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Cinematic Spectatorship
before the Apparatus:
The Public Taste for Reality
in Fin-de-Siècle Paris

"No people in the world are so fond of amusements—or *distractions* as they term them—as Parisians. Morning, noon and night, summer and winter, there is always something to be seen and a large portion of the population seems absorbed in the pursuit of pleasure."¹ Cassell's Paris guidebook confirmed that many visitors to France's capital expected to find a good time. Paris, by the last third of the nineteenth century, had become the European center of the burgeoning entertainment industry. But more important than pleasure, perhaps, the guidebook promised that "There is always something to be seen." Life in Paris, I would like to suggest, became powerfully identified with spectacle. Yet, real life was experienced as a show at the same time as shows became increasingly lifelike.

By examining a field of novel cultural forms and practices in late nineteenth-century Paris, I hope to situate early cinema as a part of the public taste for reality. Rather than understand cinematic spectatorship through a universal and timeless theory of psychic spectatorship constructed in direct relation to the cinematic apparatus or as an idealized vision produced through discourses about perception and embodied in technological innovations, I frame spectatorship within a particular cultural moment. As Guiliana Bruno has suggested, spectatorship is most

aply conceived of as a "kinetic affair"—a practice whose history, I would further suggest, can be understood by examining both the relation between the content and the form of technologies that produce possibilities for observation and the discourse produced by the experiences of those technologies in a specific context.² By looking at practices that were coterminous with cinema in its initial moments, I suggest that cinema ended up as more than just one in a series of novel gadgets, because it incorporated many elements that already could be found in diverse aspects of so-called modern life.

In three sites of popular pleasure in late nineteenth-century France—the unexpected location of the Paris Morgue, wax museums and panoramas, I situate *flânerie*, which has begun to be used as a shorthand for describing the new, mobilized gaze of the precinematic spectator—in its proper context as a cultural activity for those who participated in Parisian life—claiming that the late-nineteenth century offered a sort of *flânerie* for the masses.³ But I also connect this *flânerie* to the new mass press, which served as a printed digest of the *flâneur's* roving eye. Spectacle and narrative were integrally linked in Paris's burgeoning mass culture: the realism of spectacle was in fact often contingent on the familiarity of real-life newspaper narratives.

The Paris Morgue

"There are few people having visited Paris who do not know the Morgue," wrote Parisian social commentator Hughes Leroux in 1888.⁴ Listed in practically every guidebook to the city, a fixture of Thomas Cook's tours to Paris, and a "part of every conscientious provincial's first visit to the capital,"⁵ the Morgue had both regulars and large crowds of as many as 40,000 on its big days, when the story of a crime circulated through the popular press and curious visitors lined the sidewalk waiting to file through the *salle d'exposition* to see the victim.

A large and socially diverse audience went to the Morgue. The crowd was composed of "men, women and children," of "workers . . . *petits rentiers* . . . *flâneurs* . . . women workers . . . and ladies."⁶ In fact, the location was so well frequented that vendors lined the sidewalk outside hawking oranges, cookies, and coconut slices.⁷

The morgue in question was built in 1864 in the center of Paris, behind the cathedral of Nôtre-Dame on the Quai de l'Archevêché (where

the Memorial to the Deportation stands today) and was open to the public seven days a week from dawn to dusk. The institution began in the eighteenth century as the *basse-geôle* of the prison, the Châtelet, in a dark and dank room where "visitors could only present themselves one after another; they were forced to press their faces against a narrow opening"⁸ in order to identify corpses that had been found in the public domain. By the late-nineteenth century, the Morgue, whose name comes from an archaic verb meaning to stare, featured a *salle d'exposition*, wherein two rows of corpses, each on its own marble slab, were displayed behind a large glass window, which had green curtains hanging at each side. In contrast to the situation at the *basse-geôle*, large crowds could gather and gaze at this almost theatrical display. Of the three large doors at the front, the middle one remained shut and visitors filed through, entering at the left and exiting at the right, prompting the Morgue's registrar to comment that it was nothing more than an *entresort* (a carnival attraction one paid to see by walking through a barrack and gazing at the sight within).⁹

The *salle d'exposition* was comparable to other displays that dotted the Parisian landscape in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ernest Cherbuliez, in an article in *La Revue des deux mondes*, highlighted this quality by recounting an anecdote in which a man walked down the Boulevard Sébastopol, stopped in front of a store window, and asked the window dressers for work. They suggested he ask at the Morgue.¹⁰

Most often, however, the Morgue was celebrated as public theater. Emile Zola remarked in *Thérèse Raquin* that it was a "show that was affordable to all. . . The door is open, enter those who will."¹¹ A poem in a popular edition called *Les Chansons de la Morgue* described the scene in the *salle d'exposition*: "The crowd, gay and without remorse, comes to the theater to take its place."¹² Upon the closing of the Morgue to the general public in March 1907, one journalist protested:

The Morgue has been the first this year among theaters to announce its closing. . . . As for the spectators, they have no right to say anything because they didn't pay. There were no subscribers, only regulars, because the show was always free. It was the first free theater for the people. And they tell us it's being canceled. People, the hour of social justice has not yet arrived.¹³

In a time of increasingly private and commercial entertainment, the Morgue was open and free, and the display of dead bodies existed for the

public to come and see. As a municipal institution, however, the Morgue's principal goal was to serve as a depository for the anonymous dead, whose public display administrators hoped might aid in establishing their identity. Yet the Paris Morgue was like no other municipal institution. Despite its location in the shadows of Nôtre-Dame, its deliberately undramatic facade, and its seemingly somber subject matter, the Morgue was "one of the most popular sights in Paris."¹⁴ The identification of dead bodies was turned into a show.

Why did this show attract so many visitors? The historical record does not offer many direct answers. Looking at descriptions of the Morgue in the popular press and in administrative literature, however, offers a means through which one may attempt to reconstruct the Morgue's allure. The vast majority of visitors probably did not go to the Morgue thinking they actually might recognize a corpse. They went to look at real dead bodies under the pretense of acting out of civic duty. This was public voyeurism—*flânerie* in the service of the state.

Many commentators suggested that the Morgue satisfied and reinforced the desire to look, which permeated much of Parisian culture in the late nineteenth century. Clovis Pierre, the Morgue's registrar and a sometime poet, wrote that visitors came "to exercise their retinas at the window."¹⁵ Why, however, go to the Morgue when there was so much to see in the city most often associated with the "spectacle of modern life?"¹⁶

The Morgue served as a visual auxiliary to the newspaper, staging the recently dead who had been sensationally detailed by the printed word. The late nineteenth century in France has been called the "golden age of the press"¹⁷ and it is critical to understand the central role it played in the development of Parisian spectacle. Current events became the daily fare of the popular Parisian dailies, whose overall circulation increased 250 percent between 1880 and 1914.¹⁸ Newspapers replaced opinion with so-called truth as the world "entered the age of information."¹⁹ In the Parisian press, political life took a backseat to theater openings, horse races, and charity events, but it was the *faits divers*—reports of horrible accidents and sensational crimes—that filled the columns and the coffers above all else.

The *fait diver* was a popular newspaper rubric that reproduced in extraordinary detail, both written and visual, representations of a sensational reality. In addition to the sensationalism of the *fait diver*, newspapers offered serial novels. Clearly demarcated from the rest of the newspaper by a bar across the bottom of the page, these popular narratives were often based on actual newspaper stories, especially the *fait diver*.

Because of its featured role in so many *faits divers*, the Morgue appeared regularly in the newspaper. As Alphonse Devergie, medical inspector of the Morgue, explained, "Once the newspapers announce a crime, one sees a great number of the curious arrive at the Morgue."²⁰ And, of course, when a large crowd gathered at the Morgue, it then became the subject of further news reports, which in turn kept the corpse, the unsolved crime, and the Morgue in the public eye, guaranteeing a flow of people to the Quai de l'Archevêché.

Press coverage heightened public awareness and interest. Guillot argued that the newspaper constituted a source that stimulated public interest for what "in newspaper jargon is called the *plat du jour*."²¹ He believed that all the reporting turned the Morgue into a "glass house" and that if the Morgue could be considered a theater of crime, then the newspaper was its program.²² One of the Morgue registrars argued that newspaper reading prompted visits by women workers to the Morgue because the women's spirits had been haunted by the newspapers' serial novels.²³ Other comments suggest that the Morgue was a version of the newspaper's *feuilleton*. *L'Éclair*, for example, described the Morgue as "this living illustration of a serial-novel mystery."²⁴

Some people believed that the popularity of public visits to the Morgue, like interest in the newspaper itself, stemmed from the public interest in so-called reality. "What if rather than your stories, your most frightening paintings, they prefer reality and what a reality," Firimin Maillard, one of the Morgue's earliest historians, suggested.²⁵ An article in *Le Paris* boasted that the Morgue was worth a visit because what one saw "are not imitations, not *trompe l'oeil*."²⁶ Yet, while the newspapers may have encouraged many visits, a look at one of the many *causes célèbres* of the Morgue reveals that the show in the window was far more spectacular than the ordinary placement of corpses on slabs facing the public.

In August 1886, the cover of *Le Journal Illustré* featured a doyenette of the Morgue, the "Enfant de la Rue du Vert-Bois"—a four-year-old girl found on July 29, 1886, in a stairwell at 47 Rue du Vert-Bois, near the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers. The corpse, which was transferred to the Morgue, showed no apparent signs of injury except a slight bruise on the right hand. The newspapers reported that the display attracted "a considerable crowd," which by August 3 was estimated at about 50,000.²⁷ The body, clothed in a dress, was mounted in the *salle d'exposition*, "on a chair covered in a red cloth that brought out the paleness of the little dead one even more."²⁸ *Le Matin* reported that despite the "service d'ordre" that had been established, the size of the crowd forced



PARIS. — LE MYSTÈRE DE LA RUE DU VERT-BOIS : EXPOSITION DU PETIT CADAVRE A LA MORGUE. (Dessin d'après nature de M. Paul Destès.)

Display of corpse of the "Child of Vert-Bois Street." *Le Monde Illustré*, August 15, 1886.

traffic to a halt and vendors hawked coconut, gingerbread, and toys, turning the Quai de l'Archevêché into "a genuine fairgrounds."²⁹ On August 5, the papers reported severe disorder: "The mob rushes the doors with savage cries; fallen hats are trampled on, parasols and umbrellas are broken, and yesterday, women fell sick, having been half suffocated."³⁰

By then, *Le Matin* estimated that 150,000 people had filed past the body (in groups of no more than fifty at a time, in rows of five, who were forbidden to stand in front of the glass). Each night the corpse was put in a refrigerated case to preserve it. In order to avoid altering it in any way, Morgue attendants simply strapped the corpse to the red velvet chair and deposited the complete display in the refrigerator.

Because of the state of decomposition, Morgue doctors decided to perform an autopsy on August 6.³¹ *Le Petit Journal* reported the sentiments of the crowds that had gathered that day only to "have had the disappointment not to have caught sight of the child displayed on its little chair."³² After the autopsy, doctors concluded that the child had died a natural death, having suffocated by choking on an earthworm.

Images of both the child and the crowd at the Morgue appeared in the popular press throughout the period of display. *Le Journal Illustré* featured an illustrated narration—a sort of illustrated serial novel and a genre that often accompanied a cause célèbre at the Morgue. The illustrated journal showed the building on the Rue du Vert-Bois, two men discovering the corpse, a crowd outside the morgue, and the display of the corpse in the *salle d'exposition*. When the illustrations appeared on August 15, part of the case had already been resolved, but the child's civil status and why she had been abandoned remained a mystery. She was buried on August 17, and although the photograph remained on display at the entrance, the child went unidentified.³³

The Morgue's visitors came neither to identify corpses nor simply to see them laid out on slabs. No doubt the Morgue was a morbid attraction.³⁴ More significant, however, it was "part of the catalogued curiosities, of things to see, under the same heading as the Eiffel Tower, Yvette Guilbert, and the catacombs."³⁵ In other words, this public service was experienced as a Parisian attraction. Newspapers featured stories about the crowds at the Morgue, and like newspapers, the Morgue re-presented a spectacularized Parisian life. The *salle d'exposition*, its curtain, the lines outside, corpses dressed and seated on chairs, and newspaper illustrations guaranteed that the Morgue's reality was re-presented, mediated, orchestrated, and spectacularized.

In part a visual digest of the printed word, the Morgue transformed real life into spectacle. It is worth noting that the Morgue was finally closed to the public in 1907—a year often considered a watershed among cinema historians and which in France was marked, in particular, by a proliferation of institutions devoted exclusively to cinema.³⁶ The audience, it seems, moved from the *salle d'exposition* to the *salle du cinéma*.

In trying to explain the Morgue's popularity, its administrative director remarked, "The Morgue is considered in Paris like a museum that is much more fascinating than even a wax museum because the people displayed are real flesh and blood."³⁷ He was not alone, however,

in drawing a connection between these two institutions of Parisian spectacle.

The Musée Grévin

When the Musée Grévin opened in 1882 on the boulevard Montmartre, in the heart of "modern" Paris, a newspaper cartoon linked the wax museum to the already-popular Morgue. In it two working-class men gape at a wax figure laid out on a slab. One says, "Geez, you'd think it was a real stiff." His friend replies, "This is almost as much fun as the real Morgue."³⁸ An immediate success, the museum attracted a half a million visitors yearly and remains open to this day. An emblem of the burgeoning entertainment industry, one reviewer noted its fundamental tie to the public: "It is not from the Institute that Grévin will seek approval, it's from the public."³⁹ Why did the wax museum capture the public imagination in fin-de-siècle Paris?

The Musée Grévin was modeled, in part, after London's very popular Madame Tussaud's, itself a direct descendant of the well-known wax cabinet of Philippe Curtius, popular in Paris during the revolutionary era. Unlike Madame Tussaud's, the Musée Grévin was founded by a well-known boulevard journalist Arthur Meyer and the newspaper caricaturist Alfred Grévin. Both men envisaged the museum as an improvement upon newspapers, as a more realistic way to satisfy the public interest in *les actualités* (current events). The museum's founders promised their display would "represent the principal current events with scrupulous fidelity and striking precision . . . [It will be] a living newspaper."⁴⁰

The two also believed that written reporting did not entirely satisfy the public. As the preface to the museum's first catalog, written by *Le Figaro's* Albert Wolff, explained,

By adding an image to the text, illustrated newspapers . . . have made a decisive advance in modern communication. The museum's founders appraised, with reason, that one could go even further and create a *journal plastique*, where the public would find those people that occupied their attention, reproduced with a scrupulous respect for nature.⁴¹

Critics constantly remarked on the museum's verisimilitude, calling it a chronicle in action and an animated newspaper despite the fact that the tableaux did not move.

The realism of the displays relied on many devices other than the lifelike quality of the wax figures themselves. Accessories, ornaments, and the framing device of the tableau worked together to effect the real. For example, the museum used authentic accessories. The figure of Victor Hugo held his real pen, and a tableau of the death of Marat featured the actual tub in which he had been murdered (and for which the museum paid a hefty 5,000 francs), a genuine soldier's pike from the revolutionary era, and a 1791 edition of *l'Ami du Peuple*—the newspaper edited by the murdered revolutionary. The figure of Zola wore a suit donated by the author.

A tableau's realism might also be derived from its status as an authentic copy. For example, the president's library was a replica of the room at the Elysée, and a tableau of a scene from the new opera *Françoise de Rimini* was the "exact and absolute facsimile of the National Academy of Music," from the costumes to the furniture and the sets.⁴²

The tableaux created recognizable, taxonomical, and appropriate settings for the figures—mini-narratives in the form of peepholes into Parisian life. As the museum catalog explained,

It was necessary to make the museum interesting not only because of the exact likeness of the characters, but also by the composition of groups, in showing individuals in their milieu.⁴³

Left unsaid, however, was the necessity of the tableaux for public recognition of the figures. Visitors, for the most part, had probably never seen either in a newspaper or in person most of the subjects represented at the museum because the only mass-produced visual images available were at best color engravings. Photographs were not to be easily reproduced for newspapers until the twentieth century. The tableaux and their abundant details—whether genuine objects or copies—were essential in effecting verisimilitude simply because of the crowd's inability to actually assess the likeness of the various personalities represented, for they had either no visual basis for comparison or one that was hardly itself an exact copy.

Aside from the vivacity of the wax sculpture and taxonomic groupings of the dioramas, the museum formed a pantheon that relied on the public's recognition of and familiarity with its characters; its success dwelled ultimately in the eye of the beholder. Rather than a definitive collection decided on from above like at most museums, the Musée Grévin held a rapidly changing collection whose content was contingent on the public's interest and visual recognition. Whereas

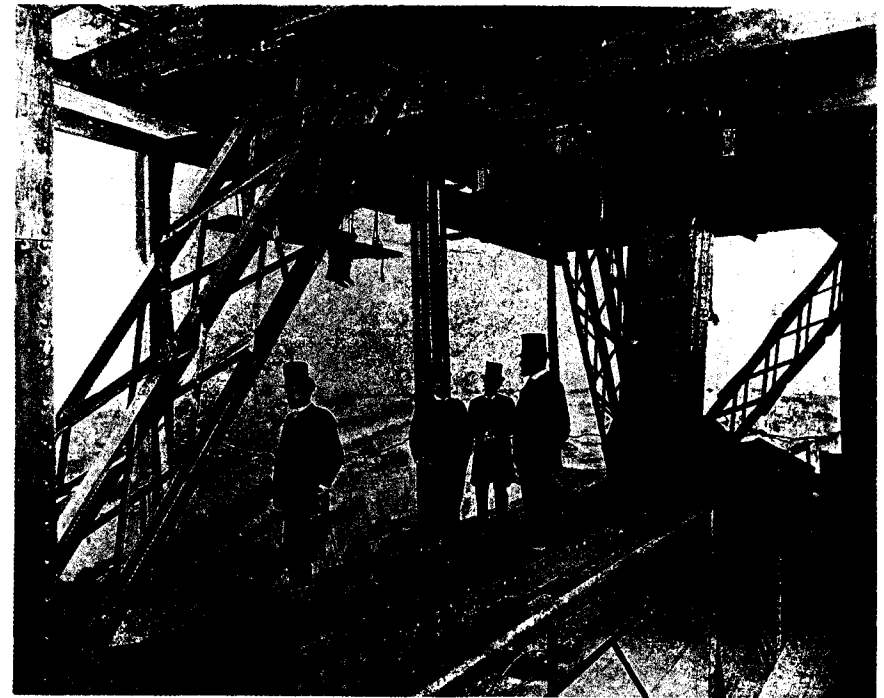
traditional pantheons may be characterized by their selectivity, the Musée Grévin boasted of its range and inclusiveness. The novelist Paul Bourget celebrated the museum: "In three or four rooms is it not the abridged version of the modern city?"⁴⁴

As a broad-ranging pantheon, the museum mimicked the newspaper's form: tableaux most often stood side by side in no particular relation to one another, as did newspaper columns filled with seemingly unconnected stories.⁴⁵ The juxtaposition of political leaders, actors, and artists attested to the prominence of the modern social order: one dominated by celebrity and based on popularity. With what seemed like "intrepid whimsy," celebrities filled this "Parisian Pantheon."⁴⁶ That the café-concert singer Yvette Guilbert and the president of the republic might stand side by side suggested that the wax museum also echoed the basis of political legitimacy in Third Republic France, in which politicians—like performers and artists—rose and fell seemingly by virtue of the crowd's fancy. The wax museum materialized that new social order based on the whims of the crowd.

While representing a social order created in and by the public eye, the museum also offered its visitors visual privilege through seeming proximity to the celebrities. One newspaper review explained, "The likenesses of our great men, of our famous artists or society people pleases us . . . and it is to see them up close that the public crowds to the Musée Grévin."⁴⁷

Beyond representing celebrities, the tableaux also afforded museum-goers something special: an up-close-and-personal view of dignitaries who might otherwise be seen only at official functions, if seen at all. For example, a tableau featuring Napoleon seeking shelter from the snow upon his retreat from Russia represented the emperor huddling in the cold. The catalog explained, "Napoleon's look is poignantly filled with anxiety: you can already see foreshadowed there the Empire's destiny."⁴⁸ One found the country's fate in its leader's emotional physiognomy as opposed to on the battlefields. Visitors also saw the famous explorer Savorgnan de Brazza relaxing in his tent and Bismarck meeting with the Marshall Von Moltke in a "private visit" at Varzin, where he "often rested from the fatigues of politics."⁴⁹ These tableaux personalized politics, transforming the scale of history and contemporary politics into something with which visitors might identify.

But privilege did not stop at the relation between the viewer and the subjects represented. The three-dimensional tableaux created a particular perspective between the spectator and the display, which func-



View from the Eiffel Tower. Musée Grévin, 1889. (Musée Grévin Archives, hereafter MGA.)

tioned as one of the museum's lasting attractions. At the Musée Grévin, visitors could inhabit multiple perspectives—panoramic views—at the same time as the displays often offered privileged access: peepholes into Paris.⁵⁰

In 1889, the museum opened a tableau of the Eiffel Tower. Rather than reconstruct the sight that could be seen on the Champ de Mars, the museum offered a view, in midconstruction, of a visit by Eiffel and Exposition and Parisian officials Lockroy, Alphand, and Berger. The scene included workers who had been interrupted by the visit and who were represented as watching the visiting dignitaries. The museum visitor, therefore, saw what most people had never seen: the tower under construction—in a sort of dress rehearsal. At the same time, the scene depicted a panoramic view of Paris as it would have been seen from the second level of the Eiffel Tower. The catalog boasted that "Everything is rendered with a fidelity that can be appreciated by only the rare privileged who have already made this marvelous ascent."⁵¹ The display represented a privileged view of a privileged view of Paris. Visitors enjoyed not



Workers looking at dignitaries on the Eiffel Tower. Musée Grévin, 1889. (MGA.)

only a panoramic view of the city but also the peephole view of workers being interrupted by a visit of dignitaries. Not one, but three, sights confronted the museum visitor: the panoramic view of Paris, the view of the visitors Eiffel et al., and the view of the workers watching the visit.

Over the years, the Musée Grévin's tableaux featured several *coulisses*—representations of a perspective not usually accessible to most spectators and the domain most often reserved for the allegedly privileged *flâneur*. Here *their* voyeurism was extended to every visitor who could pay the museum's small admission price. The museum spectator's privilege resided in the tableau's offer of more than one view at a time: that of both a spectator of the show and a spectator of other spectators.⁵² In 1885, for example, the museum represented "A Dancer's Loge" at intermission. The scene showed a dancer being visited in the dressing room by an elegant man. In 1890, that tableau was replaced by "Les Coulisses de l'Opéra: Le Foyer de la Danse." Here, the visitor simultaneously saw both onstage and offstage. The catalog underscored the tableau's privileged perspective: "all [here] works to give the spectator

the illusion of a visit to so curious a corner of the grand Parisian stage, a visit only permitted an elect few."⁵³

While the themes may not have been unfamiliar to at least those visitors who had attended various Impressionist salons, the display's three-dimensionality and verisimilitude were touted as effecting the illusion of presence or reality in a way that paintings simply could not. An 1887 diorama of the Comédie-Française further reveals what the wax museum offered. "A Rehearsal at the Comédie-Française" represented the director's loge during a dress rehearsal. There the museum's visitors observed Juliette Adam, editor of *La Nouvelle Revue*; Ambroise Thomas, director of the Opéra; Jules Claretie, director of the Comédie; and Edouard Pailleron, author of *La Souris*, watching a scene from that play. The tableau was structured around its three-dimensionality and the visitor's mobility. It was assumed that the spectator would approach the tableau from the left, where the figures in the box appeared to be watching something. As spectators walked to the right, they could then see the inset of the dress rehearsal being watched, which was represented as though through the eyes of those seated in the box and which because of its angle could not really be seen by museum visitors until they aligned themselves with the visual perspective of the wax figures. The tableau's designers intended that people walk through and thus offered them movement through sequential points of view. This not only vested spectators with the power of making the scene happen through their own motion but also offered a primitive way of introducing motion into the display—an effect that the museum actively pursued in another way. In 1892, the Musée Grévin became the first institution to offer projected moving images in the form of Émile Reynaud's "Pantomimes Lumineuses."⁵⁴

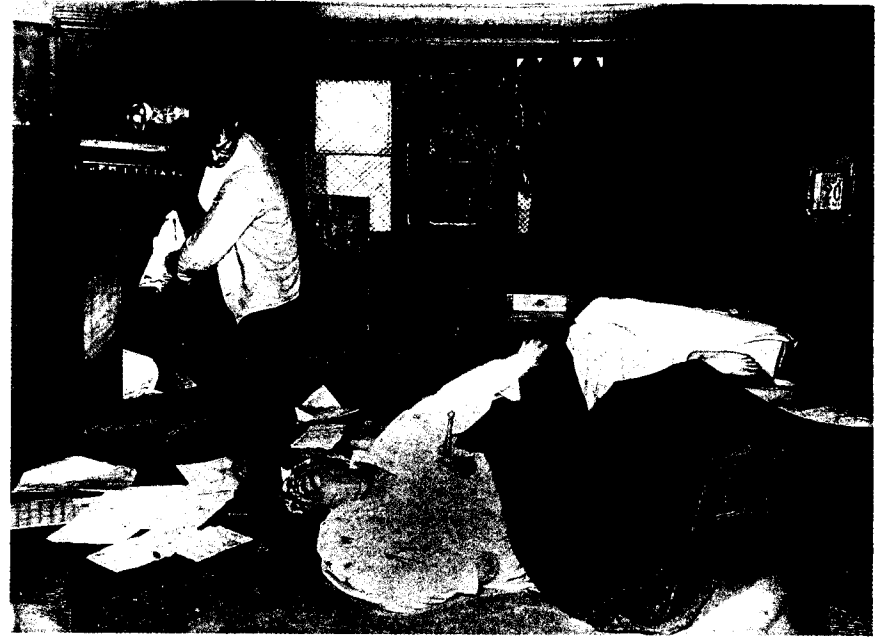
If spectators' movement might have been incorporated into the museum's display, narrativity also built motion into the displays. The response to "l'Histoire d'un Crime"—the museum's serial novel—clarifies the imbrication of serial narrative to motion at the Musée Grévin. A series of seven tableaux, the display portrayed the vicissitudes of a crime from start to finish: the murder, the arrest, the confrontation of the murderer and his victim at the Morgue, the trial, the cell of the condemned, preparation for execution, and the execution. An early review noted that its "thrilling realism made it the display that most interested the crowd; it was difficult even to approach, the crowd was so enormous."⁵⁵ Reviewers explained, "It is a *fait divers* in seven tableaux, of an extraordinarily realistic execution which creates an intensity of



A rehearsal at the Comédie Française. Musée Grévin, 1887. (MGA.)

effect that is stunning."⁵⁶ Another simply called it a "living [live] fait divers."⁵⁷

The enhanced realism of the series of tableaux was embedded in its familiar narrativity, while its seriality presented a sequence of freeze-frames set into motion by the spectator's walk through the display.



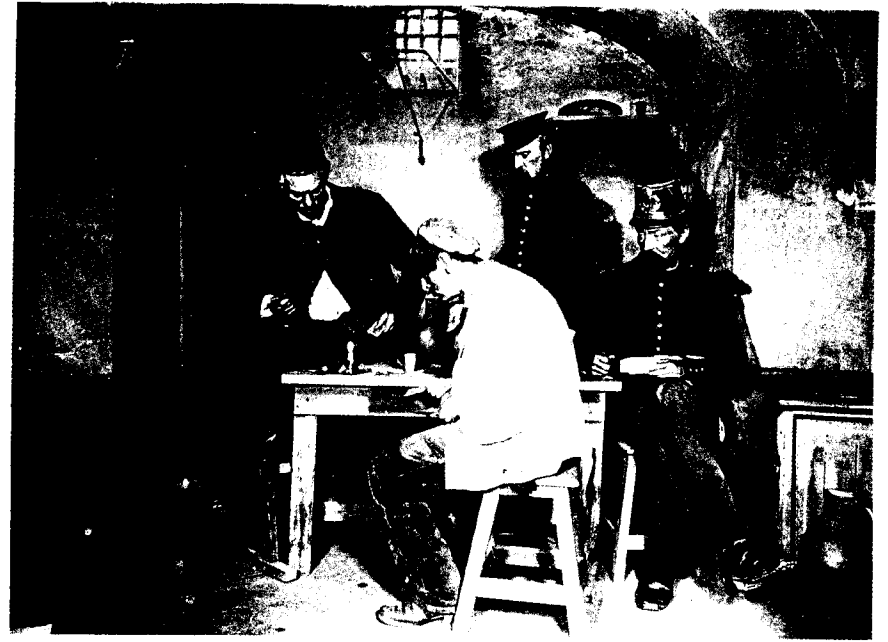
The Story of a Crime, 1882. Musée Grévin. The Murder. (MGA.)



The Arrest.



Confrontation with the Victim's Corpse at the Morgue.



Waiting in the Cell at La Roquette.



The Trial.



Preparing for Execution.



The Convicted Being Led to the Guillotine.

"L'Histoire d'un Crime" also offered a familiar form of narrative in its conceptualization as a serial novel—a standard feature of almost all newspapers by the late nineteenth century. "L'Histoire d'un Crime" announced itself as a serial novel, yet was reviewed as though it were a *fait divers*. Not only does this echo the blurring between reality and fiction that characterized each genre, but it also suggests that what was so strikingly real about "L'Histoire d'un Crime" was neither its props nor its wax figures but rather its serial narrativity. The seven wax tableaux seemed more realistic than even a serial novel. The spectator's motion infused the display with its seemingly lifelike quality; such serial motion linked "L'Histoire d'un Crime" to real life. It should come as no surprise that Ferdinand Zecca, an early filmmaker at Pathé, established his fame with a 1901 film titled *L'Histoire d'un Crime*, based on the Musée Grévin display.⁵⁸

The content of the tableaux and the way they situated spectators helped turn museum visitors into *flâneurs*. It offered the public, at the very least, views of the places and perspectives that seemed to belong only to the hounds of modern life. But visitors to the Musée Grévin also

entered a plastic newspaper—a world dominated by events (the making of the sight bite, if you will) and a Pantheon of the present—where the will of the crowd might determine the content of the collection and in which the powerful were rendered familiar and personable. The technology of the tableaux offered museum visitors a world of visual mastery and access to privilege, giving them both panoptic and peephole visual fields. The Musée Grévin's dedication to the public taste for reality, its use of wax sculpture to reproduce that so-called reality, its focus on current events and rapid change, its link between both spectacle and narrative, and the scopic organization of its tableaux are all elements associated with early cinema and yet found at the Musée Grévin well before the alleged invention of film.

Panoramas

While crowds gathered at the Musée Grévin, Parisians and tourists sought out other realist entertainments. Cassell's 1884 *Guide to Paris* remarked, "with the last few years there has been a perfect eruption of panoramas in every quarter of Paris."⁵⁹ "We are entering Panoramania," declared an article in *Le Voltaire* in response to the opening of the third panorama in a year's time.⁶⁰ Indeed, that late eighteenth-century entertainment, which had virtually disappeared by midcentury, witnessed a renaissance in the 1880s and 1890s.

Panoramas and dioramas have often been discussed as technological inventions of the early nineteenth century that can be understood as antecedents to film. In particular, scholars have drawn attention to the way panoramas and dioramas marshaled vision to transport spectators in time and place through the illusion of realistic representation.⁶¹ Rather than simply limit a discussion of panoramas and similar entertainments to the moment of their invention in the early nineteenth century, I want to show how, like wax museums, panoramas flourished in the 1880s and 1890s because they attempted to capture and re-present an already familiar version of reality—a reality in which life was captured through motion. The panoramas' realism hinged on the notion that to capture life, a display had to reproduce it as bodily and not merely visual experience.

The 1880s and 1890s witnessed a proliferation of realistic details in the panoramas. Photography helped. Some panorama painters painted

from photographs; others projected enlarged slides onto the canvas and then traced the projected images. Even before photography, panoramas mixed three-dimensional objects with the painted canvas to improve the display's realism. Langlois incorporated a real set in the 1830s in his "Battle of Navarino," in which spectators found themselves on an actual battleship. In his 1881 panorama "Les Cuirassiers de Reichshoffen," depicting a defeat by French troops in the Franco-Prussian war, Poilpot used tinsel for the weapons and for the buttons on the military costumes on his canvas. The catalog of "Les Cuirassiers de Reichshoffen" acknowledged sculptor Jules Talrich for providing the wax figures that "represent the bodies strewn out on the natural setting in such an astonishing and true manner."⁶²

The caricaturist Robida mocked the increasing verisimilitude of panoramas in a cartoon featuring the Panorama of the Battle of Champagne during the siege of Paris. One of the captions explained that to truly evoke the siege, visitors were forced to stay for three days and were each given only one smoked herring to eat. Another caption noted that the attraction was freezing cold and visitors could be drenched by a simulated rainstorm. With shells exploding and military music in the background, Robida concluded that "One deserved a military medal upon exiting." Although no panorama actually went so far as Robida's parody, his point was clear: people delighted in the realistic re-creation of this terrible event.

Whereas panoramas of the early nineteenth century may have provided news in a world prior to the mass press, in the 1880s panoramas served as visual corollaries of the popular press in much the same way that the wax museum did.⁶³ Panoramas began to represent particular moments of the daily events reported in newspapers, such as the "Tsar's Coronation" or the "Visit by the President to the Russian Fleet." A definition of panoramas and dioramas from the 1890s described their realism as generated by the subjects they represented rather than as a product of their technologies:

Scenes of current events have the knack of attracting the crowd that is still struck with emotion about a recent event, a catastrophe, an execution or a famous assassination. They reexamine the accident or the crime in a tableau that creates the illusion of reality.⁶⁴

Late nineteenth-century panoramas broke with traditional, landscape-oriented panoramic representations despite the fact that illustrating individuals was not as effective as landscape in the creation of the

realistic panorama effect. Realism was no longer simply an effect of visual representation. For example, the success of Charles Castellani's panorama "Le Tout Paris" resided in cultural fascination with representations of celebrities in the familiar sights of modern Paris. The tableau grouped Paris's celebrities at and around one of the symbols at the center of modern Paris: the Opéra. Spectators were positioned as though standing in front of the Opéra; around them were the adjacent boulevard des Capucines, the Grand Hôtel, the rue du Quatre Septembre, the Café de la Paix, and the Louvre at the end of the long Avenue de l'Opéra. A review celebrated the choice of the Place de l'Opéra: "No better place could have been chosen in this shining and noisy Paris to represent Parisian life in all its ardor, vigor and feverishness."⁶⁵ "Le Tout Paris" was intended to satisfy public interest and curiosity—one that was clearly tied to press culture. One review explained that the panorama would attract many of the people who "always wanted to know and see the poets, writers, painters, sculptors, actors, and politicians whose names they read in the newspaper every day."⁶⁶ The gallery served as a sort summa of the popular press.

The panorama contained none of the foreground objects that had been added to other attractions, but only by virtue of circumstance. Located within the actual Exposition grounds on the Esplanade des Invalides, its site was nonetheless considered a dead area of the Exposition.⁶⁷ This poor location worried the panorama's financiers, who insisted on keeping expenses down. As a result, as Castellani complained about the attraction, "We had neither accessories, nor false terrains, nor any of the things that are absolutely indispensable for producing what the public likes: trompe l'oeil and illusion."⁶⁸ The reviews suggested, however, that the illusion of life might be otherwise generated.

Popular despite the poor location that had worried its financial backers, the panorama remained open for the entire Exposition, during which time over 300,000 people visited.⁶⁹ Aside from celebrating the range and sheer number of celebrities represented, reviews noted the panorama's lifelike qualities. A simple circular painting, without props and sets, one would imagine that it could not compete with other panoramas in terms of its verisimilitude. Yet critics celebrated "the astonishing expression of activity and life that animates the entire composition."⁷⁰ It was as though its subject matter somehow animated the composition itself. Another review described the panorama as though it were a freeze-frame—an instant captured:

... seized while passing by in a carriage, on horseback, in groups, with even more truth than an instant photograph can give the idea of. What's more, aren't there the charm of color, the representation of gestures and looks, the entire Parisian spirit spread among the brilliant, animated crowd that is so lively that we have the perfect illusion of its movement and its reality?⁷¹

Although the painting did not portray an actual moment, it depicted an idealized and possible moment in Parisian life that most readers of the daily press could have imagined based on their familiarity with the location and the people populating it. In other words, the painting seemed lifelike because it visually materialized a world that formed a familiar popular narrative: the real world that one found represented in the Parisian press. Like the wax museum, the panorama's success was in the eye and the mind of the beholder; realism was not merely a technological evocation.

Of course, public interest in reality also drove many other panoramas toward ever-increasing realism in the form of simulation. The panoramas of the late nineteenth century relied less on an imagined transport and instead offered simulations of voyages and literally moving landscapes.

The first moving panorama was the "Panorama of the Fleet of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique," where visitors boarded a re-creation of the company's newest steamer *La Touraine*.⁷² Opened in May 1889, on the Quai D'Orsay, within the Exposition grounds, the attraction received more than 1.3 million visitors.⁷³ The painter Poilpot served as the artistic director of the display, which incorporated a view of the entire port of Le Havre, including a view of the company's eighty other ships harbored. The attraction also featured eleven other canvases and a coastal landscape that moved as the ship allegedly went by. Passengers climbed aboard this life-sized reproduction of the ship through an elegant vestibule and walked up a set of stairs and then out onto the captain's deck into the supposed open air. Wax figures of crew members in lookout positions and of the captain describing the port to a female passenger mingled with live sailors and officers dressed in the uniforms of the Transatlantic Company. Reviewers noted that "He [Poilpot] has succeeded in reconstituting scenes from life on board in its most minor details with surprising fidelity. . . . The artist has completely achieved his goal; he has mixed reality and fiction in such a way that we are practically fooled."⁷⁴

With as many visitors as the attraction had, each paying the small sum of one franc, it should come as no surprise that reviewers remarked on the diversity of the crowd, which included peasants, workers (who had never seen the sea, the reviewer noted), bourgeois men and women, shopkeepers, and diplomats.⁷⁵ Visitors of different classes must have had divergent experiences on *La Touraine*. Those bourgeois visitors who had actually taken a cruise could judge the quality of the simulation. For others, it might be the only time that they set foot on a ship, and one imagines that the Compagnie Transatlantique hoped it would not be their last time.

Poilpot continued in his attempts to achieve a more realistic effect by simulating motion. His 1892 panorama, which represented the sinking of the French Ship *Le Vengeur* during the Revolutionary War against the British in 1794, provided a technological watershed. Spectators stood on the deck of the battleship *Le Hussard* surrounded by enemy ships and across from the sinking *Vengeur*. The deck of *Le Hussard* pitched back and forth, literally giving spectators the feeling that they were on a ship.⁷⁶ Reviewers celebrated what they considered an advance toward greater illusion in this panorama, opened on May 25, 1892. In July, Poilpot added to his spectacle the feature of sound in the form of gunfire, cannons, a chorus singing *the Marseillaise*, and two actors reciting a lyric poem about the accomplishments of the sinking ship. Despite its critical acclaim, "Le Vengeur" did not stay open for more than a year; its enormous costs simply did not allow the two-franc panorama to make a sufficient profit.⁷⁷

Between 1892 and the next Exposition in 1900, many attractions successfully simulated motion. For example, Parisians could see the "Pantomimes Lumineuses" at the Musée Grévin starting in October 1892. In 1894, they could see moving photographs in Edison's Kinetoscope, and as of December 1895, the Lumière Brothers' films could be seen at the Grand Café.

Entrepreneurs sought to incorporate the new moving pictures into already existing amusements. Moving pictures were initially considered simply a novel technique for representing motion, and it was not clear that they might suffice as an entertainment in their own right. Moving pictures did, however, blend well with the cultural agenda of the panoramas. So, for example, in 1898, Louis Régnault opened "Maerorama" on the boulevard across from the Porte Saint-Martin. A simulated boat ride, it incorporated the moving platform used in "Le Vengeur," adding compressed air to make wind and waves. The exhibitor, dressed

in a captain's uniform, warned, "We announced that those susceptible to falling seasick should abstain."⁷⁸ The lights then dimmed, and instead of a painted canvas rolling by, visitors watched "movies" of coastal views photographed from boats: the Corsican coast, Africa, the Italian lakes, and finally a view of Marseille, where, after two toots of the ship's horn, passengers were asked to descend and allow other tourists, "Eager to experience the wonders of 'Maerorama,'" to be given their chance.⁷⁹ Régnault presented a similar attraction at the 1900 Exposition; there passengers were seated in a funicular instead of on a boat. The advent of film did not replace mechanical panoramas: film was not, at least in its early years, perceived as the answer to the public's taste for reality.

Panoramas and similar entertainments reproduced reality in a variety of ways: by relying on spectator-generated optical illusions, by echoing other realist genres such as the press, and by simulating reality. One can find no technological telos toward ever more perfectly realistic reproduction culminating in the invention of cinema. Rather, as this focus on panoramas during the 1880s and 1890s has tried to suggest, these spectacles technologically generated "reality" and its concomitant animation in a variety of ways during the same period. Further, the various representations of "real-life" experiences offered sensationalized versions of reality—a sensationalism that ranged from narrative suspense to physical simulations.

To many fin-de-siècle observers, Parisians demonstrated a new and marked taste for reality. Stretching beyond the bounds of realism and illusionism, I have tried to argue that their taste for the real was posited on the blurring of life and art—on the way that reality was spectacularized (as at the Morgue) at the same time that spectacles were obsessively realistic. Reality, however, was complexly constituted and defined. Looking at contemporaneous observations suggests that, as in any technological apparatus, the reality effect resides as much in spectators' abilities to make connections between the spectacles they saw and the familiar press narratives that they already knew.

To understand cinematic spectatorship as a historical practice, it is essential to locate cinema in the field of cultural forms and practices associated with the burgeoning mass culture of the late nineteenth century. It is not mere coincidence that apart from people's interest in reality, the activities described here transpired among large groups of people in whose mobility some of the spectacles' realistic effects resided. Those practices suggest that flânerie was not simply the privilege of the bourgeois male but a cultural activity for all who participated in Parisian

life. Thus, rather than identify the seeds of cinematic spectatorship, this sort of flânerie for the masses instead points to the birth of the audience. For it is necessarily in a crowd that one finds the cinematic spectator.

NOTES

1. *Guide to Paris* (London: Cassell's, 1884), p. 111.
2. Giuliana Bruno, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 38.
3. See Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), on the relationship between flânerie as modern spectatorship.
4. Hughes Leroux, *L'Enfer parisien* (Paris: 1888), p. 353.
5. *Le Temps*, September 25, 1882.
6. Ernest Cherbuliez, "La Morgue," in *La Revue des deux mondes* January 1891, p. 368, and Émile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin* (Paris: Flammarion, 1970), p. 131, and Adolphe Guillot, *Paris qui souffre: le basse-geôle du Grand-Châtelet et les morgues modernes*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Chez Rouquette, 1888), p. 177.
7. Leroux, p. 353, and Guillot, p. 177.
8. Guillot, p. 43.
9. Clovis Pierre, *Les Gaietés de la Morgue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1895).
10. Cherbuliez, p. 360.
11. Zola, p. 131.
12. Angelin Ruelle, *Les Chansons de la Morgue* (Paris: Léon Varnier, 1890).
13. Pierre Véron, "La Morgue," in *Le Magasin Pittoresque* (March 1907), pp. 171–72.
14. E. A. Reynolds-Ball, *Paris in Its Splendors*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (London: 1901), p. 312.
15. Clovis Pierre, *Les Gaietés de la Morgue* (Paris: Flammarion, 1895).
16. Georg Simmel, as cited in Walter Benjamin, "Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Charles Baudelaire*, tr. Quintin Hoare (London: New Left, 1973), p. 151.
17. Jacques Wolgensinger, *L'Histoire à la une: la grande aventure de la presse* (Paris: Découvertes Gallimard, 1989).
18. Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidien* (Paris: Le Chemin Vert, 1984), p. 17.
19. Émile Zola in Wolgensinger, *L'Histoire*, p. 67.
20. Alphonse Devergie, *Notions générales sur la Morgue de Paris* (Paris: Félix Malteste, 1877), p. 11.
21. Guillot, *Paris qui souffre*, p. 182.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 199, 258.
23. *La Presse*, March 22, 1907.
24. *L'Éclair*, March 21, 1907.
25. Firmin Maillard, *Recherches historiques et critiques sur la Morgue* (Paris: Delahays, 1860), pp. 94–95.
26. *Le Paris*, August 31, 1892.
27. *Le Petit Journal*, August 3, 1886.
28. *Le Matin*, August 2, 1886.
29. *Le Matin*, August 4, 1886.
30. *La Liberté*, August 5, 1886.
31. Archives of the Police Prefect, Morgue register, 1886.
32. *Le Petit Journal*, August 6, 1886.
33. Archives of the Police Prefect, Paris; Morgue registers.

34. See Anne, Margaret, and Patrice Higonnet, "Façades: Walter Benjamin's Paris," *Critical Inquiry* 10:3 (March 1984), 391–419, in which the Morgue is discussed as part of the nineteenth-century bourgeois obsession with death.
35. *Le Voltaire*, July 22, 1892. Yvette Guilbert was a well-known singer in the café-concerts.
36. For more on the closing of the Morgue, see my dissertation, "The Public Taste for Reality: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris" (University of California at Berkeley, 1993).
37. *La Presse*, 22 March 1907.
38. Cartoon from Musée Grévin Archives (hereafter "MGA").
39. *Le Monde Illustré*, May 22, 1882.
40. Stock prospectus, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris, *Actualités Anciennes*, 102.
41. *Catalogue-Almanach du Musée Grévin*, MGA (1882).
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Le Parlement*, June 8, 1882.
45. See Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 122, for a discussion of newspapers.
46. Jules Lemaître, *Impressions de Théâtre*, 2nd series (Paris: Société Française de l'Imprimerie, 1897) 8th ed., originally 1887, p. 325.
47. *L'Indépendance Belge*, June 12, 1882.
48. *Catalogue du Musée Grévin*, MGA, 54th ed.
49. *Catalogue-Almanach du Musée Grévin*, MGA, 32nd ed.
50. For an important discussion of spectator position at wax museums, see Mark Sandberg, "Missing Persons: Spectacle and Narrative in Late Nineteenth Century Scandinavia." Dissertation (University of California at Berkeley, 1991).
51. *Catalogue du Musée Grévin*, MGA, 57th ed.
52. As Robert Herbert has noted, this theme could be found represented in many Impressionist paintings and in other more popular images as well. Herbert, *Impressionism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 104.
53. *Catalogue du Musée Grévin*, MGA, 82 ed.
54. For more on the cinema at Musée Grévin, see my article coauthored with Jean-Jacques Meusy "Le Musée Grévin et le cinématographe: l'histoire d'une rencontre," in *1895* 11 (December 1991), 19–48.
55. *Le Temps*, June 7, 1882.
56. *L'Express*, June 7, 1882.
57. *Le Parlement*, June 6, 1882.
58. This 140-meter film, lasting between five and six minutes, was based on the tableaux that could still be found at Musée Grévin, with one exception: whereas the wax scene of the convict in his cell shows him playing cards, the film version shows him in an activity that would later become the primary metaphor of the filmic experience—he is dreaming.
59. Cassell's *Guide to Paris* (Paris, 1884), p. 117.
60. *Le Voltaire*, January 3, 1881, as cited in François Robichon, "Les Panoramas en France au XIX^e siècle" (University of Paris, Nanterre, 1982), p. 216.
61. Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, pp. 20–22. Jonathan Crary has made a distinction between the two; in the panorama, one is compelled to turn one's head and look around, while the diorama actually turns its spectators, transforming the observer, he argues, into a component of the machine. Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1990), p. 113.

62. *Les Cuirassiers de Reichshoffen* (Paris: Société des Grands Panoramas, 1881), BHVP, *Actualités Anciennes*, ser. 103.
63. See Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978). Altick argues that panoramas provided news for those who could not get it. The problem here is that the audience for panoramas and newspapers was one and the same: only the bourgeoisie read newspapers or could afford panoramas.
64. *Encyclopédie enfantine recommandée pour les écoles*, BHVP, *Actualités Anciennes*, ser. 103.
65. *Le Figaro*, February 23, 1889.
66. *Le Petit Moniteur*, May 16, 1889.
67. See Charles Castellani, *Confidences d'un panoramiste* (Paris: Maurice Dreyfous, n.d.), p. 281.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 281.
69. Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 173.
70. *Le Rappel*, March 12, 1889.
71. *Le Courier des Expositions*, March 1889.
72. Readers will note that many of the attractions were sponsored by companies that actually offered the real trips on their modes of transport. That fact should serve as an important corrective for those who associate such corporate entertainment with twentieth-century America in general and, say, the Disney theme parks in particular.
73. Robichon, "Les Panoramas en France," p. 504.
74. P. Bluysen, *Paris en 1889* (Paris: P. Arnould, 1890), p. 19.
75. *La Nature* (June 15, 1889), 34, in Robichon, "Les Panoramas en France," p. 507.
76. A two-horsepower gas-generated machine activated two pistons of a hydraulic press that moved the platform. See Robichon, "Les Panoramas en France," p. 520.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 516.
78. R. M. Arlaud, *Cinéma-Bouffe* (Paris: Jacques Melot, n.d.), p. 66. I thank Jean-Jacques Meusy for this reference.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 67. It should be clear that this well predates Hale's Tours. See Raymond Fielding, "Hale's Tours: Ultra-Realism in the Pre-1910 Motion Picture," in John Fell, ed. *Film before Griffith* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983).