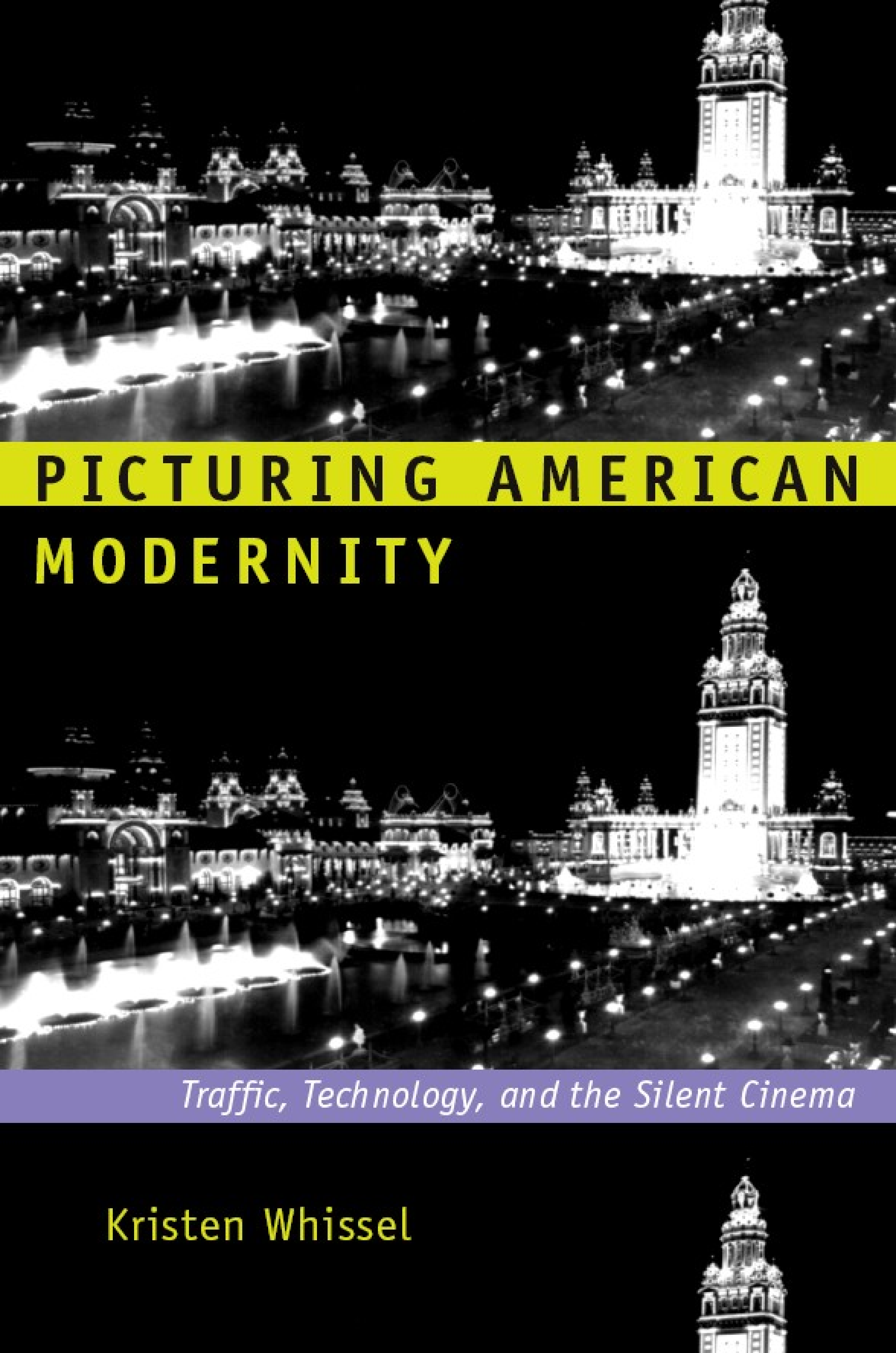

PICTURING AMERICAN MODERNITY

Traffic, Technology, and the Silent Cinema

Kristen Whissel

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FOR

Isaac MacPherson Hager

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INTRODUCTION

In this book I use the concept of "modern traffic" to investigate the relationship between the American cinema and technological modernity from the late 1890s to 1916. In so doing I aim to answer the following questions: How did the moving pictures help audiences make sense of, and find pleasure in, the experience of modern life? How did the cinema address the profound social, cultural, and political changes associated with modernity and its myriad and oftentimes unpleasurable consequences? How did the cinema's modernity—its imaginary mobilizations, its machine-made vision, its annihilation of space and time, its "reality effects," and its status as a form of urban, commercialized leisure—contribute to its pleasurable articulation of modern life? How did the cinema help shape and define a sense of the national specificity of the American experience of modernity—those aspects and features that made it different yet inseparable from, say, European or Asian modernity? To answer these questions, I focus on the silent American cinema's representation of four well-known, broadly covered (inter)national events that foreground the deeply ambivalent character of technological modernity in the United States: the Spanish-American War, the Philippine-American War, the Pan-

American Exposition, and the so-called white slavery scandal. Each event was linked to new forms of circulation and hence the increasing power and progress of the nation; yet all precipitated high-tech crises that brought into relief various reasons to lament or resist the changes wrought by modern life. Early and transitional-era films made each of these events visible, knowable, and pleasurable to the audiences with which they were extremely popular. In turn, as documents of modernity, the films under examination here reveal much about the early and transitional cinema's various modes of address and visual pleasures, its formal and generic transformations, and its capacity for and response to change.

The decade in which the moving pictures emerged onto the field of commercialized leisure witnessed the culmination of a number of processes that constitute the hallmarks of technological modernity. By the 1890s, industrialization had intensified and accelerated the transformation of the United States from an agrarian economy to an urban one and in the process mobilized many Americans from small towns and farming communities to cities. This shift precipitated a way of life in which families and individuals no longer themselves produced the things they needed to sustain life—food, clothing, modes of transport, and even homes—but instead satisfied their needs by purchasing mass-produced goods made by anonymous others in factories. As the industrial economy expanded and contracted, it took Americans through harrowing cycles of boom and bust: half of the twenty-five years spanning from 1873 to 1898 were years of depression.[1] In 1877, 1886, and 1894 there were massive strikes against unfair labor practices that were violently suppressed by state militias and the army.[2] Rather than producing and enjoying directly the fruits of their labor, more and more Americans experienced the alienating effects of the abstraction of their work into time and into wages that for many were low enough to make survival difficult and urban existence miserable. Moreover, many who worked in factories and mills could not afford to buy the goods they produced, and many found it difficult to save enough disposable income to spend on leisure.[3] New technologies of production, transportation, and illumination were celebrated as agents of progress and national power and made life easier and labor more efficient; however, they also subjected bodies to accidental electrocution, deadly accidents, and horrifying injuries in the workplace. Railways, steamships, and streetcars brought the distant near, but they also fragmented entire families and communities by dispersing their members across regions, states, and for many immigrants, across the Atlantic or the Pacific Ocean. In the very act of bridging the distance between sender and receiver, the telephone and telegraph simultaneously emphasized separation and the lack of face-to-face interaction.[4] Women and members of newly arrived immigrant groups claimed a presence in public life and politics, much to the distress of native-born, white, middle- and upper-class men. Members of different classes, ethnicities, nationalities, and races who fifty years earlier might only rarely have encountered one another in public space suddenly found themselves sharing—and often struggling over—housing, transportation, labor, amusements, local politics, and city sidewalks.[5]

All of these changes are inseparable from the development of a highly efficient system of modern traffic. Urbanization and industrialization demanded a radical expansion of the transportation infrastructure to circulate natural resources and workers to factories, as well as finished commodities and a new class of consumers to department stores and commercial thoroughfares.[6] Hence the railroad increased from 30,000 miles of track in 1860 to 200,000 miles in 1900, and between 1890 and 1902 electric streetcar traffic went from constituting 15 percent of urban transit to 94 percent.[7] In turn, the telephone, telegraph, and stock ticker transcended the constraints that space and time placed on the circulation of information about markets and economies, and so further accelerated the traffic in bodies, commodities, and machines.[8] At the same time, the modern steamship gave rise to a new navy able to extend the reach of American "interests" (political and economic) around the globe and to a new fleet of privately owned passenger liners that brought millions of immigrants to U.S. shores from Europe and Asia.[9] Electrification spread weblike through cities: it sped workers and consumers by streetcar through spaces of commerce and leisure; it powered assembly lines; and it illuminated moving picture screens, "great white ways," theater marquees, department stores, amusement parks, world's fairs and expositions, office buildings, and the private homes of the well off, thereby uniting all into an expanding electric network of circuits and currents.[10] And throughout this era, leisure was increasingly commercialized and consumed en masse in dime novels, penny arcades, vaudeville houses, amusement parks, moving picture shows, phonograph parlors, dance halls, Wild West exhibits, and stage melodramas. Hence, entertainment that had previously been enjoyed in the privacy of the home became a part of the public sphere that kept thoroughfares in cities and towns animated with bustling commercial traffic.

Indeed, the *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that by the early twentieth century "traffic" had acquired the multiple meanings that make it an ideal concept for tracing the various ways in which the new patterns of accelerated circulation shaped the contradictory experiences of modernity. As Jürgen Habermas notes, the emergence of "traffic" into the English language in 1506 roughly coincided with "three monumental events—the discovery of the 'New World,' the Renaissance, and the Reformation," which, he argues, "around the year 1500 constitute the epochal threshold between modern times and the Middle Ages."[11] The origins of "traffic" were, of course, commercial, and the meanings of the term multiplied along with the development and diffusion of transportation and communications technologies that accompanied the expansion of industrial capitalism until it eventually came to encompass most forms of modern mobility. The eighteen-page definition found in the OED provides numerous meanings of the term.[12] "Traffic" initially identified the circulation of goods between "distant or distinct communities" and thereby implied the development of new forms of spatial, temporal, economic, and social intercourse around emerging commercial practices. It came to include not only the commodities but also the vehicles, bodies, and disembodied communications that move, in one form or another, through the landscape, as well as the rate charged for such circulation and the profits derived therefrom. Traffic eventually incorporated the various technologies—such as the railway, steamship, telephone, and telegraph—that precipitated the annihilation of space and time and gave rise to new forms of "panoramic perception" that historians such as Wolfgang Schivelbusch have defined as central to the experience of modernity.[13] Importantly, the concept of traffic simultaneously accommodated legitimate transactions along with "dealings of an illicit or secret character; to deal, intrigue, conspire." It manifested itself as one of the most public and visible aspects of modern life (i.e., "the passing to and fro of persons, or of vehicles or vessels, along a road, railway, canal, or other route of transport") while simultaneously providing an avenue for and a clandestine means of carrying out conspiracies and forms of trade “with sinister or evil connotation: dealing or bargaining in something which should not be made the subject of trade.” In the examples provided by the OED, the virtue of young women (from 1903: “Fruits of ‘the [white slave] traffic’ occupy a prominent place in today’s Metropolitan police court reports”) and “honor” (from 1702: “They make a Traffick of Honour, and pay for it with the wind of fair words”) are as easily trafficked as more legitimate, saleable merchandise. In turn, in a single space traffic could simultaneously accommodate and bring into relief the old and the new, the modern and everything displaced by it (from 1868: “Cadiz . . . where the ancient and modern systems of traffic were blending like the mingling of the two oceans”). “Traffic” at once implied the efficient circulation of workers and consumers through city streets and the chaotic flurry of speeding vehicles that made urban life difficult to negotiate (from 1886: “The traffic of omnibuses, cabs, carriages, and carts at this point is greater and more confusing than in any other part of London”). The multiple and often contradictory definitions of “traffic” make it emblematic of an era in which, as Karl Marx argued, “everything seems pregnant with its contrary.”[14]

For some observers of U.S. culture at the turn of the century, modern traffic was the defining feature of American technological modernity. One particular example is so germane to the argument made here that I would like to discuss it briefly before I outline the structure of this book. In 1899 the Rev. John Watson, an English visitor to the United States, published an article in the *North American Review* entitled “The Restless Energy of the American People—An Impression.” Writing under the pen name Ian MacLaren, he describes in rather astonished terms the degree to which life in the United States seemed integrated into a highly efficient system of modern traffic. After describing the United States as a place “where the atmosphere is charged with electricity, and every second man is a ‘hustler from way back,’ ” Watson continues by comparing British and American traffic: “The stir of the New World affects the visitor and quickens his pulse as he goes up the Hudson and gets his first glimpse of New York. Your steamer had waited for hours at Queenstown for the mails, but the same mails were transferred to the United States tender as the steamer went up the bay. It is said that some day one of the great railway companies whose connections are broken by the Mersey, will utilize the underground tunnels for goods trains; but on the Hudson you see huge ferryboats carrying across the river the freight trains of the Pennsylvania Railway Company. Little tugs dart about on all sides with feverish speed, and larger steamers pass with their upper machinery exposed as if there had not been time, or it had not been worthwhile, to cover it. Buildings of incredible height line the shores, and suggest that the American nation, besides utilizing the ground, proposes also to employ the heavens for commercial purposes."[15]

Watson's first impression of the United States echoes many descriptions of the overwhelming impression made by the speed and volume of urban traffic upon the newly arrived visitor, immigrant, or rural émigré to cities like New York and Chicago. The efficiency of American traffic amazed Watson (he seems particularly impressed by the sight of railway cars ferried across the Hudson) and the vertical articulation of traffic aided by electricity made circulation in his native country seem both sluggish and retrograde in its insistent horizontality: "It is only yesterday that elevators were introduced into English city buildings," he laments, and then he adds with sarcasm that "there are many London offices to which you still have to make an Alpine ascent of four stairs; but New York regards the stair as a survival of barbarism . . . The higher buildings have several sets of elevators, like the four tracks that railways lay down to work the swift and slow traffic."[16]

For Watson, Americans themselves appeared to be individual nodes to and through which modern traffic found further means of acceleration. Indeed, Americans appeared incapable of idleness and, quite contradictorily, they seemed most at ease when plugged into electricity grids spanning urban landscapes and immersed in the flurry of machines and communications that seemed to circulate with breathtaking rapidity to every corner of the nation. In the United States, he observed, "No man goes slow if he has a chance of going fast, no man stops to talk if he can talk walking, no man walks if he can ride in a trolley car, no one goes in a trolley car if he can get a convenient steam car, and by and by no one will go in a steam car if he can be shot through a pneumatic tube. No one writes with his own hand if he can dictate to a stenographer, no one dictates if he can telegraph, no one telegraphs if he can telephone, and by and by when the spirit of American invention has brought wireless telegraphy into thorough condition, a man will simply sit with his mouth at one hole and his ear at another, and do business with the ends of the earth in a few seconds, which the same machine will copy and preserve in letter books and ledgers. It is the American's regret at present he can do nothing with his feet while he is listening at the telephone, but, doubtless, some employment will be found for them in the coming age."[17]

Always preferring to keep pace with the speediest form of transit or communication available, the modern American keeps traffic in motion even while confined to an office. Even factory workers seemed capable of functioning at alarming speeds. In comparing the British laborer to the American one, he claims that "there seems no doubt that an American workman will do from twenty-five to thirty-five percent more than an Englishman in the same time, and that the higher wages of the American have their compensation for the capitalist in a workman's quickness of mind and sleight of hand."[18] To be sure, Watson also noted the accelerated rate of consumption that spurred the nation's production and circulation of goods and capital. The average newspaper reader, he notes, "flings paper after paper upon the floor. Three minutes or, in cases of extreme interest, five minutes suffice for each paper, and by and by this omnivorous reader, who consumes a paper even more quickly than his food, is knee deep in printed information or sensation."[19]

At the same time that he praised the American capacity for speed in all matters, Watson recognized that the seemingly thorough incorporation of modern life into traffic had its perils as well as its benefits. Drawing from contemporary European and American theories of the body as a repository of a limited amount of "nerve force" that powered human "batteries of life,"[20] Watson explains that "the American climate is an electric climate, and the electricity has passed into the people, who are simply vessels charged up to a certain number of volts." And he continues by noting that "the vessels as sources of motive power can then be attached to pulpits, or offices, or workshops, or politics. Of course, a day will come when the vessels will have been completely discharged, and that day arrives very frequently without warning. A little confusion in the head, and a slight numbness in the limbs, and the man has to go away to Colorado Springs or to Los Angeles. If he's fortunate, he can be recharged and run for another five or ten years; then nature does not give any warning, but simply stops the heart or darkens the brain, and you must get another man."[21] Thus while Watson marvels at the restless energy of the American people and their capacity to function as dynamic subjects of and agents within modern traffic, he also makes it clear that like trains, trolleys, and steamships, Americans are subject to catastrophic breakdown and subsequent replacement by a similar "vessel." This pattern of electrification, expenditure, and collapse is the rule rather than the exception in the United States, where, "no one, unless he leaves the country or becomes a crank, can escape from this despotism of activity; he is part of a regiment and must march with his fellows."[22]

Though written with some hyperbole, Watson's essay provides an excellent portrait of American modernity at the end of the nineteenth century: it is defined for the reader as an exceptionally efficient, highly coordinated *system* of traffic kept in rapid circulation by a broad range of technologies, workers, and consumers. While this rapid circulation thrills Watson and seems to encompass the "miraculous" aspects of technological modernity, it is also profoundly linked to the more dystopian aspects of modern life at the turn of the last century. Watson thereby confirms Schivelbusch's assertion that "by the end of the nineteenth century, the capitalist world's recomposition on the basis of modern traffic had been completed. From then on, traffic determined what belonged where. The pre-industrial contexts of location and space-time relations were no longer valid. Only the general context of traffic assigned and dictated positions to the individual elements."[23]

To be sure, early film scholars have analyzed the relationship between new forms of mechanized mobility created by traffic and the cinema's imaginary visual mobility in order to theorize and historicize the cinema's modernity. Anne Friedberg's influential concept of the "mobilized virtual gaze"—a mediated form of seeing provided by a range of visual amusements that transported the spectator spatially and temporally "to an imaginary elsewhere and an imaginary elsewhen"—is inseparable from urban traffic.[24] As Friedberg explains, "The city itself redefined the gaze. New means of transport provided an unprecedented urban mobility, the broadened boulevards produced unimpeded forms of urban circulation, and shop windows invited passersby to engage in imaginative new sites of looking."[25] In turn, Lynne Kirby has shown how the pleasurable convergence of the cinema and the railway derived from the transformation of the journey into an optical experience based on the perception of shifting and changing "enframed" views that endowed the viewer with visual mobility in exchange for his or her bodily stasis.[26] More recently, scholars have shifted their attention from perceptual mobility to hyperkinetic bodily motion. Historians such as Shelley Stamp, Ben Singer, and Jennifer Bean have shown how the early film serial provided audiences with dynamic images of daring female mobility as stars like Pearl White and Helen Holmes jumped from moving trains, commandeered airplanes, and careened about in speeding motor cars.[27] In doing so, film serials dramatize some of the contradictions central to women's increased presence in the public sphere and their corresponding absorption into modern traffic. In Singer's words, "With its repudiation of domesticity and its fantasy of empowerment, the serial queen melodrama celebrated the excitement of the woman's attainment of unprecedented mobility outside the confines of the home" while at the same time envisioning "the dangers of this departure."[28]

In this project I continue such lines of research by historicizing and theorizing the cinema's imbrication within a complex of technological "directions in motion" that increasingly incorporated everyday life into modern traffic. Rather than focus on the cinema's relation to a single technology, such as the railway or automobile, I focus on the cinema's place within a broader network of multiple forms of traffic. Indeed, the defining feature of modern technologies was their generation of, and function within, networks and grids that linked individual technologies into expanding systems and integrated a range of technologies into patterns of interdependence. Not only did films exploit the visual and narrative potential of the telephone, railway, and telegraph, but the day-to-day operations of the moving picture industry depended upon its exploitation of transportation and communication systems: exhibitors increasingly relied on their ability to plug into electricity grids to illuminate marquees and screens and to power projectors; the mass distribution of films depended heavily on the railway system; and exhibitors placed orders to film companies by telegraph.

This emphasis on the networks and systems formed by modern technologies opens up new avenues of inquiry into the relationship between cinema and modernity. Some of the most important work on this topic has focused on the profoundly urban nature of both the moving pictures and modern life.[29] Much of this research draws from Walter Benjamin's and Georg Simmel's analyses of the new sensory and bodily experiences to which the modern city subjected the individual. For example, in 1903 Simmel characterized the subjective experience of the modern urban landscape as follows: "The rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impression: these are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates. With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life."[30]

I begin this book by looking beyond the urban settings familiar in early film studies and outward toward broader systems and networks of traffic. By the turn of the century in the United States the commercial traffic that circulated through cities such as New York and Chicago implied (and was ultimately inseparable from) a broader network of imperial traffic made up of shipping lanes, naval bases, and coaling stations located on newly won colonies and protectorates such as the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Cuba that stretched from the Caribbean to the Pacific and beyond. In 1898, as fighting broke out in the Spanish-American War these distant locations became sites of shifting, disorienting images, onrushing impressions, and intense bodily "shocks" (indeed, this term has military origins). High-tech imperial traffic brought traditional and rural ways of life on these islands into violent conflict with the hypermodern, and thus subjected the bodies and perception of those caught up in the war to machine-made shocks and a barrage of stimuli exponentially more intense than anything experienced in an urban setting. And just as other forms of traffic produced new optical experiences, imperial traffic created a broad network of "looks" across space and time (between civilians and the military, old and new imperial powers, officers and soldiers, colonizers and colonized, cameras and spectators) into which moving picture audiences were incorporated by the cinema.

Thinking about modernity and the cinema in terms of expanding networks of traffic also brings the ambivalence of modern life into sharper focus. Historians have recently shown how the breakdown and failure of technologies of transportation and communication provided compelling subject matter for sensation melodramas that represented the perils and terrors of modernity as well as its possibilities and pleasures.[31] Tom Gunning argues in an article on *The Lonely Villa* (Biograph, 1909) that the same telephone connection that unites a married couple across the distance between the suburban home and the urban office serves as a narrative device for staging the violent severing of that connection by a malevolent force.[32] I find Gunning's analysis particularly provocative because it demonstrates how the very same features that made new technologies and new narrative devices pleasurable might also create new machine-made terrors. It also suggests that modernity's capacity for bringing about alarming reversals without warning demands that we invert normal lines of inquiry, particularly when thinking about modern technological networks and the individual's relation to them. For example, catastrophic breakdowns and accidents are often cited as the negative outcomes of mechanization while the annihilation of space and time, the extension of human perception, and efficient circulation are often cited as its triumphs.[33] Yet, as I will show, films from the transitional era such as *The Lonedale Operator* (Biograph, 1911), *Traffic in Souls* (Universal, 1913), and *Suspense* (Rex, 1913) dramatize the ways in which interconnecting lines of high-tech modern traffic might be exploited to nefarious and tragic ends. And while historians have revealed how an entire culture coalesced around the spectacle of the cataclysmic breakdown of transport technologies and its (traumatic) effect on the human body, less attention has been paid to the ways in which, as Anson Rabinbach has shown, modern culture also reconceived the human body as a machine powered by a human motor.[34] This project shows how discourses on the working poor woman's absorption into a pulsing system of commercial traffic, from Lois Weber's *Shoes* (Bluebird Productions, 1916) to Jane Addams's *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil*, detail the features of industrialization that caused the catastrophic breakdown of the *human* motor and made "moral breakdown" a corollary to modern life.

In this study my most significant departure from previous studies on cinema, modernity, and mobility is the close attention I pay to the national specificity of the experience of *American* modernity. Importantly, the formation of the nation-state and the rise of nationalism are cited by historians as two significant hallmarks of modernity. Hence, as Richard Abel argues in his scholarship on the American film industry's deployment of nationalism in moral debates about the content of imported films: "Rethinking the history of early American cinema requires a further reframing . . . through the contexts of modernity (or modern consumer society) and what Homi Bhabha has called 'the ideological ambivalence' of the 'nation-space.' For it was during this period that the cinema as a specific instance of modernity—a new technology of perception, reproduction, and representation; a new cultural commodity of mass production and consumption; a new space of social congregation in the public sphere—was inscribed within the discursive fields of imperialism and nationalism and their conflicted claims, respectively of economic and cultural supremacy."[35]

Early nonfiction films often represented current events of national interest to audiences and thereby functioned, as Charles Musser argues, as visual newspapers.[36] In doing so, they worked with print media to bind American audiences into what Benedict Anderson famously describes as the "imagined community" of the nation.[37] Hence, while early actualities certainly provided images of local street scenes and regional life, they also gave audiences unprecedented visual access to well-known events that, though taking place in a specific city or region or on a distant war front, nevertheless resonated across the country and demanded new interpretations of what it meant to be "American." By bringing these frequently distant events "near" to audiences in cities and towns across the country, the cinema participated in the self-conscious constructions of present and future national identity that were necessary in an era of rapid change. As I will discuss in detail, the cinema provided astonishing visual dispatches from military camps prior to the outbreak of fighting in the Spanish-American War, as well as allowed audiences both to delight in images of the Pan-American Exposition and to mourn the assassination of President William McKinley there. Another early film genre, the reenactment, provided spectators with imaginary visual access to bloody battles fought overseas during the Philippine-American War. In turn, early "features" of the cinema's transitional era offered sensational dramatizations of the scandalous "traffic in souls" that threatened to absorb the nation's young women into a thriving and lurid trade. The cinema made these events compellingly visible to audiences in cities and towns and in the process entered into, by varying degrees, "the discursive fields of imperialism and nationalism."

This book comprises four chapters: the first two focus primarily on imperial traffic, the last two primarily on commercial traffic. Certainly, the separation of commercial and imperial traffic is done here primarily for organizational purposes; for, like two sides of a coin, the two are ultimately inseparable. Not only did the new imperialism help expand American commercial enterprise but new forms of commercialized leisure made participation in imperial culture pleasurable for many Americans and profitable for a few, even when imperial traffic remained an implicit and even unnoticed part of the everyday experience of modern life. However, I have separated these lines of modern traffic in order to bring various parts of a complex system into view—much like the technique of an iris-in isolates part of a detailed image in order to direct the spectator's attention to an important element that might otherwise go unnoticed. As the OED definition of traffic makes clear, commercial traffic encompasses the broad, everyday circulation of bodies, goods, machines, and communications that is a defining feature of modernity. Commercial traffic includes the means used for achieving and expanding circulation (such as new technologies of transport and new forms of consumption and production) and the various representations of technological modernity that celebrated and lamented the various social, political, and cultural effects of new forms of mobility. By imperial traffic I mean the materiel and personnel required to execute a war as well as the images and narratives that always subtend conquest and circulate broadly within a society to constitute a collectively experienced imperial culture. Imperial traffic encompasses those "official" military technologies, goods, and individuals mobilized to a space of conquest, such as battleships and trains, cavalries and pack mules, as well as officers, soldiers, nurses, and the supplies they need to execute a war. The term also includes the journalists, photographers, camera operators, and illustrators and the stories, photographs, films, and sketches they produce for eager audiences at home. Imperial traffic circulates back and forth between the war front and the domestic front, and it includes the agents and technologies of war, the always-profitable discourses (pro- and anti-imperial) that shape prevailing conceptions of empire, and the audiences and readers who flock to sites of commercialized leisure to participate in imperial culture through such representations.

Chapter 1 discusses how in 1898 the Spanish-American War transformed and intensified the social and political meanings attached to modern traffic and its various movements as the United States began constructing what Amy Kaplan calls the "disembodied" overseas empire.[38] Detached from the continental "body" of the nation, its purpose was to accelerate and expand the flow of commercial traffic into and out of the United States by securing greater control of markets in Asia, the Caribbean, and South and Central America and to provide an outlet for the surplus production that was depressing the domestic market.[39] As the United States prepared for war with Spain, moving pictures gave audiences visual access to war camps in Florida and in doing so endowed them with a mobile disciplinary gaze that provided multiple opportunities to review, inspect, and observe new military machinery and robust martial masculinity. War actualities allowed curious audiences to observe soldiers engaging in drills and marching in formation in military camps and to inspect battleships manned by new naval recruits who are seen fueling at coaling stations and speeding through the Caribbean to demonstrate the "restless energy" of the U.S. military that, one year later, the Reverend Watson argued was a general attribute of American culture as a whole. This chapter shows how such films functioned in a mode of revelation by giving audiences the opportunity to see highly mobile, dynamic, and disciplined bodies for the first time as they were harnessed to the project of extending around the globe the reach of the U.S. military and industry. To do so, these films diverged somewhat from other actualities (such as the travelogue) by conflating the optical "journey" with the military mission and both, in turn, with the visual pleasure of operating, however temporarily, as a functional relay in the military's scopic regime.

If the actualities shot in the days and weeks leading up to the war confirmed the cinema's power to annihilate space and time and to extend the spectator's perception into new and previously unseen spaces, the conditions of modern warfare eventually revealed the limitations of the cinema's power to circulate (within) imperial traffic. As the ground campaign got under way first in Cuba and later in the Philippines heavy, bulky motion picture cameras proved difficult to transport across the campaign trails that troops carved out of rain-soaked tropical landscapes. Moreover, the conditions of modern warfare placed limits on both human and machine vision. In Cuba, Spanish forces had the advantage of knowing the terrain and were able to camouflage their positions and movements, thanks in part to their use of smokeless gunpowder. In contrast U.S. soldiers still used black gunpowder, which obscured the soldier's vision upon firing and revealed his position to the enemy via telltale clouds of smoke. As a number of accounts confirmed, American forces experienced much of the conflict in a terrifying state of highly visible battlefield blindness. Naval battles posed a different set of challenges to camera operators: the long trajectory of cannons, the speed of the new fleet, the smoke given off by burning ships and gunpowder, and the temporal contingencies of surprise attacks all conspired to make battle actualities difficult if not impossible to record. However, rather than resulting in an absence, these limitations to the cinema's capacity to circulate within the paths of imperial traffic ultimately proved to be astonishingly productive. To represent battles, production companies resorted to filming reenactments.

The number of battle reenactment films produced in the United States during and after the Spanish-American War and the Philippine-American War suggests that the very artificiality of this genre provided the pleasurable means for audiences to circulate visually within imperial traffic that actualities could not. To explain the pleasures and peculiar authenticity of the reenactment and its particular strategies for picturing American modernity, in chapter 2 I place the battle reenactment film within the broader context of the culture of live reenactments from which this film genre emerged and diverged. William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody's Wild West was one of the most popular and enduring amusements based on battle reenactments. Programs sold before the show explain that the peculiar pleasure of the Wild West reenactments derived from their simulation of spectacular historic events *and* the spectator position from which these spectacles were "originally" perceived. By placing an "original" spectator on the scene of a historical event and then replicating such a position for spectators at its simulation, the Wild West made the reenactment highly pleasurable and in the process intensified its reality effects. In this chapter I discuss how the cinema borrowed the reality effects of the live reenactment to place its own spectators on the simulated "scene" of history, and I show how the iterable structure of the genre made it ideal for repeating and hence mastering the historical trauma of high-tech modern warfare. In the process, reenactments (both live and film) helped construct the discursive interchangeability of U.S. overseas conquest with the relief of trauma and suffering caused by the soldier's incorporation into imperial traffic.

In chapter 3 I focus on the intersection of electricity, modern traffic, and the cinema at the Pan-American Exposition in 1901. Moving picture technology was only one of several new technologies that provided an outlet for the electric currents that incorporated modern life into a system of circuits that kept electrified traffic in motion. As an invisible source of energy sensible through its effects (light, heat, and motive force), electricity was experienced primarily through whatever (signifying) machinery completed its circuit. Moreover, electricity was a highly profitable commodity and its rapid circulation through expanding urban grids constituted a form of meta-traffic that contributed to technology's annihilation of space and time. At the turn of the century, world's fairs and expositions functioned as the primary sites where amusement seekers could observe the functioning of a broad range of electric technologies during the day and then delight in massive electric illuminations at night.[40] To demonstrate and celebrate the nation's new imperial and industrial power, the organizers of the 1901 Pan-American Exposition staged a massive electric light display that used 350,000 incandescent light bulbs and was called the City of Living Light. The brilliance of this illumination allowed Edwin S. Porter to film what the Edison Manufacturing Co. called "marvels in photography" and claimed were the first films shot at night in the United States. In chapter 3 I discuss how Porter's films of the City of Living Light enacted and aestheticized industry's transcendence of the natural order, celebrated electricity's extension of human vision across space and time, and helped teach amusement seekers how to perceive the power of American technology and industry.

Before the closing of the Pan-American Exposition, however, the cinema would make both the vulnerability and the visibility of this power evident to moving picture audiences after Leon F. Czolgosz, described by newspapers as an unemployed laborer with ties to the anarchist movement, shot President William McKinley on the Exposition grounds. In the aftermath of the assassination another new technology, the electric chair, would join the cinema to help reinforce the close association of national-industrial progress with electric power and the boundedness of modern American life and death with the circuits of technological modernity.

Chapter 4 analyzes the American cinema's participation in the early-twentieth-century moral panic concerning the so-called white slave trade as it created sensational films in which otherwise virtuous young women are detoured into a life of prostitution. White slavery films are based on