Profit Margins: The American Silent Cinema and the Marginalization of Advertising

Jeremy W. Groskopf

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/communication_diss

Recommended Citation
doi: https://doi.org/10.57709/4313936

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Communication at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.
PROFIT MARGINS:
THE AMERICAN SILENT CINEMA AND THE MARGINALIZATION OF ADVERTISING

by

JEREMY GROSKOPF

Under the direction of Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley and Ted Friedman

ABSTRACT

In the early years of the twentieth century, the unique new medium of motion pictures was the focus of significant theorization and experimentation at the fringes of the American advertising industry. Alongside the growth of the nickelodeon, and the multiple shifts in the American cinema’s business model in the ‘transitional era,’ various individuals at the margins of the advertising industry attempted, and most often failed, to integrate direct consumer-goods advertising regularly into motion picture theaters. Via techniques as diverse as the glass slide, the commercial trailer, and the advertising wall-clock, cinema patrons of the 1910s witnessed various attempts by merchants and manufacturers to intrude upon their attention in the cinema space. Through research in the trade presses of the cinema, advertising, and various consumer
goods industries, along with archival ephemera from the advertising companies themselves, this
dissertation explores these various on and off-screen tactics for direct advertising attempted in
silent cinemas, and their eventual minimization in the American cinema experience. Despite the
appeal of the new, popular visual medium of cinema to advertisers, concerns over ticket-prices,
advertising circulation, audience irritation, and the potential for theatrical ‘suicide-by-
advertising,’ resulted, over a mere fifteen years, in the near abandonment of the cinema as an
advertising medium. As a transitional medium between the 19th century forms of print and
billboarding, and 20th century broadcasting, the silent cinema was an important element in the
development of modern advertising theories.

INDEX WORDS: Advertising, Silent cinema, Transitional era, Film exhibition, Film
spectatorship, American cinema, Magic lantern, Trailer, Animation
PROFIT MARGINS:
THE AMERICAN SILENT CINEMA AND THE MARGINALIZATION OF ADVERTISING

by

JEREMY GROSKOPF

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
2013
PROFIT MARGINS:
THE AMERICAN SILENT CINEMA AND THE MARGINALIZATION OF ADVERTISING

by

JEREMY GROSKOPF

Committee Chairs: Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley

Ted Friedman

Committee: Alisa Perren

Cynthia B. Meyers

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University

August 2013
A moving-picture audience ought to be an inspiration to an advertising man. I have sat in a moving-picture theater full of kids and grown-ups and have thought, 'If I only knew how to reach these people, I would know all about advertising.'

- Don Herold, September 1915
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Regardless of attribution of authorship, a dissertation is a community effort. What is contained within these pages has been immeasurably improved by intellectual and emotional support from numerous people. In the former category, my committee – with special thanks to Kathy – has helped to massage this project from nebulous concept to functioning dissertation. Archival support from Lynn Eaton at Duke, and Dennis Daily at the Penrose Library in Colorado Springs streamlined my research significantly, and both led me in very useful directions. David Boutros from the State Historical Society of Missouri was invaluable during a moment of long-distance research. The impact of prior teachers is also apparent in these pages, especially that of Matthew Bernstein, who guided me through my thesis and who taught me so much about researching and writing.

Perhaps more valuable than information, to a dissertator, is the emotional maintenance which helps one to survive the process. All of my friends, both local and distant, have assisted me through this process in some way. However, Ian Peters deserves special mention for performing admirably as both occasional research-monkey and frustration-sponge, not to mention the countless hours of entertainment. My now two-year old daughter Ivy should also be singled out for praise for both improving my productivity and helping me to remember that, even in academia, there is such a thing as down-time. And she’s cute too.

And, of course, my wife Jennifer – who helped me survive my dissertation only a few years after finishing her own – was both advisor and ally in one, for which she deserves both the final and most appreciative thanks.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... v

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: THEATERS, COMMUNICATION, AND ADVERTISING IN THE AMERICAN SILENT CINEMA ............................................................................................................. 1

  Topics and Terms ..................................................................................................................... 6

  Technological ‘Failure’ and the Study of History ..................................................................... 10

  Literature Review: Media Studies .......................................................................................... 16

  Literature Review: Advertising History ................................................................................. 27

  Literature Review: Silent Era Cinema Advertising ............................................................... 36

  Scaffolds and Structure .......................................................................................................... 41

CHAPTER 2. “A NOVEL AND IRRESISTIBLE MAGNETISM”: ADVERTISING LOOKS AT CINEMA, 1908-1921 .......................................................................................................................... 49

  Medium Specific Psychology and the ‘Passive’ Cinema Spectator ........................................ 51

  The Captive Audience and Receptive Mood.......................................................................... 56

  The ‘Combative Spirit’ and Film’s Stagnation as an Ad Medium ........................................ 60

  The Happy Captive and Twentieth Century Advertising ...................................................... 63

CHAPTER 3. “THE FRONT COVER MEDIUM”: MAGIC LANTERN SLIDES, TEMPORALITY, AND ONSCREEN ADVERTISING ............................................................................................................... 68

  What Was a Lantern Slide? .................................................................................................... 71

  A Brief History of the Early American Slide Advertising Industry, 1908-1922 .................. 77

  Why Slide-vertising? .............................................................................................................. 120

  Why Not? .............................................................................................................................. 130

  ‘Slide Psychology’ .............................................................................................................. 134
Technological Slides – Spectacle and Practicality .......................................................... 138

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 146

MARGINALIZATION OF ONSCREEN ADVERTISING ...................................................... 148

What Was a ‘Trailer’? ........................................................................................................ 151

A Brief History of the Advertising Trailer, 1914-1922 .................................................. 159

Why Trailer Advertising? .............................................................................................. 192

Why Not? .......................................................................................................................... 202

Case Study - The Alexander Film Company and the ‘High Class’ Trailer ..................... 207

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 217

CHAPTER 5. WATCH THIS SPACE: PERIPHERAL ADVERTISING THROUGH
TECHNOLOGIES ............................................................................................................. 220

Rethinking the Theater and Its Relationship to Advertising ........................................... 224

Frames ............................................................................................................................... 225

‘Public Service’ Tech ....................................................................................................... 235

Clocks ................................................................................................................................ 242

‘Active Audience’ Rhetoric and the Cinema as Venue .................................................... 251

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 255

CHAPTER 6. “INTEMPERATE PROCLAMATIONS”: EXHIBITION, TICKETS, AND THE
BIG CHILL OF CINEMA ADVERTISING ........................................................................ 258

Participating Sponsorship as a Model of Cinema Exhibition ........................................... 263

The Incredible Shrinking Field of Cinema Advertising .................................................. 268

Cinema Advertising as Media Development .................................................................... 271
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: THEATERS, COMMUNICATION, AND ADVERTISING
IN THE AMERICAN SILENT CINEMA

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a much remarked turn in the American cinema experience occurred. Often described (erroneously) as an intrusion upon a previously uncontaminated medium, direct consumer goods advertising in motion picture theaters began its meteoric rise in the United States. The formation of Screenvision and the National Cinema Network (soon to become National CineMedia [NCM]) for the purposes of pre-film slide and trailer advertising in the late 1970s, the boom in product placement in the wake of Reese’s Pieces’ star turn in *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial* in 1982, and the accelerating use of cinema advertising at the turn of the 20th century following advertiser’s fears of the fading effectiveness of television,¹ have combined to produce a sense that a venue once dedicated solely to onscreen entertainment has been colonized by the ever expanding American advertising industry. This sense of newness is common not only among spectators, but also among scholars and advertising practitioners and proponents. Kim B. Rotzoll, author of one of the earliest studies of cinema advertising after its rebirth, mentioned in passing that “there was some [cinema advertising] present in the ’50s,” but appears to have been aware of no other precursors.² *Advertising Age* columnist Matthew Grimm gave the appearance of an even shorter lifespan for cinema advertising when he asserted, in 2003, that “turning the big screen into a cross-category ad

---


medium did not happen until the mid-1990s.”³ Marketing scholar Herbert Jack Rotfeld, in 2006, declared vaguely that “cinema advertising for unrelated products or services…is relatively new in the USA.”⁴ In that same year, Joanna Phillips and Stephanie M. Noble’s research into audience sentiments about cinema advertising revealed, among many preconceptions, the same sense that the intrusion of advertising was recent, with one respondent claiming that “prices for the movies keep going up, and now there is advertising that you got to put up with.”⁵ In the eruption of studies of the promise and problems of cinema advertising that has appeared in advertising oriented journals, the reader frequently encounters the assumption that cinema advertising is a new field.⁶

Marginalized in many analyses, then, is the fact that the techniques currently enjoying such a wave of popularity among advertisers are actually more than 100 years old. Product placement dates at least as far back as the Edison Company’s ubiquitous train films of the 1890s.⁷ The pre-film digital advertising slides and trailers circulated by Screenvision and NCM have roots at least as far back as the physical advertising slides circulated by Boston’s Preston

---

Lombard in 1908\textsuperscript{8} and the film-trailer advertisements of Houston’s Southern Film Service in 1914.\textsuperscript{9} Concerns over the effectiveness of given techniques feature equally well-worn tropes. The attitudes which Joanna Phillips and Stephanie M. Noble connect to ‘Reactance Theory’ (combative behavior resulting from the sense of curtailed freedoms), ‘Equity Theory’ (decreasing attendance due to a sense that the cost of a ticket exceeds the pleasure derived if advertising is added to the cinema experience), and ‘Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory’ (displeasure resulting from the cinema experience failing to meet preconceptions)\textsuperscript{10}, were being voiced, albeit in different terms, about cinema advertising throughout the ‘transitional era’ (roughly 1908 to 1917).\textsuperscript{11} In this study, I contend that advertising and the cinema not only have a long history of interrelation, but that, until Depression era radio, they were mutually defining institutions. Cinema advertising of the transitional era, as an overt foil for many cinema commentators, played a formative role in the American rebranding of cinema as a highbrow entertainment. Simultaneously, the marginalization of these practices from the mainstream theaters established a cultural hostility to direct advertising in new media which would require years of broadcasting experience to overturn.

\textsuperscript{8} Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 2.15 (11 April 1908): 329.
\textsuperscript{9} Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 19.10 (7 March 1914): 1330.
\textsuperscript{11} Periodization of the American silent cinema generally reduces the era to three hazily dated phases: the ‘cinema of attractions,’ the ‘transitional era,’ and the ‘feature film era.’ During the time when cinema was an ‘attraction,’ the fact of film mattered more than the content, as the very act of seeing a film was noteworthy. In the ‘feature’ era, most of the practices we recognize from pre-World War II American cinema, except for the use of pre-recorded sound – major studios, feature films, vertical integration, the Hays Office, etc. – were already in operation or shortly to be born. The ‘transitional era’ in between thus encapsulates the institutionalization of the cinema, as the original practices were abandoned, sometimes in multiple phases, resulting in the mature industry of the 1920s. For a detailed study of the vagaries of periodization, see: Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp, “Introduction,” and Ben Brewster, “Periodization of Early Cinema,” both in American Cinema’s Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices, ed. Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2004). See also: Tom Gunning, “Cinema of Attractions,” \textit{Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative}, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 58-59; Tom Gunning, \textit{D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph} (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991); and David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, \textit{The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
For cinema studies, this dissertation on the direct advertising tactics used in transitional era cinema – including slides, trailers, and offscreen materials like advertising clocks – reveals a new breadth of local cinema experiences which were slowly pushed into the margins by the vertically integrating industry. For an era in which the tension between mass and class audiences was a driving factor for innovation (leading, for example, to the creation of feature films and palatial theaters), cinema advertising was a key way in which cinema theaters were differentiated. Though cinema advertisers were eternally chasing the affluent, cinema advertising itself became a marker of lower class and independent theatrical experiences. Opinions about poor quality cinema advertising – cracked slides, cheap animation, and light polluting clocks – became entangled with the notion that advertising was inherently lowbrow. The entire field was increasingly condemned as a boorish intrusion on the refined American cinema of the future. By examining the history of transitional era American cinema advertising, through the lens of supportive and critical rhetoric, this study reveals how the American film industry intentionally divorced itself from commercialism. This dissertation thus contributes to our understanding of the ways in which the “business pure and simple” of American cinema was distanced from alternative exhibition practices in order to strengthen its new institutional standing as an art.

For the history of American advertising, this study of silent era cinema advertising erases the dissonance in canonical advertising history caused by juxtaposing the proliferation of direct advertising via periodicals and billboards at the turn of the century, with the hesitation about direct advertising on radio throughout the 1920s. What appears to be simple hesitation in the face of a new technology is revealed to be the legacy of the failure in the cinema. As Kenneth Lipartito has said, in the history of technology and ideas,
failures…contribute to the construction of the frameworks of meaning that guide decisions in an open-ended technological world. They fit into a narrative about technology that helps to shape the range of choices we can make.  

Cinema advertising is thus an important failure, in which the faltering dream of an advertising supported cinema sowed seeds of doubt about the suitability of direct advertising in new media. The American silent cinema is, thus, a missing link in the history of the advertising industry’s relentless 20th century expansion – a largely failed attempt to colonize the first moving medium, which, by the very fact of its failure, directly influenced developments to follow.

Much like the concepts of pre-recorded sound, color photography, and widescreen aesthetics, cinema advertising is not an era but an idea, threaded through the history of both the American cinema and advertising industries – now present, now absent, but always in the air as an option. The cultural antagonisms bound up in the history of cinema advertising – audiences vs. advertising, exhibitors vs. studios, the film industry vs. the advertising industry, and advertising agencies vs. non-print media – are still with us, as are many of the preconceptions which developed around the experimentation. In the interplay between onscreen and offscreen space, audience captivity and audience hostility, downtown and neighborhood theaters, and the many attempts to culturally define the cinema, advertising in American film theaters shaped future conceptions of what modern advertising and the cinema experience could be.

---

Before going any further, it is important to introduce the exact subject of this dissertation. While ‘consumer goods advertising in American silent theaters’ may seem quite specific, advertising can be researched from a number of angles. This dissertation will not focus, to any large degree, on the aesthetics of advertising content, the growth of consumer culture, or the importance of government regulation to advertising proliferation. Though short discussions of all of these elements will be included where relevant, my focus will be on the debate surrounding the adoption of the motion picture theater (in both the on and offscreen spaces) for direct consumer goods advertising. Cinema advertising ‘agents,’ film audiences, and exhibitors will be the predominant human subjects. The central subject of the study will, thus, be the silent motion picture theater and the theories and practices of film consumption. If cinema is a ‘medium,’ it is a medium made of wood and brick, and must be conceptualized through the interplay of spaces and crowds. To quote Andre Gaudreault, cinema is not a device, but “a social, cultural, economic, etc. system.”16 Shifting focus from the screen to the venue allows us to reconsider cinema as a gestalt entity. Before the sound revolution, the cinema was a multiple media environment. Reconsidering transitional era cinema from the perspective of advertising allows us to see the ways in which American silent cinemagoing was an untidy event, in which a number of divergent experiences coalesced.

Therefore, various tactics for integrating direct advertising into a cinema theater will be discussed, with the center of debate always being between the goals of advertisers and the desires

---

of filmmakers, exhibitors, and audiences. Chapters will be structured not around copy style, or ideological opinions, but around tactics for invading the theatrical space – lantern slides, commercial trailers, and offscreen technologies. As this is a study of the early adoption of a medium, the multiplicity of available tactics, and the way those tactics were distinguished, are the most important subjects.17

In basic terms, cinema advertising tactics fragment along three important axes: the directness of address (camouflaged via integration with entertainment, or overt standalone messages), formal properties (moving or still imagery), and physical position (onscreen or offscreen). The first axis – directness – is a distinction that frames the entire selection of topic for this study. Via direct advertising slides, trailers, or offscreen imagery, the viewer is introduced unambiguously to the availability of a product (up to and including a mention of the price and a merchant’s address). Indirect advertising tactics, like product placement and sponsorship, link a product to a film without overtly calling attention to product qualities or price. In the American silent cinema, direct and indirect advertising were distinct practices, which were offered by different advertising companies, and financially benefitted different sectors of the film industry. Direct cinema advertisements were brief and independent messages, the theater ‘space’ was openly purchased from exhibitors, and the producers were typically small companies dedicated exclusively to one tactic. Indirect advertising was often circulated surreptitiously (only the film producer, not the exhibitor, was paid), and the producers were often mainstream American studios like Universal. Thus, the two represent distinct projects. As

17 Similar analyses of what Rick Altman has termed the “chaotic diversity” of early developmental periods can be found in numerous previous studies. For two film related examples, see: Rick Altman, Silent Film Sound (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 23; Tom Kemper, Hidden Talent: The Emergence of Hollywood Agents (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2010).
indirect tactics have received the lion’s share of previous scholarly attention,\(^{18}\) I have opted to devote my energies to the lesser known direct advertising methods.\(^{19}\)

The remaining two axes – formal properties and physical position – help to fragment direct advertising discussions still further. The dominant area of debate in direct cinema advertising in the silent era was regarding formal properties. It is important to remember that the transitional era cinema remained, for a time, a mixed media venue. During the 1910s, though motion picture theaters were defined by the centrality of film to their offerings, still images through lantern slides, live musical performances, and even brief stage shows remained a part of programs. As such, a significant amount of time and ink was expended in cinema advertising debates on the topic of still imagery, and whether the use of stills was an aid or a hindrance to advertising effectiveness. (For example: Was a still image a welcome ‘rest’ from motion picture eye-strain, or was it a boring disruption of the flow?) Slides were also cheaper to produce and circulate than films, adding an element of practical financial concern to an otherwise complex biological and psychological debate.

Physical position was a less common, but no less compelling, topic which fragmented debate on cinema advertising in the United States. For a minority of cinema advertising proponents, it was not the lack of motion but the usurpation of the screen which caused the most trouble for cinema ads. For these ad men, the walls, chairs, and air were all seen as viable location alternatives for advertising content, as long as such advertisements did not obstruct the screen or otherwise interfere with its viewing. Such advertising would occur to the side of the


\(^{19}\) The issue of ‘hard sell’ and ‘soft sell,’ on the other hand, does come up. Through the use of humor and animation, trailers were decidedly more ‘soft sell’ than slides. Though ad content is not a primary topic of this study, this distinction between ‘dry’ slides and ‘fun’ trailers became part of the rhetoric that differentiated the two tactics, and shall be explored in chapters three and four.
entertainment, as marginalia to a simultaneously available focal point. In the debate over physical position, theories of permanent visibility (as opposed to the ‘fleeting’ nature of an onscreen ad) and the importance of viewer choice (could the viewer ‘opt out’ of reading the advertisement) came to the fore. Emerging from the tradition of printed handbills and theater curtains, the chair-back, wall, or waste receptacle sign were proposed as alternative advertising forms for the cinema space. As such, the distinction between temporal and spatial advertising became one of the central and most influential aspects of silent cinema advertising debates.

Concerns over the consequences of temporal advertising (primarily, the possibility of ‘ill will’ created by audience compulsion) grew to dominate the discussion of cinema advertising, and were formative concerns for early radio (see chapter six).

Identifying these fault lines is important as they drove both competition and innovation in all areas. While commercial trailers were designed to compete with lantern slides, on the grounds that stationary slides were undesirable, the inventors of ‘motion slides,’ using liquid-chambers and moving parts, used the same logic to try to improve their wares. The importance of evading a fleeting impression drove many slide and trailer makers to suggest offscreen parallel advertising (like a simultaneous printed ad in the theaters handbill). As such, identifying the

---

20 Non-cinematic precursors also informed this debate. Probably most important was the then comparatively recent shift of magazine advertising out of a bookend position (where all advertisements were restricted to their own pages at the beginning and end of each issue) and into the regular pages. See: Hugo Münsterberg, “Social Sins in Advertising,” *Psychology and Social Sanity* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1914), 229-249.

21 Perceptive readers may note a similarity between the spatial arrangements of the theater and the spatial arrangements of a screen. As product placement has become more complex, similar issues have been discussed; how ‘central’ should an advertisement be? Amanda Lotz identifies a product placement split which she terms ‘organic’ (non-obtrusive product placement which doesn’t call too much attention to itself – like a logo appearing in the background) versus ‘inorganic’ (very forced and obvious placement – like a close-up of a car logo, or the inclusion of the product name in the dialogue). (Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007), 168; see also Jean-Marc Lehu, *Branded Entertainment: Product Placement & Brand Strategy in the Entertainment Business* [London and Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2007], 114-115.) The increasing visual and verbal centrality of inorganic product placement is similar to the usurpation of the screen that was criticized by offscreen advertising proponents in the silent era. Despite the parallel, Lotz’ terms do not really fit with the offscreen / onscreen split. As such, they have not been adopted here.
conceptual lines is not simply an exercise of differentiation, but also an introduction to many of
the debates to come.

Studying transitional era American cinema advertising by fragmenting out tactics and the
thinking underlying them allows us to see not only the importance of cinema advertising to the
development of the classical Hollywood exhibition paradigm, but also the complicated debates at
the time over how best to define the audience. Perspectives on the formal properties and
positioning of cinema advertising, including the belief that advertising had no place in the
cinema, were tied to perspectives on audiences. Were audiences grateful for services? Annoyed
by interruption? Accepting of humorous or pleasant advertising messages? Disdainful of all
things commercial? By separating the study into tactics for direct advertising, we can see clearly
the ways in which a single topic – in this case, cinema advertising – produces a mass of
conflicting interpretations which are then smoothed into a single, mainstream institutional
definition of the medium. Such a study is of added relevance to current scholarship due to the
parallels with current digital culture. The mass rethinking of advertising in the wake of the
digital transition has given new life to these audience debates which occurred in the silent
cinema as the now virtual ‘venue’ of digital media can contain marginalia as well as ‘spots’ and
‘placement.’

Technological ‘Failure’ and the Study of History

In the wake of the postmodernist critique of historical practice in the 1970s – in which
historical writing was criticized, among other things, for hiding interpretive claims in formal
structures and erroneous assertions of ‘objectivity’\(^{22}\) – it is helpful to define and justify, at the

\(^{22}\) Though the movement was part of the larger wave of postmodern critique, the locus of historical postmodernism
is the work of Hayden White, whose 1970s critiques led to the scholarly equivalent of open warfare in the 1980s and
outset, one’s particular historiographic approach. History as a discipline has its operating theories as well. (Indeed, it is in deference to this critique that history is an interpretive act, structured by various interpretive preconceptions, that my writing is at times worded in the first person [“I argue…”] rather than in an omniscient third person.)

In brief and explicit terms, my perspective is that dead ends, failures, abandoned ideas, and stagnant theories are vital to the telling of history, as successful and immediate adoption of a concept is not a pre-requisite for historical influence. Indeed, as Kenneth Lipartito argues,

[failed technologies, far from being dead ends or even mere cautionary tales, may persist well beyond their material life. They may reinforce rather than undermine technological paths, even when those paths are questionable or undesirable. [...] Failure…stem[s] not from some functional flaw in the product or from a traditional notion of consumer demand, but rather from a contingent sequence of actions that reflect the influence of expectations, assumptions, uncertainty, politics, and self-reinforcing decisions.]

In short, the existence of an idea matters, regardless of its breadth of adoption, as it is imbricated in a way of thinking and a larger process of social development. This is, to my mind, the primary reason why the main line of development in any given field is always susceptible to jarring paradigm shifts or unexpected recurrences of ideas that seemed to have died long ago. Progress, if indeed we can call it that, is not always (perhaps even rarely) rational. To treat the less successful elements of history as ipso facto unimportant is to commit the error of thinking that the present has never lost or temporarily mislaid ideas from the past. The telling of history must not abandon counter-histories, cyclical repetitions, and coincidence in favor of causal logic. Nor, of course, should the inverse be true. We must be capable of telling both the ‘master

narrative’ and the marginal history simultaneously. One of the ways in which we can do this is to find those moments – those seemingly minor, barely-influential ideas – which prefigure later turns in the ‘master narrative.’

The historical turn towards studying failures is comparatively recent. Scott A. Sandage asserts in his 2005 book *Born Losers* that, from the early 1800s to the late 1900s, American culture at large – and, by extension, the historians and other scholars who studied it – commonly “fixed blame [for failure] squarely on individual faults, not extenuating circumstances.” The deterministic assertion that failure was somehow predictable due to technological or personal fault became axiomatic. The “‘reverse Whig’ histories” described by Lipartito, in which technologies that failed in the market become “cautionary tales of error or hubris,” are thus a longstanding tradition in American (mis)interpretation. Sandage stresses that prominent business historian Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., as recently as 1975, still confidently asserted “that studying failure in and of itself would not be a useful enterprise.” In the latter half of the 1980s, scholars began to attack such deterministic thinking and rethink the importance of the study of failures to culture, both as prerequisites to later successes and as important markers of the contingent nature

---

24 I use the term ‘failure’ here as scholarly studies of the importance of ‘non-successes’ typically use the term, in deference to their case studies (most commonly, technologies abandoned after a cool market reception). However, as Graeme Gooday has pointed out, the definition of ‘success’ is hazy – even when one restricts the discussion solely to economics; the diesel engine may not have dominated the market, but it was still successful. Sales figures and their duration therefore remain open questions. As cinema advertising is a particularly complicated case, I will, over the remainder of this study, use the more open term ‘marginalized’ rather than ‘failed.’ Cinema advertising businesses may have failed, but the techniques and technologies rarely died with them. In most cases, they were simply pushed out of the mainstream. As such, the late 1970s cinema advertising renaissance was merely an expansion of long, low-level usage. ‘Failure’ of silent cinema advertising is, thus, solely a measure of scale, not a complete disappearance. Graeme Gooday, “Re-Writing the ‘Book of Blots’: Critical Reflections on Histories of Technological ‘Failure’,” *History and Technology* 14 (1998): 269.


of success – that any ‘success’ emerges from a field of related marginal ideas. The study of failed, abandoned, and unexpectedly recurrent ideas has thus already added significantly to our understanding of the development of technology, discouraging deterministic descriptions of the impact of technological invention on history (asserting that success or failure of an idea, and its impact on culture, is inevitable due to traits of the invention), and encouraging a focus on the contextual elements driving both the invention and adoption of a technology. However, as Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman assert,

[a]t too high a level of generality, the knowledge of social shaping is vacuous, except as a polemical counterpoint to simplistic technological determinism. If the idea of the social shaping of technology has intellectual or political merit, this lies in the details: in the particular ways technology is socially shaped.

Important to the history of failure, then, is understanding the way that the act of invention is integrated into longer histories of ideas, from the overdetermination of the act of invention, to the polysemy (or “interpretive flexibility”) of a technology once it has been released into culture.

The field of technological history provides numerous examples of the importance of failed technologies to longer histories of ideas. An exceptional example is the research into the failure of Picturephone by Kenneth Lipartito, in which he links the concept to longer standing notions of visuality and ‘distance learning’ – going so far as to assert that the Picturephone, given different circumstances, could have filled the same cultural niche that the internet now occupies.

Randall Patnode argues that technologies can fail (and succeed) due to institutional inertia in competing areas, as was the case with ‘wired wireless’ transmission, which both AT&T

and RCA failed to push as an alternative to commercial radio in the 1920s. 31 Steven Boyer connects Nintendo’s Virtual Boy videogame system to the discourse of virtual reality, asserting that niche appreciation connects technologies to wider cultural concerns even in the wake of a mainstream failure of a product to sell. 32 Paul Atkinson asserts that even ‘non-products’ like the Kitchen Computer (a piece of technology designed for reasons other than sales) can connect to broader ideas; in Atkinson’s words, the aesthetics of the Kitchen Computer were significant for design history, regardless of the circulation of the technology, as “it was purely the idea of the product that was being consumed.” 33 Patrick McCray makes a similar argument for the influence of one discarded concept on future scientific developments, in his study of the abandonment of the National New Technology Telescope. 34 As mentioned above, cinema studies has its own examples of this historical rethinking; studies of the persistence of experimentation with color, sound, and widescreen ground particular failed efforts in longer lines of conceptual development. 35 Such studies, to varying degrees, stress the complex array of influences on the development of any given device, putting the importance on the life of an idea rather than an invention. 36

35 The most influential early work was John Belton, Widescreen Cinema (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). See above for further examples.
36 The conception of technologies as merely iterations of long lines of thinking has even entered popular historicism. See, for example, Tom Standage’s The Victorian Internet (in which the telegraph is analyzed as a proto-internet) and The Turk (in which an 18th century hoax featuring a chess-playing automaton is cited as a formative moment in the progress towards mechanical intelligence). The reclamation of Charles Babbage, and his ‘Difference Engine,’ in contemporary computer culture is further evidence of the way popular culture has begun to embrace particular historical failures. For a scholarly take on the difficulty in placing Babbage in the line of computer development, see Chapter 1 of Ted Friedman, Electric Dreams: Computers in American Culture (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005).
Recent work in media history has been more interested in the second approach to failure: studying the ‘broth’ of alternative uses from which the successful mature form of a medium emerges. Rick Altman has proposed a model of research which he calls ‘crisis historiography,’ in which one studies the ‘identity crisis’ of new technologies caught between competing cultural ideologies before finally settling into their stable form.  

André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion call this moment the “incubation period” between a medium’s “integrating birth” (its moment of invention when it is seen as a continuation of old forms) and its “distinguishing birth” (when it becomes fully institutionalized as a unique medium). Carolyn Marvin, using a spatial metaphor that I literalize in studying exhibition structures, forwards a notion that new mediums are like undiscovered country, slowly being ‘mapped’ by minds slanted by cultural preconceptions. Lisa Gitelman calls this phase the development of ‘protocols,’ in which one particular usage of a technology becomes ‘common sense’ as all other possible uses are publicly forgotten. For media, the state of newness requires the existence of a multiplicity of interpretations and competing uses, many of which must, by the fact of later institutionalization, be eventually marginalized.

---

It is my contention that the study of cinema advertising – a concept which not only had the long gestation period of widescreen cinema, but also the flurry of early conflicting interpretations of an ‘identity crisis’ – can helpfully join these two approaches to ‘failure.’ By studying the early adopters, foundational concepts, and the everyday men and women of American history bound up in the ‘identity crisis’ of early cinema advertising (and early cinema itself), in the wake of a later renaissance of the substantially similar techniques in substantially similar venues, we can link the marginalized ideas of one generation to a reoccurrence. In the American cinema, as it turns out, advertising techniques behave like weeds; they grow in hidden places and occasionally overrun the garden, and a long line of cinema ‘guardians’ have continually tried to pull them out. What follows is a first step: a study of the ‘identity crisis’ of cinema advertising, analyzing the large-scale insertion and removal of consumer goods advertising in American silent movie theaters, decades before the contemporary renaissance. Experimentation with direct advertising in the American silent cinema was a social event, and its fate was determined by expectations, preconceptions, and struggles to define the medium. An emerging rhetoric of cultural hierarchy (with cinema as a highbrow medium), along with rapidly codifying preconceptions about the incompatibility of direct advertising with both pleasure and ticket prices, were important social determinants for the initial marginalization of cinema advertising.

*Literature Review: Media Studies*

This study is placed at the intersection of two major fields of study – histories of film and histories of advertising – each of which is large enough to require its own sub-heading here. In
this section, I will deal exclusively with media studies. Four specific sub-fields in media studies have bearing on this research: aesthetics (specifically animation), reception studies, studies of silent film exhibition, and media industries studies (specifically silent film). Combining these four branches of study allows us to restore the marginal practice of direct consumer goods advertising in the American silent cinema to a place of formative importance for film history. For formal aesthetics, direct cinema advertising techniques compel us to rethink the received wisdom about the origins of animation, which was a practice tightly connected with commercial trailers in the mid-1910s. For reception studies, this research can help to re-insert cinema advertising into the discussion as an interpretive frame for the cinema experience, both then and now. For histories of transitional era exhibition, early American advertising experiments provide an important element of marketing context to the development of a middle-class cinema culture, as the rebranding of cinema as highbrow occurred with overt reference to the supposed lowbrow qualities of advertising funded entertainment. For studies of media industries, transitional era cinema advertising research provides a parallel with radio, television, and internet industrial studies, describing the dalliance with consumer goods advertising which resulted in the cinema becoming the only mass medium to predominantly reject direct advertising. Each of these four topics shall be reviewed in turn in this section.

Aesthetic concerns dominate early work in scholarly cinema studies. Vachel Lindsay published the first aesthetic analysis of film, The Art of the Moving Picture, in 1915, in which he laid out an early taxonomy of ‘genres’ he labeled films of ‘Action,’ ‘Intimacy,’ and ‘Splendor.’ As cinema studies emerged as a distinct field in American universities at mid-century, aesthetics dominated the discourse, with the concept of ‘auteurism’ (the study of cinema as a work of a

---

particular author – usually the director) dominating the discourse. American silent era auteurs like D.W. Griffith and Charlie Chaplin, and genres like the Western and the adventure serial, have received significant scholarly attention, ranging from purely formal analyses to broad biographically and culturally informed studies, as pure formalism has become less dominant in the field. Although much of the study to follow is not oriented towards the screen or the creators of the advertising content, one highly pertinent sub-field of aesthetic research is relevant: studies of animation. While the field is understandably oriented around major figures and studios from the golden age of cinema – like Walt Disney and Warner Bros. – a few scholars have researched the early history of film animation. Donald Crafton’s *Before Mickey* is the touchstone for silent era animation, in which he studies the makers and styles of early entertainment animation, taking particular interesting in the slow and difficult evolution of the form as techniques were invented to streamline and cheapen the process. Giannalberto Bendazzi takes a longer view, studying a hundred years of animation history, while helpfully providing a global context for developments – providing brief overviews of unstudied national animation cinemas like Sweden (where the animation “grew in the field of advertising”). The very early silent film work of Walt Disney has, of course, also received significant attention as a

---

developmental period for his work, including (often brief) discussions of his introduction to animation at the advertising oriented Kansas City Slide Company. These scholars have already given us a suitably nuanced conception of the interplay between art, technology, and business acumen in early American animation.

However, the importance of cinema advertising history to animation has remained predominantly off the radar. The references to advertising cartoons in the works of both Crafton and Bendazzi are slim, and the early work of Disney is studied only as a precursor to his later fame, not as part of a broader culture of commercial animation. This study of direct cinema advertising, particularly the early years of consumer-goods trailers, and their relationship to the even older concept of hand-drawn lantern slides, provides a shadow history of the origins of animation – a history in which advertising dollars were equally responsible for technological innovation. Animated trailers were circulated regularly in American cinema theaters as early as the work of the entertainment pioneers. This history is thus very important to a complete understanding of the development of animation from a cinema novelty to an institution.

Research into reception is as established as aesthetic studies of cinema, although early work was conducted from a social scientific angle, rather than the literary inflection of scholars of the cinema as an aesthetic form. Scholars have been interested in ways in which cinema transmits meaning to viewers, and the elements which frame and delimit interpretation, since Hugo Münsterberg published *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* in 1916. In this work, Münsterberg codified the early film theory of “psychical infection,” in which the communication

51 Stephen Bottomore has proposed a similar theory of the development of non-fiction production, asserting that the development of documentary film cannot be understood completely without direct reference to commercial non-fiction like chamber of commerce produced city advertisements, or “educational” industrial advertising. Although work on such films is now growing (see below), their integration into the history of documentary remains incomplete. Stephen Bottomore, “Rediscovering Early Non-Fiction Film,” *Film History* 13.2 (2001): 160-173.
of information via motion pictures was deemed too rapid to allow for critical thinking, thus effectively ‘implanting’ information into the viewer’s mind.\(^{52}\) After significant revision to this ‘passive audience’ thesis over decades of social scientific research,\(^{53}\) the current theory of ‘active audiences’ and interpretive flexibility emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Post-Structuralists like Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes introduced the concept of ‘intertextuality,’ in which a text, for both the writer and the reader, must always be filtered through connotations both social and personal.\(^{54}\) Meaning is thus not in the books, but created through the interaction of a mind and a text. Through Cultural Studies theorists, this concept has taken on the status of theory of interpretation. Stuart Hall proposed the possibility of ‘negotiated’ and ‘oppositional’ interpretations of messages in his 1973 argument “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse” – an essay which was a driving force for the explosion of Cultural Studies scholarship in the years that followed.\(^{55}\) Since the turn to ‘active audience’ thinking, some


\(^{55}\) Hall’s essay, in a revised form, has been anthologized repeatedly; see, for example: Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 90-103. Lynne Kirby insinuates that the association of cinema with hypnosis reached its peak (or nadir, if you prefer) at approximately the same time, in the 1970s publications of Raymond Bellour. Parts 3 and 4 of Will
scholars have begun to study elements of the cinema experience which, while they do not determine, can at least delimit interpretive freedom. A foundational text in this line was Lawrence W. Levine’s *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, in which he asserted that the distinction between high-class and popular American culture emerged over the course of the 19th century, resulting in the ”sacralization” of high culture as inherently valuable and deserving of reverence and respect. This cultural hierarchy became a fundamental interpretive frame in consumption of cultural works.  

Silent era studies have also pursued this notion productively. Various scholars have studied the American film industry’s quest for respectability in the mid-1910s, which had the ultimate goal of rebranding the cinema experience as a highbrow entertainment. As this attempt at rebranding the experience of cinema became more and more successful, it acted as a frame on interpretation, skewing the viewer’s reading towards artistic appreciation. Kathryn Fuller-Seeley has studied the development of storefront theater advertising during the early silent era, asserting that the content of film posters helped to train audiences how to view the content

---


on the screen.\textsuperscript{58} Richard Abel has asserted that the production of Westerns, for example, was part of a concerted effort to train viewers to notice, and appreciate, that American films were American made and thus attuned to American beliefs.\textsuperscript{59} Research into the theory of the ‘balanced program’ – in which more sedate, intellectual and ‘educational’ films were used to avoid “continual stimulation from exciting dramas,” and thus (in theory) gave the program a psychologically comfortable flow of tones – has even provided some knowledge of how silent era American film practitioners themselves conceived of factors which influenced viewer reception.\textsuperscript{60} As such, scholars have provided a significant working knowledge of the contextual elements of interpretation in American silent theaters.

We can add to this work on silent era context through a study of cinema advertising. A glaring absence in research into American silent era interpretation and framing is the structuring presence (and equally structuring absence) of direct consumer-goods advertising within the cinema space. In the transitional era, a large number of cinema fans and practitioners accepted without question the notion that the presence of advertising in the cinema theater would influence the viewer’s interpretation of the films and the experience. Generally this sense of the intertextual impact of advertising was linked overtly to a Levine-esque cultural hierarchy, in which advertising was described as ‘degrading’ to the cinema experience. The marginalization of advertising is a moment in which the mainstream film industry asserted that advertising


content, specifically, would not be allowed to delimit the viewer’s interpretive independence. Commerce was to remain outside of the experience; the cinema was a place to escape from exhortations to consume.

Tightly connected to research into the vagaries of audience reception and interpretive framing, is research into exhibition – particularly the variations in silent cinema exhibition practices. Early scholarship on the American silent cinema was predominantly concerned with national norms of exhibition. As such, the turn to the feature film model of exhibition, the formation of large chains of theaters, the construction of palatial theaters, and the vertical integration of the industry (in which the major studios took over the chains) were all studied as elements in the creation of the ‘classical Hollywood cinema’ model – the homogenization of American cinema culture. Recent scholarship into the silent era has begun to stress the vagaries of this transition, pointing to the prevalence of old and alternative exhibition practices alongside the mainstream palatial model. The particularities of segregation have allowed for significant research into the fragmentation of American silent era exhibition. Mary Carbine, Gregory A. Waller, and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart have all studied the ways in which segregated and exclusively black theaters provided unique experiences for the audiences within them. Ben Singer has shown that the transition from the ‘variety program’ of shorts to the ‘feature program’ took place over a number of years, indicating that, between 1914 and 1918,


both ‘feature program’ and ‘variety program’ houses were in operation simultaneously.63 Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley has differentiated between rural and urban exhibition models over the course of the 1910s, arguing that nickelodeon-style exhibition continued in rural areas until the studios made a concerted effort to link palatial exhibition with ‘quality’ cinema. In this same work, Fuller-Seeley also points to the importance of regional variations (like the South’s pioneering use of air-conditioning) and movements for non-theatrical screenings (like the censored and/or ‘educational’ church and school shows) to the exhibition culture(s) of the 1910s.64 Richard deCordova’s earlier research into children’s matinees provides further information on the proliferation of censored shows.65 With the recent turn to regional and local studies of American cinema, significant research into ‘educational’ film exhibitions in non-theatrical spaces has also been done.66 We now have a sense that the transitional era was one of various interlocking exhibition cultures, in which a number of key determining factors – including race, censorship, region, etc. – are important to understanding any individual exhibition site.

My research adds another element to our knowledge of the ways in which exhibition practices in the American silent cinema were fragmented. Much like Fuller-Seeley’s notion that rural cinema practices were increasingly derided as culturally inferior to the urban palatial cinemas, the theaters which chose to integrate consumer goods advertising into the experience –

whether it be through slides, trailers, or offscreen technologies – came under increasing attack as well. As it became more and more common to assert that direct advertising within the cinema space was not in keeping with the ‘dignity’ of motion picture exhibition, both the integration and rejection of advertising became a point of distinction for American silent theaters of the 1910s. Those theaters which rejected cinema advertising often publicized their decision boisterously. Thus, whether or not a given theater included advertising was an important distinguishing element.

Comparatively recently, scholarly studies of production and exhibition cultures have coalesced into broader studies of the industrial structure of media. In general, media industries scholarship focuses on production cultures and the elements which impact the creation of media forms and content. \(^{67}\) For example, Michael Curtin has argued for the importance of regional specificity to production cultures in, for example, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Hong Kong. \(^{68}\) A common topic of study in media industries research is the importance of advertising dollars to production. Philip M. Napoli, Robert McChesney, and the team of David Croteau and William Hoynes, have variously studied the ways in which advertising becomes entwined with media like radio and television. The ‘dual market model’ of business, in which content is sold to viewers in order to sell viewer numbers to advertisers, can skew production towards the (presumed) tastes of popular target audiences. \(^{69}\) Although media industries studies are not exclusively focused on

---


contemporary events, historical research is less common. In many ways, the first three volumes of Scribner’s “History of the American Cinema” series remain the best reference texts for the American silent cinema as an industry, as their wide ranging contents provide easy access to broad knowledge of the American film business.\(^\text{70}\) While most of the previously cited work in silent cinema deal, partially, with culture and aesthetics as industrially determined, book length research explicitly focused on the industrial structure of the silent cinema remains rare. Tino Balio studied the development of the American cinema from a historical angle in 1976, stressing the importance of transitional era events like the developing hierarchy of theaters, and the competing groups of the Motion Picture Patents Company and the Independent film producers.\(^\text{71}\) Janet Staiger’s portion of the 1985 study *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* extended our understanding of the evolution of the American industry through a discussion of the shifting production models common to studio filmmaking, and how the alterations in the structures of power impacted production.\(^\text{72}\) Staiger’s later research into the adaptation of advertising practices for film marketing added further detail to our understanding of the growth of American film as a cultural industry.\(^\text{73}\) The institutionalization and competitive conditions of transitional era cinema are thus relatively well understood, even if the information is dispersed.

A study of cinema advertising in the 1910s adds helpfully to the discussion, in that it brings one particular conversation from media industries scholarship – advertising and its impact

---


on industry structure and content production – into an arena where it has been largely left aside. As a rapidly marginalized practice in the American cinema, research into early cinema advertising has remained limited – likely under the assumption that cinema advertising failed to gain significant traction in this medium, and that it thus had no significant impact. However, it is my contention that, since the development of advertising as an industry in late 19th century America, all American mass media have negotiated their own relationship to the dual-market model. There is no medium that is outside of the advertising question in a market economy where media operate as private, for-profit businesses. For a significant stretch of time, the cinema was a prominent example not of the absence of advertising, but of a large-scale rejection of it. As such, debates over cinema advertising add greatly to our understanding of the early institutionalization of the medium in this country. As exhibition culture was still seeking its stable form, practices of financing were in flux; it was not entirely clear that ticketing and concessions would be the predominant means of funding the cinema experience, as exhibitors attempted many means to underwrite cinema expenses. The marginalization of direct advertising was, thus, as important as the acceptance of advertising would have been; it was a conscious response to a question which demanded an answer.

*Literature Review: Advertising History*

While this study of cinema advertising adds an easily identifiable component to extant transitional era cinema scholarship, what it offers to advertising scholarship is both more subtle and more modest. In the early decades of the 20th century, cinema advertising in the United States was a marginal practice dominated by upstarts and charlatans. However, as we have learned from scholarship on failure, the historical importance of a venture is measured not by its
institutional or financial success, but the way it connects to ideas. In short, this dissertation helps to smooth the historical progression from printed messages – be they distributed through periodicals, billboards, or printed lithographs and novelties – to the ‘moving media’ of radio and television. Although radio itself had a long transition from agency indifference to agency domination, radio research tells only a part of the story. Experimentation and disillusionment with moving media occurred in the American cinemas of the 1910s. Arising at a moment when the American advertising industry was in significant flux, this history of American cinema advertising adds helpfully to our understanding of the redefinition of advertising in American culture over the 1910s, and the ways in which this decade set the terms for the new debates of 1920s. Three topics of study in previous advertising scholarship are thus central to this work: institutionalization of the advertising industry as an adjunct to industrial manufacturing, theories of audience hostility and how to overcome it, and theories of medium form and advertising placement.

Modern scholarly studies of the institutionalization of American advertising begin with the pioneering work of Daniel Pope and Quentin J. Schultze. Pope, in his 1983 study, The Making of Modern Advertising, persuasively argued that the rise of modern advertising agencies was directly tied to the rise of large industrial manufacturing. Pope’s work reveals two important elements underlying the institutionalization of the ‘full-service agency,’ which provided copy writing, market research, and placement services: the need of large-scale manufacturers to create, rather than follow, demand; and the financial benefits of having middle men create, coordinate, and negotiate vast campaigns.\textsuperscript{74} Quentin J. Schultze, whose research was roughly

contemporaneous with Pope, studied the latter stages of institutionalization, when agencies attempted to gain ‘professional’ status. Schultze argues that the industry encouraged the growth of advertising as a part of college curriculums, intending to improve the sense that advertising was a legitimate profession, complete with its own high-level skills and training.\textsuperscript{75} In a study of the trade journal \textit{Judicious Advertising}, Schultze also revealed that, by the first half of the 1910s, the opinion that advertisers held of advertising was clearly on the rise, indicating that the public relations campaign was having positive impact on the agent/client relationship.\textsuperscript{76} Roland Marchand helped to clarify the master-narrative of American advertising development through an analysis of the conflicting theories of advertising active in the early 20th century. Marchand differentiated between the thinking of what he termed the ‘real pros,’ who saw the value of advertising solely in financial terms, and the ‘uplifters,’ who believe that advertising should serve the needs of education, public service, and cultural uplift. In short, as advertising institutionalized, an internal schism developed around whether or not advertising should aim for a highbrow aesthetic.\textsuperscript{77} Cynthia B. Meyers’ recent research into early radio has shown the persistence of this particular conflict, as ‘real pro’ and ‘uplift’ advertisers had different notions of the value of the medium.\textsuperscript{78} Pamela Walker Laird added the element of medium specificity to the


complexities of advertising’s institutionalization with her 1998 book *Advertising Progress*. Laird asserted that periodical-oriented agencies became the central figures in American advertising by engaging in direct competition with billposters and job printers. By directly attacking the use of other forms, while simultaneously engaging in a massive public relations campaign describing periodical advertising as trustworthy, moral, and helpful, agencies consolidated power not simply through the appeals Pope identified, but through a competitive campaign to boost the perceived merits of their offerings.\(^{79}\) In her 2004 book *Buyways*, Catherine Gudis studied the standardization of practices in the billboard industry specifically, providing clear evidence of the distinct challenges each branch of the advertising industry faced in becoming an accepted part of the market matrix. For example, a central crisis for early billposting was the likelihood that any given advertisement would be covered or torn down within minutes of being posted; it was not until 1909 that the national Association required billboard companies to contract only for “listed and protected showings.”\(^{80}\) In sum, industrial studies of the American advertising industry provide a sense of an industry simultaneously institutionalizing and remaining deeply divided by both medium selection and theories of persuasion.

Closely connected to the professionalization and institutionalization of particular branches of the advertising industry, is the public standing of advertising with its audience. It was not solely advertisers who had to be convinced that advertising men were useful. In the political atmosphere of muckraking literature and Progressive political action, the general public – which tended to see advertising in relation to patent medicine or P.T. Barnum’s circus hokum –

---


was increasingly hostile. Advertising as an encouragement to consume has been a part of sociological criticism of American culture since at least 1899, when Thorstein Veblen described the acquisition of particular goods by the rich as ‘conspicuous consumption.’ A number of contemporary scholars have approached the public acceptance of advertising as part of the ideological growth of a consumer culture, often analyzing how copy trends dovetailed with urban modernity: such as T.J. Jackson Lears’ notion that the tone was ‘therapeutic’ and designed to meet the emotional needs of modern, urban life. More important to this study than large-scale shifts in cultural ideology are the various ways in which advertising men consciously attempted to defuse or pre-empt public hostility. The ‘Truth in Advertising’ movement represented industry concerns about audience hostility writ large and acted, as Pamela Walker Laird has asserted, as a public-relations campaign to “advertise advertising.” Research into industrial practices also provides numerous examples of smaller, more specific efforts to give particular types of advertising positive connotations. Often these efforts were attempts to associate advertising with ‘public service.’ Richard Ohmann’s research into the emergence of mass magazines, which were sold below cost and derived a profit through advertising, has shown that audience hostility can be circumvented through direct reference to the audience’s pocketbooks. Though the magazines were not free, the reduction in subscription cost, combined with a simultaneous increase in quality, was enough to make the advertising appear to be providing a

---

literally valuable service. Laird has asserted that the late 19th century explosion of lithography as an advertising medium was largely due to the vast circulation that could be attained through distributing artwork to merchants and consumers for free, “[i]n a culture not yet saturated with manufactured images.” Although, as Laird says, there are no records for advertising work at this date, the democratization of art images through advertising lithography has the appearance of intent, not accident; courting a culture of image ownership was the lithograph equivalent of boosting circulation. More obvious are the actions of the billboard industry, where public hostility towards ‘defamation of the landscape’ was a persistent problem. Throughout the 1910s, as Catherine Gudis asserts, billboard companies began filling unsold billboard space with pleasurable content (such as nativity scenes for the Christmas season), and advertisers began weaving elements of practical use value – such as thermometers, clocks, and tourist information – into their advertisement. Studies of radio and television again provide evidence of the continuation of such thinking. Alexander Russo discusses the “Bulova Time Signal” of American radio – a regular announcement of the current time, overtly sponsored by Bulova watches. In short, the use of advertisements themselves, ad space, or public rhetoric to encourage a sense that advertising provided a public service was a widespread tactic for defusing audience hostility towards advertising.

87 Alexander Russo, Points on the Dial: Golden Age Radio Beyond the Networks (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 115. See also: Cynthia B. Meyers’ assertion that free radio was viewed, by the networks themselves, as a public service which would produce “subconscious good will”: A Word From Our Sponsor: Admen, Advertising, and the Golden Age of Radio, manuscript, 57.
This dissertation can add helpfully to this literature on the rise in the standing of advertising among both clients and the public, as the experience of silent era American cinema advertisers provides a significant example of the extreme difficulties faced in earning the approval of these groups. For cinema advertisers, precedents in viewer appeasement were problematic at best. Theaters already featured very low pricing; as such, cinema advertisers could not claim a demonstrable impact on prices without subsidizing the experience completely through the creation of free-theaters. Charitable or public service use of space was equally problematic for two reasons. First, demand for space dramatically exceeded supply; thus, in this environment, utilizing limited space for public service displays was unlikely. Second, unlike billboards, which were the possessions of the billboard companies, theaters were independent entities; as such, even when public service imagery – like Liberty Loan advertising – was integrated, it was the exhibitors, not the cinema advertisers, which received the praise. The only means concocted at the time to concretely link cinema advertising to public service were sponsored time-pieces, produced both as onscreen slides and fully-functioning offscreen wall installations. When the mainstream film industry began overtly deriding advertising as a piece of its own public relations campaign – asserting that advertising was explicitly degrading to highbrow cinema – cinema advertisers effectively lost the battle, and were pushed into “hole in the wall type” of theaters for decades. In short, the thorniness of entrenched cultural hostility towards advertising becomes much more apparent when one studies a branch of the industry which failed to effectively combat it. In the absence of a sense of significant public service, and with no public support from the film industry, cinema advertising was left out of the general trend towards greater respect for advertising. As such, this cinema oriented study of advertising adds some important context to the early 20th century public relations efforts by the advertising
industry. The parallel efforts of the film industry and the advertising industry to climb the cultural hierarchy became, in the limited arena of cinema advertising, conflicting goals. Public hostility towards cinema advertising did not simply remain active; it was intentionally increased by the film industry. Though the advertising industry in general improved its standing in this era, the mainstream cultural sense that cinema advertising was conducted by parasites and charlatans, by and large, remained.

Connected to the issues of client and audience appeals, is the ever expanding literature on the relationship between media, advertising form, and viewer acceptance. Scholarly interest in the relationship between form and response dates at least to 1914, when Hugo Münsterberg published an aggressive critique of magazine advertising; asserting that it should always be restricted to a ‘bookend’ position before and after the traditional content, Münsterberg argued that interleaving advertising with content produced “a sermon of bewilderment and scramble,” and had a devastating impact on a reader’s psychological well-being.88 Recent scholarly studies have frequently focused on the thorny problems of spatial and temporal sequencing in electronic media. Cynthia B. Meyers has shown that a subset of advertising men at the J. Walter Thompson Company were indifferent to radio in the 1920s because they doubted that indirect, good will advertising was effective enough to justify the cost of program production. In this case, a doubtful audience response was cause to question the sponsorship model.89 Alexander Russo asserts that the growth of ‘spot’ advertising in daytime radio was directly connected to the shifting sense of the prevalence of inattention; if daytime listeners were not suitably focused on

88 Hugo Münsterberg, “Social Sins in Advertising,” Psychology and Social Sanity (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1914), 237. In 1996, Ellen Gruber Garvey proposed, alternatively, that the interleaving of advertising and content in magazines was actually one of its most successful features, as it linked women’s experience of magazines to the “moment-by-moment multiple focus [female consumers] were already familiar with as department store shoppers.” Ellen Gruber Garvey, The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.
89 Cynthia B. Meyers, A Word From Our Sponsor: Admen, Advertising, and the Golden Age of Radio, manuscript, 71.
the programs, then the risk of alienating viewers through hard-sell spot advertising was considered to be a better than the risk of more subtle soft-sell advertising being missed.\textsuperscript{90} In the wake of the digital transition in media, such concerns have taken on a sense of urgency. As Amanda Lotz has said, digital technologies and ‘spot’ skipping through DVR has shaken television advertising out of “fifty years of complacency,” as placement, sponsorship, and new spatial tactics (like the corner ‘bug’) now appear better suited to contemporary television viewing patterns than the traditional 30-second spot.\textsuperscript{91} As the newest and therefore least settled medium, research into internet advertising formats has received perhaps the most attention. See, for example, the avalanche of research into ‘banner blindness’ – the fear that a magazine-esque direct advertisement in the margins of a website will be ignored – includes research not only on the applicability of the form, but even screen positioning.\textsuperscript{92} Through these studies it is clear that, in ‘transitional eras’ for any medium, advertising methods are subject to wholesale rethinking.

This dissertation adds to the existing literature by providing a thick description of the variety of tactics proposed in the era of cinema advertising’s advent. A broad array of possible


advertising methods arose for cinema use. Some methods treated the cinema like a projected magazine, inserting direct advertising as pauses in the flow. Other methods treated the cinema like a single entertainment, inserting indirect advertising – through product placement and sponsorship – into the flow of otherwise entertainment oriented films. Some cinema advertising proponents even treated the cinema walls like the outside environs, proposing to erect lighted billboards around the periphery of the cinema screen, as though the moving pictures were like passing scenery outside a train window. The indeterminate position of cinema as an advertising medium – with both temporal and spatial locations for advertising – produced an array of conflicting, but equally plausible, interpretations of cinema spectatorship. This study of the thinking of the silent cinema era provides a clear precursor to later debates about electronic media. Temporal rather than spatial advertising grew to dominate the thinking of the time, but national circulation was a persistent problem. As such, experience and frustration with rigid temporal restrictions – what the J. Walter Thompson Company criticized as broadcasting’s ‘fleeting’ nature – began with the silent cinema.

*Literature Review: Silent Era Cinema Advertising*

A small, but growing body of research has already begun to fill this gap and connect the early 20th century American cinema and advertising industries. The early days of in-cinema advertising are not entirely undiscovered country. Beginning in star studies, with research into testimonials and the ‘halo effect’ of stardom,93 scholars have expanded research into American silent era product advertising to include multiple forms of in-cinema advertising. Two particular

---

forms have received the bulk of attention: product/brand placement (and the related practice of sponsorship), and industrial/educational films.

As the only book length study focusing exclusively on cinematic permutations of advertising, Kerry Segrave’s book, *Product Placement in Hollywood Films: A History*, is the widest ranging take, as yet, on the topic. Covering just over 100 years of cinema advertising – focusing, as the title would suggest, on product placement – Segrave’s book provides a good starting point for future studies. Despite devoting only sixteen pages to the thirty years of silent cinema, Segrave manages to cover many of the high point, including both tactics (lantern slides, trailers, industrial films, product placement) and theories (such as the rising faith that ‘trade follows the film,’ and the notion that placement was an abuse of the exhibitor – which culminated in an official ban on paid product placement, by Will Hays, in 1922). 94 Indeed, this split between swelling advertiser interest and equally increasing exhibitor reticence was the central reason for the proliferation of tactics in the era, as advertisers tried many different approaches in an effort to find a workable model. Despite the value of Segrave’s work, however, the analysis can be expanded significantly. 95

Jean-Marc Lehu, and the team of Jay Newell, Charles T. Salmon, and Susan Chang have both provided valuable expansions to the analysis of the growth of product placement in the

---


95 One example of the limitations of Segrave’s brevity will suffice. In focusing on such a broad swath of time, constraint on both research time and publication space, and related issues caused by primary source selection (the trade journal *Variety* – which spans much of cinema history – is Segrave’s primary source), resulted in some incomplete or erroneous information. For example, it is clear that the industrial film work of Universal was discussed rarely in *Variety*. Segrave mentions the film *The Yanks Are Coming* (1918) as though it was Universal’s only foray into industrial advertising films. In fact, Universal had an entire Industrial Department, headed by Harry Levey, and was one of the major players in Industrial production between 1917 and 1919. Universal, under Levey, may in fact have been the primary cause of the short-lived late 1910s boom in industrial filmmaking. Universal had a much higher profile in the advertising trade journals *Printers’ Ink* and *Advertising & Selling* than they had in entertainment industry oriented journals like *Moving Picture World* and *Variety*. Kerry Segrave, *Product Placement in Hollywood Films: A History* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, 2004), 12, 15.
silent era. Lehu, with a practitioner’s interest in placement (resulting in both an extremely brief analysis of the history and an unfortunate lack of concrete examples), asserts that filmic product placement had important precursors in 19th century stage theater, citing (but not dating) a Sarah Bernhardt performance. Lehu thus helps to link cinema advertising to longer traditions in American advertising practice.\footnote{Jean-Marc Lehu, \textit{Branded Entertainment: Product Placement \\& Brand Strategy in the Entertainment Business} (London and Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2007), 17.} Newell, Salmon, and Chang have more helpfully added significant nuance to our knowledge of the permutations of transitional era placement, arguing that its development was largely a means of subsidizing early film production, as ‘tie-ups’ could provide props and result in the circulation of film stills (which would help market the film), both with no direct cost to the studio. The watershed moment was the Edison Company’s passenger rail placement, which occurred repeatedly (52 films) in the first decade of cinema, in exchange for which the company received free transportation for its camera crews. Newell, Salmon, and Chang likewise connect the struggles of product placement to exhibition culture, indicating that placement was “controversial almost from the start,” and that “negative reactions…from theater owners, foreign distributors, and motion picture critics…dr[o]ve [it] underground.”\footnote{Jay Newell, Charles T. Salmon, and Susan Chang, “The Hidden History of Product Placement,” \textit{Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media} 50.4 (December 2006): 580, 586-587. It is unclear from the authors’ word choice exactly what they mean by ‘underground.’ My presumption is that they mean coerced and non-reciprocal placement, like the example of the Lux Soap campaign studied briefly by Jane Gaines. In the Lux campaign, J. Walter Thompson provided free soap to Hollywood actresses in order to sow the seeds for a massive collection of testimonials. What Gaines does not reveal in her essay is that, after a time, brand placement occurred in films as a consequence of this action, despite the lack of a direct request from J. Walter Thompson. By 1928, there were two films (one in release, and one then still in production) which Lux Toilet Sopa appeared positively in the inter-titles “purely as a voluntary gesture.” Jane Gaines, “From Elephants to Lux Soap: The Programming and ‘Flow’ of Early Motion Picture Exploitation,” \textit{Velvet Light Trap} 25 (Spring 1990): 29-43. “Special Production and Representatives’ Meeting – Monday, April 9, 1928,” p. 11, Box 1, J. Walter Thompson Company, Howard Henderson Papers, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book \\& Manuscript Library, Duke University. Though the comparison is never direct in their paper, the motion picture experience clearly prefigured later television battles over product placement, in which unpaid advertising was “seen as a threat to the existing revenue stream.” The same could be said of silent era exhibitors, who, as we shall see, were deeply afraid of advertising’s possible impact on box office receipts.} Knowledge of this reluctance provides two important elements for a study of cinema advertising: first, stagnation of the cinema advertising industry likely resulted primarily from exhibitor, not
production company, pressure; second, opposition to product placement gave impetus to the experimentation with the direct advertising tactics to be discussed in this study – tactics which included payment to exhibitors for their screen time. As such, the history of early product placement is foundational for a study of direct advertising, in which the exhibitors – so concerned about studios profiting from their screens without sharing the revenue – were paid directly for the use of the screen.

Though product placement remains one of the most important elements of cinema advertising practice, in the past few years the lion’s share of attention has been given to a common, but until recently understudied, alternative in silent cinemas: industrial films (educational films produced specifically for advertising value). Drawing attention initially via the pioneering work of both collector Rick Prelinger and NYU’s Orphan Films Symposium, the industrial film has emerged as one of the focal points in scholarly studies of non-theatrical and local film practice. Studies of industrial films have helpfully stressed the importance of context, rather than aesthetics, to the study of advertising oriented films. This research is helping to pave the way for future work by theorizing methodology. For example, in the edited collection Films That Work, multiple interpretive schema are proposed which are helpful for the broader study of cinema advertising: most notably Thomas Elsaesser’s tripartite focus on the ‘commissioning/funding,’ ‘purpose,’ and ‘addressee’ of such films (or, what he terms the

98 Note, specifically, Stephen Bottomore’s claim that “in the realm of non-fiction film…what a film is is more important than how it is.” Martin L. Johnson relies on a similar sense of contextual importance in his claim that “most municipal advertising films were exhibited in local movie theaters, and…little evidence…suggest[s] that these films received distribution elsewhere”; as such, despite production company assertions to the contrary, city booster films are better seen as local films than national advertisements courting migration. Indeed, Lynne Kirby’s study of gender roles in early advertising shorts is a rare example of a study of cultural context is used to explain advertising content, as opposed to explaining its very existence. Stephen Bottomore, “Rediscovering Early Non-Fiction Film,” Film History 13.2 (2001): 169; Martin L. Johnson, “‘Boost Your Town in the Movies’: Municipal Film Companies in the United States, 1910-1917,” Beyond the Screen: Institutions, Networks and Publics of Early Cinema, ed. Marta Braun, Charlie Keil, Rob King, Paul Moore, and Louis Pelletier (London: John Libbey Publishing Ltd., 2012), 288; and Lynne Kirby, “Gender and Advertising in American Silent Film: From Early Cinema to the Crowd,” Discourse 13.2 (Spring/Summer 1991): 3-20.
Auftraggebur, Anlass, and Addressat – the “three A’s”), and Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vondereau’s “three R’s” (the corporate values of recording, rhetoric, and rationalization).  

Beyond methodology, research into industrial and sponsored films has provided indications of their importance to cinema aesthetics and exhibition. In the realm of aesthetics, Stephen Bottomore has asserted that the development of mainstream documentary cannot be understand without a knowledge of such advertising inflected precursors as “travelogues, industrials and educational films,” and their use in the building of balanced programs throughout the 1910s.  

Lee Grieveson similarly encourages us to see Ford films as central to the growth of an American filmic address promoting both industrialization and consumption as redeeming values.  

From an exhibition standpoint, Joseph Corn has connected the industrial advertising style to the notion that cinema audiences are active and irritable, and in need of courting. For Corn, successful theatrical circulation of advertising films was only attainable when advertisers learned to use indirect methods, stressing educational content rather than “bludgeon[ing] viewers” with a direct sales exhortation.

In short, the various studies of the growth of product placement and industrial films – though their number remains limited – provide a number of valuable foundational concepts. These studies stress the importance of audience irritation to the stagnation of in-cinema

99 Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vondereau, eds., Films that Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 10-11, 23, 40. Although their foci are broader (non-theatrical films, rather than industrial films), two further essay collections have also added helpfully to the discussion: Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible, eds., Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, eds., Useful Cinema (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).


advertising practice, indicate that a history of exhibitor hostility towards advertising may play an important role, and encourage a focus on contextual issues (including not only what advertisers hoped to gain from a given film, but what exhibitors and audiences might have hoped to gain from viewing or refusing to view such films). Despite these previous studies, however, the bigger picture remains under-researched. What relationships drove the proliferation of product advertising tactics in the silent era? Was there a pattern of development, or were all tactics experimented with simultaneously? And what elements of American cinema history led to the failure and marginalization of certain models and the partial acceptance of others? The following study is an effort to answer these question, as the three little studied direct advertising tactics (lantern slides, consumer goods trailers, and offscreen advertising techniques), when analyzed in parallel, add significantly to our understanding of the ebbs and flows of cinema advertising theory and practice during its formative years between 1908 and 1922.

Scaffolds and Structure

This project is a model of the type of research now possible with internet based archiving. While terrestrial holdings provided important content – including Duke University’s complete run of Printers’ Ink during this date range – this research was simplified significantly by Google and by the Internet Archive. The scanned materials from the Media History Digital Library

103 Lynne Kirby avers that “[b]y the 1920s, advertising in film had become less a relation of direct use of film as a marketing tool and more one of either subtle placement within the film narrative, or more overt incorporation into the diegesis.” Kirby leaves unanswered the question of just how far into the margins tactics other than product placement had been pushed, and what exactly drove them to this fate. Lynne Kirby, “Gender and Advertising in American Silent Film: From Early Cinema to the Crowd,” Discourse 13.2 (Spring/Summer 1991): 5.

104 Jim Loter briefly referenced trailers in his web-published article “Early Motion Pictures and the ‘De-Rationalization’ of Advertising” (http://www.jimloter.com/essays/early.html) though without great detail. Kerry Segrave mentioned both slides and trailers in his chapter on the silent era, but offered little data. My own article “Profit Margins: Silent Era Precursors of Online Advertising Tactics” (Film History 24.1 [2012]: 82-96) is the only published study of offscreen tactics. Concordia University doctoral candidate Matthew Ogonoski is currently researching the later history of ‘minute movies’ (another name for commercial trailers) more fully; his 2013 SCMS paper “Minute Movies and the Divergence of Commercial Film from Commercial Advertising in Early Cinema” is an early piece of the project.
provided an invaluable repository of motion picture industry trade papers like *Moving Picture World* and *Motography*, in a searchable format so that minor references to particular terms like ‘trailer’ and ‘slide’ would not be missed. ProQuest provided the same value for searching old issues of *Billboard*. Google’s ‘Book Search’ likewise provided significant searchable access to advertising trades like *Printers’ Ink* and *Advertising & Selling*, which pinpointed a number of articles and display advertisements which made only casual reference to cinema advertising, while their ‘Patent Search’ allowed me to easily find motion picture theater related patents which would otherwise have remained in the dustbin of history. Online newspaper holdings at ProQuest, though not frequently used here, added the occasional nuance. Without full-text-searchable online archives, this dissertation would have required unwieldy research time and would likely have been abandoned as an unworkable concept.

This wealth of digitized trade materials – ranging from theoretical articles, to diatribes of condemnation, to self-advertising from cinema oriented ad men – is unfortunately balanced by a corresponding absence: there are virtually no internal business materials to draw from. Only the Alexander Film Company material held in Colorado Springs, the collection of Kansas City Slide Company catalogs in Kansas City, and the (extremely small) collection of Publicity Clock Company trade materials held by Duke University provided significant information. Large and promising archival holdings of advertising papers, like the J. Walter Thompson archive at Duke University, turned out to contain very little of use, as mainstream advertising agencies were, by their own description, apathetic about cinema at this early date.\(^{105}\)

---

\(^{105}\) Mr. Kimball, “Industrial Film Facts as of March 12, 1929,” p. 10, Box 1, Folder 7 “1929 Jan 4 – April 17,” J. Walter Thompson Company, Staff Meeting Minutes, 1927-1938, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. The reasons, though not made explicit in the document in which this assertion is made, parallel early agency disinterest in the billboard industry. There were concerns over the perceived classlessness of the cinema, uncertainty over whether or not paid advertising would be made properly visible, and the absence of a central authority through which large-scale space-buying could be made for national campaigns. Until the film
As an industrial history, therefore, the primary documentation is imperfect, as no income figures or internal strategy discussions can be cited. The material was simply never archived, except for the few pieces of pre-1930s material in the Alexander Industries holdings. It would take a heroic effort to even determine incorporation and dissolution dates for the nearly 200 businesses mentioned in these pages. As such, much of the argument to come is inferred from the swelling and receding quantities of trade-press advertising, persuasive claims made in the copy of these advertisements, and more nuanced discussions from trade articles. This is an approach fraught with unsolvable problems. How much of self-advertising copy was false, or at least inflated rhetoric? Does a decrease of self-advertising mean that a business was at risk of failure (lack of advertising budget) or that it was flourishing (operating at peak capacity would leave no value to further advertising)? How much of the difference in rhetoric is attributable to changes over time and how much is simply regional or personal variance in opinion?

Even more problematically, the internal politics of industries and trade presses could have dramatically impact what was discussed. The trade presses, in deference to their own circulation numbers, had reason to minimize discussion of issues deemed both sensitive and trite by the mainstream of their industry. It is plausible, then, that the contours of the discourse are skewed by prominent journals pushing particular agendas about cinema advertising. The *Moving Picture World*, for example, seems to have devoted less time to the topic of cinema advertising than it might—publishing regular columns from Epes Winthrop Sargent and F.H. Richardson (both of whom opposed the commercialization of cinema) but featuring a dearth of articles in which cinema advertising men were allowed to speak directly. Even more compelling is the case of *Nickelodeon* (which became *Motography* in 1911) which published articles by industrial film industry could prove broad class based appeal, and exhibitors began to band together and offer guaranteed advertising space at predictable prices, the established agencies considered the medium too unsettled to bother with.
producer Watterson R. Rothacker roughly twice per month for more than two years (from 14 January 1911 to 5 April 1913), after which point discussion of the topic occurred significantly less frequently. The reason for the reduction of focus on cinema advertising is unclear, but the moment of the change is suspiciously near to the historic nadir of slide advertising. The trades thus fail to provide a reliably impartial record of cinema advertising in either their articles or display ads.

Without the ability to see internal correspondence from a suitably large number of companies, there is little opportunity to study the undercurrents and unspoken covenants driving the public face of the debate. Nor do we have the ability to study the internal contradictions and conflicts that occur within any industry. As David Hesmondhalgh has said, the media industries are “complex, ambivalent, and contested,” as various opinions exists between companies and even within an individual company. 106 Unfortunately, the extant evidence emerges almost entirely from sources which were speaking to particular public audiences. The individual, unvarnished voices are largely missing. As such, this study will, by necessity, lay perhaps undue stress on the sales rhetoric of the companies themselves, and the opinions of trade presses which may have had hidden agendas and editorial policies.

The study will proceed in five further chapters, the last of which acts as both a standalone argument and a conclusion. Chapter two sets the tone for the dissertation as a whole, providing a broader introduction to a central concept in the American advertising industry’s media proliferation: the notion of the ‘receptive mood.’ 107

---


107 In a seminal text on early advertising development, Daniel Pope asserts: “National advertising [at the turn of the century]…was not designed to eradicate free will, reason, and egalitarian social relations, nor…could it have accomplished these nefarious deeds. Crude notions of the consumer as marionette were nor more realistic than the earlier ideal of the fully autonomous individual. […] Even their…descendants today are well aware that their powers
spectator of electric media arose in response to two key elements of early twentieth century American discourse: the rise of medium specific psychology; and the notion that image based – and specifically cinematic – communication resulted in a ‘passive audience.’ The captive audience of the motion picture theater was often described as captivated by what they witnessed. Although cinematic advertising faltered, the myth of the ‘irresistible medium’ persisted. The dream of a captive and receptive audience continues to define the ad industry’s hopes for any new medium, as abandoned and marginalized cinema techniques re-emerge across the media landscape. The rise of this logic is a key legacy of silent cinema advertising. Understanding the rise and use of this rhetoric not only renders silent cinema advertising debates comprehensible, but adds important foundational knowledge to our understanding of the ways in which the American advertising industry has interacted with new media.

The remaining three body chapters predominantly function as two overlapping pairs. The first (chapters three and four) shows the rise and fall of the ‘commercial break’ model in motion picture theaters, and the methods that arose from this model. Chapter three, “The Front Cover Medium,” details the history of the so-called ‘magic lantern’ advertising slide, which opened up a space for in-cinema advertising by staking claim to the gaps which necessarily existed between films prior to the advent of the multiple-projector model of exhibition. In the early days of experimentation with this form, many nickelodeon theaters operated much like contemporary television stations, with an advertising ‘break’ at regular intervals during the entertainment – here, at the end of each roughly fifteen-minute reel. As screening spaces improved – by adding

are limited.” While this is fine as a historical overview, it writes past the experimentation with the ‘crude notions of the consumer as marionette’ which occurred in the early attempts at electronic advertising, and which continue to inform the decision making process even in the wake of a realization of ‘limited powers.’ The mythical ‘irresistible medium’ is itself an irresistible notion. A study of cinema advertising theory is, therefore, a valuable corrective the historical writing-out of the ‘zombie idea’ of the consumer marionette. Daniel Pope, The Making of Modern Advertising (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983): 15.
Chapter four, “Screen Sugar Pills,” discusses the upgrading of the ‘slide’ into the commercial film ‘trailer’ – a roughly one-minute advertisement designed to be appended to the ends of film reels – and the permanent abandonment of the regular commercial pause. As the slide faltered around 1913, the trailer form was developed to partially replace them. The shift to a multiple projector system could have allowed trailers to completely replace slides, as they would have been spliced into the program in the same places, artificially maintaining the gap between reels without forcing a pause in the projection of motion pictures. However, exhibitor reluctance, combined with the trailer producers’ need to regularize income resulted in the development of a less obtrusive model. Theaters sold a certain number of minutes of their program duration to trailer producers, and the trailer advertisements, initially conceived for piecemeal circulation, began to be screened in series of five to ten as a ‘chaser,’ indicating that the program had reached its end and was about to restart. Over the course of this process, what is recognizable as the commercial advertising ‘spot’ was developed, but almost immediately moved into a limited ‘bookend’ position in a small subset of American film theaters.

Chapter five, “Profit Margins,” provides a discussion of an alternate ‘corrective’ to the faults of slide advertising: offscreen advertising technologies patented in the 1910s and 1920s. Although they were only rarely integrated into cinema spaces – and remain little used in the

---

108 Effectively, film became a temporally bound, 20th century version of 19th century magazine culture, where space-brokering contracts allowed agents (in this case the trailer producers themselves) to sell a certain amount of space, usually restricted to advertising sections bookending the content.
contemporary resurgence of cinema advertising – lighted clocks, lighted signs, wall units, branded trash bins, and other elements of cinema advertising at the periphery of the screen, were created to stress the interactivity of the theatrical space. Designed as alternative sites of visual stimulation, offscreen advertising was not only a conciliatory gesture in response to audience desires not to have advertising forced upon their attention, but also a means to provide potential secondary entertainments. When paired with the analysis of slides in chapter three, the history of peripheral advertising technologies provides evidence of an alternative argument arising in the realm of moving advertising, in which ad content was nearly literalized as billboards at the edge of a viewer’s celluloid based ‘travels.’

Chapter six, “The Cinema Wants to Be Free,” wraps up the study with a discussion of the various attempts to use direct advertising tactics to create a free, fully advertiser-funded cinema. Ranging from simple coupon models, to television-like collections of shorts interspersed with long commercial breaks, a minority of film advertising proponents encouraged the marginalization of the ticket price, rather than the marginalization of advertising, as a way to solve the persistent problem of spectator irritation. Had either of these models become the common method of cinema spectatorship, film culture would have developed in a way parallel with television and internet content distribution, with ‘free’ content underwritten by the intrusion of direct advertising messages. The presupposition that advertising and ticketing are incompatible remains at the core of critiques about cinema advertising, and the case study in this chapter proves that the concern (and that the correlated support for advertising supported free-media) is decades old. On the heels of the discussion of free theaters, chapter six returns to the issues which have opened the dissertation, describing the multiform reasons for the partial abandonment of the cinema as an advertising medium. A coda on the contemporary rebirth of
cinema advertising will add clarity to the analysis, analyzing the important distinctions between silent era and 21st century cinema advertising which help to explain why the previously unsuccessful experiments are unexpectedly prosperous nearly a century later.
In 1925, prominent cinema exhibitor Samuel ‘Roxy’ Rothapfel co-authored a book called *Broadcasting: Its New Day*. In this book, Rothapfel declared that the newly developing medium of radio, with which he had experimented, could not use direct advertising funds to become self-sustaining on the grounds that “if you try to sell...some brand of shoes or anything else over the radio [then] you’ll have no radio audience” regardless of the non-advertising component of the programming.² While the quote makes sense as part of radio history, as the form was just then developing and Rothapfel was an early adopter, the identity of the speaker stands out. Rothapfel was, above all, a film exhibitor. To assume that his impression of direct advertising on the radio came solely from two years of radio experimentation would be ludicrous.³ Rothapfel’s opinion was formed over the course of more than a decade in the cinema.⁴ The myth of the vanishing audience, asserted so confidently at this early date – and disproven with gusto by the decades of direct advertising on American radio and television – became widely held during the 1910s through debates about the plausibility of advertising in the cinema. It was the standard rhetoric

---

² Technically Rothapfel was quoting the words of Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover here, though that does nothing to diminish his faith in the theory. Cited in Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 34.
³ Hilmes clarifies that Rothapfel’s work in radio began in 1923. As such, by the time the final manuscript was written, Rothapfel had, at best, roughly two years of experience in the field. Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 61.
⁴ See, for example, the following article from 1916, in which Rothapfel is clearly already wrestling with the issue. He expresses doubt about onscreen advertising, but is still willing, at this date, to see it as a problem whose solution is determined by local tastes: “This question of advertising is one which has to be faced and worked out by each exhibitor individually. [...] Study your patrons and you will find here the answer as to how much or how little of this advertising you should allow to be shown in your house and what method you should choose.” S.L. Rothapfel, “First Aid to Theater Men,” *Motography* 16.2 (8 July 1916): 77-78.
of men who opposed advertising in cinemas, and the certitude with which Rothapfel made the claim cannot be understood without reference to the years of debate from which it emerged. The American cinema – for Rothapfel and others – set the terms of debate for early radio advertising theory.

In this opening argument, I wish to give prominence to a particular element of the American cinema advertising debate of the 1910s – the part which was most relevant to Rothapfel’s 1925 radio claim, and which continues to inform advertising theory to new media to this day: the dialectic of the ‘captive audience’ and the ‘receptive mood.’ The belief in an inherently receptive spectator arose in response to two key elements of early discourse: the rise of medium specific psychology; and the notion that image based – and specifically cinematic – communication resulted in a ‘passive audience.’ The captive audience of the motion picture theater was often described as captivated by what they witnessed. As cinematic advertising faltered, American advertising culture normalized the assumption that pausing a public pay-per-view entertainment in order to integrate advertising was tantamount to abuse of the spectator.

Advertising was, eventually, only minimally integrated into American cinema, due to the assumption that the audience would always resist the otherwise promising techniques devised for it. Product placement, pre-feature stills, and trailers – even in 21st century America cinema advertising – are heavily delimited in deference to the likelihood of audience frustration.5 There is a tacit understanding between audiences and exhibitors that consumer-goods advertising should predominantly occur before the house lights are dimmed, with coming-attractions predominating once the house is darkened.6 Indeed, much direct advertising is screened during

the intermission between showings of the feature, when theaters are devoid of all but a handful of spectators. This placement is the legacy of more than 100 years of compromise between cinema audiences and cinema advertisers.

Medium Specific Psychology and the ‘Passive’ Cinema Spectator

In the 1910s, as the number of viable advertising mediums began to proliferate beyond the simple binary of print publications and posters, it became common in the American trade press to argue for the adoption of a specific medium through appeals to the psychology of its consumption. In 1902 the magazine *Cosmopolitan* claimed that the power of popular magazines for advertising rested in their status as “peculiarly the companion of leisure hours, when the mind is free to accept new impressions.”

Over the course of the early decades of the twentieth century, the psychology of a medium’s ‘readers’ became a common rhetorical trope. Shredded Wheat publicity director Truman A DeWeese offered an even more personal rationale in 1915, when he proclaimed that “[t]he newspaper stands first as an advertising medium because it is peculiarly a home institution and sustains an intimate relation to the family circle.” By 1920, outdoor advertisers claimed that it was not the home that created a positive psychological state for advertising, but nature which “puts people in a friendly, cheerful, optimistic frame of mind”

---

7 John Brisben Walker, “Beauty in Advertising Illustration,” *Cosmopolitan* 33 (September 1902): 491. Referenced in Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 279-280. The 1919 self-advertising for film magazine *Film Fun* is an example of the persistence of this psychological rhetoric: “[a]dress your prospect when they are in a responsive mood, in their homes, where the conversation drifts from their ‘favorite star’ to their daily needs.” Display Ad, *Advertising & Selling* 29.14 (6 September 1919): 47. Earlier competition between magazines, newspapers, and job printers, had parallels with this psychological argumentation, but the more common approach was to stress class issues. For example, see George P. Rowell’s assertion that newspaper, unlike lithographs reached “a class that…never would think of gazing into a shop window for what they desire.” Magazines were targeted and generally reached a national, affluent audience, while newsprint could reach massive local populations often regardless of class distinctions. Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 158.

and leaves them “most open to suggestion.” Strauss Theatre Programs asserted that the live theater was the best venue for advertising as it was the site of the “Emulative Attitude of Mind.” As the advertising industry expanded, and medium options grew, such theorizing was commonly seen as a viable means to attract advertisers to a given medium.

The rise of this rhetoric of receptivity coincides with the growth of a theory of image power which culminated in mid-1910s debates about cinema censorship. The psychological interpretation of film by Hugo Münsterberg, the ‘impressionability’ theory of the film reform community, and the legalese of the Mutual Decision all display an obsession with the ability of motion pictures to ‘infect’ the viewer. In short, a swelling sense of the cinema audience as the passive recipient of an ‘injection’ of pictorial information is clear in this era.

Lee Grieveson, in discussing early academic study of film in the United States, asserts that Hugo Münsterberg’s 1916 book The Photoplay was the first academic endorsement of the growing public sense that cinema was akin to hypnosis. Prior to Münsterberg’s work, numerous film reformers published arguments expounding a similar thesis. In 1909, for example, Jane Addams, organizer of the well-known Chicago reform community at Hull House, described film as a “mimic stage” which, specifically in crime films, had a pernicious influence on children.

In 1911, Reverend H.A. Jump asserted that “movies operated through ‘psychic suggestion,’ to

---


10 Full Page Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 98.6 [8 February 1917]: 40. A decided anomaly in this wave of medium psychology arguments was the Emerson Advertising Record, which was advertised as a medium which the listener would “preserve…indefinitely and repeat…over and over again to their friends.” This sense that the listener was not just receptive, but infatuated with their new technological toy and would therefore help spread the message to other receptive listeners, is unique in my research. Half-Page Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 96.5 (3 August 1916): 97.

11 It is important to note that this is largely an aspect of pop-psychology. While direct social science research at the time – and even the first hand experiences of reformers – indicated that the transfer of information from film to spectator was complicated, as a rhetorical trope and a popular faith what became known as the ‘hypodermic theory’ of media expanded dramatically in this era. For a fuller discussion of the complexity of thought at the time, see Richard Butsch, The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

put ideas in the viewer’s head without his knowing it.”

Belief in ‘impressionability’ – specifically in women, immigrants, and children – and the cinema as capable of ‘implanting’ ideas in unsuspecting viewers, steadily increased over the course of the 1910s. As Richard Butsch argues, the cinema represented the first instance in which “reformers concentrated their attention on the effect of the show rather than on the behavior in the audience as a primary concern.” Münsterberg’s book helped to institutionalize the critique as a cinema-specific concern, asserting that film spectatorship produced a mental state where ideas are “forced upon us,” and that the cinema environment produced the possibility of “psychic infection.” As Lee Grieveson has asserted, “the power of movies over subject-spectators hovers at the margins of [Münsterberg’s] account.”

What Münsterberg did for academia, the Mutual Decision (1915) did for law. With this decision, the American judicial system – while famously declaring cinema to be “a business pure and simple” – effectively codified ‘psychic infection’ theory as a legal concept. As Samantha Barbas asserts, the court rejection of film as protected speech act was, at its base, an extension of the notion that images were more manipulative than words and were prone to trump reason. The case, centering on newsreels as an argument against prior restraint, was an attempt to legally assert that film was as good, if not a better disseminator of news than print. The argument ran aground on the widespread faith that images held spellbinding powers. In the words of the court, motion pictures had a power for evil “the greater for their attractiveness and manner of exhibition.” Clarifying this interpretation, the court declared that “those who witness the [movies] are taken out of bondage to the letter and the spoken word.” Barbas is correct to assert

---

14 Ibid., 152, 157.
that this shadowy wording represented the court’s agreement with the notion that the viewing of motion pictures was, in essence, “a passive, noncognitive act.” As such, legal rhetoric paralleled the popular conceit that the cinema was a venue in which mental sponges soaked up ideas from the screen.

Of course, a reform community is a largely optimistic one; negative rhetoric is marshaled in support of a presumable positive alternative model. While it is undoubtedly true that descriptions of film “play[ing] on the keyboard of our mind[s]” have an implication of terror, the sentiments were actually expressed ambivalently. Münsterberg’s book was ultimately a defense of the film as art: a medium, unlike any other, in which reality was resequenced to match mental activity (where a close-up was the equivalent of directed attention, and a flashback was visualization of a memory link, for example). Likewise, the Mutual Decision was not designed to destroy cinema, but to allow for oversight from censors to make sure that the presentation of information was handled agreeably. Notions of an ‘injection’ of information were, even then, not a reason to abandon or destroy the cinema. Opponents simply saw the possibility of damage as evidence of the need for oversight.

Underlying all of this concern with media infection, therefore, was the reformer’s hopeful sense of cultural ‘uplift’ – the assumption that socially impactful media could be harnessed for

---


18 Hugo Münsterberg, The Photoplay: A Psychological Study (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1916), 83. Some other pertinent quotes: In film, a thought process is compulsory, as “suggestion…is forced on us” as the associations are not personal thoughts, but “something to which we have to submit” (108); it may erode “subtle sensitivities” by lurching from farce to romance (222); may stupefy the populace with “insipid” stories (225); encourage vice by glorifying crime and reducing punishment to a brief conclusion (227); and, perhaps most damning of all, the notion that “[t]he high degree of… [viewer] suggestibility during those hours in the dark house may be taken for granted” (223).
good, to ‘infect’ the viewer positively. Influence was only pernicious if it was allowed to be.

The world of film reform, arising in parallel to this ‘psychic infection’ theory in the 1910s, was the optimistic outgrowth of ‘passive spectator’ ideology. The National Board of Review, Better Films Committees, and ‘uplift’ groups nationwide waged a massive campaign for the improvement of film, designed more to elevate the masses than it was to limit the release of pernicious films. Louise Connolly, speaker on behalf of the Better Films Committee, described film as “a great new avenue for…God to pour Himself out into the genius of man for the uplift of the joy of men,” and argued strongly that the film reform community should act as “guardian angels for the motion pictures” by encouraging the production of moral films. The rise of Saturday morning, age-segregating children’s matinees, and the boom in non-theatrical educational screenings were both tied directly to this ‘uplift’ corollary to fears of cinema infection. Despite the legal standing of film censorship, the drift of public sentiment, in the upper and upper-middle class reform community, was towards reformation rather than restriction.

---

19 It should not escape our attention that the history of early film analysis has been largely written from a top down perspective – focusing on academics, lawyers, courts, and media producers. But film study arose from both the top and bottom of culture, arising also from the population (most prominently Woman’s Clubs). This bottom up history of early film study and censorship, though well documented in the archive of the National Board or Review correspondence (held at the New York Public Library), has received too little attention.


21 For children’s matinees, see: Jeremy Groskopf, “‘A Tempest in a Tub’: The Atlanta Better Films Committee and the ‘Passive’ Censorship Experiment” (M.A. thesis, Emory University, 2008).

22 This is not to imply that the drift was ‘natural.’ Indeed, it was largely the work of film industry defenders in ‘exploitation’ departments (early cinema publicity men) and the National Board of Review, who sold the notion of ‘selection – not censorship’ to the reform community in the wake of the Mutual Decision. A history of the importance of the Better Films movement (largely organized by the National Board of Review’s subcommittee the National Committee for Better Films) to this shift in public sentiment has yet to be written. Indeed, the National Board of Review correspondence is one of the great overlooked archives of film history. The Board’s correspondence is held by the New York Public Library and is open to the public, but the only book length study of their work is Charles Matthew Feldman’s dissertation from the 1970s, The National Board of Censorship (Review) of Motion Pictures, 1909-1922, which was written prior to the opening of the archive. It is my belief that the rise of the MPPDA and the hiring of Will Hays cannot be understood without full comprehension of the National Board of
As such, as the cinema was transitioning into the classical Hollywood form, it became increasingly common for parties interested in but external to the film industry to feel that film’s defining feature was an ability to bypass rational thought, and that cinema therefore had unprecedented possibilities for both social damage and social control. Although it is impossible to know just how widespread the faith became in American culture, we can safely emphasize that, over the course of the 1910s, it became increasingly common to assert that film needed a guiding hand to keep it educative rather than retrograde.\textsuperscript{23} Although this definition of the audience – to use Philip Napoli’s advertising-oriented term, this ‘predicted audience’\textsuperscript{24} – was massively out of sync with the observed audiences of the time (a distinction which will become important below), reformers turned to it time and time again as a shorthand description for cinema psychology.

\textit{The Captive Audience and Receptive Mood}

From the earliest days, the discussion of the cinema by the advertising community contained numerous references to this growing popular theory of image power. The words of professional advertising man Don Herold, in 1915, provide a well written summary of early thinking:

\begin{quote}
An advertising man ought to spend a nickel now and then and go to a picture show and sit among his parishioners. He should not only sit among them, but
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{23} A decade of full scale rhetorical warfare is being elided here, of course, as the film industry’s public attacks on the very notion of censorship, in the wake of the Mutual Decision, shifted the debate even further. It remains valid to declare that image manipulation was codified as cultural truth after 1916, and so I end there. But it is equally true that a campaign to stress individual and industrial liberty despite the danger continued to shift the terms of debate into the 1920s. See Barbas for a discussion of the rising tide of ‘free speech’ after World War I crackdowns on dissidents, as well as my own Master’s Thesis, “A Tempest in a Tub” for the ways in which film censors reconceived their work in the wake of industry attacks.

Among the many interesting turns of phrase in Herold’s article (not the least of which is the slippage between consumers and ‘parishioners’ here), is the telling insinuation that motion pictures on a screen would force a virtual cessation of all other thinking. For Don Herold, image power was an element of communicative simplification: “Good copy makes men think in pictures; good pictures make thinking easy.”

Among cinema advertisers, Herold was clearly not alone. The power of visual communication was repeatedly used to assert the supremacy of motion pictures for the purposes of advertising. The International Harvester Company used image-power as a primary argument for their film work as early as 1911, declaring that “the things we see have a habit of staying with us more clearly than the things we hear.” By 1913, the superiority of images to words had been commonly reduced, in cinema advertising circles, to the maxim that “[e]ighty-five per cent of all impressions upon which we act are received through the eye.” Hierarchical notions of imagery developed quickly as an elaboration of image-power. As cinema advertisers clearly wanted others to see film as the advertising medium par excellence, the addition of motion to images was commonly asserted as a means to increase the potency of image-based communication.

Advertising theorist Ernest A. Dench asserted that film could allow advertisers to evade the need

---

26 Ibid., 39.
28 Edwin L. Barker, “Picture and Lecture Publicity,” *Advertising & Selling* 22.10 (March 1913): 56; “Use Slides to Advertise,” *Furniture Worker* May 1920 (37.5): 178; and “Sales Manual,” p. 62, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. This should not be misinterpreted to include print, which is technically also read with the eye. The assertion, at least when made by advertising oriented individuals, was not about the superiority of the eye over the other five senses, but the superiority of images to text. If this were not the case, the claims would have no bearing on film as a medium, as all advertisements except music and voice would have technically entered through the eye.
“to compel the spectator to imagine things,” implying – as Münsterberg suggested the same year – that the motion and editing of cinema would make it possible for advertisers to construct an advertisement that would do the thinking for the spectator. Harry Levey, head of Universal’s Industrial (read: advertising film) Department, argued that “the eye is quicker than the mind,” clearly connecting the needs of advertisers to film’s supposed ability to bypass reason. A wave of other cinema advertising articles likewise described cinema advertising as a form of ‘mental photography’ for sales messages, as though moving images could circumvent critical thinking regardless of content and chemically develop advertising directly within the brain.

An outgrowth of this conception of the cinema as a copying machine (imprinting advertising information on the brain) was the cinema advertising community’s obsession with the notion of the captive audience – an idea which has since developed into not only a common idiom, but the impetus for a legal expansion of First Amendment rights. Examples of the captive audience as a marketable trait of cinema audiences appeared as early as 1910, and continued to appear in articles at least as late as 1921. The assertions ranged from the simple notion of the audience being unable to leave (without forfeiting their ticket price), to the complex assumption that viewers would stare at moving images in much the same way that moths approach flame. The trade presses of the 1910s were inundated with countless examples, many

---

32 Although the bulk of 1910s writing on the cinema as an advertising venue includes phrasing which clearly indicates that the ‘captive audience’ is conceptually on their minds, these ad men rarely use the term. It does not appear to have been in wide use as shorthand until the 1930s – the earliest use I have seen in this context is from 1938. Therefore, while I cannot definitely assert in this space that the cinema gave rise to the wide usage of the term, it remains true that the idea was central to cinema advertising discussions.
of which reduced the entire issue to the euphemism that film was “a 100% medium.”

For example, the Neosho Slide Company asserted that slides had “[n]o waste circulation” because “Ad Slides Compel Attention.”

Even industrial film producer Watterson Rothacker, a proponent of indirect advertising methods, promoted his product with the claim that “moving pictures…ha[ve] a novel and irresistible magnetism which demands and receives an undivided attention.”

In cinema advertising rhetoric, then, the very act of sitting in a motion picture theater provided the advertisement with a direct conduit to the brain. The rhetorical implication was that a spectator would have had to possess an almost inconceivable force of will to resist cinema advertising.

In most cases, an assertion of audience captivity was followed immediately by a claim that the audience was in a ‘receptive mood.’ Expanding on mass magazine trade rhetoric which connected “pleasant, leisure hours” to a receptive state of mind, cinema advertising proponents asserted a connection between the medium and a positive mindset.

Advertising film advocate Joseph B. Baker asserted as early as 1911 that cinema advertising could deliver content


34 Classified Ad, Printers’ Ink 77.1 (5 October 1911): 101.

35 Watterson R. Rothacker, “Moving Pictures Sell Real Estate,” Motography June 1911: 123. In a broader study of cinema advertising – one including industrial film and non-theatrical circulation – Watterson Rothacker would be a central figure. The Industrial Moving Picture Company (later the Rothacker Manufacturing Company) was an extremely prominent producer of advertising films. However, Rothacker’s preference for indirect advertising methods makes him an outlier for all but the most general claims in this study.

36 Harold Ives Company: Full Page Ad, Printers’ Ink 84.6 (7 August 1913): 30.
“with... ease and certainty” due to the fact that the intensely focused audience was “in the mood to be entertained.”  

Lantern slide proponent Frank Farrington claimed, in 1913, that no other advertising could possibly be “received in so favorable a frame of mind” as that seen in a motion picture theater. By 1921, ad man Francis T. Kimball went so far as to describe the cinema patron’s mood as “absorbent.” For cinema advertising thinkers, then, entertainment and audience passivity were coalescing into a perfect storm; cinema spectators were effectively described as jovial sponges.

*The ‘Combative Spirit’ and Film’s Stagnation as an Ad Medium*

Despite the common use of ‘passive spectator’ theory, across both advertising and reform culture, a large contingent of film industry workers and cinema fans were simultaneously advocating for an alternative description of the audience – that the cinema was a site of ‘active audiences’ whose attention needed to be both respected and courted. While reformers and advertisers often took a prescriptive approach to cinema audiences, trying to fit them into particular conceptions of an ideal society (be it a moral society or a consuming one), film culture saw the audience as endlessly differentiated and in need of proper courting in order to maximize profit. Studios and exhibitors therefore tried to cater to spectator tastes in hopes that they would define themselves. Indeed, it is this dialectic between the reformist’s description of an absorbent spectator, and the film industry’s fear of a bored one which kept advertising from being more broadly integrated and caused the cinema to remain a perpetually third class advertising medium.

Fears of a backlash against compulsory viewing have effectively the same date range as their ‘receptive’ counterparts, as examples have turned up from 1909 to 1921. If assertions of

---

37 Joseph B. Baker, “Examples of Motion Picture Advertising,” Motography 5.6 (June 1911): 133.
38 Frank Farrington, “Advertising in Moving-Picture Shows,” Bulletin of Pharmacy 27.6 (June 1913): 249.
audience receptivity were tied to the over-optimistic assumption that a mind attuned to pleasure would not rebel against an advertising message, notions of distaste were tied to the equally problematic assumption that advertising could not occur in a venue for which one had to pay a ticket price. Presuming that advertising would generally occur on the screen, exhibitors, film fans, and their rhetorical allies asserted that the viewer would rebel against an advertisement due to the fact that a pause in the entertainment for advertising was a hijacking of the paying patron’s time. Such a compulsory pause could result in audience irritation at best, and could escalate to “hisses,” antipathy, and even a complete abandonment of the offending theater at worst.

Francis Holley of the Bureau of Commercial Economics – which specialized in the non-theatrical circulation of advertising films – went so far as to claim that such aroused not a receptive mood but a “combative spirit.” Perhaps the most compelling comment along this line came from actor Edward Earle who declared that advertising on the screen was generally unacceptable in the United States because “[n]othing is more distasteful to Americans than compulsory methods.”

More importantly, such arguments often became an implicit critique of the notion of passive audiences, as boredom and irritation were traits of ‘active’ rather than ‘passive’ minds.

---

40 As early as 1909, Nickelodeon was reporting that a “good many picture theater managers…declare[d]…that the exhibitor ha[dn’t]…the right to collect admissions” if showing ads. “Advertising Slides,” Nickelodeon 2.1 (July 1909): 3.
43 Ernest A. Dench, “Motion Picture Photography,” The Camera 20.11 (November 1916): 629; and Ernest A. Dench, Advertising by Motion Pictures (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1916), 140-145. In 1918, Dench also reported that “an exhibitor friend” believed, similarly, that “compulsory methods” were “detestable to the people of this democratic country. It is possible, however, that this was at best a man concurring with Earle’s claim, and at worst a misattribution of the old Edward Earle quote. Ernest A. Dench, “Slide Hints for the Motion Picture Advertiser,” American Stationer and Office Outfitter 83.1 (5 January 1918): 36. Earle’s claim interestingly parallels Daniel Pope’s claim that advertiser’s detested compulsory methods. It seems that, while many in the film industry were in agreement, cinema advertisers briefly forgot this maxim in all the hubbub about image power and spectatorial passivity.
Contrary to the nearly unavoidable attention posited by Don Herold, exhibition oriented
descriptions of the audience considered avoidance of advertising to be so mundane as to border
on childish petulance. Businessman and film fan George M. Rittelmeyer recounted stories of
audiences “passing the time away the best they could” during advertisements with chit chat.44
An unsigned 1921 article in Moving Picture Age declared that when an advertisement is “in front
of [the viewer]…he has to look at it or close his eyes.”45 The willful rendering of oneself
temporarily blind may be relatively petty behavior, but for these writers it was a legitimate
concern. Designers of offscreen advertising technologies, like lighted signs and advertising
clocks (see chapter five), expanded this ‘active audience’ rhetoric into an advertising theory of
their own, proposing that the wandering eye of the spectator, while a problem for slide and film
advertising, could be positively courted if offscreen tactics were used.46 The creation of
alternative viewing objects – even if they were advertising oriented – was offered on the grounds
that it would increase the spectators’ ability to freely choose what to see.

Among these latter advocates of the active, discriminating spectator, we read not just the
typical rhetoric of positive differentiation of media – ‘x’ is the supreme advertising medium
because of ‘y’ – but also negative comparison. Roy D. Mock, among many thinkers critical of the
concept of an absorbent spectator, noted that a primary difference between advertising in the

45 “How to Use Ad Slides,” Moving Picture Age 4.3 (March 1921): 35.
46 Frank C. Thomas, “Display Apparatus,” U.S. Patent 1,252,629, filed 1 November 1915, and issued 8 January
1918; Harry Verran and Alfred R. Groetz, “Advertising Device,” U.S. Patent 1,321,863, filed 10 March 1919, and
issued 18 November 1919; and Francis T. Hayes, “Theater, Hall, or the Like,” U.S. Patent 1,728,731, filed 8 March
1927, and issued 17 September 1929. Inventor Frank C. Thomas went so far as to state that entertainment and
advertising required different mindsets, declaring that any onscreen transition from entertainment to advertising
would, therefore, “caus[e] one naturally to resent the drawing of one’s attention so abruptly to advertising matter.”
Compare this theory to that of Hugo Münsterberg, in his essay “Social Sins in Advertising,” in which he declared
that placing advertisements on the same pages as entertainment in magazines was a “sermon of bewilderment and
scramble” which could only “develop a desire for harshness and crudeness and chaos.” While Münsterberg was
concerned with mass mental health and Thomas with profit, Thomas’ notion would blend perfectly with
Münsterberg’s assertion that the two attitudes required different mindsets, and that to blend them was like
“constantly ha[v]ing] to alternate between lazy strolling and energetic running.” Psychology and Social Sanity
cinema and advertising in all other venues was the concept of choice. In magazines, for example, the reader could simply turn the page or ignore advertising content; in the cinema, that choice was not possible, as the focal point of the room was out of the spectator’s control.\(^{47}\) Electronic advertising demanded a new notion of spectatorship – one attuned to the promise and problems of temporal constraint. Despite the predominantly theoretical thrust of the public conversation – no academic studies of viewer antipathy to advertising in these early days have yet resurfaced in the historical record – the assumption that temporal compulsion and ticket price combined into an unsolvable problem for cinema advertising naturalized over the course of the decade, through a combination of exhibitor reluctance and trade press discouragement.

_The Happy Captive and Twentieth Century Advertising_

In these debates over the merits of the cinema as an advertising site – ranging, in their initial appearance, at least from 1909 to 1921, and engaging minds as diverse as advertisers, exhibitors, actors, and early cinema theorists in the trade presses – the persistent concern that culture was wrong to attribute unilateral power to image-based communication kept the advertising industry from leaping into the motion picture arena with both feet. For every cinema advertising proponent who argued for a view of the motion picture patron as a smiling cash machine waiting for input, there were likely a hundred exhibitors, film fans, and advertising theorists decrying the practice as an intrusion. While neither viewpoint was ultimately entirely correct – as a small amount of advertising was eventually accepted in nearly every film (via product placement) and theater (via stills and trailers) in the country – a rhetorical stalemate between the two positions kept growth in American cinema advertising very slow.

Forms of electric advertising were designed, tested, and accepted in theaters across the country, but no tactic was discovered which could satisfy both film industry concerns for viewer pleasure and advertiser desires to directly address a captive audience. The failure to find a commonly acceptable approach is apparent in the wide variety of tactics attempted – ranging from temporal alternation (screen as medium), to product placement (celluloid entertainment as medium), to lighted offscreen signs (venue as medium), etc. The end result was that the cinema remained an outsider in the growing advertising industry. Small, start-up advertising businesses (and dedicated film men) experimented with cinema advertising, while mainstream agencies were hesitant, and would remain so until the television revolution compelled them to use cinema advertising as a training ground. The perpetual disconnect between captivity and receptivity is one of the fundamental reasons why cinema advertising was kept in a holding pattern in the United States.

However, although advertising in cinema theaters has remained limited and inconsistent, even in the comparatively more permissive decades at the end of the twentieth century, the debate over cinema’s suitability for advertising furthered the creation of a collection of rhetorical tropes which would help to shape new media advertising theory over the course of twentieth century American history. The ‘captive audience,’ ‘receptive mood,’ ‘combative spirit,’ and ‘vanishing audience’ have all, to various degrees, continued to inform thinking about modern electronic advertising.

Some examples of the perpetuation of ‘receptivity’ theory are obvious in American advertising history. Radio appeals, for example, were described as the most powerful due to the idea that the radio voice had the “supple power to move people and mold them, to enlist them

and command them[; f]or people do what they are told.” Additionally, advertiser created and sponsored radio programs were considered to “creat[e] a subconscious obligation [to buy] in the mind of the listener” on the grounds that the audience would feel indebted for the free entertainment. The power of the voice, and of ‘public service’ (providing freely available entertainment), are thus asserted to create a receptive mood for broadcast advertising.

Contemporary interactive media receive similar rhetorical treatment. Scholar Paul Skalski has described video game product placement as “a relatively new way to reach…not just consumers, but engaged consumers.” Internet marketing professional Greg Jarboe has described YouTube similarly, arguing that it is an excellent advertising venue on the grounds that its users “come predisposed to ‘lean forward’ rather [than] ‘lean back.’” Note that, in interactive media, the physical posture of the user can become shorthand for receptivity. As advertising men and women attempt to interest advertisers in new forms, notions of psychological receptivity continually arise.

53 In this light, technology, and particularly new media, may serve a rhetorical purpose for the advertising industry which parallel’s Ted Friedman’s notion of the cultural ‘utopian sphere.’ For Friedman, “the debate over the uses and meanings of computer technology is one of the few forums within the contemporary public sphere where idealized visions of the future can be elaborated without instant dismissal.” Thus, the power of technology to allow us to throw off intellectual restraint and imagine wonderful futures provides, in the Marxist inflection of Friedman’s initial description, one of the few venues where we can discuss a world in which labor and markets do not hold sway. But capitalists have their utopian fantasies as well. Indeed, Pamela Walker Laird’s argument that advertising is in “the business of progress” could be readily rephrased to assert that ad men frequently adopt utopian rhetoric. Although it would take far more detailed argumentation than is reasonable in this study, one could plausible argue that capitalist dreams of advertising utopias become, through assertions about audience receptivity, active parts of the adoption rhetoric for new media. The creation of new media would thus provide a perpetually renewable resource for advertisers’ utopian dreams. Ted Friedman, Electric Dreams: Computers in American Culture (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 4-5; and Pamela Walker Laird, Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 2.
Captivity, meanwhile, has been a driving theory not just for the adoption of particular mediums for advertising, but for the intentional integration of advertising outlets into previously ad-free spaces. In the 1950s, the United States Supreme Court heard a case on the growing issue of advertising on public buses and streetcars. Enterprising advertising men had provided bus companies with free radios permanently tuned to a single station – a station for which they sold advertising. The piping of commercial radio into public spaces has only expanded since this early iteration, in which “[t]he passengers listen[ed] to what the people at the station want[ed] them to hear, whether they like[d] it or not.”\footnote{Charles L. Black, Jr., “He Cannot Choose But Hear: The Plight of the Captive Auditor,” \textit{Columbia Law Review} 1953: 961. The Supreme Court found that this was not an infringement of individual freedom to choose. Thus, the practice continued and expanded. For contemporary discussions, see: Marcy Strauss, “Redefining the Captive Audience Doctrine,” \textit{Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly} 19.85 (Fall 1991): 85-121; and Caroline Mala Corbin, “The First Amendment Right Against Compelled Listening,” \textit{Boston University Law Review} 89.939 (June 2009): 939-1016.} Attempts to turn individuals in public venues into \textit{de facto} captive audiences also resulted in the creation of Channel One in 1989, in which, much like the example of buses, schools were provided with free television equipment in exchange for the guarantee that the channel’s twelve minute program (which included two minutes of advertising) would be watched every day by at least 90% of students.\footnote{Michael W. Apple, “Constructing the Captive Audience: Cannel One and the Political Economy of the Text,” \textit{International Studies in Sociology of Education} 2.2 (1992): 111, 113.} Both public transit and classroom advertising continue as legal and profitable advertising venues. Although it has not yet been put into use, video gaming giant Sony has even patented technology which would turn electronic game players into ‘captive audiences,’ by providing a simple means for “suspending playing of the interactive content, displaying an advertisement, and resuming playing of the interactive content.”\footnote{Gary M. Zalewski, “Advertising Scheme for Use With Interactive Content,” U.S. Patent 2011/0274409A1, filed 22 July 2011, and issued 10 November 2011. <http://www.google.com/patents/US20110274409>}

As there could be significant repercussions to a game experience if the player was not present when play resumed, the user would effectively be held captive during
such an advertisement, unable to move away from the screen. With the popularity of captivity as a description of audiences, even the old medium of billboarding, in contemporary theorizing, has been reconceived as a means to reach captive audiences; as a Warner Bros advertising executive asserted in 1999, “[t]here’s no way to avoid it if you do a large enough showing.” Despite long-standing concerns about captivity being ‘abhorrent’ to American citizens, then, the advertising industry has continually sought out audiences which were unlikely or unable to completely avoid an advertising message.

As such, the rhetorical battle over the cinema screen – at the time, a unique dialectic between the emerging fields of media effects and audience psychology – has been highly influential. The cinema bears the most obvious marks of the conflict, as the poles of audience receptivity and frustration continue to dominate the discourse. However, the concepts at the heart of the cinema advertising debate – including, most importantly, ‘captivity’ and ‘receptivity’ – have taken on a life of their own as foundational concerns for media selection in the American advertising industry.

---


59 The notion of the captive audience has become so ingrained in the American experience of media, that it often forms the backdrop for fictional content. For example, Alex’s experience of the Ludovico Technique, in the mid-century novel *A Clockwork Orange*, is a cynically comic take on the hypodermic theory of media, in which compulsory viewing is directly tied to psychological manipulation. Late 20th century television series *Mystery Science Theater 3000* – in which the three members of the ‘audience’ are trapped in space and forced to watch, among other things, 1950s commercial educational films from Jam Handy – visualizes the ‘active audience’ counter theory; the onscreen audience exhibits frustration, weeping, and, most of all, aggressive humor.
Films may come and films may go, but the advertising slide seemingly goes on forever.
- North Tonawanda Evening News (1917)\(^1\)

As the epigraph opening this chapter would indicate, the commercial magic lantern slide was a pervasive and long-lived form of theatrical advertising in the United States. Experimented with or used heavily to ‘get the word out’ for such diverse purposes as local piano tuning, running for government office, and furthering the awareness of a major brand, magic lantern advertising slides were a common and influential element of early cinema programs in America.\(^2\)

Via witty phrasing – entangling the screening duration of a single slide, the extent of a slide ‘break’ in the program, and even the repeated use, for months on end, of a single slide in a single theater – the above quote humorously derides the multivalent interminability of lantern slides. In hindsight, a fourth layer of meaning also arises from this statement. The lantern slide as an advertising form also seems to ‘go on forever.’ Indeed, a high-tech variant of the form persists to the present day in American theaters; although cheap digital production and distribution is aiding in the final phasing out of still advertising, Screenvision, the second largest cinema advertising company in the United States, still offers ‘slides’ – in both 35 mm and digital formats

---

2 C.E. Livengood advertised his piano tuning services in a theater in which the piano was under his care. C.E. Livengood, [Letter to the Editor], The Tuner's Magazine 3.1 (January 1915): 29-30. Though such is outside the parameters of this dissertation, slides were a global phenomenon. They were “extensively used” on six-month or one-year contracts in Sydney, Australia in 1915 (“Advertising Media in Australia,” [Great Britain] Board of Trade Journal 22 April 1915: 227), and U.S. companies were pushing their use in Peru in 1918 (New York Sun 26 February 1918: 14). Robert Crawford asserts that current motion picture advertising giant Val Morgan Advertising was using slides in Australia by 1914 (Robert Crawford, “Old Debts: The Unsung Relationship Between Australia’s Film and Advertising Industries,” Studies in Australasian Cinema 2.1 [September 2008]: 34). At least one German theater in Breslau – the Tauentzian – was screening upwards of 30 advertising slides at the end of the program in 1915 (“Picture Situation in Germany,” Moving Picture World 24.9 (29 May 1915): 1434).
– as one of their wares. Still-imagery, peddling merchants and services, continues as a means to fill the interim.

When integrated with filmed entertainment – the first medium in which temporal, rather than spatial, sequencing was of prime importance – the lantern slide was the first widely successful attempt to reconceive advertising towards a ‘single voice’ model. Prior to the advent of lantern slide advertising in motion picture theaters, the driving theories of advertising placement were spatial: nearness to a site of stimulation (interspersed with reading material, or erected near a beautiful Vista) or simple repetition (papering every available surface with posters). Film – at least, the celluloid portion of it – began the 20th century transition in media towards temporal structuring. The ethos of advertising changed to a fleeting integration – folded into narratives, or even pausing the entertainment for commercial messages – rather than an existence at the margins. To use a contemporary travel metaphor, slides mark the first shift in placement ideology from the optional billboard to the mandatory stop sign, and caused much handwringing about the rights of the audience. This structuring of sequential media messages (entertainment, advertisement, entertainment, etc.) – which would become the model for broadcasting – was introduced with the magic lantern slide.

Though old and seemingly outdated, even at its first appearance in cinema theaters, the form was highly successful and became foundational for advertising development in 20th century

---

3 “Cinema Slides,” Screenvision.com. Accessed 15 March 2013. <http://www.screenvision.com/advertise-with-us/cinema-slides/> Though I have as yet found no current ‘slide’ makers or designers which can trace their business to the 1910s, some of the companies active in the ‘teens persist to the present day in other lines. For example, the Erker Bros. Optical Company of St. Louis, still owned by the Erker family, now deals exclusively in eyeglasses. See www.erkers.com.

4 At this time, the magazine parallel for an advertising pause was not the ‘interstitial page’ of 1950s television, but the ‘front cover.’ This subtle shift in the metaphor vividly displays the difference in how the advertisers viewed the audience and their acceptance of the form. A television pause is just another page to flip through; a cinema pause is big and brash and unavoidable.

5 Indeed, the assumption was that cinema would permanently destroy the lantern slide business. In 1909, slide historian C.K. Larson wrote of the surprising turn of events that “the moving picture houses ha[d] actually increased
electronic media for two reasons. First, the cheapness of the form allowed for adoption by local advertisers, providing a broad and relatively large early-adopter base despite its lack of previous triumphs.  

This cost-efficiency allowed for persistent use of the formative medium, prior to its adoption by national advertisers – a necessary element for the rapid development of movie theater advertising despite persistent early reluctance from exhibitors. Second, and more importantly, the unavoidable fact of reel-change pauses in nickelodeon theaters opened an obvious gap in motion picture display – a gap which advertising has attempted not only to fill, but to maintain as a defining element of ‘moving’ media. The concept of an advertising ‘caesura’ is an intentionally maintained shadow of a technological limitation of early cinema.

The adoption, abuse, and partial abandonment of the form as a part of the silent era film experience is the structuring incident underlying all other attempts at ‘new media’ advertising over the course of the 1910s and the following decades. The slide-model’s influence, either as a success to be emulated or a failed style to be avoided, is apparent in future development ranging from the cinema’s experimentation with product placement, advertising shorts, trailers, and offscreen technologies, to broadcasting’s development of sponsor produced programming and participatory sponsorship via commercial ‘spots.’ A thorough understanding of its advent and marginalization is crucial to the history of advertising in twentieth-century media.

This chapter will describe the rise, rationale, and specifics of slide advertising in the atmosphere of expanding national advertising and expanding cinemagoing in the early 1910s, and will explain its popularity at the time, its longevity as a form, and the perceived flaws in its


6 Lara Cain Gray, though she may erroneously presume that local advertising has always predominated in the slide industry, is correct to assert that the special needs of local advertisers are well served by the advertising slide. Lara Cain Gray, “Magic Moments: Contextualising Cinema Advertising Slides from the Queensland Museum Collection,” Queensland Review 18.1 (2011): 81-82.
structure which compelled advertisers to experiment with other cinema advertising models. The chapter will begin with a description of the lantern advertising slide and its place in the silent era program, revealing a history of the business of slides from its emergence around 1908, through its boom-period as a reel-change ‘commercial break,’ and concluding with its increasingly marginal usage following World War I. Following this, a study of the rhetoric both for and against slides as a cinema advertising medium will show what slide manufacturers, consumer goods manufacturers, and exhibitors expected to gain – and sometimes lose – by the use of slides. This rhetorical analysis will include a section on Ernest A. Dench’s nuanced theory of ‘slide psychology,’ a complex take on the tone of the slide pause from a moment – 1916 – just before the advertising slide permanently lost its prominent position in the program. Dench’s writings inspire thinking about what might have been, had the regular slide ‘break’ not been abandoned as an exhibition form. The chapter will culminate with an analysis of two forms of ‘high tech’ slides – motion slides and clock slides – showing how the presence of technological variants clarifies some of the most commonly perceived flaws of slides as a medium.

What Was a Lantern Slide?

Lantern slides were, generally, still photographs, printed onto a coated plate in order to be displayed on a large screen, either via an attachment to the motion picture projector, or a specially designed projecting device (little more than a light-source and a lens). Most commonly the plates were glass, though a minority of slide manufacturers also used mica, which tended to fade but was lighter and harder to break, reducing the cost of shipping. 

---

7 Glass was already the standard by the early 20th century, when prepared glass plates could be ordered in bulk – 24 plates per box, 50 boxes per case – for mass reproduction. A further option for simple but long-lasting slides was cut metals, like brass; these were expensive, and could contain little more than a stock phrase, but could be tossed roughly about or left in front of the hot lantern light indefinitely with no damage. However, as most advertising was
produced advertising messages could also be created via various home-use processes – including ‘scratch slides’ (painting a slide with an opaque coating then scratching in a message), typewriter slides (a sheet of typewritten text sandwiched between two pieces of glass), adhesive letters (affixed to plain glass), or even pencil on “draftsman’s tracing cloth” (again, sandwiched between two pieces of glass for screening).\textsuperscript{8} The simplicity of these home-made options, however, rendered them decidedly uncommon for advertising use. Though advertisers appreciated cost-efficiency, they rarely wanted their names associated with such aesthetically simplistic forms as home-made slides. Professional advertising slides were almost always photographic reproductions on glass or mica.

Commercial mass-reproduction of slides was a multi-step process, the first of which was the making of a usable image. An artist would draw the advertisement at an overlarge size – up to 16 square inches – and generally in black and white; photographs could also be used\textsuperscript{9}, but drawn images were far more common in early advertising slides. The industry standard was to paint an image in white onto black paper, as a design “on a background of solid, impenetrable black” was considered more pleasing to the eye.\textsuperscript{10} From a practical standpoint, this ‘white figure’ style would keep the focus on the copy (rendered as the brightest thing on the screen) and

\textsuperscript{8} These home-made slides were more commonly used for announcements, especially when spontaneous communication with the audience was required – for example, calling a patron to the lobby. Typewriter slides from Utility Transparency Co: Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 19.7 (14 February 1914): 826. Pencil slides from the Seattle Slide Co.: Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 11.1 (6 January 1912): 52. Tracing Cloth: “Projection Department: An Announcement Slide Scheme,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 16.6 (10 May 1913): 591.

\textsuperscript{9} The Kansas City Slide Company, for example, offered photographic reproduction, but the process was approximately twice as expensive as drawn slides: $1.50 per slide in 1913. “Some Slides for Advertising in the Moving Picture Show,” p. 5, Box 4, Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC.

would simplify the process of hand-coloring the slides (dye could be generally washed over particular areas, as the dark background concealed sloppy work).

Commonly these drawn images were generic creations of the slide company’s own copy writers, designed to advertise classes of, rather than specific, products: for example, the Kansas City Slide Company’s restaurant slide: “‘Too many cooks spoil the broth.’ That’s why we have one good one.” These ‘stock slides’ were designed to be ordered from catalogs in order to turn a profit from repeated small sales (no more than a few copies at a time) to merchants across the country. Sometimes ‘stock slides’ were just ‘billboard slides,’ with attractive borders designed around an empty white space which could be filled with custom copy. Alternatively, the artwork could be commissioned, or produced from client copy, for a ‘special slide’ – mass produced, in exactly the number desired by the advertiser, immediately after the drawing was approved.

In any case, written copy was always brief, as one could never be sure how long a given projectionist would leave the slide on the screen, and film viewers were presumed to be “incredibly slow” readers under the best of circumstances. Slide advocate Frank Farrington suggested no more than four words per line, while the Kansas City Slide Company advocated a ten word maximum for finished slides. The bottom quarter of the image was generally left

---

11 “Some Slides for Advertising in the Moving Picture Show,” p. 77, Box 4, Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC.
13 The terminology for these three slides comes from Kansas City Slide Company catalogs, though any given slide company produced the same products with roughly the same names for the styles.
15 Frank Farrington, “Advertising in Moving-Picture Shows,” Bulletin of Pharmacy 27.6 (June 1913): 250; Slide News May 1922, p. 4, Box 4, Folder “KC Slide Co – Flyers ‘Slide News’,” Kansas City Slide Manufacturing
blank in order to insert a local dealer’s name, although the positioning of this empty space could vary depending on the slide producer or the copy design.

Once completed to the above specifications, the image would be placed in front of a camera (all images were drawn at the same scale so that the camera wouldn’t have to be refocused), and a negative would be created from the drawing. A specially-made, pedal-operated printing box was used so that a single operator could rapidly expose a large quantity of slides. Once a suitable number were printed, they would be run through developing fluid and washed, leaving completed black and white slides, at a uniform (American) size of 3 ¼ x 4 inches. The printed glass slides would then be hand colored. Finally, a mat (complete with the slide maker’s name and address) and a second piece of glass were laid on top to protect the image coating, and the layers were bound together with paper tape.

Advertising slides – just one of many types of glass slides then being made – were available for purchase by any size business, and even by proxy. National advertisers could make bulk orders to be sent to local dealers as ‘helps’ (shorthand for a piece of advertising material

Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC. Farrington also warned against the use of all capital letters, as they made copy harder to read. Frank Farrington, “Practical Talks With the Shop Butcher,” National Provisioner 49.26 (27 December 1913): 40. There are important links between the development of billboard copy and that of slides and trailers. The billboard industry, as rapid transit via rail and then automobiles began to dominate the thinking of the time, developed what Catherine Gudis calls an ‘aesthetics of speed’ and distraction. Temporal limitations on reading were seen as a reason to decrease written content (such as limiting headlines to three words) and increase image use (known at the time as the theory of “picturization”), creating advertisements which could have an impact quickly, and without the requiring the full attention of the reader. Catherine Gudis, Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 66-68.

16 Given the three-second exposure time, Two dozen plates could be printed in five minutes with time to spare. Silent era slide-analyst David E. Ardley asserted that an operator, working at peak efficiency, could make “[f]ive hundred slides in a working day of eight hours.” David E. Ardley, “Commercial Slide Making,” Camera Craft 27.10 (October 1920): 317.

17 Standard sizes were different around the globe. The British used a square 3 ¼ inches on all sides, for example.

18 I have, as yet, encountered no evidence of color photography being used to quickly and efficiently reproduce a color advertising image, but it is possible, as non-advertising slides were capable of this at least as early as 1915. “Natural Color Slides are Startling,” Moving Picture World 25.6 (7 August 1915): 1035.

19 All drawing and developing information is from David E. Ardley, “Commercial Slide Making,” Camera Craft 27.10 (October 1920): 317-321. Final assembly information is my own generic knowledge.
sent out by the manufacturer to help the dealer move the goods). Local merchants could order one or a few slides solely for their own use. Exhibitors could even order multiple one-off slides on behalf of a few local advertisers, as a way to both lower total shipping costs for merchants, and engage in a bit of censorship over what would appear on their screen. Although early slides were mailed out immediately upon receipt of the order, with instructions for the customer to hand-write their own dealer information into the blank space at the bottom, by 1913 multiple companies offered to professionally append dealer information, via a sticker or piece of celluloid, before the slide went into the mail.

Completed slides could be projected in any space where a ‘magic lantern’ and screen were available – generally a motion picture theater, though vaudeville theaters and window displays were also used. In theaters, the end result was a single massive advertisement projected on the screen and looming over a seated audience. In the over the top rhetoric of the Neosho Slide Company, this unavoidable, lighted, massive ad would “stamp [the advertiser’s] name, trademark, package, goods, or proposition indelibly upon the buying sense of moving picture show audiences.”

20 In their 1913 catalog, the Kansas City Slide Company claimed that 75 percent of their business was from national manufacturers. Only 25 percent was from exhibitors and merchants. However, this may have been intentional misinformation designed to encourage national advertisers to adopt the form on the grounds that others had supposedly already done so. “Some Slides for Advertising in the Moving Picture Show,” p. 7, Box 4, Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC.

21 It is unclear whether professional appending of name-plates ever became an industry standard. An unsigned article in Moving Picture Age from 1921 still claimed that only “some” companies insisted on the practice, despite the same journal deriding the practice of hand writing, earlier that year, as a “blotchy illegible scrawl.” One of these must have been the Kansas City Slide Company, which once declared that hand writing a dealer name on a professionally designed slide was the equivalent of “going to a ball in evening clothes and gym boots.” Some evidence exists of attempts by other companies to eliminate the practice as well. For example, Kansas City Slide’s patented process, from 1912, in which celluloid name plates could be inserted, was echoed in the Troy Slide and Sign Companies description, the following year, of what they called the “Troy Photoprint Method.” “Some” companies: “How to Use Ad Slides,” Moving Picture Age May 1921: 19. “Blotchy”: “Screen Advertising with Slides and Films,” Moving Picture Age January 1921: 24. “Gym boots”: Slide News May 1922, p. 4, Box 4, Folder “KC Slide Co – Flyers ‘Slide News’,” Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC. KC Process: A.V. Cauger, “Lantern Slide,” U.S. Patent 1,142,143, filed 11 June 1912, and issued 8 June 1915. Troy Photoprint: Full-Page Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 85.10 (4 December 1913): 89.

22 Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 79.3 (18 April 1912): 88, and 79.10 (6 June 1912): 83.
Like a high-tech version of hanging a sign on a theater curtain (visible when the curtain was closed between each act), the advertising slide separated the pieces of the film program, acting as a buffer zone in the intermissions between short films and between program repetitions as a whole. For films longer than one reel, slides would have acted as an intermission. As such, lantern slides were an onscreen but formally distinct type of advertising, in which the advertisement was delivered in the same space as the entertainment, but in a form distinctly different from its ‘moving’ nature (and possibly containing content disruptive to an ongoing multi-reel film narrative). Additionally, unlike the advertising curtain, where the quantity of advertisements had no necessary impact on duration, lantern slide advertising was ‘discrete’ but ‘fleeting’: only one advertisement appeared at a time, giving it the best possible chance of being read, but an advertisement had to clear the screen (never to return during that program turn) before another could take its place. As such, an onscreen disruption (or, if one chooses to discuss the slides individually, a collection of disruptions) would occur repeatedly, every fifteen minutes, as the theater changed reels, and the duration of the disruption would be measurable, roughly, by the number of slides shown. The advertising lantern slide was, therefore, the nearest sibling the silent era cinema possessed to the contemporary television commercial spot: it was seen, at least in the early 1910s, as a caesura integrated into the film program at regular intervals, and was as often as not regarded as an imposition to be avoided (perhaps with a trip to the restroom or a conversation with a friend).
A Brief History of the Early American Slide Advertising Industry, 1908-1922

The history of the lantern slide as a medium dates back to at least the 17th century, though 19th century developments in lamp technology were responsible for its widespread use.\(^{23}\) Despite their disparate dates of invention, early motion picture exhibition tended to treat film and slides as fellow travelers, as early storefront theaters and itinerant exhibitors would integrate motion pictures with slides in their programs. Indeed, well known itinerant showman Lyman Howe toured with slides exclusively before transitioning to films at a later date.\(^{24}\) In early nickelodeon screenings, with the demand for films exceeding the supply, many exhibitors turned to technologies like the “Stereoptigraph” – a motion picture projector with a lantern slide attachment – in order to easily integrate song and news slides into film shows. As such, the interaction of lantern slides with the early film industry is a concrete example of an old medium helping to delimit and define the horizon of expectations of a newer medium. Indeed, Charles Musser has argued that the experiential and communicative properties of motion pictures were largely worked out in direct comparison with stage performance (vaudeville) and the magic lantern.\(^{25}\) As stable, film-oriented theaters emerged, the ‘combined show’ was, for many, the pinnacle of nickelodeon exhibition.\(^{26}\)


\(^{25}\) Early motion pictures were integrated into both vaudeville programs and lantern show exhibitions. Charles Musser indicates, however, that these might have been independent movements. Though any combination of two was not uncommon, one would rarely if ever see all three in the same show. Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York and Toronto: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990), 42. Lara Cain Gray argues, for example, that slides were used to help define the film as a continuation of the legitimate stage, as a moving lantern slide giving the appearance of an opening curtain would often be shown just prior to a film. Lara Cain Gray, “Magic Moments: Contextualising Cinema Advertising Slides from the Queensland Museum Collection,” *Queensland Review* 18.1 (2011): 82.

\(^{26}\) See Richard Abel’s assertion, referenced below, that the song-slide added a touch of class to theaters in Iowa.
However, the pairings appear to have been largely entertainment oriented – the slides were generally song slides or news images. Although there is evidence for the existence of direct advertising slides in the late 1800s – the advertising screenings of New York’s Commercial Advertising Bureau, Fred A. Clark’s ad subsidized screenings in department stores, and an exhibitor who claims to have interspersed Civil War slides in the 1880s with advertising material – this use was presumably uncommon. Indeed, all such screenings of advertising slides would likely have been experimental; every advertising slide would have been either a one-off or part of a very limited production run. The slide was, like the film, a medium predominantly of entertainment. There was simply no market for mass-produced advertising slides.

The transitional moment was 1908, when the major film producers regularized output by shifting to studio-bound production of fiction films. The massive upswing in available product, combined with the popularity of cheap amusements in the wake of the Panic of 1907, allowed

---

29 Regardless of these limitations, historical research into earlier slide advertising would be very helpful. Much of 19th century advertising research is slanted towards the growth of agencies. Only Pamela Walker Laird makes a significant attempt to integrate other branches of the emerging American advertising industry into the story of its origins. A history of the development of advertising slides prior to the nickelodeon boom would helpfully open up the discussion of 19th century American advertising.
for a boom in nickelodeon businesses, and a corresponding boom in slide production. Song-slide usage, already common in earlier exhibition – especially vaudeville – peaked around 1910, as sheet-music publishers used the sing-a-long slide performance in motion picture theaters as a form of indirect advertising to increase the popularity, and therefore the sales, of their new songs. Slide historian John W. Ripley asserts that nearly every motion picture theater regularly integrated song slide performances at this time, as a means to avoid the interminable ‘reel change’ announcement slide.\(^\text{32}\) Richard Abel, identifying it as an almost exclusively American element of nickelodeon display, argues that the boom was facilitated, at least in small town theaters, by its addition of a patina of ‘class’ to motion picture exhibition.\(^\text{33}\) As such, the song slide was a pivotal transitional form – a proto-advertising slide which both stabilized the presence of slides in motion picture theaters and provided a backdrop for theorizing the presence of advertising within the cinema program.\(^\text{34}\)

The increasing number of theaters likewise produced a greater need for announcement slides – such as “Ladies, Please Remove Your Hats” – and increased the circulation of news slides (a slide alternative to the irregularly circulated filmed news footage that existed prior to the 1911 advent of newsreels). The demand for such content boosted the flow of film exhibitor dollars into the slide industry. Nickelodeon exhibition, flooding the slide makers with cinema related cash, triggered a dramatic increase in both the circulation and quality of slides. Slide

---


\(^\text{34}\) John W. Ripley has offered multiple explanations for the death of the song-slide form, ranging from the increasing length of films, to the abandonment of home performance in the wake of improvements to recording, to the rise in popularity of ragtime over the romantic ballad. However, even as song-slide popularity was peaking, there were indications of coming troubles. One anonymous ‘song slide maker’ asserted, in early 1909, that publishers had already abandoned funding of song slides. He argued that “[i]t is a forgone conclusion that the song slide does not increase the popularity of a song,” and decried the poor singing by paid song slide accompanists. It is plausible, therefore, that slide makers were seeking alternative advertising dollars at a very early date, and hit upon the advertising slide as a replacement for the income from a medium – song slides – that they knew to be nearing the end of its lifespan. A Song Slide Maker, “The Value of Lantern Slides as Advertisements for Sheet Music,” *Moving Picture World* 4.20 (15 May 1909): 633.
makers attempted to outclass each other with their products, and attempted to shame exhibitors into purchasing the latest and best slides. For example, the Levi Company traded on recent improvements to slide quality as early as December of 1908, when they declared that only a “Bumble Puppy” would still be using announcement slides of the previous generation.\textsuperscript{35} New companies, offering either more aesthetically pleasing, more humorous, or sometimes simply cheaper announcement slides flooded the market to compete for these dollars.

It was this 1908 flourishing of the slide market which also gave rise to the nationally circulated, massively reproduced advertising slide.\textsuperscript{36} Frank B. Howe, a silent era slide maker writing for \textit{Camera Craft} magazine in 1917, asserted that “the development of present day slides,” including the advertising variant, could be traced to 1909. As late as 1906, Howe asserted, “the only variety of slide in use was the…‘picture slide’…[used for] lectures, travelogues, and home entertainments.”\textsuperscript{37} Howe’s history, unlike many of the early trade press histories of in-cinema advertising, appears to be accurate. The earliest examples of advertising slides appear in 1908, we can reasonably date the proliferation and standardization of the form to a point prior to 1910. There were two important logics underlying the shift. First, the era from 1910 to 1915 witnessed “rapid growth” in national consumer advertising.\textsuperscript{38} Tied to rising interest in marketing to immigrants and the poor via mass repetition of imagery (technically

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Display Ad, \textit{Billboard} 26 December 1908: 35. A now very outdated bit of slang, ‘bumble puppy’ most likely refers, here, to a variation on the game of whist played with casual disregard for rules and conventions.}
\footnote{Intriguingly, song advertising may have provided a similar boost to cinema advertising in the early 1980s. As cinema advertising was once again growing, small companies like Cinema Concepts and Concert Cinema began screening music videos and live performances in movie theaters as advertisements. The form was seemingly popular with audiences. Kim B. Rotzoll, “The Captive Audience: The Troubled Odyssey of Cinema Advertising,” \textit{Current Research in Film} 3 (1987): 77, 80.}
\footnote{Frank B. Howe, “Commercial Lantern Slides,” \textit{Camera Craft} 24.2 (February 1917): 66. See also Roy D. Mock’s December 1916 article in \textit{Telephony}, in which he asserts, with less precision, that “[w]ith the increasing popularity of the movie, there has grown up a branch of advertising which a few years ago was unknown. We refer to the use of slides or short motion picture films as a means of exploiting certain products or services.” Roy D. Mock, “Fundamental Principles of the Telephone Business, \textit{Telephony} 71.24 (9 December 1916): 43.}
\end{footnotes}
advertising to the illiterate), the advertisers were also in the market for new, image-based ways to reach the masses.\footnote{Quentin J. Schultze ties the expansion of billboard advertising, and the Progressive opposition to it, to an aesthetic targeted to the poor and immigrants. Quentin J. Schultze, “Legislating Morality: The Progressive Response to American Outdoor Advertising, 1900-1917,” \textit{Journal of Popular Culture} 17.4 (1984): 37-38.} Second, the burgeoning cinema slide market boosted interest in cinema applications. The rapidly developing slide industry became a cut-throat business almost overnight, as every successful new concept was imitated by a multitude of competitors within months of its premiere.\footnote{The Brayton Manufacturing Company’s ‘Baby Show’ scheme – a simple idea in which theaters were encouraged to draw a crowd by showing a series of slides of cute babies – was immediately stolen by countless slide makers all across the country. Hans Meinhardt’s patented ‘clock slide’ concept – discussed at the end of the chapter – was so heavily pirated that he was unable to profitably market it himself. When conceptual theft wasn’t the problem, the industry had to contend with simple direct copying. In an echo of early film industry copyright problems (which eventually caused producers to place company logos directly onscreen in their films), the slide industry struggled to police copyright in its work, as unscrupulous businesses would rent slide series’ and re-photograph them, eventually renting out the duplicates as their own work. Brayton’s Baby Show: “The Brayton Baby Show Scheme,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 4.20 (15 May 1909): 632. Novelty Slide Company’s Baby Show: Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 4.26 (26 June 1909): 877. The Premo Company advertised baby shows on the exact same page! The same issue called Baby Shows “the fad of the summer”: “The Baby Show as a Summer Attraction,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 4.26 (26 June 1909): 869. The ‘baby show’ concept was still going strong as late as 1916. “The Better Way,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 7 October 1916: 69, and Epes Winthrop Sargent, “Advertising for Exhibitors,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 11 November 1916: 847. Clock Slide: “The Meinhardt Clock Slide,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 16.7 (17 May 1913): 714. Slide copying: “Amend the Lantern Slide Makers,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 3.1 (4 July 1908): 9.} As such, companies were seeking not only new product lines to sell, but also ways to reduce their price point so as to gain market share through lower prices.

Advertising could serve both of these ends. Though, as we shall see in successive chapters, the relationship that developed between advertisers and slide makers was not a unique one (many forms of cinematic advertising developed almost simultaneously), it is very apparent why the two would have been drawn together at this juncture. Advertisers were seeking an audience, and the rapidly proliferating slide businesses – in desperate need of regular income – were seeking other revenue streams.

Research into the trade presses of the early twentieth century, with particular focus on the display advertisements which slide manufacturers placed within their pages, shows a dramatic upswing in advertising slide production between 1908 and 1910. The first evidence of
advertising slide production in the *Moving Picture World* was the April 1908 advertisement from Boston’s Preston Lombard, in which he offered “Announcement, Advertising, [and] Special” slides.\(^{41}\) Although slides were not mentioned directly in the article, the Young Advertising Service of Manning, SC, was also engaging in ad slide sales by 25 July 1908. The *Moving Picture World* declared that the company had “originated a good advertising proposition” in which they had “arranged with several moving picture establishments for space upon the canvas between acts.”\(^{42}\) Within four months, on 7 November 1908, commercial lantern slides were common enough for the *Moving Picture World* to caution against their proliferation:

> quite a business was done Election Night [November 3\(^{rd}\)] in several dime theaters…with advertising slides. We venture to caution these places, however, that this advertising the grocery, shoe, drug, and other stores in their neighborhood will in time drive the people away from their shows. They come there and pay to see moving pictures and illustrated songs and not to get quotations on green apples from some local grocer.\(^{43}\)

During the latter half of 1908, then, the notion of the advertising slide arose – perhaps independently in multiple cities – as a viable product for use in nickelodeons. Importantly, the unproven assumption that advertising was incompatible with the cinema audience’s desires was

\(^{41}\) Display Ad, *Moving Picture World* 2.15 (11 April 1908): 329. The only mention of advertising slides being regularly integrated into theatrical programs that I have found predating this is international, and not cinema related. In late 1904, stage theaters in London began integrating them into “the interval between acts,” rather than using the standard advertising curtain. The practice was then new, even in England, as the article lauded the London houses for adopting the practice. Theodore Brown, “From the Editor’s Pen,” *Optical Lantern and Cinematograph Journal* November 1904: 2. This is not to say that such ad slides ran without complaint. In fact, Mrs. Lewis Waller refused to allow slides to break the continuity of her play “Zaza” at the Camden Theatre. The theater manager, in an act that seems shocking in hindsight, closed the theater rather than break his contract with advertisers. “From the Editor’s Pen,” *Optical Lantern and Cinematograph Journal* May 1905: 147.

\(^{42}\) The quote would be an extremely early date for celluloid based advertising, and the phrase ‘between acts’ indicates something shown during a reel change. As such, Young must have been contracting either for slides or curtains. As the idea is called ‘new,’ slides seem the most likely interpretation. “Ads with Moving Pictures,” *Moving Picture World* 3.4 (25 July 1908): 63. The *Moving Picture World* mentioned advertising slides a second time this month, but the wording is difficult to parse. In an article on the non-viability of motion pictures for advertising, the editor asserts: “To use such pictures as lantern slides have been used for many years would be another proposition and one which would not take as well with the advertiser.” It is unclear from this sentence if he means that advertising via slides was an old idea, or simply that it was a contemporary alternative notion. “Motion Pictures as an Advertising Proposition,” *Moving Picture World* 3.3 (18 July 1908): 43.

\(^{43}\) “Among the Slide Makers,” *Moving Picture World* 3.19 (7 November 1908): 357.
asserted almost immediately. Both the use of slides and the assumption that they were an inherent evil in the cinema would swell enormously over the course of the next five years.

Slide manufacturers, both established and newly formed, quickly jumped into the advertising slide field. The Well’s Moving Picture Enterprises’ included the tagline “Advertising and Special Lantern Slides Made” in their display ad of 24 October 1908.44 On 21 November of the same year the Ohio Transparency Company included a consumer goods advertising slide – a stock slide for cigar merchants – as the image in their trade press display ad, while the copy claimed “[s]ome exhibitors are paying their rent by exhibiting Advertising Slides before the show.”45 The Levi Company, Inc. (later to change its name to the Perfection Slide Company), offered the “brand new idea” of advertising slides in their display ad of 15 May 1909.46 On this same date, the Brayton Manufacturing Company took out a full-page display ad, devoting more than half of the space to their new line of advertising slides. The ad declared, at the top of the left hand column, “Advertising Slides will pay your expenses,” and included two photographic examples of their work: one for the Schulze Baking Company, and one for the Union Furniture Carpet Company.47 Cleary, as far as Brayton was concerned, the market for advertising slides had grown so rapidly in the preceding year that the cost of a full-page ad in the top flight cinema trade journal, Moving Picture World, was not a wasteful expense.

44 Display Ad, Moving Picture World 3.17 (24 October 1908): 348.
45 Display Ad, Moving Picture World 3.21 (21 November 1908): 404. Ohio Transparency’s first offer of advertising slides had been in a display ad the previous month: Moving Picture World 3.15 (10 October 1908): 283.
By June 12th of that year, a short article in the *Moving Picture World* concurred, avowing that “[w]ithin the past year a pleasing change has developed in the quality and character of the…announcements and advertising slides shown in nickel theaters,” and placed Brayton at the forefront of the movement that had “opened up a field of remuneration to the exhibitor.”

Between April 1908 and the end of 1910, at least twenty-three slide makers offered advertising slides through display ads in the pages of the *Moving Picture World*. The major centers of slide production – New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia – were also the hub cities for the ad slide trade. Companies dotted the countryside, however, with an unexpectedly large number of advertising slide manufacturers sprouting across the state of Missouri, for example, presumably to take advantage of a nationally central location. As such, it is undeniable that the advertising slide went through a phase of rapid development between 1908 and 1910, mushrooming across the country and attaining early widespread adoption by both slide manufacturers and film exhibitors.

50 Charles Musser notes that these three cities’ prominence in the lantern slide field was, by this point, longstanding: “Philadelphia functioned as the center of the American photographic and lantern-slide industries” from the 1860s; New York, though “only of secondary importance in the lantern slide world,…claimed several noteworthy enterprises”; and by 1893, “Chicago had become another important commercial center in the ‘optical trade,’ serving as a distribution point for the sale of lanterns and slides throughout the Midwest.” Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York and Toronto: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990), 36-37. The needs of advertising, however, steered ad slide production away from Philadelphia dominance and towards the advertising and marketing hub cities of Chicago and New York. Those two cities alone account for 44 of the 104 advertising slide manufacturers I have found, as opposed to only 5 in Philadelphia itself. And of those Philadelphia companies, 3 were already in business by the end of 1910 (as opposed to only 4 in New York and 9 in Chicago). As such, Michael Curtin’s argument about Chicago as a ‘media capital’ seems to apply to early 20th century advertising slides. Though such a study is beyond the scope of this dissertation, one way to distinguish the slide cultures of New York and Chicago, for example, would be that New Yorkers were far more concerned with technological innovation and patent control.
51 A “more geographically centralized location” was the overt reason given by the Alexander Film Company for moving its business from Washington state to Colorado. “Alexander Film Co.: Behind the Scenes” pamphlet, unpaginated [3], Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
Though it is clear that the nascent field was in full swing by the end of 1910, it is equally clear that small manufacturers and local merchants were the predominant clients in the early years. The unsettled and local nature of early slide business is directly evidenced in the fact a pair of sixteen year old boys from Sandusky, Ohio began an advertising slide company of their own and, by late May of 1909, were “getting out, after school hours and on Saturdays, two-hundred advertising slides a week.”\textsuperscript{52} The fact that young boys in Sandusky had heard of the concept implies its commonality, while their audacity in starting up and apparently succeeding with a business of this type strongly implies that, to this point, local manufacture was still more common than postal order or dealer ‘helps.’ By early 1911, columnist Thomas Bedding, in an article in Moving Picture World, came near to directly stating that such conditions persisted. Bedding admitted surprise that the ‘soulless’ advertising man, who would “advertise on a funeral hearse” if given the chance, had not adopted the motion picture theater for advertising purposes. While his mocking tone was not exactly inviting to advertisers, it is clear from his article that “Mr. Postum, Mr. Moxie, [and] Mr. Munyon,” among other major advertisers, were not at this point attempting national brand advertising through the medium of slides.\textsuperscript{53} As such, the quantity of active advertising slide producers in these first few years likely greatly exceeds the number advertising nationally in trade presses like the moving picture world, as the bulk were producing local slides for local use.

There are several plausible reasons for the rapid proliferation of commercial slide companies at this time. While local demand may have been the primary determinant for local production, part of the proliferation of national advertising slide companies might have been caused by what we could term a slide diaspora. At least one major slide manufacturer ‘gave

\textsuperscript{52} [Untitled News Note], \textit{Moving Picture World} 4.22 (29 May 1909): 714.
\textsuperscript{53} Thomas Bedding, “Propagandry and the Picture House,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 8.7 (18 February 1911): 347.
birth’ to a second around 1910. A news report from the time declares that A.V. Cauger had “formerly lived [in Neosho, MO] and was interested in the Neosho Slide Co.” before moving to Kansas City and “start[ing] the Kansas City Slide Co.”54 In the first half of the 1910s, both Neosho and Kansas City Slide were in the top tier of national slide companies. A second reason may be the fact that one could open and operate a slide company with very few employees. Though the Kansas City Slide Company already had thirty-two employees in 1912 (which ballooned further to 64 by 1914), the North American Slide Company of Philadelphia was able to operate with only three employees from 1916 to 1919.55 Two blocks up the street, the No-Destructo Slide Company employed only six Philadelphians in 1916.56 Third, the explosion of spending in the industry would undoubtedly have drawn prospectors to the field. The relentless expansion of both the advertising industry and the slide industry at this point in American history created a perfect storm for start-up businesses to enter the field in search of a quick buck.57

54 “Former Neosho Boy Makes Good,” Neosho Daily Democrat 20 April 1912: 2. Timothy S. Susanin says that Cauger moved to Kansas City in 1910 (Walt Before Mickey: Disney’s Early Years, 1919-1928 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 11). Brian Burnes, Robert W. Butler, and Dan Viets also note that the Kansas City Slide Company first appears in the 1910 city directory (Walt Disney’s Missouri: The Roots of a Creative Genius (Kansas City: Kansas City Star Books, 2002), 88). Both of these claims would roughly match the previous article’s assertion that the move occurred “about three years ago.” It is also plausible that the Novelty Slide Company of New York had a working relationship with Neosho, as they had very similar slogans – “The Cheapest Song Slide Service is the Best” for Novelty, and “the best is always the cheapest” for Neosho. (Display Ad, Billboard 5 December 1908: 98, and G.R. Lowe, “Slide Advertising for the Retail Druggist,” American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record April 1914: 44.) Novelty also, in May of 1909, inexplicably declared “If you’re from Missouri, we’ll show you that our claims are backed up by our excellent line of goods.” As Novelty gave its only address as New York City in this ad, the Missouri caveat is odd. The only alternative explanation that strikes me is that Missouri may have been dominated by Kansas City Slide and Neosho, and that this was a specific attack on their market. (Display Ad. Moving Picture World 4.21 (22 May 1909): 691.)


57 I have found no evidence that established ad agencies were opening their print-dominated business model to slides. All slide production seems to have been occurring in the offices of dedicated slide manufacturers. As such, a flourishing of small businesses was possible as the major players in advertising remained aloof. The only evidence I have that runs counter to this claim is a (likely poorly informed and poorly worded) letter to the editor from an exhibitor, which claimed that “already various advertising agencies are realizing this [is an] effective way of getting
Fourth, and most important, however, was the established relationship between slides and motion pictures in nickelodeon exhibition practices. Dedicated film theaters delivered a series of short films – one reel (roughly 15 minutes) in duration – from a single projector. Both song and announcement slides had developed as common means of filling the pause created during a reel change. This gap was a clear and established zone of indeterminate (but definitely non-filmic) content, during which a seated audience patiently waited for the next film. With exhibitors already seeking ways to fill this technologically mandated pause, and already turning to slide manufacturers to do so – especially the promotionally-inflected song-slides – advertisers interested in reaching the large and growing customer base of the motion pictures had an obvious form on which to focus their attention. Offering to pay the cost of announcement slides in exchange for including advertising, or, better yet, offering to pay the exhibitor a small weekly fee for the space (helping them ‘pay the rent’), it would not have been difficult for advertisers to stake claim to a part of the temporal flow which the film industry proper seemed incapable of or uninterested in filling. As such, though dated, lantern slide advertising emerged specifically as a way to capitalize on a large audience rendered idle by a reel change.

For the first few years, however, the young commercial slide industry was so flooded with small businesses – “many of which…were incompetent in the extreme”58 – and was so devoid of standards of practice that it looked as though it would soon self-destruct. Witness, for example, the story of the Marshaw Slide Manufacturing Service, criticized not once but twice, in early 1909, by the editors of the *Moving Picture World*. Though Marshaw claimed that business had suffered only a minor hiccup as they transitioned to larger quarters, complaints circulated for weeks about their failure to fill orders or even respond to queries. The *World* claimed to have

---

received “dozens” of complaints, including that of LeRoy Bickle, of Ardmore, Oklahoma’s Theatorium, whose slide order was weeks late – though the check had been cashed – and whose letters to the company had been ignored. While Marshaw itself was singled out as a particularly poor business in these notes, the company can be held up as a historical emblem of the poor business practices rampant in early advertising slide production.

The slide industry’s most pronounced problem was price-cutting, resulting in largely unsatisfactory slides being made just as they were becoming common in theaters. As photography journalist T. Stanley Curtis asserted, in late 1911:

> a number of men who possessed more business acumen than photographic or artistic talent...have entered the field and flooded it with worse than mediocre work, cutting their prices to the detriment of the conscientious slide makers.

Curtis also helpfully added that “[i]t was at the time when the demand increased so suddenly that the ‘shyster’ slide-makers started their work,” implying the importance of the nickelodeon boom to the rise of ‘shysters,’ without directly stating the fact. Corroborating evidence for this assertion exists at least as early as 1908, when New York song slide makers engaged in a price battle. By early 1909, the Ohio Transparency Company was already using a price-cutting reference as its company slogan: “The Best not the Cheapest.” By the middle of 1911, the Niagra Slide Company humorously attempted the reverse tactic, taking out a display ad in which

---


60 One of the most persistent acts of bad faith in the early slide business was F.H. Richardson’s nearly two-years of regular recommendation, in his *Moving Picture World* column, of the “Make ‘Em Your Self Slides” kit from the Utility Transparency Company. Richardson owned Utility, but never revealed that information in his column. I have discovered six examples in F.H. Richardson, “Projection Department,” *Moving Picture World* – 9.8 (2 September 1911): 622; 10.7 (18 November 1911): 546; 10.13 (30 December 1911): 1069; 13.6 (10 August 1912): 550; 15.12 (22 March 1913): 1216; and 15.13 (29 March 1913): 1334.


62 The *Moving Picture World* reported that “soon slides will be so cheap that the slide makers will be glad to give them away. Nevertheless the makers who stick to the price with a fair profit are still getting the business. Slide buyers are getting suspicious of price cutters.” “Among the Slide Makers,” *Moving Picture World* 3.21 (21 November 1908): 401.

they claimed to have all been “Arrested…for selling slides too cheap.” Publicly declared prices – still common in slide company self-advertising during these early years – also show a clear downward trajectory. The Brayton Manufacturing Company was advertising hand-colored advertising slides from custom copy for fifty cents each in December 1908. In March of 1909, the Levi Company dropped their price to thirty-five cents per slide, attributing the reduction to “increased facilities.” Later that same year, the Marshaw Slide Manufacturing Service matched that price. In mid-1912, the Erker Bros. Optical Company of St. Louis used the thirty-five cent price as a launch special for their new designs, and even offered to cut further (four dollars per dozen, or thirty-three and one-third cents per slide) for larger orders. That same year, George Birt of Indianapolis offered advertising slides for thirty cents each, and had cut corners so badly that he was openly admitting that his slides were merely black letters on color-tinted glass. By 1913, the Greater New York Slide Company had dropped its offer as low as eighteen cents per slide, if ordered in quantities of one-hundred, and (quite accurately) called it “an extremely low price for good advertising slides.” In the surviving data, the historical low point is found in a one-year contract, commencing in late 1914, signed by the Advertising Slide Company of St. Louis in which the company agreed to a price of sixteen cents per slide. However, slide maker Frank B. Howe, in his 1917 historical overview of the market, even asserted that hand colored, custom designed slides could be had for as little as ten-cents during this period. Knowing these

---

65 Display Ad, *Billboard* 26 December 1908: 43.
67 Display Ad, *Billboard* 11 Sept 1909: 40
71 International Shoe Company Contract, Folder 3, Charles Trefts Papers (C3465), State Historical Society of Missouri – Columbia.
conditions, it is perhaps unsurprising that companies could form and fold in less than a month—as Louisville’s Advertising Specialty Company did in early 1912.\footnote{Formation: “Correspondence: Louisville,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 11.5 (3 February 1912): 406. Dissolution: “Correspondence: Louisville,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 11.6 (10 February 1912): 506.}

The quantity of producers and rapidly dwindling pricing had dramatic effects on the industry as a whole in its early years, as companies tried every tactic imaginable to gain attention. As early as 1909, the Levi Company attempted to draw the eyes of trade press readers by heading a self-advertisement with the title “MURDER,” and then openly admitting that it was a ploy to get the reader’s attention.\footnote{Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 4.24 (12 June 1909): 810.} Apparently even at that date a mention of slides was no longer a draw to the potential client’s eye. More problematically, in the hyper-competitive early years of advertising slides, popular images would be rapidly pirated by unscrupulous opponents. Such companies would even publicly boast of their superior renditions of the work of others. A 1913 catalog from the Kansas City Slide Company, for example, included a page with eight slide images: four of which were the original designs of their competitors, while the other four were their own ‘superior’ renditions.\footnote{The third slide is a design that was used heavily in self-advertising for the Columbia Slide Company of Chicago. It is clear, therefore, that the Kansas City Slide Company was openly declaring their pirating of competing slide content. “Some Slides for Advertising in the Moving Picture Show,” p. 77, Box 4, Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC.}

In this wildly competitive market, a subset of slide companies—the larger companies regularly advertising in the trade press—attempted to add elements to their business model to help carve out a stable and profitable niche. Most of these elements ran directly parallel to principles of the established, print-focused advertising agencies: cultivating a notion of professional expertise, space brokering, and offering ‘services’ like distribution and screening
assistance. An oligarchy of high-end slide makers developed through these efforts to combat the price-cutting problem.

‘Professional’ rhetoric – assertions that one could be a slide advertising ‘expert’ – ran rampant in these early years, as companies attempted to mimic the ‘full service’ notion of traditional agencies by marketing themselves as not only manufacturers of slides, but creators of both visual and written copy. The Brayton Manufacturing Company, in their first full-page display ad, used the word “Artists” five times (along with the words “Original” and “Alive”) as a buffer between the two columns. The following month, Brayton asserted that profit was just a side effect of their public respect as “artists,” with the claim that “money-making is not our business or pleasure.” As early as 1911, the Lee Lash Company asserted that the weight of experience – its long history of ‘censorship’ of advertising curtains – had given the company keen insight into advertising copy. By 1912, the Thornton Advertising Company encouraged advertisers to see its hiring of B.S. Presba – described as a man with years of experience in slide advertising – as “evidence that…[they had] standardized Theatre Slide Advertising, and brought it to such a state of efficiency that it demands careful attention.” In 1913, the North American Slide Company brought the term ‘expert’ into the industry for the first time when it declared that its slides were “made by experts – the copy prepared and the drawings made by trained specialists,” resulting in their slides having “character…snap and go.” Within a decade – by 1922 – even the mainstream New York press was able to identify George Toner, of the Unique Slide Company, as a creator of “cornucopias, curlicues, and similar ornamental dingbats” under

---

79 Display Ad, *Printers’ Ink* 74.4 (26 January 1911): 91.
81 Display Ad, *Simmons’ Spice Mill* July 1913: 686; and August 1913: 790.
the assumption that the reader would understand the description as a recognizable sub-field of commercial art. For the general newspaper reader of 1922, ‘slide artist’ was a definable, if somewhat eccentric, profession. That same year, the Kansas City Slide Company declared in its monthly catalog update “Slide News,” that the price of slides was for the art rather than materials; as such, a decrease in the price of glass would not decrease the cost of slides because they were “drawn by high-salaried experts.”

This, however, was simply the explicit rhetoric. Many companies also tacitly declared expertise by publishing catalogs of stock slides – implying clearly that their creativity was what was for sale. Although A.V. Cauger of the Kansas City Slide Company claimed to have been “the first concern in the slide business to put out an illustrated list,” the Levi Company catalog was already in its ‘second edition’ as early as 1908 – two years before the Kansas City Slide Company opened for business. Perhaps Cauger was referring to his time with the Neosho Slide Company, which offered a sixteen page catalog, with ad slides included alongside announcement slides, by the end of 1909. By 1910, the Brayton company had taken to publicly referring to them as “Stock Advertising Slides.” Within a few years, many of the more prominent slide

---

82 “Holiday-Working Artist Scares Away Gang of Silk Burglars,” *New York Tribune* 5 September 1922: 1. The remainder of this article glorious fun. Toner was mentioned in the paper for his part in foiling a robbery. The gist of the situation is that Toner walked into the office during a holiday to find the place strewn with lace teddies.

83 Compare this to the 1913 price-cutting era, when the Mica Lantern Slide Company openly describe it’s decrease in prices (to the ten to forty cent range) as the result of being “able to close a contract with the Mica dealers...[and obtain] raw material at a reduction [in price].” For the Mica company, materials cost was directly related to slide price. Mica: “Philadelphia Notes,” *Exhibitors’ Times* 1.2 (24 May 1913): 8. KC: *Slide News* March 1922, p. 4, Box 4, Folder “KC Slide Co –Flyers “Slide News”,” Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC.


producers – including Scott & Van Altena, the Niagara Slide Company, the Erker Bros. Optical Company, and Burden & Salisbury - offered catalogs in their self-advertising, and many others were likely circulating catalogs without offering them nationally through trade press self-advertising. By 1917, the practice was so common that photography expert Thomas P. Mason asserted that anyone thinking of starting a commercial slide company should, as their first act, “classify his possible customers according to their lines of business and then make up…some ready-to-serve designs” that could be made and sold immediately through a catalog list. In the absence of (or possibly in addition to) a catalog, some companies would even send one slide free as an example of the high quality of their work. Both the Mica Non-Breakable Slide Company, in 1912, and the Columbia Slide Company, in 1915, even offered to make a free sample from the advertiser’s copy. As such, either through direct claims or the weight of catalogs, advertisers were encouraged to see slide copy as an expert service provided by slide companies.

‘Professionalization’ was not just implied in copy writing practices, however. In an attempt to indicate that slide advertising was a stable and accepted medium, slide producers either offered, or explicitly guaranteed, distribution in various ways. Space brokering – the very same concept which the print-based agencies had used in the late 1800s to stabilize magazine and newspaper advertising – was the method of choice for the Motion Picture Advertising Company and Lee Lash Company, both of New York City, and the Auerbach Advertising Agency of Butte, Montana. Space brokering in motion pictures consisted of the signing of exclusive contracts with a number of theaters and then ‘reselling’ the contracted advertising

space to clients as part of the cost of a slide purchase. The Lee Lash Company had enough theaters under contract that a one-year advertising deal, running until the 31st of May 1913, was valued at $87,946.

In the absence of space brokering, two other forms of ‘guarantee’ were attempted: offering a check-up service, or offering to aid in contracting theaters. At least one, the Thornton Advertising Company, took the former course and attempted “to absolutely guarantee service” by using a system of “territorial managers” to personally double-check that slides were being screened as promised, and in good condition. Although Thornton is the only example I have uncovered, this method would have been relatively easy for small, locally focused slide producers to integrate. Multiple slide concerns – such as the Harold Ives Company and the

---

91 The Auerbach agency claimed to “represent thirty of the best photo-play houses in Montana.” Display Ad, Advertising & Selling February 1913: 79. The Motion Picture Advertising Company claimed the much more grand figure of “500 motion picture theaters throughout the Eastern States.” Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 81.11 (12 December 1912): 97. Additionally, the Keeshen Advertising Agency claimed to have guaranteed screenings in five “first run” theaters in Oklahoma City in August of 1915, though they did not openly claim exclusivity. Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 92.9 (26 Aug 1915): 88. The idea persisted among film and technological advertisers as well, as we shall see. Though I have as yet found no evidence for the typical duration and cost of an exclusive cinema theater contract, the Lee Lash Company signed ten year and five year contracts with stage theaters in 1902 and 1908 respectively. 1902: “Lee Lash Co. v. White,” District Reports of Cases Decided in All the Judicial Districts of the State of Pennsylvania During the Year 1907 (Philadelphia: Howard W. Page, 1907), 393-397. 1908: “Nixon & Zimmerman Amusement Co. v. Lee Lash Company, Appellant,” Pennsylvania Superior Court Reports, Volume 46 (New York: Banks Law Publishing Company, 1915), 89-93.

92 “Lee Lash Co. v. Northwestern Consol. Mining Co.,” Federal Reporter with Key-Number Annotations, Volume 218 (St. Paul: West Publishing Co, 1915), 910-911. Though they were based in New York, this lawsuit appears to have been for a contract with the Chicago office. Using fuzzy math, dozens – if not hundreds – of theaters were in use for this contract. Depending upon the number of operating days, $87,946 results in a per day cost of between $230 and $280. Taking the Keeshen Advertising Agency’s 1915 price for five top flight theaters ($4 per day) as the baseline (when, in fact, it is the highest dollar total I have seen), Lee Lash would have to have been using more than 50 theaters per day. Considering, however, that they claimed to have made at least 2,681 slides – for a series of only four - simple division indicates that the number of theaters may have been as high as 650. As replacements for broken slides must be taken into account, as well as the significant likelihood of a lower per day cost (perhaps even below $1 per theater) it seems safer to assume that the number of theaters was somewhere in between: perhaps around 200 to 300. This number is not unreasonable for Lee Lash, which was able to put ads for American Chicle chewing gum on the curtains of 550 stage theaters in 1917. “How the American Chicle Company Sold Its Salesmen on New Campaign,” Printers’ Ink 98.4 (25 January 1917): 61.

93 It is interesting that so little information survives on space brokering by slide makers. For some reason, it appears to have been either uncommon, or at least not worth mentioning in self-advertising. However, the Lee Lash Company provides evidence that space brokering happened in stage theaters for advertising curtains (see earlier note). Chapter four will provide ample evidence that space brokering was fundamental to the post-war survival of the advertising trailer. As such, if space brokering was truly as limited in slide production as it appears, that fact is a decided historical anomaly.

94 Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 79.2 (2 May 1912): 16.
Neosho Slide Company – went the latter route and offered to aid in contracting with theaters for screenings of finished slides. These methods of ‘guaranteeing’ circulation in the absence of space brokering contracts with theaters were, likewise, attempts to prove that slide advertising was not a scattershot and unprofessional affair, and that the professional slide maker had the experience and knowledge necessary to get advertising slides onto screens.

In short order, the larger slide producers began describing themselves as ‘full service’ agencies for motion picture theater advertising. The Neosho Slide Company declared, by 1912, that they made slides “complete from the design to the guaranteed delivery of the slides to your trade.” By 1914, the Kansas City Slide Company was offering contracts for service that included new slides weekly, conceived, made and mailed with no need for continual advising by the advertiser. In 1921, the Standard Slide Corporation’s notion of a ‘full service’ slide manufacturing concern was clear from the following description:

> We prepare the layout of the copy for the slide; explain how the slides can be used to the best advantage; secure the dealer’s cooperation and take entire charge of the distribution of slides direct to dealers with return card check-up.

Integrating elements of all of the above – copy writing, consultation, and distribution assistance – the slide manufacturer as professional expert on slide advertising became common by the mid-1910s, as slide manufacturers effectively became cinema-based ad ‘agencies’ in an American

---

95 Harold Ives: Display Ad, Advertising & Selling June 1913: 45. Neosho: Display Ad, Boot and Shoe Recorder 1 Nov 1911: 125; and Printers’ Ink 79.12 (20 June 1912): 81. Neosho’s work also provides some indirect historical evidence of the commonness of distribution assistance. The Neosho Slide Company was sending out so many slide packages in 1914 that it triggered an official investigation by the Joint Committee to Investigate the Parcel Post. It was found that the slide company and the William P. Stark Nurseries combined were resulting in unexpectedly large postal traffic in and out of Neosho, MO. The Parcel Post, Report of the Joint Committee to Investigate the General Parcel Post, 1 December 1914 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1915):44.

96 Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 79.12 (20 June 1912): 81.

97 “Some’ Comic Slides,” p. 132, Box 3, Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC.

advertising culture where medium exclusivity was still a common way of differentiating advertising companies.

Much of the above professionalization, despite the slide industry’s largely catalog (and therefore local merchant) based business, included one further rhetorical spin designed to imply strength and stability: the implication was always that slides were plausible for national campaigns. The attempt to draw national advertising contracts as a way to legitimize and stabilize both a company (through windfall profits) and the industry (by association with mainstream advertisers) was often rhetorically bald-faced. Overt name dropping, of national manufacturers who had once used a slide maker’s service, proliferated in self-advertising. Often such mentions included example images printed as part of the display ad. For example, well-known brands and manufacturers like Arrow Collars and the American Tobacco Company appeared in the self-advertising for the Greater New York Slide Company and Niagara Slide Company respectively.99 The Advertising Slide Company of St. Louis even circulated a portfolio of previous work for national advertisers like Coca Cola, Sunkist Oranges, and the Heinz (“57 Varieties”) Corporation.100 Other companies overwhelmed a lack of concrete detail with large numbers – like Neosho’s 1912 declaration that “40 National Advertisers” were using their distribution service, or the Novelty Slide Company’s boast that “115 National Advertisers” had at one point signed a contract for their slides.101 The presumed endorsement of national advertisers, on top of full-service appeals, made top-flight ad slide manufacturers look quite stable.

100 The company even claimed to have “sold Sunkist their first slides and have been honored with their business ever since.” Portfolio, Folder 4, Charles Trefits Papers (C3465), SHSMO-C.
101 Neosho: Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 79.12 (20 June 1912): 81. Novelty: Display Ad, Advertising & Selling 22.9 (February 1913): 77. Additionally, the Thornton Advertising Company (Full-Page Ad, Printers’ Ink 79.5 [2 May 1912]: 16) included a laundry list of former clients of B.S. Presha.
Despite all these efforts, the advertising slide business, in the short term, was a troubled realm. Price competition by small, often fly-by-night producers had placed individual company profit above market health and had devastated the public reputation of the form. Regardless of the attempts by the larger manufacturers to attain professional credibility, cut-rate slide producers, and their many clients, created an avalanche of shoddy product and poor display practices…and a massive backlash against advertising slides.\textsuperscript{102} To the vexation of the larger slide makers, in-cinema advertising became not only common, but so often ‘incompetently’ produced, that public complaints proliferated. A parade of exhibitor rejections and legal restrictions of slides appear in the historical record between 1912 and 1916.

As spectator complaint expanded, many exhibitors took it upon themselves to try to force advertising off of cinema screens. At least one prominent member of the film press – the \textit{Moving Picture World}'s own Epes Winthrop Sargent – playing on growing anti-advertising feelings, made claims to a supposedly higher moral standing that the ‘manager’ had over the ‘billposter,’ asserting the need to “[h]ave respect for your business even if you have none for yourself.” For Sargent, the exhibitor who would turn a screening of ‘Quo Vadis’ into a “store show” by breaking it up with slides indicating “that the bull Ursus kills represents a well known brand of smoking tobacco,” was the epitome of capital influenced moral degradation.\textsuperscript{103} Exhibitors themselves often simply refused to run ad slides (occasionally using such a decision as a reason for chest-thumping in the press.) A few theaters in Louisville, Kentucky, for example, voluntarily abandoned slides altogether in 1912 on the grounds that “the public…[was] not meeting the show-slide with particular warmth, and that not enough business [could] be secured

\textsuperscript{102} Frank B. Howe, "Commercial Lantern Slides," \textit{Camera Craft} 24.2 (February 1917): 67. \\
to make the shortening of the shows worth while.” 104 The Dreamland Theater, of Augusta, Georgia, was more boisterous in its rejection, asserting not only that “[n]o advertising slides go on our screen...at any price,” but also that they would not even place advertising in their printed programs. 105 Multiple public refusals of this nature are recorded in the motion picture trade press.

Two specific legal attacks on slide advertising, in the wake of public outrage, have also come to light. In 1915, Bloomington, Illinois, added an extra $20 per year to the licensing fee for theaters using “advertising slides or curtains.” 106 Acting as both a deterrent (for theaters who did not want to pay an extra $20 before inaugurating a possibly damaging advertising line), and an act of acceptance (simply an added tax on increased profits), the Bloomington advertising fee indicates not only the commonality of debate of the topic, but also the public’s difficulty in knowing quite how to respond to it. The double-edged law implies the existence of both quality professional slides and cheap profiteering. Legislators in Boston attempted to pass a bill in 1916 of much less ambiguity: the bill would have made it illegal to show any advertising onscreen in Boston – “with the exception of...religious or charitable institutions or events, or when it refers to his own theatrical affairs” – with a mandatory fine of $50-200 for violators, and a license revocation for repeat offenders. 107 By the mid-1910s, then, public condemnation of slides had reached such a fever pitch that local government was stepping in.

In the absence of the defunct song slides, and with the growing reluctance to use advertising slides to fill the gaps between reels, the advertising slide began slowly slipping out of typical theater programs. Many exhibitors turned increasingly to self-promotion to fill gaps.

During the early 1910s, an increasing use of home-made slides to announce either the next film in the program, or the program for the following day, led to an eventual professionalization of the ‘coming attraction’ or ‘advance’ slide. In 1911, F.H. Richardson, in early advertising for his typewriter slides, declared that “Up-to-date theaters use them for announcing future programs” – a practice which surely dated back to old scratch and handwritten slides in the earliest film theaters. Earlier that year, exhibitor Samuel Acri, in a letter to the editor of *Moving Picture World*, requested that the practice be professionalized. Acri asked studios to circulate advance slides with images and names of actors and actresses on the grounds that the drawing power of certain performers could improve box office receipts if it was used to advertise. Over the following years, the ‘coming attraction’ slide would be inaugurated in a number of formats, by independent (non-Patents Company affiliated) studios, in an effort to increase the competitive value of their films. In July of 1912, both the Crown Feature Film Company and Universal were offering ‘announcement slides’ for their upcoming productions. Reliance offered advance announcement slides – made by high-class slide producers Scott & Van Altena – by 1913. Between 1912 and 1913, a number of general slide producers also began circulating coming attraction slides (apparently without studio consent or funding), including the Novelty Slide Company and the Manhattan Slide Company. By early 1913, however, the practice was still so haphazard that the Windsor Cut-Out Slide Company of Baltimore was offering, for 75

---

110 See chapter four for more information on the transition from the largely non-competitive approach of the Patents Company unit to independent studios and heightened competition.
cents per week, rudimentary ‘coming attractions’ slides which featured nothing but a list of the next program’s titles cut out of plain paper.\textsuperscript{114} Discussion of the Windsor slides, in \textit{Moving Picture World}, provides evidence for the growing use of the pause between reels to streamline audience pleasure. Rather than frittering away the pause on advertising or songs, only to have spectators get up to leave in the early moments of a film (after realizing that the program has started to repeat), Windsor advocated for the use of film-title slides not only to announce the next program, but even to announce the next picture in the current sequence. In this way, patrons would “have a chance to leave before the [actual film] is thrown on the screen.”\textsuperscript{115} The ‘advance’ slide, then, became a standard form of exhibitor discourse with patrons in the early 1910s, both to keep the program running smoothly, and to entice patrons to return for more.

Other forms of theater self-publicity joined the ‘coming attraction’ slide in the pauses in the program. One example was the Novelty Slide Company’s advocacy of regular screenings of a slide indicating that the theater was “A Member of the Exhibitor’s League of America.” This information would supposedly indicate that one’s program was consistently of the highest quality.\textsuperscript{116} Such self-advertising tactics are indicative of a transition in exhibition philosophy before 1915, when exhibitors would attempt to either phase out the reel change pause (by installing a second projector and moving to a model with only one intentional ‘intermission’ between turns of the program\textsuperscript{117}), or use the pauses for theater business. This streamlining of the

\textsuperscript{114} At each program change, the operator would swap the old list for the new one, placing it between a reusable pair of clear mica plates. Display Ad, \textit{Exhibitors Times} 1.3 (31 May 1913): 5; and “Advertising the Picture,” \textit{Exhibitors Times} 1.4 (7 June 1913): 10.


\textsuperscript{116} “Exhibitors’ Slides,” \textit{Exhibitors Times} 1.6 (21 June 1913): 29.

\textsuperscript{117} The analysis of the above mentioned Boston slide fine bill, from 1916, mentioned that theaters were, by that point, split between a model in which slides were shown “at intermission…or between reels.” William M. Flynn, “An Anti-Advertising Slide Bill,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 27.5 (5 February 1916): 755. The use of a second projector was “steadily on the increase” in the middle of 1912. “Facts and Comments,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 12.9 (1 June 1912): 805. The notion that an intermission occurred between turns, not in the middle of the program comes from: John B. Rathbun, “Motion Picture Making and Exhibiting,” \textit{Motography} 10.3 (9 August 1913): 95.
program sequence, purportedly for the benefit of patrons, while not completely incompatible with continued advertising slide use, reduced the amount of space available for their integration.

Quality cutting had clearly damaged both exhibitors’ and advertisers’ faith in the standard advertising slide. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the commonly reported ‘hissing’ at slides by angry spectators was not a natural response to an unwanted imposition into the film program, as silent era critics would contend. Rather, slide hatred was the outgrowth of a particular historical moment in which the slides themselves were ugly and often screened for months on end, even when dirty and broken, and in which the quantity had escalated beyond the tolerance level. Indeed, a 1921 article in *Moving Picture Age* declared that “[a]lmost any theater owner will agree that it is the poor slides that draw the kicks. For this reason the…theater manager…must insist on good slides.” Though a minority of voices likely continued to oppose advertising slides throughout the silent era – decrying them as a generic ‘evil’ of the motion picture theater – the origin of viewer and exhibitor displeasure was abusive early business practices which put slide-industry competition above spectator desires.

Although the print-based ad agencies were, even then, waging a successful battle against public distrust, the lantern slide industry – less entrenched in the business model of exhibition

---

119 George M. Rittelmeyer - “Slide Advertising,” *Moving Picture World* 13 September 1913: 1178 – though he expressed a blanket condemnation of advertising, specifically pointed to quantity as the problem: “From all quarters of the United States the patrons…are complaining about the increasing number of advertising slides.” Emphasis added.
120 “How to Use Ad Slides,” *Moving Picture Age* February 1921: 17.
121 Aside from his admission about quantity, an exemplary article of this type is George M. Rittelmeyer, “Slide Advertising,” *Moving Picture World* 13 September 1913: 1178, in which he declared “[t]he moving picture men of America owe it to themselves and the public generally to discontinue the slide evil – for it is an evil in every sense of the word.” The fact that ‘high class’ theaters continued their embargo on all forms of consumer goods advertising deep into the 1920s, and perhaps beyond, indicates that the anti-slide rhetoric had persistence and developed class connotations.
122 The truth in advertising movement and the attempts to inaugurate college level advertising education were both tactics designed to combat the ‘humbug’ problem in which the advertising industry was associated with the misleading tactics of P.T. Barnum and patent medicines. Truth: Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press,
than print ads were to magazines and newspapers – struggled to fight a battle against public
distaste in the absence of clear financial underwriting of the exhibition field. The evolving
oligarchy of large manufacturers, while shifting their business model to full-service and their
rhetoric to national advertiser appeals and professionalization, paralleled their self-elevation with
critique of the problems in their industry. Decrying price-cutters as the bane of the slide field,
this minority of major slide makers both admitted and condemned the state of their industry, in
an attempt to put themselves above the fray. In seeking to rationalize and solidify their industry,
and to shift the public perception of slides from ‘parasite’ to legitimate cinema adjunct, major
slide manufacturers did not simply offer better product, but argued explicitly that quality was the
opposite of low cost. High price became almost synonymous with quality production.

Although T. Stanley Curtis asserted, in late 1911, that the price-cutting situation was
starting to improve, the movement for higher quality slides would not become apparent in
slide-maker self-advertising until 1912 and 1913. As early as 1912, direct mention of prices in
display advertising began to disappear. Many, including the Kansas City Slide Company,
eventually began to hold the line on prices in order to keep quality up – their minimum price for
stock advertising slides was fifty cents each in 1913. Signs of the coming transition to pricier
slides appear in the advertising from the Niagara Slide Company in 1913, which held to the then
common thirty-five cent price tag only for duplicates; the first iteration of any ad slide would
cost fifty to seventy-five cents. The Neosho Slide Company was attempting a rhetorical
flourish to justify higher prices as early as 1914, claiming “the best is always the cheapest” (a bit

Education, 1900-1917,” Business History Review 56.1 (Spring 1982).
124 Frank B. Howe, “Commercial Lantern Slides,” Camera Craft 24.2 (February 1917): 70; and “Some Slides for
Advertising in the Moving Picture Show,” p. 5, Box 4, Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records
(K0637), SHSMO-KC.
125 Display Ad, Moving Picture World 15.2 (11 January 1913): 197.
of linguistic double talk which, though still capable of drawing business from someone scanning the page for the word cheapest, actually meant that the greater returns from a more expensive ad paradoxically made it a ‘cheaper’ advertisement). In their previously cited 1912-13 contract, the Lee Lash Company legally claimed the value of its slides at $1 each – a claim that was not contested. In 1914, the Perfection Slide Company offered any two slides, out of a pictured eight, for $1.50. By 1915, a letter to the editor of a journal for piano tuners indicated that Neosho’s price for stock slides was also seventy-five cents at that point, and the Best Slide Company took to openly deriding price cutting in its catalog, saying “[t]he price cutter never commands respect.”

Though it is difficult to name a date for when, or even if, the major players in the industry entirely ‘won’ the price cutting conflict and rallied around a stable minimum of pricing, it is clear that the problem drug on, in some regions, at least as late as 1917. Camera Craft magazine published two articles in 1917 in which descriptions of price-cutting were worded to imply that it was a current problem. Frank B. Howe’s previously cited article of February 1917 still claimed that coming attraction slides could be had for nine cents in 1917, and asserted that only two companies were then holding the line on prices.

Thomas P. Mason, though he was writing six

126 G.R. Lowe, “Slide Advertising for the Retail Druggist,” American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record April 1914: 44. Philadelphia’s North American Slide Company tried something similar two years earlier by claiming that “[t]he quality of our slides is remembered long after the price is forgotten.” Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 81,4 (24 October 1912): 83.


128 Full-Page Display Ad, Illustrated Milliner April 1914: 45.


130 Frank B. Howe, “Commercial Lantern Slides,” Camera Craft 24.2 (February 1917): 68, 70. Judging from the included imagery, the two were the Kansas City Slide Company and the Novelty Slide Company. The Vitaslide Company also had images reproduced, but as they made complex technological slides rather than traditional slides (see below), they would not have been included in Howe’s estimate. The Kansas City Slide Company’s catalog was even quoted directly in this article as stating: “Poor, cheap slides are hurting the business. Time will change this, as the tendency is to give more attention to the matter of better slides.” A form of this claim was being printed in
months later, still took the time to mention that one could not cut costs to twenty-five cents or less and maintain quality because “[i]t costs an average of thirty cents each to make and market the slides.” As such, fading, low-end manufacturers might have persisted in price-cutting up until the start of American involvement in World War I.

In New York, where small, cut-rate producers were so common as to threaten the entire local industry, a more direct attack on price competition was attempted. Rather than simply holding the line on prices and attempting to use rhetoric to sway advertisers to better quality slides, a small group of slide manufacturers attempted, in 1914, to form a local slide monopoly. Late in the year, an undisclosed ringleader company (most likely Joseph F. Coufal’s Novelty Slide Company) sent letters to all the prominent New York concerns suggesting a group meeting. This ringleader made two arguments for amalgamation: first that one large unit could more effectively drive out price cutting – thereby both guaranteeing “a high standard of work generally” and a stability of profit that would “encourage new business and ideas”; second, that a combine could appeal to national advertisers more effectively. As such, this was a plan designed to combat price cutting by creating a single, large, service-oriented organization, in the name of more effectively and profitably courting advertising dollars.

Though nothing appears to have come of this initial effort in the short run, two years later an association, rather than an amalgamation, of quality slide producers went into effect – most

Kansas City Slide Company catalogs as early as 1913; see: “Some Slides for Advertising in the Moving Picture Show,” Box 4, Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC.

131 Mason additionally declared that, though thirty cents was the minimum, slides “worth from seventy-five cents to a dollar and a half” should be turned out regularly by anyone with the skills to operate a profitable slide company. Thomas P. Mason, “Commercial Slide Making,” Camera Craft 24.8 (August 1917): 321.

132 “Combine of Slide Manufacturers,” Billboard 3 October 1914: 52.

133 A similar attempt was made in Chicago, roughly a year earlier, when the International Slide Advertising Company attempted to engage all local exhibitors as stock holders. Using a dividend structure to encourage them to use the most expensive slides possible, International hoped to boost both the quality of slides and the income from them. The fact that the exhibitors were coerced into attending the incorporation meeting under false pretenses, however, likely doomed the venture from the start. “Chicago Letter,” Exhibitors Times 1.8 (12 July 1913): 15-16.
likely for the same reasons and featuring the same major players. Led (in this case definitely) by the Novelty Slide Company, seven powerful New York slide companies banded together in an official association. Envisioned as a slide centered adjunct to the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry (NAMPI – an early film industry organization designed to ‘clean up’ the movies), the group operated under the slogan “Unity of Action Spells Screen Success.” This association was designed “to promote the quality of the lantern slide, and to insure for exhibitors a standard of workmanship in slides” – in part by “[s]tandardization of prices with a fixed minimum,” banning the “imitat[ion] of another’s design,” and by eliminating free samples, free design work, and other “illegitimate competitive methods.” The association thus directly attacked poor business practices in the field. Though no extant information on this organization stresses advertising as a fundamental issue, it is worth remarking that, of the seven charter members – Novelty Slide Company, Manhattan Slide and Film Company, Perfection Slide Company, Commercial Slide Company, Greater New York Slide Company, Excelsior Illustrating Company, and Long and Heller, Inc. – all but the latter two had been openly soliciting the business of national advertisers for years. The additional fact that, by 1920, “[t]he kind of slides in demand are used mostly for advertising purposes” makes any action by slide companies effectively into a decision regarding advertising dollars.

The association of price with quality – so obvious in Coufal’s slide maker association – was paralleled by attempts to encourage both advertisers and exhibitors to engage in more

136 The above list is from after the official formation of the association. An alternative list was published in *Motography* two weeks earlier, in which the Perfection Slide Company and Long & Heller were omitted, with Scott & Van Altena and the Economy Slide Company included instead. In both lists, however, the number of companies with known connections to advertising slides was five – and a total of six of the nine companies reported. “Film Chiefs Meet in Chicago,” *Motography* 16.20 (11 November 1916): 1056.
responsible screening practices. For advertisers, this was accomplished through a transition to long-term service contracts which included mandatory slide changes on a regular basis. For exhibitors this included exhortations to limit the quantity of slides integrated into the program.

Changing the slide weekly, or at worst bi-weekly, became something of a mantra for those interested in regularizing the form. G.R. Lowe of the Neosho Slide Company, “Old Man Best” of the Best Slide Company, and independent advisors Frank Farrington and Ernest A. Dench all encouraged the use of a new slide every week. Most worded the advice pessimistically, citing advancing levels of irritation, though D.H. Harris optimistically declared that “change of copy…brought the largest response.” Keeping the patrons from seeing the same slide multiple times was deemed essential to evading spectator irritation. For a cinema culture not yet used to ‘reruns’ (a common experience for the television and home video generations), repetition of slides was seen as an inherent fault.

Proliferation was also an issue deemed worth of comment. It is not uncommon to run across, in the trade press of the early 1910s, hyperbolic condemnation of the quantity of advertising slides in a given show. Take, for example, the criticism from “[a] correspondent” in Guthrie, OK, sent to the Moving Picture World in 1914, “protest[ing] against a twenty or thirty-

138 Ernest Dench declared that showing a slide “for months, until it gets cracks, dirty and faded” is “a thousand times worse” than wasting your slide expenditure on the “least desirable theater.” As such changing your slide “once-a-week is an ideal interval, but in no case should it exceed a month.” Ernest A. Dench, Advertising by Motion Pictures (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1916), 195, 197; G.R. Lowe, “Slide Advertising for the Retail Druggist,” American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record April 1914: 44; Best Booster December 1915, p. 4. Folder “Best Slide Co – Catalogs 1915,” Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC, Frank Farrington, “Advertising in Moving-Picture Shows,” Bulletin of Pharmacy 27.6 (June 1913): 249.


140 For those advertisers who were concerned about the increase in cost associated with buying, for example, eight slides to advertise for a two month period, rather than buying just one, slide proponents suggested signing contracts with multiple theaters, so that slides could be passed from one to the next to extend their use value. With eight contracted theaters, the number of slides purchased to advertise for a two month period would be the same, as the slides would circulate from one theater to the next each week. “Use Slides to Advertise,” Furniture Worker 37.5 (May 1920): 178.
minute siege of advertising slides at moving picture houses.”

Excessive slide usage was common enough that many slide proponents felt moved to suggest a specific numerical limit. In late 1911, Motography’s resident projection specialist, William T. Braun, proposed that “no more than two or three should be run at each show,” and asserted that further congestion could be relieved by dispersing that limited number into multiple reel-changes. By 1913, John B. Rathbun – author of a guide to film production and exhibition – asserted that “three slides should be the limit in any case,” and warned strongly against screening any outside of the intermission, “after the theater is darkened for the show.” The most permissive (and most common) quantity which has turned up in my research was twelve per program. Ernest A. Dench asserted, in 1916, that in a good theater “the slides do not exceed one dozen.” Exhibitor S.L. ‘Roxy’ Rothapfel proposed the same number that year as well. As such, the spectatorial experience was to be disturbed minimally, and always with fresh, professional looking advertising material.

Although no published sales material from slide companies declares such to be the case, it is plausible that both space brokering and other forms of exhibition assistance were inaugurated specifically for this reason – as a way for slide producers to help limit the number of slides any given theater would screen.

---

141 “Exhibitors’ News: In the Southwest,” Moving Picture World 25 April 1914: 545. See also, Charles A. Young’s report of “two dozen or so advertising slides” at the beginning of the Elmo Theater’s program, prompting a young male patron to complain “Just see the line of dope we’ve got to look at”: “Among the Chicago Houses,” Moving Picture World 10.8 (25 November 1911): 624.


146 An 1893 article in Iron Age directly attacked the ‘clutter’ of merchant areas papered liberally with “gaudy and senseless placards,” and suggested that the use of advertising lithographs was only acceptable if they were exceptionally attractive and limited in number. While the distinction between spatial and temporal limitations is an important one, this is yet another precedent for slide advertising conditions found in the history of advertising lithography. Pamela Walker Laird, Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 219.
Through these efforts by top-flight slide producers to legitimize and professionalize the field, at the expense of any small slide producer which attempted to compete on price alone, large national advertisers were becoming sold on the value of slide advertising. More and more consumer goods manufacturers dabbled in the field, to varying degrees of success. The makers of Calumet Baking Powder found, in a survey of dealers in 1912 and 1913, that slide advertisements were dramatically increasing sales; in one extreme case, a dealer, after regular slide advertising for two months, saw a 50% increase in total sales. The trade press for druggists had declared slides the best form of advertising for soda as early as 1914. The “Question Box” section of the 1914 *Monthly Bulletin of the National Commercial Gas Association* was also enthused, as all but one dealer reported good results from slide advertising, provided regular changes were maintained, and seasonal articles were stressed. Goodyear was also sold on slide advertising by 1914, as their “Dealer Help Book” for that year asserted that the movie theater patron “sees [advertising] at a time when his mind is not only most influenced by what you have to say, but when you are sure of his WHOLE attention.” Some combination of slide producer professionalization, cinema psychology rhetoric, and measurable financial impact had developed a distinct appreciation of the short, direct advertising slides in cinema programs.

As the quality of slides improved, a few exhibition groups changed their tune as well. Two state exhibitor leagues – Ohio and Michigan – along with the exhibitors association of St.

---

149 There were only two dissenting letters – both from George W. Allen of the Consumers’ Gas Company of Toronto. His first was the first public response printed, in which he declared that slides in theaters were “not...profitable from a gas standpoint.” His second letter seems like an angry response to the enthusiasm of others, as he admitted to using slides for educational sales lectures, but declared that motion picture theater advertising not only failed to reach gas consumers, but was “also not conducive towards upholding the dignity desired by responsible gas companies.” See the following issues, all from 1914, for the conversation: 5.4 (April): 276; 5.5 (May): 373; 5.6 (June): 459; and 5.7 (July): 561. Allen’s letters appeared in April and July.
150 Full-Page Display Ad, *Printers’ Ink* 89.5 (29 October 1914): 85. This rhetoric of the captive and attentive audience was common when discussing slides; see below.
Louis (which consisted of fifty theaters), went so far as to allow theaters to pay their monthly ‘dues’ to the association by running a slide for which the association, rather than the theater, was paid—effectively making the association itself a space broker. Although all three groups made allowances for exhibitor reluctance, allowing them to pay dues in cash if they desired, the fact that regional exhibition groups had accepted slides to such a degree indicates a generally dwindling exhibitor hesitancy. Likewise, tirades about abusing cinema patrons all but disappeared from the trade press after 1916. Every published mention of slide advertising from 1918 to the early 1920s was an unreserved recommendation. Surprisingly, then, the era of slide hate—so overblown in the historical memory of the form—was actually relatively brief and very early. It was largely a memory by the mid-teens. While it may be a stretch to assume that advertisers, exhibitors, and spectators had found mutually acceptable ground, at the very least, the public debate had burned itself out and moved on to other areas (like product placement, industrial films, and advertising trailers, all of which were much more common after World War I). The advertising slide industry was, with the disappearance of large scale public condemnation in print, left to persist or dissolve on a company-by-company, and exhibitor-by-exhibitor basis.

The fact that it persisted, even in the wake of the advent of advertising trailers (see chapter four), indicates that the implied reduction of antipathy was, in practice, an actual one.

151 St. Louis was the earliest to definitely use the plan, which was in operation by 1917 (“St. Louis Theater Men Meet,” *Motography* 17.4 [27 January 1917]: 162). Ohio also inaugurated such a plan by 1919 (“Black Chosen President of Exhibitors’ League,” *Billboard* 5 July 1919: 81), though it was under discussion as early as 1914 (James S. McQuade, “Fourth Annual Convention of Ohio,” *Moving Picture World* 19.6 [7 February 1914]: 681) and may have been in effect earlier. Michigan was also using the plan in 1920 (*Half-Page Display Ad, Printers’ Ink* 111.9 [27 May 1920]: 203).

152 One decidedly thin critique simply asserted that a high-class theater should “[k]eep them out just as far as possible,” and mentioned ‘some’ patrons in Chicago theaters walking out when ad slides were shown. “First Aid to Theater Men,” *Motography* 17.3 (20 January 1917): 129. A slightly harsher critique from April of the same year calls ad slides and films “perennial like iron weed in a farmer’s garden. They systematically rob good soil and give no return.” Untitled editorial note, *Moving Picture World* 32.2 (14 April 1917): 241. I have found no arguments critical of slides after this point.
This stabilization of the commercial advertising slide industry was historically abrupt and must, therefore, have owed a debt to tangentially related experiences in exhibition at mid-century. It cannot be coincidence that the apparent stabilization of the form occurred, much like all early 20th century advertising, in the years immediately surrounding World War 1, when an avalanche of patriotic advertising was created for the war, and consumer goods advertising increased in response to the excess profits tax.\textsuperscript{153} Indeed, a cursory glance at the wartime issues of the *Moving Picture World* – a journal which openly detested advertising slides during their first decade – might lead one to assume not that slide advertising had stabilized, but that it had suffered a rapid (and appropriate) death. The few wartime mentions of consumer goods advertising slides in the journal were entirely self-congratulatory descriptions of their supposed disappearance under the weight of patriotic slide needs. An early editorial comment on patriotic slides attempted to differentiate them from commercial advertising, openly calling ad slides ‘business’ and saying “no one ‘talks business at a club,’” while political talk was inexplicably described as “wonderfully appropriate.”\textsuperscript{154} Thornton Fisher, in a delightfully snotty tone, included a paragraph of ‘Reminiscences,’ in a 1918 column, remembering the ‘old’ days:

[w]hen they used to throw slides on the screen between pictures. After having basked in the light of love’s fond dream in one reel your vision would suddenly be startled by a slide announcing “Henry Beermeister, Delicatessen, Liverwurst and Sausages,” or “Visit Smith’s Emporium. Clothes for all the family. Your father bought his pants from us. Why not you?”\textsuperscript{155}

For Fisher, commercial startlement had two contexts: placement between reels of a multi-reel film (a practice technologically outdated by 1915, as most theaters had switched to two projectors), and the directness of advertising exhortation.

\textsuperscript{155} Thornton Fisher, “Grinding the Crank,” *Moving Picture World* 35.9 (2 March 1918): 1227.
The film industry was seemingly incapable of describing this outpouring of unpaid, charity and propaganda slides during film screenings (including at least 100,000 Liberty Loan slides) as a furthering of cinema ‘advertising’\textsuperscript{156} – this despite the fact that major ad slide manufacturers, like their ad agency counterparts, were central to the movement.\textsuperscript{157} Rarely, in published material, was a political exhortation considered ‘startling’ to an entertainment seeking audience. This is likely due to the fact that charity and political advertising was tacitly or literally forced on exhibitors.\textsuperscript{158} Two stories of exhibition groups grumbling about charity slides were recounted in the pages of the \textit{Moving Picture World}, in 1915, in which the exhibitors lamented the abuse of their generosity. Social welfare groups pressed so strongly for free assistance that refusal to help was tantamount to anti-social behavior.\textsuperscript{159} Election slides were equally problematic. Jamestown, New York exhibitor M.L. Woods, in late 1916, refused to run political slides in his two theaters on the grounds that they “stirred up strife and confusion, and attracted the attention of our regular patrons from the screen.”\textsuperscript{160} As such, political and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{156} The first Liberty Loan included 30,000 slides. The second Liberty Loan used 70,000 slides. I have no figures at present for the third and fourth Liberty Loans. This number also does not include countless Red Cross, fuel conservation, and military recruitment slides also screened free of charge. Similar conditions persisted in Canada, where patriotic slides were circulated on a nearly identical model. First: “McAdoo Writes Letter to Industry,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 32.13 (30 June 1917): 2108; and “Theaters Furnished With Slides,” \textit{Motography} 18.15 (13 October 1917): 746. Second: “Secretary McAdoo Writes to Exhibitors,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 35.6 (9 February 1918): 834. List of government aids: “Exhibitors Protest Lightless Nights,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 35.1 (5 January 1918): 120. Canada: “Slides Go to 903 Picture Theaters,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 35.7 (16 February 1918): 993.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Novelty Slide Company: Half-page Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 32.12 (23 June 1917): 2001. North American Slide Company: Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 32.6 (12 May 1917): 1031. Excelsior Illustrating Company: Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 32.9 (2 June 1917): 1477. Novelty’s president Joseph Coufal, as remarked below, was also central to the Creel Committee’s wartime slide production.
\item \textsuperscript{158} See, for example, Marcus Loew’s telling comments in which he tacitly, but clearly, linked patriotic elements to anti-advertising rhetoric by saying that the Four Minute Men were a bad idea because “nothing should be included in the show except what the patrons expected to find when they paid the admission.” Hanford C. Judson, “Marcus Loew, a Real Showman,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 34.1 (6 October 1917): 78.
\item \textsuperscript{160} Joseph McGuire, “Does It Pay to Lend Theaters to Politicians,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 11 November 1916: 891.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
charitable slides were opposed both for their refusal to pay and for their incompatibility with entertainment programs; both critiques echoed attacks on cinematic advertising.\textsuperscript{161}

Once the Creel Committee began inundating exhibitors with demands for patriotic inclusions, the compulsion for assistance included a real threat of punishment. New Hampshire exhibitor Charles H. Bean made the threat nearly blatant in his letter, late in 1917, in which he encouraged cooperation with Creel Committee requests in the following terms:

In view of the fact that the United States Government has been lenient with motion picture exhibitors on the recent proposed tax of 10 per cent of gross receipts…every exhibitor…should show its appreciation and patriotism…by doing his bit in helping lend the fullest support of his screen to our government.\textsuperscript{162}

In November of 1917, one exhibitor – J.H. Ruerup of Bozeman, Montana’s Gem Theater – had his exhibition license revoked after purportedly declaring “[t]o hell with the government,” and refusing to allow Creel’s ‘Four Minute Men’ – touring patriotic exhorters – to speak in his theater.\textsuperscript{163} The following year, H.J. Paradis – manager of the Oasis theater of Wilson, North Carolina – was likewise “investigated” for refusing to allow the Four Minute Men to speak on the far less inflammatory grounds that “it would disarrange his program.”\textsuperscript{164} Though Paradis was eventually acquitted,\textsuperscript{165} it is clear that rejection of government propaganda (or: political advertising) was a dangerous choice which could arouse both cultural and governmental retribution.

In an atmosphere in which public condemnation and even loss of one’s theater were plausible outcomes, it is not surprising that exhibitors accepted the intrusion of political advertising on their screens. The film press helped to cover over exhibitor hesitation by heaping

\textsuperscript{161} The ‘refusal to pay,’ though not commonly a critique of slides, was the primary criticism of product placement, which caused significant controversy at certain points in the first decade of nickelodeon exhibition.

\textsuperscript{162} “Exhibitors Organizing to Aid U.S.,” Motography 18.10 (8 September 1917): 485.

\textsuperscript{163} “Remark Causes License Loss,” Motography 18.19 (10 November 1917): 1004.


praise on theater men as leaders of their communities. As early as mid-1914, W. Stephen Bush declared that the professional exhibitor was to be praised not for being a showman, but because “[t]he great forces which to-day are working for the good of mankind are coming after the exhibitor to enlist his aid” through the screening of ‘Safety First’ and Department of Health slide messages. Piggybacking on screen advertising rhetoric (see chapter two), Bush described the cinema screen as the best way to “reach all the public” because, unlike print pages which could be skipped, “you cannot escape the screen.” The door opened by advertising slides – or, as Bush would have it, “[t]he space which the cigarette makers could not buy at any price and which few exhibitors sell at any price for any advertisement” – became the avenue for the exhibitor to flex his social conscience, as it became the exhibitor’s ‘job’ to “mentally and morally” improve his community. The coerced exhibitor could at least bask in the glow of public praise while he struggled to organize a pleasurable show around government slides, patriotic films, and the Creel Committee’s mandatory political speakers.

Regardless of exhibitor consent, however, these political and philanthropic slides – shown largely from 1914 to the end of World War I – obliterated any advertiser, slide maker, and even exhibitor hesitation about the effectiveness of slides as an advertising medium. While some (perhaps even a majority of) exhibitors may have continued to harbor reservations about the intrusion of advertising onto their screens, there could be no doubt after the war that the site was an effective means of reaching the public. In 1914 and 1915, the pages of Moving Picture World clearly indicate a growing use of slides for these philanthropic and political purposes.

campaign period of late 1916 witnessed substantial use of slide advertising for drives as disparate as voter registration in “a large Southern city,” preservation of Cincinnati’s Zoological Gardens, and road improvement in Battle Creek, Michigan. As often as not, such slides were, in an echo of the bygone song-slides, indirect advertising for major manufacturers, such as the ‘anti-fly’ slides circulated by the International Harvester Company, and the Detroit Brick Manufacturers and Dealers Association’s fireproofing campaign.

Most common of all was the political campaign slide featuring either the face of a candidate for office, or an endorsement for a ballot issue. As political tensions increased, the quantity of campaign slides escalated. Indeed, many of these slides were ‘justified’ – i.e. not seen as an imposition or as patently offensive to the audience – when they became more openly self-serving. Countless theaters took up slide campaigns opposing motion picture censorship and Sunday closings. Exhibitors in the state of Illinois went so far as to mandate that any candidate who desired to run a campaign slide in a theater must first publicly oppose legal censorship of motion pictures. Moving Picture World itself circulated anti-censorship slides as early as February of 1915, even taking ad agency N.W. Ayer & Son’s old slogan “Keeping

---


170 These were common enough that Michigan eventually banned them entirely as in excess of the state’s size restrictions on “campaign cuts for advertising purposes.” “Exhibitors News: Detroit,” Moving Picture World 21.9 (29 August 1914): 1256. The Kansas City Slide Company’s Slide News for July 1924 included three pages of campaign slide designs, clearly indicating that the practiced continued widely. Slide News July 1924, p. 3-5, Box 4, Folder “KC Slide Co – Flyers “Slide News”,” Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC.


Everlastingly at It Brings Success” as their own. Renowned film director D. W. Griffith himself circulated slides, at his own expense, supporting the re-election of New York Mayor Charles S. Whitman, who had vetoed a state censorship bill in his first term. Whitman won re-election. In 1917, theater manager Joseph L. Steurle used cinema advertising slides to come within 158 votes of the Democratic nomination for city auditor of Louisville, despite being a political unknown. Though many exhibitors did not consider this a form of intrusive advertising, campaign slides were, like any other advertising, generally screened for a fee; “[p]ractically every theater in the city” of Louisville was attaining “[a] good price…for this service” in 1915. With three distinct benefits – profit, furthering anti-censorship, and the integration of the theater into the modern information web – it is understandable why so many exhibitors would have found ways to integrate them into the program.

Even openly self-serving advertisements for consumer goods were acceptable to certain theaters. For example, some theaters offered to run slides advertising local papers in order to encourage them to have larger film sections. As the theatrical self-advertising slide pushed

---


175 “Screens Helped J.L. Steurle Pile Up Votes,” Moving Picture World 33.9 (1 September 1917): 1415. For local coverage of his announcement, “movie advertising,” and “surprising strength” as a candidate, see also: “Candidates,” Kentucky Irish American 12 May 1917: 1; “Democrats,” Kentucky Irish American 30 June 1917: 1; and “Politicians,” Kentucky Irish American 11 August 1917: 1.

176 “Profit From Politics,” Moving Picture World 25.8 (21 August 1915): 1339. This evidence, and much more from the Moving Picture World during the 1916 election period, clearly indicates that the journal’s “man about town” was incorrect in his 1913 prediction that campaign slides would soon be banned for causing disturbances in theaters. “Observations By Our Man About Town,” Moving Picture World 18.7 (15 November 1913): 723.

traditional advertising slides further and further out of the program, a few consumer goods
producers found clever means to disguise advertising slides as announcement slides, indicating
the class and quality of the theater. In exchange for a price break, the company that provided
one’s fire extinguishers or air purifiers would also give the exhibitor a slide indicating that their
equipment was a primary reason why the theater was a safe and healthful environment.¹⁷⁸

Post-war histories of the moment, however, would give virtually all credit for the success
of political and cultural advertising in motion picture theaters to the Liberty Loan and other
related Creel Committee slides.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, the U.S. government put a massive amount of money
into slide advertising for wartime funding. Two New York companies – the Novelty Slide
Company and the Unique Slide Company – received multiple payments for services rendered to
the Departments of Food and Fuel Conservation during the war, some as high as four digits. For
example, Novelty – whose president Joseph F. Coufal was part of Hollywood’s War Cooperation
Committee – received $7,811.76 on the 23rd of October, 1917 from the ‘educational fund’ of the
department of Food and Fuel Conservation.¹⁸⁰ Unique received $1,080 from the department of
Fuel Conservation on 31 August 1918.¹⁸¹ The war also brought with it the first definite attention
in the historical record which slide advertising received from major ad agencies; the food

¹⁷⁸ Fire Extinguishers: Half-Page Ad, Moving Picture World 21 October 1916: 463. Air purifier: Display Ad,
¹⁷⁹ “How to Use Ad Slides,” Moving Picture Age March 1921: 35.
¹⁸⁰ Coufal: “Leaders of ‘Movie’ Industry Confer with Officials on War Program for Film World,” Official Bulletin
Administration Report for the Year 1917 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 111. Also see page 119
for a payment to the American Slide Company. This single payment to Novelty is equivalent to $140,254.66 in
2012 dollars. Novelty was central to government slide work from the earliest days of the war, as they were the
makers of the Navy’s first wave of recruitment slides. “Navy Offers Free Recruiting Slides,” Moving Picture World
32.6 (12 May 1917): 993.
¹⁸¹ Final Report of the Business Manager to H.A. Garfield, United States Fuel Administrator (Washington:
Report of the Administrative Division, 1917-1919: Part 1, Reports of the Bureau of State Organizations and of the
90. It is worth noting that the Excelsior Illustrating Company also received a $490 disbursement from United States
Fuel Administration for “Safe Coal” slides on 27 June 1918, listed on the same page of this latter volume.
conservation campaign was being handled, free of charge, by powerhouse ad agency J. Walter Thompson.\footnote{\textquotedblleft Advertising in Food Control Campaign,	extquotedblright\textit{ Printers’ Ink} 100.2 (12 July 1917): 66.} Wartime advertising dollars and the tacit ‘blessing’ of a mainstream agency may, therefore, have stabilizing the oligarchy of quality slide producers that had been developing prior to the war in the wake of price-cutting. It would be an extreme coincidence if wartime dollars and prestige did not aid Joseph Coufal’s 1919 combine of slide manufacturers, in which roughly half of the founding members of the 1916 New York association officially became a single company: the Standard Slide Corporation.\footnote{\textquotedblleft Lantern Slide Makers Combine,	extquotedblright\textit{ Printers’ Ink} 106.8 (20 February 1919): 65. The three other companies were the Greater New York Slide Company, Commercial Slide Company, and Economy Slide Company. The first two were members of the 1916 association, which means that three of the seven original members were part of this merger. A bit of fallout from this combination shows up in New York state court proceedings, as George Appel – the former owner of the Economy Slide Company – broke the clause in his contract mandating that he not operate a competing business for five years. \textit{Reports of Cases Heard and Determined in the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of New York} (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, 1920), 799-801.}

After philanthropic and compulsory wartime propaganda had legitimized the presence of advertising in theaters, on the grounds that it was a public good, it remained only for commercial advertisers to reclaim the site. Over the course of the war, several changes, problematic for advertising slides, had become common across the exhibition community. The integration of a second projector, so as to eliminate reel-change breaks, had become the mode of exhibition in most theaters.\footnote{\textit{Silent Film Sound} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 250.} The construction of picture palaces and establishment of studio-owned chains of theaters had solidified both a class divide, and a split between urban and rural viewing. In the cities and/or in the large theaters, overt ‘class’ consciousness was, as often as anything else, tied to an explicit rejection of screen advertising.\footnote{\textit{Motography} 16.2 (8 July 1916): 77. In these same years, there are countless additional news reports, especially in the \textit{Moving Picture World}, of the leading theaters of various towns rejecting advertising as a matter of principle.} Additionally, the commercial trailer (see chapter four) had grown to prominence and was in competition for the same program space. As such,
the lantern slide never regained the cinematic prominence of the early 1910s, though it did make a permanent re-entrance after the war.

Not coincidentally, an early form of advertising convergence, in which the same ad was run over multiple mediums, began to flourish as way for companies to spend ballooning advertising appropriations (caused by the excess profits tax) after the war. As early as January of 1915, the camera-producing American Optical Company was already running a single image in newspaper, slides, posters, circulars, and even ‘blotters.’ After the war, clothier David Adler & Sons was mandating that the Advertising Slide Company of St. Louis “co-ordinate their national advertising into slides.” The post-war business environment rendered this mode of advertising common. A history of advertising slides in Moving Picture Age in 1921 reveals that during the post-war years slides came to be used in practically every line of business. The tendency was to advertise through every possible medium, and the dealers used all channels of help to continue the prosperous times. This abnormal period was so protracted as to allow commercial slides to become firmly entrenched as a successful advertising medium, not because the unusual situation encouraged products which had no merit, but because dealers used commercial slides and found that the investment yielded definite results.

This cross media blitz was tied to a concept of ‘reiteration,’ as multiplying a single message was seen as productive advertising. As such, slide acceptance went hand in hand with advertising convergence and proliferation in the post-war boom. The entrenchment of slide advertising in motion picture theaters occurred, therefore, after the period of reluctance, and can be credited to the same post-war flood of advertising dollars that drove the entire advertising industry to greater heights after their successful work as wartime propagandists.

187 Portfolio, Folder 4, Charles Trefts Papers (C3465), SHSMO-C.
189 “How to Use Ad Slides,” Moving Picture Age March 1921: 35.
Though, with the continuing growth of trailer advertising and the repeal of the excess profits tax in 1921, slide dollars tapered off, slide-vertising – as the Standard Slide Corporation became fond of calling it – had attained a level of acceptance that it would never truly relinquish. A slowly dwindling number of entrenched companies would continue for decades to produce slides that were acceptable and desirable to national manufacturers, local distributors, and theater managers alike. In an almost triumphant note, the Standard Slide Corporation estimated that, in 1921, “more than 8,000 theaters in the United States…and many more abroad” were open to slide advertising. Though estimates vary, this would have accounted for roughly half of the active theaters in the United States at the time – an astonishing level of integration for a form of advertising which, a few short years earlier, was considered by many to be naturally offensive to film patrons.

The slide had also made inroads with the mainstream advertising community. At least one prominent slide maker – the Advertising Slide Company of St. Louis – had developed a presence in their local advertising association. By 1920, the Standard Slide Corporation – Joseph Coufal’s New York conglomerate – was attending the yearly convention of the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World, and openly solicited established advertising agencies by

---

191 Half-Page Ad, *Printers’ Ink Monthly* 1.4 (March 1920): 84. Assuming this estimate to err on the high side, if all 8,000 theaters were using 12 new advertising slides per week (the suggested maximum number of slides at the highest suggested replacement rate), then the advertising slide business, at maximum, could absorb 4,992,000 slides per year in 1920.
192 A 1920 book on general industrial numbers claimed that there were 18,000 active theaters in the United States (*Crain’s Market Data Book and Directory of Class, Trade and Technical Publications* [Chicago: G.D. Crain Jr., 1920], 321). In 1921, Frank Leroy Blanchard, in his book on advertising, estimated that there were 14,000 (*The Essentials of Advertising* [New York & London: McGraw-Hill, 1921], 241). In a 1922 article citing comments by Will Hays – and likely, therefore, representing industry estimates – the *Express Gazette Journal* claiming the number to be “approximately 15,000” (“Movie Director Hays Favors Express,” *Express Gazette Journal* 57.3 [March 1922]: 75).
offering a special “Agency Rate Card.” Slides were deemed a safe enough investment that mainstream manufacturers were, by the 1920s, generally having custom slides made; as Moving Picture Age somewhat inaccurately declared in 1921, “stock slides are practically a thing of the past,” as the notion of cross media advertising reiteration took firm hold. Philanthropic advertising continued to act as a bulwark; its existence offered a convenient way to defend slide advertising as a valuable information service to the American public; for example, the American Humane Education Society circulated free slides for ‘Be Kind to Animals Week’ in 1921. The lantern slide – and its commercialized variant, the advertisement slide – had become an accepted adjunct to the film industry as a whole, and its progeny extend, though in increasingly circumscribed placement, all the way to the digital projectors of the present day.

Why Slide-vertising?

Lantern slides, as the most successful form of early in-cinema advertising, were generally described, by both slide makers and slide advocates, in broad rhetorical strokes. Overstatement was common, regardless of whether the slide proponent was discussing audience psychology, financial viability, or the possible superiority of slides to other advertising media. The Lee Lash Company called slide advertising the “Front Cover Medium,” likening it to getting one’s ad onto the front cover of the magazine, implicitly declaring slides to be both a continuation and a

196 “How to Use Ad Slides,” Moving Picture Age April 1921: 19.
perfection of print ads.\textsuperscript{198} This exceptionalist description – in which the slide was an
unavoidable and spectacular perfection of the print model – is a microcosm for the type of
overstatement rampant in slide rhetoric.

Central to slide advertising, as with all in-cinema advertising of the 1910s, was the notion
of audience ‘captority’ (see chapter two), which was asserted almost universally, by slide
proponents, to be an accurate description of the cinema audience. It is virtually impossible to
find a single argument for the use of slides as an advertising medium which does not make some
mention of slides being a ‘one-hundred per cent medium’ due to the assumption that “folks, in
the darkened hall, must concentrate upon the screen.”\textsuperscript{199} As early as 1912, the Thornton
Advertising Company claimed that slides were “[t]he only medium which \textit{guarantees} a reading
of the advertiser’s message.”\textsuperscript{200} Frank Farrington, the most vocal advocate of slide advertising in
the first half of the 1910s, claimed that slides in cinemas had “no waste circulation” because
“[e]very man, woman, and child there sees the advertisement, and if it is given fair display
and…allowed to remain long enough to be read, every man, woman, and child will read it and
know what is advertised.”\textsuperscript{201} The Motion Picture Advertising Company likewise asserted that
every spectator “\textit{positively will see and read}” your advertisement when thrown on the screen,\textsuperscript{202}
while the Neosho Slide Company asserted that “Ad Slides Compel Attention” and that, as a

\textsuperscript{198} Full-Page Ad, \textit{Printers’ Ink} 73.13 (29 December 1910): 63; and 74.4 (26 January 1911): 91. Size of copy and
quantity of imagery were concepts to which agency men devoted significant time and energy. Between 1870 and
1910, headlines “almost doubled in height”, and between 1894 and 1919, image usage rose from 30\% to 90\% of ads.
The fact that slide advertisers used magazine metaphors when describing the size of their wares was likely an
attempt to imply that the slide was the next logical step in agency theory. For the data, see: Daniel Pope, \textit{The
\textsuperscript{199} Dench seemed to think that all film goers went stag, and found all other elements of the theater uninteresting, as
he expressly said that, without slides, audiences would have “nothing to do [during intermissions] but gaze idly
around the hall.” Ernest A. Dench, \textit{Advertising by Motion Pictures} (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company,
1916), 196, 198. See also the Brite Lite Film Advertising Company’s display ad (\textit{Printers’ Ink} 103.4 [25 April
1918]: 162) for the phrase “\textit{100\% Efficient Advertising}” – a business slogan version of this argument.
\textsuperscript{201} Frank Farrington, “Advertising in Moving-Picture Shows,” \textit{Bulletin of Pharmacy} 27.6 (June 1913): 249.
\textsuperscript{202} Half-Page Ad, \textit{Printers’ Ink} 81.11 (12 December 1912): 97.
medium, it had “[n]o waste circulation.” Standard Slide Corporation employee D.H. Harris even declared that audiences could “see nothing else, read nothing else, and think nothing else” while a slide advertisement was onscreen. This was, of course, no more true for slide advertising than any other form of advertising, but advocates of onscreen advertising preferred to ignore the fact that the room, even when dark, could not entirely compel.

As the first and most widely used form of in-cinema advertising, the ‘active’ audience was almost never acknowledged by proponents of screen advertising. Slide proponents were uniformly focused on creating and preserving the myth of the receptive cinema audience. An unsigned article in the March 1921 issue of *Moving Picture Age* was as close as ad slide proponents would get, in the transitional era, to acknowledging viewer empowerment, as the author made the marginally more hesitant assertion that the slide “is in front of [the viewer] and he has to look at it or close his eyes. With an attractively gotten up slide, preferably in color, he does not close his eyes.” As a unit, the advertising slide industry wanted advertisers to see the cinema theater as a site of audience passivity – where messages could be inserted into open eyes with no waste.

The correlated concept of the ‘receptive mood’ was likewise asserted almost universally in support of slides. If spectators had no choice but to read your advertisement, one would hope that they would not do so with hatred in their hearts. Thankfully, as far as slide makers and proponents were concerned, the motion picture theater was a zone of uniformly happy people. Farrington noted that “[n]o other form [of advertising]…is received in so favorable a frame of

---

mind.” The *Moving Picture Age* asserted that the motion picture theater was a perfectly comfortable environment, in which “every body [was] relaxed to enjoy the exhibition” and “every mind [was] alert to receive impressions.” The Harold Ives Company assured the advertiser that “[t]he psychological moment to offer your sales arguments is when your listener is in an agreeable frame of mind” – a frame of mind only attainable by advertising during “pleasant, leisure hours.” The Levi Company even went so far as to assert that their slides were “Good for Sore Eyes” and were, therefore, “a distinct relief to the monotony of the film.” A happy audience, doing a pleasant thing, greeted with a restful slide…no wonder slide advertising was so popular!

Of course, popularity and influence would have meant little if the people receiving the message could not be relied upon to actually spend money on the goods advertised. As such, the notion of the motion picture theater as a site of potential consumers – stressing, regardless of class, their possession of and willingness to spend cash – was also common. Farrington asserted that advertising in cinema theaters could “reach a class of people whom it is often hard to reach in other ways[, including…] the transient population…the lower middle classes…[and] the poorer class. It reaches many people who do not read newspapers. It takes in all nationalities.” The Thornton Advertising Company went so far as to assert that the slide

---

206 Frank Farrington, “Advertising in Moving-Picture Shows,” *Bulletin of Pharmacy* 27.6 (June 1913): 249.
208 Full-Page Display Ad, *Printers’ Ink* 84.6 (7 August 1913): 30. Same ad also published *Advertising & Selling* August 1913: 52.
209 “Sore Eyes”: Display Ad, *Billboard* 28 November 1908: 25. This phrase was reworded as “Good for Tired Eyes” for the ad in *Moving Picture World* on the same day – 3.22 (28 November 1908): 427. “Monotony”: Display Ad, *Moving Picture World* 4.3 (16 January 1909): 70. By the time of the Levi Company’s assertion, this was an old belief regarding the ‘flicker show.’ The first issue of *The Optical Lantern and Cinematograph Journal*, published in 1904, declared similarly “[n]o one will deny…that after watching a long series of animated pictures…an ordinary slide comes as a welcome pause, and…a source of restfulness to the eye.” (Theodore Brown, “From the Editor’s Pen,” *Optical Lantern and Cinematograph Journal* November 1904: 2.) At least for proponents of advertising slides, it was not uncommon in the early years of the 20th century to think that lantern slides were a necessary component of a film show.
210 Frank Farrington, “Advertising in Moving-Picture Shows,” *Bulletin of Pharmacy* 27.6 (June 1913): 249.
“gives you a circulation that reaches every class.” An unsigned article in *The Furniture Worker*, in 1920, also asserted that “the people who attend the moving pictures are the ones who are on the street and ready to spend money, and it pays any man with goods or services to sell to get his name before these crowds.” In fact, all writers except Ernest A. Dench – who, without any stated reason, declared that lower class theaters should be avoided – thought that the existence of a ticket price indicated that all cinemagoers, regardless of class, possessed spending money that advertisers should court. This notion of motion pictures opening advertising up to lower class spending was important as it was, contrary to magazine advertising, described as a medium for the masses. An aggregate of small purchases by film fans was openly part of its ‘lower class’ oriented advertising philosophy, and those who adopted it were, therefore, acting on a theory of advertising that was mass rather than class oriented.

Motion pictures weren’t simply attended by people willing and able to spend money, however. They offered a type of audience selection that was rare in print media. As opposed to newspapers – which generally targeted everyone in the city – and magazines – which targeted everyone in the country, limited only by magazine topic – the motion picture theater was ‘sectional’ and represented a stable local audience. Much like direct mail (which might be thrown out, unread) or billposting (which had the tendency to annoy), slide advertising reached a massive proportion of local inhabitants. This was especially true of neighborhood theaters – as opposed to the ‘scattered’ circulation of downtown theaters – and it was these neighborhood theaters that advertisers courted.

---
212 “Use Slides to Advertise,” *Furniture Worker* 37.5 (May 1920): 178.
214 Richard Ohmann, in his study of magazine advertising, found that few agencies openly asserted the value of aiming for the lower classes. Calkens and Holden was an exception, however. The agency publically asserted that although the “uneducated and credulous class” would generally “buy only the most inexpensive things…large numbers of them do buy.” Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), 113.
theaters that were most likely to accept advertising. As such, the cinema theater was, it was argued, ideal for advertising because, in general, it had the broad class appeal – even attracting the illiterate – of newspapers, but the targeted appeal of a local clientele. As such, one could advertise to very particular audiences, in ways impossible in the other media. Farrington, for example, even suggested that one put on an advertisement in a foreign language at a theater that catered to a largely immigrant population – an action that would be implausible in all but the smallest circulation newspapers or magazines, as large circulation print materials did not give price breaks to advertising that was not geared to general readers. Such immigrant targeted advertising in the city-wide or national press would have been phenomenally wasteful – nowhere near ‘100% circulation.’ As such, though mass appeal was still the goal, cinema slide advertising allowed for local advertising as an element of mass campaigns.

One of the most interesting arguments about the cinema’s specific value as an advertising medium was Neosho Slide Company owner G.R. Lowe’s assertion that motion picture viewers – who were already out of their home and on the town – would see screen advertising at the same time of day that certain stores were open (in Lowe’s argument, it was drug stores). As such, they could “go right from the show to the store” while the advertising compulsion was fresh. Lowe encouraged druggists – and by extension any business with hours of operation similar to a theater – to use slide advertising on the grounds that it could be reasonable assumed to have the least lag time between seeing the ad and shopping.

---

217 Frank Farrington, “Advertising in Moving-Picture Shows,” _Bulletin of Pharmacy_ 27.6 (June 1913): 249. Farrington does not mention the possibility of foreign language press usage in his article, asserting simply that city papers and national magazines cannot accept non-English advertising.
218 G.R. Lowe, “Slide Advertising for the Retail Druggist,” _American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record_ April 1914: 44. Oddly, the same argument was made in reverse, proving the generally unscientific nature of assertions for or against slide advertising. In Rittelmeyer’s condemnation of slides, he asserted that spectators couldn’t act on the advertisement while watching the film, and had forgotten it by the time they left. (George M. Rittelmeyer, “Slide
Taking these last three elements together, the cinema had unique values as an advertising site beyond the notion of the ‘captive audience.’ Slide advertisers considered messages to have the greatest sales values when they: 1) spoke to the spectator as a member of a particular cultural community, 2) spoke to the under-class – the biggest purchasing group for cheap goods – rather than the upper class, and 3) spoke at the same time that the viewer was already out of the home and on the town. In slide rhetoric, this provided slide advertising with benefits distinct from print, which was perused while in the home, and was, by necessity, not tethered to the flow of the day’s events.  

Though all of this was asserted on behalf of slides, the bulk of the foregoing theory is simply cinema specific, not slide specific. Most of the arguments for the use of slide advertising specifically were connected to its cheapness (as opposed to the expense of producing an advertising film, or even the expense of a print campaign). As Quality Slide and Photo Makers bluntly claimed, a slide “Reaches More People At a Smaller Cost Than Any Other Advertising Medium.” Though estimates of the cost of a motion picture were extremely variable, and determined as much by selection of production company as by length of the final product that one was after, by World War I a custom made glass slide would generally cost about a dollar – shipping included – and sometimes significantly less. The Kansas City Slide Company was still charging seventy-five cents for stock slides as late as 1927. Even custom slides were only $1.25 at that late date, if the advertiser included their own artwork. In 1920, the Furniture Worker estimated a price of seventy-five cents to one dollar for a custom slide, given that the illustration

Advertising,” *Moving Picture World* 13 September 1913: 1178). As such, even being out of the house was not enough for ad success for Rittelmeyer.

219 Historically, then, slide advertising would also be – along with magazine advertising – one of the early forms of niche marketing which would come to dominate advertising theory in the latter decades of the 20th century.


221 “1927 Red Book of Advertising Slides,” inside back cover, Box 3, Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC.
was provided by the advertiser, and not designed by the slide manufacturer’s staff. This was undeniably cheaper than all but the smallest print display advertisement.

Additionally, the cost for running a slide in a given theater was typically low. Although we must remember Dench’s assertion that “[t]here are really no standard rates” for exhibition, as “[e]ach exhibitor has his own ideas in regard to the value of the location and size of his theater,” we do have some indication of the range of prices at the time. From the exhibitor’s perspective, the income – based on quantity of slides and the amount the house was able to charge – could be as high as four digits; the Bijou Theater of Mt. Clemens, Michigan, claimed to be making $800 per year on the date that they abandoned advertising slides (on principle) in 1915. From an advertiser’s perspective, Farrington claimed that the absolute minimum cost was 25 cents per week for small houses where they ran films 3 nights a week. An upper estimate would have to be that of the two top-flight theaters in Louisville which were pulling down $10 per week, per slide, in 1915. The Keeshen Advertising Agency claimed, also in 1915, to be able to guarantee a minimum of four showings, every day, in five first run Oklahoma City theaters for $80.00 per month – an average weekly screening cost of only four dollars per theater. Ernest Dench, despite being very hesitant about standards, offered a (very wide) estimate of five to ten dollars per theater, given a six-month contract. The latest estimate, from 1920, was “from fifty cents to two or three dollars, depending on the locality.” That said, some ‘public service’ advertisers, like libraries for example, were often capable of getting

---

222 “Use Slides to Advertise,” Furniture Worker 37.5 (May 1920): 178.
theaters to screen their advertising slides gratis, as if they were a charitable organization.\textsuperscript{229} As such, although there was at least one assertion that a slide campaign would bear no fruit if it lasted less than three months,\textsuperscript{230} the total outlay for slide advertising was generally assumed to be much lower than any other form of mass advertising.

The cheapness of the medium was not simply a generalized positive. Specific value arguments were made. First, it was cheap enough to allow individual dealers to use it quickly to “couple up their name with products which are continually advertised in the magazines and newspapers.”\textsuperscript{231} Though an individual store may not have had much of a budget for advertising, the fact that they dealt in nationally recognized brands, especially if those national brands distributed glass slides for free as a selling ‘help,’ could allow the local store to piggy-back on widely recognized advertising campaigns. As such, a very small outlay for a local store could effectively allow them to receive massive collateral advertising from newspapers, magazines, and billboards hawking national products.\textsuperscript{232} Additionally, with the commonness of exclusive advertising contracts, the appearance of having a monopoly on a national brand could make cinema advertising seem like very cheap advertising indeed, for a local merchant, compared to the benefits it offered.

Thirdly, cheap slide advertising allowed for rapid, even constant, change in copy with minimal cost. A change of slides did not add any work for the exhibitor, and the easy availability of stock slides rendered the transition simple for the advertiser. As such, one could change slides at will. Additionally, the wide availability of extremely cheap home-typed or hand-written slides – purchased blank, in bulk, at an average rate of one penny per finished

\textsuperscript{229} The Carnegie Library of Mitchell, SD, claims to have had their slides run for free in the town theater. “News From the Field,” \textit{South Dakota Library Bulletin} 12.2 (June 1926): 42.


\textsuperscript{231} Chalmers L. Pancoast, “Picture Slides as Business Getters,” \textit{Advertising & Selling} 22.9 (February 1913): 78.

\textsuperscript{232} Frank Farrington, “Practical Talks With the Shop Butcher,” \textit{National Provisioner} 49.26 (27 December 1913): 40.
slide—allowed one to slip in a quick update when desired, letting regular customers know of a
sale or special event. Provided one had been advertising regularly in the theater, and the sale
announcement was seen as beneficial information, the audience would likely not take too
unkindly to the general ugliness of a home-made slide.

A final argument for slide advertising should not go unmentioned, as it was surprisingly
common. Despite lantern slides being a very old technology, and full motion film
advertisements being made as early as 1910, slides were often sold as a hip, ‘now’ medium of
advertising. The North American Slide Company declared that “Up-to-date Manufacturers”
were using them, while the Levi Company claimed that “[e]very up-to-date and progressive
theater” was using their slides. The Harold Ives Company declared that “[y]ou can’t hold your
trade by last year’s methods, [so] give [your dealers] selling helps that are this year’s styles.”
Correlated to this trendiness of the medium was a notion that ‘last year’s styles’ had worn out
their welcome with the public, and that slides should be adopted because “[i]n many
towns…[they] have not been overworked as yet.” These notions that in-cinema advertising
via the glass slide was novel and trendy, were important elements in the rhetoric for its adoption.
Novelty is, as Pamela Walker Laird has asserted, an important factor in the adoption of an

---

233 See, for example, the ‘Make ‘Em Your Self’ Slides, offered throughout the early 1910s by the Utility
Transparency Company, for $3 to $4. Included in the price were 24 sheets of cover glass, and enough colored
gelatin to make “300 to 400 slides.” Display Ad, Moving Picture World 19.7 (14 February 1914): 826.
234 Though I’ve found no evidence for it in rhetoric of the time, Lara Cain Gray’s point about slides’ moderate
“adaptability” to specifics is also part of their perceived cheapness as a medium. Gray mentions, for example, that a
mid-century slide for “hot or cold” Cadbury drinking chocolate was not incompatible with a store that only offered
the drink cold. They simply covered up the words “hot or” so that they would not be projected onscreen. Lara Cain
Gray, “Magic Moments: Contextualising Cinema Advertising Slides from the Queensland Museum Collection,”
December 1908: 25.
236 Full-Page Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 85.1 (2 October 1913): 69.
237 Full-Page Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 6 Nov 1913 (85.6): 56. For the same phrase, see also: “Moving Picture
Advertising for Druggists,” American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record April 1914: 84.
advertising medium.\textsuperscript{238} For a small number of years in the early 1910s, the lantern slide was the hot new novelty in advertising.

\textit{Why Not?}

As with most new concepts in advertising, supportive arguments from makers were partially balanced with counter arguments by viewers or media owners (in this case, exhibitors). None of these arguments carried enough weight to end the practice, but they raised sufficient concern that in-theater consumer-goods advertising struggled mightily between 1913 and 1918, and remained a marginal practice for decades. As such, these arguments kept slide advertising from becoming as ubiquitous as magazine advertising and billboarding, but did not keep it from developing as a useful, minor practice in theaters.

The most common assumption about the non-viability of slide advertising was that “many patrons of motion picture theaters look[ed] upon advertising slides as an imposition upon their time.” The \textit{Moving Picture World}, probably the most implacable opponent of advertising on the theater screen, used this as its reasoning. Regular columnist Epes Winthrop Sargent compared it to allowing a man in a sandwich board to walk across the stage during a live theater performance, and declared:

\begin{quote}
The screen advertisement is not the same as the advertisement upon the wall. It is thrust upon the patron. He \textit{must} read it whether he wishes to or not. There is no alternative. It is thrust into his face. […] There is no objection to a few house slides, but the foreign advertisement has no place on the screen.\textsuperscript{239}
\end{quote}


Indeed, slide opponents generally did not take issue with the assumption of compulsory attention at all. On the contrary, it reveled in it, arguing instead that the compulsory nature of the ads destroyed the ‘receptive mood’ of a theater audience. Roy D. Mock argued in 1916 that unlike magazine advertising which, if read was read voluntarily, ads in the cinema were “forced to his attention” for as much as ten minutes while he was “kept in his seat.” As such, it would not leave him in “a very satisfactory frame of mind,” and would instead result in a backfire, as rather than “being inclined towards the advertiser…[he would] become biased against him.” Often this destruction of the ‘receptive mood’ became an implicit argument for ‘active audiences.’

George M. Rittelmeyer argued, in 1913, that

[a] few nights ago…I looked around the house to see how many people were reading the slides that were being shown. I counted probably a dozen people in an audience of about one hundred and fifty. The balance of the crowd was passing the time away the best they could, waiting patiently for the ads to cease.

The disinterest was so obvious that he professed to see life return to the “bored, tired” faces of the crowd when the first reel finally came on. Though this type of description was undoubtedly slanted by personal opinion, overstatement, and the happenstance of a ‘worst case scenario’ experience, it was common among opponents of slide advertising.

Some writers bolstered the sense of audience irritation by reference to ticket cost, asserting that not only was the audience being annoyed, but they were being forced to pay for the

---

240 No less an authority that Ernest Dench reported, in early 1918, that it was “not often” that screen ads were opposed on the grounds that they were compulsory. With this mention of rarity as his only critique, he reported the opinion of “an exhibitor friend” who believed that “compulsory methods” were “detestable to the people of this democratic country” and, moreover, that monopoly contracts were anti-choice. Ernest A. Dench, “Slide Hints for the Motion Picture Advertiser,” American Stationer and Office Outfitter 83.1 (5 January 1918): 36.


243 Even Nickelodeon – “Advertising Slides,” Nickelodeon 2.1 (July 1909): 3-4 – in an article in support of slide advertising, asserted that the problem was not the incompatibility of advertising with ticket cost – citing magazine cover prices as a parallel – but the fact that advertising was effectively compulsory in theaters, while it was optional in magazines. The defense offered in the article was that optionality was a non-factor as, if magazine buyers did not read the advertising, it would cease to exist as a waste of money. Ergo – using flimsy logic – Nickelodeon asserted that compulsory viewing should not matter to the bulk of cinema goers.
privilege. Indeed, in 1909, a “good many picture theater managers...declare[d]...that the
exhibitor ha[d] neither the right to expect continued patronage nor the right to collect admission
fees” if showing ads.\footnote{“Advertising Slides,” \textit{Nickelodeon} 2.1 (July 1909): 3.} An unsigned article in 1915 voiced the still commonly heard opinion
that advertising was incompatible with ticket costs, as “[p]assing a dime into the box office
makes one the proprietor of the screen...and anything that is shown without contributing to the
amusement of the audience...is going to be frowned upon.” The result was bound to be “hisses
on the part of a good many people in the theater.”\footnote{“Publicity for Plumbers,” \textit{Domestic Engineering} 73.11 (11 Dec 1915): 337.} As such, arguments about advertising as an
unwelcome imposition carried significant weight with a particular crowd which considered not
just entertainment, but \textit{paid} entertainment as a zone where commercial exhortation should not intrude.

While it is probable that, as noted earlier, general opposition to advertising was based in a
historical moment when the slides were particularly poorly made, other elements of the slide
experience could have exacerbated and extended audience frustration. Regardless of slide
quality, and despite persistent comments about limiting advertising slides to a comfortably small
number (probably twelve) in any given program, exhibitors could and did often engage in
behavior that was actively destructive of viewer pleasure, and therefore of the value of slide
advertising to the advertiser. Rittelmeyer, likely with a bit of overstatement, declared that a
theater not only ran slides in the middle of a two-reel film, but ran them “for five or ten
minutes.”\footnote{George M. Rittelmeyer, “Slide Advertising,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 13 September 1913: 1178.} This clearly would have consisted of more than three ads, and would
understandably have felt like overkill, as the slides would have been nearly equal in duration to
the entertainment. A collected list of humorous ‘advice’ for projectionists, published in early
1916 – effectively a summary of poor exhibition practices at the time – included “[c]atch[ing]
up...
on your sleep” during the ad slides as one of its ‘suggestions,’ assuring the projectionist that the audience would “talk to the Lord about you for teaching them the gentle lesson of patience.”

Even if duration was not the problem, quantity could still be a source of concern. Ernest A. Dench mentions the persistence of the problem of the “slide dodge,” a term for when the exhibitor would run the slides for which he had contracted, up to thirty or more at any one time, all in a rapid burst at the end of the program, rather than scattering them throughout the program and leaving them onscreen for a reasonable reading time. The appeal of the ‘dodge’ to the exhibitor was undeniable. Flipping through thirty slides in a minute could have allowed the exhibitor to keep the advertising dollars, and also keep the most valuable screen-time for coming-attraction slides and other announcements that were more directly beneficial to the theater.

This latter possibility would, of course, have done as much to harm the advertiser as the spectator. Exhibitors could also abuse the advertiser’s faith while leaving the spectators unaware. They might elect to show the coming attractions slides before the advertising slides; the coming attractions generally indicated that the program was over, and would have largely cleared the theater of spectators before ads had run. Alternatively, the exhibitor might take the money and simply not show the slide at all. As such, anyone booking a single slide for screening in a theater, without having developed a longstanding relationship with the exhibitor, had to double check that they were being screened, and screened properly – a difficult procedure considering the business model of a motion picture theater. Unlike magazines, where you could pick up a single issue and find evidence that it had been printed in every issue, to completely

249 Ibid., 210.
The check up on slide projection required someone to be present all day, every day, at every theater.\textsuperscript{250}

One further persistent counter argument deserves mention, despite its limited importance. A small collection of slide opponents – generally makers of advertising films – asserted that slides were not valuable because the cinema screen was a site where motion was expected. This argument was only partially effective for two reasons. First, slides were, as mentioned, significantly cheaper than full motion films; as such, the fact that they were on the screen for so much less expense may have been seen as a valid tradeoff. Second, those who still saw motion as a necessity but didn’t want to spend the money on a film could choose from some of the technological slides discussed below. As such, the ‘lack of motion’ critique was less dissuasive, at least prior to 1915, than it might otherwise have been.

‘Slide Psychology’

Most opposition to slide advertising was phrased in very unflattering generalities. Even Ernest Dench’s 1916 book-length study of the subject asserted that “[t]he majority…are merely plain business notices that…remind one only too strongly of the early days of newspaper advertising, when every advertiser thought it sufficient to have a formal announcement, unchanging from year in to year out.”\textsuperscript{251} Despite the apparent commonality of simple slides, ‘slide psychology’ was relatively well thought out by some – most notably by Dench himself, in articles he published in 1918. In much the same way that magazine advertisers argued about the importance of images, the quantity of copy, and the placement of an ad on, say, the left or right side of the page, slide advertising was theorized in terms of its position in the program, and the

\textsuperscript{250} Ibid., 207-8.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid., 173.
most productive use of image and copy. Though, by this time, most theaters had integrated a second projector and abandoned the reel-change pause, the theoretical writings of Dench and others offer a tantalizing notion of how complex slide theory could have become, had feature films and multiple projectors not radically reduced the space.

Most commonly, notions of best practices in slide advertising were broad pronouncements, intended as advice for all advertising slides in all circumstances. Ernest Dench once asserted that, if you were going to use humor in your slides, you would be best served by using a stock slide rather than writing your own humorous copy. Dench’s logic was that stock slides, as they were designed to sell nationally, were “prepared especially to appeal to the universal sense of humor as distinct from that of the sectional brand.”²⁵² As such, Dench downplayed the frequently local nature of slide advertising in the name of a more broadly accepted, national sense of humor. Dench equally poo-pooed the use of “gloom” in slides, under the assertion that “[t]hey should strike an optimistic note at all times [because p]eople go to the movies to thrust aside their worries and responsibilities and not to be reminded of the dark and seamy side of life.”²⁵³ Frank Farrington held a similar opinion, claiming that “[a] lighter, brighter form of advertising can be used…in a place of amusement than…in the newspapers. A little humor carefully handled is not out of place at such a time…though it would act as a boomerang in the printed medium.”²⁵⁴ As such, slides in general were expected to be light and fun – more so than any other medium.

²⁵⁴ Frank Farrington, “Advertising in Moving-Picture Shows,” Bulletin of Pharmacy 27.6 (June 1913): 249. In December of 1913, he gave a slightly more hesitant endorsement of humor, saying “[o]ne may even be a little flippant at times…[though] business talk is more effective as a rule when presented in business form.” Frank Farrington, “Practical Talks With the Shop Butcher,” National Provisioner 49.26 (27 December 1913): 40.
Other pieces of advice were intended to be rarely implemented and therefore be an added interesting feature which would help certain slides stand out from the crowd. Dench proposed both the ‘poetic slide’ and the ‘serial slide’ to gain audience attention in the maelstrom of less creative advertising slides. Poetic slides were simply slides in rhyme – like a jingle without the music – but with no other pretensions to literary merit. The very existence of rhyme would set it apart from other slides which often said “stereotyped things in a stereotyped way.” Rhyme was an aid to both pleasure and memory, providing a hook to help lock the copy in the viewer’s memory. Serial slides could add a bit of drama to a slide campaign by making the audience look forward to the next slide in the series, much like a film serial. Engaging the audience’s interest for a period longer than the traditional duration of a slide’s projection would likewise improve attention and retention. The problem with this serial concept was making sure that the bulk of your audience didn’t miss any slides in the series; as such, Dench proposed that the advertiser only use serial slides when piggy-backed on the presentation dates of a film serial, so that the appeal of the film serial would stabilize the audience for the advertiser’s own slides. The serial slide was used frequently enough that slide manufacturers carried stock versions that could “be filled in to suit almost any business.” Turning advertising into a game by offering a prize to a viewer who could correctly spot several intentional spelling mistakes was another clever suggestion for encouraging attention to specific ads.

Ernest Dench, the most thoughtful author of in-cinema advertising of any type in the 1910s, even worked out a theory (that he termed ‘slide psychology’) in 1918 that linked slide

---

257 As was customary for him, Dench published this suggestion in multiple places. The earliest appears to have been: Ernest A. Dench, “How Clothiers Can Use the Local Moving Picture Theatre,” Clothier and Furnisher 91.4 (November 1917): 68-69.
content to position in the program. Dench asserted that the state of mind of the audience after – or, in the case of the feature, during – any given part of the standard program should determine the type of copy on an advertising slide. If one’s slide was run following the newsreel, the slide should contain copy in an informational or descriptive tone similar to the news: for example, telling, in a sober and professional tone, of a new shipment of goods or an imminent sale. If your slide followed an educational film, it should display the inner workings of your business, piggy-backing on the educational mood. If it followed the comedy, the tone should be light and comic. Only the most beautiful, dramatic, and thought provoking slide should be run during or following the main feature, as a feature picture was the classiest form of film, and was often a very engaging drama. In order to maintain variety in one’s advertising, Dench suggested the purchase of one slide of each type, allowing the tone and program position of one’s advertising to change from week to week.

By January of the following year, Dench was also asserting that slide copy should be altered for special screenings, such as children’s matinees, encouraging not just tone and content that would appeal to children, but perhaps even offering the children a creative contest where the best advertisement created by one of the children would be rendered in slide form and thrown onscreen at the next matinee. One can imagine that Dench would offer similar advice for heavily ethnic theaters, or those defined by class or religious persuasion.

This notion that the best slide was not determined just by quality of copy, but by the context in which it was screened, allowed for a great deal of variety and complex thinking in the

---

258 Also published in multiple publications. Ernest A. Dench, “Giving Your Movie Slides the Proper Atmosphere,” National Drug Clerk 6.6 (June 1918): 424, 456; and Ernest A. Dench, “Possibilities of the Moving Picture Slide as a Means of Instilling New Life in Retail Sales,” American Cutler June 1918: 10. As the National Drug Clerk version was slightly longer, all future references will be from that version.

259 Ernest A. Dench, “Making Your Movie Advertising Appeal to Children,” National Drug Clerk 7.1 (January 1919): 33-4. The contest would have the added benefit of encouraging the kids to take the company’s name into their own home, as they would likely ask their parents for critiques of their early work. As such, the parents, who had not even attended the screening, would also be the recipients of an advertisement at no additional cost.
creation and display of slides. While it is undoubtedly true that the bulk of advertisers did not put nearly so much thought into their slides, there was nothing inherent in the medium which kept it from being used in a pleasantly complicated variety of ways. Repetition and boredom in slide advertising was, therefore, a failure of individual thinking, not of the form itself.

_Technological Slides – Spectacle and Public Service_

Typically, the response to fears of slides irritating the audience was not a turn to Denchian slide psychology. Rather, an attempt to add clever nuances to the technology – preserving or improving on the novelty of cinema advertising – was the common approach. Two ideas in particular deserve discussion at length, as their existence is emblematic of two particular philosophies of advertising active at the time: the drawing power of spectacle, and the reluctance-defusing power of ‘usefulness.’ Each was most productively used by a single company, though many parallel concepts can also be cited.

As film was often considered a spectacle in and of itself, the notion that greater eye appeal would necessarily result in a more productive advertisement was not uncommon. For most, this was simply a reason for better or more creative visuals. Any company, from the Novelty Slide Company, to the Kansas City Slide Company, to the Levi Company / Perfection Slide Company would make assertions to the greater drawing power of their imagery. The Levi Company once asserted about its own product that “there is no other Slide made that grips the attention of the audience and holds it as ours do. They are…dazzling in their variety, full of humor and surprises…[and] will be found to be a source of unqualified delight.”

Such claims were common, and almost always referenced the superior creative powers of the company hawking their wares. Several American companies – the Vitaslide Company of San Francisco

---

260 Display Ad, _Billboard_ 5 December 1908: 94.
and the Perfection Slide Company of New York, most prominently – took the idea of ‘eye
appeal’ farther than the others, into the realm of technology and motion, seemingly the purview
of motion pictures, not the stodgy old lantern slide.  

As early as January 1913 – the date of his first patent – Earl L. Gilmore, president of
Vitaslide, had conceived of a fully functioning moving-picture slide, requiring no extra
equipment from the exhibitor (though Gilmore had also designed automatic slide projectors with
the Vitaslide in mind). Rather than simply having a photograph printed in between two pieces
of glass, the Vitaslide contained a fluid filled chamber, in which a portion of the design was
included on a moving piece. When not in use, the slide was to be stored right side up, so that the
moving piece would sink to the bottom. During projection – which, due to the construction
idiosyncrasies of lantern slide projectors, occurred with the slide positioned upside down – the
moving part would appear to slowly rise in the image, as it began, in the projector itself, to sink
to the ‘top’ end of the fluid chamber. During projection, the presence of a fluid chamber was
disguised by design, so that the appearance of motion had no clear cause. The added fact that the
apparent motion was upwards rather than down appended a level of mystery to how the motion
was created.

The visible interaction between the stationary and moving parts of the image could create
a variety of onscreen events, ranging from the very simple to the very complex. Three were
described in the patents. The simplest included a diagonal trench, so that, for example, an image
of a car could appear to drive uphill. A more complicated design included a ‘Merry Christmas’

---

261 Integrating rudimentary motion into slides dates back at least to the ‘slipper slide’ of the early 1800s. (Lara Cain
Gray, “Magic Moments: Contextualising Cinema Advertising Slides from the Queensland Museum Collection,”
Queensland Review 18.1 [2011]: 75.) However, the special circumstances of advertising slides of the early 20th
century – specifically the need for the slides to be self-sufficient, as projectionists could not be expected to put any
effort into their exhibition at all – meant that motion in advertising slides followed its own path of invention.
262 Every year, from 1916 to 1919, E.L. Gilmore of the Vitaslide Company filed a lantern slide projector design for
patent: The first titled “Lantern Slide Exhibition Apparatus,” and the others titled simply “Projector.” See patent
numbers: 1,245,454; 1,303,193; 1,345,084; and 1,354,823.
message where the words were broken into two collections of apparently meaningless scratches; as the bottom half of the image rose to meet the top half, the scratches would align and render the message readable. In the most complicated iteration of the method – a variation of the standard ‘Ladies, Please Remove Your Hats’ announcement slide – the moving part rotated rather than moving upwards. In this concept, the lady’s hat was attached to one end of a pivot; at the other end was an image of an usher connected to the hat by a line. As the hat was made of heavier material, it would ‘sink’ upwards in the image during projection, making it appear as though the tiny usher had flipped it skywards by jumping on the other end of the shaft. As if this weren’t complicated enough, this slide also used the message-forming scratches to spell out the announcement.263

With these various approaches possible – angled, straight, and rotating motion – Vitaslide could create eye-catching advertisements unlike any other slides on display in the theater. Ads which not only were more interesting and therefore more memorable than the stationary ads, but also avoided the potential problem of a still slide being disruptive in an environment dedicated to moving pictures. Vitaslide motion was so unexpected, when compared to other advertising slides, that they were reportedly able to “create the remarkable situation of a theater audience applauding an advertisement.”264 Indeed, they were so surprising, that moving slides capitalized not on blending in with the flow (moving pictures), but on doubling disruption (a moving ‘still’). By adding motion to a part of the program in which all other imagery was still, motion slides provided a triumphant return to motion imagery: a noticeable improvement over stills as well as a return to the established norm of moving pictures.

Despite the time it took to create working designs (their early announcement slides were released one per week beginning in April 1914\textsuperscript{265}), frequent reports from 1914 to 1915 indicate that the company was effectively an overnight success. The cross country sales trip of Bernard Wolf, from San Francisco to New York City (stopping at all major cities along the way) resulted in slides “being ordered extensively by business men for advertising purposes,” including a single order from New York City which accounted for 100 slides all by itself.\textsuperscript{266} Considering they sold for $3.00 each – approximately three times the cost of a regular slide – adoption represented a relatively large expense for advertisers. George Breck, Gilmore’s partner and manager of the Vitaslide Company, was circulating Vitaslides to such great success in mid-1915 that the company was able to focus entirely on yearly contracts rather than single orders. Even after increasing their productivity 50\% by hiring more staff, they were “still behind on orders.”\textsuperscript{267} As this was reported in the notoriously anti-slide-advertising journal \textit{Moving Picture World}, it should be taken as quite a successful technology indeed. And with good reason: if the slides were looked on as both pleasing and entertaining, they would have defused the common critique of viewer displeasure.

The Perfection Slide Company patented a much more complicated design that would create a spiraling effect in the background of a slide.\textsuperscript{268} Perfection (in their days as the Levi Company) also contracted to be the exclusive producer of Spiegel Motion Slides – a complicated

\textsuperscript{265} Half-Page Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 11 April 1914: 273; Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 18 April 1914: 433; and Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 9 May 1914: 896.
\textsuperscript{267} “Other San Francisco Notes,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 23.1 (2 January 1915): 99; and “Other San Francisco Notes,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 23.12 (20 March 1915): 1791. It’s not clear from the wording of these articles, and the following self-advertisement, whether these yearly contracts were with advertisers or exhibitors. Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 13 June 1914: 1611.
\textsuperscript{268} F.A. Apfelbaum, “Stereopticon Slide Carrier,” U.S. Patent 1,116,201, filed 9 December 1913, and issued 3 November 1914.
slide technology which, like their patented spiral technology, required a special projector.\textsuperscript{269} The Enterprise Optical Manufacturing Company, the Illinois Motion Picture Advertising Corporation, and the Genre Transparency Company also dealt in motion slides of one make or another.\textsuperscript{270} A non-motion variant was the Florida Photographic Concern’s “Color-Changing Chameleon Slide” which would fade “from green to reddish-brown,” presumably from the heat of the projector lamp.\textsuperscript{271} Though still decidedly less impressive than real film, these slides could likewise join more comfortably into the sequence of films, appealing to the same interest in motion pictures, while simultaneously standing out as something special as they were (hopefully) compared favorably to other slides, rather than being compared unfavorably to the films. It elevated the slide via spectacular effects in an attempt to be the most likely slide remembered.\textsuperscript{272}

In contrast to this, other slide makers added a technological element in order to attempt to make sure that their slides were not victims of the ‘slide dodge,’ or simple failure on the part of the exhibitor to screen the slide. The concept became known under the shorthand of the ‘clock slide,’ and was created by at least five different companies at one time or another, though in fact the technology was patent controlled. Originally filed for patent on 12 September 1911 by Hans A. Meinhardt and Thomas J. Urell of Pittsfield, MA, the clock slide featured no clock work and as such included no spectacular onscreen motion. What it did possess, however, was manually adjustable hands which could be set by the projectionist so that an accurate time could be flashed

\textsuperscript{271} Frank B. Howe, “Commercial Lantern Slides,” \textit{Camera Craft} 24.2 (February 1917): 70.
\textsuperscript{272} Ernest Dench indicates that an unnamed British company was also experimenting with motion slides, as a slide on which a dog could be seen lapping up beer is described in detail. Ernest A. Dench, \textit{Advertising by Motion Pictures} (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1916), 176.
onscreen at intervals to the paying spectators. Clock slides purportedly cut through any reticence towards advertising slides by both exhibitor and audience members by providing a valuable public service – i.e. they would provide easy access to the time for women, who generally did not wear watches, and for men, who had trouble seeing their watches in the darkness of the theater. As Meinhardt’s original patent declared, the slide was designed so that “the attention of the audience is held in an agreeable manner.”

The history of the clock slide is convoluted. Meinhardt and Urell initially attempted to sell the invention themselves but, due to inexperience, failed to turn a profit on the invention. Their many missteps included not fighting patent infringement; indeed, they apparently did not realize such clone clock-slides were even being made. In their innocence and inexperience, they apparently failed to notice blatant national advertising by the Kansas City Slide Company, the American Slide & Poster Company, and the Novelty Slide Company for clock slides. Kansas City Slide advertised their clone first, advertising its availability in February of 1912; the company even had the audacity to claim “patent applied for.” Kansas City Slide offered stock versions for $1.25, but would append an advertising message to the bottom for twenty-five cents more. American Slide & Poster and Novelty Slide may have pilfered the idea slightly later, but their clones were likely the driving factor in Perfection’s purchase of the patent rights and attempt at legal reprisals. American advertised the availability of clock slides in May of 1913, and Novelty in May of the same year. American was asking 75 cents, while Novelty offered the

---

277 Display Ad, Billboard 3 February 1912: 57. They dropped the price a bit by a 1913 catalog, but still insisted that they were “the originators of this slide” and had “sold thousands of them.” “Some Slides for Advertising in the Moving Picture Show,” p. 80, Box 4, Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC.
lowest price: 50 cents. Several other companies may also have been infringing the patent; if they were, however, they were not advertising in national trade presses. The Best Slide Company of Kansas City, for example, included four clock slides in a catalog – offering them for 75 cents if blank, one dollar if a merchant’s name was appended – though they never publicized these offerings in a national trade press.

By the 17th of May, 1913, the Perfection Slide Company had not only purchased the patent rights from Meinhardt and Urell, but had proceeded to pursue legal redress from the infringing companies. Perfection took out a display advertisement in the pages of Moving Picture World declaring that exhibitors displaying clock slides not made by the Perfection Slide Company would be “party to the infringement and, therefore, liable.” Such patent control was likely necessary to keep circulation of the product high, as illuminated clocks could take theaters permanently off the market; the city of Louisville, for example, claimed to be devoid of clock slides, as all theaters had illuminated clocks as early as 1913. Regardless of patent issues, the makers of clock slides were all trading on the value of passing information along to the audience as a means to defuse irritation.

Similar notions of adding elements of practical benefit to advertisement slides exist. Calumet Baking Powder offered to add standard announcements like “Another fine picture

---

279 The Slider, unpaginated, Box 4, Folder “Best Slide Co – Catalogs 1915,” Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records (K0637), SHSMO-KC. The State Historical Society of Missouri archivists date all the catalogs in this folder as 1915, although this one is, in fact, undated, and features both a different manager and different mailing address from the others. If the 1915 date is correct, the appearance of a clock slide in this catalog would date to after the patent acquisition by the Perfection Slide Company, and their legal offensive against patent infringers.
281 “Correspondence: Louisville,” Moving Picture World 18.8 (22 November 1913): 886.
coming up next” as the text portion of a slide otherwise dominated by an advertising image.\textsuperscript{282} The Fisk Rubber Company likewise made a “Good Night” announcement slide (to be shown at the end of the last show of the night), that contained the company logo and the witticism “Time to Re-Tire,” alongside a picture of a tired child holding a Fisk Tire.\textsuperscript{283} Book stores were especially well suited to this form of ‘announcement’ advertising, as any film adapted from a book could mention a bookstore right on the ‘coming attraction’ slide.\textsuperscript{284} Neosho’s G.R. Lowe likewise suggested that doctors might get free advertising by asking the exhibitor to ‘call’ them to the telephone or the lobby in an emergency via the use of a slide which displayed their name to patrons. Such a slide could be shown free as it was a service to the exhibitor (no need to stop the show to call the doctor), and it would get across the doctor’s name more clearly than an announcement while also implying that he was in demand.\textsuperscript{285}

These two types of technological slides were both a means to diffuse the irritation caused by compulsory attention – motion slides through pleasurable spectacle, and clock slides through practical use value. In any of these examples, however, the advertising was rendered palatable by its seemingly secondary status. As a precursor of the later notion of sponsorship, the advertisers seemed to be providing a service or a form of entertainment, and merely declaring their philanthropy openly. As such, these types of slides are indicative of the struggles of the slide industry to fully integrate with motion pictures. Direct advertising needed a little boost in

\textsuperscript{282} Chalmers L. Pancoast, “Picture Slides as Business Getters,” \textit{Advertising & Selling} 22.9 (February 1913): 77-8.
\textsuperscript{283} The slide in the ad is openly described as a product of Scott & Van Altena. Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 19.3 (17 January 1914): 326.
\textsuperscript{285} G.R. Lowe, “Slide Advertising for the Retail Druggist,” \textit{American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record} April 1914: 44. Though it is certainly possible for an idea to arise independently in multiple places, it is possible that this concept can be traced directly to the publication of a note in \textit{Moving Picture World} in 1913, where a quick-made slide was used to call patrons out of the theater in a family emergency. In reporting this act, \textit{Moving Picture World} proposed that physicians use slides in this way; the wording indicates that they thought it a novel proposition. [Untitled], \textit{Moving Picture World} 15.6 (8 February 1913): 575.
order to ‘get over the footlights,’ as it were. The impending advertising trailer revolution (see chapter four) was, from a certain angle, simply another technological step in this process.

**Conclusion**

From their plausible inception in motion picture theaters in 1908, to their incomplete 1920s integration, advertising slides developed a stable, profitable, largely unquestioned, but decidedly marginal presence in motion picture theaters. This presence set the tone for the other advertising concepts that would arise and develop over roughly the same time period, as lantern slides were the first to encounter and negotiate the thorny problems of exhibitor and spectator reluctance. Through experimentation with various business models, slide manufacturers taught the advertising industry that film goers would accept the ‘intrusion’ of commercial messages into entertainment for which they had paid under the express conditions that it be presented in a form that was not cut-rate and in a quantity that did not dominate the proceedings. If the slides could include elements of entertainment (preferably humor or inventive motion) or some element of public service (such as a clock or other informative announcement), so much the better.

The perceived failings of slides either added weight to the adoption, or directly inspired the creation of other models of in-cinema advertising. The sense that direct sales exhortations resulted in viewer antipathy led some to push forward with industrial films and product placement. The notion that antipathy was related to the compulsory entertainment pause led others to move slide techniques off the screen and onto the walls. The sense that viewers were simply displeased by the outdated, motionless technique spawned the advertising trailer.

With the lantern slide, then, the typical motion picture theater opened its doors – hesitantly – to consumer goods advertising. Though longstanding assumptions about audience
displeasure would cause direct sales messages to slowly decrease in favor of sneakier advertising like product placement, the cinema theater would never again be entirely devoid of advertising. Slide advertising successfully navigated its early troubles, maintaining not just a place for itself in cinema theaters, but tacitly supporting further investigation of the venue. Slides proved the logic that the ‘captive audience’ of the theater – though perhaps more psychologically complex than hoped – was in truth a profitable and desirable community. Their flaws only encouraged national advertisers to further experimentation with the best way to profitably draw this community’s attention.

It was felt by advertisers that the lantern slide had had its run. People yawned at the still picture on the screen. Some method of knocking them down and dragging them out had to be devised.

The little ad-plays turned the trick.

- Jonas Howard (December 1919)

In the first quarter of 1938, the J. Walter Thompson Company’s Fred Fidler encouraged the company to experiment with motion picture advertising, primarily on the grounds that it would “provide invaluable preparatory experience against the time when commercial public television arrive[d] and demonstration share[d] description’s importance as an advertising technique.” After 40 years of “agency apathy” towards cinema advertising, and more than a decade as a major player in radio, J. Walter Thompson finally gave serious consideration to the moving picture. Historically, there are two very important elements to Thompson’s change of

---

3 Mr. Kimball, “Industrial Film Facts as of March 12, 1929,” p. 10, Box 1, Folder 7 “1929 Jan 4 – April 17,” J. Walter Thompson Company, Staff Meeting Minutes, 1927-1938, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
4 The structure of cinema advertising was largely to blame, for two reasons. First, regular national circulation was a problem. At best, individual companies could promise limited circulation, but even these “promises…turn[ed] out to be mirages in a good many instances.” Second, it was not possible to pre-estimate attendance figures for any given advertising film, as there were too many variables and even after release attendance figures could be very unreliable. In the absence of a simple model for national circulation and attendance estimates, mainstream agencies like Thompson saw the cinema as too unsettled to adopt as an advertising venue. J. Walter Thompson had even had direct contact with silent cinema advertising in the 1910s, as they were heavily engaged with the Creel Committee’s wartime advertising (which was, itself, heavily engaged with cinema). Their further attempts to manipulate Hollywood for free advertising – most notably in the Lux Soap campaign – shows without a doubt that they were aware of the cinema’s power to mold desires. Their ‘apathy,’ therefore, occurred despite direct knowledge of the advertising possibilities of motion pictures. Problems: Mr. Kimball, “Industrial Film Facts as of March 12, 1929,” p. 5, 9, Box 1, Folder 7 “1929 Jan 4 – April 17,” J. Walter Thompson Company, Staff Meeting Minutes, 1927-1938, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. Wartime advertising: “Advertising in Food Control Campaign,” Printers’ Ink 100.2 (12 July 1917): 66. Lux: Jane Gaines, “From Elephants to Lux Soap: The Programming and ‘Flow’ of Early Motion Picture Exploitation,” Velvet Light Trap 25 (Spring 1990): 40-41.
heart. First, they asserted that cinema advertising had been a qualified success, despite early exhibiton and spectator reluctance, due largely to persistence. By carrying on, advertising film makers had “developed an appreciative tolerance on the part of the audience,” neutralizing complaints by simply refusing to leave.  

Second, they claimed that “[s]ome of the finest film work that has been done from an advertising standpoint has gone into the making of trailers that would have real ‘punch’ so they would be used right along.”

Trailers were short, generally one minute, film strips designed to advertise consumer goods, complete with a merchant’s ‘video business card’ as the culminating image. It is therefore telling that a mainstream ad agency, on the cusp of the development of television’s ‘participating sponsorship’ model, was interested in the cinema trailer as a parallel to the radio ‘spot’ (then still largely restricted to daytime programming).

The analysis throws into sharp relief two important elements of cinema advertising history: that the threat of published complaints about onscreen advertising was parried by advertiser persistence; and that the motion picture advertising trailer is directly related to the televisual development of the 60-second broadcast ‘spot.’

The commercial ‘trailer’ rose to prominence shortly after the advertising slide, and would slowly usurp, over the course of two decades, the much of the positioning of its technologically simplistic sibling in motion picture theaters. Indeed, commentators of the time saw the trailer as

---


6 Mr. Kimball, “Industrial Film Facts as of March 12, 1929,” p. 3, Box 1, Folder 7 “1929 Jan 4 – April 17,” J. Walter Thompson Company, Staff Meeting Minutes, 1927-1938, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

a direct replacement for the outdated lantern slide, which “had had its run.”*8 The perceived value of motion to the power of image-based advertising (see chapter two), combined with a growing sense that the cinema audience was frustrated with slides, drove cinema advertising producers to develop the advertising trailer to capture and captivate an audience which, it seemed, had not been properly approached via slides. Some of the more prominent slide producers concurred with that thinking, and attempted to shift production to the trailer model over the course of the 1910s and 1920s. One example was the Kansas City Slide Company; company President A.V. Cauger, as part of his shift in focus from slides to films, trained his young artists Walt Disney and Ubbe Iwerks – originally hired in 1920 to produce “Cartoon and Wash Drawings” for advertising slides – to produce advertising trailers. Disney, who was to make himself a household name, thus discovered cartooning largely due to cinema advertising trends, as the slide lost ground to the commercial trailer.9 Most early participants in the trailer field, however, were new companies which saw themselves as directly competing with the struggling slide makers.

Trailers, like slides before them, were designed to be inserted into an entertainment sequence in the ‘gaps’ in the program, perpetuating the ‘single voice’ model, but without the disruption of breaking up full-motion images with stills. Paradoxically, however, the increasing

---

* See, for example, the Jonas Howard quote above, as well as the following: “Little Schoolmaster’s Classroom,” Printers’ Ink 92.10 (2 September 1915): 94; “Publicity for Plumbers,” Domestic Engineering 73.11 (11 December 1915): 337; “The Newest Kind of Store Publicity,” Clothier and Furnisher 89.2 (September 1916): 98; and “How to Make a ‘Movie’ for Straw Hat Day,” American Hatter 46.9 (April 1917): 69. Further examples will be cited below in the section “A Brief History of the Advertising Trailer, 1914-1922.”

9 On the strength of his previous work in commercial illustration for local art studio Pesman-Rubin, and his fledgling independent venture Iwerks-Disney, Walt was hired to create advertising slides for use in motion picture theaters. Ubbe Iwerks joined Kansas City Slide months later. Only five months after Disney was hired (May of 1920), he claimed, in a letter to a friend, to “draw cartoons for…advertiser films.” As such, though his hiring was for slide work, his transition to animation was rapid. Disney later specifically claimed to have been trained in stop-motion filming by Kansas City Slide Company employee George E. ‘Jimmy’ Lowerre. Timothy S. Susanin, Walt Before Mickey: Disney’s Early Years, 1919-1928 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 10, 12, 16. Letter reported in: Neal Gabler, Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 49.
technological suitability of the form to the cinema correlated to a historical moment when pauses for advertising were diminishing in programs rather than growing. Trailers, despite their suitability for use at the end of each reel, commonly wound up strung together on their own reel and used as a form of ‘intermission’ between turns of the program. It is in the marginalization of the trailer where the cinema found its stable form – unbroken feature films (and, to a decreasing degree, shorts) surrounded, in lower-end theaters, by an intermission buffer zone of advertising clips. The notion that paid admissions were ‘naturally’ incompatible with intermittent advertising breaks normalized in the public consciousness through an accidental confluence of events.

This chapter shall chart a course very similar to chapter three. Opening with a clear description of the trailer form, and the production methods employed in their creation and screening, the bulk of the chapter will recount a history of trailer development as a commercial adjunct to cinema culture. Following this historical breakdown, public rhetoric both positive and negative about the trailer form (spoiler alert: it’s almost all positive) will reveal the ways in which trailers were ‘sold’ to both the film and business community as a viable advertising medium. The chapter will conclude with a case study of the early years of the Alexander Film Company – the predominant trailer manufacturer from the early 1920s to the advent of commercial television and beyond.

What Was a ‘Trailer’?

Referred to variously as ‘minute movies,’ ‘photoplaylets,’ and ‘Visual Publicity Telegrams,’ trailers were very short advertising film strips which played out like temporally,  

---

10 Minute: “Used-Car Sales Promotion Work,” *Automobile Topics* 8 October 1921: 639; and Fred Fidler, “A Discussion of the Current Status and Future Possibilities of Commercial Motion Pictures,” 8 January 1938, p. 5-6,
rather than spatially, organized slides. Most often they were made, like lantern slides, to promote generic products, with a dealer identified in the concluding moments of the film.

Trailers could, and did, promote national brands, but even then would almost invariably have had a local dealer name and address eating up the final seconds. Commonly the running length of an individual trailer advertisement was roughly 45 feet for the ‘story’ and 15 feet for the name and address of a local business where the product could be purchased. Due to the variability of projection speeds in the silent era, the actual viewing of an advertising trailer may have taken much less than the commonly presumed one-minute running time of 60 feet of film. Roughly one-minute was, however, the standard estimate, if not the standard experience.

At their inception in the early 1910s, trailers, as the name would imply, were intended to be appended to the ends of entertainment reels that ran a bit shorter than the typical 1000 feet, and were thus circulated individually. Research by the J. Walter Thompson ad agency, in 1929, asserts that mainstream films of this era could run “as short as 650-700 feet,” causing exhibitors to look with a good deal of favor on film novelties running about 50-250 feet…which could be patched onto the ends of short reels when it was desirable to lengthen the program, or left off when it was preferable.” Custom trailers were usually made-to-order and purchased outright,

---

11 Unlike nationally broadcast radio and television – in which the same programs and advertisements were sent to various parts of the country – cinema theaters were local entities. Even when theaters were simply links in larger chains, exhibitors had minor control over the local elements of the program, such as the re-editing of newsreels to boost local value, or construction of musical accompaniment (often done independently by the house composer). As such, cinema advertising was seen, generally, as local advertising. Even national branding in a theater was valued most highly when patrons were also informed of the nearest dealer. General brand advertising was uncommon in direct advertising models like slides, trailers, and offscreen technologies.

12 Mr. Kimball, “Industrial Film Facts as of March 12, 1929,” p. 3, Box 1, Folder 7 “1929 Jan 4 – April 17,” J. Walter Thompson Company, Staff Meeting Minutes, 1927-1938, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. See also Francis T. Kimball’s assertion that a trailer “is hitched on to the last and slightly shorter reel of one of the features.” Francis T. Kimball, “The Film Trailer and What it Will Do,” Moving Picture Age February 1921: 11.
with circulation decisions often left up to the advertiser him or herself. The typical cost for a custom trailer was between fifty cents and one-dollar per foot, or about thirty to sixty dollars per trailer.\textsuperscript{13} Although custom trailers persisted throughout the life of the form, the growth of space-brokering by trailer producers (signing contracts with exhibitors which allowed the trailer producer to re-sell a certain number of minutes per program) led to the growth of an alternate model of distribution in which the trailer producers would send a reel of multiple trailers. Predominantly of the ‘stock’ or ‘syndicate’ variety – generic trailers selected from a catalog for merchants in particular lines of business\textsuperscript{14} – such collections of trailers were designed to be run in sequence as a standalone reel somewhere in the program. Stock trailers had wide variation in cost – ranging from four to twelve dollars – depending on whether they were rented or purchased outright.\textsuperscript{15} By 1916, both models were possible, and operated simultaneously; any given company offered both custom and stock trailers.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{14}Of the many product lines, W.A. Harris asserted that automobiles (including accessories and repair) already accounted for more than ten percent of trailer sales by January 1917. [W.A. Harris], “Movie Film Becoming Big Car Sales Feature,” \textit{Motor World} 17 January 1917: 65. The quantity of automobile related material in the Alexander Film Company scrapbook indicates that this predominance continued at least into the 1920s. For two examples: “Alexander Film Company – Scrapbook, 1919-1923,” p. 36 and 41, Box 11, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.

\textsuperscript{15}Ernest A. Dench asserted an average price of $4 to $5 in 1916. The Rothacker Film Manufacturing Company was reportedly charging $12 in 1919. The Alexander Film Company did rental only and mandated 6 months to one year contracts. In 1921, averaging out the cost, their minimum price per film was $4.25 ($17 per month for weekly change) and their maximum was $5.50 ($11 per month for bi-weekly change). These prices, however, did not include the cost of the 15 foot dealer strip which, though cost could be distributed over the life of the contract, had to be made to order and cost the merchant/dealer a minimum of $20. Ernest A. Dench, “Motion Picture Photography,” \textit{The Camera} 20.9 (September 1916): 520; Jonas Howard, “Sodas or Shaves,” \textit{Photoplay} 17.1 (December 1919): 112; and “Sales Manual,” p. 80-81, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. In 2012 dollars, this would be between $80 and $250.

\textsuperscript{16}Depending on whether a company wanted a custom or stock trailer, the viewer might see a trailer which was resolutely about a particular product, like Nunnally’s Chocolates, funded by and with script input from the makers of the product itself, or an ad which was about the generic class of product, chocolates in general, to which a specific merchant name would then be appended. Nunnally: Carl B. Rowntree, “Apparatus For and Method of Taking Trick and Advertising Moving Pictures,” U.S. Patent 1,227,075, filed 29 April 1915, and issued 22 May 1917. Generic chocolate narrative adapted to a particular seller: H.H. Dewey, “Movies Are Moving Goods Over the Counter,” \textit{Confectioners Gazette} 41.462 (10 March 1920): 24.
Despite the vast differences in cost and production style inherent between custom and stock trailers, form and content (what the cinemagoer actually saw onscreen) had little variation. Custom production was a means to more completely integrate the brand, not a way to create an ad of higher formal quality. Although they could be made in live-action, the typical advertising trailer was animated. (See the history section below for detail on the appeal of animation in the mid-1910s.) Designed to be both short (to defuse exhibitor reluctance and keep costs low for the advertiser) and direct (making them memorable to the viewer, unlike subtle product placement and sponsored educational shorts), trailers were like full-motion slides, offering a clear sales-pitch for a given product as briefly and pleasurably as possible.

The ‘copy’ style was thus generally humorous, relying more on ‘soft sell’ strategies than slides, used a limited number of words (so as not to waste running time), and was – as was typical for 1910s advertising – an either explicit or implicit comparison of life with and without the product. Jonas Howard described this narrative structure of playlets as providing “[a] sort of object lesson, negative or positive,” in order to persuade the viewer of “the necessity for new

---

17 Indeed, there seems to have been a bit of a vogue for live-action trailers in the vicinity of World War I. However, the dominance of the industry by the Alexander Film Company, beginning in the early 1920s and continuing beyond World War II, indicates that animation predominated both in the early and mature iterations of the form. (See below for further information on these historical shifts.)

18 Interestingly, the complexities of artist compensation in the United States has resulted in a continued focus on animation in advertising work. As animated ad director Stephen Oakes has noted in an interview, re-running a popular animated ad is simpler because the talent residuals are lower. Richard Ohmann, ed., Making and Selling Culture (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 81.

19 ‘Soft sell’ tactics extend beyond humor; Juliann Sivulka asserts that the basic definition of soft sell advertising is “link[ing]…the all-important trademarks and symbols for the brand name with…favorable and memorable associations” – effectively adding emotional connotations to a brand. (Juliann Sivulka, Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising [Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 1998], 55.) However, ‘humor’ was one of two primary soft-sell concepts (along with ‘edification’) active in early cinema advertising. Industrial filmmakers often turned to the educational mode as the most effective soft-sell strategy for cinema use. Trailers producers, which, like slides makers, were allowed to be more direct in their advertising, opted instead for humor. While humor was not unknown in the realm of slides, trailer makers were the first cinema advertisers to broadly embrace the notion that audience pleasure and direct advertising could work in tandem. The persistent use of not only comic scripts, but animation, by trailer makers is evidence of the ethos of pleasure which they adopted.

20 Lynne Kirby mentions the prevalence of this comparative structure as well, in “Gender and Advertising in American Silent Film: From Early Cinema to the Crowd,” Discourse 13.2 (Spring/Summer 1991): 3.
shoes or a safety razor.” These ‘object lessons’ could be either rational or emotional appeals – either ‘reason why’ or ‘impressionistic’ copy. Howard described the rational argumentative copy of a corset film, in which the near indestructibility of a corset was personified in the actions of two rambunctious children who used a corset to play tug of war before soaking it in a tub. The quality of the corset was assured by a narrative assertion that it would neither tear nor rust easily, implying superiority to a life with a lower-quality corset. An example of ‘rational’ copy from the time with more overt comparative structure is a cement film which juxtaposed a thin, grumpy hog whose food kept sinking in the mire, to a fat and happy hog dining off of a concrete floor. Howard likewise provided an example of more emotional, impressionistic comparative; a shoe advertisement linked the quality of a man’s shoes to his romantic appeal, having an onscreen love interest refuse to marry the romantic lead until after he had purchased a new pair of shoes. Such binaristic arguments – the simplest means of integrating salesmanship into narrative structure – are the structuring motif of virtually every published example of the form.

Most variation in style was, thus, not copy related but confined to minor aesthetic differences. A multitude of aesthetic possibilities, largely determined by the technology developed by a given company, were available. Trailers could be made in live-action, hand-drawn animation, or cut-out puppetry (the most common method). The ‘Rowntree Process’ of

---

22 “Little Schoolmaster’s Classroom,” Printers’ Ink 102.10 (7 March 1918): 142.
23 For other clear examples, see H.A. Shaw’s monthly column “A Few of Last Month’s Productions,” in the house organ, the Alexander Cooperator, in which he described the plots of trailers produced in the previous month. Alexander Cooperator, Box 8, Folder 1, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. Other plot descriptions are scattered throughout the trade press of the time; see for example: “Publicity for Plumbers,” Domestic Engineering 73.11 (11 December 1915): 337-338; “Kansas City Trade,” Black Diamond 58.5 (3 February 1917): 101; Francis T. Kimball, “The Film Trailer and What It Will Do,” Moving Picture Age February 1921: 11; and “Used-Car Sales Promotion Work,” Automobile Topics 8 October 1921: 639. The only films which do not at least implicitly assert the trait of a product are non-narrative, abstract ads in which company names were simply revealed through magical play with letters. See, for example, the previously discussed Scenic Film Company ad for Nunnally’s Chocolates.
24 This propensity for cut-out puppetry is likely a key reason for the persistent marginalization of advertising cartoons in historical studies of animation. There is no clear parallel in successful American entertainment
the Scenic Film Company was designed to backlight cardboard “figures...cut out in the fashion of paper dolls.”\textsuperscript{25} The Kansas City Slide Company used a similar method; Walt Disney once described his work there as the manipulation of “little puppet things” with joints.\textsuperscript{26} The Federal Development Company, as revealed in a self-advertisement, used hand drawn animation highly reminiscent, due to color inversion (black marks registering white onscreen), of the ‘chalkboard’ style of Emile Cohl’s famous film Fantasmagorie (1908).\textsuperscript{27} The Rothacker Film Manufacturing Company preferred to deal in live-action, and expressed a, probably not uncommon, weakness for “pretty girls.”\textsuperscript{28}

Unlike lantern slides which, for several reasons (see chapter three), developed a propensity for black backgrounds extremely early, trailer animators commonly operated in both white-on-black and black-on-white styles. The Scenic Film Company, which openly described its animation as consisting of “silhouette and manikin effects,” and which reproduced several black silhouette images in a 1916 article in a local newspaper, appears to have been comfortable with black-figures on a white background.\textsuperscript{29} Sample images in the display ads for the Dra-Ko

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item [26] In later reminiscence, Disney claims to have personally experimented with hand-drawn animation but failed to convince Slide Company president A.V. Cauger to adopt it. Timothy S. Susanin, Walt Before Mickey: Disney’s Early Years, 1919-1928 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 11, 15-16.
\item [27] Federal Development Company: Display Ad, Simmons’ Spice Mill 40.1 (January 1917): 78.
\item [28] Jonas Howard, “Sodas or Shaves,” Photoplay 17.1 (December 1919): 112. By mid-century, the Alexander Film Company claimed to frequently use “‘kiddie’ talent” and “animal pets” which, along with “pretty girls,” form the holy-trinity of emotional advertising appeals. “Alexander Film Co.: Behind the Scenes” pamphlet, unpaginated [6], Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
\item [29] Full-Page Display Ad, Refrigeration 17.6 (January 1916): 54. Britt Craig, “What Makes the Animated Movie Ads Move?: How the ‘Go-Fans’ Go on a Picture Screen,” Atlanta Constitution 2 April 1916: D3. See, however, the extant 1921 short The First Circus for an example of the ways in which black figure, puppet animation could keep white backgrounds to a minimum. \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OltruL2_e0k}
\end{itemize}
Film Company also reveal black-figure production. B.F. Goodrich appears to have circulated animated trailers in black-figure as well. However, Artfilm Studios’ Reginald V. Stambaugh not only made white-figure animation, but strongly asserted that a white background “contrasts uncomfortably with the usual background of motion picture plays…[by] produc[ing] a high light that is out of place.” The previously cited Federal Development Company image was also white-figure production. It is possible that the decision was technologically or financially determined; certain methods may have simply produced better or cheaper product in one or the other form. It is also probable that black backgrounds were more common with those who continued the hand-coloring practices of slide production; black backgrounds allowed for easier ‘slopping’ of color across a space, as the background would hide the color which fell outside the lines. Of course, it is also plausible that American entertainment animation from Winsor McCay and Bray Productions, as black-figure productions, may have convinced most trailer animators that the whole subject was unimportant. In any case, it appears that white backgrounds were common in trailer production – far more so than in slide production.

Aesthetic variation was also partially the result of textual concerns. Some stock trailers makers, in an attempt to construct trailers which left written copy in the hands of the advertiser as much as possible, concocted numerous methods for integrating text throughout trailers. While the Alexander Film Company was content to limit dealer copy to the last fifteen seconds, and the Rothacker Film Manufacturing Company kept copy open to change by integrating it via intertitles (as was typical for live-action film), Reginald V. Stambaugh performed technological

33 Federal Development Company: Display Ad, Simmons’ Spice Mill 40.1 (January 1917): 78. B-D-F Films’ wartime propaganda trailer, known as W.S.S. Thriftettes (1918), was also white-figure. It is readily available online from the Library of Congress, and via YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nPwXSqZXBl>. 
gymnastics to try to put stock animation and custom copy on the same frame of the trailer. Stambaugh left open spaces in his animation designed to accommodate custom dialogue and then developed a complicated dual-threading process in which two pieces of film (a shooting negative and a completed animation positive) would run through the camera simultaneously. The location and specificity of copy could, therefore, vary widely depending on the trailer producer.

In terms of exhibition, trailers were a national, but limited, phenomenon – they skewed towards rural and suburban areas. As the growth of the form coincided with the rise of the urban picture palace, which commonly rejected commercial advertising intrusions across-the-board, the advertising trailer found a home in mid-range and low-end theaters and, effectively, wound up as one of the myriad ways in which first-run, downtown, palatial theaters were differentiated from other theaters in the silent era. The exhibitor was almost always paid for the screening time – either by the merchant who had paid for the film (directly, if placing the film himself, or indirectly, if he hired a space-broker to produce the trailer), or by the consumer-goods manufacturer (if it was a national campaign). Any given film was guaranteed, as far as possible,

---

34 Stambaugh’s patent is an intriguing read, as he takes time to lay out the many ways in which the concept could be botched before finally revealing his own technique. As such, he gives considerable data on the variations in advertising animation practice at this early date. His own process involves the filming of text with the negative resting directly against the stock animation film strip. As such, the animation prints directly to the finished film at the same time that the lettering comes through the lens. Reginald V. Stambaugh, “Process of Making Moving Picture Films,” U.S. Patent 1,226,135, filed 26 May 1916, and issued 15 May 1917.

35 This was probably the most important difference between silent and sound era production. Provided animation remained a prominent practice, sound re-recording could easily integrate brand specificity into generic animation with only minor impact on ‘lip-sync.’ As such, Stambaugh’s attempt at creating stock ads with textual variability was a dead-end for silent era production but prefigured production choices from more than a decade later.

36 ‘Roxy’ Rothapfel asserted that this split had developed as early as 1916, in the wake of emergence of the picture palace. By 1921, Francis T. Kimball asserted that “[o]f course, ‘first-run’ theatres in a few of the larger cities will not put even the most sugar-coated trailer on their screens”; his article directly asserted that it was a mode of advertising for “the thousands of cities and towns and hamlets of the United States which are not among the leading few.” In 1956, research by the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency reveals that the split remained entrenched, as urban theaters would not screen advertising films. S.L. Rothapfel, “First Aid to Theater Men,” Motography 16.2 (8 July 1916): 78; Francis T. Kimball, “The Film Trailer and What it Will Do,” Moving Picture Age February 1921: 11; and Fred Fidler and Wallace Boren, “Commercial Movies,” 1 February 1938, p. 9, Box 7, Folder “1937 Nov. 9–1938 Oct. 25,” J. Walter Thompson Company, Staff Meeting Minutes, 1927-1938, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. For further information on differentiating rural and urban viewing during the 1910s, see: Kathryn H. Fuller, At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996).
to be screened according to contract, either by sending a man to ‘check-up’ on the exhibitor, or by developing longstanding, mutually-respectful relationships with exhibitors through space-brokering. As such, commercial advertising trailers – though not as common as lantern slides in the years between 1910 and 1913 – would have been seen by the bulk of film patrons as a normal piece of the program. If a viewer saw one advertising trailer – hawking either a national product like Coca Cola, or a local one like “Jones’ Toys” – it was unlikely to be a one-off experience, but a part of a larger pattern witnessed every time they went to their favorite theater.

A Brief History of the Advertising Trailer, 1914-1922

It is difficult to discuss the history of the advertising trailer without a little pre-history, as filmed advertisements are nearly as old as film itself. As early as 1896, a film featuring Sunlight Soap, called Washing Day in Switzerland, was screened at Keith’s Union Square Theater in New York. The Edison Company’s paid filming of passenger rail was in full swing in their early short productions by 1897. By 1898, there were advertising films screened in New York (and possibly elsewhere) for products like Dewar’s Scotch Whiskey, Maillard’s Chocolates, Columbia Bicycles, Piel’s beer, and Hunter’s Rye Whiskey. Future animation pioneer J. Stuart Blackton, along with his partner Albert E. Smith, made commercial films, along with slides, for their Commercial Advertising Bureau – projecting them from rooftops onto canvases hung at busy intersections. There is even evidence that the use of humor as a salve for advertising content is

38 Newell, Salmon, and Chang assert that, of the 52 films Edison made involving trains, only twice was the onscreen train a freight train; almost invariably the trains were for passenger transport. Jay Newell, Charles T. Salmon, and Susan Chang, “The Hidden History of Product Placement,” Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media 50.4 (December 2006): 580, 590.
39 Charles Musser is the best source of information on this movement, specifically indicating that there was a site at Herald Square in New York, and giving concrete dates for certain productions. Kerry Segrave, provides the list of advertisers, but otherwise offers less detailed information. Charles Musser, “American Vitagraph: 1897-1901,”
an early innovation. When Sears and Roebuck catalogs began to offer projectors and films in 1898, they added to the available product by selling films, for only three dollars (40% less than non-advertising films), which subtly advertised the Sears name – displaying subjects like employees leaving Sears for lunch. In order to counter the undoubted reluctance of some to purchase advertising footage, even at a cut rate, some of films were graced with the description “very funny.”\(^{40}\) The extant 1897 commercial film *Admiral Cigarettes* relies likewise on humor, through its ridiculous imagery of a ‘cigarette fairy.’ Though it is important not to oversell the comparison, all of these early advertisements were, in effect, proto-trailers, as the jokes and last-second slogans were integrated into a (then common) running length of roughly one minute.

As film expanded, however – both in terms of celluloid running length and national audience – between 1900 and 1914, advertising films expanded apace, relegating the extremely brief advertising film to the rubbish bin as an outdated form. Large film producers continued to make commissioned films stylistically parallel to their entertainment fare. Charles Musser, in the most detailed study of advertising in the pre-nickelodeon era, asserts that American Biograph was so heavily engaged in producing commissioned advertising and public announcement films that “[o]f the 653 films [they] made from 1 May 1903 to 1 May 1904, more than 120 were sponsored by large corporations or the United States government,” including films for “Shredded Wheat Biscuits, Mellin’s Baby Food, and the Gold Dust Twins.”\(^{41}\) Vitagraph – Blackton and


Smith’s second film venture – experimented with product placement and was able to extract fabulous sums from advertisers for the service; they were eventually sued for commissions on these contracts, which included $25,000 from American Tobacco for a hanging sign during the Johnson-Jeffries fight, and $15,000 from Wrigley for a close-up of a girl unwrapping a piece of gum.\footnote{Julius Legett, the man who claimed to have negotiated the contracts, was seeking $26,000 in commissions, strongly implying that there were several very large contracts with Vitagraph prior to the Patents Company banning the practice. As typical commissions for advertising agencies at this time were roughly 15%, Legett may have been asking for this percentage. If so, a simple mathematical extrapolation would put Vitagraph’s income from Legett-negotiated product placement at roughly $173,000. The Goat Man, “On the Outside Looking In,” Motography 7.6 (June 1912): 252.} The National Cash Register Company was also using film at the St. Louis Expo in 1904.\footnote{James H. Collins, “Advertising Via the Motion Picture,” Printers’ Ink 70.8 (23 February 1910): 24.} As such, advertising – via one-reel shorts and product placement – was everywhere. It was likely to be screened in every plausible American venue prior to the establishment of the nickelodeon, from Edison’s kinetoscope parlors, to vaudeville performances, to general public celebrations of modern technology at fairs and expositions.

With the stabilization of exhibition practices in nickelodeon theaters, however, advertising motion pictures began losing ground. As the industrial advertising short and tourism-boosting travelogue fought for integration into cinema programs between 1908 and 1913, the roughly 15 minute duration of a standard reel became a problem. Once film had lost its status as inherently spectacular, advertising annoyed patrons at the length of a full-reel. More and more advertising in motion pictures was camouflaged with a veil of ‘human interest’ or educational content, and reduced to an indirect, ‘soft-sell’ integration of trademarks.\footnote{Industrial film producer Watterson Rothacker called this the “veil of interest” and likened it to using seasoning in cooking. Watterson R. Rothacker, “Motion Pictures that Really Advertise,” Nickelodeon 11 February 1911: 161; and Watterson R. Rothacker, “System in Motion Picture Advertising,” Motography May 1911: 71. See also, among countless others: James H. Collins, “Advertising Via the Motion Picture,” Printers’ Ink 70.8 (23 February 1910): 24; and “The Newest Kind of Store Publicity,” Clothier and Furnisher 89.2 (September 1916): 99.} As the advertising component of a reel became less and less noticeable, the fantastic costs of making such films –
reaching as high as $5000 apiece – became less and less attractive.\textsuperscript{45} Slides, on the other hand, could be picked from a catalog, ordered for a dollar, and taken to every local motion picture theater in turn until some exhibitor agreed to run them. The cost of failure was dramatically different. With the success of advertising slides prior to 1910, numerous articles dreaming of a future for the advertising film were published,\textsuperscript{46} but attempts at full-reel production simply weren’t working. By 1913 – after significant efforts from industrial film producers like Watterson Rothacker, Arthur N. Smallwood, and the industrial division of Essanay – the advertising film appeared to be destined for a life on the non-theatrical circuit.\textsuperscript{47} The expensive indirect approach found few adherents when forced to compete with direct advertising via cheap slides.

By this same date, however, even the ‘direct’ advertising slide was struggling through a wave of negative publicity. Ugly slides made by cut-rate slide manufacturers had markedly increased public resentment of the form, as unpleasant (and often broken) slides would be screened for months on end. By 1913, exhibitor elimination of advertising slides was in full swing (see chapter three). The American advertising industry was, however, going through

\textsuperscript{45} A 1910 article asserted not only that a good estimate for film production with a plan for seven months of theatrical circulation (the rough lifespan of a print in constant use) was $5,000, but also that “no contract for less than $2,500 worth of film is taken” by the average advertising film producer. As such, an advertising short was an expensive risk for companies willing to experiment. James H. Collins, “Advertising Via the Moving Picture,” \textit{Printers’ Ink} 70.8 (23 February 1910): 28. For the lifespan, see: Ernest A. Dench, \textit{Advertising by Motion Pictures} (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1916), 28.


\textsuperscript{47} See, for example, the publications of industrial film maker Watterson Rothacker, who clearly preferred the making of films for use by traveling salesmen, as theatrical release was simply a “blunderbuss that makes a big noise [by] aim[ing] at anything and everything.” Watterson Rothacker, “Pictures as an Advertising Force,” \textit{Motography} February 1912: 71. The history of the industrial advertising film, product placement, and sponsored newsreels is, admittedly, far more important to the development of cinema advertising in the silent era and will be dealt with more fully at a later date. See the following references to Watterson Rothacker’s work: Mack Sennett, \textit{King of Comedy} (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2000), 122; Kathryn H. Fuller, \textit{At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture} (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 83-84; and Nanna Verhoef, \textit{The West in Early Cinema: After the Beginning} (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 313-314.
significant expansion in this period; Quentin J. Schultze points to the era between 1910 and 1915 as a period of “rapid growth” in national advertising in the United States. As such, the mass rebellion against industrial reels and advertising slides, in an era when the desire to advertise was expanding rather than contracting, opened a clear space for advertising films in cinema programs…provided the films were short enough to fit into the same gaps. Enter the trailer film, appended to the ends of film reels or distributed as a short reel of one-minute long advertisements, which began its rise in 1914.

Over the course of the following two years, it was common, among trailer producers and advocates, to openly describe the trailer as the logical replacement for the faltering lantern slide. The earliest known trailer producer – Houston’s Southern Film Service – directly declared, in its 1914 self-advertising, that their films were “not to be compared with the ordinary slides.” The Fort Wayne & Northern Indiana Traction Company justified its use of trailer footage that same year on the grounds that it involved neither the pause nor the resentment inherent in slides. Atlanta’s Scenic Film Company used simple derisive metaphors to critique the impertinence of using still slides in moving picture theaters. For example, their claim that “[e]ven a piece of paper, blown by the breeze across a screen, will attract attention and would be watched by anyone, when something still may stand unnoticed for a long time.” Harvey F. Morris, advertising manager for the Hickey-Freeman clothing company, concurred, saying that slides represented “a decided drop from the pictures between which they were shown” and “were

---

49 The earliest direct comparative attack I have found is: “Publicity for Plumbers,” *Domestic Engineering* 73.11 (11 December 1915): 337.
not successful in interesting the audience.” By the end of 1916, advertising journalist Ernest A. Dench reduced the critique to the simple assertion that lack of motion was “a serious defect” in slides which could be remedied through the adoption of trailer advertising. As such, the rhetoric of the trailer as an improved form of the slide both adopted and advanced the public sentiment that motion pictures were a form of communication which bypassed critical faculties. Culminating in the mid-decade ‘psychic infection’ film theories of Hugo Münsterberg and the Mutual Decision (see chapter two), advocacy of trailers at the expense of slides implied not just an improvement in technology, but a strengthening of advertising power.

Although slide usage continued (and continues) in American motion picture theaters, the 1913 backlash against slides was, therefore, a necessary pre-requisite for the boom in advertising film. It not only inspired the creation of short, cheap, and direct advertising film (rather than the subtle camouflaging tactics of product placement and ‘educational’ reels), but also opened up a simple rhetorical argument for adoption: ‘upgrade your slides’ with the more captivating and pleasurable moving advertisement. In short, the trailer industry was a parasite on the slide industry, pushing condemnation of still advertising in favor of its own full-motion product.

The trailer method appears to have arisen independently in at least three places: Houston, Atlanta, and New England. In Houston, the Southern Film Service, Inc., began offering

---

53 “The Newest Kind of Store Publicity,” Clothier and Furnisher 89.2 (September 1916): 98.
54 Ernest A. Dench, “Bringing the Ad. Film Within Reach of Every Confectioner,” International Confectioner September 1916: 70.
55 Although the anti-slide rhetoric would lose priority in trailer adoption rhetoric, it remained a useful persuasive angle for trailer producers as late as 1921. See, for example, the Jonas Howard article quoted above. The Alexander Film Company made a habit of slide derision, including a 1921 comparison in which a slide was described as a valueless window shopper, and a trailer was a man throwing a brick through the glass. See the following Alexander documents: Strand Theater, Billings, MT, to “All Advertisers and Prospective Advertisers on the Strand Screen,” 1 January 1920, “Alexander Film Company - Scrapbook, 1919-1923” p. 23, Box 11, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. “Sales Manual,” p. 32, 58, 61, 62, 81, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
56 It is possible that it was likewise invented in Chicago around this time as Donald Crafton mentions, without citation, that Watterson Rothacker’s Industrial Moving Picture Company was making animated advertisements prior
“Mysterious Writing” advertising films, designed “[t]o be attached to your daily film.” Using the slogan “An unseen hand in letters white on a darkened screen appears to write,” it is clear that their ads were nothing more than stop-motion writing, projected in negative to achieve a white-figure effect.\textsuperscript{57} Atlanta cameraman Carl B. Rowntree, of the Scenic Film Company, produced a more complicated practice of full scale puppet animation, claiming to have invented his process for producing short animated ads in the middle of 1914.\textsuperscript{58} By early 1915, he had filed his animation technique with the United States patent office, was regularly soliciting the business of Atlanta merchants and manufacturers, and openly declared that his cartoon films were, likewise, to be used “by attaching them to the end of regular moving picture reels.”\textsuperscript{59} New England’s National Advertising Motion Picture Weekly, Inc., also in the latter half of 1914, contracted with sixteen nearby theaters to run a weekly five-minute reel containing five distinct advertising films.\textsuperscript{60} In short, both business models – the ‘appended trailer’ and the ‘reel of trailers’ – were in use in the United States by the end of 1914. The idea would spread remarkably quickly, with at least seven further companies adopting the form by the end of

\textsuperscript{57} Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 19.10 (7 March 1914): 1330.


\textsuperscript{59} Carl B. Rowntree, “Apparatus For and Method of Taking Trick and Advertising Moving Pictures,” U.S. Patent 1,227,075, filed 29 April 1915, and issued 22 May 1917; and Display ad, \textit{Atlanta Constitution} 8 August 1915: B5. Quote from: Carl B. Rowntree, “A Business Producing Idea That Compels Attention,” \textit{Refrigeration} 18.3 (April 1916): 34. It is not clear exactly when Scenic officially began circulating trailer advertisements. The \textit{Moving Picture World} announced, in June of 1915, that the Strand Theater in Atlanta was “the first to adopt a new idea in screen advertising,” but it is not clear if this was the ‘first’ Scenic trailer, or the first contract for regular trailer circulation. By the time of the report, however, the ads were popular enough that there was already ‘waiting list’ for local advertisers. Whether the waiting list was due to Scenic’s lack of sufficient production facilities, or the Strand’s limited space in the program, is also unclear. “Ads That Entertain,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 24.10 (5 June 1915): 1650.

\textsuperscript{60} “Plans to Check Film Circulation,” \textit{Printers’ Ink} 89.5 (29 October 1914): 28.
A total of at least thirty-one trailer producers were, or had been, in operation by 1921—
including Tilford & Tilford, a Chicago company which made trailers exclusively for black
theaters. The form was so successful that, by World War I, the mainstream film industry
would adapt the method to replace ‘coming attraction’ slides.

While it is not entirely clear where the idea came from, there are several plausible origins
for the thinking. The term ‘trailer’ was in use no later than 1910, as the inverse of the term
‘leader,’ to describe the short strips of informational film at the end of a reel: company logos,
‘The End’ tags, and censor board approvals. At times the production of such material was even
outsourced to a company that specialized in the form. It would not have been a great leap for
such a company to branch out into sales messages, as they were effectively acting as film
branding agents already. A secondary influence may have been ‘split-reel’ and newsreel
releases. In split reels, two films – neither of which was a full reel in length – were released
together as a single product. By 1914, one half-reel film, Fireproofing Children, was said to be

---


62 “A New Enterprise,” Chicago Defender 14 February 1920: 19. While I cannot corroborate the assertion that Tilford & Tilford were “the first” to make such films exclusively for black theaters, the description of their work as “a wonderful improvement on the time-worn slides” indicates that they were definitely working in the medium of the ‘minute movie.’

63 The Indiana Curtain Advertising Company pioneered coming attractions trailers with simple ten foot footage of stars and titles, made by commission for theaters, in 1915. This same year, serials began to use edited footage as teasers for the next episode. By late 1916, the Moving Picture World was still able to assert that Triangle had a ‘new idea’ when the company began to attach an advance trailer for next week’s feature to the end of every feature film the company released. In 1917, an article in Moving Picture World declared that the coming attraction trailer had “come into use extensively of late” clearly indicating that the vogue of film trailers arose after the rise of the consumer goods advertising trailer. “Chicago Film Brevities,” Moving Picture World 25.9 (28 August 1915): 1464; Margaret I. MacDonald, “Exploits of Elaine,’ Episode 14,” Moving Picture World 24.2 (10 April 1915): 246; “New Advertising Idea,” Motography 16.18 (28 October 1916): 970; “Selznick Has Clever Trailer,” Moving Picture World 33.4 (28 July 1917), 663; and “Trailer for ‘Parentage,’” Motography 18.7 (18 August 1917), 357.

“released as a trailer,” seeming to indicate that the line between a ‘split-reel’ film and a ‘trailer’ was breaking down.\(^65\) Newsreels were similar to split reels, in that they strung together largely unrelated footage, which could be shuffled or dropped at will, on a single reel.\(^66\) The fact that advertisers continually attempted to get brief footage into newsreels – culminating in the Ford Motor Company producing newsreels of its own from 1914 to 1921 - indicates early interest in the placement of short advertising strips onto larger reels of unrelated material.\(^67\) Newsreels, split reels, and informational ‘trailer’ footage were all, therefore, common practices in entertainment cinema which, in hindsight, were logical precursors to the advertising trailer concept.

As likely as these entertainment concepts are as stimuli, however, it is perhaps more likely that the commercial advertising film industry was inspiring itself. Attempts at getting advertising into newsreels were but one piece of a much larger interest in the powers of very-short advertising footage. A January 1913 article reveals that advertising films intended for theatrical release and those intended for use by salesmen were being distinguished by referring to the former as “regulation lengths” and the latter as “short lengths.”\(^68\) It is possible, then, that the creation of full-reel (approximately 15 minute) advertising films was always seen as a formal

---

\(^65\) “Fireproofing Children,” *Moving Picture World* 22.8 (21 November 1914): 1090. Janet Staiger cites an article from a November 1913 issue of *Reel Life* to assert that the word trailer “referred to a brief film at the end of a short reel” by that date. However, without access to the original article, it is not clear from Staiger’s description whether the “brief film” under discussion is a reference to standalone film stories like *Fireproofing Children*, or simply the earlier form of company logo trailer. As such, I cannot use Staiger’s information to definitely push the date of the earliest standalone ‘trailer films’ earlier by one year. Janet Staiger, “Announcing Wares, Winning Patrons, Voicing Ideals: Thinking About the History and Theory of Film Advertising,” *Cinema Journal* 29.3 (Spring 1990): 26 n24.

\(^66\) Ross Melnick has noted that ‘Roxy’ Rothapfel would edit together material “from up to four different newsreel services to create his in-house newsreel program.” Ross Melnick, *American Showman: Samuel ‘Roxy’ Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 17.


imposition and an unnecessary expense. If salesmen could make do with less, why couldn’t the consuming public? The same article also provides a practical example of a one-reel advertising film in which the most popular and influential piece was a quasi-trailer magic trick at the end of the film. A film for Waterman Pens called *The Story of the Fountain Pen* (presumably 1912) was believed to be successful largely for its animated ending in which pieces of rubber and gold assembled themselves into a pen and then drew pictures which were made to “come to life.” Audiences loved this part of the film, which was described as “about a minute” in duration. At a time in which ‘impressionistic copy’ was already making inroads into mainstream advertising, it is not implausible that the Waterman company, along with other business men, would have begun to wonder if the roughly nine-hundred feet of film prior to this novelty animated section was entirely superfluous.

Even if this particular film had no direct bearing on trailer development, it serves as perfect transitional moment, due not only to the duration and placement of the sequence, but also its reliance on animated effects. Sharply highlighting just how much the margins of the advertising industry could differ in opinion from the agencies, early trailer producers embraced entertainment and pleasure, and made their advertisements almost exclusively as humorous animated cartoons. Ernest A. Dench was almost misleading when he asserted that animation was simply “[t]he most popular” form of trailer up to 1916. Between 1914 and 1916, nearly all film production companies known to have been experimenting with trailers were dealing

---

69 Ibid, 54.

70 Roland Marchand describes the chagrin of some agency men as growing association, over the 1920s and early 1930s, with “frivolous entertainment” debased the advertising industry. See, particularly, his take on the adoption of comic-strips for advertising in the early 1930s. Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1985), 115.

71 Ernest A. Dench, “Motion Picture Photography,” The Camera 20.9 (September 1916): 520. The Rothacker Company, in 1919, was misleading in the opposite direction, asserting that “[o]riginally these short subjects were confined to the popular animated cartoons. Now the films made from live models are more in demand” (emphasis added). Jonas Howard, “Sodas or Shaves,” Photoplay 17.1 (December 1919): 112.
primarily, if not exclusively, in animation. The only known live-action footage in these early years were one-time uses: the Fort Wayne & Northern Indiana Traction Company’s electrification footage in late 1914, and the trailer advertising the Portland Rose Festival in 1915. Animation wasn’t simply popular; it was so predominant as to render non-animated trailers a decided anomaly.

Popular animation was in a very early stage of development at this point: Bray Productions, the largest early animation house, did not release its first cartoon (The Artist’s Dream) until 12 June 1913 and was still seeking a wide audience for its work, and Winsor McCay did not begin screening his highly influential third animated short, Gertie the Dinosaur, until 8 February 1914. As such, from mid-1914 to mid-1916, we can comfortably assert that animation did not just dominate the trailer business, but that the trailer business also dominated animation. The Moving Picture World reported that, by mid-1916 ‘animated ads’ had “to a very large extent” replaced slides entirely in New Orleans. Three months earlier, the Atlanta Constitution strongly implied that any viewing of animation in a cinema theater was an animated ad, saying “[y]ou have seen it – if you’re a picture play-goer – queer little cartoon-like characters that perform all manner of intricate antics…in exploitation of the merits of this trade shop or

---

72 Live-action advertising trailers are only even mentioned, prior to late 1916, in the mid-1915 write-up on the work of the Raymond Anderson Company, which was said to have used “[l]ocal boys and girls of the better circles…in making some of the films.” The same article, however, added the caveat that “[c]omedy, or trick photography and cartoon stuff is used in many of the films,” indicating that live-action was likely a minority production practice even there. “Comic Advertising Films,” Moving Picture World 25.5 (31 July 1915): 850. The only other live action trailers at this stage were proto-coming attractions films. See, for example, the work of the Indiana Curtain Advertising Company of Chicago, which was offering ten-foot generic footage of stars with for the purpose of advertising the coming week’s attractions at any given theater. “Chicago Film Brevities,” Moving Picture World 25.9 (28 August 1915): 1464.


that.” The trailers of the Hickey-Freeman Company help to roughly pinpoint the moment that live-action trailers became more common; the company made animated trailers in Fall 1915 and Spring 1916 before making their first live-action trailer for the Fall of 1916. In short, the rise of the trailer was inextricably linked to the rise of animation.

In the short run, the focus on animation had two practical benefits, one which helped convince advertisers that the form had value, and one which helped defuse exhibitor reluctance to screen the films. For advertisers, the need to produce recognizable sales copy (i.e. written persuasive claims) in a medium of motion virtually required that letters be kinetic. Early trailer producers almost universally promoted ‘moving or mysteriously appearing letters’ as their primary asset. Although advertising animators believed that minimizing written content produced better ads, all advertising films had to include a small amount of written copy – at the very least providing a dealer’s name and address. One could use stop-action and animation to do this with flair in many ways: letters which appeared in a place previously occupied by another object, which flew around the screen and formed words, or which seemed to write themselves without a visible hand, to name just three examples. Simple stop-motion tricks could render the

---

78 Southern Film Service: Display Ad, Moving Picture World 19.10 (7 March 1914): 1330. Effankay Film Company: Display Ad, Moving Picture World 25.4 (24 July 1915): 745. Ray: Classified Ad, Moving Picture World 26.9 (20 November 1915): 1563. Kansas City Slide Company: Timothy S. Susanin, Walt Before Mickey: Disney’s Early Years, 1919-1928 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 11. Scenic Film Company: Full-Page Display Ad, Refrigeration 17.6 (January 1916): 54. There is evidence of the same appeal of animated letters in Germany around this time, as an American consul station in Breslau remarked upon a Dorndorf Shoes ad which was “a kind of puzzle picture in which the letters…were made to appear in irregular order, but each letter, after more or less confusion, finally arranged itself in place.” Harry G. Seltzer, “Motion-picture Advertising in Germany,” Advertising & Selling January 1916: 76.
on-screen reproduction of words a dynamic experience. Likely emerging from pre-narrative trailer practice, in which an abstract visual was made to reveal a product or merchant name – like the Scenic Film Company’s ad for Nunnally’s chocolates, in which the letters appeared out of an exploding heart – the persistent need to include written advertising copy kept animated letters at the forefront of trailer practice in the early years. Animation was, therefore, a means to inject spectacle not just into the action of the film, but into even the most mundane of content.

Animation also had a direct appeal to exhibitors and audiences. It was a form with inherent spectacle and novelty. Early commentators remarked on the “unusual interest” which the audience expressed in animated trailers, and proposed that this may have been a result of the novelty of animation, as the audience was “try[ing] to figure out how that [was] done.” Add in the fact that trailer producers also oriented their scripts towards pleasure – the Dra-Ko Film Company went so far as to hire Frank A. Nankivell, famous for his work in the humor magazine *Puck*, to head their art department – and the animated trailer had distinct appeals across-the-board: directness and cheapness for advertisers, brevity and humor for audiences, and cash for exhibitors. (For more regarding the appeals of animation to advertisers and exhibitors, see the following section on positive rhetoric.)

Although brevity was intentional, the thirty to ninety second running time was likely not a technological or exhibitor mandated maximum, but a choice. Over the course of roughly a

---

80 This focus on integrating kinetic written words fundamentally distinguishes advertising filmmakers from their entertainment oriented counterparts, whose use of the written word was more often a crutch for faulty or incomplete visual narration.

81 By the 1920s, an example of a Jeweler’s merchant-strip shows that the Alexander Film Company was attempting to surround letters with moving objects, rather than make the letters themselves move. In this particular strip, an undulating string of pearls surrounded the otherwise immobile merchant name. [Sample Images from Jeweler Trailer], Box 2, Folder 4, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.


year, the typical running time slowly but perceptibly increased in published accounts from thirty
seconds to one-minute. In mid-1915, the Raymond Anderson Company was producing trailers
with a uniform running length of thirty-five feet. A general article on the form from the end of
1915 declared that one could succeed with a cartoon trailer using “not more than twenty or thirty
feet of film.” The Scenic Film Company, in early 1916, though offering durations ranging
anywhere from twenty-five feet to multiple reels, asserted that thirty-five to fifty feet was the
norm. By September of 1916, Harvey F. Morris, advertising manager for the Hickey-Freeman
Company, claimed that sixty to seventy feet was the norm for a trailer film. By 1919, however,
there had been no further change, as two of the most prominent trailer producing companies –
the Rothacker Manufacturing Company and the Alexander Film Company – were continuing the
practice of one to one-and-a-half minute long advertising trailers. This duration would remain
constant throughout the 1920s. It appears, then, that the roughly one-minute running time
developed as a standard, between 1914 and 1916, partly as a compromise: it was long enough to
integrate rudimentary narrative, but short enough to fit onto a film reel which was only slightly
below full. 

Scenic is the one company for which one-minute seems to have been a legitimate technological limit. The company
filmed all of its product in reverse for the expressed reason that heat distortion would get more prominent the longer
the ‘stage’ was exposed to the lamps. Reverse filming was a quick way to avoid having the brand logo or dealer
name marred by a filming defect. Carl B. Rowntree, “Apparatus For and Method of Taking Trick and Advertising
Moving Pictures,” U.S. Patent 1,227,075, filed 29 April 1915, and issued 22 May 1917.
Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak
Library District, Colorado Springs. The running time started to recede in mid-century to a new standard of roughly
forty seconds. This was likely in response to the increased projection speed in the sound era. The same sixty foot
strip which ran for one-minute on silent projectors would have taken exactly forty seconds to screen at twenty-four
frames-per-second on a sound era projector. “What Are Alexander Movie Ads?” pamphlet, unpaginated, Box 10,
Folder 2, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak
Library District, Colorado Springs.
Of course, cost-control likely also had some impact on running time. Ernest Dench, in 1916, declared that the average price per foot for a trailer film was fifty cents, resulting in a cost of $30 for a one-minute trailer – a drastic increase over the typical $1 cost of a lantern slide. The Scenic Film Company quoted the same price that year, though the price would double to $1 per foot if the advertiser wanted to handle the bookings himself. Even at durations under one minute, trailers were a financial burden to merchants with small advertising budgets. This pricing issue rapidly led to the development of the ‘syndicate’ or stock catalog trailer to cut costs further. The Dench article cited above actually used the cost estimates for custom animation as a contrast to the newly developed stock trailer, which was priced at the more affordable rate of $4 to $5. Copying the idea of a stock slide – selected from a catalog with a specific dealer name appended – eventually shifted the trailer business from a purchase to a rental structure, resolving at least two cost problems. First, it distributed first copy costs across unrelated businesses. Second, as with entertainment fiction before them, it allowed trailers to “be made in a central location and on a predictable basis,” reducing idle labor and travel expenses. It also added to the profitability of the form, as exceptionally popular copy could produce nearly unlimited...

---

89 Ernest Dench mentions $1 as a stock slide price in 1916. By 1920, even custom slides could be had for this price. Ernest A. Dench, “Motion Picture Photography,” The Camera 20.9 (September 1916): 520; and “Use Slides to Advertise,” Furniture Worker May 1920 (37.5): 178.

90 Carl B. Rowntree, “A Business Producing Idea That Compels Attention,” Refrigeration 18.3 (April 1916): 34. It is not entirely clear why there would have been a price difference. It’s possible that Scenic was charging a commission for placement, which would have covered the difference in cost. It’s equally plausible, however, that Scenic simply wanted to retain control of all prints in order to keep their exclusive contracts with local theaters from breaking down.

91 This shift from purchase to rental occurred between 1917 and 1921. In January 1917, even stock films were described, by the Federal Development Company’s W.A. Harris, as sold “outright” to dealers, “becom[ing] his property” for the cost of seven dollars. By 1921, Francis T. Kimball had no sense of purchased trailers, claiming that the entire industry worked on a rental model. [W.A. Harris], “Movie Film Becoming Big Car Sales Feature,” Motor World 17 January 1917: 65; and Francis T. Kimball, “The Film Trailer and What it Will Do,” Moving Picture Age February 1921: 11. There is a third possible cost issue for which I have no evidence, but seems plausible. The establishment of the stock trailer business model occurs just prior to American entrance into World War I – a war which Europe was already fighting. Cost of materials might have increased (or been expected to increase) enough to make the purchase system problematic. Renting, by its nature, required fewer prints, and therefore less material waste.

profits. The Alexander Film Company worked exclusively on a rental system for its stock trailers, as revealed in its 1921 sales manual. As such, keeping the duration to roughly one-minute kept the trailer as affordable as possible, while allowing sufficient time for rudimentary narrative.

The developmental period of trailer advertising, then, was a two-year-long attempt to find a compromise between quality and cost. The result was experimentation with three modes of production – custom, stock, and ‘partially-stock’ (in which only the imagery was pre-made, with gaps left in the image to add onscreen dialogue later). Each had its strengths and weaknesses. Custom copy, of course, was the most controllable – allowing the advertiser to have input on the style, copy, and duration. Unfortunately, it was also the most expensive – a problem which compounded if the advertiser failed to drum up enough exhibitors willing to screen the film.93 Stock product inverted the strengths and weaknesses. Although the cost was minimal, especially under the rental system, almost all decision making was taken out of the hands of the advertiser. Indeed, not only were advertisers forced to select pre-conceived films, they would choose them from an illustrated catalog, not after a personal screening of the available options. Much of the suitability of the trailer, therefore, had to be taken on faith. The ‘partially stock’ model attempted to split the difference, allowing for cutting costs in animation, as the character work was all done in advance, while gaps remained for the advertiser to integrate his or her own copy throughout. The problems were increased cost (including a return of the problem of drumming up screenings – one couldn’t rent custom copy), technical difficulty (getting both action and

---

93 It was commonly stated that it took six months of constant use for a print to ‘wear out.’ Leaving it in a theater at one theater a week, each print would need to be used in 26 theaters in order to get the full value from the purchase.
copy to match up without ‘wobbling’ was challenging), and narrative weakness (as the ‘plot’ of the animation portion needed to be vague enough to integrate variations in copy).

As one can readily see from this breakdown, the fully stock model – which would eventually become the dominant model – was not necessarily superior, nor can we presume that its users believed it to be. The American advertising film industry intentionally sacrificed elements of message delivery, like specificity and advertiser-written copy, to cost considerations. In the absence of an easy way to fund and nationally circulate trailer cartoons for specific brands, trailer producers targeted merchants by producing the cheapest possible variant. As such, the other two modes of production (custom and partial-stock) shifted into the background due entirely to cost and circulation problems, not technological inefficiency or aesthetic dislike. Trailer producers therefore integrated copy writing services at a very early date out of necessity; production was generally too expensive if the producer allowed advertiser input.

During the two-years of experimentation, adoption of the format increased steadily. Perhaps the best evidence for the growing popularity of the animated trailer prior to the war is that it spawned fraudulent behavior. ‘Salesmen’ promising the delivery of commercial cartoon trailers would abscond with down payments from merchants. One (individual or group) ravaged Bainbridge, Georgia in late 1916 offering twenty-five foot cartoon ads from a non-existent

---

94 See Reginald V. Stambaugh’s patent for a whirlwind tour of technical difficulties in producing such ‘partially stock’ cartoon trailers. Reginald V. Stambaugh, “Process of Making Moving Picture Films,” U.S. Patent 1,226,135, filed 26 May 1916, and issued 15 May 1917. Partial-stock format was a bit easier for live-action producers. As live-action used intertitles, the copy could always be tweaked at advertiser request, with the action shots re-harvested after the screening for rental to another customer.

95 Though the data analysis was skewed towards tying dollars spent on film advertising to net store sales, a study of clothing stores in the years 1914, 1918, and 1919, does show a decided slant towards smaller town and smaller merchant adoption in all years. In all years, use was slight by stores with over $180,000 net sales (although the larger stores did spend more per dollar of net sales than smaller stores). Towns of under 40,000 citizens dominated the over-40,000 towns to the tune of 49 stores to 1 (1914), 82 to 8 (1918), and 105 to 10 (1919). It is clear not only that a rural/urban split was forming, but also that small merchants were the early adopters. As such, the advent of the trailer had a significant impact on adoption of advertising film. For the raw data, see: Costs, Merchandising Practices, Advertising and Sales in the Retail Distribution of Clothing (New York City: Prentice-Hall, 1921), 284, 328, 363-369, 377.
Nebraska company. In mid-1917, a similar film fraud was perpetrated in Kansas. Five merchants in the town of Ellis “were induced to make a preliminary payment of $5” on a contract for thirty-two weekly film ads, “eighty feet in length.” Again, the offer was made in the name of a company quite distant – the ‘National Film Company’ of New York – and the merchants were promised circulation over an entire circuit of theaters. The low-cost combined with the superiority of the trailer to slides rapidly rendered trailer advertising so popular that businessmen of all sizes were willing to part with a few dollars in down payment on very little evidence. The trailer had become the model to beat in cinema advertising.

Despite the marked difference in public approval (slides largely derided while trailers were on the rise), the years 1916 to 1918 provided nearly identical problems and benefits for trailers as they had for slides. The exhibition industry legitimized and stabilized the form by adopting it for self-advertising, while the wartime work of the Creel Committee (among other, private patriotic gestures) gave minor sanction to the intrusion of non-cinema related advertising in theaters. The war and the film industry combined to culturally entrench the form, while also usurping much of the space.

Cinema self-defense and self-advertising via trailers entered a phase of large-scale growth in 1916, as the ‘announcement’ and the ‘coming attraction’ trailers – experimented with by outsiders in the preceding year – were both adopted by the studios. Industry defense announcements were common in this era of expanding film censorship – Balboa, for example,
was circulating an anti-censorship trailer in the first quarter of 1916. In short order, however, the most prominent way in which the studios adopted the trailer format was in the production of ‘coming attraction’ snippets. In the transition of the motion picture industry from the early decade dominance of the patents company, to the vertically integrated independent studios, competition for viewership increased. In an effort to guarantee profitability in an environment of increased competition and increased expense (due to the production of features, which the industry believed required individual marketing), film promotion by the studios increased. By September of 1916, Famous Players “issue[d] an advance strip” to promote the upcoming film *The Quest of Life*. The following month, the Triangle Film Corporation – with the assertion that “the screen…is a most powerful advertising medium…that was not being taken full advantage of” – began circulating ‘coming attraction’ trailers for their own products. By July of 1917, *Moving Picture World* declared that such trailers had “come into use extensively of late,” while reporting Selznick’s new concept of using behind the scenes footage to announce coming attractions. Rather than closing off the open spaces in the program, then, exhibitors and entertainment producers began to compete for usage of the space through self-serving ‘trailers’ of their own.

What space was not being maintained for film industry self-promotion was being adapted for wartime use. As early as 1914, Universal (always the quickest to interact with cinema advertising theory) had already adopted the direct advertising trailer model for philanthropic

---

100 For the adoption of individuated marketing campaigns for feature films, see: Janet Staiger, “Announcing Wares, Winning Patrons, Voicing Ideals: Thinking About the History and Theory of Film Advertising,” *Cinema Journal* 29.3 (Spring 1990): 6.
102 As Motography called this a ‘new idea,’ it is relatively safe to assume that Triangle was the first entertainment producer to begin regularly circulating their own ‘coming attraction’ trailers. “New Advertising Idea,” *Motography* 16.18 (28 October 1916): 970.
exhortation, when the company attached a 30 foot strip to each film as a ‘leader,’ encouraging spectators to “Buy a bale of cotton” – a response to the overstock of cotton caused by the closing of European markets during the early hostilities of World War I.\textsuperscript{104} By 1917, both the U.S. government, through the propaganda campaign of the Creel Committee, and the public, through growing patriotic sentiment, pressured exhibitors to integrate political advertising into their programs. While the trailer form was adopted frequently for war work,\textsuperscript{105} the Liberty Loan was again the watershed. The Creel Committee, of course, circulated official Liberty Loan trailers, including some in the animated format.\textsuperscript{106} The movement was bolstered by a few motion picture studios – like Kalem and Selig-Polyscope – who, eager to display their patriotism, produced Liberty Loan trailers of their own.\textsuperscript{107} Other wartime patriotic trailers were circulated as well, most notably the American Bioscope Company’s “Your Flag and Mine” trailer, which was advertised heavily in the pages of \textit{Moving Picture World} during the war.\textsuperscript{108} By March of 1918 patriotic messages were so ingrained in American exhibition culture that \textit{Moving Picture World} columnist Walter K. Hill even proposed that all features have a leader or trailer in which “the star of the piece be posed…holding a sign” extolling the virtues of purchasing war stamps.\textsuperscript{109} The proliferation of patriotic appeals on the screen solidified the presence of advertising copy in even

\textsuperscript{104} “Universal Booting ‘Buy A Bale,’” \textit{Moving Picture World} 22.5 (31 October 1914): 619. For more, see my 2013 SCMS paper: “Engines and Anchors: The National and the Local in Atlanta’s \textit{Buy a Bale of Cotton}, 1914.”


\textsuperscript{108} See for example: Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 32.6 (12 May 1917): 1031.

the highest class theaters, and likely helped to develop an “appreciative tolerance” for direct appeals in between film reels.

With the adoption of the form for both film industry self-advertising and the delivery of political messages, the first two years of trailer development were followed by roughly three years of transitioning business models. Major studio and government interest in trailers decreased the available space. As the circulation of ‘coming attraction’ trailers increased, exhibitors were faced with the decision of devoting a larger percentage of the program to trailers, decreasing their use of commercial trailers, or declining to use the (free) self-advertising sent out by the studios. With the increasing dominance, even ownership, of exhibition sites by production companies, the exhibitor’s ability to decline decreased; exhibition was becoming a national business, not a local one. Trailer producers attempted to survive the competition, and the war, by escalating the scale of their operations as well. Most trailer makers abandoned their piecemeal production – abandoning also their reliance on advertisers being confident of finding circulation – and went through a phase of increased professionalization. In an echo of the slide industry’s turn to ‘full service’ production and distribution, which had occurred over the previous few years (see chapter three), trailer producers predominantly adopted space-brokering as a business model, and shifted their focus to national advertisers. A number of trailer producers even banded together in a professional association in an attempt to stabilize and grow the field, even at the risk of sharing trade secrets with competitors. The increasing scale of contracts – both with exhibitors and advertisers – added a patina of proficiency and efficiency to trailer production.\footnote{Notably, extant documents from this period do not stress the concept of ‘artistry,’ so pronounced in the slide industry’s rhetoric of professionalization. It is plausible that this is simply an artifact of research, as I have had no opportunity to study catalogs from trailer makers – I have found none archived. More than likely, such arguments were being made in direct mail materials, even if they did not appear in trade press display ads of the time. Oddly,} All of these changes occurred between late 1916 and 1918.
While the development of the advertising trailer appears to have repaired the major failing of slides, and could logically have resulted in a form of commercially subsidized cinema exhibition in which an advertising trailer was appended to the end of each reel, this television-esque form of exhibition did not arise. The advent of the trailer coincided with a shifting emphasis from reel change pauses to a single intermission as a buffer between turns of the program. The greatest boon to slide advertising was the fact that most early theaters had only one projector, necessitating a pause at the end of each reel as the projectionist swapped out the completed reel for the next one in the program. As even lower-end theaters shifted to a two-projector model, in which the reel-change could occur without onscreen interruption, the need for a distinct pause was eliminated. Debate over the best way to structure a ‘balanced program’ (leading the viewer comfortably through the tonal transitions of a multitude of genres) likely kept hope alive for pauses between reels, as some exhibitors – most notably ‘Roxy’ Rothapfel – preferred pauses for non-filmic entertainment.\textsuperscript{111} The industry-wide transition to feature films, however, finally and irreversibly shifted the focus from buffering successive shorts, to creating an intermission between turns of the program, stressing beginnings and endings rather than an endless loop of shorts for ‘transient spectators.’\textsuperscript{112} The purveyors of onscreen advertising – both


\textsuperscript{112} Richard Koszarski quotes Edison production manager Horace Plimpton’s telling 1915 comment that most of his friends outside the film industry “object to sitting through a film that takes an hour and a half or two hours to show…particularly…if he happens to come in during its running so that he is forced to sit through some thousand feet of film which cannot interest him because he does not understand it.” From this description, it is clear that
slides and trailers – did not hold enough sway over exhibition culture to militate against feature culture, or persuade studios and exhibitors to break up such films with commercial pauses.

As such, the trailer, like the slide, drifted rapidly into placement in a single intermission somewhere in the program. Jonas Howard’s article on Rothacker photoplaylets, published in late 1919, declared that good films must be able to “hold the attention of the audience between Mary Pickford and the news weekly.”113 In 1921, the Alexander Film Company openly asserted that their contracted films were screened “between the comedy and the feature” in most theaters.114 While it is difficult, if not impossible to determine an actual location in the program from assertions such as this, it is clear that the typical screening model had shifted away from appending the films to short reels, and towards the screening of a reel of successive advertisements.115 Rather than encouraging exhibitors to split the films apart, then, complex fade in and fade out transitions were included, and the reel was intended to be run as a standalone

---

feature screenings quickly gained a reputation for affording the greatest narrative pleasure when one arrived in time to see them straight through. See Michael Quinn’s essay on the Motion Picture Patents Company’s difficulty in integrating features with their distribution model for further discussion of the way in which ‘transience’ was a courted form of fandom incompatible with the transition to features. Richard Koszarski, *An Evening’s Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915-1928* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990), 163; and Michael Quinn, “Distribution, the Transient Audiences, and the Transition to the Feature Film,” *Cinema Journal* 40.2 (Winter 2001): 35-56.

115 Interpreting descriptions like the two just cited is difficult at best, as exhibitors could justify virtually any sequence of films. See, for example, the sample program for the Strand Theater, from 1918, included in *Moviegoing in America*, where the short comedy clearly comes after the feature. As such, either of the above descriptions could indicate intermission positioning, as either the comedy or the newsreel could have been first in the sequence, with the feature last. Alexander’s wording, in which they declared that their trailers screened while the audience was seated, strongly indicates that they wanted potential clients to see their films as a legitimate part of the program, not a buffer. However, this is largely an issue of interpretation. Transient spectatorship did not disappear overnight simply because features appeared on the program. If the audience chose to leave during the advertisements, then the advertisements became the moment of turnover regardless of the announced sequence of films. In short, the Strand’s published sequencing matters little; in a culture where the program was still seen as cyclical, there is nothing that demands that the viewer interpret the comedy as screening last rather than first. Gregory A. Waller, ed., *Moviegoing in America: A Sourcebook in the History of Film Exhibition* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 103.
component of the program in a space contracted for by the trailer maker. In practice, the shift of the trailer into an intermission was part and parcel with the film industry’s slow transition away from the ‘transient spectator’ (who would arrive and leave anywhere in the program) to a scheduled entertainment with a distinct beginning and end point.

Paradoxically, then, the running of all advertisements in a lump at the end of the program – derided as the ‘slide dodge’ by Ernest Dench as late as 1916 – became the typical practice, as advertising in most theaters became a form of ‘chaser’ which would help identify when the program had completed a turn and was about to restart. Whether or not trailer makers were responding to this shift in screening theory, or were simply adding weight to the transition is unclear. It is a near certainty that space-brokering arose as a way for trailer producers to regularize profit by normalizing and guaranteeing circulation. What is not clear is whether the shift to circulating a reel of trailers was simply expedient, or if it was a response to the dwindling ‘gaps’ in the program caused by the rise of the feature film. If it was the former, then the shift away from ‘commercial breaks’ was largely a serendipitous historical accident, as the open spaces were on the verge of disappearance. In any case, by 1916 space-brokering, which had appeared haphazardly in slide industry display ads over the previous few years, began to dominate the business of trailer distribution. Building on the 1914 example of the National Advertising Motion Picture Weekly, Inc., companies began circulating reels rather than individual trailers, contracting for a specific amount of space in the program – generally at the rate of about $100 per month.117

116 By 1921, Printers’ Ink columnist Arthur McClure was even able to claim that “the day is not far off when the motion picture theater will offer its patrons a programme consisting of five or six parts entertainment and one part advertising,” with the advertising reel placed either at the the beginning or the end in order to defuse irritation by screening it where the patron “need not look at it, should he prefer” or “leave the theater…before the advertisement is run.” Arthur McClure, “Advertising Stories Told in the Movies,” Printers’ Ink Monthly 2 (February 1921): 31. 117 Although each individual theater had different notions of its value, the Camel Film Company and the American Commercial Film Company, both in 1916, and the Alexander Film Company, in 1924, all offered $100 per month as
Space-brokering, like trailer production itself, was a local practice before it became a national one. At times the practice could be remarkably small. The Real Publicity Company had contracted with only two Kansas City theater by mid-1915 – the Benton and the Royal – to which they delivered weekly reels containing 12 ads each. Typically trailer producers would, at the very least, attempt to control all theaters in their cities of activity. The Scenic Film Company controlled seventeen theaters in Atlanta as early as May 1916. Nelson Motion Picture Studios claimed sixty theaters across Detroit in 1918. Screen Press, Inc. dominated Minneapolis and St. Paul by 1919. James P. Simpson developed a stranglehold on the state of Texas by 1920. Over 1916 and 1917, a trend is apparent towards multi-state focus in space-broking. The Scenic Film Company attempted to expand into Boston and Philadelphia in 1916, in an effort to become an east coast power. More notable, however, was Screen Advertising, Inc., and its chain of contracts with “1000 Better Class Neighborhood Theatres” east of the Mississippi River. Organized in 1917, and contracting for 200 feet of advertising per the typical income an exhibitor could receive from an advertising reel. By contrast, the Real Publicity Company’s two contracted theaters received wildly different income - $200 per month for the Royal, but only $50 per month for the Benton – despite the fact that Real Publicity supposedly charged advertisers the same price – $30 per month – for each theater. Camel: Display ad, Moving Picture World 28.12 (17 June 1916): 2109. American Commercial: Display Ad, Moving Picture World 27.12 (25 March 1916): 2106. Alexander: “Feeding Ambition with Gold” pamphlet. p. 6, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. Real Publicity: “Local Film Ad Men Meet,” Moving Picture World 26.4 (23 October 1915): 649.  

\[\text{If these reels were full – 1000 total feet – the average ad would have been roughly 83 feet long. This would have resulted in slightly longer than average running times, nearly a minute and a half per advertisement.} \]


118 The seventeen local theaters included: the Criterion, New Piedmont, Georgian, Victoria, Alpha, Bonita, Strand, Bijou, Alsha, Regent, Bonheur, Park, Bellwood, Fulton, Euclid, and “the two largest negro theaters.” The last nine (from the Alsha to the negro theaters) were described as neighborhood theaters. Scenic: Display Ad, Atlanta Constitution 21 May 1916: C8.

119 Classified Ad, Moving Picture World 35.13 (30 March 1918): 1877.

120 Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 108.11 (11 September 1919): 236.


122 A 30 July 1916 article asserted that 126 theaters in Philadelphia and 150 in Boston and surrounding territories had signed contracts, and that D.D. Marcus had been appointed as the company’s Philadelphia based representative to “the eastern territory.” By August, Moving Picture World corroborated Marcus’ appointment, but did not corroborate the number of contracts. “The Scenic Film Co. Appoints Eastern Agt.” The Atlanta Constitution 30 July 1916: B6; and “Atlanta Notes,” Moving Picture World 29.8 (19 August 1916): 1285.
program in each of their theaters, Screen Advertising Inc. not only offered the selection of pre-certified theaters, but also a ‘service department’ to help national advertisers contact dealers and inform them of upcoming ad screenings (thereby presumably eliminating the need to append dealer information to the trailer itself). On July 5th, Screen Advertising, Inc., claimed the enormous vote of confidence of the Marcus Loew theaters of New York, which signed on for their service. By 1921, the Alexander Film Company had transitioned from a west coast company to a national business, and was contracting theaters across the United States for a reel of between five and ten ad trailers.

In transitioning to space-brokering, then, trailer producers developed a model nearly identical to early magazine advertising – placing large swaths of pre-contracted advertising in a bookend position (the closest to an ‘optional’ position that the screen could offer), and stressing audience selection as the form’s greatest strength. Screen Advertising, Inc., for example, used detailed knowledge about the clientele of particular theaters to offer advertisers a selection of audiences. While Screen Advertising, Inc., described all of its theaters as middle class, they offered to rent space by neighborhood, city, or ‘zone,’ so that the advertiser could feel confident of reaching his target audience without overpaying for valueless screenings. Signing contracts in advance with the theaters guaranteed placement, allowing advertising film manufacturers to approach advertisers armed with their list of theaters and allow the advertisers to decide for him

---

124 Two-Page Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 98.13 (29 March 1917): 82-83; and Full-Page Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 99.2 (12 April 1917): 111. In June of 1919, Universal – then also a recipient of the halo effect of a Loew’s booking – declared that “Marcus Loew was once offered and refused $1,000 a day for the use of his screens for advertising purposes.” Of course, this number means little; if that was a $1,000 lump sum for every theater on the circuit, it would not amount to much per screen. Multi-Page Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 107.13 (26 June 1919): 34. Screen Advertising was one of the first to focus almost exclusively on national product advertising, and pushed the boundaries of the trailer in other ways. For example, their tendency was to use up their entire 200 feet of contracted space on a single longer trailer. See: “Louis Geleng Takes Up Advertising Work,” Moving Picture World 32.6 (12 May 1917): 934.

or herself how many and of what type to use. Exhibitor reluctance was cut off before the film was even produced, opening up the field to advertisers who had previously avoided film as a questionable investment which might simply “repose peacefully in [its] can” after it was made.126

The contracting of multiple theaters to a single trailer producing company was likely, therefore, undertaken in order to make the medium viable for national advertisers – a change vital for the growth and stability of trailer production. This targeting of national advertisers allowed for the integration of trailer advertising with the intensifying intermediality of ‘dealer helps.’ Across the advertising industry, an early theory of convergence was arising in which advertisers began to believe, or were encouraged to believe, that the most productive advertising was not to tailor the message to the medium, but to distribute a single recognizable advertisement through as many media as possible, providing pre-constructed, recognizable advertising, for dealer’s to circulate in their home towns. By late 1917, Manhattan Slide and Film even turned the connection into a selling slogan, declaring that “Animated Trailer Films” were “The New Dealer’s Help,” pushing the novelty of the form in an attempt to maintain profitability in an economy where the slide appeared to be falling out of favor.127 As such, the new national focus – tied directly to space-brokering contracts – was driving the trailer industry.

The trailer industry’s adoption of the ‘uniformity’ approach is directly traceable to the advent of the Advertising Film Producers’ Association in June of 1916. Formed during a meeting of seven producers at the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World convention in

126 “Plans to Check Film Circulation,” Printers’ Ink 89.5 (29 October 1914): 28.
127 Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 100.13 (27 September 1917): 117. ‘Dealer Helps’ were a form of co-operative advertising, in which the manufacturer would pay to have the advertising material produced and shipped, and the merchant would pay local costs to have it shown. The rise of cinema advertising as a ‘dealer help,’ pushing dealer advertising far beyond the walls of the merchant’s store, is apparent over the course of the early 1910s. See, for example, the following articles. R.P. Spencer, “Helping Dealers Ring Their Cash Register Bells,” Printers’ Ink 79.7 (16 May 1912): 54; John Allen Murphy, “The Kind of ‘Selling Helps’ We Dealers Need,” Printers’ Ink 84.8 (21 August 1913): 12; and “Fall Dealer-Helps That Hit the Mark,” Printers’ Ink 89.6 (5 November 1914): 40.
Philadelphia – with trailer company representatives elected to all four offices\textsuperscript{128} – the
Association resulted in a homogeneity of sales rhetoric among trailer producers. W.A. Harris, president of the Association and head of the Federal Development Company, became the spokesman for the entire industry, publishing multiple articles on the history and promise of trailer advertising. In these articles, he asserted that, not only had production quality seen “marvelous” improvement through the association of producers, but the united front of trailer makers had resulted in positive streamlining of the business model. For example, the AFPA claimed responsibility for making film “admissible through the United States mails,” allowing for the shipment of film “in three days by parcel post,” as opposed to the need for special transit arrangements.\textsuperscript{129} The exchange of information among multiple businesses allowed Harris additionally to make broad cost claims in print, as he could provide a general cost of trailer usage (seven dollars per film) and a range of costs for weekly screenings (a minimum of one dollar and

\textsuperscript{128} The initial meeting, at the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World (hereafter AACW) convention in Philadelphia, which led to the foundation of the AFPA included representatives from only seven producing companies. Of the four companies revealed in the list of elected officers – Federal Development Company (President W.A. Harris), Kansas City Slide Company (Vice President A.V. Cauger), Scenic Film Company (Secretary Carl B. Rowntree), and Camel Film Company (Treasurer Fred C. Laflin) – all were trailer producers. It is probable, therefore, all of the original seven members of the Association were trailer producers. Industrial film makers, however, joined over the course of the following year and, by late 1917, began to usurp control of the association. Rothacker became increasingly important (often holding AFPA meetings at his Chicago factory), Camilla Donworth (then with industrial film producer E.I.S.) encouraged a focus on training films due to wartime employee turnover, and the presence of the AFPA at the AACW convention of June 1917 was announced by a constant screening not of trailers but of industrial films. For reasons that are not clear, the Association disappears from search results after December 1917; neither the original name, nor the proposed new name – Moving Picture Advertising Association of the World – turn up any further notes. A distributors association – called the Advertising Film Service Association of America, and also featuring Cauger and Laflin on its board – arose in 1917 and suffered the same rapid disappearance in the historical record. Seven original members: “Advertising Film Producers Organize,” \textit{Printers’ Ink} 96.2 (13 July 1916): 35. Officer affiliations: [W.A. Harris], “Movie Film Becoming Big Car Sales Feature,” \textit{Motor World} 17 January 1917: 65. Rothacker meetings: “Chicago Film Brevities,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 33.9 (1 September 1917): 1379; and 6 October 1917: 64. Donworth: “Urge ‘Movies’ to Train New Salesmen,” \textit{Associated Advertising} July 1917: 44. AACW industrial film screenings: “Movie Men Show Great Variety of Films,” \textit{Associated Advertising} July 1917: 44. Advertising Film Service Association: “Advertising Films Organization,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 32.2 (14 April 1917): 310.

\textsuperscript{129} [W.A. Harris], “Movie Film Becoming Big Car Sales Feature,” \textit{Motor World} 17 January 1917: 65; and W.A. Harris, “History, Future and Possibilities of the Advertising Film Industry,” \textit{Simmons’ Spice Mill} 40.3 (March 1917): 356-357. I presume that the similarity between these two articles, and their targeted audiences, implies that multiple other articles were printed in other trade publications which are simply not (or not yet) accessible through Google’s book search. Such tailoring of a single article to multiple trades was common at the time.
a maximum of five). The late-decade predominance of stock film production may also trace to this association, as trailer producers learned tricks of the trade from their competitors.

The notion that advertising was not medium-specific but required a confluence of multiple media – the Association’s most important rhetorical move – arose in their first year. For the AFPA, the idea may have originated with the Scenic Film Company’s Carl B. Rowntree. In March of 1916, Rowntree, during a presentation at an ice makers’ convention, asked: “how much greater would be the results if your regular ads were also at the movies”? Rowntree was a prominent early member of the AFPA – acting as their secretary at their inception in June of 1916, and carrying on in the post throughout their first year. By the September 1916 publication of Advertising by Motion Pictures, Ernest Dench likewise asserted that no medium could go it alone; each had weaknesses which it needed the others to counter. While it is unclear whether Dench and Rowntree were in communication, were both responding to a wider ad industry shift, or had independently concocted the same notion of advertising as necessarily intermedial, the fact remains that the idea was growing, and AFPA members – unlike the reluctant print agencies – were about to adopt the concept as uniform rhetoric for the adoption of trailer advertising.

By early 1917, the push to unite all advertising mediums into an array of united advertising was central to W.A. Harris’ public declarations about the value of trailer ads. He declared that

it has become necessary to take the advertisement as used in magazines and newspapers…and blend these advertisements into real action so that, when they are thrown on the screen of the moving picture shows of this country...[they] strengthen the general publicity campaign of the advertiser.

---

130 [W.A. Harris], “Movie Film Becoming Big Car Sales Feature,” Motor World 17 January 1917: 65.
132 Film’s weakness, according to Dench, was a dearth of words, as the heavy use of intertitles bored audiences. Ernest A. Dench, Advertising by Motion Pictures (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company, 1916), 11-12.
133 W.A. Harris, “History, Future and Possibilities of the Advertising Film Industry,” Simmons' Spice Mill 40.3 (March 1917): 356.
Describing this as “a higher calling to the advertising film industry than ever was anticipated,” Harris went on to describe an example: the animation of the Dayton Spice Mills (Coffee) Company’s trademark of a pipe-smoking, fur hat-wearing Dutchman. For Harris and the AFPA, one of the most important qualities of the trailer was that its running time was perfectly suited to rendering print advertisements and brand logos, such as the Dutchman, in motion, thereby integrating cinema into this widening sense of a complete campaign.\textsuperscript{134}

Further evidence for the Association as the source of the rhetorical move comes from the public statements of Chicago’s industrial film wunderkind Watterson Rothacker. Although his company dabbled in trailer production – and he even claimed to have been the first company to make them\textsuperscript{135} – at this date his interests were in industrial films. It does not seem to be coincidental that Rothacker, who became a member of the AFPA at some point during its first year, suddenly began to espouse copy-uniformity as well by the middle of 1917. Indeed, his presentation at the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World convention was centered on the ways in which film advertising could cooperate with print: “[i]n order to successfully engineer a moving-picture advertising campaign it should be co-ordinated with the general advertising and

\textsuperscript{134} While this is only implicit in Harris’ writing, the J. Walter Thompson Company’s 1938 analysis of trailers asserted, in no uncertain terms, that the minute movie was equivalent to “the amount of ‘copy’…on an ordinary magazine page.” While one must make adjustments for the quantity of copy on a given page at a given time, the paralleling of the two forms would not have changed so drastically in the intervening 20 years to shift the analysis very much. Fred Fidler, “A Discussion of the Current Status and Future Possibilities of Commercial Motion Pictures,” 8 January 1938, p. 3, Box 7, Folder “1937 Nov. 9 – 1938 Oct. 25,” J. Walter Thompson Company, Staff Meeting Minutes, 1927-1938, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

\textsuperscript{135} “W.R. Rothacker,” \textit{System} 38.3 (September 1920): 419. It is not clear exactly when Rothacker began making trailer length advertising films. The ‘Photoplaylet Department’ was advertised heavily in the second quarter of 1918, and was thus likely a new department at that date. However, Rothacker’s hiring of Vincent V. Colby – “well-known originator of the ‘Colby Dog’ post cards, which…had a record-breaking sale of more than twelve million” – in 1916 to make “animated advertising cartoons” may indicate earlier adoption. Colby: “Rothacker Signs Colby,” \textit{Motography} 15.13 (25 March 1916): 692; and “Chicago Film Brevities,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 28.1 (1 April 1916): 86. Department: Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 35.13 (30 March 1918): 1878.
selling campaign.” Despite the fact that industrial films were significantly longer and required far less direct advertising than trailers, even Rothacker began to assert the theory of copy-unity.

By the time of World War I, then, AFPA members were targeting national advertisers with the argument that a campaign without a film recapitulation was missing a central pillar. In the wake of wartime advertising – so successful in spreading Creel Committee messages across multiple media – this early notion of intermedial advertising practice became industry maxim. With the rise and rampant abuse of the ‘excess profits tax’ (a wartime tax which compelled goods manufacturers to spend money on advertising rather than lose it to taxes), media diversification became central to advertising industry practice.

In the shift to reels of trailer-length films, circulated regularly to contracted theaters, and sometimes containing national advertising messages, the model had largely completed its development. The years after the war (in this study, 1918 to the early 1922) witnessed little change to the form other than growth and stabilization, as exhibitors continued to decrease their use of slides. Former slide manufacturers – like the Manhattan Slide and Film Company (in 1917) and the Brite-Lite Film Advertising Company (in 1918), both from New York – joined the transition and began to offer animated trailers as a second line of business. Leaping into the fray, auto manufacturer Dodge shifted to the ‘minute movie’ model, also in 1921, producing

---


137 Over the course of 1917, Artfilm Studios and Manhattan Slide and Film openly sought national advertising contracts through their self-advertising, as did the National Motion-Ad Company in 1921, clearly indicating that the custom trailer, for use as a dealer help, was regaining a section of the market. Others were undoubtedly doing so in person as well. Artfilm: Display Ad, Advertising & Selling January 1917: 46. Manhattan: Display Ad, Printers’ Ink 100.12 (20 September 1917): 124. Motion-Ad: Display Ad, Moving Picture Age March 1921: 41.

three cartoons which they rented to dealers at the rate of $15 for the three. In the years after the war, the trade presses for various industries clearly indicate the widening adoption of a relatively stable form.

The point of debate after the war was not the viability of the trailer format, but the mode of trailer production most suited to advertising. After inaugurating the form with a spectacular flourish, animation came under direct attack from producers of live action trailers, as they attempted to elevate trailer advertising to the level of sober, dignified discourse preferred by the mainstream advertising industry. In an implicit echo of the J. Walter Thompson company’s 1903 claim “[w]e don’t believe in funny advertising” as “the expenditure of money is entirely too serious…to be made the subject of a joke,” H.H. Dewey, of the Rothacker company declared that “[t]he animated cartoon…would get a laugh at the expense of dignity.” Though he claimed that cartoon trailers, even “the better grades of them[,]…failed to place the [quality and beauty of] the merchant’s goods…upon the counter of the silver screen,” Dewey’s examples of his own work otherwise varied in no noticeable way from the work of others. A short comedy about a girl turning down a suitor because her current boyfriend buys her ice-cream, and a nostalgic story about a husband and wife remaining in lifelong bliss through the aid of boxes of chocolates, can, at best, be said to be more ‘dignified’ than the work of others by stressing romance. While nothing really came of the critique – the dominant company of the 1920s was an animation house, the Alexander Film Company – such industry infighting indicates that the form itself was

139 “Used-Car Sales Promotion Work,” Automobile Topics 8 October 1921: 639.
no longer a bone of serious contention. It had achieved a level of stable integration with exhibition culture.

By the early 1920s, trailer advertising was common enough that the Alexander Film Company was reporting bewilderingly high commission rates for salesmen. A “Mr. Morris” earned $23,757.54 in one year.\(^{142}\) (This would translate to a $275,000 salary in 2012.) Two other employees, extrapolating from strong sales rates in brief windows (less than a year) of time, were earning ‘at the rate’ of $10,000 and $40,000 per year in 1920 and 1921 respectively.\(^{143}\) W.A. Rice made $1,117.60 in June of 1924; Jack Woltz make $1,098.35 in his first 22 days.\(^{144}\) Generally promising commissions as high as 35%, Alexander was clearly turning a large profit even in its earliest years, and offered a profit-split to its salesmen which kept the best men interested in selling Alexander trailers.\(^{145}\) In fact, Alexander became so used to paying massive commissions to traveling salesmen that, by 1925, they began to manufacture and sell light aircraft to salesmen in order to reduce the costs of their frequent travel.\(^{146}\) The trailer was so stable throughout the 1920s as a form that Alexander had at least one client – a

---

\(^{142}\) As the manual was published in November of 1921, and the company opened for business in 1919, the year was likely 1920. “Sales Manual,” p. 3, 11, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.

\(^{143}\) Though the same large extrapolations were made in public pamphlets designed to encourage salesmen to handle their product, they don’t appear to have been engaging in intentionally misleading calculations. The two figures quoted here were written on internal correspondence, as evidence of the strength of these particular salesmen. As such, the ‘pro-rated calculation’ was the way Alexander chose to speak to everyone, including themselves. J.F. Jokeman to Mr. Alexander, 19 March 1920; and Walter Morris to Mr. Alexander, 30 January 1921; both in “Alexander Film Company – Scrapbook, 1919-1923,” p. 9, 25, Box 11, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.

\(^{144}\) “Feeding Ambition with Gold” pamphlet, p. 1, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.

\(^{145}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{146}\) “The Era of Airplanes,” Alexander Cooperator July 1925, p. 7, Box 8, Folder 1, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
“ladies’ and children’s shop in Green River, Wyo.” – which used Alexander trailer films unceasingly for eleven years (from 1923-1933).147

The history of cinema advertising after 1920, then, is largely one of entrenchment of the trailer model – as product placement and industrials were comparatively minor in theatrical advertising until the 1982 ‘star turn’ of Reese’s Pieces in *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial*. By 1922, then, the commercial trailer was the predominant mode of cinematic advertising, but had – through a confluence of events – been relegated to a position reminiscent of very early magazine advertising. For the cinema, the ‘magazine format,’ consisted of multiple small advertisements, created and placed by a space-broker, and restricted to an advertising section at either the beginning or the end of the content (depending on if one arrived early or left late, or both). As such, the cinema had developed a spatially influenced structure in a temporal program, with the advertising placed in the only position where patrons could regularly ignore it: in a bookend after the completion of the program.

**Why Trailer Advertising?**

As with all cinema advertising rhetoric, audience captivity and the ‘receptive mood’ undergird all arguments for the adoption of trailers. However, arising as it did from early claims about the “defect” of slides (their lack of motion), trailer advertising proponents were forced to walk a middle line between passive and active audience rhetoric, as trailer makers wanted to stress both the ‘inherent’ nature of their product and the ‘inherent’ failings of their competitors. As the goal was profitability, of course, also prominent were the various ways in which trailer

147 “Oldest Customer Renews Construct,” *Weekly Animator* 6.8 (27 February 1933), p. 1, Box 7, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. As this was reported in 1933, it’s possible that the store continued to use the Alexander service for many additional years. Also, as record keeping was hazy in the early years of Alexander operation, it’s possible that this same store had been a client for even longer than they knew.
usage could decrease advertising costs, or make appropriations more efficient. Detailed analyses of each of these broad argumentative motifs will be provided in turn in this section.

Clear references to the captivity of the audience, and the exclusivity of attention were, of course, always the starting point. For most, this required little more than a regurgitation of the assertion that trailers, like all onscreen cinema advertising, were a “100% medium” – a claim made by W.A. Harris, Screen Advertising, Inc., and many others. The less complex arguments simply stressed a lack of anything else to view, often tied to exclusivity of advertising rights, as dual rationalizations for faith in ‘100%’ success. In the words of the trade journal Clothier and Furnisher, “[c]an you imagine how more ideal conditions could possibly be devised than to assemble your audience in a darkened theatre, all waiting to see what’s next – and then flash your story on the screen before their eyes?” Proposals for the adoption of screen advertising almost uniformly described it in this way: one shot, right between the eyes.

Additionally, if the standard screening contract included, as it did with slides, a guarantee that no competing products would be advertised during the same week, then a guarantee of audience attention to your product had a corresponding guarantee of inattention to your competitor’s product. This basic argument about screen attention prompted the Alexander Film Company

---

148 As the ‘convergence’ rhetoric just prior to and encompassing World War I was so central to the growth of the form, it will be omitted here. However, in theory it was also a financial argument, as convergent advertising was repeatedly asserted as a way to make all advertising dollars work more efficiently.


150 “The Newest Kind of Store Publicity,” Clothier and Furnisher 89.2 (September 1916): 98; Strand Theater, Billings, MT, to “All Advertisers and Prospective Advertisers on the Strand Screen,” “Alexander Film Company - Scrapbook, 1919-1923,” p. 23, Box 11, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs; and “Sales Manual,” p. 81, Box 5, Alexander
to describe trailers as the equivalent of buying “the whole front page” of a magazine – the same metaphor that the Lee Lash Company had used for lantern slides a decade earlier.\(^\text{152}\) As such, every argument for the adoption of trailer advertising included the familiar rhetorical claim that cinema patrons could not help but see your advertisement, exclusive not only of the surrounding environs but also the competitive market.

Unlike slides, however, which could only claim ‘captivation’ on the simplistic grounds that slides were lighted images in a darkened spaces, trailers were sold to advertisers, by producers and proponents, under the theory that onscreen motion was almost mesmeric, possessing an appeal unknown anywhere else. Take, for example, the argument for animated trailers offered by the Scenic Film Company’s Irvin A. Burdette in 1916:

> Actions speak louder than words. […] Animated Films are 100% action. The public is moved by Curiosity; all are wondering what the actions will develop into next. The minds are receptive and accept your point of view through the ‘art of suggestion.’ Animated Ads are ‘Direct,’ ‘Main Point’ Evangels of Trade. […] Cartoon ads create a feeling of personal interest and confidence in you and your product which must exist between the Buying Public and Successful Sellers. The same subconscious ‘Good Will’ which the public have in the players.\(^\text{153}\)

Burdette clearly presumes the superiority of the animated trailer because of the ‘magic’ of animation. The fabricated motion links directly to suggestion, for Burdette, through an almost involuntary “Curiosity” – of “wondering what the actions will develop into next.” The notion that all of this was somehow occurring “subconsciously” clearly prefigures trailer proponent Francis T. Kimball’s 1921 assertion that cinema audiences were “absorbent.”\(^\text{154}\) AFPA President W.A. Harris likewise asserted that “action compels attention.”\(^\text{155}\) (Indeed, note that in all of

---

\(^{152}\) Sales Manual,” p. 35, 62, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.


\(^{155}\) [W.A. Harris], “Movie Film Becoming Big Car Sales Feature,” *Motor World* 17 January 1917: 65.
these phrasings, but especially that of Scenic, one can read a connotative slippage between cinematic ‘action’ and consumer ‘action’ – between a moving [in motion] picture and a moving [persuasive] one.) The Alexander Film Company persisted in this argumentation over the course of the 1920s by asserting that human beings were predisposed to attend to motion out of self-defense: variously using metaphors of predators in the bushes, snakes in boxes, and thieves throwing bricks through windows.\textsuperscript{156}

Even more compelling is Burdette’s notion that what animation was subconsciously providing was “Good Will.” It seems that Burdette was referencing, here, the other side of the appeal coin posited by trailer proponents – not only did they produce quasi-involuntary attention, they also provided pleasure in an environment where pleasure was expected. What little of the ‘receptive mood’ was not attributed to viewer ‘captivation’ was credited – in a move which likely alienated trailer makers from mainstream admen – to the appeal of ‘fun.’ Trailer producers were caught in a rhetorical middle ground, critiquing a form (the lantern slide) via assertions that the audience was actively voicing its displeasure, while trying to retain the notion that the audience was happy and receptive. The Rothacker Company’s 1920 claim about the undignified comic cartoon notwithstanding, trailer producers commonly asserted that pleasurable delivery went hand in hand with receptivity to an advertising message. Indeed, a second Scenic Film Company self-advertisement proudly proclaimed that their animated trailers would work

\textsuperscript{156} Snakes: “Opportunity Knocks” pamphlet, p. 11, Box 10, Folder 2, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. Predators and Bricks: “Sales Manual,” p. 61-62, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. One interesting outlier in this rhetoric should be mentioned; an unsigned article asserting the value of trailer advertising for plumbers argued not that patrons were necessarily receptive, but that their act of engaging in leisure activity meant that “they may be presumed to have time to give to the consideration of advertising.” While this is technically just another way for a trailer proponent to assert the need for ‘fun’ to predominate in advertising, it leaves open the notion of ‘active audiences’ far more than commentators from later in the decade. As such, it is likely evidence of that 1916 (featuring the publications of Dench and Münsterberg) was indeed the watershed moment for passive spectatorship theory, as it grew in the wake of the Mutual Decision (see chapter two). “Publicity for Plumbers,” \textit{Domestic Engineering} 73.11 (11 December 1915): 337.
“whether [the audience was] in a receptive mood or not”\textsuperscript{157} – expressing an almost gleeful disinterest in the entire theory of picture psychology on the grounds that it was true of animation in any case. The predominance of comedy in trailer advertising was part of a concrete theory of audience receptivity, in which the stoic, critical viewer’s defenses were broken down with the pleasures of laughter. Openly referencing the ‘hissing’ and irritation which could accompany the slide, trailer producers attempted to both integrate and abandon ‘active audiences,’ by asserting that the failure of slides had been rectified; slides were unpleasant, and trailers were fun.

As such, perhaps the most common argument in trailer rhetoric was a sense that humor was the ultimate panacea. The Dra-Ko Film Company declared that animated cartoon trailers were a form of advertising in which “[f]un predominates.”\textsuperscript{158} The Alexander Film Company offered trailers with “Punch and Ginger and usually humor.”\textsuperscript{159} Trade presses interested in the form repeatedly asserted that amusement was the way in which one kept the audience docile.\textsuperscript{160} This attempt to promote fun as a counter to active audiences could result in descriptions uncomfortably close to outright manipulation; for example, Jonas Howard, in typical fashion, asserted that Rothacker Company photoplays were “snappy” and had “laugh and a punch,” but concluded that the style was “calculated to draw the unwary movie goer into a spending mood.”\textsuperscript{161} The power of ‘fun’ was even at times promoted by admen who had previously held the deeply entrenched position that humor and business were best kept separate. \textit{Printers’ Ink}’s unidentified ‘Little Schoolmaster’ was forced to declare, in early 1918, that his “poor opinion of the short, comic moving-picture” ad was incorrect, as “the right kind of a comic goes big, even

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{157} Display ad, \textit{Refrigeration} 18.3 (April 1916): 61.  \\
\textsuperscript{158} Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 6 May 1916: 1033.  \\
\textsuperscript{159} “Sales manual,” p. 32, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.  \\
\textsuperscript{160} “Publicity for Plumbers,” \textit{Domestic Engineering} 73.11 (11 December 1915): 337; “The Newest Kind of Store Publicity,” \textit{Clothier and Furnisher} 89.2 (September 1916): 99.  \\
\textsuperscript{161} Jonas Howard, “Sodas or Shaves,” \textit{Photoplay} 17.1 (December 1919): 112.
\end{flushleft}
By 1921, the ethos of pleasure was so ingrained in trailer theory that Francis T. Kimball described the typical trailer via the euphemism “screen sugar-pill,” and included two entire paragraphs likening the pleasure of trailers to the sweet-taste that convinces children to take medicine. The pleasures of comedy, therefore, were central to arguments about the appeal of trailers which opted not to trade on theories of universal captivation.

By the end of the period under study, the two arguments – captivation and ‘screen sugar’ – had become a united front, as trailer advertisements, through the aid of humor, were described like an injection or photographing of information directly onto the brain. The aforementioned Francis T. Kimball used both metaphors in the space of only two sentences, in 1921, asserting both that fun resulted in messages being “subtly and…irrevocably injected into the receptivity of little Willie Audience,” and that trailers resulted in “[t]he dealer’s advertisement get[ting]…‘fixed’ as surely in the mind of the spectator as it is in the emulsion of the film.” The Monache Theatre Company, Inc., in a 1923 testimonial letter on behalf of the Alexander Film Company called film advertising “a sort of photographic process registered permanently in the brain cells of the prospective customer.” Even when integrating the critique of slides (“hissing” for example) into their rhetoric, then, trailer advertisers persisted in describing cinema viewers’ minds as blank photographic plates which would register whatever message the advertiser could compel them to see.

---

162 “Little Schoolmaster’s Classroom,” Printers’ Ink 102.10 (7 March 1918): 142.
163 Francis T. Kimball, “The Film Trailer and What It Will Do,” Moving Picture Age February 1921: 11. The now common connotation of a sugar pill as a placebo was not part of Kimball’s argument. For Kimball, a sugar pill was a ruse to get a reluctant person to enjoy taking their medicine.
164 Ibid., 18.
As the potential users of trailer advertising were businessmen, of course, many arguments were also made around the decidedly more down-to-earth notion of finances, and the ways in which trailer usage was monetarily sensible. Oddly, it was rare to assert, through concrete data, that trailer advertising boosted sales. Even vague claims of this nature have only arisen once in my research – an article on a particular Goodrich Tire ad included a smattering of dealers declaring that the trailer had “increased my sales at least ten percent” or resulted in the need to “put on another man” to handle the business boost.\textsuperscript{166} Again, plausibly indicating that trailer rhetoric was primarily focused on competition with slides, the bulk of financial argumentation in the early years was organized around assertions of cheapness, not added sales.

Often, in trade press descriptions, cost-efficiency was simply asserted. Sometimes such assertions were vague – like Manhattan Slide and Film’s description of trailers being of “reasonable cost,” or the National Builders’ Bureau’s assertion that cost was “nominal.”\textsuperscript{167} Other times direct dollar amounts were cited – such as Dench’s claim that trailers were $4 to $5, or Rothacker’s $12 price – along with a declaration that such a cost was ‘cheap enough for merchants.’\textsuperscript{168} Sometimes the same argument was attempted through an inversion. Despite the 500% (or more) increase in cost over slides, trailers were even described as cheaper than slides in some cases by asserting that one may be able to get theaters to run trailers for less than they’d charge for slides; as trailers were asserted to provide entertainment exhibitors, it was claimed, would gladly run them free, as they’d otherwise have to pay for such entertaining parts of the

\textsuperscript{166} Francis T. Kimball, “The Film Trailer and What It Will Do,” \textit{Moving Picture Age} February 1921: 19.
program. Such attempts were clearly geared towards minimizing the difference between the cost of slide and trailer adoption.

Towards the early 1920s, as the competition from slides became less pressing, financial arguments began to focus on print. Detailed numerical claims attempted to show that the cost per prospect of trailer advertising was actually superior to magazine and newspaper advertising. Francis T. Kimball laid out a plain numerical comparison, confirming that

> the cost of one page in one issue is about three-tenths of a cent a possible prospect. And the ‘possible’ is used advisedly, because it is far from certain that every individual in the total circulation is going to get the message.

[…Meanwhile] the trailer costs the manufacturer about six-one-hundredths of a cent a prospect – and here the ‘possible’ is advisedly omitted, since in a motion picture theater there is but one attention focus.

Even if one removed the familiar ‘100% attention’ rhetoric Kimball used to heighten the comparison, the comparison of ‘circulation’ figures clearly gave motion pictures the edge. In 1921, the Alexander Film Company explicitly compared their yearly contracts to full page ads in magazines; while the latter cost $75 and only ran once, an advertiser could receive six months of bi-weekly service on theater screens for only slightly more ($86). By 1924, Alexander had adopted Kimball’s method and declared that film’s cost-per-prospect was “one-tenth to one-fifth of a cent” – much higher than Kimball’s figure, but still superior to the cost of print advertising.

---


171 “Sales Manual,” p. 63, 80, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.

172 “Feeding Ambition with Gold” pamphlet, p. 4, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
Often, such financial argumentation was given additional weight through attacks on print as an outdated form of communication. Anti-reading rhetoric was presaged in a late 1916 article on trailers in the *Clothier and Furnisher*, in which the following (probably apocryphal) conversation between advertising men was reported:

> Why does not advertising in the magazines bring the results it used to?” Various answers were suggested…until finally one man summed it up in a way which left nothing further to be said. This man’s explanation was in effect as follows: “In former times the whole family used to sit around the library table in the Winter time or out on the porch in the Summer and read magazines from cover to cover. […] Nowadays, in all stations of life, it’s ‘Let’s go to the movies.’ I tell you we advertising men have got to go to the movies, too. We’ve got to advertise where the people are!”

Fears that the birth of the film medium had resulted in a shift in the advertising values of old media were encouraged widely by film advertising producers. In 1921, both the National Builders Bureau (“Break Away from Old-Time Methods”174) and Francis T. Kimball (“the majority…never read much of anything at all”175) voiced variants of the death knell of reading as a reason to transition at least a percentage of one’s advertising budget to trailer advertising. As late as 1927, the Alexander Film Company was still asserting that print was inferior to film as the former required “the effort of reading” – described as an unreasonable requirement as “[t]he mind is naturally lazy.”176

---

173 “The Newest Kind of Store Publicity,” *Clothier and Furnisher* 89.2 (September 1916): 98. This article is dominated by an ‘interview’ with the advertising manager for the Hickey-Freeman Company, and as such was likely placed or suggested either by Hickey-Freeman itself, or by the company to whom they outsourced production of their trailers.
176 “Opportunity Knocks” pamphlet, p. 12, Box 10, Folder 2, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
Not surprisingly, these arguments for the cost efficiency of trailers, in between
disparagements of other mediums, also included positive assertions about the quality of the
‘prospects’ in cinema audiences. As mentioned above, Screen Advertising Inc., in an attempt to
elevate the ad industry’s perception of the class reached by its trailer service (and downplay the
fact that the larger urban palaces were still off-limits to advertisers), offered to its customers the
ability to select the theaters from its already selective collection of ‘high class theaters’: which
included “no nickel shows” and therefore reached only “the great middle class – the buying class
– the class that is most responsive to good advertising.”177 Others asserted that film, with its
broad audience base, reached the “representative families” of a community without any further
selective effort on the part of the advertiser or the space-broker: among the typical cinema
crowds were “a splendidly high percentage of just the people Mr. Dealer wants to be known to
and patronized by.”178 The Alexander Film Company went even further. Explicitly attacking
notions that even a minor amount of the film audience was ‘waste circulation,’ Alexander, like
slide makers before them, defended film as a means to reach the lower classes. Attacking the
typical American ad agency’s focus on the affluent, Alexander asserted that, even though a

177 Full-Page Display Ad, *Printers’ Ink* 99.4 (26 April 1917): 92. Although the article doesn’t clarify, it would
appear that Duncan A. Dobie Jr. worked for Screen Advertising, Inc, as his article from 1919 used almost exactly
the same three-part phrasing to describe the ‘great middle class’: Duncan A. Dobie, Jr., “The Value of the Motion
assertions of the cross-class value of advertising audiences can be found in: Don Herold, “Moving Pictures and
Advertising Pictures,” *The Printing Art* 26.1 (September 1915): 33; and “The Cinema as a Medium for Making
Sales,” *Simmons’ Spice Mill* 42.4 (April 1919): 468. The National Builders’ Bureau went so far as to assert that
“ninety per cent of the inhabitants of the average community” attend the local motion picture performances,
implying that cinema was not only cheap but reached, quite literally, virtually everyone for that price. Full-Page
Box 11, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak
Library District, Colorado Springs.
person may be the type “that spend[s] nearly all they make,” that did not mean they wouldn’t “spend some with you” if enticed.\textsuperscript{179}

As such, trailer proponents did some remarkable rhetorical gymnastics, including anti-cinema arguments only to minimize them as a problem solely for slides. The passive audience did not naturally exist, but trailers could produce it. Film was admittedly expensive, but was cheaper per prospect than any other form. The cinema contained a large number of poor spectators, but cumulatively they were a lucrative market. As such, the trailer proponent’s take on screen advertising seemed to agree with everything an advertiser had ever heard and yet produced a positive assertion of value despite the criticism. In short, they made themselves seem forthright and honest – gracefully accepting critique and then turning it into an advantage.

\textit{Why Not?}

Unlike slides (chapter three) and offscreen technologies (chapter five), which were both directly and heavily criticized, one of the most problematic aspects inherent in researching the rhetoric surrounding advertising trailers is the nearly complete lack of direct critique in the historical record. Indeed, as was implied above, the bulk of critical argumentation appeared in historical documents which ultimately supported trailers. Comparatively speaking, there were very few overt declarations that an advertiser should \textit{not} adopt trailers as a medium. In fact, among my research data, it occurred only once: an extremely early (July 1915) tirade against cartoon trailers by a Chippewa Falls newspaperman whose advertising revenue was slipping. Admittedly, his two-fold argument was relatively compelling: first he criticized their emptiness of content, declaring animated letters to be an inconsequential “little frill”; second, and even

\textsuperscript{179} “Sales Manual,” p. 54, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
more damning, he argued that trailers would generally be seen at “night when your business is closed,” rendering memorability an overwhelming (and possibly unanswerable) concern. The latter was a deceptively powerful critique of developing notions of the importance of making an advertisement ‘sticky’ in a temporally fleeting medium. While print may have been an ‘opt in’ form of advertising, where the reader could choose whether or not to give his attention, it was also mobile and permanent. Print was a possession, not an experience. As print-centric agencies continued to dominate the industry, advertisers undoubtedly had (and were encouraged to have) doubts about the ‘fleeting impression’ given by a medium which the reader could not take home. Unfortunately, while such claims were likely repeated often in verbal exchanges and may have been a major factor in advertiser reluctance to use the form, they almost never reached the stage of published argument. Anti-advertising film arguments in the trade press were so obsessed with industrial films and product placement that trailers barely received a word of direct condemnation. Whether this lack of open discussion was intentional (snubbing of trailers by the film trades) or accidental (the focus of trade press reporters was elsewhere – the war, features, the post-war boom in industrials and non-theatrical screenings, etc.), the result, for the historical researcher, is the same: any attempt to lay out cultural opposition to trailer advertising must come from more general concerns over the ‘hijacking’ of the screen.

---

181 Note, additionally, that the Chippewa Falls newspaperman, like George M. Rittelmeyer before him, asserted here an inversion of G.R. Lowe’s defense of slides: that certain businesses, like drug stores, could use them specifically because they were open at the same hours as cinema theaters. There is, therefore, a fascinating but minor debate occurring in this era about the relative merits of tailoring temporal advertising to store-hours versus simply making it ‘sticky.’ George M. Rittelmeyer, “Slide Advertising,” Moving Picture World 13 September 1913: 1178; and G.R. Lowe, “Slide Advertising for the Retail Druggist,” American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record April 1914: 44.
182 It is unfortunately outside the scope of this project to expand the research into the early growth of temporally delimited advertising outside of the cinema. American billboardng, for example, was dealing with the development of an ‘aesthetics of speed’ at this time, as automotive transit grew. Similarly, electronic billboards in cities – particularly the work of Oscar Gude in New York – began transitioning to temporal sequencing through electronically controlled lights, in a variant of the motion picture model. As such, the cinema was one element of a larger cultural turn to temporal awareness in advertising. Catherine Gudis, Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 66-70; and Darcy Tell, Times Square Spectacular: Lighting Up Broadway (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2007), 34-46.
Much reticence regarding the use of trailer advertising was likely a holdover from exhibitor-centered arguments. Regardless of whether or not exhibition culture openly admitted – via self-promotion and wartime advertising – that the screen was indeed an excellent means of reaching the public, the perception that exhibition culture remained hesitant about commercial intrusion into theaters would have kept a rein on advertiser excitement. Remember that as early as 1909, *Moving Picture World* was already asserting that slide advertising “tend[ed] to lower the dignity of the moving picture theater.”183 This assertion remained prominent in film advertising discussions beyond slides. The Motion Picture Patents Company went so far as to ban the circulation of advertising films in their theaters, on the grounds that their inclusion “would inevitably and rapidly degrade the business” by chasing away patrons.184 As late as 1931, an advertiser with film experience still asserted “[t]he screen…is dedicated to the duty of entertaining those who pay their admission at the box office. Therefore it can offer nothing but entertainment if it is to keep faith with the public.”185 Even when the exhibitor was not criticized for the ‘hijacking’ of the screen, per se, the notion of quantity could become a problem, as it had been with slides. New Orleans film journalist George M. Cheney was scathing in his indictment of New Orleans theaters, in mid-1916, for simply transferring bad slide practices into the realm of animated advertising films. Cheney asserted that “there are exhibitors who are running it into the ground as they did the still slides” by running such ads for “ten to twenty minutes” – the length of a full reel – and using films for consecutive days, rendering them repetitious and “exceedingly boresome to an audience used to a daily change.”186 The notion that screen

184 Joseph B. Baker, “Examples of Motion Picture Advertising,” *Motography* 5.6 (June 1911): 133.
advertising, either by its nature or by excessive quantity, was an act of ‘bad faith’ clearly remained a primary factor in exhibitor thinking throughout the silent era, even in the realm of the tiny trailer advertisement.

However, one cannot forget that this critique was discordant. At the very same time that exhibitors were told to steer clear of advertising, and often even in the very same breath, they were being told to make sure that advertising was paid. Almost any critique included in implication that the ‘defenders of the public’ were for sale – that there was a price for their complicity. In banning advertising films from its theaters, the Patents Company did not just call them degrading; they also asserted that exhibitors should have been earning royalties rather than paying for the films. Complaints about product placement criticized the practice largely on the grounds that “[i]t is not fair…to try to force the exhibitors to run advertising films free.” As such, the rhetoric against exhibition was as much an argument for profit as it was against advertising, and it is understandable, therefore, that both exhibitors and advertisers would have held inconsistent and even confused views on the subject. In such a milieu, trailers would have been the easiest form to ‘sell’; they were brief (like slides), openly offered to pay (unlike product placement), and yet provided motion (unlike slides) and even entertainment value (unlike most industrial films). The trailer, then, was likely the least susceptible to struggle from entrenched exhibitor reluctance.

With such weak opposition, it may seem like a wonder that trailer advertising didn’t instantly lurch into ubiquity in all theaters nationwide. Perhaps the single largest problem for trailers was not the content of such critiques but the response to them by trailer salesmen. At least one company – the Alexander Film Company – recommended, in their training manual for

---

187 Joseph B. Baker, “Examples of Motion Picture Advertising,” Motography 5.6 (June 1911): 133.
salesmen, a delicate response to criticism in which the salesman was never to disagree with a critique of the screen as a site. Instead of disagreement, the salesman was to overwhelm the critique with a large number of unrelated positive claims. See, for example, the following sample response: if the prospect says ‘onscreen ads make people angry,’ the salesman should respond “[t]hat is good evidence…that they see the ad, otherwise it would not make them mad.” While this massaging of the advertiser’s ego was likely a very successful approach to sales, it encouraged erroneous preconceptions about film advertising in the name of boosting Alexander’s bottom line. In this particular exchange the salesman was to avoid the very persuasive rhetoric about the powers of both animation and comedy, and admit that onscreen advertising angered patrons. (No advice was offered for the obvious follow up question: what keeps an angry audience from forming ‘ill will’ rather than ‘good will’ towards the product?) In the same training manual, Alexander also encouraged salesmen to “stay as far away from advertising agencies as possible.” While there are numerous likely reasons for this encouragement, in the short run it closed the door to perhaps the greatest avenue for growth. Agencies were the most powerful pro-advertising community in the country; to win their favor, though it would have been difficult, could only have been an asset for the trailer industry at large.

Alexander, then, not only held back from defending trailers, the company even implicitly attacked its own medium in the name of ascending to the top of the industry. The limited critiques of the form in public discourse were, therefore, likely exacerbated by the sales behavior

190 See chapter two, specifically the discussion of the ‘combative spirit.’ Advertisers, it would seem, could easily slip into a mindset in which cinema advertising was not simply seen as unhelpful, but actively damaging to sales.
of trailer makers. As such, the greatest strength of trailer rhetoric was also its greatest weakness. The ‘honesty’ of admitting to criticisms did not just defuse them, but kept the criticisms in the public consciousness; it kept discussion positive, but growth slow.

**Case Study - The Alexander Film Company and the ‘High Class’ Trailer**

Opened for business by brothers J. Don and Don M. Alexander, in Spokane, Washington, in January 1919, the Alexander Film Company – which moved to Colorado for a “more geographically central location” in 1923 – represents the culmination of the cinematic trailer advertisement. Its growth between 1919 and 1923 was meteoric. According to internal figures, business increased roughly 1000% over these first five years. By 1923, the company was already circulating trailers regularly in forty-two states, and had approximately 150 employees. By the end of the 1920s, they were circulating trailers to 2,400 theaters and were receiving over 60% of the trailer business in the United States. By the middle of the 20th century, Alexander’s circulation had swelled to include 16,000 theaters.

---

192 “Alexander Film Co.: Behind the Scenes” pamphlet, unpaginated [2-3], Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
193 This is not to say that the trailer industry itself was necessarily growing. Most likely Alexander’s swelling coffers were offset, nationally, by the falling income of competitors.
194 “Alexander Film Company – Scrapbook, 1919-1923,” p. 108, Box 11, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. The data was revealed only in unlabeled scale drawings of muscle-men, and requires retranslation into numerical data. However, simple hand-measuring of the size of each figure produces the following comparison – in centimeters of height: 1919 = 3/4; 1920 = 1 3/4; 1921 = 3 1/2; 1922 = 5 1/4; 1923 = 7 3/4. In short, the size went from .75 centimeters to 7.75 centimeters, or just over 1000%. The year-by-year growth was: 133%, 100%, 50%, 48%.
196 2,400: Mr. Kimball, “Industrial Film Facts as of March 12, 1929,” p. 3, Box 1, Folder 7 “1929 Jan 4 – April 17,” J. Walter Thompson Company, Staff Meeting Minutes, 1927-1938, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. 60%: “Over 10,000,000 Extra Revenue for Theatres” pamphlet, unpaginated, Box 10, Folder 2, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. Alexander’s own internal figures indicated that, between 1923 and 1932, an
Alexander was not just a dominant company, however. It aided in the growth of the form by taking a leading role in the development of national standards in the trailer community – the very role the AFPA had hoped to serve in 1916. By the end of the 1920s, the national reach of agency created radio advertising had thrown into sharp relief the major problem with cinema trailer circulation: there was no simple way to show a single trailer in all available theaters. Such a screening plan would have required days of contractual negotiations with a multitude of trailer companies. Alexander helped to restructure the trailer producing community to meet the demands of national advertisers. In 1929, in negotiating a contract for national advertising with Chevrolet, Alexander was instrumental in creating the National Film Advertising Bureau: allowing simultaneous access to the space-brokering contracts of multiple companies. The Bureau made it easy for national advertisers to place advertising, with one purchase, in over 5000 theaters across the country – a uniformity of distribution which had been lacking in cinema advertising since the beginning. As Alexander was by far the dominant partner (controlling over half the available theaters), this effectively opened up even non-Alexander theaters to Alexander service. By 1938, ad industry powerhouse the J. Walter Thompson Company singled out


An undated pamphlet declares that, by some point in the mid-twentieth century, Alexander was circulating its service to 16,000 theaters in the 48 states. (The pamphlet is probably from the late 1940s, as it does not mention television. Alaska became the 49th state in 1959.) Although the average running time for trailers had decreased to approximately 40 seconds, and the average number per program had dropped from “five to ten” to three or four, Alexander continued to dominate. Their business model had also grown, by this point, to include published weekly rates for all theaters; so much for haggling with advertisers for the largest possible dollar amount. “What Are Alexander Movie Ads” pamphlet, unpaginated, Box 10, Folder 2, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.

Alexander Cooperator October 1929, p. 5, Box 8, Folder 1, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
Alexander’s “library service” of stock trailers as the paragon of the form. The work of the Alexander Film Company represents the perfection of the stock animated trailer.

In many ways, Alexander looked like any other trailer producer. Their theory of cinema spectatorship invoked the common ‘captive audience’ and ‘receptive mood’ concepts, and described the effects of film advertising as both “a photographic process registered permanently in the brain cells” and, likened advertising to the chiseling of cavemen “carv[ing] creases in the memories of…prospects with pictures.” The form of Alexander trailers was also in-line with previous standards: running roughly one minute, stressing humor, with the final 25% of the running time devoted to the dealer name, which maintained interest through motion and font choice. Alexander, then, is indicative of the standards that had developed in the field before the company was born.

What stands out about Alexander is the ways in which they streamlined their product and their business model in order to achieve dominance both in local and national advertising. Alexander’s strengths were two-fold. First, it provided extremely polished trailers, focusing more on subtle pleasurable effects than early animators’ focus on spectacularity. Second, as a business, the company operated, simply and efficiently, almost everywhere in the country simultaneously, using complex information systems, modern transportation, and wide-ranging contracts to please both locally and nationally focused advertisers.

---


At the risk of implying that business success is a meritocracy, any discussion of Alexander’s success must begin with a discussion of the polish which the company brought to its trailer work. General high quality production elements are apparent, including filming in negative (in order to retain “half tones and fine details”) and repairing or retiring prints before damage became visible in projection. These choices indicate a company concerned with a high-class image – both for its clients and itself. More important, however, was the company’s desire to stress leisure and pleasure even in the high-pressure style of direct advertising. Focusing on viewer pleasure as much as copy ‘punch,’ Alexander developed a more leisurely pace for the merchant’s ‘business card’ at the end of the trailer, a highly restricted notion of word use, fade transitions for consecutive advertisements, and a mood-based theory of color usage. Each idea was clearly laid out as business policy in the company’s November 1921 handbook for its traveling salesmen.

Their sense of written content was perhaps the most obvious difference between an Alexander ad and a trailer from another company. While they followed the standard industry maxim of 3/4 of a foot per word as a reading pace, Alexander mandated fifteen feet for a ten word dealer strip, with an extra foot per word thereafter. As the bulk of trailer producers allowed only ten feet for the dealer strip, Alexander was allowing for significantly more leisurely reading even at maximum word counts. The company went further, however. By early 1925, Don M. Alexander penned an article for the company’s house organ, the Alexander Cooperator, in which he asserted that four words should be the target, as short copy was “dignified” and brevity was not only “the soul of wit…[but] the soul of advertising.” Offering three examples (“Chesterfield

202 “Sales Manual,” p. 25-29, 51, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. These pages are a laundry list of why Alexander’s films are superior to their competitors.
Cigarettes – They Satisfy”; “Ivory Soap – It Floats”; and Alexander’s own “J.B. Gilmore – The Jeweler”), Don M. asserted in the strongest possible terms that limited copy was the best copy in the medium of trailer advertising. Stress-free reading at a leisurely pace was, therefore, one of the primary ways in which the Alexander Film Company conceived of trailer advertising.

As the literal ‘trailer’ had, prior to 1919, given way to a reel of consecutively-screened ‘trailer-length’ advertisements, Alexander also took pains (and running time) to keep transitions from jarring the spectator during the projection of the advertising reel. As their contracted theaters would run “[f]rom 5 to 10” trailers in a row, Alexander made sure that the exhortations had room to breathe. They not only used fade-ins and fade-outs to comfortably ease the spectators into and out of an advertisement, they added “a couple of seconds” of solid black footage in between, extending any given reel by ten to twenty seconds rather than fostering irritation through abrasive jumps from trailer to trailer.

Their use of color overtly combined this sense of viewer comfort with theories of impressionistic copy. Declaring that green was a good color for a picnic “not only to show that the grass is green but to utilize the restful effect of green as a color,” Alexander was deeply concerned with the control of the spectator’s mood. Simple color-wheel concepts – like red for excitement and blue for cold – were foundational for Alexander productions. In addition, however, the company would use color tinting to polish and perfect the display of products. In one telling example, sepia toning was proposed for bread advertising, as it would give the crust a pleasing and realistic brown color while leaving the loaf “a little more white and pure than any

204 Don M. Alexander, “Advertising Words, Cut Them Out,” Alexander Cooperator April 1925, p. 4, Box 8, Folder 1, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. As with word limitations in slides, the correlation between brevity and limitations on the reader’s time have important parallels in billboard copy developments. Catherine Gudis, Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 66-68.
loaf of bread could ever be.” As such, Alexander’s conception of not-irritating the spectator with an avalanche of words or a jarring transition, and their use of color for both pleasure and product-gloss, were all designed to create a subtle and overwhelming minute of advertising – an advertising environment in which every element of the trailer registered the dignity, comfort, and perfection of the product for sale, regardless of whether the copy was humorous or serious.

The willingness of the Alexander Film Company to spare no expense to get the mood correct was apparent in their inauguration of weekly screen tests for new work. Before any trailer would be shipped out for theatrical usage, it needed to receive a positive verdict from the “super-critical audience” of Alexander employees who would meet in the company screening room, every Wednesday, at the end of the working day. If a positive response could not be attained through editing out or replacing elements of the footage, an entire film would be “throw[n]…in the junk pile.” Although the notion of a preview screening was not new in the film industry by this time – the Motion Picture Patents Company and the Mutual Film Corporation had experimented with it as early as 1909 and 1914 respectively – the existence of the practice at Alexander is another mark of the care which they took in sending out only that work of which they were quite proud.

---


206 This is not to say that all of their trailers were ‘calming’ in terms of their copy. Indeed, Alexander advertisements evince some of the earliest use of ‘scare copy’ in motion picture advertising. For example, the hand of ‘life’ literally dealing out horrible cards – labeled “sickness,” “permanent disability,” and “death” – was used in an advertisement for insurance. Their quality was designed to make consumption of advertising easy and palatable, regardless of the positive or negative emotions which the copy itself played upon. Insurance ad: H.A. Shaw, “A Few of Last Month’s Productions,” Alexander Cooperator February 1925, p. 14-15, Box 8, Folder 1, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.


The consistently high-quality of production was designed to appeal to any potential client, no matter how large their advertising appropriation. For Alexander, the goal was always to produce the highest quality trailers on the market. This allowed the company to produce a form which was priced for local merchants and yet appealed to national advertisers. Contracting with theater chains and national brands as often as possible, demanding six-month or one-year contracts in any case, maintaining detailed records for trailer circulation, and even pioneering the use of private aircraft for its sales force, Alexander created a business model which was amenable to both the largest and the smallest possible contracts, allowing for both windfall profits and the steady accumulation of small sales.

In contracting with theaters, the company allowed for the exhibitor’s own sense of worth to dictate the value of the space. Although their generic sales pitch was to suggest that theaters “may average $100.00 or more per month” from screen advertising, significantly larger contracts were signed. Two theaters in Billings, Montant (the Regent and the Strand) were charging $20 per month per advertiser, in 1920, and were offering to carry between seven and ten ads at any one time.\footnote{209} A ‘full’ contract at either theater could have resulted in twice the ‘average’ profit. In 1921, large west coast theaters were receiving “as much as $150 per month from each advertiser or about $20,000 per year for a full screen.”\footnote{210} This represents a rate approximately fifteen times greater than the standard $100 per month offer. While these theaters were certainly outliers – especially the west coast contract – they are indicative of the fact that Alexander, as a space broker, was willing and able to pay fantastically high rates for desirable theaters. The goal was always to increase the available space, regardless of price variation.

\footnote{209}{“Alexander Film Company – Scrapbook, 1919-1923,” p. 4, 23, Box 11, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.}
\footnote{210}{“Sales Manual,” p. 98, Box 5, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.}
circuit, various state exhibitor associations, and even the Fox theaters across the Midwest all signed contracts for Alexander service at one point. For the most part, the theaters needed do no more than screen and return the reels and cash checks; Alexander would solicit all business, negotiate all contracts, and send the pre-constructed reels each week. Aside from the potential continuation of audience disapproval, it is obvious why exhibitors would have appreciated the Alexander model; it was effectively an agreement to listen to a small number of patron complaints in exchange for $1000 or more per year.

Contracts with advertisers were equally open to negotiation. In exchange for the guarantee of several months’ worth of income, Alexander gave their salesmen the right to haggle over the cost of service. The sales manual only listed “Minimum Prices of Playlet Service” under which there would be no profit for the company; anything above the minimum was up to the skill of the salesman. For example, the minimum cost for a year of bi-weekly service was $10 per week with $20 for the dealer strip. However, an archived contract from 1923 indicates that the salesman, while contracting service at the minimum rate of $10 per month, talked the advertiser into paying $50 for the dealer strip. The target for salesmen was.

---

212 It is not entirely clear how there could be a ‘minimum’ for service when certain theaters, like the aforementioned west coast theaters, were receiving disproportionately large payment for service. It seems most likely that salesmen were given complete price lists, so as to adjust the minimum depending on the city. It is, however, plausible that Alexander, out of a desire to fill all contracted space, had worked out a generic minimum to cover all costs. If the latter were the case, then it would have been possible for an advertiser to get an ad on the screen of a top flight theater at a 90% or greater loss to Alexander, with that loss being covered by small town screenings elsewhere.
214 Liberty Theater (Marysville, CA) Contract, Box 2 Folder 3, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs. The first film was #3352 of the then current catalog. If a copy of the catalog were to be found, it would be possible to determine exactly which Alexander film screened in February of 1923 at this particular theater.
therefore, not a dollar amount, but the signing of one contract per day at whatever rate they could achieve. (Perhaps this hazy pricing structure is the reason why Alexander discouraged its salesmen from dealing with advertising agencies; larger average profits were likely when each individual contract was negotiated with no knowledge of what others were paying for the same service.) In their six-months or one-year contracts, merchants would select their preferred advertisements by looking through a catalog and choosing the numbered ads which appealed to them. Alexander data tracking would double check that none of these trailers had screened in that particular town before, as the company had a standing rule that “the same animation [would] not appear twice in the same town.” The advertiser would also select whether they wanted a weekly or bi-weekly change, so that any given advertisement would not get stale. In all other ways, Alexander operated like any trailer advertising company, offering exclusivity (no ads for competing products in the same program) and regular screening checkup.

Thus able to suck up as many dollars as local merchants were willing to pay to get on their local screens, Alexander provided itself with a business model which could turn a profit on an aggregate of extremely small contracts. Large contracts, in contrast, would provide occasional massive boosts to the cash flow. In 1920, for example, Alexander signed a contract to produce a custom series of thirteen films (the equivalent of six-months of bi-weekly service) for the National Builder’s Bureau. Alexander contracted for 100 prints – which the National Builders Bureau was responsible for circulating to dealers – at a price of between three and four thousand dollars. By January of 1921, 89 dealers had signed on, plausibly guaranteeing Alexander additional profit from the creation of dealer strips to match the 100 prints for each

216 “Natural Color Films,” Box 2, Folder 3, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
trailer advertisement.\footnote{217} While such national campaigns were undoubtedly a minority of Alexander’s product, they were actively sought.

The result of the business model was a bewilderingly large output. While data does not exist for the years before 1924, and an average likely skews the number upwards in early years, Alexander produced 8,771 different trailer advertisements between 1924 and 1931 – an average of just over 90 per month.\footnote{218} That is not the number of rentals – it represents only the number of newly produced playlets which could then start generating a profit through years of national circulation. As such, Alexander’s business model was clearly resulting in massive cash flow. Substantial quantities of trailers were produced regularly over the course of a dozen years, and the company would remain in business deep into the television era.

Perhaps the most important element of Alexander’s business model – certainly the most intriguing – is the fact that, in 1925, they began manufacturing and selling airplanes to their salesmen. As “[b]ad roads and poor train schedules used up lots of time” in non-productive travel, in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Alexander gambled that its best salesmen would leap at the chance to cheaply purchase an airplane to simultaneously expand their zone of influence while reducing the cost of travel to established areas.\footnote{219} Selling what they named the ‘Eaglerock,’ a two-seat plane, for $2475 to salesmen (who were making roughly $10,000 per year in

\footnote{217} \textit{“Alexander Film Company – Scrapbook, 1919-1923,”} p. 1, 8, 57, 59, Box 11, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
\footnote{218} In early January of 1933, Alexander reported that 2,374 playlets had been produced in 1932, and that 11,145 playlets had been produced in the previous nine years combined. Simple math produces the numbers above. The caveat about inflating the numbers of early years is rendered clear by the jarring difference between the average yearly rate of 1,096 and the 1932 rate which was more than twice as high despite being called a “tragic” year. R.A. Duncan, “Proof of Progress,” and C.J. Shaw, “1933 – The Year to Work and Build,” in \textit{Weekly Animator} 6.1 (7 January 1933), p. 1, 9, 11, Box 7, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
\footnote{219} J. Don Alexander, [Letter From the President], \textit{Alexander Cooperator} July 1925, p. 2, Box 8, Folder 1, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
commissions), provided Alexander with a second revenue stream and allowed them to profit further from the greater reach of their best salesmen. Thirty salesmen had ordered planes before a single aircraft left the assembly line. Alexander’s already broad national reach expanded even further.

In this assembly of a national distribution and sales system for a fundamentally local advertising medium, the Alexander Film Company became (and remained) the largest company in the field. Using economies of scale to simultaneously increase quality and minimize costs, Alexander perfected the stock trailer, opened itself up to income from custom trailers, and maintained strong working relationships with all involved parties: from small town toy stores to major goods manufacturers; from mom-and-pop theaters in small Midwestern towns, to multi-state chains in the densely populated coasts. The Alexander Film Company nationalized the stable but stagnant trailer industry, and dominated output for the next several decades.

Conclusion

The introduction and standardization of trailer advertising, over the latter half of the 1910s, is emblematic of the rapidly codifying theory of advertising in moving media. The form was a specifically cinematic one in its aesthetics and tone, as pleasurable and humorous content was used to create direct advertising without overtly rational argumentation. Tied to the national shift away from ‘reason why’ advertising and towards modern electric hyperactivity, trailer ads

---


221 J. Don Alexander, [Letter From the President], *Alexander Cooperator* July 1925, p. 2, Box 8, Folder 1, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.
were emotional more often than cerebral, mobile rather than stable, and so pleasing as to be a form of entertainment in themselves. As such, the sense that advertising must not only occur onscreen, but be made as a motion picture, normalized, as the notion of the passive audience (or pacified audience, as animation proponents would have it) led advertisers to obsess over onscreen placement of advertising, to the exclusion of the rest of the venue. A ‘captive audience’ receiving pleasurable commercial stimulation led to the perfection of the slide in the trailer form. As an industry grew around this form of production, it developed cost effective methods for producing spectacularly brief and kinetic images of dancing products and jumbling copy, producing the model for broadcasting and the online video spot of the future.

However, the nearly simultaneous increase in film length, and the corresponding decrease in ‘gaps’ in the program, forced this impressive form into a minor role at the intermission between turns of the program. Cultural discomfort with integrating advertising into the first ‘temporal’ entertainment medium, pushed the advertising into the closest approximation possible of print advertising’s ‘spatial’ organization: the pre-/post-program buffer zone. As such, the commercial ‘spot’ – effectively a form of ‘participating sponsorship’ funding local exhibitors rather than national entertainment producers – was born and streamlined predominantly in motion picture theaters of the latter half of the 1910s. In their eventual onscreen but marginal position (in the intermission), the cinema ‘playlet’ helped to define the motion picture experience – including the establishment of a time-based entry model, and reifying the idea that commercialism was an outsider to the cinema, to be inserted only in clearly labeled and unobtrusive areas. Early experiments in commercial broadcasting kept this ‘playlet’ form at the margins for decades. With early broadcasting’s focus on the big network programs, and broadcast historians’ traditional (and justifiable) focus on the same, the long but marginal history
of the pre-broadcasting ‘spot’ has remained on the sidelines.\footnote{For a study of the hidden history of spot advertising in early radio, see: Alexander Russo, \textit{Points on the Dial: Golden Age Radio Beyond the Networks} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).} By the time the ‘minute movie’ attained a place of prominence in 1950s television, its origin in the cinema went largely unremarked.
CHAPTER 5. WATCH THIS SPACE: PERIPHERAL ADVERTISING THROUGH TECHNOLOGIES

You Must Invest Thousands to Make the Front of the Chair a Profit Producer; You Need Invest a Few Hundred to Make the Back of the Chair Bring you in as Great, if Not Greater Profits.

- Inter-state Vending Company (1914)¹

In August of 1915, regular Moving Picture World columnist Epes Winthrop Sargent – resident expert on publicity for exhibitors – felt moved to disagree with a letter from an exhibitor defending the practice of onscreen advertising. Sargent’s response was largely identical in theory to the bulk of published opposition to screen advertising – citing the difference between the optionality of most advertising and that which is forced upon the patron through inclusion on the cinema screen. His choice of counter example, however, was unique and raises the specter of an obvious alternative to onscreen advertising which has, as yet, gone unmentioned in the body of this study. Opting to compare the cinema not to magazines but to the stage theater, Sargent declared that

[t]he screen advertisement is not the same as the advertisement on the wall. It is thrust upon the patron. He must read it whether he wishes to or not. [...] He comes in to see pictures and not the advertisement of Smith’s skin cure or Jones’ grape juice. He resents being compelled to read the stuff and he resents the interruption to the performance. [...] A manager, if he wishes, may plaster his walls with advertisements and fill up his program with them until it becomes valueless to himself or anyone else, but the screen is his stage. He should not permit the advertising slide any more than a dramatic theater should permit a sandwich man to walk on and spoil the realism of a performance.²

¹ Two-Page Display Ad, Motography 11.9 (2 May 1914): 30-31. Though this advertisement was for an automated candy machine installed on chair backs, and therefore was technically not part of the movement for consumer goods advertising in theaters, the tone of the advertisement caught the spirit of offscreen advertising technology better than the inventors themselves. The assertion that the venue was the source of easy profits, as opposed to the ‘thousands’ it took to perfect the appeals of the screen, is the same as those advocating ad placement in the margins.

For Sargent to compare the advertising slide to a sandwich board on a theater stage is in and of itself interesting for multiple reasons – not least of which is the conundrum of whether this would be ‘compulsory’ or more like product placement, and why exactly sandwich men advertising real world products did not qualify, in Sargent’s mind, as ‘realism.’ More important for the present discussion, however, is his telling revelation of the specific spatial relations of the theater. The screen was, indeed, not the same as the wall…but they did reach the same crowd.

Sargent’s response, though it gives no space to actual examples of such practices, is an indicator of the fault lines in consumer goods advertising in silent era theaters. Debate over the ways and means of in-cinema consumer goods advertising did not restrict themselves to the screen. As such, the slide crisis of roughly 1913 (see chapter three) added impetus to not one but two forms of counter-theorizing. The more common response to slides was that they irritated the audience by being disjunctive, resulting in the invention of the consumer goods trailer to approximate a ‘moving’ slide (see chapter four). A minority of advertising proponents and exhibitors, however, stressed not the lack of motion in slides, but their unavoidable hijacking of the screen. In order to retain the profit from sales of advertising, but move advertising slides off the screen, a proliferation of technology patents appeared, designed to create alternative advertising sites somewhere within the cinema venue.

Abandoning the ‘psychic infection’ theory of cinema spectatorship altogether (see chapter two), peripheral advertising proponents reconceived the theater as a site of active audiences. This contingent of advertising thinkers was operating in line with previous, venue based types of advertising (like billposting and magazines), in which the advertisements were included alongside the entertainment, to be perused or ignored at the viewer’s discretion. These advertising proponents argued for a stress on optionality rather than temporality – using the
cinema’s status as not just medium but venue – as a way around the problem of irritation from compulsory attention. In theatrical performance, this mode of advertising was not without precedent. Although advertising on the drop curtain between the acts was the most common form of stage advertising, border drapes often included advertising signs as well, visible throughout the performance.\(^3\) Even in motion picture venues, the idea had a track record.

Airdomes – open air ‘theaters’ designed to provide a less stifling experience in summers, in which a vacant lot with a screen at one end was enclosed with a fence – were often funded through the selling of space on the fences, both outside and inside the ‘theater,’ for advertising purposes.\(^4\) Even the printing of advertising matter on handbills could be seen as a precursor of this peripheral advertising practice, in which optional viewing theoretically defused audience irritation.

Acting on the notion that advertising worked best when it was “visible at all times without interfering in the least with the…motion picture,”\(^5\) cinema oriented tinkerers devised a mass of offscreen technologies designed, between 1912 and 1927, to include advertising somewhere other than the main screen of a movie theater. Designed specifically to blend into

---

\(^3\) New York’s Turner Company even encouraged early film theater operators to adopt these advertising curtains by offering them free, presuming that the advertising income would, in short order, pay for the cost of the curtains themselves. This particular advertisement was geared towards theaters running both films and vaudeville acts, and as such it is also a perfect microcosm of the transition from stage advertising concepts to cinematic ones. Display Ad, *Moving Picture World* 6.5 (5 February 1910): 152. Curtain distributor F.M. Tisdale Enterprises, when moving to Chicago, also used advertising curtains as a means to pay for its plan to distribute free samples. Offering their ‘Daylight Curtain’ for free, in exchange for one-year of advertising on the included drop curtain, Tisdale implicitly promoted advertising as a cost-free means to improve the house. “Tisdale Enterprises Locate in Chicago,” *Moving Picture World* 9.10 (16 September 1911): 793.

\(^4\) A correspondent to the *Moving Picture World* noted that “[m]ost of the airdomes we have noticed up to the present time look more like billboards than they do like theatres. It seems to be the fashion to reserve a small section of the enclosure for an entrance and turn the remainder over to the bill-poster and sign-painter, who decorate it in their usual crazy-quilt fashion…inside and outside.” The author of this article derided the practice for its lack of aesthetic appeal – a critique which, as we shall see, was persistent for all offscreen advertising. “The Airdome Season,” *Moving Picture World* 8.17 (29 April 1911): 934. A later article by regular *World* columnist Epes Winthrop Sargent asserted that the use of airdome space for advertising was acceptable, provided “the space nearest the entrance [w]ould be held for the house to the extent of the width of six sheets on each side.” Epes Winthrop Sargent, “Advertising for Exhibitors: Plenty of Poster Space,” *Moving Picture World* 16.10 (7 June 1913): 1022.

modern American cinema spaces, the bulk of patents were created with electricity and drew the eye towards lighted objects in a darkened space. Much like William Leach’s description of the rise of modern department store displays featuring glass, light, and spectacle to link consumption and the technological future, theater tech was a flashy window onto a world of consumption, bringing consumer-goods into the theater much as display windows brought them onto the streets. These concepts ranged from stacks of glowing advertisements flanking the screen, to seat back advertising, to complex advertising clocks.

As this chapter synthesizes the similarities between disparate ‘media,’ it will be structured somewhat differently from previous chapters. There will be no clear historical progression section, as there is none to be told; many of these technologies were, at best, adopted sporadically, and as such there is little evidence for a coherent developmental pattern for an ‘offscreen advertising’ industry. Instead, the primary material will be separated into three blocs – ‘frame’ technologies, ‘public service’ technologies, and advertising clocks (a line-crossing technology blending frame and public service elements). Each block will contain its own rhetorical analysis, leading into a synthesizing analysis at the end of the chapter.

---


7 Early cinema analyst Siegfried Kracauer would likely have seen this differently: as an element of heightened consumer manipulation, rather than admission that viewers were critical. Kracauer argued, in an essay published in 1926, that the opulence of palatial theaters added to an atmosphere of distraction which, rather than allowing for viewer choice, overwhelmed the viewer with imagery thereby shutting down critical faculties. For Kracauer, “[t]he stimulations of the senses succeed each other with such rapidity that there is no room left for even the slightest contemplation to squeeze in between them.” However, there is no evidence in the descriptions cited throughout the rest of this chapter that American advertisers and advertising technology inventors were thinking this way. American advertising thinkers were not (overtly) attempting to subvert critical faculties through offscreen placement. Siegfried Kracauer, “Cult of Distraction: On Berlin’s Picture Palaces,” trans. Tom Levin, New German Critique 40 (Winter 1987), 94.
Rethinking the Theater and Its Relationship to Advertising

By the mid-1910s, though filmed advertising was still developing, the positives and negatives of lantern slide advertising seemed relatively clear to most film men. They provided a small amount of income which could be inflated further by trading in monopoly contracts and keeping the total number of ads small, but they annoyed patrons and, if inserted into the program in larger quantities, cut the amount of time that could be devoted to running films. From the advertisers’ perspective, onscreen advertising was also problematically impermanent – or, as it would be termed in later critiques of radio, ‘fleeting’\(^8\) – and required extremely memorable copy in order to make a lasting impression in the few seconds that the audience could see it. For those exhibitors who did not mind the intrusion of advertising into their theater, but wanted to avoid the issues of impermanence and irritation that came with placement onscreen, several inventors concocted technologies which allowed an entire collection of advertisements to crowd around the theater without landing on the screen itself. Allowing for most slide conditions to persist – roughly a dozen ads, contracted space, ease and cheapness of replacement – but moving the ads off of the screen was a possibility requiring only a reevaluation of the motion picture theater as a venue.

In this light, the theater was reconsidered not as a single ‘window’ through which one viewed an unceasing flow of images, but as a venue capable of a multiplicity of entertainments and distractions. As such, the theater, for these men, was more like travel down a busy street or like a precursor of broadcasting’s multiple channels. Road travel, either on foot or by car, was coming more and more to be defined by an atmosphere of multiplicity. Billboards were springing up with greater and greater frequency as distractions breaking into a journey to which

---

they were otherwise unrelated. In the commercial districts, more and more eye catching window displays disrupted a stroll down the sidewalk in an attempt to draw attention away from the perceived goal of the walker. Reconceiving the cinema experience as a metaphor for travel, the advertising literally became theatrical billboards – marginalia littering the environment in an attempt to turn one’s thoughts from the goal to a sales pitch.

Frames

The simplest means of retaining all cinema advertising theory and practice, but repackaging it as a form of ‘billboard,’ was a concept which I would term the advertising ‘frame’: a collection of inventions which shared a single goal – the creation of an array of lighted advertising signs placed around the central film image. The concept of the frame arose, like all of these technologies, as a direct response to the slide crisis and the audience’s growing desire to get slides off the screen. Indeed, in the middle of 1912, as the slide industry was suffering through the low ebb of its public image, the operator of the New Isis Theater in Denver first proposed the frame concept. The man, unnamed in the publication of his letter, declared his desire to use a slide projector – presumably showing a single slide with a large blank space in the middle for the motion picture – to create “a border around the picture, announcing the big features.” While he was proposing ‘coming attractions’ content rather than consumer goods advertising, this Denver man produced the first clear historical example of the concept of framing the film screen with advertising matter. The response by Moving Picture World exhibition specialist F.H. Richardson was, in keeping with his loathing of all forms of in-cinema advertising, “I do not believe I would like that very well.”

9 This ‘call and response’ between a technologically inflected advertising concept and Richardson’s dislike of ‘distracting’

advertising matter in the vicinity of the screen, would be the hallmark of frame technology throughout the 1910s, as new technologies were patented, built and used…and irritated Richardson to no end whenever he encountered them.

At least four versions of the frame concept were filed for patent in the United States between 1915 and 1920, although it is probable that many other versions were sold and installed without patent protection. New Yorker Frank C. Thomas was, to my knowledge, first on the scene with a patented design specifically for this purpose, filing his ‘light diffusing’ array for patent in 1915 – a patent which he then “assigned” to the United Exhibitors’ Advertising Corporation of Wilmington, Delaware, for production and sale. Diffusion of light is technological shorthand for completely shielding a light source from view and reflecting it back into the room off of a surface, resulting in a ‘softer’ form of light. Thomas used the notion of diffusion to create what he considered to be unobtrusive advertising, as it provided “a sufficient but not a brilliant” lighting of advertising signs to make them visible without making them a distraction. He suggested, in his patent, the placement of a stack of light diffusers on each side of the screen which would produce two towers, with a quantity of slots “adjusted to the needs of the advertisers” interested in the theater – in the patent, the presumed standard number of slots was eight per side.10

Harry Verran and Alfred R. Groetz, of Minneapolis, patented a concept effectively identical to Thomas’ in 1919, with the same strengths and weaknesses. Using light box technology rather than diffusion – in which a light bulb was placed directly behind a sign, with the light passing through cut out letters – Verran and Groetz attempted to streamline the

10 Frank C. Thomas, “Display Apparatus,” U.S. Patent 1,252,629, filed 1 November 1915, and issued 8 January 1918. Filed again, with better technical descriptions, as: Frank C. Thomas, “Method of Combining Advertising with Amusement or Instruction,” U.S. Patent 1,200,399, filed 15 June 1916, and issued 3 October 1916. In deference to the first patent as both foundational and less ‘techy’ in its mode of address, I draw all quotes and descriptions from it; however, all ideas are restated, though often rewritten, in the latter patent.
rhetorical appeal of the concept by directly linking it to the slide model of advertising. They adopted the term ‘slide’ for their own light box slots, on the grounds that these too were ad images held between two plates of glass. Though Verran & Groetz proposed ten slots per side of the screen as their standard size, inexplicably calling this size ‘preferable,’ their system, like Thomas’, also allowed for variation to meet the needs of a given theater. Although the cost of materials would have been greater, in all important respects the design of Verran & Groetz differed in no way from Thomas’. It was a cheap (the advertiser could simply “cut [letters] out of a sheet of opaque paper”) means to retain advertising while moving it off the screen.11

Silent era director T. Hayes Hunter – working in Hollywood by the date of his invention – filed for patent a third variation on the theme. In Hunter’s patent, which was geared (predictably) towards production companies rather than exhibitors, he proposed a new means of printing films which would mask part of the image and create a space for advertising on the edges of the screen. Designed to produce a permanent iris, Hunter’s concept was to print the film with an oval mask which would have kept the four corners of the negative from registering on the positive print. Running the film through the printer a second time, one could then append “a still picture or scene in the border or corner of the motion picture, which w[ould] persist unchanged in the vision of the spectators…without breaking into the thread of the drama,” as in product placement or in unrelated advertising slides between the reels. The result would have been an oval shaped entertainment film with from one to four advertising messages perpetually hanging from the corners. Hunter effectively created the earliest version of what we now know as the television advertising ‘bug’ (with his direct mention of “still picture[s]” implying that

---

11 Harry Verran and Alfred R. Groetz, “Advertising Device,” U.S. Patent 1,321,863, filed 10 March 1919, and issued 18 November 1919. The only practical difference between this proposal and Thomas’, that I can detect, was that the bulb – given adoption of the ‘cut out letters’ model – would have been incompletely shielded from view. It stands to reason that Verran & Groetz’s tech would have irritated viewers slightly more than Thomas’ as the light would shine directly into the eyes of many viewers.
moving corner ads were a plausible variant). Hunter had the much broader intention of not only replacing slides as an advertising medium, but also amplifying the quality of sponsorship advertising (by producing “a much more lasting impression” than a brief opening title announcement), and improving product placement (by removing the need for direct connection to the narrative). Its problems were two fold, however. Firstly, it was a producer oriented technique; as film prints circulated to multiple theaters, it was the producer, not the exhibitor, who would have been signing advertising contracts and (presumably) retaining the dollars. Hunter’s technique, therefore, did nothing to defuse exhibitor hostility toward advertising on their screens for which they were not being paid. Secondly, the advertisements were permanent; once an ad was printed into the corners of the film, that print could never be changed. As such, it was likely a much more expensive form of advertising, as the national advertiser would have either had to pay for each individual screening of a print, or simply buy the copy outright. In each case, the popularity of the film (as yet unknown and difficult to estimate in advance) would have become a major factor in advertiser interest. Hunter’s concept was, therefore, probably unworkable for traditional Hollywood releases, and was unlikely to have been adopted by film production companies for use with entertainment films. However, had the American film industry been less hostile to advertising, popular older films could have been re-released with significant advertiser funding (as a form of sponsorship) – allowing them to circulate cheaply to low-end theaters for a break in ticket price, or to free-admission venues. In either case, the mode was a frame technology, with “the advertising matter…[not] covering any portion of the film necessary to show the action of the story.”

---

12 T. Hayes Hunter, “Advertising Film and Method of Producing the Same,” U.S. Patent 1,426,567, filed 6 November 1919, and issued 22 August 1922.
Evansville, Indiana’s Henry Miedreich patented a projector based concept in 1920, which evaded many of the problems of the Hunter patent. In Miedreich’s patent, the ad boxes would have been created by an independent device, allowing them to be altered at will, and allowing the exhibitor to draw the revenue. Miedreich’s invention was, effectively, a modified magic lantern – designed to project the image of eighteen to twenty ads simultaneously (the two drawings in the patent were not made in the same scale). In the center was a gap for the film to unspool unmolested – like the proposed frame from the operator in Denver discussed above. When in operation, Miedreich’s stereopticon would have had an appearance between Hunter’s iris and Thomas’ diffusers. The film would be crowded by advertisements sharing the screen, but the ads would have been unrelated squares, rather than an oval shadow obscuring part of the frame. Like Verran & Groetz, Miedreich directly played to slide advertisers, using ‘slide’ as the term for each individual ad in his projector. However, his technology was also the most problematic. Advertisers would have needed a different copy style for slides projected at a smaller size, and audiences would have had to deal with the potential problems caused by the overlapping of two beams of light in roughly the same space.

The patents – the only real source of pro-frame rhetoric available – put forth a compelling argument for the use of wall space as a way to preserve association with the screen without forcing a pause in the entertainment. The most boisterous advocate was Frank C. Thomas; this is not entirely surprising, as he was the inventor the first technology known to be placed on the market for sale, and the originator of a concept is always faced with a higher level of inherent doubt than his imitators. Thomas asserted that onscreen advertising was a natural irritant which would cause “[a]ttendance…to fall off rapidly…[so that] the pecuniary return for the advertising

---

d[id] not compensate for lost patrons,” Thomas asserted that his invention was the solution to this “most complicated” problem. In attempting to pull advertising dollars away from the faltering slide industry, Thomas was bald faced about his invention’s appeal to advertisers more than spectators, as he asserted that the goal of the technology was that “the display of advertising [would be] so associated with the main screen that…the illuminated display [could not] fail to attract the eye” at some point during the show. The technology allowed for the placement of sixteen or so contracted advertisements (conspicuously an ‘improvement’ to the typical number of lantern slide ads: twelve per program), while simultaneously bowing to the desires of the audience not to be “tricked into reading advertising matter when expecting other things.” Inventing a site which was used exclusively for advertising, yet was still very near the focal point of attention, allowed Thomas to seemingly have the strengths of all concepts: (almost) certain attention, perpetual visibility, and a supposed absence of ‘trickery.’ Verran & Groetz, two years after Thomas, made nearly identical claims about onscreen compulsion versus marginality, and the value of permanent visibility, asserting that the value of the device was the ability avoid “the unfavorable impression…produced by having the advertisements forced upon them to the exclusion of the pictures.” They likewise asserted that the audience could thus attend to the advertising at a time of their choosing, whether it be during a reel change, after they had seen the entire program, while taking a pause to relieve eye ‘fatigue,’ or even at a moment when a “particular portion of the picture exhibition does not prove of interest.” Miedreich also suggested that his technology allowed the advertising to occur “without interfering in the least

14 Frank C. Thomas, “Display Apparatus,” U.S. Patent 1,252,629, filed 1 November 1915, and issued 8 January 1918.
with the moving picture.”\textsuperscript{16} Though Hunter’s phrasing has few parallels, his obsession with permanence as an avenue to ‘subconscious’ impact differs little from the rhetoric of permanent visibility expounded by others.\textsuperscript{17} In short, the bulk of these inventors implied that a bad film was like an onscreen advertisement: a compulsory experience to be assiduously avoided. Openly engaging in a parasitical relationship, the inventors offered a means to prey on moments of frustration, boredom, and eye strain through the offer of alternative material.

In short, there is an admission, across the patents, of both the strengths and weaknesses of cinema theater advertising: it was desirable enough as a medium that exhibitors were being encouraged to see major expenses and changes to their venue layout as plausible ways to retain it; however the audience was reluctant enough to the notion of temporal force (showing nothing but an ad at a given point in the program) that pulling the ads out of the flow of the program was also seen as central to advertising’s cinematic future. Frank C. Thomas openly declared that the integration of a commercial marketing message into a stream of entertainment required such a jarring change of mindset that it would “caus[e] one naturally to resent the drawing of one’s attention so abruptly to advertising matter.” For Thomas, resentment was practically biological.\textsuperscript{18} There was also a nearly unanimous interest in cheapness of production, implying that advertisers needed to be lured to in-cinema experimentation by a comparatively low cost per thousand.


\textsuperscript{17} T. Hayes Hunter, “Advertising Film and Method of Producing the Same,” U.S. Patent 1,426,567, filed 6 November 1919, and issued 22 August 1922.

\textsuperscript{18} Compare this to Hugo Münsterberg’s nearly simultaneous public comments about the interleaving advertising with magazine content. For Münsterberg, entertainment and advertising required two different mental states, and the mixing of the two thus created a “feeling of irritation.” Therefore, integrating advertising onto pages with content did a disservice to both the advertiser and the reader. Hugo Münsterberg, “Social Sins in Advertising,” \textit{Psychology and Social Sanity} (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1914), 243-244.
Regardless of the success of any given application of the concept, it is clear that the idea was persuasive for at least a brief time, as variants of the frame model became quite common in some locations between 1915 and 1917. As this timeframe corresponds to the years when self-advertising, philanthropy, and war were combining to push slide and trailer advertising into the margins of the program, it is possible that the frame concept was less a response to the slide crisis, that to the problem of continuing to integrate, and profit from advertising after the encroachment of film studios and politics on the intermissions. (Indeed, it is telling that T. Hayes Hunter used “Buy War Saving Stamps” as the sample image in his patent, directly connecting his studio-oriented technology to the patriotic advertising which the industry had recently been pushing.\(^{19}\)) Whatever the reasons, the Moving Picture World uncovered multiple uses of advertising signage near the screen in 1917. Indeed, no less a person than ‘Roxy’ Rothapfel even proposed, in 1916, that exhibitors deal with spectator irritation at onscreen advertising by “establishing a regular billboard” around the screen.\(^{20}\)

However, the bulk of the information comes from F.H. Richardson – the World’s expert on projection – who was sent on a tour of American cinemas in 1917…and who manifestly despised the practice. Richardson, without fail, asserted or implied that positioning of lighted advertising matter near the screen was tactless and distracting. In an April 1917 issue of the Moving Picture World, he heavily criticized Nashville’s Strand theater for placing alongside the screen “an advertising announcement board with…five or six lines of letters in white lights” (along with a clock and two exit signs, both also lit). The habitually cranky author called the scene damaging to the eyes and “distracting immensely.”\(^{21}\) The very next week, he found the

---

\(^{19}\) T. Hayes Hunter, “Advertising Film and Method of Producing the Same,” U.S. Patent 1,426,567, filed 6 November 1919, and issued 22 August 1922.


\(^{21}\) “Richardson Lets Out a Link,” Moving Picture World 21 April 1917: 415.
same problem at Pearce’s Tudor theater in New Orleans, which also had “an announcement board containing…six lines of illuminated white letters.” Noting also the presence of a lighted clock (with advertising), and six other inexplicable red lights, he walked out of the theater complaining of their attempt to “murder the picture.”

In July, he discovered that “most of the houses” in Topeka, Kansas were running an advertising stereopticon (magic lantern) “[b]eside the screen,” rotating the slide every thirty seconds. An extraordinarily simplistic version of the frame concept, Richardson called it “very, very bad…from the projection point of view.” Later that month, he mentioned the “‘shadow box’ of light colored advertising cards” surrounding the screen at the Orpheum in Centerville, Iowa. Although he offered no direct condemnation, it is very clear, from his subsequent description of the Majestic as a “fine little house,” that he disapproved of the Orpheum’s practice. By early 1918, the ‘frame’ at the Crystal Theater in Chicago – in which “several bright lettered illuminated signs advertis[ed] future programs…on the wall not far from the screen” – received a simple condemnation as “not good practice,” despite the lack of any obvious light leakage. By this point, Richardson was so fed up with the concept that its very existence was deemed a problem in need of correction. Richardson, though accepting of variations in practice from house to house, was not willing to give an inch to advertising that had even a highly circumscribed impact on the projection of the program. If it impacted the viewing of the film in any way, it was a poor practice. With one of the foremost

---

22 “Richardson Going Strong,” *Moving Picture World* 28 April 1917: 596-597. The parallel descriptions and geographical nearness of these two examples leads me to believe that the advertising board described is the previously unknown product of a fifth inventor / company in the ‘frame advertising’ field. The description would largely fit the Verran & Groetz tech (not filed for patent until 1919), but the date and the description of it as an ‘announcement board’ appear incorrect.


25 [F.H. Richardson], “Richardson Visits Chicago and St. Louis,” *Moving Picture World* 36.8 (25 May 1918): 1147.
projection experts in the country vehemently critiquing the practice, it is no wonder that even lower-end theaters abandoned the practice before long.\textsuperscript{26}

Despite the number of examples Richardson discovered on his tour, the dearth of any national advertising of technologies like this in the trade presses implies that adoption was never great. The failure of the technology to catch on can be explained in a number of ways. First and foremost was the opposition of Richardson. Both technological failures leading to light pollution, and the threat of annoying one’s audience with the distraction, were likely to keep many exhibitors from taking the plunge (especially in the wake of Richardson’s perpetual public condemnation of the practice). A further issue was apparent, however: for exhibitors, there was an inherent cost barrier. All of the technologies would have required a significant start-up cost for use despite the dearth of any positive testimonials. While any company selling such a device may have had testimonials which they shared in private, there were no publically known examples of the concept working as promised. Indeed, only ‘Roxy’ Rothapfel spoke publically of the concept without complete derision. Though the wording of Frank C. Thomas’ second patent implied that he had personally operated a theater in which this technology had given favorable results,\textsuperscript{27} it seems unlikely that many theaters would want to go to all the installation

\textsuperscript{26} Two moments of advertising on the walls (farther from the main screen than was generally deemed necessary) did occur in at least two theaters. In 1915, a theater called the Empire (city unknown, but it was “on Bank Street”) put advertising cards all over the side walls “more or less like…a streetcar.” In reporting the existence of these signs, the \textit{Moving Picture World} simply criticized them as not “harmoniz[ing] with the decorations of the theater.” In 1916, Lester Nichols (of the Gem Theater in Petersborough, NH) proposed the use of a lighted picture frame to “attract[their] attention, as it is different from a slide or any common way of advertising”. Columnist Epes Winthrop Sargent added further attention grabbing tactics by rigging a switch so that the sign could be illuminated only when the pictures stopped: “[t]he flashing into sight will attract attention where the constantly lighted sign soon becomes a part of the surroundings.” In neither case was a frame tech implied, but in neither case did the shift to the side walls imply a “convenience.” As such, both are outliers in my study and are best relegated to this footnote. Empire: “Puts Ads on Walls,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 23.4 (23 January 1915): 550. Gem: Epes Winthrop Sargent, “Advertising for Exhibitors: Lighted Announcements,” \textit{Moving Picture World} 29.4 (22 July 1916): 629.

\textsuperscript{27} Of the significant additional material in the second patent, two particular sentences contain revealing wording. Rather than talking about the invention in the abstract, Thomas at one point declares that it “has resulted in...greatly improved results.” Later, his description of the invention is shifted from dry information to an active voice in which he uses phrases like “I project” and “I display.” Presumably, the later patent was written after some practical
expense for a technique that was not proven to reduce spectator irritation at advertisements. Verran & Groetz technology would have been even more expensive, as it would have required not just lighting and ad-card holders, but the multiple panes of glass and the cost of materials to construct closed boxes so as not to lead to the common problem of light ‘smears’ across the screening space. Meidreich’s tech required the exhibitor to purchase an entirely new projection device. Even Hunter’s patent – which would have been adopted by studios not exhibitors – would have required an additional stage of printing, adding significantly to the cost of any negative. In no case would it have been easy to try-out these technologies without potentially putting the user in financial danger, should the tech fail immediately.

‘Public Service’ Tech

The most pronounced issue with frame technologies was their encroachment on the screen without added anything of value to the film experience aside from moving the advertising off the screen. For those viewers and exhibitors opposed to advertising on grounds larger than opposition to a compulsory pause, practices both less encroaching and more justifiable were required. Other technologies, therefore, were invented in the same era which covered their advertising nature with a patina of practical use value. An old concept – tied to the same logic as using advertising slides for political information, and describing industrial films as ‘educational’ – providing either valuable information or some other supposed convenience was assumed to weaken audience resistance to advertising. In the case of these technologies, it was intended that the audience be convinced that advertising was necessary to fund an experiential improvement.28

experience with the product in a real theatrical setting. Frank C. Thomas, “Method of Combining Advertising with Amusement or Instruction,” U.S. Patent 1,200,399, filed 15 June 1916, and issued 3 October 1916.

28 The concept persists as one of the most common ways to advertise or market without seeming pushy. See, for example, the online ‘long tail’ concept, currently in use by Amazon.com, among others, in which each product page
Slide, film, and ‘frame’ advertising rhetoric may have achieved a notion of utility from the exhibitor’s perspective – as the income could offset cost of operation – but the audience was unlikely to recognize the added benefit of a mountain of advertising signs shining directly at them. The advertising content would likely have seemed disproportional to the financial value, especially if they did not see either a sharp rise in show quality or, more likely, an even sharper break in ticket prices. Many diverse products and technologies were designed in the silent era with this problem in mind, and which therefore attempted to foreground the use value of the object, while appending advertising only as a side feature. These marginally located items were intended to act as an object of interest not only if the viewer became bored with the current film, but if they wished to investigate or appreciate the other elements of the theater in which they were sitting. These technologies, in order to downplay the advertising content and seem to stress the wishes of the audience first-and-foremost, tended to be placed farther from the screen and blatantly stressed their own utility.

Perhaps the simplest example of ‘public service’ technology was the ad-branded trash can. Though I have as yet found no patents specifically encouraging their use in motion picture theaters, such items had been patented for years in the United States (and would continue to be). Though most were designed for outdoor use, at least two patents openly stressed placement “in stores.” In 1914, Eugene B. Cooke and Chauncey O. Lewis, of New Philadelphia, Ohio, created a waste-basket enclosure offering advertising card holders on multiple sides,

29 George J. Richardson was, for example, a one-man avalanche of trash can patents. See, for example, patent 1,364,209 (filed 3 September 1919) among many others. One of the many values of Google to historical research is apparent in this Richardson patent, as the information page links to eighteen future patents which cited and built upon his design. The Cooke & Lewis patent (below) was also heavily cited by future inventors.
allowing for quick and cheap replacement of advertising signs. Samuel Leveen, of Anderson, Indiana, had a similar product filed for patent almost exactly a decade earlier, which not only offered space on the sides for advertising but which also included lighting to illuminate the signs; Leveen’s design could, therefore, easily have been adapted by the earliest permanent theaters in ways distinctly similar to the frame technologies. By the 1910s, with the rise of the motion picture theater as a venue where such items might be profitably used, it is implausible to presume that they were not intentionally experimented with as a form of cinema advertising.

As with all other forms of peripheral cinema advertising technology, however, most ‘public service’ technology was electric; in a cinema, objects of attention were objects of light. Tacoma, Washington’s Gloss H. Fowler, owner of the Fowler Sign Company, concocted the earliest known concept along these lines – a ‘light diffusing’ wall unit. Filed for patent in 1912 and therefore predating Frank C. Thomas’ remarkably similar ‘frame’ patent – Fowler’s technology was designed to provide the soft and “more restful” ambient light required in a silent era motion picture theater. At this time, it was believed (according to Fowler) that turning off the theater lights completely, even during projection, was said to make the theater “uninviting for the timid, particularly women and children.” Designing his device around a commonly felt audience need, Fowler used advertising as a means solely to reduce operating costs. In order “to suitably light a motion picture theater…with the least interference with the exhibition on the screen…and with the greatest comfort to the audience,” Fowler proposed placing his diffusers along the walls of the theater, at intervals. Almost as an afterthought, Fowler contended that,

32 Interestingly, Fowler actually proposed the frame concept as a variant use of his own patent technology, effectively giving him precedence for that concept as well.
rather than diffusing light by reflecting it off unadorned wall space, advertising signs would do
the job equally well and provide a little extra income for the theater. An added benefit was that
the signs, requiring no more expensive printing than a standard poster, could be changed at will
with little expense to either the advertiser or the exhibitor. As such, the advertising – requiring
more effort to see than the light – would hopefully have come across as unobtrusive and
acceptable, while also allowing inexpensive change of copy which would have pleased
advertisers.

A similar lighting patent was the glowing seat-back advertisements of Francis T. Hayes
from Richmond Hill, New York. Comparatively late – not filed for patent until 1927 – Hayes’
patent was an adaptation of old fashioned seat-back signs, a concept which predates motion
picture theaters. In Hayes’ patent, the signs were created with luminous “radium paint,”
allowing them to glow without the need for electricity. It is evident that Hayes had a more
complex notion of theatrical lighting needs than Fowler. The signs were designed to add to the
theater in two ways. First, they were an added “artistic and attractive lighting” element for the
house, designed to “brea[k] the monotony of a darkened theater.” They were, in short, an
attraction in their own right. Secondly, they were a cost-saving device. The seat-backs, rather
than simply providing general ambient light, were intended as a replacement for ushers.
Working from the notion that it was difficult for spectators to find a seat in a darkened theater,
Hayes’ glowing seat backs were designed as a simple way to reveal empty seats; the
phosphorous paint would have been visible to a standing patron, if there had been no spectator in
the seat to block the light. The seats at the edge of the aisles would also have provided a lighted

33 Gloss H. Fowler, “Lighting Fixture for Theaters and Public Halls,” U.S. Patent 1,054,759, filed 16 January 1912,
and issued 4 March 1913.
34 See the following patents for earlier examples of seat-back advertising (inventor name and filing date in
parentheses): 741,004 (S.W. Van Nostran, 22 August 1902); 769,868 (J.W. May, 24 August 1903); 784,590 (J.A.
Olson & P.D. Sherwin, 4 March 1904); 901,065 (H.L. Broad & F.H. Orcutt, 19 March 1908).
path for entrance and exit, as they would have been visible regardless of seat occupancy, due to the patron’s position to the side. As such, glowing signs, according to Hayes, would have “eliminat[ed] the present overhead expense necessary in darkened theaters in the employment of ushers with flashlights” to lead patrons safely into and out of the theater, even in the event of a loss of electrical power. 35 The seat-backs therefore provided a middle ground between the ‘frame’ advertisements and Fowler’s wall units: the advertising still seemed to serve a practical benefit, and could still be changed rapidly and cheaply, but was less possible to ignore as it was placed directly in front of the spectator. It was, unfortunately for Hayes, also a much more limited form of advertising, as any given sign could be seen by, at most, a few spectators. As such, it would have required either extreme cheapness of sign production – which is unlikely due to the need for special paint – or the renting of a massive number of spaces to a single advertiser. 36 Both of these problems would have rendered Hayes’ technology troubling to in-cinema advertisers accustomed to a low cost-per-thousand views as the most prominent description of the venue.

A much flashier – and in hindsight significantly less useful – technology was Norman T. Whitaker’s elapsed-time tracker. According to Whitaker, one convenience that motion picture theaters were not then providing was a revelation of the duration (both elapsed and remaining) of a given film. Whitaker’s invention was from the waning days of the dominance of short films, when a culture of ‘transient’ patrons were first learning to coordinate their entrance and exit from the theater to the ‘start’ and ‘end’ of the program (or, at least, to the feature). Whitaker argued that a patron might choose to delay entry until one film finished, and that a patron already within

35 Francis T. Hayes, “Theater, Hall, or the Like,” U.S. Patent 1,728,731, filed 8 March 1927, and issued 17 September 1929.
36 Indeed, seat back advertising may have resulted in an early version of the contemporary practice of ‘roadblocking,’ in which all advertising space in a particular venue is purchased by a single advertiser.
the theater, but with time constraints, “might stay somewhat longer if he knew there were only a few feet more of the [current] film to be shown.” As such, he invented a device which, when synchronized to the projector, would deliver periodic updates via a box onstage. The updates would have been rendered visible as light shining through cuts in a rolling paper strip. Whitaker then suggested that in the interim moments one could scroll other messages in front of the audience (like the patent’s example “Eat Smith’s Good Eats”). Whitaker’s concept was admittedly a bit more intrusive – as one would have been encouraged to read the box expecting a message about length and would instead have received an advertisement. It was, of course, also woefully impractical – as the modern day practice of a printed list of start and end times would have been cheaper and could even have been included in the handbill (resulting in the need only for a clock within the theater). Despite these problems, the idea remains the paragon example of ‘public service’ technologies, as it combined flashy technology, a beneficial convenience, and advertising all in one place.

In broad terms, these technologies of convenience were designed with a very different notion of both advertising and the cinema audience in mind. As mentioned at the outset of this section, these technologies attempted to invade the space not by crowding the entertainment, but by providing a service. As such, they tended to be much farther from the screen; with the possible exception of Whitaker’s elapsed time box (which may or may not have been placed

---

37 The centrality of features to this shift in the behavior of the cinema audience is apparent in the fact that Whitaker’s example drawing included a notice of “6000 Feet Now Shown” – a quantity of film which could only correspond to a feature film of at least seven reels (as each reel was 1000 feet in length). The clear implication of this image is that a spectator would much rather wait for the film to finish than enter or exit at this particular point.


39 It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the advertising element of the technology is the most understated in Whitaker’s patent. More than any of the other inventors, he clearly felt that he had created a valuable technology, and appended advertising as a secondary argument for adoption. It would be interesting to know, then, how many exhibitors he convinced to adopt the technology. Though impractical, its flashiness may have resulted in it being quite a widespread item.
directly beside the screen), the advertising integrated into such inventions was on the side walls, by the doors, and on the seats. As such, the inventors discussed advertising much more positively. For example, though Francis T. Hayes’ patent appears, at first glance, to echo the audience definition of Thomas, Verran, and Groetz, in asserting that his glowing seat-backs would “break the monotony of a darkened theater,” note the decided lack of cynicism in the phrasing. For Hayes, the cinema audience simply wanted pleasure – which could have been provided by the film, advertising, or simply by noticing clever lighting techniques. As such, these inventors were not only explicitly responding to spectator complaints about advertising – moving it decidedly to the periphery and making it more clearly voluntary – they were trusting that voluntary advertising would still be attended to. Their faith in the audience to seek the greatest pleasure, wherever it may be found, placed all elements of the theater on an even footing. The possibility of poor quality films on the screen (so vital in frame tech patents) was a non-issue for these inventors. The goal was a cost-effective improvement of the space.

At least one – Hayes’ phosphorous seat-backs, or a knock off – was put into use, though not particularly effectively. Reports of a lawsuit reveal that Hal Hodes had signed two-year contracts with theaters resulting in a total of 225,323 seats in 1928. The theaters were to be paid one dollar per seat per year, with the Thayer Advertising Corporation acting as space broker and retaining all income above that price. Alleging that he had not been paid commission for this work, he asserted that Thayer had erroneously claimed to have contracts with multiple national advertisers – including the Coca-Cola Company, the Wrigley Chewing Gum Company, and the Ward Baking Company – in hand. As Hodes won the suit (and was awarded, in 1932, a 23% commission – $104,900 for the $450,000 worth of contracted space) it can be presumed that
Thayer drastically overestimated the potential of the technology.\textsuperscript{40} That said, upwards of 1,000 theaters signed on with Hodes for this service. The failure was on the broker’s end, not the exhibitors’. Flashy peripheral ‘public service’ tech was, thus, still a workable technique as late as 1928.

\textit{Clocks}

Perhaps the single most important peripheral advertising concept proposed during the silent era was the advertising clock. The advertising clock blurred the lines between the advertising ‘frame’ and ‘public service’ technologies, and appears to have been the offscreen advertising technology most commonly integrated into the silent era theater experience. An advertising clock, as it was marketed to silent era theaters, was a high tech, peripherally projected variant of a lantern slide projector. Advertising clocks consisted both of a visible clock face, and a rotating sequence of advertising slides, which were projected simultaneously (often overlapping the clock image), on the theater wall. Nothing in their designs required a hijacking of the motion picture screen, or even placement on same wall – though, in fairness, all extant example drawings and descriptions placed the clocks right next to the screen in a position echoing frame technologies.

Although the concept of projecting ads within the wheel of a clock face had patent antecedents dating back to 1905,\textsuperscript{41} clocks specifically designed for cinema usage arose from one direct and one indirect cause in the early 1910s. Indirectly, they emerged in the wake of the slide crisis of the early 1910s, and may well have been inspired by the clock slides which had become


popular in 1912 and into early 1913 (see chapter three). Directly, a growing sense that overcranking during projection was a way for the theater to ‘chase-em-thru’ led F.H. Richardson to propose that theaters install clocks in plain view of the audience, so that they could see that the ‘one hour program’ promised was delivered.\(^4\) Although Richardson would come to loathe the light pollution caused by in-theater clocks, if his call in 1912 resulted in actual increased demand, then the appearance of advertising funded variants should not be surprising.

The earliest to directly offer a slide based advertising clock to motion picture theaters was the J.H. Genter Company, of Newburgh, NY, which offered its “Announceoscope” in the pages of the *Moving Picture World* during 1913.\(^4\) The General Sales Company of America, from Pittsburgh, offered a more basic contraption – dubbed the Wonder Clock – late that same year.\(^4\) It is easy (though perhaps inaccurate) to infer that neither product met with much success in the market: Genter’s Mirroroid Screen remained his most heavily advertised item as the Announceoscope drifted slowly out of the company’s self-advertising; General Sales abandoned the Wonder Clock little over a year later, selling their remaining stock for a cut rate at the end of 1914.\(^4\) However, at least five further companies would pick up the baton. The Kineto Machine Company of Chicago, and the Publicity Clock Company and Standard Manufacturing Company, both of New York, were all advertising the availability of their own advertising clocks, also in the *Moving Picture World*, by the latter half of 1915.\(^4\) Though they would not nationally advertise until 1917, in *Printers’ Ink*, New York’s Wonder Clock Advertising Company (no

\(^4\) F.H. Richardson, “Projection Department,” *Moving Picture World* 12.1 (6 April 1912): 44.
relation) also appeared in a 1915 New York directory. In 1917, the Kalck Safety Specialty Company, of Amityville, NY, received a small write up in Motography offering advertising clocks as well. At least one of the above companies – the Publicity Clock Company – was still actively selling space on the clocks of cinema theaters into the 1930s. As such, advertising clocks, like slides and trailers, persisted in cinema theaters long past the transitional era and were, for some filmgoers, a recognizable and regular element of their cinema experiences.

In general, there were three different types of clocks which could be purchased for use in motion picture theaters, ranging from the extremely simplistic to the relatively complex. The earliest was also the most complex. J.H. Genter’s ‘Announceoscope’ was an exceptionally useful technology – almost excessively so, as though Genter was attempting to provide as much ‘use value’ as possible to justify its inclusion in theaters. The Announceoscope could project a clock (either as a standard dial face or digital, depending on the model), while projecting a list of further information. In the sample layout on the patent, Genter provided a long space for the name of the current film to be displayed (thus labeling the screen so that patrons could follow along in the printed program, much like Whitaker’s elapsed time clock), along with two smaller squares for advertising messages. Slides, of apparently American standard size, would rotate automatically through the clock at whatever rate the theater chose – presuming they were


49 The author’s personal collection includes multiple signed contracts from the Publicity Clock Company for Brooklyn theaters two of which appear to be dated from 1938 (the handwritten number may, alternatively, be 1934). It is plausible that Publicity Clock rapidly bought out its largest competitor, Kineto; the self-advertising copy Publicity Clock was using in 1917 has strong parallels to Kineto’s ads from 1916. Display Ad, Moving Picture World 29.3 (15 July 1916): 550; and Display Ad, Moving Picture World 31.10 (10 March 1917): 1680.

50 Jacob H. Genter, “Automatic Annunciator,” U.S. Patent 1,147,501, filed 14 May 1913, and issued 20 July 1915. Genter filed two variant patents for the same device on the same day: 1,097,310 and 1,101,429.
labeling the films, the slides would likely only change every fifteen minutes. Although no information survives indicating the number of slides or advertising messages that the machine could hold, the flexibility of use of the device is indicative of both a creative mind and an unconventional product.

Rapidly, the machines streamlined. The General Sales Company’s Wonder Clock was the influential model. Projecting a round image with the advertisement contained within the dial of the clock, custom designed slides would rotate automatically through the projector.\(^{51}\) Although it is difficult to make out the images in the display advertising for the General Sales Company, the slides were presumably round, so as to fit neatly inside of the clock dial. This same round-slide design was adopted by Kineto, Kalck, Publicity Clock Company, and the later Wonder Clock Advertising Company. Although not all companies listed official numbers of slides slots within their machines, eight and twelve slot models appear to have been the norm. The most simplistic – the second, New York based Wonder Clock – used no rotation mechanism at all, allowing “but one product at a time [to] take advantage of th[eir] service”).\(^{52}\) Kineto and Publicity Clock both offered eight and twelve slot models, while the Kalck patent indicated an eight slot model as well.\(^{53}\) The Standard Manufacturing Company’s clock, though it used square slides, only offered six slots, and did not overlap the clock face and the advertisement (the maker opted instead for a stacked image), varied in no mechanical respects.\(^{54}\) All clocks which offered multiple slide slots also offered the convenience of infrequent winding, and the ability to select

\(^{51}\) Full-Page Display Ad, *Moving Picture World* 17.8 (23 August 1913): 867.

\(^{52}\) Display Ad, *Printers’ Ink* 98.5 (1 February 1917): 102.


the speed at which slides would change (for Publicity, the standard speed was a change every thirty seconds\(^55\)).

Unlike slides and trailers, either an exhibitor or a local agent was usually expected to purchase an advertising clock. Only the Wonder Clock Advertising Company gave any indication that they sold the space on their own clocks after installation. Offering, in their only known advertisement, to rent space on their clocks “in 75 leading moving picture houses” in New York, the company treated local cinemas like newsprint – integrating as much of New York’s filmgoing populace as possible and reaching them all simultaneously.\(^56\) For all other companies, clocks were likely a one-off. Whether or not assistance was offered in gathering advertisers, each clock was an individual item, purchased, owned, and operated primarily by the theater or regional representative. The costs of clocks for such exhibition varied unexpectedly widely. The General Sales Company claimed their wonder clock to be “a One Hundred and Twenty Five Dollar instrument,” but then sold their remaining inventory for the clearance price of $35 each in the very same ad.\(^57\) The Standard Manufacturing Company, however, sold their clocks for “$35 complete” – no clearance needed.\(^58\) A Minnesota lawsuit reveals that an agreeable price, in 1917, for Kineto clocks was $95 for the eight slide version, and $120 for the twelve slide model.\(^59\) Publicity Clock offered a profit to cost ratio of “$75 Weekly from a $500 Investment,” though this was clearly a dealer price and it is impossible to know whether this was


\(^{56}\) It appears that the Wonder Clock Advertising Company rented out all their clock space simultaneously. Apparently they had designed their advertising as a way to reach a significant portion of New York’s film going public, in an attempt to make local cinema circulation seem more like local newspaper circulation. Display Ad, *Printers’ Ink* 98.5 (1 February 1917): 102.


a profit and cost estimate for one clock or many.\footnote{Classified Ad, \textit{Cosmopolitan} July 1919: 165. The price quoted might have been, for example, five $100 clocks each returning $15 per week.} The costs, therefore, could be relatively exorbitant, and the assistance in rounding up advertisers to fill the spaces could be slight or nonexistent.

For such an investment, profit similar to that of slide and trailer advertising was promised. Genter promised “anywhere from 20 to 50 dollars weekly” in his 1913 ad.\footnote{Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 16.2 (12 April 1913): 197.} In 1915, Standard Manufacturing suggested charging “$2 to $5 weekly” for each of the six slide slots, producing “$600 to $1500 yearly profit.”\footnote{Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 26.2 (9 October 1915): 354.} The aforementioned, indecipherable promise of $75 from the Publicity Clock Company gets no clearer with two such extraordinarily different profit quotes. However, the fact that they were selling space in Brooklyn theaters for $1.25 per week in 1932 and $1.50 per week in 1938 implies that the initial profit estimate of $75 per week was for multiple clocks.\footnote{Three signed contracts from the author’s private collection list the following information. On 2 March 1932, a Brooklyn drug store signed a contract for a year of service at the Graham Theater at $1.25 per week. On 6 April 1938, the Glen Morris Meat Market signed a contract for sixteen weeks of service at the Farrell Theater for $1.50 per week. On 8 September 1938, a man (J. Barker?) signed a contract for twenty-eight weeks of service at the Echo Theater, also at the rate of $1.50 per week.} In either case, the purchaser of these clocks was intended to see them as a gravy train – effectively like buying their own medium to place within cinema venues which, once the device was paid off, would print money unfettered into a golden future.

Although the initial cost was an entry barrier, such clocks were used remarkably often. The Wonder Clock Advertising Company, of course, claimed to have 75 clocks scattered throughout New York in 1917.\footnote{Display Ad, \textit{Printers’ Ink} 98.5 (1 February 1917): 102.} The General Sales Company claimed that “hundreds of theaters” were using their ‘Wonder Clock.’\footnote{Full-Page Display Ad, \textit{Moving Picture World} 22.10 (5 December 1914): 1413.} The aforementioned Kineto lawsuit was for a broken contract which initially called for the purchase of 242 clocks to cover the Minnesota
While none of these claims can be taken entirely at face value, persistence is also an indicator of success. As the Kineto Machine Company was in operation for at least five years – in Chicago, a hub of advertising dollars – and its head, George Willens, invented similar clocks for years to come, one must assume that the device was relatively profitable. The Publicity Clock Company likewise seems to have turned a tidy profit for its owners, as the company persisted, as has been mentioned, into the late 1930s. Publicity Clock was profitable enough, in fact, that it suffered not one, but two forms of theft, without collapsing under the weight of financial losses or advertiser distrust. In 1916, salesman Harry Smith was caught “collecting money of the firm and appropriating it to his own use.” In an unknown year, the company circulated a card to its advertisers offering a reward for the capture of man who was collecting the business names from active clocks, and then presenting a bill for continuing the service – absconding with the funds. The fact that either of these acts of criminal behavior could provide enough income to be worth the risk indicates that Publicity Clock was turning quite a bit of profit. The weight of scant evidence implies, then, that the advertising clock found a comfortable niche in a small subset of theaters and had a reasonably long and profitable life.

69 “Notice to Advertisers,” Publicity Clock Company Advertising Cards and Brochures, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
70 There is some indication, however, that the industry could not sustain many clock makers at one time. For example, the Publicity Clock Company took out a legalistic self-advertisement in *Moving Picture World* in which they declared themselves to be “the sole…owners of the Automatic Advertising Clock” and cautioned “Exhibitors and others…against the use of devices infringing our patent rights.” Attempting to strong arm the competition through patents – misleadingly citing a 1914 filing which actually made no mention of clocks – Publicity appears to have tried, through devious methods, to undercut the sales of its competitors. The fact that other companies survived this threat implies its toothlessness. However, the fact that Publicity was the longest surviving company implies either that the approach had an effect, or that similar ruthless tactics played a part in their longevity. Display
The advertising clock phenomenon was, in fact, widespread enough that installations and territorial contracts were occasionally reported in the *Moving Picture World*. In 1916, the Empire Theater of Auburn, Indiana, installed an 8 slot model from an unidentified company.\(^{71}\) John C. Green, manager of the Temple Theater in Galt, Ontario, purchased the distribution rights for Kineto machines for the entire province.\(^{72}\) In February of 1916, F.H. Richardson had already given his blessing to the adoption of almost any such advertising clock by declaring that such a device was “the way” to integrate advertising into the cinema theater, as “several theater managers” had installed them and communicated a favorable impression.\(^{73}\) If even the notoriously anti-advertising *Moving Picture World* was willing to report clocks this often and this favorably, they were a blessed form of advertising indeed.

In any case, the sales rhetoric was simple and, as such, we can relatively safely assume that those exhibitors who did adopt the clock did so for one of two reasons: they needed a clock but couldn’t afford the added expense, or they needed the income from advertising but could not tolerate, or could no longer justify, an onscreen advertising break. Kineto sold its product under the former argument. Their self-advertising described the Kineto clock as “designed to meet a long felt want in furnishing theatres with an attractive time-piece that could be seen at all times by the entire audience.”\(^{74}\) Kineto and General Sales even went so far as to imply that such a

---

\(^{71}\) “Indiana Notes,” *Moving Picture World* 27.9 (4 March 1916): 1515. Later that same year, the Kineto company reprinted a letter from a customer in its display advertising, clearly indicating that Redmon’s Majestic in St. Louis was operating a Kineto clock. Display Ad, *Moving Picture World* 29.3 (15 July 1916): 550.


\(^{74}\) Display Ad, *Moving Picture World* 25.4 (24 July 1915): 748. Though he moved to Paducah, Kentucky in the early 1920s, before returning to Chicago by the early 1930s, Willens filed advertising clocks and ad-clock parts for patent as late as 1934. He filed at least one more clock for patent, in 1944, before his career as a clock designer ended. See the following patents, all George Willens: “Spring Motor,” U.S. Patent 1,496,572, filed 22 November 1921, and issued 20 July 1924; “Combination Clock and Sign,” U.S. Patent 1,846,928, filed 4 February 1931, and issued 23 February 1932; “Advertising Clock,” U.S. Patent 1,846,929 filed 10 June 1931, and issued 23 February 1932; “Advertising Clock,” U.S. Patent 1,852,869, filed 7 December 1931, and issued 5 April 1932; “Advertising
clock would draw business: Kineto called its clock “a decided and distinct attraction” for the
theater opting to use it; General Sales called their ‘Wonder Clock’ a “crowd puller” and praised
its ‘startling,’ looming size as a novelty that would, itself, attract a crowd. Kalck used the
latter, arguing that their clock could bring advertising revenue “without the delay that
intermissions often occasion.”

Printed opposition to advertising clocks was very limited, and skewed entirely towards
either technical malfunctions or inherent light pollution. All of the public criticism of
advertising clocks comes from Richardson’s nationwide critical tour of theaters in 1917. In one
particularly memorable week in April, three clocks – only one of them an advertising clock –
raised Richardson’s ire. An advertising clock in Pearce’s Tudor Theater in New Orleans was
chastised for including “an illuminated green-letter sign, presumably advertising the jeweler who
supplied the clock,” and for causing “a smear of white light…clear across the front end of the
auditorium over the screen.” A second clock, from the Empire theater in Mobile, Alabama
(“more light on the wall than is on the clock dial”) and a third clock, from the Globe Theater in
New Orleans (“smeared all over with white light”) were also given harsh reviews. In October,
the Graphic Theater in Bangor, Maine, raised Richardson’s blood yet again with an advertising
clock, by including “two or three [brightly illuminated] advertisements beneath its dial.”
Although we cannot interpret such comments to be outright condemnation of all clocks,
Richardson’s critiques clearly imply both the difficulty of confining the light from an advertising

Clock,” U.S. Patent 1,888,366, filed 27 August 1932, and issued 22 November 1932; “Drum for Advertising
Clocks,” U.S. Patent 1,898,924, filed 30 September 1932, and issued 21 February 1933; “Display Device,” U.S.
Patent 2,057,465, filed 28 November 1934, and issued 13 October 1936; and “Three-Dimensional Time Indicator

75 Kineto: Display Ad, Moving Picture World 25.4 (24 July 1915): 748. General Sales: Full-Page Display Ad,
Moving Picture World 17.8 (23 August 1913): 867.
76 [Untitled News Blurb], Motography 17.11 (17 March 1917): 560.
77 [F.H. Richardson], “Richardson Going Strong,” Moving Picture World 32.4 (28 April 1917): 595-597.
78 [F.H. Richardson], “Richardson Crosses Pine Tree State,” Moving Picture World 34.2 (13 October 1917): 223.
clock to its desired region (the constantly invoked ‘smears of white light’) and the fact that their placement right next to the screen may well have been distracting in the best of circumstances. As such, the lack of clear growth in the field of advertising clocks is also not surprising, as audience irritation once again kept the industry as a whole from prospering.

‘Active Audience’ Rhetoric and the Cinema as Venue

The multiplicity of peripheral advertising techniques – resulting in permanently visible but optionally viewable advertising – added an important wrinkle to the terms of the in-cinema advertising debate. The then increasingly common notion, on the part of advertisers and the general public, of the film audience as a passive collection of sponges, soaking up the onscreen material, was partly counterbalanced by peripheral advertisers’ more realistic approach which acknowledged what the film studios and exhibitors had known all along: that viewers were thinking, unpredictable individuals, whose attention was given rather than compelled. Peripheral advertising functioned by rigorously dividing advertising content from the entertainment – rather than trying to ‘slip it through’ – and then justifying it’s presence as a service or an alternative diversion. As such, these early 20th century inventors described viewers who were subject to their own tastes and whims, and whose motivations and interpretations were therefore individual. Operating under this definition of an audience, attention was redefined as something for which advertisements could compete without describing it as a completely unwanted presence.

Attention was, in theory at least, closer to a meritocracy. The bulk of the companies and inventors working in the arena of advertising marginalia would, therefore, repeat the standard critiques of onscreen advertising – that it was “a source of more or less dissatisfaction to your
patrons”⁷⁹ – before defending their own technology as a site from which advertising would be willingly and voluntarily read. Rather than attempting to force the audience’s attention at a specific time, then, these men encouraged advertisers to place their ads “in full view of the audience during the entire exhibition” as this would provide “the assurance that at least a majority of the persons in the audience [would], at some time before they le[ft], read the advertisement.”⁸⁰

Frame tech designers – perhaps evidenced by their desires to crowd advertising as close to the screen as possible – were frequently pessimistic about advertising’s ability to draw attention on its own merits. The advertising needed, at the very least, to be “associated with the main screen” to be considered viable; as such, positioning, even if the screen was off limits, still implied that the audience needed to be nearly, if not entirely, forced to read an ad. Reading of ads would then happen almost naturally when the spectator became bored or otherwise irritated with the films being projected. Frank C. Thomas, for example, asserted that nearness to the primary image was a virtue on the grounds that “the pictures being displayed upon the screen [might] fail to interest anyone in the audience.” Harry Verran and Alfred R. Groetz claimed nearly the same thing when they argued that the audience might voluntarily look away from the screen if “any particular portion of the picture exhibition [did] not prove of interest.” As such, active audiences were acknowledged, by frame inventors, negatively – their attention was something that an entertainment film could lose, leaving it up for grabs. As such, there was an element of cynicism and fearfulness to these inventors’ takes on audiences.

⁷⁹ “The Publicity Clock” pamphlet (eight slot version), Publicity Clock Company Advertising Cards and Brochures, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
The problem with this description is that, in abandoning the need for compulsion by stressing the possibility of a crummy film, they abandoned not just the value of a compulsory screen, but also the sense of the ‘receptive mood.’ If as the above thinkers implied, the ads were being perused at moments when the audience was bored, or disappointed in the films on the program – so bored that they were more interested in their surroundings than the show – how would the advertising have been received? If the uniform happiness of the cinema audience could no longer be assumed, was there even any value to advertising in the venue? Such claims are the only point in the historical record of silent era cinema advertising where the proponents relied overtly on a cynical view of the audience.

The bulk of the proponents of peripheral advertising, perhaps realizing the danger of stressing a bored or irritable viewer, took a more optimistic approach, and asserted that their technologies were an alternative but no less valid way to appeal to the viewer’s attention. Kineto company head George Willens almost imperceptibly slipped from the valuable notion of compulsion to an acknowledgement of choice. Indicating first choice, and then compulsion, Willens claimed that the placement of an ad placed upon his invention “compels one to see an advertisement when looking at the time on my clock.” 81 Frank C. Thomas, possibly in an attempt to overcome the cynicism of the rest of his patent, included perhaps the most over-zealous claim for the appeals of quality advertising, when he argued that patrons could “look at the advertisement several times…[and] thoroughly assimilate the idea” if they found the ad particularly interesting or amusing. 82 Put simply, the quickest and most compelling way to sell

---

82 Frank C. Thomas, “Display Apparatus,” U.S. Patent 1,252,629, filed 1 November 1915, and issued 8 January 1918.
peripheral advertising was to treat advertisements as miniature entertainments which could appeal just as well to a spectator.

As such, patent inventors took a wholly different approach to the debate – not just defending cinema audiences as desirable and reachable, but defending advertising as, itself, a part of the modern entertainment environment which could enter an entertainment venue without necessarily being pre-judged as an unwanted intrusion. The choice of rigidly separating the theatrical sites of ‘art’ and ‘commerce’ into ‘screen’ and ‘margin’ paradoxically allowed these men to describe the two in fundamentally similar experiential terms. The advertisements at the margins became potential alternative diversions – something else to see if one was inclined to appreciate one’s surroundings, or if the screen failed to entertain. Implicitly conceiving of cinema advertising not in the temporal terms assumed by others, but as yet another site where advertising was an element of personal selection, their notion of the cinema was experientially parallel to magazines and billboards. These men argued that, though one may not have had any control over the progress of the main entertainment (no ability to ‘turn the page’ or, in a vehicle metaphor, skip past the less beautiful pieces of landscape), one could, at least, look to the advertising for alternative material.

Unfortunately for these advertising proponents, the notion of ‘breaking the monotony of a darkened theater’ by adding secondary attractive elements was, even then, running in the opposite direction. The picture palace movement arose in the early 1910s, alongside an embargo on ‘scandalous’ films in favor of ‘high-class’ dramatic films, and became part of the industry’s appeal to upper class audiences, in an attempt to turn them from censorship advocacy into film fans. The ‘palatial’ architecture of massive first-run theaters encouraged the building of intricate
and beautiful structures, rather than bland environs filled with tacky advertising lights. The same theaters that were leading the attack against onscreen advertising – refusing to include it in their high class entertainments – were, therefore, also filling all the offscreen space with sumptuous architectural flourishes. The type of active audience then being solicited by the film industry was one which purportedly would choose to turn their attention to the ornamental curlicues and faux Grecian columns on the theater walls, rather than to an advertising sign. In attempting to shift to a high-art aesthetic, anti-advertising snobbery would have rendered peripheral signage less and less likely in more and more theaters. As such, off-screen advertising was a dead end at the time that it arose, as the periphery was becoming the venue of ostentation and beautification rather than technological gimmickry.

Conclusion

Advertising at the margins of the theatrical experience has, unfortunately, left the fewest historical traces. It is difficult to know just how many of these technologies were put into use. Of those technologies which were adopted for use, it is almost impossible to know if any were widely used nationally, regionally, or locally. Indeed, the historical traces of such technologies are often grotesquely unhelpful; witness the following news report – reproduced in its entirety:

Central City, Neb. – The Donelson theater has recently installed an advertising machine. For the historian of such material, this is a frustrating tease. What type of machine? What did it do and when? Although this is an extreme example, the bulk of the analysis in this chapter has

83 See, for example, much of the display advertising for Paramount Pictures from mid-decade. In one particularly evocative example, a palatial theater screening highbrow dramatic features is compared, both visually and in writing, to a nickelodeon papered with posters for low-class genre fare with titles like Shot at Sunrise and The Mill Mystery. Display Ad, The Atlanta Constitution 23 December 1915: 13.
been extrapolated from primary documents only marginally more helpful – either patents with no connection to actual usage, two-sentence dismissals from F.A. Richardson, or trade materials (like business cards) with little more content than a slogan. In terms of actual usage, advertising clocks were clearly the most commonly available concept (particularly in New York), while the placement of lit signage next to the screen appears to have been a Plains state fad. Any further analysis about adoption patterns is impossible.

Despite the lack of clarity about the actual use of the objects, the concept of peripheral advertising is vital to our understanding of silent era debates about advertising. It provides our only direct evidence of attempts to respond to concerns about the ‘commercial caesura’ in ways other than simply removing all consumer goods advertising from the theater, and provides us with the most tantalizingly unfulfilled glimpses of how the cinema experience might have been different. The motion picture theater, still connected to (at least the perception of) lower-class and immigrant audiences, could have metamorphosed into a circus-like riot of lighted entertainment and advertising elements – a technological rather than architectural wonderland – with the film itself privileged only in its central placement. The decision to pursue a high-class ambiance foreclosed this possibility just as it was being conceived. However, the existence of the idea, and the implication that it was incompatible with ‘high class’ cinema, reveals that ‘class’ and ‘advertising’ were drifting more firmly into separate spheres in early 20th century American media.

Peripheral advertising was simultaneously backward looking (inherently non-temporal and ‘print-esque’) and forward looking (it would take decades for the ‘active audience’ to become second nature in media research). Its existence vividly displays the subtlety of American advertising thinking at the time. While there were significant historical barriers to its
adoption – including the cultural pretensions of the film studios and the swelling opposition to cinema advertising caused by onscreen methods – peripheral advertising techniques are the strongest evidence of the inherent complexity of the cinema as an advertising venue, and they presage the difficult rethinking of advertising in the wake of digital media.
CHAPTER 6. “INTEMPERATE PROCLAMATIONS”: EXHIBITION, TICKETS, AND THE  
BIG CHILL OF CINEMA ADVERTISING

Think of it! People will pack your house day after day,  
and night after night, because it costs them nothing to see  
your show, still you are paid cash for every admission.  
- The Robyn-Kander Service (1915)

In early 1915, Moving Picture World columnist W. Stephen Bush sarcastically reviewed  
the avalanche of in-cinema advertising tactics which had hit his beloved film industry in the  
preceding few years. In deriding “the screen advertisement” as the greatest “[o]f all the follies of  
the screen,” Bush worked himself up to a quite a lather, revealing, mid-tirade, that he felt that  
advertising men are not and cannot be moved by appeals to their aesthetic  
sensibilities. They have none. They climb…our own glorious mountains and  
upon those awe-inspiring heights, when man is nearest to the blue vault of  
heaven, they paint the name of some tooth paste with an adjuration to use the  
same. […] Men to whom Nature, in her most solemn moods, fails to make the  
slightest appeal cannot be expected to stand in awe of the screen. I am often  
surprised that our great dramas are not interrupted at tense moments by the  
temperate proclamation of the merits of so-and-so’s cigarettes and of so-and-  
so’s cheese.

Bush’s article, regardless of its intent as condemnation, points to the myriad ways in which  
consumer goods advertising, had it been allowed, could have fundamentally altered the standard  
business and aesthetic models of motion pictures. Though the advertising-filled intermission  
between turns of the program was, and remains, an important interweaving of advertising content

---

1 Display Ad, Billboard 19 June 1915: 53.  
with the film program\(^3\), the possibilities for interpenetration with the cinema were much more vast.

The following year, the Edison Film Company’s young acting star Edward Earle, in an interview with motion picture advertising proponent Ernest A. Dench, restated Bush’s hypothesis—though without the vitriol—as a legitimate theory of the future of cinema. Earle asserted:

> [i]f I am not mistaken, there will spring up a chain of photoplay theaters in the large cities to which the public will be admitted free. At these ‘billboard stations’ short, regular photoplays will be sandwiched in between the ad. films so as to attract the folks inside.

Accepting that “compulsory” advertising in a ticketed environment was “abhorrent to the people of this democratic country,” Earle presumed that—for good or ill—the way around the moviegoer’s reluctance was to do away with admission prices.\(^4\) Reading through the logic leaps in his comments, Earle’s rational differentiation between ‘optional’ print advertising, which one could skip past, and ‘forced’ cinema advertising, which the spectator had to wait through even if disinterested, was the breaking point for a dual-market system. If the advertiser was going to hijack the viewer’s attention rather than ask for it, then the spectator must be ‘paid’ for his time; a free show would fit the bill. Earle was not alone in this belief. For many of the proponents of connecting the cinema to consumer goods advertising, the problem was ticket prices.\(^5\) For

---


cinema advertising to function, perhaps the entire film industry needed to be freed from the burden of consumer cost.

Earle’s comments were not without precedent. Various means of delivering cinema free of charge had been, and would continue to be, attempted during the silent era. Indeed, in the wake of the mainstream film producers’ turn away from nonfiction just before 1910, the film reform community developed a cottage industry of ‘non-theatrical’ screenings, often in an attempt to influence the film content which their patrons would consume. Church shows were a common form of this ‘community theater’ concept – an offering of educational, religious, and eventually even mainstream studio pictures, as “ministers sought to recapture the attention of their straying parishioners…by adopting the movie theater’s products and appeal.”

Children’s matinees (often held in legitimate cinema theaters) and school affiliated shows were also common forms of community cinema. Free ‘censored,’ targeted, and otherwise non-theatrical shows became common enough by 1920 that the Motion Picture Theater Owners of America were compelled to publically criticize the non-theatrical ‘free cinema’ as “unfair competition,” and discourage mainstream film producers from circulating films to non-theatrical venues like churches and schools. In short, the notion of a cinematic experience with no admission fee was a growing trend at this point – though exhibitor distrust of the form was also growing.

8 Kathryn H. Fuller, At the Picture Show: Small Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 94.
9 Further studies of various forms of free cinema include: Charles Tepperman, “Digging the Finest Potatoes from Their Acre: Government Film Exhibition in Rural Ontario, 1917-1934,” and Terry Lindvall, “Cinema Virtue, Cinema Vice: Race, Religion, and Film Exhibition in Norfolk, Virginia, 1908-1922,” both in Hollywood in the
Even the notion of an advertising-supported ‘free cinema’ was not out of the ordinary. Screenings funded in the name of particular consumer goods had been tried numerous times.

Both theatrical and non-theatrical free screenings of advertising films were a regular occurrence. Manufacturers would often simply rent out theaters – a practice common enough for non-mainstream films (advertising, educational, and exploitation) that it would eventually earn the industry nickname ‘four-walling.’\(^{10}\) In the absence of a theater to rent, advertisers would pay traveling film trucks, or have films screened in store windows or other places of business.\(^ {11}\)

Under the auspices of Camilla Donworth, of the Films-of-Business Corporation, New York’s Rialto Theater even inaugurated a regular tradition of free morning screenings of advertising films in mid-1920. Begun on July 1st, with a screening of four industrial films, showings were to occur every Tuesday and Thursday morning from 10:00 til 12:00.\(^ {12}\) Evidence for similar screenings at the Rialto exists as late as the 9th of December that year.\(^ {13}\)

---


\(^{13}\) *Printers’ Ink* 113.9 (2 December 1920): 41. Note the following article which proposed the plan as a good one for local adoption in any city where the cinemas were closed during the mornings. “Is Your Movie Theater Empty in the Morning? – Then Use It to Show Your Electrical Films!,” *Electrical Merchandising* 24.3 (September 1920): 151.
Alternatively, many merchants – having negotiated the privilege with a particular theater – offered free tickets to regular film screenings in exchange for purchases. \(^{14}\) E.H. Hill’s Rex Theater of Arkansas, KS, even adopted the idea for its own use, and offered free tickets to children who brought in 1,000 dead flies – a philanthropic ‘advertisement’ for summer pest control. \(^{15}\) The ‘free ticket’ option was so common that at least two nationwide services formed in the mid-1910s to capitalize on the movement: the Robyn-Kander Ticket Service\(^ {16}\) and the National Free Movie Picture Ticket Company. \(^{17}\) Robyn-Kander’s model was promising enough that a major film studio, Universal, offered to back the company, with the product then renamed Universal Moving Picture Tickets. \(^{18}\)

All of these commercial precursors, however, were slightly incomplete iterations of Earle’s concept of the ‘billboard station.’ Screening advertising films for free was not really an attempt to provide free film; it was an admission that industrial films were almost impossible to screen in any paid venue. Meanwhile, free tickets, while directly linking consumption to free cinema, were a scattershot affair which did not produce a free theater so much as a single, random free admission. Earle’s notion, though uncommon, was much more grand and seems to presage advertising formats central to entertainment in the twentieth and twenty-first century.

---


**Participating Sponsorship as a Model of Cinema Exhibition**

Earle’s perspective encouraged an interleaving of the ‘rented theater’ approach and the community screening, combining both mainstream entertainment films and advertising content into a form much like the later ‘participating sponsorship’ model of television, where advertisers bought “interstitial ‘pages’ of time” in an otherwise unrelated program.\(^\text{19}\) When he spoke in 1916, the breaking-up of a sequence of film reels with advertising slides had been relatively common in movie houses across the country for several years, though it was then a waning exhibition model. The one or two-reel advertising short was by then also well known, and the advertising trailer was in its early stages of development. Trailers, shorts, and slides all provided possible models for a pause in the entertainment – an interleaving of entertainment and advertising. If one then adds the snide 1915 comments of W. Stephen Bush, about “interrupt[ing] great dramas] at tense moments,” to the theory espoused by Edward Earle, it is plausible to imagine a free cinema in which the advertisements were not simply inserted in between short reels, but between reels of a feature, and at moments of the keenest interest. Indeed, the popularity of serials had recently crested, as both *The Perils of Pauline* and *The Exploits of Elaine* were initially released in 1914. With serials, the multi-climax narrative structure, in which pauses were inserted at moments of heightened tension, was known. Bush’s comments provide direct evidence that transitional era film theorists were able to conceive of a link between dramatic high-points and the retention of viewer interest across an advertising break.\(^\text{20}\)

It is, therefore, possible to see in Earle and Bush’s comments a template not just for participating

---


sponsorship of a program, but indeed for proto-television, in which a larger narrative was provided free of charge but broken up by advertising material. At the very least, Earle was willing to gamble (and even Bush may have been willing to admit) that a ‘variety program’ of shorts, fully underwritten by advertising would have drawn urban crowds. The theory of ‘participating sponsorship’ is, therefore, nearly as old as cinema advertising itself.

Importantly, the ‘free cinema’ was not entirely theoretical. Several iterations of the concept were, in fact, attempted in the ten years between 1911 and 1921.21 Often these were simple one-off attempts in theaters otherwise operated on a ticket basis. In 1914, Atlanta’s Gem Theater funded free Saturday matinees for ten weeks through the sponsorship of local merchants.22 In mid-1916, clever Tennessee exhibitors in both Memphis and Nashville were running free, advertising slide supported screenings on Sundays as a means to evade local blue laws.23 A few years later, in 1921, Atlanta society women even attempted to fund a children’s matinee screening via the inclusion of an ‘educational’ short advertising the Biliken Shoe Company.24 Although these were not fully ‘billboard stations’ – and possibly were not even successful, one-time ‘billboard screenings’ – they are evidence that even established urban exhibitors were aware of, and in some cases intrigued by, the concept.

The most prominent and consistent usage of the concept was in the creation of free ‘open air’ exhibitions, providing community performances through private advertising funding rather

21 International examples were reported in American film trades as well, implying that the idea drew interest in countries outside of the United States. In 1908, Mexico City offered free ‘views’ on the city streets interspersed with ads, and had a theater operated by a cigarette company which accepted cigarette coupons as tickets. “Cinematographs in Mexico,” Moving Picture World 2.8 (22 February 1908): 141. In London, it was proposed by a member of the stock exchange to take over a theater in every major city and screen advertising films, using entertainment films as an inducement to attend. “Foreign Trade Notes: British Notes,” Moving Picture World 18.9 (29 November 1913): 997.
22 This Atlanta note was, for unknown reasons, included in the regional news for Illinois. “Exhibitors News: Illinois,” Moving Picture World 21.10 (5 September 1914): 1394.
24 The cost of the films – which included three short comedies, including “one of Charlie Chaplin’s best” – was paid for by a local shoe dealer, the Fred S. Stewart Company. “Billiken Shoe Story Shown to Children,” Atlanta Constitution 18 Sept 1921: 7.
than donations or government dollars. The concept appears to predate its common reportage in the film trade press. The *Moving Picture World*’s resident cinema advertising curmudgeon, F.H. Richardson, confidently asserted, in late 1911, that no one with experience in exhibition would attempt to completely fund a touring open-air show through advertising slides. Writing as though from real-world experience, Richardson asserted that any such attempt would be beset with the following problems:

where he…figures one dollar expense it would really take nearer five. The local papers would knock you. The local showman would inspire local authorities to make things unpleasant for you in the way of license holdups, etc. Bad weather could smite you. Breakdowns and delays would conspire to make life miserable for you. Railways would lose your stuff and break what they couldn’t manage to lose. Verily, your joys would consist mainly of anticipating the day of your return, a chastened, sadder, and wiser man – oh yes, and a poorer one too.25

To hear Richardson tell the tale, ‘free cinema’ had already left a trail of broken hearted and impoverished men in its wake. At least one recent, real-world example could have inspired Richardson’s account. Three months earlier, an open-air free theater in Jackson, Tennessee drew the ire of two local exhibitors – Capt. W.D. Ament (of the Elite) and D.L. Williamson (of the Marlow) – on the grounds that it operated without paying rent to the city for the park in which the films were shown. Ament and Williamson asserted that the license for the free show should not have been granted on the grounds that it “permit[ted] the use of public property by individuals to the great harm of other citizens engaged in a legitimate and useful business.”26

Though it is unclear how this conflict ended, the circulation of moral (“unfair competition”) and financial (bad business concept) arguments from Ament and Williamson in the trade press may have helped to put a stop to the practice – though only for a few years. By mid-decade, free

open-air community theaters ran wild in a three-state region consisting of Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

Perhaps the first free show in the area appeared in mid-1914 in Chicago Heights, Illinois (a suburb of Chicago). In Chicago Heights, a man named Delmar Lee was said to have been showing films “on the streets” (presumably on a screen erected on the back of a truck), funding the screenings through merchant advertising. In June 1915, enterprising individuals in Louisville proposed using a downtown site for “a free motion picture house” where “the cost and a profit [were to be covered] by showing a number of advertising slides” in between each short subject reel; the originators of the plan even attempted to financially justify it by claiming that downtown theaters in the city earned between $2 and $10 per week from each slide screened – a price presumably, therefore, high enough to completely fund the project via a manageable number of slides. In February 1916, the small town of McClure, Illinois – with “practically unanimous” support – got on the bandwagon, and inaugurated weekly free screenings “to improve the social life of the community and the church and give merchants a chance to exploit their wares.” In June of 1916 free park-screenings hit two major cities in Tennessee. In Nashville, the Crescent Amusement Company began using city parks for screenings which were two-thirds entertainment and one-third “advertising matter” – which likely included industrial films, as the Company had “been instructed…to secure…pictures having an educational value along with comedy and other subjects.” Nearby, a “[m]ain street moving picture man” from

---

27 “Exhibitor News: Illinois,” *Moving Picture World* 21.9 (29 August 1914): 1258. In the small town of Rossville, south of Chicago, the manager of the Idle Hour Theater was also offering free screenings “on the streets” on Wednesday evenings. However, it is not clear if these were ad funded, or simply a ‘public service’ advertising gimmick for the theater.


30 “Free Picture Shows in City Parks,” *Moving Picture World* 28.12 (17 June 1916): 2080. While this two-thirds split may sound excessive, 21st century American television operates on a similar split. Typical network programming currently offers 42 minutes of program and 18 minutes of advertising per hour.
Chattanooga started a similar open-air theater in Warner Park, but remained determined to fund the screenings entirely with slides, putting an embargo on “travel stuff and...educational pictures dealing with the manufacture of this and that.”31 By 1917 the concept approached the Missouri border, as promoter Ed Batts persuaded the Park Board of East St. Louis, Illinois, to show films “from one to three times a week” in five different parks (Jones, Emerson, Franklin, Virginia, and Edgemont), funding the screenings with advertising slides.32

Though the practice was, if reports can be trusted, relatively contained in this one region, it was not solely an urban and suburban phenomenon. A Wisconsin entrepreneur attempted to tour free, ad funded screenings through local small towns. In 1916, the Open Air Dome Company of Green Bay, after “several weeks” of screenings in Green Bay, began a touring show with trips to West De Pere and Kaukauna – two towns on a line southwest of Green Bay.33

Despite F.H. Richardson’s 1911 warning (which effectively critiqued exactly this action), the notion of free, ad supported cinema – even as a model of itinerant exhibition – was persistently enticing.

The bulk of these screenings likely failed to turn a profit. Indeed, the 1915 Louisville proposal admitted that “[t]he plan has not proven successful in other cities” before optimistically asserting that a downtown location might work better.34 However, the important thing to note is not whether or not such screenings were successful, but whether or not they were attempted. The

31 “Free Films in Parks,” Moving Picture World 28.13 (24 June 1916): 2276. As these were reported only one month prior to the report of free Sunday screenings in Nashville and Memphis, it’s possible that the traditional exhibitors were attempting to steal the thunder of these free screenings, by offering the same thing in an indoor setting.

32 “Free Films in East St. Louis Parks,” Moving Picture World 32.11 (16 June 1917): 1823. It is possible that the practice did extend into Missouri, though the shows would have been on wheels rather than in parks. Two months prior to the East St. Louis plan, the city of St. Louis, Missouri, received a proposal, by “[a]n advertising concern,” to tour free performances through town showing films on screens mounted on the backs of moving vans. Local exhibitors, in attempting to file a complaint, were told that free shows operating out of a truck, required no license.


concept of participating sponsorship of a free electronic medium was alive in 1910s cinema circles, even if it was never perfected.

Edward Earle was thus both spectacularly correct and incorrect, depending on your perspective. In the end, motion pictures did not widely develop into ‘billboard stations’; the rise of the feature film and the palatial theater discouraged alternative models of cinema, as desires for both ‘respectability’ and profit encouraged an increase, rather than a decrease, in ticket prices. However, if one thinks of the mass electronic media as interrelated and mutually influencing, rather than rigidly demarcated, then Earle was highly prescient…though a decade ahead of his time. In the 1920s, American broadcast radio developed a business model which provided entertainment free of charge and profited entirely from advertising dollars. By the advent of commercial television, the concept of visual entertainment, provided at no cost through advertising dollars collected from participating sponsors, was a reality. Earle had predicted not the future of motion pictures, but of broadcasting – where the ‘billboard stations’ were on dials in our living rooms, rather than the downtown shopping district.35

The Incredible Shrinking Field of Cinema Advertising

In the wake of the auteur theory (a screen rather than audience based theory), the advent of television (which compelled the industry to stress the aesthetic elements of color, widescreen, and 3-D rather than the venue), and the recent mobility of film texts (first to television, then home video, and now onto portable devices), it can be difficult to remember just how important the structures of both the venue and the program were to the silent era experience of motion

35 See Kenneth Lipartito’s article in which he argues persuasively that, due to similar conceptions of use, the Picturephone could have filled the cultural role that the internet has grown into, had the technology been successfully adopted. (Kenneth Lipartito, “Picturephone and the Information Age: The Social Meaning of Failure,” Technology and Culture 44.1 (January 2003): 70) In much the same way, the cinema could have been television, given the acceptance of advertising breaks and ticketless entry.
pictures. Studies of regional viewing habits, segregated theaters, and non-theatrical screenings remind us of the importance of these structural elements of the cinema. The unsettled conditions of both film programs and theaters also gave rise to the variety of cinema advertising tactics in the transitional era.

The institutionalization of the American cinema experience under the narrower thinking of the mainstream studios, however, ultimately condemned cinema advertising to a long life at the periphery of film culture. During the American cinema’s period of greatest novelty and appeal as a potential advertising venue – the decade prior to the commercialization of American radio – the film industry went through a transition to features, vertical integration, and a large scale campaign to elevate the perceived status of the medium. The shift to feature dominated programs limited the screening options for advertising. As W. Stephen Bush indicates (and Edward Earle implies, with his assumption that ‘billboard stations’ would screen only “short” entertainment films), fragmenting a single plotline with advertising breaks was perhaps the least likely option for cinema advertising in a culture which was hostile to the form under even the least intrusive circumstances. As the industry underwent simultaneous vertical integration and the picture palace revolution, the film industry erected even broader barriers to cinema advertising. In a picture palace, and even a smaller town theater with pretentions to palatial esteem, the screen was to be dominated by high end feature dramas, and remain unsullied by an association with commercialism. The offscreen space was to be kept dignified and opulent to match. The cinema theater itself became an advertisement for the quality of the content projected on the screen and, as such, high-brow considerations drove a wedge between studio production and exhibition and the desires of advertisers. There was no place left for cinema advertising in the mainstream theaters. Direct advertising thus became a trait of rural and mom-
and-pop theaters, and product placement began its slow rise as the method favored by an oligopoly of producers. At exactly the moment when in-cinema advertising was at its most vibrant, then, and when advertising itself was experiencing phenomenal growth (post World War I), the studio-dominated film industry declared it unacceptable.

This is not to say, however, that cinema advertising was solely the victim of the cinema’s growing cultural pretensions. While cinema-cultural preconceptions that advertising was ‘lowbrow’ were undoubtedly important to the marginalization of cinema advertising, abusive practices were equally important in declaring cinema advertising an irritant. The early hostility created by excessive quantity, broken, endlessly reused, or simply ugly slides was persistent. Indeed, deriding the shoddy work of extant and defunct competitors was even a part of the sales pitch at the Alexander Film Company as late as 1921. As such, it is clear that the sense that cinema advertising was generally low quality and unlikeable remained common nearly a decade after its emergence in the specific context of the price-cutting conflict in the slide industry.

Slides created a reputation that was difficult to live down. The major studios thus also wanted the cinema to be free – free of advertising, not ticket prices.

Functional difficulties with the form also kept advertiser interest in the cinema low. Circulation was a persistent problem, as there was no central authority through which one could purchase national space from multiple cinema advertising space brokers. Money was also an issue, as the production costs for trailers, for example, were relatively high, even if the cost-per-thousand viewers was low. Even the quantity of available forms may have had a negative impact on advertiser interest, as the multiplicity of options may have made cinema advertising seem even more unsettled than it already was. It is likely, therefore, that the film industry was fighting
a lopsided battle against cinema advertising, as advertisers themselves did not rush to the new medium in support.

In short, consumer-goods advertising for the American cinema was born in a hole – one which it took decades, rather than a few years, to climb out of. Local exhibitors were hesitant about the impact advertising might have had on their small profit margins. National production and exhibition companies – with greater financial flexibility – were more concerned with freeing cinema from its low cultural esteem, than creating open access. With the advent of a national plan for commercial radio, the cinema’s slim hold on the advertising industry evaporated along with its novelty. Rather than escalating acceptance of consumer goods advertising in the mainstream experience of cinema, then, the American film industry’s interest went from hesitant to hostile, while advertiser interest went from moderate to indifferent. The American film industry opted to consider a ‘dual product’ business model (in which the films were sold to audiences in order to sell the audiences to advertisers) to be synonymous with the lowbrow aesthetic they were attempting to avoid. In the studios’ definition of culture, overt advertising did not suit the feature film experience.

Cinema Advertising as Media Development

The history of silent era advertising provides evidence of multiple possible models of an ad supported cinema (ranging from minimal to full funding, via onscreen and offscreen tactics), and multiple plausible arguments for why such models would succeed or fail. The appeal of the communicative powers of what was then the most up-to-date medium led advertisers to theorize both temporal and spatial flows of attention, and to conceive of restrictions on cinema advertising effectiveness ranging from the financial (ticket prices) to the psychological (the
‘combative spirit’ or ‘ill will’ caused by compulsory attention). Advertising could have led to a cinema program with frequent direct advertising caesuras, a proliferation of viewing choices within the theater, or even ‘free cinemas’ (possibly including both spatial and temporal ads). Instead, due to the lack of easy national circulation through theaters, combined with the relatively unified bloc of opposition from exhibitors and filmgoers (citing both ticket cost and issues of opulent theatrical spaces), the silent American cinema became a site of only infrequent and restrained advertisements, restricted in most cases to appearances in intermissions and on clocks and handbills, and much more common in small town or neighborhood theaters than urban palaces.

Despite marginalization of advertising in the mainstream American silent cinema, the experiments in and debates over cinema advertising were an important stage in the development of 20th century advertising. Indeed, although Michele Hilmes was correct to assert that the structure of television could only be understood by acknowledging that it “grew directly out of three decades of radio broadcasting, from which it carried over not only its economic, regulatory, and institutional structures but also its familiar program forms,” the cinema’s influence should also not be forgotten. The concept of an advertising supported medium of imagery (and/or audio) was an idea with a long gestation. The cinema experience set the terms for early radio, which then set the terms for television, which, paradoxically, set the terms for the rebirth of cinema advertising at the close of the 20th century.

Although a study of the cinema’s direct and indirect influences on later media is beyond the scope of this dissertation, one clear link between cinema advertising and early radio is commonly known – although the importance of cinema to the equation has never been stressed.

---

As mentioned in chapter two, in the 1925 book *Broadcasting: Its New Day*, cinema exhibition guru ‘Roxy’ Rothapfel asserted, in a direct quote of Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, that “if you try to sell…some brand of shoes or anything else over the radio [then] you’ll have no radio audience.” This restatement of the cinema myth of the vanishing audience, in a book by a cinema exhibitor, is an absolutely clear indication that radio theorizing began where 1910s film theorizing left off. Importantly, this was not a minority opinion in early American radio. A sense of the fragility of audience attention to a temporal medium, and the claim that direct advertising would shatter that audience, was widely held in early radio. AT&T rented time to advertisers for ‘selling talks’ in the early 1920s under the provision that direct advertising (specific information on product qualities and prices) was forbidden. Hoover made his comments in 1924, declaring, in short, that direct advertising would “kill broadcasting.” As networks arose, this opposition to direct advertising was institutionalized; NBC specifically declared that radio must function through indirect good will advertising, and could not be “a selling medium.” As should be apparent from the preceding chapters, this was a lesson advertisers and the entertainment industry believed had been learned from experiences with motion picture related advertising. The fact that Rothapfel, AT&T, NBC, and Hoover believed direct advertising on radio to be a dead end should come as no surprise, considering that opponents of advertising in motion pictures had rallied around the rhetorical claim that slide and photoplaylet advertising was likewise incompatible with ‘moving’ entertainment. Although the film industry was not ultimately allowed to directly control and develop the new medium, early

---

39 Ibid., 45.
40 Ibid., 49.
radio advertising theory did not diverge from the developed film sense. Mainstream commercial radio history in America is, therefore, predicated on cinema advertising theory.\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Gone Today, Here Tomorrow}

Early conclusions about the non-suitability of advertising to the motion picture theater became standard presuppositions of the mainstream film industry for decades – with some persisting to the present – and have appeared in studio claims routinely whenever cinema advertising discourse has increased. Indeed, film historian Christopher Anderson has asserted that the American film industry, after the establishment of television, explicitly differentiated itself as a highbrow entertainment on the grounds that film screenings did not contain advertising.\textsuperscript{42} Film industry hostility to overt advertising remained a point of pride. It was not until a late 1970s crisis among independent exhibitors that cinema advertising would have its renaissance – finally flowering into the mainstream in spite of persistent attacks on its lack of ‘taste.’ However, this story remains slanted towards the top-flight, urban theaters. A more complete sense of the growth of cinema advertising is more complex.

The eventual expansion of the onscreen advertisement – predominantly the trailer – began relatively quickly after the institutionalization of silent era split between the first run theaters and the rural and neighborhood theaters. By 1938, in the words of the J. Walter Thompson Company’s Fred Fidler and Wallace Boren, “more or less regula[r]” advertising film screenings had expanded to “over half” of the 16,000 theaters in the country, but this half was

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{41}] See Kenneth Lipartito’s article on the importance of the Picturephone to the perpetuation of the ideas it represented, even as the technology itself failed in the market. Kenneth Lipartito, “Picturephone and the Information Age: The Social Meaning of Failure,” \textit{Technology and Culture} 44.1 (January 2003): 50-81.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
disproportionately made up of “the country theatres or hole-in-the-wall type of 10-cent movie houses.”43 By the late-1950s, the differentiation of advertising vs. non-advertising theaters had become even more polarized. A second J. Walter Thompson Company research team indicated, in 1959, that the urban/rural divide had grown in importance, with “theatres in the eight major metropolitan cities” having become so hostile to screen advertising, that they were omitted completely from the research report.44 Opposition had clearly not abated. Although neither report clearly indicated reasons for the obviously increasing usage in lower end and rural theaters, these two J. Walter Thompson Company studies were completed conspicuously near two historical events: the transition to sound, and the rise of national television. As such, it is possible that a widening gap between the fortunes of top-flight and lower-end theaters was acting to increase advertising consistently over the years, with transitional moments in media acting as flash points for significant increase.

In the latter decades of the 20th century, old hostilities have persisted. In the late 1970s, Norman Levy, executive vice president of Columbia, and Irving Ludwig, of the Walt Disney Company’s distributing subsidiary Buena Vista, continued to voice silent era perspectives on cinema advertising. Levy asserted that such advertising was “in terrible taste” and suited only to “low class theaters.” Ludwig repeated the obsession with ticket prices, declaring that “a patron [who] has paid $3.50 for a seat…[should not receive] three minutes of commercials before my picture.” As recently as 1990, both Warner Bros. and the Walt Disney Company refused to

---

43 Fred Fidler and Wallace Boren, “Commercial Movies,” 1 February 1938, p. 5, 7, 12-13, Box 7, Folder “1937 Nov. 9 – 1938 Oct. 25,” J. Walter Thompson Company, Staff Meeting Minutes, 1927-1938, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. The numbers are difficult to interpret from the extant report. Supposedly both General Screen Advertising, Inc., and Screen Broadcasts, Inc., had 7,000 contracted theaters. However, the description “over half” implies that there was significant overlap between the two.

circulate their films to theaters which used direct, pre-film advertising content. Exhibitor concerns from this later era are strikingly similar to silent era concerns as well. Kim B. Rotzoll, perhaps unwittingly, used a silent era phrase to describe 1980s exhibitor concerns when she declared that many theaters were holding out “based on some sense of ‘good faith’ with the audience.” Concerns from the perspective of advertisers, though often given much more up to date language, likewise sound familiar. The ‘absent audience effect’ (viewer’s intentionally arriving late to avoid advertising content), or more perilously the possibility of a theater committing ‘suicide-by-advertising’ (viewers abandoning the theater altogether to avoid advertising content), along with concerns about audience irritation continued (and continue) to arise in the literature on cinema advertising.

Despite the entrenched reluctance of both the producers and exhibitors in the American film industry, and the continuing fears of advertisers to adopt a medium which might produce ‘ill will,’ cinema advertising experienced a surprising renaissance in these recent decades. As Deron Overpeck has observed, the decreasing output and increasing profit-percentages demanded by major studios in the late 1970s may have been a key factor in the return to prominence of cinema advertising, despite ongoing hostility from certain producers and exhibitors. Both independent exhibitors and large theater chains experimented with pre-film advertising as a means to boost receipts, resulting in the formation of Screenvision and National CineMedia. The combination of national chain circulation, a smaller number of tactical choices (only slides and trailers), and

simple persistence appears to have increased both viewer and advertiser acceptance of the form. Even the agencies jumped onboard quickly; the J. Walter Thompson Company was a partner in the acquisition of Screevision, in 1981. Over the course of the 1980s, pre-film advertising, under the auspices of the large-scale space brokers Screevision and NCM, became the norm in American theaters.  

The fragmentation of the television market in the wake of the multi-channel transition, and the subsequent havoc wrought by DVR and online video, only added to the trend, as advertisers sought out new media markets.

In light of this surprising turn of events, it is revealing to note that rhetoric in support of cinema-advertising likewise continued to parallel silent era claims. Twenty-first century scholars Michael Ewing, Erik du Plessis, and Charles Foster reference the appeal of ‘mood carryover’ – effectively a contemporary version of the old theory of the ‘receptive mood.’ Joanna Phillips and Stephanie M. Noble’s research into current issues in cinema advertising acceptance includes, among a number of issues, frustrations about captivity (fear of losing your seat or missing some of the film if one leaves), repetition (seeing the same advertisement at successive visits to the theater), unexpected delays prior to a film, preconceptions that ticket price ought to buy “the right to view a movie in a commercial-free environment,” and even the assumption that advertisements in a cinema should be entertaining in content.

---


voiced in the American transitional era as well. Cost rationalization likewise occurs with familiar tortured reasoning. For example, compare the following two arguments:

Francis T. Kimball (1921): [T]he cost of one page in one issue is about three-tenths of a cent a possible prospect. And the ‘possible’ is used advisedly, because it is far from certain that every individual in the total circulation is going to get the message. […Meanwhile] the trailer costs the manufacturer about six-one-hundredths of a cent a prospect – and here the ‘possible’ is advisedly omitted, since in a motion picture theater there is but one attention focus.52

Kim B. Rotzoll (1984): Although cinema advertising’s costs…are four or more times those of prime time television…cinema advertising is shown to deliver recall scores 3-5 times greater than that of television ads, so the initial cost disadvantage rapidly turns into a cost efficiency as measure at the more meaningful level of cost-per-thousand- impressions.53

Despite the shift from magazines to television as the point of comparison, and Kimball’s elision of the fact that cinema advertising required a larger outlay to reach the superior ‘cost-per-prospect’ number, the two rationalizations, separated by decades of experience, are nearly identical – greater expense is countered with a claim of greater attention and memorability. Even the voluntary limitations are familiar, as a limit of “two or three” commercial advertisements, rather than a half hour onslaught of advertising, has been proposed repeatedly and even adopted as a working practice during the renaissance of cinema advertising.54

In sum, all involved parties appear to hold positions remarkably similar to their silent era counterparts, and yet cinema advertising is significantly more common now that it was in the mid-1920s. The pertinent question, then, is: what has changed? Overpeck is, of course, correct

to point to the changing structure of media ownership, and the fall-from-grace of the television spot. With the same conglomerates owning television and cinema outlets, decreasing reluctance, by company heads, towards cinema advertising is plausible. As the diminishing returns from television advertising encourages multimedia campaigns, advertisers’ attraction to the ‘captive audience’ of the cinema is also less surprising than we might, at first, be inclined to believe. Cultural preconceptions are perhaps even more important. Even in the 1930s, the J. Walter Thompson Company’s Fred Fidler and Wallace Boren had begun to feel that persistence, even in the face of hostility, could create an “appreciative tolerance” in the audience. Overpeck points to the fact that those who grew up in the United States in the 1980s and beyond have done so in an environment in which advertising has been more widespread; that the young display a general indifference to the question of cinema advertising is part of a trend away from compartmentalizing life into elements where advertising is and is not expected. As the young continue to dominate cinema attendance, their across-the-board tolerance of ubiquitous advertising is an important one. Television and advertising in the broader culture may have begun to outweigh the film industry’s own precedents.

However, cultural changes – important though they may be – are only a part of the story. More concrete, institutional changes have also been instrumental to cinema advertising’s changing fortunes. One important element is the increasing centralization of distribution, culminating in the digital distribution of cinema advertising through the massive systems of both Screenvision and NCM. The ability of advertisers not only to buy significant space from a single


company, but also to have the advertisement broadcast to theaters – rather than having to send individual slides or prints and rely on hundreds of projectionists – has both reduced the costs and increased the reliability of cinema advertising. Technological improvements and national oligopoly have, thus, removed some significant barriers to the circulation of cinema advertisements.\(^57\) Oligopoly has not just been a factor in distribution, however; it has also simplified tactical choice. Early cinema advertising, as a young theory in a transitioning medium, was awash with competing tactics and theories of the audience. The array of options may have been bewildering and kept adoption low. The recent claim that “low…environmental clutter” contributes to a heightening of viewer ‘captivity’ (there are fewer options when a viewer desires to turn from the screen) not only suggests that simplified architecture of the multiplex era is important, but also implies that the absence of offscreen advertising technologies as an option – there are no more lighted clocks or wall advertisements – is driving renewed faith in the ‘captive’ spectator.\(^58\)

In short, new electronic delivery technologies, cultural acceptance of advertising intrusions into temporally bound entertainment, the increasingly corporate conditions of the American media, and fears that television’s advertising value was eroding all helped to awaken cinema advertising from a long coma. However, the practices, concerns, and effects have remained remarkably unchanged over a century. Both the means of integrating advertising into

---

\(^57\) Recall that the first national distribution plan for cinema advertising was not put into effect until 1929. All previous circulation plans for cinema advertising had regional limitations. Even then, with the availability of cross-company space-brokering, circulation of advertisements still required the circulation of a vast number of physical copies if an advertiser desired a simultaneous, nationwide campaign. Digital circulation through a single large network is immeasurably more cost efficient than the circumstances in, say, 1918. For the 1929 plan, see: *Alexander Cooperator* October 1929, p. 5, Box 8, Folder 1, Alexander Industries Records (MSS 0056), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library, Pikes Peak Library District, Colorado Springs.

the cinema space, and the reluctance advertisers have attempted to overcome in order to do so, are legacies of the transitional era American cinema.

*Implications for Further Research*

While this study has added significantly to our understanding of both the American cinema and advertising industries, especially in the transitional era, it raises many questions. As indicated above, the conditions of cinema advertising at mid-century require more scrutiny. While Deron Overpeck provides good reason to believe that the late 1970s cinema advertising renaissance originated in the changing conditions of American film production and exhibition associated with ‘New Hollywood’ practices, the research reports of the J. Walter Thompson Company indicate a greater continuity in cinema advertising history than has yet been acknowledged. Specifically, significant material may remain undiscovered in the Alexander Film Company records in Colorado Springs, which contains multiple boxes of material from the 1930s and beyond. More work needs to be done before we can completely understand the developmental trajectory of American cinema advertising; Kerry Segrave’s 100 year history of *Product Placement in Hollywood Films* is only a small piece of a larger history.

For the transitional era itself, this study begs the question of what a study of indirect advertising, similarly structured and with similar goals, would reveal about the other practices and theories of cinema advertising in the transitional era. As mentioned at the outset, the two wings of cinema advertising can be separated cleanly, as they were produced by different companies, operated on different fundamental theories of the audience, and funded different players in the film industry. However, the fact that they can be separated does not mean that there is nothing to be learned from studying them side by side. The theory and practice of direct
advertising in the American cinema is only one half of dialectic. Indirect and direct cinema advertising both emerged together at the dawn of cinema, both went through a period of experimentation in the 1910s, and both experienced a renaissance around 1980. This is not coincidence; their fates have been tied together all along, despite their differences. Knowledge of the shifting conditions of indirect cinema advertising in the transitional era would provide a more complete understanding of the ebbs and flows of cinema advertising acceptance, and the breadth of advertising practices experienced by transitional era American cinema audiences.

The two above suggestions would add breadth to our understanding. This particular study would also withstand deeper probing. As stated at the outset, this study was designed to draw the broad contours of direct cinema advertising over the course of the transitional era American cinema. But broad contours are never the whole story. A study of the regional differentiation of production would be helpful. Divergences in theory and practice between Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and other production and reception cultures in silent cinema advertising would give us a better understanding of the flow of the idea around the United States. Why, for example, did so many of the slide patents emerge from New York? Company by company specificity would also help. Why was Joseph Coufal central to American government slide production during World War I? What was the working relationship (or conflict) between the Kansas City and Neosho Slide Companies? Did other trailer makers suggest that their salesmen deride the competition, or was that a practice exclusive to the Alexander Film Company? How creatively autonomous were slide and trailer filmmakers from company to company? This study, through limitations in source material, has drawn attention to the general trends and most commonly espoused beliefs in the era. Local studies in newspapers, archives, and even with family descendents (the Erker Bros. Optical Company remains a family business)
could add significantly to our understanding of the likely hundreds of companies active in this field during this era. This dissertation is a step into a surprisingly vast arena of the transitional era film experience.

Beyond studies focused on cinema advertising, this research compels us to give greater attention to the ways in which transitional era cinema, in both its national and local contexts, was informed by commodification and consumption. The rise of the star-system and palatial cinemas, the advent of popular film magazines, the adoption of advertising practices and experienced professionals to market the cinema, and the creation of film related products are all part of the larger interaction between the institutionalizing American cinema and modern consumer culture. Palatial cinema architecture both nationalized the local (by appealing to cinema trends) and localized the national (by appealing to cinema audiences). Jackie Coogan’s star image sold hats as well as it sold tickets. *Photoplay Magazine* sold film to fans and sold their collected attention to advertisers. And the entire industry became one long commercial for California. Consumption is a web of practices, and the film industry – as evidenced by its response to cinema advertising – was attempting to negotiate a particular position for film between commodity, gallery, and trend.
WORKS CITED

Archival Collections

Duke University, David M. Rubinstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library: J. Walter Thompson Company; Publicity Clock Company Advertising Cards and Brochures.

Pikes Peak Library District (Colorado), Special Collections in the 1905 Carnegie Library: Alexander Industries Records.

State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center: Charles Trefls Papers; Kansas City Slide Manufacturing Company Records.

Historic Trade Journals

Advertising & Selling

Moving Picture World

Nickelodeon / Motography

Printers’ Ink

Printers’ Ink Monthly

Books


Carbine, Mary. “‘The Finest Outside the Loop’: Motion Picture Exhibition in Chicago’s Black Metropolis, 1905-1928.” *Camera Obscura* 23 (May 1990): 8-41.


-----.


Fuller, Kathryn H. *At the Picture Show: Small Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.


Spigel, Lynn. *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America.*


-----.


-----.


Stamp, Shelley. *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon.*


-----.


Susanin, Timothy S. *Walt Before Mickey: Disney’s Early Years, 1919-1928.* Jackson:
University Press of Mississippi, 2011.


Appendix A: Advertising Slide Companies

The following is a complete list of all 104 lantern slide companies which I know to have been willing and able to produce advertising slides for use in American motion picture theaters between the years of 1908 and 1922. The company name(s) and home city are provided. Undoubtedly countless additional companies slipped through the cracks of my research, either because they did not place self-advertising material in national trade journals, or because they placed them in periodicals to which I had no access.

Adfilm Company – Kansas City, MO
Advertising Slide Company – St. Louis, MO
Advertising Specialty Company – Louisville, KY
A.J. Clapham – New York City
Alfred L. Simpson, Inc. – New York City
American Advertising Company – Columbus, OH
American Motion Slide Company – Chicago, IL
American Slide and Poster Company – Chicago, IL
American Slide Company – Columbus, Ohio
American Song Slide & Poster Company – Chicago, IL
American Typo-Pad Company – Raleigh, NC
Art Slide Company – (unknown)
Auerbach Advertising Agency – Butte, MT
Battershall & Oleson – Chicago, IL
Best Slide Company – Kansas City, MO
Brayton Manufacturing Company – Chicago, IL
Brite Lite Film Advertising Company – New York City
Burden & Salisbury Company, Inc. – Rochester, NY
Business Efficiency Company – (unknown)
Clarice K. Rogalla – Chicago, IL
Columbia Slide Company – Chicago, IL
Curtainyline Curtain and Producing Company / New Process Film Title Co. – Chicago, IL
Denver Theater Supply Company – Denver, CO
Des Moines Slide Company – Des Moines, IA
D.P. Shull – Long Beach, CA
Economy Supply Depot / Economy Film Exchange – Chicago, IL
E.L. Dyer Slide Company – Kansas City, KS
Erker Bros. Optical Company – St. Louis, MO
Emnkay Moving Picture Company – Terre Haute, IN
Enterprise Optical Manufacturing Company – Chicago, IL
Excelsior Slide Company / Excelsior Illustrating Company – New York City
Flashagraph Company – Chicago, IL
Florida Photographic Concern – Fort Pierce, FL
F.M. Tisdale Enterprises – Chicago, IL
George Birt – Indianapolis, IN
Genre Transparency Company – Chicago, IL
Grant Carder Slide Company – Portland, OR
Gunby Bros. – New York City
Greater New York Slide Company – New York City
Harold Ives Company – New York City
Hill & Orr – Chicago, IL
Houston Slide Company – Houston, TX
Ideal Amusement Company – Louisville, KY
Illinois Motion Picture Advertising Corporation – Chicago, IL
Independent Advertising Company, Inc. – New York City
International Film Products Company – Cincinnati, OH
J.E. Naylor & Company – Chicago, IL
Kansas City Slide Company – Kansas City, MO
Keeshen Advertising Agency – Oklahoma City, OK
Kleine Optical Company – Chicago, IL
Kurtz & Mack – Sandusky, OH
L.B. Adkins Company – Columbus, OH
Lee Lash Company – New York City
Manhattan Slide and Film Company – New York City
Marshaw Slide Manufacturing Service – Kansas City, MO
McFerran-Knopf Company – Louisville, KY
Metropolitan Slide Company – New York City?
Mica Non-Breakable Slide Company – Philadelphia, PA
Midland Transparency Company – Omaha, NE
Motion Picture Advertising Company – New York City
Mott-Le-Gaige Animated Advertising Company – New York City
National Moving Picture Advertising Company – Charlotte, NC
National Song Slide Exchange – Chicago, IL
Ned Cleaveland – Washington Court House, OH
Neosho Slide Company – Neosho, MO
New York Advertising Slide Company – New York City
Niagara Slide Company – Lockport, NY
No-Destructo Slide Company – Philadelphia, PA
North American Slide Company – Philadelphia, PA
Northwestern Amusement Syndicate – Seattle, WA and St. Paul, MN
Novelty Slide Company – New York City
Ohio Transparency Company – Cleveland, OH
Paris Slide Company – Philadelphia, PA
Peerless Slide Company – (unknown)
Perfection Slide Company / Levi Company, Inc. – New York City
Photo Specialty Company – Keenesville, NY
Premier Slide Company – New York City
Premo Company – Philadelphia, PA
Preston Lombard – Boston, MA
Quality Slide and Photo Makers – Chicago, IL
R. Naylor & Company – Chicago, IL
Radio Ad Slide Company – (unknown)
Scott & Van Altena – New York City
Seattle Slide Company – Seattle, WA
Shepherd’s Song Slide Service – New York City
Shreveport Advertising Slide Company – Shreveport, LA
Slidene Manufacturing Company – Columbus, NE
Specialty Slide Makers – Chicago, IL
Standard Slide Corporation – New York City
Superior Advertising Slide Company – Cleveland, OH
Thornton Advertising Company – Chicago, IL
Three Star Slide Company – Chicago, IL
Tilley Bros. – Austin, TX
Troy Sign and Slide Company – Troy, OH
Unique Slide Company, Inc. – New York City
U.S. Slide Company – Kansas City, MO
Utility Transparency Company / F.H. Richardson – Brooklyn, NY
Vitaslide Company – San Francisco, CA
Well’s Moving Picture Enterprises – New York City
White Specialty Company – New York City
William A. Lochren Film & Slide Company – Minneapolis, MN
Wm. H. Swanson & Company – (unknown)
Williams Advertising Slide Company – New York City
Young Advertising Service – Manning, SC
Appendix B: Advertising Trailer Companies

The following is a list of the 31 companies I know to have been making or encouraging the use of commercial advertising trailers in the United States between the years of 1914 and 1922. As with the slide producers, a significant number may have slipped through the cracks during the research process. As before, the company name(s) and home city are provided.

A caveat is warranted here: It can be very difficult to determine what, specifically, individual companies were making in the early years of advertising film production, as length and style of product were frequently veiled by indistinct terminology. This list includes 8 debatable, but plausible, inclusions. Companies which definitely specialized in advertising cartoons but did not overtly refer to them as trailers have been included as theatrical cartoons were predominantly, then as now, half reels or less; thus, all advertising cartoons would have been de facto trailers, even if they were significantly longer than the typical one-minute in duration. Five companies are known to have offered animation but did not overtly describe their products as ‘trailers’: the American Cartoon Film Corporation, the Dra-Ko Film Company, the Metropolitan Company, the Pacific Coast Film Advertising Company, and the Standard Motion Picture Company. A sixth company – the Quality Film Company – was even more vague, offering only “animated advertising along commercial lines” in its 1918 publicity blurb. In early film discourse, ‘animated’ was often simply a synonym for ‘motion picture.’ However, 1918 is a late enough date that the implication of the term was more likely ‘cartoon,’ and as such they are also included here. Two other concerns offered only a product ‘superior to slides.’ As trailers were the only celluloid product I have run across which were marketed as a replacement for slides, I presume these companies were making trailers rather than longer films or offscreen
technologies. In this list, American Commercial Film and James P. Simpson describe their wares in this way.

Alexander Film Company – Colorado Springs, CO
American Bioscope Company – Chicago, IL
American Commercial Film Company – Chicago, IL
Animated Cartoon Film Corporation – (unknown)
Arftfilm Studios – Cleveland, OH
Brite Lite Film Advertising Company – New York, NY
Camel Film Company – Chicago, IL
Dra-Ko Film Company – New York, NY
Effankay Film Company – Austin, TX
Federal Development Company – Alliance, OH
Fort Wayne & Northern Indiana Traction Company – Fort Wayne, IN
Fox-Burgh Syndicate – San Francisco, CA (and possibly Chicago)
Industrial Moving Picture Company / Rothacker Manufacturing Company – Chicago, IL
James P. Simpson Company, Inc. – Dallas, TX
Kansas City Slide Company / Kansas City Film Ad Company – Kansas City, MO
Manhattan Slide and Film Company, Inc. – New York, NY
Metropolitan Company – Detroit, MI
National Advertising Motion Picture Weekly, Inc. – [somewhere in New England]
National Motion-Ad Company – Chicago, IL
Nelson Motion Picture Studios – Detroit, MI
Pacific Coast Film Advertising Company – (unknown)
Quality Film Company – Davenport, IA
Ray – New York City
Raymond Anderson Company – Louisville, KY
Real Publicity Company – Kansas City, MO
Scenic Film Company – Atlanta, GA
Screen Advertising, Inc. – Washington DC
Southern Film Service, Inc. – Houston, TX
Standard Motion Picture Company – Chicago, IL
Tilford & Tilford – Chicago, IL
Triograph Film Manufacturing Company – Atlanta, GA

Appendix C: Offscreen-Advertising Companies

The following is a list of the 10 companies I know to have been offering offscreen advertising technologies for use in American cinemas in the 1910s and 1920s. I suspect that more examples have been missed in this category than in either of the others, as offscreen advertising tactics were frequently ‘home-brewed’ adaptations designed either by an exhibitor for his or her own use, or sold in a limited region by the original inventor. Trade press advertising was extremely rare for these products. As always, company name and home city are provided.

Fowler Sign Company – Tacoma, WA
General Sales Company of America – Pittsburgh, PA
J.H. Genter Company – Newburgh, NY
Kalck Safety Specialties Company – Amityville, NY
Kineto Machine Company – Chicago, IL
Publicity Clock Company – New York City
Standard Manufacturing Company – New York City
Thayer Advertising Corporation – New York City
United Exhibitors’ Advertising Corporation – Wilmington, DE
Wonder Clock Advertising Company – New York City