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Kristen Whissel

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Placing the Spectator on the Scene of History: the battle re-enactment at the turn of the century, from Buffalo Bill's Wild West to the Early Cinema

KRISTEN WHISSEL, *University of Michigan*

At the turn of the last century, the cinema emerged onto the burgeoning field of commercialized leisure to demonstrate its remarkable capacity to negotiate, aestheticize, and charge with pleasure social and cultural changes brought about by the rise of industrial capitalism and technological modernity [1]. Though film scholars have tended to focus on urban street scenes and their crowds as the *locus classicus* of modernity, the turn-of-the-century imperial battlefield stands as one of the most intensely modern landscapes [2]. In 1898, the Spanish–American war sparked a heated rivalry in the United States’ sensational press, as the conquest of an overseas empire was promoted as both a cure for the ills of industrial capitalism and a timely opportunity to display US military power before the eyes of a watching world. While economists argued that the fabled China market would provide an outlet for industrial overproduction, progressives such as Theodore Roosevelt proposed that war with Spain would provide a much needed return to ‘the strenuous life’ that would cure American men from degeneration as they fought to subordinate a new frontier to Anglo-American civilization [3]. Very quickly, US imperialism was incorporated into the scopic regime of modernity as actuality films of massive battleships on the move, war preparations and camp life in Tampa, and Admiral Dewey’s triumphant return from the Philippines played before fascinated crowds in urban centers [4]. Such pictures provided audiences with an imperially inflected panoramic perception and provided the opportunity to undertake a ‘fascinated inspection’ of American military masculinity and power. However, the modern dynamics of imperial warfare—its unprecedented mechanization of violence, unstable visual fields, its surprise attacks and blinding smoke, its dispersal of charging, falling, and dismembered bodies across distant and unfamiliar tropical landscapes—made cinematic recordings of battles a difficult if not impossible genre. To represent this most modern scene cinematically, companies had to resort to re-enactments.

When discussing the generic liminality of early re-enactment films, historians tend to agree, ‘imposing the later distinction between documentary and fictional genres ... is problematic in several respects’. As Richard Abel eloquently states in his history of early French film, prior to 1908 ‘the difference between recording a current public event as it was happening and reconstructing a past (or even present) historical event in a studio’ was relatively insignificant. More important ‘was that a representation of the

“historical” differed from a representation of the “purely fictive” or imaginary—which meant that referential differences mattered more than differences in modes of representation ... In other words, the “historical scene” was bound to the actualité within an unbroken continuum uniting historical past and present ...’ This historical continuum allowed French filmmakers such as Pathé and Méliès to ‘exploit the shared “family resemblance” between historical reconstructions and actualités’ [5]. Miriam Hansen concurs, noting,

many actualities involved reconstructions ... yet not necessarily with the intent to deceive; as a subgenre, dramatic reenactments of current events were considered legitimate. [While the] boundaries between documentary reality and *mise en scene* may have been relative, they seem to have mattered less than the kind of fascination which connects, for instance, the ‘realistic imitation’ of President McKinley’s assassin in the electric chair in *The Execution of Czolgosz* (Porter/Edison 1901) with historical reenactments such as *The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots* (Edison 1895)—or the substitution trick in *Execution by Hanging* (Biograph 1905) with the authentic footage of *Electrocuting an Elephant* (Edison 1903) [6].

For Hansen, then, sensationalist appeal joined to an historical referent smoothed over the difference between ‘documentary reality and *mise en scene*’ and hence the difference between actuality and re-enactment.

While I agree with the argument that the re-enactment achieved a widespread turn-of-the-century ‘legitimacy’ as a form for representing the historical real and that a very hazy line—or as David Levy puts it, ‘a weak ontological frontier’ [7]—separated the documentary actuality and the re-enactment, I would contend that we have not yet determined *how* it achieved legitimacy. Without determining the latter, we risk conflating these distinct genres and their specific modes of address, forms of spectatorship, and the visual and epistemological pleasures they provided. Such conflation, in turn, risks consigning the re-enactment to the secondary status of a ‘sham’ actuality. Importantly, the live historical re-enactment prepared consumers of urban commercialized leisure for their encounter with re-enactment films and established this early film genre’s peculiar authenticity. Hence, this essay will locate the re-enactment film within the broader culture of late 19th-century live re-enactments that the film re-enactment participated in and transformed. The fact that a large percentage of re-enactment films produced in the USA represented military subjects suggests that the very artificiality of the battle re-enactment provided pleasurable means of knowing and ‘seeing’ imperial history that documentary actualities could not. I will begin by analyzing the live battle re-enactments and military displays featured in ‘Buffalo Bill’s Wild West’ and the particular relations they constructed between ‘history’ and its spectacular simulation, and between the ‘original’ witness of an event and the secondary audience who delighted in its re-enactment. After contrasting the mode of address and visual lure of the battle re-enactment to that of P. T. Barnum’s hoaxes and humbug, I will then demonstrate how the battle re-enactment film drew from the mode of address, spectatorship and reality effects previously manufactured by the ‘Wild West’. Although it has become conventional to perceive the re-enactment as a genre that mimicked the actuality, historical evidence suggests that the battle re-enactment strongly informed turn-of-the-century notions of what war would look like to a (camera or individual) ‘witness’ on the battlefield. In turn, a kind of paradox ensued: to seem most ‘real’, the

turn-of-the-century battle actuality had to aspire to achieve the 'reality effects' that had already been established by the (live and film) battle re-enactment [8].

The Peculiar Authenticity of the Live Re-enactment

The re-enactment had been a part of live urban commercialized leisure since the 1880s, perhaps most popularly incarnated in William F. Cody's traveling entertainment enterprise, 'Buffalo Bill's Wild West' [9]. Between 1883 and 1913 the 'Wild West' appeared before audiences in US and European cities, including New York, Atlanta, Buffalo, Manchester, London, Rome, Paris, and at a number of World's Fairs, including Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition [10]. 'Wild West' re-enactments were often promoted as 'object lessons' that demonstrated through visually compelling spectacles the higher ideals characteristic of a fast receding, nostalgically rendered past. The 'Wild West' represented early stages of the civilizing process through re-enactments of Indian battles (including Custer's Last Stand and later, The Battle of San Juan Hill), attacks on pioneer cabins, stagecoach ambushes, buffalo hunts, and catastrophes such as prairie fires, stampedes, and cyclones [11]. These re-enactments synthesized the sensationalism of cheap stage melodrama with the myth of 'frontier life' that had become so compelling for urban Easterners mired in big city life [12]. The resulting 'Drama of Civilization' was produced by Steele McKaye whose stage melodramas, Nicholas Vardac argues, represent the culmination of the theater's late 19th-century drive towards a 'pictorial ideal' later realized in the moving pictures. Played out against a backdrop of massive panoramas and cycloramas and accompanied by live music and a lecturer's narration (but virtually no dialogue), 'Wild West' re-enactments featured the dynamic, violent action of frontiersmen, scouts, and Cavalry as they subordinated hostile landscapes and 'villainous' native populations to American civilization.

Though Cody promoted his 'Wild West' re-enactments as factual, Richard Slotkin notes, 'the "Wild West" wrote "history" by conflating it with mythology. The reenactments were not recreations but reductions of complex events into "typical scenes"'. Cody's 'West' 'was a mythic space in which past and present, fiction and reality could co-exist; a space in which history, translated as myth, was reenacted as ritual' [13]. Cody's profitable articulation of 'history' via the conjoined modes of myth, realist spectacle, sensation, and melodrama was nevertheless championed as an example of progressive education about the nation's recent history [14]. 'Wild West' re-enactments earned the status of authentic 'history' by purporting to re-enact historical events as well as the spectator-position from which these spectacles were 'originally' perceived. By placing an 'original' spectator on the scene of an historical event and then replicating such a position for spectators at its simulation, the 'Wild West' made the re-enactment highly pleasurable and in the process guaranteed its authenticity.

Sold before every show, the extensive program for the 'Wild West' gives insight into the modes of address and forms of spectatorship around which Cody and his partner, Nate Salsbury, constructed their re-enactments. The program provided narrative summaries of the re-enacted events, brief biographies of Cody and the other featured 'historical characters', as well as reprinted reviews of the 'Wild West' and letters of support from military officials and historians who testified to the exhibition's authenticity. Hence, just as it detailed the historical contexts in which the re-enacted events 'originally' took place, the program also provided cues regarding the attraction-spectator relation on which the visual pleasure of the re-enactment relied. The program

even provided audiences with a vocabulary for understanding the realism and sense of presence the re-enactment evoked, deploying terms such as ‘actual pictures’, ‘living pictures’, and ‘faithful pictures’. For example, it explained:

Our aim is to make the public acquainted with the manners and customs of the daily life of the dwellers in the far West of the United States through the means of actual and realistic scenes from life. At each performance marked skill and daring are presented. Not only from the standpoint of the spectator, but also from a critical point of view, we assure the auditor that each scene presents a faithful picture of the habits of these folk, down to the smallest detail [15].

In support of this claim of pictorial realism, Brick Pomeroy’s review of the ‘Wild West’ (reprinted in the program) declared that ‘as a lover of his country’ Cody ‘wishes to present as many facts as possible to the public, so that those who will can see actual pictures of life in the West, brought to the East for the inspection and education of the public. Buffalo Bill has brought the Wild West to the doors of the East’ [16]. Over and over again the program promoted the re-enactment as a form able to make available representative ‘pictures’ of a society, culture, or nation that, like photographs, contain the ‘smallest detail’ and have the capacity to circulate (though to a far more limited degree). Moreover, the program implied that the reiterative structure of the re-enactment captured and preserved past events through ritualistic repetition which, unlike photography, functioned in a mode of presence rather than absence, and through dynamic rather than suspended movement—both of which intensified the impression of the past reanimated in the present as ‘*living* pictures’. Though not itself the ‘original’, the re-enactment emerges here as a form that has a special ontological relationship to it. By bringing ‘the Wild West to the doors of the East’ the re-enactment provided late 19th-century amusement seekers a credible solution for overcoming the ‘aura’ of the wild West without destroying it entirely [17].

The emphasis on framing and circulating ‘actual and realistic scenes from life’ links ‘Wild West’ re-enactments to a broader scopic regime characteristic of late 19th-century European and Anglo-American imperial culture in which, Timothy Mitchell argues, can be found the tendency to render up ‘the world-as-exhibition’. Along with ethnographic exhibitions found on midways at World’s Fairs and Expositions, panorama paintings, landscape pictures, wax museums and ‘life group’ museum displays, the ‘Wild West’ encouraged audiences to perceive ‘the world as a picture set up before a subject’ [18]. Mitchell links this latter tendency ‘to the unusual conception of the world as an enframed totality, something that forms a structure or a system’ [19] organized ‘to evoke some larger meaning, such as History or Empire or Progress’ [20]. ‘Wild West’ re-enactments evoked history, empire and progress as its ‘Drama of Civilization’ pictured a spectacular history of American continental expansion, updated in 1898 to dramatize the Battle of San Juan Hill and US overseas imperial expansion following the Spanish–American War.

To bolster the realism of his re-enactments, Cody suggested that the original wild West often appeared before the frontiersman ‘as a picture set up before a subject’. Hence, the ‘Wild West’ insisted that life on the frontier was characterized by participation in—and the visual consumption of—spectacles of dynamic action, violent conflict, and astonishing displays of power. Pomeroy’s review of the ‘Wild West’ suggests that Cody fulfilled his promise to ‘illustrate life as it is witnessed on the plains’.

Could a man now living have stood on the shore of the Red Sea and witnessed

the passage of the children of Israel and the Struggle of Pharaoh and his hosts, what a sight he would have seen, and how interested would be those to whom he related the story. Could the man who stood on the shore to see Washington and his soldiers cross the Delaware have lived till now to tell the story, what crowds he would have to listen. How interesting would be the story of a man, if he were now living, who had witnessed the landing of Columbus on the shores of the New World, or the story of one of the hardy English Puritans who took passage on the 'Mayflower,' and landed on the rock-bound coast of New England. So, too, the angel who has seen the far West become tame and dotted under the advancing civilization as the pioneers fought their way westward into desert and jungle. What a story he can relate as to the making of that history and what a history America has, to be sure! [21].

As an 'angel who has seen the far West become tame', Cody occupies the ideal and unique position of one who was simultaneously and somewhat paradoxically a part of the spectacle he witnessed. The tailoring of the re-enactment's spectacular simulation of an equally spectacular real according to Cody's privileged perspective supported the re-enactment's claim to historical realism:

Since the railroad gave its aid to pioneering, America is making history faster than any other country in the world. *Her pioneers are fast passing away.* A few years more and the great struggle for possession will be ended and generations will settle down to enjoy the homes their fathers located and fenced in for them. Then will come the picture maker—he who with pen, pencil, and panel can tell the story as he understands it. The millions will read and look at what the pioneer did and what the historian related, wishing on the whole that they could have been there to have seen the original. These are some of the thoughts that crowd in upon as we view the great living picture that the Hon. Wm. F. Cody ('Buffalo Bill') gives us at the Wild West Exhibition, which every man, woman and child the world over should see and study as realistic fact [22].

Pomeroy contends that literary and painterly representations of the West only intensify the desire to see a no-longer available 'original' wild West seen and known only by those pioneers who began 'the great struggle for possession'. The gap left between the pioneer and the picture-maker, the 'original' and its inadequate representation in literature, written history, and painting is filled by the pioneer showman, Cody. His spectacular re-enactments achieve the status of a 'great living picture' appearing as 'realistic fact' precisely by reproducing the point of observation from which this unfolding history was 'originally' seen. By making the presence of a spectator an integral part of the original historical event, Cody made such a position available and seemingly authentic when the event was re-enacted before a paying audience. For, it was precisely the 'proximate distance' of the 'agent-observer' that the 'Wild West' aimed to reconstruct for its audiences. For, on the one hand, the 'Wild West' insisted that the process of westward expansion it re-enacted took place in an extremely harsh context (i.e. the *wild west*), which was *by definition* beyond the scope of any 'audience' other than the exceptional agent/observer pioneer. On the other hand, it insisted that this process was so central to American history and identity that it demanded a national—even international—audience. Hence, the particular visual pleasure and peculiar authenticity of 'Wild West' re-enactments derived from their power to endow

audiences with an imaginary presence at historically significant and highly sensational moments that by definition precluded their attendance.

Just as 'Wild West' re-enactments defined American 'history' as a series of grand spectacles taking place before a participant-observer, so, too, did they suggest that these historical episodes took the shape of a series of shocking and surprising sensational incidents, defined primarily through violent conflict between (morally superior) agents of civilization and (morally inferior) obstacles to civilization. For example, to introduce its re-enactment of a Native attack on the Deadwood Stage Coach, the program describes the history of the West in sensational terms characteristic of the dime novel and cheap melodrama:

The people of the Eastern States of the Union are accustomed to regard the West as the region of romance and adventure. *And, in truth, its history abounds with thrilling incidents and surprising changes.* Every inch of that beautiful country has been won from a cruel and savage foe by danger and conflict ... The history of the wagon trains and stage coaches that preceded the railway is written all over with blood and the story of suffering and disaster, often as it has been repeated, is only known in all of its horrid details to the bold frontiersmen who, as scouts and rangers, penetrated the strongholds of the Indians, and backed by the gallant men of the army, became the avant couriers of Western civilization and the terror of the red man (my italics) [23].

Condensing several different attacks into a single event, the 'Attack on the Deadwood Stage' re-enacted past history in order to position spectators as 'witnesses' at the edges of a 'vivid representation'—replete with 'authentic' and melodramatic 'horrid details'—of the violent struggle between 'the avant couriers of Western civilization' and their savage foes. To intensify the sense of the presence and presentness made possible by the re-enactment, Cody would select a few members of the audience to ride in the Deadwood stage during the attack and rescue, giving such privileged spectators an even closer yet nevertheless 'safe' proximity to the deadly shocks of life on the frontier. Like the highly manufactured and controlled thrills of the Coney Island attraction, 'Loop the Loop', such re-enactments promised 'The Greatest Sensation of the Age ... No Danger Whatever' [24], for the re-enactment's reiterative structure allowed for control over 'thrilling incidents' and 'surprising changes'. In turn, the moral of the story rehearsed the stage melodrama's conflict between 'innocence' (civilization) persecuted by villainy (its savage foe), with the former ultimately defeating the latter. As Linda Williams notes, though the 'Wild West' represented US expansion and imperial conquest, it consistently represented the conquerors as victims whose suffering at the hands of Native Americans needed to be displayed and then avenged in racialized spectacles of power and action [25].

The Re-enactment's Witness-Spectator vs. Humbug's Detective-Spectator

These hyper-kinetic live re-enactments were part of a shift in late 19th century popular culture away from a mode of intellection central to the 'operational aesthetic' typical of P. T. Barnum's hoaxes and humbug, towards more 'vigorous' forms of entertainment which, according to John F. Kasson had previously 'existed only on the margins of American life'. Such amusements included prize fighting, competitive athletics, moving picture shows, amusement parks, and literature that celebrated 'masculine toughness' such as Owen Wister's literary western, *The Virginian* (1902), and Jack London's *The*

Call of the Wild (1903) [26]. This shift is quite important to an understanding of the cultural history of the popular re-enactment and the battle re-enactment film's place in that history. It is tempting to see the re-enactment film as a kind of hoax or sham, a simulation passed off as the real to unsuspecting spectators. Indeed, at first glance, 'Wild West' re-enactments, too, seem to belong in the same vein as Barnum's famous hoaxes. Like Barnum, Cody featured a buffalo hunt, claimed to display 'authentic' Western relics such as the Deadwood Stage Coach, and exhibited feats of physical skill (particularly, Annie Oakley's sharp-shooting) so astonishing as to seem impossible and hence the effect of a trick. Yet, closer comparison of the aesthetic and spectator-attraction relation typical of Barnum's and Cody's attractions suggest that 'Wild West' re-enactments signaled a departure from humbug.

In his study of Barnum's humbug, Neil Harris defines the particular pleasure and the cultural and social conditions involved in 19th-century audiences' encounter with, and consumption of, attractions such as the 'Feejee mermaid' (a half-monkey, half-fish), a sham buffalo hunt, the display of Santa Anna's wooden leg or the 'ancient' slave, Joice Heth, which made such hoaxes pleasurable for audiences and profitable to purveyors. According to Harris, humbug thrived in a Jacksonian social and cultural milieu which was insistently egalitarian, rejected 'secret learning and private information' in favor of lecture-going, embraced widespread common-school education as 'a guarantee for the republic's future', and was in the midst of a technological revolution supported by popular enthusiasm for scientific and industrial progress. [27]. As technologies such as the railway and telegraph became more diffuse in American culture so, too, did mechanical language and a measure of technical know-how. As Harris notes, 'machinery was beginning to accustom the public not merely to a belief in the continual appearance of new marvels but to a jargon that concentrated on methods of operation, on aspects of mechanical organization and construction, on horsepower, gears, pulleys, and safety valves' [28]. Popular delight in learning and the widespread acquisition of knowledge was accompanied by a widespread skepticism, a tendency to 'test' anything and anyone for truthfulness. This combination made the American individual susceptible not to deceit and fraud but to the closely related (and more pleasurable) experience of 'humbug' that was itself organized around a contest of wits between showman and amusement-seeker. Harris explains:

Experiencing a complicated hoax was pleasurable because of the competition between victim and hoaxer, each seeking to outmaneuver the other, to catch him off balance and detect the critical weakness ... Barnum understood that the opportunity to debate the issue of falsity, to discover how deception had been practiced, was even more exciting than the discovery of fraud itself. The manipulation of a prank, after all, was as interesting a technique in its own right as the presentation of genuine curiosities. Therefore, when people paid to see frauds, thinking they were true, they paid again to hear how the frauds were committed [29].

To exploit popular propensity for skepticism and truth-testing, critical evaluation and detection, Barnum encouraged his patrons to approach his attractions fully armed with doubt, ready to match wits with the showman, eager to penetrate surface deception that cloaked the truth of the matter, and thereby provide the solution to the conundrum on display. In such a milieu, the ideal amusement-seeker took up the position of the detective who 'enjoyed disentangling the true from the false, the spurious from the genuine' [30].

Like Barnum, Cody exploited a widespread cultural penchant for the provocation and satisfaction of curiosity. However, in contrast to Barnum's hoaxes, 'Wild West' re-enactments purported to reveal previously hidden processes occluded not by a false veneer designed to deceive the senses, but instead by distance, time, geography, and the forbidding conditions of frontier life. In turn, the *processes* on display and under consideration were not the mechanics of an infernal machine designed to stymie the intellect, but were the distant processes of nation-building and imperial expansion meant to stimulate national feeling and awaken the blood of middle classes enervated by the effects of industrial capitalism [31]. Hence, the exposure of fundamental but hidden relationships—between East and West, frontier and city, native white American and Native American—was the job of the showman, not the spectator. Whereas the pleasurable experience of humbug depended upon the amusement-seeker's incredulity and a competition of wits between showman and audience, the pleasure of 'Wild West' re-enactments depended upon the amusement-seeker's *willing* and temporary suspension of disbelief. To be sure, this consensual credulity resulted neither in the spectator's confusion of the re-enactment with the real, nor in being easily duped. Rather, this willing suspension of disbelief helped align the audience's point of view with the showman's, which, in turn, made his position as witness available to them [32]

In an effort to orient its spectators away from incredulity and towards credulity, the program describes a conversion scenario, in which the doubts held by spectators on the original scene of one of Cody's buffalo hunts are ultimately transformed into astonished admiration. Under the heading, 'The Pawnees Astonished', the program recounts the pre-history of the re-enactment of one of Cody's buffalo hunts:

One day a herd of buffalo [was] descried, and Cody desired to join in the hunt. The Indians objected, telling the Major, 'The white talker would only scare them away.' Seventy-three Indians attacked the herd and killed twenty-three. Later in the day another herd was discovered, and Major North insisted that the white chief have a chance to prove his skill. After much grumbling they acquiesced grudgingly, and with ill-concealed smiles of derision consented to be spectators. Judges of their surprise when Cody charged the herd, and single-handed and alone fairly amazed them by killing forty-eight buffaloes in fifty minutes, thus forever gaining their admiration and a firm friendship that has since often accrued to his benefit [33].

Once again, the program sets up a reiterative spectatorial structure in which the 'Wild West' audience occupies the imaginary position of (the now displaced) spectators who eye-witnessed this activity, thereby preparing the audience for the ensuing re-enactment. Initially skeptical but ultimately amazed, the Pawness gleefully consume the spectacle of their own demise. Taking up the Pawnees' position at the re-enactment, the paying audience watches Cody re-enact his own famous methods used to hunt and ultimately decimate the buffalo on which Native Americans relied for sustenance. The Pawnees' shift from incredulity to astonishment and admiration provided cues for spectatorial identification with the star and the process of continental expansion, imperial prowess, and national progress he re-enacted.

In this way, 'Wild West' re-enactments constructed and then exploited the structural similarities and differences between (original) eyewitness and (secondary) audience: the audience sees the event repeated as it was originally seen by the agent-observer, a position of (illusory) 'presence' unique to the 'genuine frontiersman' now rendered available to urban consumers *en masse*. Even the military displays that constituted the

portion of the show featuring ‘The Congress of Rough Riders of the World’ seem to have created a powerful impression of revelation and presence—even immersion—in the represented scene. After seeing the ‘Wild West’ in London, Frederic Remington observed: ‘The Cossacks will charge you with drawn sabers in a most genuine way, will hover over you like buzzards on a battlefield—they soar and whirl about in graceful curves, giving an uncanny impression, which has doubtless been felt by many a poor Russian soldier from the wheat fields of Europe as he lay with a bullet in him on some distant field’ [34]. The rapid alignment of Remington’s point of view with that of ‘many a poor Russian soldier’ lying injured on a battlefield suggests that one of the hallmarks of turn-of-the-century battle re-enactment and military display was the creation of a perilous point of view that placed the spectator in the crossfire. By interpellating audiences into the visual field of spectacular history, the re-enactment transformed them into participant-observers of compelling dramas of nation-formation and imperial expansion.

Battle Re-enactment Films of the Spanish–American and Philippine–American Wars

Battle re-enactment and military display films that focus on the Spanish–American and Philippine–American Wars share with ‘Wild West’ re-enactments a generic category as well as the themes, historical characters and ideology of American imperial expansion. When Theodore Roosevelt enlisted in the war against Spain and named his Cavalry the ‘Rough Riders’, he solidified a sense of historical continuity between the new, overseas imperialism and its earlier continental phase. In 1899, when Cody included a re-enactment of the Battle of San Juan Hill into the ‘Wild West’, so, too, did the Edison Company shoot a re-enactment film of the same. The cinema’s deployment of the re-enactment to represent violent struggle on this new overseas frontier undoubtedly provided audiences with a familiar and familiarizing format for consuming ‘authentic’ re-presentations of history as spectacle seen from the (imaginary) position of a participant-observer on-the-scene.

In a paragraph that introduces a section on ‘War Films’, which includes actualities as well as re-enactments from the Spanish–American War, the catalogue of Edison agent F. M. Prescott promised exhibitors and their audiences precisely the sensation of being present as a witness on the battlefield:

In these superior films can be seen the dead and wounded and the dismantled cannon lying on the field of battle. The men are seen struggling for their lives, and the American flag proudly waves over them and can be plainly seen through the dense smoke. The brave American and Cuban soldiers show their valor and superiority in fighting the hated Spaniards. You think you can hear the huge cannon belch forth their death-dealing missiles, and can really imagine yourself on the field witnessing the actual battle [35].

Within this collection, the only films that depict battles are re-enactments; hence, like the program for the ‘Wild West’, the Prescott catalogue suggests that the particular pleasure (and profitability) of re-enactment films derived from their capacity to inspire the spectator’s fantasy of presence on the scene of history, of finding oneself suddenly ‘on the field *witnessing* the actual battle’. The language used in the catalogue to describe the film *American Cavalry Charging with Drawn Sabres* echoes the language used by

Remington to describe his experience of the 'Congress of Rough Riders' at the 'Wild West':

The public never grows tired of war pictures, as is evidenced by the enormous sale of films treating on the subject. They show their appreciation in the repeated encores, and the profits derived from these exhibitions are flattering in the extreme. We rarely are treated with a view of charging cavalry, and therefore look on this great picture with awe as the men with drawn sabers dash forward on their spirited horses and you imagine for a moment that they are the real article [36].

By orienting the cavalry charge directly towards the camera, and hence at the spectator, the re-enactment film places the latter in the direct line of danger, intensifying what Gunning refers to as early cinema's 'aesthetic of astonishment' based on shock and surprise [37]. More importantly, this positioning of the camera/spectator reveals the 'artificiality' of the re-enactment—its status as a simulation—at precisely the same time that it intensifies the 'reality effect' so crucial to the spectator's ability to 'imagine for a moment that they are the real article'. Rather than concealing the film's status as re-enactment, the catalogue describes and the film exploits precisely the 'effects' of the re-enactment Cody had so effectively and profitably deployed in the 'Wild West' and 'Congress of Rough Riders'. *Roosevelt's Rough Riders* (AM&B, 1898) provides another example of the continuity of address, aesthetic, and theme between live and film military displays and re-enactments. Though the film does not re-enact a specific battle, it showed the famous mounted cavalry charging directly towards the camera, turning sharply only at the last moment. Indeed, this visible trace of the film's generic status—its placement of the spectator in the direct line of danger—is inseparable from the particular visual experience and pleasures it provides. In the tradition of Cody's 'Congress of Rough Riders', this film offers spectators a thrilling sense of absent presence and a view of how such a charge might, or did, appear to the participant-observers/soldiers on an actual battlefield. Filmed in 1898 during war preparations in Tampa, Florida, such a film perhaps whetted appetites for actuality films of the upcoming war.

Numerous factors contributed to the paucity of actuality films of war. Like the nation's earlier phase of (continental) imperialism, the struggle for new territories (and with them control of markets, resources, and waterways) took place on distant and hostile frontiers, beyond the purview of civilian observation. Moreover, the conditions of imperial conquest and resistance to it were at odds with the desire to see History, Progress, and Empire as an enframed spectacle. As Paul Virillio argues, 'the history of the battle is primarily the history of radically changing fields of perception'. War does not simply consist of 'scoring territorial, economic, or other material victories' but also of appropriating 'visual fields' [38]. Well aware of the importance of such appropriation, Filipinos resisting US colonization fought a guerilla war in which soldiers camouflaged as civilians executed unexpected ambushes. American soldiers suppressing the Philippine insurgency often found themselves caught up in a fruitless search for an elusive enemy. One officer wrote to his wife: 'I do hope the idiotic newspapers haven't worried you to death about the heavy engagements at Caloocan. 'Battles' out here are greatly exaggerated. The enemy is like a flea you can't see' [39].

Letters and diaries written by US soldiers fighting in the war describe the visual terrain of modern imperial warfare as shifting, unstable, and characterized by self-erasure. For example, soldiers from the Black 24th Regiment on a scouting mission

to find insurgents reported seeing in the distance, 'A body of Filipinos, drilling on extended order, such as used only in fighting'. Once they reached the site, however, the dismayed 24th encountered only 'peaceful citizens planting rice' [40]. The astonishingly non-spectacular imperial landscape refused to take the shape of a clearly rendered 'living picture', yielding only disorienting, kaleidoscopic transformations, leaving US volunteers 'looking for rebel forces which are nowhere to be found' [41]. Battles against Spain in Cuba also failed take the shape of 'an enframed totality', thanks in part to Spain's deployment of new military technologies. In his memoirs of the Spanish-American war, Teddy Roosevelt described the terrifying sensation of battlefield blindness caused by the smokeless gunpowder used by Spanish soldiers, the effect of which, he notes, 'was remarkable'.

The air seemed full of the rustling sound of the Mauser bullets, for the Spaniards knew the trails by which we were advancing, and opened up heavily on our position. Moreover, as we advanced we were, of course, exposed, and they could see us and fire. But they themselves were entirely invisible. The jungle covered everything, and not the faintest trace of smoke was to be seen in any direction to indicate from whence the bullets came [42].

While smokeless gunpowder and thick tropical vegetation gave Spain the military advantage of invisibility, gunpowder smoke coming from the Americans' weapons revealed their position and further obscured their already blocked vision. Roosevelt concludes, 'It was most bewildering to fight an enemy whom one so rarely saw' whose presence was indicated only by the menacing sound of mauser bullets 'singing through the trees over our heads, making a noise like the humming of telephone wires' [43]. As Alexander Nemerov notes, though Frederic Remington represented this terrifying battlefield blindness in 'The Scream of Shrapnel at San Juan Hill'—in which soldiers are shown convulsively flailing, ducking, dropping and fruitlessly looking in every possible direction for the source of a salvo—his direct observation of the battle was prevented by the extreme conditions of modern warfare. Hence, Remington described the famous battle as 'the most glorious feat of arms I ever heard of' [44]. American imperialism placed the soldier into an intense 'visual topology of modernity', which Tom Gunning characterizes as 'fragmented and atomized' and structured around 'a gaze which, rather than resting on a landscape in contemplation, seems to be pushed and pulled in conflicting orientations, hurried and intensified, and therefore less coherent or anchored' [45].

Battlefield blindness also afflicted the motion picture camera's mechanical eye. In his memoirs of his experiences filming British soldiers in the Boer War, Biograph cameraman W. K. L. Dickson described his attempt to film a battle in the valley of the Upper Tugela. Dickson used a telephoto lens and set up the Biograph, 'not fifty feet from the big guns'. Though 'the air was full of bursting shells' and Dickson could see 'the flash of a Boer gun that might just probably miss the naval guns and strike us'—the resulting film appears onscreen as nothing more than a panorama of the South African landscape.

[t]he depth and vastness of the scene was so great as to somewhat disqualify it for a biographic view. I fear very few will be able to discern the shells bursting, or the cavalry and artillery below us ... As for the foot soldiers in khaki, it will be quite impossible to see them, as they are always invisible from a distance, being the color of the earth. The exact position of our guns and those of the enemy can be seen by studying the accompanying

panoramic sketch.... Every hill and dale and winding of the [valley] is shown, and should one see the Biograph panoramic projection of the valley at the time of the battle he will get a very good idea of the whole thing, even if the distant puffs should be invisible [46].

The battle's massive scale—caused in part by the extended trajectory of modern artillery—and khaki-colored uniforms conspire to camouflage weapons and soldiers alike, rendering the battle indistinguishable from the surrounding landscape [47]. Hence at precisely the historical moment that the cinema's panoramic perception and documentary capacities held forth the promise of actuality footage of such battles, the cinema encountered a limit case. The war re-enactment film emerged as a sort of compromise between the scopic regime of early cinema and turn-of-the-century imperial warfare. Like the 'Wild West', re-enactments of the Spanish–American and Philippine–American wars transformed the shock, surprise, and contingencies of modern imperial warfare into spectacular displays of military power and progress in order to carve out the spectatorial position of the imaginary participant-observer placed 'on the scene' by the attraction.

Advance of the Kansas Volunteers at Caloocan (Edison, 1899) provides a stunning example of such mediation. Unlike Dickson's failed battle actuality, the landscape in the re-enactment remains subordinated to action. The film opens with a line of 'Filipino insurgents' firing directly at the camera. US troops emerge from behind the camera, firing several rounds as they advance towards the now-retreating Filipinos. The US color bearer is shot and falls, at which point another soldier picks up the flag, and waves it furiously. The US troops disappear into the foliage in the background of the frame, behind a veil of smoke. Nothing in the catalogue description for the film suggests that it was passed off as an actuality to unsuspecting audiences, and the popularity of the live re-enactment as a form of commercialized leisure suggests that few would have been easily duped. Indeed the catalogue description for the film trades upon precisely those formal details that would reveal its generic status to urban, relatively sophisticated turn-of-the-century exhibitors and spectators: 'This is one of the best battle pictures ever made. The firing is first done directly toward the front of the picture, and the advance of the US troops apparently through the screen is very exciting; the gradual disappearance of the fighters sustaining the interest to the end' [48]. Positioned between the Filipino insurgents who fire directly at the camera and the charging US troops who emerge from behind it, this re-enactment places the audience in crossfire, an impossible position which, according to David Levy, led one reviewer to determine such films obvious re-enactments [49]. And while such a response provides evidence that some exhibitors might have passed off re-enactments as actualities, it also provides evidence that urban spectators were well aware of one of the characteristic features of the battle re-enactment: the placement of the audience in an impossible position at the edges of, or in this case in the middle of, the disputed territory. Indeed, the film provides an albeit mediated sensation of being visible and hence vulnerable to the enemy's frontal assault, yet the camera-endowed, disembodied presence in the scene transforms terror of such a position into the pleasurable satisfaction of curiosity about the shock and surprise of imperial warfare. And unlike the blindness experienced by US troops assaulted by and in search of an elusive enemy, the camera endows the spectator with a prosthetic vision that allows them to see the enemy and the source of the salvo, translating the imperial soldier's (and cameraman's) terrifying battlefield blindness into scopic clarity and power. Hence the gunpowder

smoke that blinded soldiers on the battlefield here creates an aesthetic effect, with 'the gradual disappearance of the fighters sustaining interest to the end'.

This positioning of the spectator on the battlefield also entails a positioning *vis-à-vis* the project of imperialism. The camera's placement has the effect of aligning the audience with the agents of US imperialism, who emerge from behind the camera to protect them from the unwarranted assault that opens the film. Placing civilian spectators in the line of this frontal assault supported the US media's representation of Filipino resistance as an unwarranted, savage attack on ostensibly innocent agents of civilization, progress, and uplift. Indeed, re-enactments of battles fought against the Filipino resistance consistently begin with Filipinos firing first: *Capture of the Trenches at Candaba* (Edison, 1899) and *Filipinos Retreat from Trenches* (Edison, 1899) open with the camera in a trench occupied by Filipinos, who fire several rounds at the initially unseen US soldiers who ultimately advance into and take the trench. As with 'Wild West' re-enactments, the agents of US imperialism appear as victims who, in the process of defending themselves, aid in territorial expansion. Though re-enactments did not show 'actual' images of battle, they allowed audiences to 'see' ostensible (and highly ideological) 'truths' about US overseas expansion promoted by pro-imperialists in the popular press.

Such 'truths' often dovetailed with ideologies of Manifest Destiny taught by the object lessons provided by the 'Wild West' and the World's Fairs and Exhibitions. *Capture of the Trenches at Candaba* places the camera-spectator in the trenches via a side-long view of Filipino soldiers defending their possession of a small strip of land. Initiating the movements of the US troops with an act of 'aggression', the insurgents fire several rounds as their color bearer waves the flag of the Philippine Republic in the middle of the frame. Suddenly, they retreat, frame left as US troops advance into the trench from frame right. The camera not only creates an illusory presence on the scene, but also seems to anticipate the historic moment when US possession takes place. In doing so, the camera's possession of, and the spectator's presence in, this space marks the trench as *already* American, suggesting the inevitability of the forward march of the agents of 'progress'. *Filipinos Retreat from Trenches* repeats this simple narrative of Filipino aggression, retreat, and US possession.

The sense of 'destiny' conveyed by these films would have found structural support in the relation between the re-enactment and popular print media. Like audiences at the 'Wild West', as well as those attending later film re-enactments such as *The Execution of Czolgosz* (Edison, 1901), *The Capture of the Biddle Brothers and Mrs. Soffel* (Edison/Porter, 1902), or *The Great Train Robbery* (Edison/Porter, 1903), audiences watching battle re-enactment films would have arrived at the theater already knowing the outcome of what was a highly sensationalized event already widely reported in the press. And like the re-enactment films mentioned above, the 'outcome' of battle re-enactments was the (often violent) subordination of forces of social and political disorder to morally superior forces of law and order. For example, *US Troops and Red Cross in the Trenches Before Calocan* (Edison, 1899) shows US soldiers falling injured as the troops advance into a trench. Just as the uninjured charge on to subordinate the unseen insurgents who wage the assault, Red Cross nurses advance into the trench and place the fallen soldiers onto stretchers. The repetition of the Filipino's assault and subordination suggest that the lure and potential pleasure of the re-enactment was perhaps uncompromised by its status as a 'mimic'—for the re-enactment's reiterative structure allowed for the sense of mastery that comes with replaying or repeating the traumatic event.

Despite—or, perhaps, *because of*—the re-enactment's mode of address, reality-effect and illusory presence-on-the-scene of spectacular history, audiences continued to imagine the potential visual effects of battle actualities. In January 1900, as the Philippine–American and Boer Wars were still being fought, an article published in *Leslie's Weekly* expressed desire for 'pictures of actual gruesome [*sic*] war' [50]. This astonishing document suggests that the (live and film) re-enactment's positioning of the spectator as participant-observer on the battlefield had so informed popular perceptions of what the battle actuality might—or should—look like that re-enactment's reality-effect had become an ideal that the hoped-for actuality might some day fulfill. The author begins by describing two different positions taken up by the camera-spectator in relation to the staged military parade and the spectacle of war.

The American Biograph is taking a prominent part in the two wars which are now occupying the center of the world's stage, and the pictures which are being shown at Keith's Theatre in New York, and at other leading houses throughout the country, are of intense interest. The biograph paid a great deal of attention to the soldier-boys of John Bull and Uncle Sam in times of peace, and so many splendid parade pictures have been made that we are all very familiar with the appearance of the American and British soldier in his gorgeous trappings of peace [51].

Each sentence describes a distinct positioning of the camera-spectator in relation to these two types of military spectacles. The latter places the Biograph amongst the crowds at military parades at which there is a fairly sharp distinction between the camera-spectator and the spectacle of 'the American and British soldier in his gorgeous trappings of peace'. In contrast, the preceding sentence suggests that rather than merely recording war from the position of a spectator cordoned off as audience with the rest of the world, the Biograph now takes '*a prominent part* in the two wars, which are now occupying the center of the world's stage'. Like the 'original' witness-on-the-scene described in 'Wild West' programs and reviews, the camera occupies the position of a participant-observer that is paradoxically a part of the spectacle it sees/records. From this new position, the Biograph offers military spectacle of a different order:

Now we are to look at [the soldier] as he works in his flannel shirt, muddy khaki trousers and gaiters, with fierce whiskers on his face, and none too much flesh on his bones. We are promised some vivid, soul-stirring pictures of actual, gruesome [*sic*] war, and the conditions under which the biograph operators in the Transvaal and in the Philippines are working are so favorable that the promises will probably be made good [52].

Taking up the position alongside the soldier and placed in the thick of things, the camera promises to provide images of the imperial soldier intimate enough to let us see his 'fierce whiskers' as he engages in 'actual, gruesome [*sic*] war'. In short, the desired point of view for the camera-spectator is that of the agent-observer of imperialism as he struggles to bring the disputed territory under control. This point of view is similar to the one promised by Cody when he claimed his re-enactments reiterated both the historical event and the position from which it was originally seen by the agent-observer of national expansion. Like the program for the 'Wild West', this article foregrounds the presence of the source of the spectacle's enunciation at the event. The cinema then displays the spectacle for the audience, who is granted the opportunity to mistake the camera's agent-observer point-of-view for its own, and thereby places the spectator in the position of an 'original' witness to the spectacle of imperial warfare. Just as the

'Wild West' rejected painterly and written accounts of frontier life, this article rejects journalistic accounts of war: 'A written description is always and forever the point of view, more or less biased, of the correspondent. But the Biograph camera does not lie, and we form our own judgment of this and that as we watch the magic screen' [53]. The transparently rendered spectacle of war seen from the point of view of the imperial agent-observer on-the-scene becomes the mark of the historical real. Rather than the battle re-enactment film 'faking' or simulating the actuality, *the actuality film aspires to achieve that which the re-enactment had already accomplished*: the illusory placement of the camera-spectator as a participant-observer on the scene of a historical spectacle it records/perceives. Important here is the relationship between history and spectator that the (live and film) battle re-enactment made both imaginable and ideal and, in turn, how that ideal informed notions of what a battle actuality should look like. Once in place, the re-enactment's reality effect informed fantasies about what the battle actuality would or should look like—never mind that the defining characteristic of the 'actual' perceptual experience of war was battlefield blindness. To become visible as spectacle and hence to seem most 'real', then, the battle actuality had to deploy the re-enactment's own reality effects.

Quite significantly, the author understands that the battle actuality and spectator position he describes will in all likelihood remain an ideal and hence the province of the re-enactment:

So both the American and British war offices have recognized the possible value of real war pictures, and have given the operators of the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company the privilege of risking their lives to secure actual pictures of the war. They may not be successful. They are handicapped by all the involved processes of photography. Their films, thousands of miles from a developing station, may be ruined before they ever pass from the negative to the positive stage, and what promised to be a wonderful scene may prove a blank strip of film. But the game is worth the candle. Imagine the historical value of a moving picture of the charge at Balaklava, or of the advance upon Gettysburg. There will be other Balaklavas and other Gettysburgs, and the biograph may get there just in the nick of time [54].

As Dickson's account of the Boer War would soon demonstrate, the sheer presence of the camera at a battle did not necessarily bring the latter into focus, thanks to the contingencies of modern imperial warfare. It was precisely the re-enactment's repetition or reiteration of the imperial battle under conditions that controlled the contingencies and shocks of modern warfare that made the participant-observer spectator position both possible *and* an ideal to which the battle actuality aspired. Like the live re-enactments staged in Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West', re-enactment films such as *Advance of the Kansas Volunteers* suggest that the pleasures provided by the battle re-enactment lay precisely in its artificiality.

Undoubtedly, the indexicality of the re-enactment film's image further intensified its reality-effect, giving support to the turn-of-the-century fantasy that the violent conflict taking place on the edges of the new overseas empire appeared to its own participant-observers as highly visible spectacles of power. The re-enactment's reality-effect allowed audiences to delight in the impossible proximity to the distant historical process the re-enactment appeared to grant them. Like the 'Wild West' battles that incorporated urban audiences into the proto-modern paths of westward Manifest Destiny, the war re-enactment film's manufacture and orchestration of the contingencies of modern

warfare incorporated film audiences into the turn-of-the-century circuits of technological modernity which were inseparable from overseas imperialism. If early cinematic representations of the urban street scene actuality demonstrate a 'picture taking capability able to match the fugitive and accelerated temporality of American technological modernity' [55], then the battle re-enactment film demonstrates a picture-making capability that strived to match the fugitive and accelerated history of American imperialism's expansion across a new frontier.

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Correspondence: Kristen Whissel Program in Film and Video, 2512 Frieze Building, 150 South State Street, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA; E-mail: kwhissel@umich.edu

NOTES

- [1] See, for example, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz, eds (Berkeley, CA, 1996) and Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: early sensational cinema and its contexts* (New York, 2001).
- [2] Tom Gunning, 'The whole town's gawking: early cinema and the visual experience of modernity', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 7(2) (1994), p. 193.
- [3] Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: how gender provoked the Spanish-American war* (New Haven, CT, 1998). See also Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: an interpretation of American expansion 1860–1898* (Ithaca, NY, 1963).
- [4] Charles Musser details the production and exhibition of Spanish-American War films in *The Emergence of Cinema: the American screen to 1907* (Berkeley, CA, 1990), pp. 225–261 and *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the manufacturing company* (Berkeley, CA, 1991), pp. 103–155.
- [5] Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896–1914* (Berkeley, CA, 1998), p. 92.
- [6] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: spectatorship in American silent film* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), pp. 30–31.
- [7] David Levy, 'Reconstituted newsreels, re-enactments and the American narrative film', in Roger Holman, ed. *Cinema 1900/1906: an analytical study* (Brussels, 1982), pp. 243–260.
- [8] To trace this cultural history, this article focuses on re-enactments of land battles and does not consider naval battle re-enactments.
- [9] Re-enactments of disasters were popular attractions at World's Fairs and at amusement parks. For example, on Coney Island amusement-seekers watched recreations of the eruptions of Mt. Vesuvius and Mt. Pelée or re-enactments of the Johnstown Flood of 1889 and the Galveston Flood of 1900. John F. Kasson notes the popularity of the Coney Island attraction 'Fire and Flames' which repeatedly sent a four-story building into flames, fought over and over again by firefighters. *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the turn of the century* (New York, 1978), pp. 72–73.
- [10] Sarah Blackstone notes that even though the 'Wild West' was set up just outside the gates at the Columbian Exposition, it nevertheless was one of the most popular attractions, and grossed \$1,000,000 in the summer of 1893 alone. *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business: a history of Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (New York, 1986), pp. 26–27.
- [11] For details of features of the 'Wild West', see Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business*. See also Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana, IL, and Chicago, 1999) and Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: the myth of the frontier in twentieth century America* (Norman, OK, 1998), pp. 29–87.

- [12] For an analysis of the social, cultural and economic transformations that made the myth of frontier life so compelling to upper class, urban Easterners, see G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience* (New Haven, CT, 1968).
- [13] Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 69.
- [14] In his review, Pomeroy noted 'I wish there were more progressive educators in this world like Wm. F. Cody'. Quoted in *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: historical sketches and programme* (New York, 1896), p. 11.
- [15] *Ibid.*, p. 5. *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Historical Sketches and Programme*, 5.
- [16] Editorial in the *New York Democrat*, 5 June 1886. Reprinted in *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, pp. 10–12.
- [17] Walter Benjamin defines 'aura' as 'the unique phenomenon of distance, however close it may be'. The decay of the aura of an artwork or of 'reality' 'rests on two circumstances, both of which are related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life. Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction'. Technical reproduction, which around 1900 'reached a standard that not only permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the most profound change in their impact upon the public; it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes'. Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (New York, 1968), pp. 219–221. The very reproducibility of life on the frontier in the 'Wild West' depended heavily on Cody's masterful orchestration of a range of technologies of transportation and representation, from the railway to electricity.
- [18] For analyses of the waxworks museum see Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: early mass culture in fin-de-siecle Paris* (Berkeley, CA, 1998). On the museum life group, see Alison Griffiths, 'Journeys for those who cannot travel': promenade cinema and the museum life group, *Wide Angle*, 18(3) (July 1996), pp. 53–84. Griffiths also theorizes and historicizes the relation between re-enactments and panorama paintings in her brilliant paper, Shivers down your spine: panoramas and the origins of the cinematic re-enactment, Conference Paper, Society for Cinema Studies, 2001.
- [19] Timothy Mitchell, Orientalism and the exhibitionary order, in Nicholas B. Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1992), p. 304.
- [20] *Ibid.*, p. 295.
- [21] *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* p. 11.
- [22] *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.
- [23] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- [24] This advertisement for the 'Loop-the-Loop' is quoted by Kasson in *Amusing the Million*, p. 81.
- [25] Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: melodramas in black and white from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), pp. 43–44.
- [26] *Amusing the Million*, pp. 6–7. For Kasson's more recent analyses of Sandow and Houdini, see *Houdini, Tarzan and the Perfect Man: the white male body and the challenge of modernity* (New York, 2001).
- [27] Neil Harris, *Humbug: the art of P.T. Barnum* (New York, 1973), p. 74.
- [28] *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- [29] *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- [30] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- [31] Slotkin quotes a review by David A. Curtis that appeared in the *Criterion* in 1899, which noted that the 'Wild West' spectacle of 'struggle and slaughter' 'stirs the thinnest blood and brightens the duller eye' in the civilized Anglo-Saxon. *Gunfighter Nation*, p. 81.
- [32] Dan Streible's research on Lubin's boxing re-enactments suggest that this particular kind of re-enactment might be more in line with humbug. However, Streible notes an increasing verisimilitude in the boxing re-enactment. Of the *Reproduction of the Jeffries-Fitzsimmons Fight* (Lubin, 1899), he notes: 'Replacing the canvas backdrop are rows of bleachers occupied by several dozen young men and boys. The sparring action between the contestants is not unconvincing, but the "acting" of the ringside extras upstages the fighters. Playing to the camera, between rounds men stand and wave their betting money in the air'. Dan Streible, Fake fight films, *Le Cinéma au Tournant du Siecle*, (Quebec, 1999), p. 71. The placement of a ringside audience in the film suggests that the fight re-enactment also enhanced its reality effect by positioning the film spectator in the imaginary position of a witness on-the-scene. Such films operated in a mode of revelation by simulating a spectacular event that had been eclipsed by legal bans on prizefighting.

- [33] *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* p. 14.
- [34] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- [35] F. M. Prescott, *Catalogue of New Films for Projection and Other Purposes* (New Yorks, 1899), p. 22, in *Motion Picture Catalogs by American Producers and Distributors, 1894–1908*, Musser et al., eds (Baltimore, 1985).
- [36] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- [37] Tom Gunning, 'The 'Cinema of Attractions,' *Wide Angle*, 8(3–4) (1986), pp. 63–70; An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in) Credulous Spectator', *Art and Text* 34 (Spring 1989), pp. 31–45.
- [38] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London, 1989), p. 7.
- [39] Quoted in Stuart Creighton Miller, 'Benevolent Assimilation': the American conquest of the Philippines, 1888–1903 (New Haven, CT, 1982), p. 181.
- [40] Quoted in Willard Gatewood, *Black Americans and the white man's burden, 1898–1903* (Chicago, 1975), p. 264.
- [41] *Ibid.*, p. 269. One battle that might have offered such an opportunity—the Battle of Manila, in which Spain capitulated the islands to US control—was itself a re-enactment of sorts. Writing from the Philippines in 1899, Karl Irving Faust explained that in order to preserve their honor before the eyes of the watching world, Spain insisted on the staging of a 'sham battle' before surrendering the islands to US control: 'By the 12th of August, the full details of the "coming battle" had been arranged ... In this, on the part of the American forces, such display was to be made as would satisfy an observer that further resistance on the part of the Spaniards would not only be futile, but grounds for censure by all non-combatants'. Though, as Faust notes, both sides worked to 'perfect the plan of a mimic battle without it verging into the real', various officers missed their visual cues due to blocked lines of sight (thanks to the contingencies of smoke, distance, and unseen flags). Confusion ensued, resulting in an American casualty. Karl Irving Faust, *Campaigning in the Philippines* (San Francisco, 1899), p. 96.
- [42] Theodore Roosevelt, *The Rough Riders* (New York, 1902, reprinted in 1990), p. 89.
- [43] *Ibid.*
- [44] Alexander Nemerov, *Frederic Remington and Turn-of-the-Century America* (New Haven, CT, 1996), pp. 86–87.
- [45] Gunning, 'The Whole Town's Gawking', p. 194.
- [46] W. K. L. Dickson, *The Biograph in Battle: its story in the South African war* (London, 1901, reprinted London, 1995), pp. 124–125.
- [47] Dickson also noted the British soldier's experience of battlefield blindness: 'The thing which chiefly demoralized our men ... was the fact that half the time they had to fire at nothing, so cleverly were the Boers hidden, while the British were being mowed down by [their] Maxim-Nordenfeldt repeating guns, making it quite impossible for our men to escape ... Our men shudder at the very sound ... for the accurate shooting accomplished with the murderous weapon is something fearful to see'. *The Biograph in Battle*, p. 135.
- [48] *Edison Films Complete Catalogue* no. 94 (March 1900), p. 4, in *Motion Picture Catalogs by American Producers and Distributors*.
- [49] Levy, 'Reconstituted newsreels', p. 247. Levy does not directly quote the article, published in May in the Rochester newspaper, the *Democrat and Chronicle*. I am still in the process of trying to locate this review.
- [50] Pictures that will be historic, *Leslie's Weekly*, 6 January 1900, p. 18. Part of this article is quoted in Stephen Bottomore's 'Every phase of present-day life': biograph's non-fiction production, *Griffithiana* (nos. 66/67 1999/2000), pp. 147–211. My thanks to Giorgio Bertellini for bringing this article to my attention.
- [51] *Ibid.*
- [52] *Ibid.*
- [53] *Ibid.* Here the author desires the erasure of the correspondent's point of view that, at the turn of the century, tended to foreground the journalist's own, often romanticized the experience of war. Indeed, during the Spanish–American War, the emergent style of 'yellow journalism' often narrated the journalist's own participation in highly sensationalized and dramatized events. In contrast to such forms of journalism, the 'magic of the screen' achieves the illusory insertion of the spectator-self into the depicted scene, and the point of observation carved out in a mode of illusory, machine-made transparency. For an account of such journalism see Charles H. Brown, *The Correspondent's War: journalists in the Spanish–American War* (New York, 1967).

[54] 'Pictures that will be Historic', p. 18.

[55] Gunning, 'The whole town's gawking', p. 193.

Kristen Whissel is Assistant Professor, Program in Film and Video, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She has published on early cinema in Screen and Camera Obscura and has an article on Spanish-American War actualities in A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema (Duke University Press), edited by Jennifer Bean and Diane Negra. She is on the editorial board of Film Criticism and the editorial advisory board of Screen and is currently completing research and writing on a book entitled Picturing the Nation: American modernity and the moving pictures.