to the outcome of this contest. Campaign activities in New York and its surroundings thus possessed a relevance and urgency that make them an appropriate focus of study.

The public sphere remained a vital force in New York City in the early 1890s. The presidential campaign in 1892 was conducted through nu-

merous political gatherings and public demonstrations. Political oratory played a central role in the media formation of presidential campaigns even though the presidential candidates themselves played a surprisingly modest role. [Grover Cleveland gave only one public speech in New York City—on November 1st at the Lenox Lyceum, a spacious auditorium, which had its seats removed.[1] As a sitting president, Benjamin Harrison did not campaign at all. (Harrison's wife was also seriously ill and died on October 25th two weeks before the election). However, numerous surrogates for both candidates gave speeches throughout the city, with Governor William McKinley playing a particularly prominent role for Harrison.[2] Many of these events were organized by clubs whose members shared work-related interests such as the Wholesale Dry Goods Republican Club or the Democratic New York Stock Exchange Club.]

Public demonstrations or performances complemented public oratory.[3] The Democrats culminated their campaign with several large-scale events. Five days before the election, they held a huge evening rally on 14th Street opposite Tammany Hall.[4] This was followed by a Saturday parade in which at least 35,000 members of the businessmen's Cleveland and Stevenson clubs marched past Cleveland who was in a reviewing stand at Madison Square.[5]

There was, moreover, a feedback loop between these carefully orchestrated political demonstrations and the media—that is, the daily press. Newspapers favored either Democrats or Republicans but covered both (though hardly even-handedly). They reported on the lengthy speeches of their party's presidential surrogates in great detail and gave extensively coverage to political rallies. Through editorials and investigative articles, these newspapers also made arguments for or against the high tariffs advocated by the Republicans. The pro-Democratic *New York Herald*, for instance, asserted that Republican tariffs would suck in cheap labor from abroad, undercutting wages. The Republican *New York Tribune*, in contrast, claimed that tariffs made possible the high standard of living enjoyed by working people in comparison to the conditions they endured in Europe.

The relationship between presidential campaigns and other cultural forms varied considerably during the 1892 election. Although these campaign speeches were obviously performances and these rallies involved a

1. "A Great Cleveland Night," *New York Times*, 2 November 1892, 1. Cleveland also participated in a campaign rally on November 4th,
2. 'McKinley in Brooklyn," *New York Herald,* 1 November 1892, p. 5.
3. Brooks McNamara, *Day of Jubliee: The Great Age of Public Celebrations in New York, 1788-1909* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).
4. "In Fourteenth Street, Opposite the Wigwam," *New York Herald*, 4 November 1892, p. 7.
5. "Business Men March and Cheer for Cleveland," *New York Herald,* 6 November 1892, p. 15.

great deal of political theater, presidential politics were rarely present inside theaters themselves. Political theater and theatrical entertainments were rivals of sorts as presidential campaigning had a negative impact on theatergoing since potential ticket buyers attended campaign events instead.

Audio-visual media, in particular magic lanterns and stereopticons, were employed for campaign purposes though in limited and unequal ways.[6] Republicans used the lantern extensively to give illustrated lectures that focused on a key feature of their party's platform: tariffs and the value of protectionism. These illustrated lectures functioned as extension of political oratory but added a visual dimension that could bolster their rhetorical effectiveness. Simply put, they were the nineteenth and early twentieth century equivalent of the documentary. Combining image and narration to engage in what Bill Nichols has appropriately called "the discourse of sobriety,"[7] these were presented in lecture halls and other locations for political gatherings.

There were a number of different lecturers and many of these were coordinated through the Speakers' Bureau. By mid-October Judge John L. Wheeler of New Jersey had been giving his illustrated lecture on the tariff question for eleven weeks and had "nightly spoken to an audience which filled the houses to overflowing."[8] *The New York Tribune*, a Republican newspaper, devoted the most coverage to Elijah R. Kennedy, a well-known insurance broker and locally prominent Brooklyn Republican.[9] According to the *Tribune*

One of the most brilliant engagements of the brilliant campaign which is being fought to restore New Jersey to Republican rule took place at South Orange last night. Major Elijah R. Kennedy, of New York, was in command of the Republican forces, ... It was in the nature of an artillery duel, and Major Kennedy fired solid shot from a double-barreled stereopticon into the ranks of the Democracy, and followed that up with a rattling volley of statistics and arguments.[10]

6. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Democrats, Republicans and the city's newspapers used the stereopticon to project information about the vote on election night, hanging canvases from their buildings so that gathering crowds could follow the returns. See, for instance, "Many Thousands Read the Signals," *New York Herald,* 9 November 1892, p. 7.
7. B. Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
8. Ibid.
9. "A New Brooklyn Park Commissioner," *New York Tribune*, 31 January 1888. Kennedy was a member of the insurance brokers' firm of Weed and Kennedy.
10. "Protection Illustrated," *New York Tribune*, 25 October 1892, p. 3. This rare, detailed description of an early campaign documentary-like program deserves extensive quotation.

Kennedy began with a lengthy speech in which he asserted, "The United States has applied Protection more thoroughly than has any other nation, and has been more highly prospered." Then,

At this point the hall was darkened and the pictorial illustrations of Mr. Kennedy's argument began. To show the less fortunate condition of people in other countries, views were given which had been taken by Mr. Kennedy with his own Kodak, showing women yoked in harness with cows and dogs, to do the work of horses and oxen; also women carrying enormous burdens through the streets of the most brilliant capitals of Europe, acting as load-carriers in Vienna, and doing all the street-cleaning in Munich. ... Then a portrait of Bismarck was shown, followed by a view of Bismarck's statement that "the prosperity of America is mainly due to its system of protective laws."

Kennedy went on to use images as evidence to refute the Democratic Party's disparagement of tariffs as effective in stimulating local industries, with tin plate manufacture being his prime example.

The enthusiasm of Kennedy's assertions was challenged by the *New York Times*, which cited a "letter to the editor" that Kennedy had written to the *Tribune* in 1890. In it, Kennedy was quite critical of the McKinley tariff, particularly as it might impact on Republican chances in the 1892 presidential election. Minnesota and other western states strong opposed it.[11] Kennedy's earlier concerns proved well founded, for Cleveland won New York State and gained a second, nonconsecutive term as president. It should be noted that the Democrats rarely used the stereopticon.[12]

Cinema and the 1896 Election

Commercial motion pictures projected in a theatrical setting—what has become known as the cinema—effectively began in the United States on April 23rd, 1896, when Edison's Vitascope debuted at Koster & Bial's Music Hall in New York City. Given that the US presidential election was barely six months away, it is perhaps surprising that they played a prominent if circumscribed role in the candidates' campaigns. However, because New York City was the center of the nascent film industry and pivotal in terms of the election, this conjunction facilitated a dynamic engagement.

Republicans remained interested in experimenting with new campaign methods involving a variety of media as well as the lantern/screen platform itself. They continued to use the traditional stereopticon, though in a less

11. "For the Stereopticon," *New York Times,* 28 October 1892, p. 4. The *New York Times* editorial was referring to letter published as "Party Policy and the People," *New York Tribune*, 9 August 1890, p. 7.
12. "Democratic Societies" *San Francisco Chronicle,* 3 November 1892, 10.

prominent role— particularly in the New York-New England area. W. D. Boyce, the Chicago-based owner of the nation's largest weekly newspaper and future founder of the Boy Scouts of America, gave illustrated lectures in the Chicago area on a daily basis usually before large audiences and often as part of a larger Republican campaign rally. His efforts were extensively covered by the pro-McKinley *Chicago Tribune*. While many elements of Boyce's illustrated lecture seem indebted to previous efforts by Elijah Kennedy and other speakers, there were some significant differences. First, Boyce's presentation used many more political cartoons and in that respect was less interested in mobilizing photographic truth to support his arguments. His presentation placed less emphasis on "the discourse of sobriety" and more on showmanship.[13]

The 1896 campaign, in comparison to the previous election, placed greater emphasis on personalities. Boyce seemed to be promoting himself almost as much as the Republican ticket or its policies. Correspondingly, in Washington, T. E. Shields delivered illustrated lectures on the life of McKinley "from the cradle to the White House." His emphasis on a personality driven politics contrasted to earlier issue-centered illustrated lectures, and this difference was evident in other parts of the campaign as well. Seeming differences in personality were evident in the very different campaign styles of the two main candidates. McKinley conducted a "front porch campaign" from his home in Canton, Ohio, while Bryan pioneered the whistle stop tour. Although McKinley was no stranger to the campaign trail—he had been a prominent Republican speaker in both the 1892 and 1894 contests, he felt that a head-to-head confrontation with Bryan would inevitably produce unflattering comparisons and potentially give an electoral victory to his rival. More than his Free Silver politics, Bryan's silver tongue was to be feared. The candidate's refusal to go on the campaign stump was also "presidential" in that sitting presidents had traditionally not actively campaigned but let surrogates act in their stead. It was a way of appearing above the fray. So he stayed in Canton and Republican groups made pilgrimages to see and hear him. In this respect, as Jonathan Auerbach has pointed out, Mark Hanna, McKinley's handler, could orchestrate the tone and pageantry of the campaign. McKinley stayed by the hearth with his invalid wife—a Civil War hero surrounded by admiring neighbors and townspeople—an embodiment of American values.

The Democrats, moreover, were divided and in disarray: the Populist wing of the party had triumphed and broken with the Cleveland wing,

13. "Rousing Meeting at Lincoln Club," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 September 1896, 2; "Talks in the Tent," *Chicago Tribune*, 20 September 1896, 1; "*Explains* Popocracy with Views," *Chicago Tribune*, 29 September 1896, 2; "Novelty in a M'Kinley Meeting," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 October 1896, 5; "Pictures Illustrate Issues of the Campaign," *Chicago Tribune,* 25 October 1896, 42.

which went so far as to field a separate candidate. Many "Sound Money" Democrats went so far as to support the Republican ticket. Part of the Republican electoral strategy must have been to simply avoid re-unifying the opposition.

The Democrats had severe handicaps when it came to carrying the swing state of New York: the city's newspapers overwhelmingly favored McKinley. Support among traditionally Republican newspapers such as the *New York Tribune*, *New York Post*, *New York Press* and *Evening Mail and Express* was to be expected. But the *New York Times*, *New York Herald*, *New York Sun* and *New York World* had all favored Cleveland and the Democrats in 1892 but shifted their support to McKinley in 1896. Only William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* was pro-Bryan. Bryan himself seemed to have recognized that defeat in the Northeast was likely and concentrated on the mid-West, particularly that other swing state— Illinois—in the last month of the campaign.

Although pro-McKinley newspapers claimed that New York State would go for McKinley by a comfortable margin, no one was taking any chances. Local Republican organizations held numerous rallies. On top of these traditional efforts to mobilize a public politically, the Republicans placed increased emphasis on slogans, clever campaign buttons, imaginative spectacle and up-to-date pageantry. The McKinley and Hobart Wheelsmen's League was particularly active. The bicycle was an up-to-date form of transportation that was transforming society, providing city dwellers with a new mobility and loosening social constraints, notably for women (who began to wear bloomers). Associating this popular phenomenon, adopted by the young and the middle class (bikes were generally beyond the budget of the working class), with McKinley and his supporters was a way to suggest they were embracing the new and were responsive to the needs of a modern society. So did the Republican party's use of cinema.

The American Mutoscope Company and the McKinley Campaign

Abner McKinley, the Republican candidate's brother, was an investor in the most ambitious of the new motion picture enterprises: the American Mutoscope Company. So was the family of actor Joseph Jefferson, who was widely known as a close friend of President Cleveland—now repudiated by the Bryan Democrats. Motion pictures had already drawn considerable media attention to May Irwin and John C. Rice as films of their kiss were screened theatrically in May, June and July 1896. What might motion pictures do for the rather staid and physically absent McKinley? Here was a chance to move politics into the nation's theaters and to mix politics with entertainment. On one of the American Mutoscope Company's first filming trips in mid-September 1896, W. K. L. Dickson photographed West Point

cadets, Niagara Falls, and on September 18th Republican political demonstrations in Canton, Ohio, and *McKinley at Home*, Canton, O.[14] He also filmed the rapidly approaching Empire State Express train under the auspices of the New York Central Railroad. The previous month, Dickson had filmed Joseph Jefferson performing excerpts of his all-American theatrical classic, *Rip Van Winkle*, in a natural outdoor setting. These provided the kinds of subject matter that would be used to frame the scene of McKinley at home: symbols of American military might, American culture, American technology, the nation's natural grandeur and Republican parades.

The biograph had its "official" premiere on Monday evening, October 12th at Hammerstein's Olympia Music Hall on Broadway between 44th and 45th streets, New York City as McKinley at Home was shown for the first time. But it was also going to be a political rally and that morning, the *New York Herald* initiated the feedback loop between event and newspaper coverage by running four line drawings "From Instantaneous Photographs Taken for the Biograph. To be Exhibited at the Olympia Theatre, Under the Auspices of the Republican National Committee." These images were said to illustrate "Incidents in Major McKinley's Life in Canton, Ohio."[15]

While Biograph's program of films at the Olympia consisted of a number of "attractions"—and so seemingly conforms to Tom Gunning's "cinema of attractions" paradigm, it is hard not to feel that such a label conceals as much if not more than it reveals. The filmmakers' careful organization of one-shot films produced a highly effective political rhetoric. Biograph's showmen not only constructed this film program around principles of variety but more importantly those of associational and contrast editing. The final program has as much affinity to Eisenstein's concept of "montage of attractions" as it does to "cinema of attractions": Eisenstein saw montage of attractions as a new editing form "in which arbitrarily chosen images, independent from the action, would be presented not in chronological sequence but in whatever way would create the maximum psychological impact."

> Thus, the filmmaker should aim to establish in the consciousness of the spectators the elements that would lead them to the idea he wants to communicate. He should attempt to place them in the spiritual state or the psychological situation that would give birth to that idea.[16]

14. For an excellent account of the Biograph company's filming *McKinley at Home* and other scenes in Canton, Ohio, on September 18, 1896, see Paul Spehr, The Man Who Made Movies: W. K. L. Dickson (Herts, UK: John Libby, 2008), pp. 437-443.
15. *New York Herald*, 12 October 1896, p. 4.
16. "Sergei Eisenstein," Russian Archives on Line, http://www.russianarchives.com/gallery/old/eisen.html .

As an exhibition service, Biograph programmed, sequenced and edited these shot-films. And they did so to powerful, calculated effect—including a test audience. Now I could spend this whole presentation analyzing the powerful rhetorical strategies of this program through editing—but I wont.

The program's focus was on the McKinley films. *The New York Tribune* reported that

> The biggest part of the enthusiasm began when a view of a McKinley and Hobart parade in Canton was shown. The cheering was incessant as long as the line was passing across the screen, and it grew much greater when the title of the next picture appeared: "Major McKinley at Home." Major McKinley was seen to come down the steps of his house with his secretary. The secretary handed him a paper which he opened and read. Then he took off his hat and advanced to meet a visiting delegation.[17]

Showing a film of the Empire State Express train was a brilliant conclusion. It might be seen as Biograph's version of the advancing brow of the battleship, which concluded Sergei Eisenstein's Potemkin. The Empire State is moving full speed ahead for McKinley. Or, like the express train, the Republican candidate was an unstoppable force. And yet—here American film programs were already ambiguous and open to multiple, often mutual inclusive interpretation—the train was also like the Biograph motion picture system: an impressive technological marvel that was hailed for the absence of flicker and 'jump' noticeable in its competitors. The repetition of *The Empire State Express* moved the program beyond McKinley (without however leaving him behind) to reassert and equate the power of American technology and industry with the Biograph motion picture system—even as the superior technology was linked to the "Sound Money" politics of the Republicans.

The fortunes of Biograph's high quality exhibitions and the businessman's candidate were linked. "No good Republican or upholder of sound money doctrine can afford to miss the lifelike representation of their champion on the lawn of his home at Canton," declared the *Mail and Express*.[18] Theatergoers who had been distracted by politics were brought back into the vaudeville house as paying customers to glimpse their candidate "in the flesh." McKinley's front porch served as a modest counterpart to the Olympia's stage, which it seemed to momentarily replace. McKinley's virtual self served as a surrogate for his absent self. His absent presence could miraculously appear on stage (on screen) at the front of the theater, acting

17. "A Moving Picture of M'Kinley," *New York Tribune*, 13 October 1896, 7.
18. "Vaudeville," *New York Mail and Express*, 17 October 1896, 13.

as a relay between the man in Canton and the spectators in the theater. This was an astute and original way to promote both McKinley and the Biograph exhibition service.

The Biograph's debut at the Olympia Music Hall seemingly was a mixture of carefully planning and last minute improvisation. A reliably Republican newspaper only revealed Biograph's coup on the very afternoon of the event. McKinley, who was rooted in Canton, Ohio, was to make an almost miraculous visit to New York City and be greeted by his in-the-flesh Vice-Presidential running mate Garret Hobart. Moreover, the candidate's beloved homestead would travel with him. Hobart may not have attended in the end, but many prominent Republicans were there. Some were associated with New York Senator Thomas C. Platt, who had opposed McKinley nomination, which suggests that the event served as a public display of party unity. Other patrons were associated with the New York Central Railroad—and Empire State Express was certainly a film they had sponsored. These people were more directly connected to this Republican event than one might assume since several of the prominent Republicans were also railroad executives. The event thus brought together powerful business and political representatives, who were often one and the same. To follow McKinley with an image of the onrushing *Empire State Express* was certainly fraught with meaning.

The biograph left Hammerstein's theater unexpectedly after a two-week run (October 12-24th) and promptly reopened at Koster & Bial's Music Hall on October 26th—again with little advance notice.[19] As Election Day approached, political demonstrations reached a fevered pitch—inside as well as outside the theater. McKinley's silent, virtual self was once again one of the candidate's most effective surrogates and turned an evening at the theater into a campaign rally.

Campaign-related Films at the Edison Company

The first campaign-related motion picture was not made by the American Mutoscope Company but by the Edison Manufacturing Company. This was *Blackton Sketches, no 2* also known as *Political Cartoon*. Shot in early August, it showed cartoonist and lightning sketch artist J. Stuart Blackton "drawing pictures of McKinley and President Cleveland."[20] Such a sketch

19. This offers a modest correction to *The Emergence of Cinema,* in which I mistakenly indicate the Biograph reopened at Koster & Bial's a week later, on November 2nd. Koster & Bial's advertisements and publicity notices running in the Sunday newspapers of October 25th failed to mention the biograph would be on its bill in the coming week. It was obviously a last-minute addition.
20. *The Phonoscope*, November 1896, 16.

aligned the Republican candidate with the Democratic president, implicitly suggesting that Cleveland supporters who favored "Sound Money" should now backed McKinley. And that McKinley would be Cleveland's successor to the presidency. Certainly Edison personnel seemed to be, like their Biograph brethren, pro-McKinley. They also made *Pat and the Populist* (September 1896) in which "Pat ascends a ladder with a hood of bricks. Is approached by a Populist politician. Shows his displeasure by dropping bricks on the politician."[21] Pat is clearly a working-class Irishman—the kind of traditionally Democratic voter that Republicans hoped to win over to their candidate. In this film, he had already switched! The Vitascope Company screened *Pat and the Populist* in Proctor's vaudeville theaters the very week that Biograph first showed *McKinley at Home*—suggesting a unified pro-McKinley outlook on the vaudeville front. However, the kind of carefully constructed, politically potent film program that Biograph used to present *McKinley at Home* was nowhere in evidence. By this time the Vitascope had been at Proctor's theaters for over a month and was simply adding new or unfamiliar views each week. It would be unfair to suggest the ordering of these films was random, but their succession was seemingly based on principles of variety and fits comfortably within Gunning's cinema of attractions paradigm. And for reasons that made good commercial sense: when *Pat and the Populist* was treated as a self-contained comedy, it was unlikely to deeply offending a pro-Bryan patron.

The Edison Manufacturing Company and the Vitascope Company faced a somewhat fraught situation in respect to the 1896 political season. First, they were supplying films to a much wider network of licensed exhibitors many of whom were in states where Bryan was popular. These showmen were eager for motion pictures of Bryan. Second, the Biograph and Edison interests quickly established a competitive rivalry, which was evident in their choice of similar yet competing subject matter. Hypothetically Bryan should have been the Edison candidate![22] So when Bryan brought his whistle stop tour through New Jersey on his way to Maine, he stopped briefly in Orange, New Jersey, on September 23rd. The Edison Manufacturing Company took this opportunity to film *Bryan Train Scene at Orange*, "showing Mr. Bryan addressing a crowd of people from the rear platform of a moving train."[23] (It is unclear how much co-ordination existed between the Bryan's campaign and the Vitascope Company. It is hard to

21. *Edison Films*, March 1900, 36.
22. Abner McKinley and Biograph may have even thwarted an Edison company effort to film the Republican candidate (Edison personnel went to Ohio in May 1896 in what proved to be an unsuccessful filming trip).
23. *The Phonoscope*, April 1897, p. 14; "Bryan Traverses New Jersey," *New York Times*, 24 September 1896, 2(?).

believe this was just a serendipitous conjunction.) This picture was taken a mere five days after Biograph filmed McKinley.

The Vitascope first exhibited *Bryan Train Scene* in Proctor's New York City on October 19th, one week after *McKinley at Home* was first shown at the Olympia. As the *Mail and Express* reported, "Edison's vitascope has new wonders to reveal in the way of motion pictures, including a graphic view of Bryan making a campaign speech at Orange. Every movement and gesture of the boy orator is reproduced with startling accuracy."[24] The film was offered as a news-related item—the chance for people to see Bryan in a representative pose. The screening had none of the orchestrated enthusiasm provided for *McKinley at Home*, but was simply part of a program that offered variety—a series of discrete unrelated attractions in which "other new animated views [were] washday at home, the feeding of chickens, a love scene, a spirited fire rescue, the landing of a Rockaway excursion, and some humorous subjects."[25] Again, there was no montage of attractions—nor even associational editing. Or so it would appear.

McKinely at Home had important affinities to other Republican efforts to generate spectacle. On Saturday evening, October 24th there was a Sound Money Naval Parade:

> A mighty armada, every craft ablaze and spouting fire, moved down the North River last evening through a rain of many colored stars to the roar of rocket batteries and the chorus of harnessed steam.
>
> The citadel of commerce was speaking for an honest dollar, and speaking with no uncertain sound.
>
> Half the city was out in the crisp, moonlit air, watching and admiring.
>
> It was a great water pageant, this of the Shipping and Industrial Sound Money Association—altogether the most picturesque of political demonstrations in the city's history. There were more than two hundred steam vessels in Admiral Miller's fleet....[26]

Then on October 31st, the Saturday before the election, Republicans mounted a "Sound Money Parade" or a "McKinley Parade" in Southern Manhattan with so many participants that not all could march. The Herald characterized this "Pageant of Patriotism" as the "Greatest Demonstration in the Nation's History."[27] Certainly the Bryan Democrats failed to mount an equivalent. This event was a direct successor to the Cleveland parade

24. "Proctor's Pleasure Palace," *New York Mail and Express*, 20 October 1896, 4.
25. "Proctor's Pleasure Palace," *New York Mail and Express*, 20 October 1896, 4.
26. "River Ablaze and for Gold," *New York Herald*, 25 October 1896, p. 5A.
27. "Pageant of Patriotism," *New York Herald*, 1 November 1896, p. 5A.

staged exactly four years earlier and an indication of where the election was heading, at least in New York. In the tension between political oratory and political pageantry, the Republicans were emphasizing the latter. Perhaps it was an early instance of "shock and awe," but pageantry was a way to avoid an indepth discussion of the issues—of Republicans' protariff position and so forth. Newspapers also were increasing their use of illustrations. Such events could be effectively conveyed by newspapers.

Biograph, Edison and the International Film Company all shot scenes of the McKinley *Sound Money parade* but failed to show the films before the election. The biograph presented *Sound Money Parade* in the week following McKinley's victory, providing many with an occasion to savor and relive the success of this political demonstration. [28] These post-election screenings indicate ways in which the Republicans, despite their close alliance with the American Mutoscope Company, did not stage their spectacles with motion pictures in mind. If the Naval Parade had been conducted during daylight hours or the McKinley Parade had been staged a week or two earlier, films of these events could have been used during the closing days of the campaign. However, these culminating events of the campaign season were designed with several publics in mind: first, those who would participate in the camaraderie of the parade itself; second, local citizens who would witnessed the events live; third, and those who would read about them in the mass circulation dailies.

Watching the Election Returns

In the interest of time, I have largely ignored an important conjunction between cinema and the newspapers which occurred on election eve. Across the nation on Election Night 1896, eager citizens once again gathered outside newspaper office buildings to watch the returns. The crowd that gathered at Printing House Square near New York's City Hall Park "excelled its predecessors by long odds last night in pint of numbers, enthusiasm, and good nature."[29] Each of the five principal newspapers in that location —the *Times, Tribune, Journal, Sun, and World*—had a stereopticon stand which relayed the returns received by a special wire connected to the offices of their respective newspapers. In this way, the newspapers offered returns that were "legible enough to be read 100 years away."[30] The stereopticon had become ubiquitous. Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, for instance, had given up on its bulletin boards, and the painted figures of presi-

28. It was announced that "The audiences will be able to distinguish faces in the ranks" of the big McKinley parade. ("Koster & Bial's," *Mail and Express*, 7 November 1896, 13.)
29. "Crowds at the Bulletins," *New York Times*, 4 November 1896, 5.
30. Crowds at the Bulletins," *New York Times*, 4 November 1896, 5.

dential candidates now climbed much smaller ladders than they had in 1892. Instead of climbing the building, they merely ran up opposing sides of the main entrance. The World now covered the outside of its building with a canvas screen 170 feet high and 60 feet wide, which was stretched from the second to the thirteenth floors. Images were then projected from at least six different lanterns. It was, the *New York World* claimed, "the largest magic-lantern screen ever made." Pulitzer offered another innovation: at his paper's uptown office on Broadway and 32nst Street; bulletins were projected onto two fifty-foot screens. It was for this location that Pulitzer's organization also employed the biograph to show films:

> The wonderful biograph, the latest of the remarkable machines which have been invented to project animated scenes from real life on canvas, and which has been on exhibition at Koster & Bial's Music Hall for a short time, has been engaged for the night to give its exhibition on a screen in front of the uptown office of The World.

Wonderful Animated Pictures

> Three pictures, which are essentially living pictures, as they show every movement of the person or thing which they represent, are sure to arouse great enthusiasm, for among them are representations of Major McKinley receiving visitors in Canton, pictures of political parades, etc. There is also a wonderful picture of the Empire State express traveling at the rate of sixty miles an hour.[31]

Motion pictures were added to the role played by lantern slide photographs of the candidates and political cartoons for these election night events. The magic lantern functioned as a parallel, complimentary platform to the newspaper. It offered the most direct and immediate means to learn the news as it arrived over the wire. Like the newspaper, it incorporated words and a diverse array of images.

The New York World was locked in a bitter circulation battle with the upstart *New York Journal*, which William Randolph Hearst had acquired in 1895. In October 1896, Hearst had hired cartoonist Richard F. Outcault away from the World. This rivalry had a political dimension as Pulitzer supported McKinley and Hearst backed Bryan. At its downtown office, the *Journal* had a map of the United States that was ninety feet long and forty feet high. When a state went for Bryan a red light appeared by the name of the state, if for McKinley it was green. In addition,

31. "All the News for All," *New York World*, 1 November 1896, 11.

> On another canvas fifty feet square, the election returns will be thrown by a powerful stereopticon, and on the same canvas, between the reports from the various States and districts, a panoramagraph—that is the latest from Paris—will throw an entire variety show. It will project life-size pictures that run and walk and jump and move about in a way to make your eyes bulge. You will see a picture of McKinley walking up and down the lawn in front of his home as large and as natural as life. There will also be pictures of the train in which Bryan travels. It will make you stare and gasp.
>
> And in order that there shall be nothing lacking to make the night joyous, the Seventh Regiment Band, of forty-four men, will play in front of the Journal office.[32]

This motion picture service was "The Wonderful Panoramographe" provided by J. Whitney Beals, Jr. of Boston, and it offered the only films shown in Printing House Square.[33]

The Journal was offering returns at seven additional locations: the set of attractions outside its offices in Madison Square was very similar to those at its main office in Printing House Square. Besides the electrified map, these included "a gigantic screen for election returns, shown by five stereopticons and ... the same kind of life-size moving pictures that will be shown at the City Hall." Gilmore's band, under the direction of Victor Herbert, filled the square with music. The *Journal* also had stereopticons at City Hall in Brooklyn, which "will throw the returns upon a screen as fast as they come into the New York Office. Here, too, the panoramagraph will play upon a big screen, displaying moving pictures exactly like those shown in front of the *Journal*'s main office." [34] The panoramographe, unlike the biograph, claimed to offer films related to both candidates. The Bryan film was probably *Bryan Train Scene at Orange*, but given this brief description it also could have been a film and a train. The McKinley subject would seem to be a staged re-enactment or faked picture—one that was mimed the Biograph subject and was perhaps produced especially for this occasion. *The Journal* also joined up with Oscar Hammerstein and showed election returns at his Olympia Auditorium using the stereopticon while a new motion picture machine, the cinographoscope, was enlisted for its debut engagement.[35] *The Journal* was thus involved in the showing of motion pictures in four different locations—while having simple stereopticon projections at almost all its other election-night locales. This was

32. *New York Evening Journal,* 3 November 1896, 3.
33. Advertisement, *New York Clipper*, 14 November 1896, 595.
34. *New York Evening Journal,* 3 November 1896, 3.
35. *New York Evening Journal,* 3 November 1896, 3.

probably William Randolph Hearst's first use of motion pictures, which he would use again much more extensively in conjunction with the Spanish-American War.

The stereopticon was the platform of choice for delivering election returns that were being provided by telegraph—and for the first time, telephone. (Indeed, there was a certain rivalry between these two means of communication and many newspapers relied on both technologies.) The telegraph was casually mentioned but the crucial communication technology that enabled citizens to follow the national election as it unfolded in what was a virtual real time. Newspaper brought together the minute-to-minute reports from around the country to present a picture of the unfolding election. The role of the newspapers was to gather, shift and collate this material for presentation. There were, as we have seen, other media technologies involved in this process as well—the photograph, lithography, the typewriter as well as pencil, and ink. The lantern and the newspaper and pageantry in public space were the dominant platforms. One could argue that the telephone and motion pictures shared affinities as emergent communication technologies. The lantern had almost universally replaced the old-fashioned posting of bulletins on boards in front of the newspaper offices though in a handful of places this residual platform for communication could be found. It was the web or interplay of these media forms and platforms that provided the architectural frame for the particular structure of feeling (to employ a term of Raymond Williams) that characterized the election.[36]

An Assessment

This new, 1896 media formation was transformative rather than additive. One way to assess this is to consider the changed relationship between political and theatrical cultures. Cinema moved political theater into New York's entertainment venues—a place where politicians had rarely gone in previous elections. It was not only that their virtual selves made appearances in these theaters—on the same programs as risqué dancing girls, breaking down some of the distinctions between the platform of political oratory and the realm of amusement. The dynamic between the press and political culture was transformed as well, expanded to include the theater in ways that would prove potent. Those who saw McKinley and his front

36. TAYLOR, JENNY BOURNE. "structure of feeling." *Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*. Payne, Michael (ed). Blackwell Publishing, 1997. Blackwell Reference Online. 09 February 2010 <http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/tocnode?id=g9780631207535_chunk_g978063120753522_ss1-37>

porch in the music halls, read newspapers about him and the delegations that came to express their homage.

One lengthy report in the *New York Sun* suggested McKinley was a humble man, adored by citizens who made the pilgrimage to Canton. It is they who provide the dynamism while he offers stability. These news items avoided the specifics of policy and party, carrying such headlines as "M'Kinley Preaches Hope. He Says He Has no Part in the Doctrine of Hate." "The people against the bosses" was one of his 1896 campaign slogans.[37] Predictably, he embraced patriotism: "Stand up for America, and America will stand up for you," he told the Republication Press Association of West Virginia.[38] The mute motion picture of McKinley, its virtual but disembodied presence had a vision-like quality that made McKinley seem momentarily transcendent. Properly contextualized—which was Biograph's achievement; it provided an effective icon which could be endowed with these sentiments with a new sincerity and power.

More generally, the politicized feedback loop between vaudeville screenings and the press, which *McKinley at Home* helped to establish, had powerful consequences around events leading up to the Spanish-American War.[39] Newspaper mogul William Randolph Heart—who showed films on election night at his headquarters— funded the taking of "war films" in the winter and spring of 1898. These pictures of the sunken battleship "Maine" and the like were shown in vaudeville theaters, which served as a space where citizens could express pro-war sentiments that were being fostered by the jingoistic press. These newspapers in turn covered these "spontaneous" and patriotic displays as evidence of American desire for intervention, thus helping to impel the US to war with Spain in April 1898. In short, film was rapidly integrated into a media system in circumscribed but powerful ways. Pro-McKinley and pro-imperialist forces had control of this new media form and used it very effectively. To do this, one might add, exhibitors structured their programs of short one-shot films in ways that made effective use of the exhibitors' control of editorial method—the construction of narrative, the use of contrast for inflammatory purposes, the careful juxtaposition of image and word.

37. "William McKinley," http://www.allthingswilliam.com/presidents/mckinley.html.
38. "William McKinley," http://www.allthingswilliam.com/presidents/mckinley.html.
39. Elsewhere, I have analyzed the opening night Vitascope program at Koster & Bial's (23 April 1896) and argued that this was not, in fact, a miscellaneous collection of views but offered a metaphorical narrative that had a clear, heavily nationalistic meaning. (See Musser, "1896-1897: Movies and the Beginnings of Cinema" in Andre Gaudreault, eds. *American Cinema 1890-1909: Themes and Variations* (New Brunsick,NK, Rutgers University Press, 2009), 52-54; "Introducing Cinema to the American Public: The Vitascope in the United States, 1896-1897," in Gregory Waller, ed., *Moviegoing in America* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 13-27, and "At the Beginning: Motion Picture Production, Representation and Ideology at the Edison and Lumière companies" in Lee Grievson, ed., *Silent Cinema Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 25-56.

The politically oriented feedback loop between audio-visual projections and the press had already been well established for campaign purposes in 1892 and was one element of continuity between these two formations. However, the shift from long-form screen programs involving the projection of slides (non-moving images) in 1892 to a selection of short, one-shot moving image projections was part of a more far reaching transformation. The illustrated lectures focused on a central political issue, emphasizing policy and programs not personality. In contrast, the short films of McKinley and Bryan were silent as to specific programmatic content but featured personalities and showed the essence of their campaign style. In this respect they might be considered "pregnant instances," along the lines discussed by Maria Tortajada.[40] That is, they were films of moments that captured the dominant or representative essences of this campaign. McKinley was always at home, Bryan seemingly always campaigning from the train. The films could thus serve as ciphers that audiences could fill with their own associations. Sound Money Democrats who supported McKinley despite their traditional party allegiances were able to embrace a personality rather than a set of developed policy agendas addressing the tariff and other issues for which they continued to have serious reservations. The move from political oratory to political pageantry and the embrace of the bicycle, the first use of the telephone for news gathering on election eve, and even the initial adoption of the phonograph by the McKinley campaign contributed to a notable transformation of prior media practices. The move away from discourses of sobriety and long forms, which included such films as Edison's *Blackton Sketches, No 2* and *Pat and the Populist*, are one dimension of this reformulated usage of media forms. These unauthorized or grassroots expressions of political sentiment attacked the Bryan campaign—asserting an affinity between Cleveland and McKinley on one hand and an incompatibility between the working classes and Bryan on the other—were again free of specific programmatic content. These used popular forms with affinities to mass circulation dailies—the performance of a lightning sketch artist whose illustrations often appeared in the *New York Evening World* and a comic-strip-like farce. This was certainly another aspect of a new interplay or feedback loop between the screen and the press.

40. M. Tortajada, "Le statut du photogramme et l'instant prégnant au moment de l'émergence du cinéma," XVI International Film Studies Conference Permanent Seminar on History of Film Theories, "In The Very Beginning, At The Very End," Udine, 24 March 2009. 1896-1897: Movies and the Beginnings of Cinema" in Andre Gaudreault, eds. *American Cinema 1890-1909: Themes and Variations* (New Brunsick,NK, Rutgers University Press, 2009), 45-65

These developments were part of a larger transformation of American culture in the 1890s, one that has been discussed by John Higham and Warren Susman, among others.[41]

Abstract

Cine, prensa y las elecciones presidenciales de 1896 en Estados Unidos

El texto investiga la relación entre el cine de los primeros tiempos y las noticias situándolas en los contextos de los *estudios de plataformas* (y en concreto las prácticas relacionadas con la pantalla) y de las *formaciones mediáticas amplias*. El objeto de estudio concreto son las campañas presidenciales en EEUU en los años 1892 y 1896. La investigación histórica permite comparar ambas campañas y descubrir las transformaciones en la comunicación política, en las que se integra el cinematógrafo.

Cinema, premsa i les eleccions presidencials de 1896 als Estats Units

El text investiga la relació entre el cinema dels primers temps i les notícies situant-les en els contextos dels *estudis de plataformes* (i en concret les pràctiques relacionades amb la pantalla) i de les *formacions mediàtiques àmplies*. L'objecte d'estudi concret són les campanyes presidencials als EEUU dels anys 1892 i 1896. La investigació històrica permet comparar ambdues campanyes i descobrir les transformacions en la comunicació política, en les quals s'integra el cinematògraf.

41. J. Higham, The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s," in *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); W. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).