Feature Essay:

The Spectator-in-the-Text: Cinematography, Spectatorship and Ideology in *Manhatta* (1921)

Clinton Barney

Washington University in St. Louis

As cinema developed into a narrative vehicle into the 1920s, moving away from its roots in experimentalism, a genre known as city-symphonies emerged, most prominently in the United States and Europe. With its emphasis on abstract aesthetic form over narrative development, city-symphonies "avoided…storylines and characters" and instead focused on capturing "the energy, the patterning, the complexities and the subtleties of a city."[1] Removed from the actuality films (i.e. panoramas, phantom/train-rides) of early cinema, city symphony films sought to capture more than just a photographic representation of the city. Rather, they sought to capture a city's *aura*. In tandem with the modernist approaches of Constructivism and Cubism, filmmakers appealed to and employed "rhythmic and associative montage" as a means to capture the "highly fragmented, oftentimes kaleidoscopic sense of modern life."[2] Capturing a city's aura was essential in capturing one's relationship with and experiences of the city, including work and leisure, and how both are shaped by industrial means.

Scholarship regarding city-symphonies typically reduces spectatorship within the confines of montage. The rapidity of images not only serve to reflect one's own overwhelming experience of the city, but categorize space and time in a manner that encourages a physiological response in the viewer. As Ori Levin notes, city-symphony directors "[turned] the rhythms of the

[1] Steven Jacobs, Eva Hielscher, and Anthony Kinik, eds., *The City Symphony Phenomenon: Cinema, Avant-Garde, and Urban Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2019), 10-11.
[2] Jacobs et. al, 5.

machine into an aesthetic feature [in an attempt] to appeal to the viewers' emotions,"[3] particularly those of overstimulation and anxiety. In her essay on Robert Florey's *Skyscraper Symphony* (1929), Merrill Schleier writes that the "kaleidoscopic view of moving skyscraper fragments…act as stand-in for the viewer's urban confusion or over stimulation."[4] Suarez writes that these films' "stress on abstract patterns and collapsed perspectives" result in a "refusal to center the spectator" within the cinematic space, further contributing to their uncertainty and disorientation.[5]

The role of the cinematography within city symphonies tends to be overlooked, understood primarily as a stepping-off point as a means to evaluate montage, and has yet to receive proper scholarly attention in itself, particularly as an independent vehicle of ideological communication. It is within this scholarly gap that I seek to operate. Evaluating the relationship between cinematography, spectatorship and ideology will provide a more nuanced approach to understanding the role/placement of the viewer within the wider city-symphony genre, as well as provide a new perspective onto the ideological pursuits, meanings and/or shortcomings of particular films.

My approach in evaluating the cinematography of city-symphony films, and their relationship to the construction of ideology, derives from Nick Browne's 1975 essay "Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of 'Stagecoach.'" In his evaluation of John Ford's 1939 film *Stagecoach*, Browne understands the cinematic spectator to be placed within the story-world

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[3] Ori Levin, "The Cinematic Time of the City Symphony Films: Time Management, Experiential Duration and Bodily Pulsation," *Studies in Documentary Film* 12, no. 3 (2018): 225–38, https://doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2018.1504370, 236.

[4] Merrill Schleier, "A Parisian in Manhattan: Florey's Skyscraper Symphony," essay, in *The City Symphony Phenomenon Cinema, Art, and Urban Modernity Between the Wars*, ed. Steven Jacobs, Anthony Kinik, and Eva Hielscher (London: Routledge, Taylor et Francis Group, 2019), 112.

[5] Juan A. Suarez, "City Space, Technology, Popular Culture: The Modernism of Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*," *Journal of American Studies* 36, no. 1 (2002): pp. 85-106, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021875802006783, 89.

two-fold: by means of not only 1) where the camera is located in relation to the diegetic space and action, but also 2) who/what the camera is pointing at. Thus, the spectator is placed in two positions at once: with the *subject* of the gaze, and with the *holder* of the gaze. However, the spectator is driven to identify not necessarily with both controller and subject of the gaze at once. Rather, the audience's identification is determined by their respective level of approval or disapproval of the character whose perspective they are inhabiting, or of the character they gaze upon. In the example from *Stagecoach* given by Browne, he evaluates a scene in which the spectator oscillates between two camera positions, though for the purposes of this essay we will only focus on the first. He evaluates a series of shots in which the camera is positioned from the relative perspective of Lucy, a conservative, high-class wife of a soldier, picturing Dallas, a shunned prostitute, which he claims is reflective of Lucy's "social dominance" and authority over Dallas. Although the spectator occupies Lucy's gaze and understands the ideological implications of it (her perceived sense of authority), they are not inclined to share it, and in fact can reject it. As Browne elaborates, identification with Dallas is possible: "Insofar as I identify with Dallas, it is not by repeating her shame, but by imagining myself in her position"[6] as the one who is shamed. It is with one's approval of the subject of the gaze that they can overcome or nullify the ideological/power dynamics expressed by the holder of the gaze.

While Browne's essay focuses on narrative Hollywood films, his understanding of dual-spectatorship can be used to evaluate even the most avant-garde of forms. For this essay, I will be using Browne's approach to evaluate one of the most famous city-symphony films: *Manhatta* (1921) by Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand as a means to understand both how the film places the spectator within the diegetic space (by means of the camera), and the ideological underpinnings

[6] Nick Browne, "The Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of 'Stagecoach,'" *Film Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1975): 26–38, https://doi.org/10.2307/1211746, 35.

or connotations established through the spectator's placement. My research is guided by these overarching yet connected questions: Who is the intended audience of these films? What/who is the audience meant to identify with? What ideology are these films trying to capture and promote? Most importantly, how does the camera position the viewer in relation to the film's ideology?

In their attempt to place the spectator within proletarian public spaces (assumedly inviting the spectator to identify with the proletarian public), the camera juxtapositionally places the spectator in a position of unhinged privilege; an outsider (or even a slummer) detached from the proletariat public spaces shown, able to weave through the city and access its entirety without consequence or hindrance. Thus, the spectator is placed in two simultaneous positions at once, swaying between the perspective of the (attached) proletariat and (detached) bourgeoisie. Ultimately, the film (by means of cinematography) does not drive the spectator to disapprove entirely of the proletarian human subjects based on their relationship with the city, but rather makes it impossible for approval of said subjects to be obtained whatsoever. This oscillating perspective negates (or at least confuses) the ideological goals of the film in relation to the wider goals of the city-symphony genre.

The dichotomy between the attached proletariat and the detached bourgeoisie can be best described as the different relationships each holds with the city. For the proletariat, the city is an inescapable, all-encompassing network. As the site of their home, work, leisure, and daily life in general, the proletarian is constantly subject to the varying stimuli of the city, from advertisements to technology to other people. Their attachment to the city is as physical as it is economical, spiritual and psychological. John Sloan's rooftop paintings (Figure 1) emphasize this attached nature of the working class to the architectural and societal infrastructure that

surrounded them. Whereas the rooftop is perceived as a site of temporary escape from the city, placing (both physical and spiritual) distance between the individual and the city's streets that serve as the hub of activity and commerce, the individual is still attached to the city, unable to truly disentangle themselves from the visual and audible stimuli of the streets below. Yet, the desire to detach is still there. This constant subjection to stimuli requires the necessity of what Simmel defines as a stimulus shield, the ability to create a "mental distance" through a "blasé attitude," or sense of emotional "antipathy" (apathy) towards the city and its inhabitants.[7] Thus, it is necessary for one to detach themselves from the city and its incessant activity in order to survive and preserve their mental wellbeing.

Figure 1: John Sloan. Sunday, Women Drying Their Hair, 1912. Oil on canvas. 26 1/8 in. x 32 1/8 in. (66.36 cm x 81.6 cm). Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA.

Comparatively, for the sake of this essay, the bourgeois experience is defined by one's ability to escape from the city and its constant stimuli. This mode of detachment can be best

[7] Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," essay, in *The Blackwell City Reader*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 103–10.

understood in terms of Chauncey's discussion of slumming. In his study of early gay culture in New York City, Chauncey notes that middle-class straight men would enter the lower-class red-light districts where the gay community resided for temporary reprieve and escape. Unlike those who actually lived in the red-light district that could not escape their daily lives, the middle-class bourgeois men were able to leave the city and remove themselves from the proletarian sphere, to come and go as they pleased. This ability to detach granted the slummers a "sense of superiority" over not only the proletarian, but the space itself, which is perceived as a mere spectacle.[8] The "blasé", unsympathetic attitude towards the city is thus realized in not just physical terms, but psychological. Inasmuch as these bourgeois individuals are able to vanish from the physical infrastructure which entrapped and defined the lives of the proletarian masses, they are able to detach themselves from any emotional connection or mode of relationship with those who they perceive as inferior. Thus, to refine our given thesis, through the placement and movement of the camera (i.e. the cinematographic means) in relation to the subject material shown and visualization of proletarian spaces, these early city-symphony films position the spectator to sway between two perspectives: a *proletarian attachment* to the city, and a *bourgeois attitude of the blasé*.

Often regarded as the first American avant-garde film, Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's 1921 *Manhatta* serves as a celebration of America's postwar vitality, architectural and industrial prowess, as well as the American Dream itself. The opening images of *Manhatta* (Figures 2 and 3) immediately introduce the spectator to New York City's vast utopian promises, placing the spectator within an immediate, fixed perspective of a passenger on a ferry entering the city

[8] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

(presumably for the first time).[9] Given the succeeding shots which sees a group of commuters descend from a ferry, it can be assumed that within the opening shot, the spectator is directly placed within the perspective of one of these commuters. While the identity of these commuters is uncertain and not directly explored by the film, scholars have interpreted these individuals to be either immigrants[10] or working-class citizens.[11] For the sake of this essay, the crowd will be interpreted broadly as a proletarian crowd, constituting both identities of immigrant and native-born workers. The cityscape, through the perspective of a working-class individual, is thus embedded with notions of an idealized utopia that New York City represented for many hopeful newcomers. The proletarian crowd lives in accordance with the American Dream, working as a means to engage with capitalism and improve their socioeconomic standing. The city serves as an arena and embodiment in which they can engage with the American Dream. In having the spectator gaze upon the skyscrapers, which in themselves serve as "emblems of capitalism and democracy, symbols of class and social mobility,"[12] the film seems to immediately inundate the spectator with the promise of success, namely economic and social mobility, representative of the American Dream. Thus, in sharing the perspective of the proletarian, the film invites the spectator into their respective ideology.

This promise of success seemingly offered to the spectator in the opening images is exacerbated by the film's constant appeal to the poetry of Walt Whitman. Excerpts from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* are intercut between the various shots of the city, serving as the

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[9] Sarah Jilani, "Urban Modernity and Fluctuating Time: 'Catching the Tempo' of the 1920s City Symphony Films," Senses of Cinema, September 2013, https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2013/feature-articles/urban-modernity-and-fluctuating-time-catching-the-tempo-of-the-1920s-city-symphony-films/.
[10] Jilani.
[11] Cecilia Mouat, "Experimental Modernism in City Symphony Films," essay, in *Film and Literary Modernism*, ed. Robert McParland (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 20–26, 23.
[12] Vojislava Filipcevic Cordes, "The City in Motion: Modernity, Mobility and Skyline Views in Manhatta (1921)," *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (2018): 331–49, https://doi.org/10.1386/jucs.5.3.331_1, 332.

guiding force for the images. Whitman's poems "emphatically celebrate the city's grandeur"[13] in terms of the scale of its population, diversity and architectural feats, inviting the viewers to relish in and understand the city's idealistic promises. Whitman's poetry embraced the new American life defined by industry and community. He was a firm believer in the existence of the melting pot, and "'expressed fascination with the urban crowd…[and] 'an egalitarian bonds of comradeship'" that occurred between peoples.[14] When intercut between images of the city itself, these excerpts produce associations in the spectator between these utopian ideals of comradery and industry, and the city. Oehlrich notes that "[Sheeler and Strand's] reliance on Whitman's idealizing verse of the city…spoke to the potential for an American way of life that had not yet been achieved, but which they hoped was on the horizon"[15] as a result of industrial means and cooperation.

Figure 2: Opening Panorama of Manhatta *(1921). The city's idealistic skyscrapers from the perspective of a ferry, 00:01:51. Public domain, 1921.*

[13] Suarez, 86.
[14] Cordes, 345.
[15] Kristen Oehlrich, "Lyrical City: Reconsidering Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand's *Manhatta* (1921)," essay, in *Film and Literary Modernism*, ed. Robert McParland (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 27–39, 35.

Figure 3: Opening Panorama of Manhatta *(1921). Skyscrapers in direct presentation with the naval vehicles that occupy the city's bays, 00:01:43. Public domain, 1921.*

The film's opening sequence is constructed of slow, methodic, wide-angled pans that seek to capture the cityscape in its entirety. Each shot ranges from 5-10 seconds, inviting the viewer to absorb the splendor and totality of the idealized New York skyline. Shot at the same height and angle, the shots follow the same movement line and do not require the spectator to reorient their eyes, reducing the possibility of visual overstimulation, save for the sublime awe one may feel about the massive range of skyscrapers. As expressed by Mouat, "[t]he editing of *Manhatta*, far from the rapid montage developed by Vertov and Ruttmann, creates a filmic space that allows enough time" for the spectator to embody and occupy and familiarize themselves with the cinematic space.[16]

This is mostly in part due to the spectator's visual arrangement and association with the proletarian crowd whose perspective they occupy. Horak determines that the film's opening sequence creates a "unified space" in which the spectator is able to "establish spatial relationships" with the city and its skyscrapers through our sense of attachment with the

[16] Mouat, 23.

individuals on the ground.[17] The spectator's understanding and perception of the city, at first, is determined or guided through their connection with the arriving proletarian crowd. Thus, the film's opening sequence also creates the expectation of a coherent relationship between spectator and the city space: their experience of the city will be in tandem with that of the group whose perspective they occupy. Paired with the celebratory nature of the film and in conjunction with Whitman's texts, in assuming the perspective of "the ceaseless crowd,"[18] again, the spectator is invited to identify with the proletarian journeymen. Thus, the opening images of the film seek to attach the spectator to the city by means of attaching their perspective to that of the working-class crowd who understand, celebrate and live in accordance with the city's utopian ideals.

However, after said opening, this mode of attachment between the spectator and the city/crowd is quickly severed by the film by means of the cinematography. Immediately as the commuters detach from the ferry, Sheeler and Strand detach the camera from the ground and the fixed position of the city-dwelling individual. Rather than placing the spectator on the ground with the proletarian crowd that defined their understanding and perspective of the city up until that point, the majority of *Manhatta* is shot at a high angle from the heights of the idealized skyscrapers, looking down upon the city (Figures 4 and 5). While likely used to "encompass a total vision of the cityscape,"[19] the camera's heightened position "'reduces the passerby to a mere note, whirled and buffeted by the winds of traffic'" and architecture.[20] The high angle in which the camera (and thus the spectator) is placed detaches the spectator from not only the proletarian subjects below, but their experiences of the city. The spectator is unable to witness or

[17] Jan-Christopher Horak, "Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta*," essay, in *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde, 1919-45* (Univ. Wisconsin Press, 1998), 271.
[18] Walt Whitman, "Sparkles From the Wheel," Leaves of Grass (1881-82), accessed January 2023, https://whitmanarchive.org/archive2/published/LG/1881/poems/221.
[19] Jiliani.
[20] Cordes, 332.

identify with the trials and tribulations of proletarian life in the new modern city. The city's architecture, rather than maintaining its aforementioned idealism, serves as a boundary between the spectator and the crowd, the means of detachment in themselves. The skyscrapers provide the spectator the ability to remove themselves from the immediacy of the street and its crowds, both in terms of physical and mental distance, something those who reside on the rooftops of Sloan's paintings could not achieve.

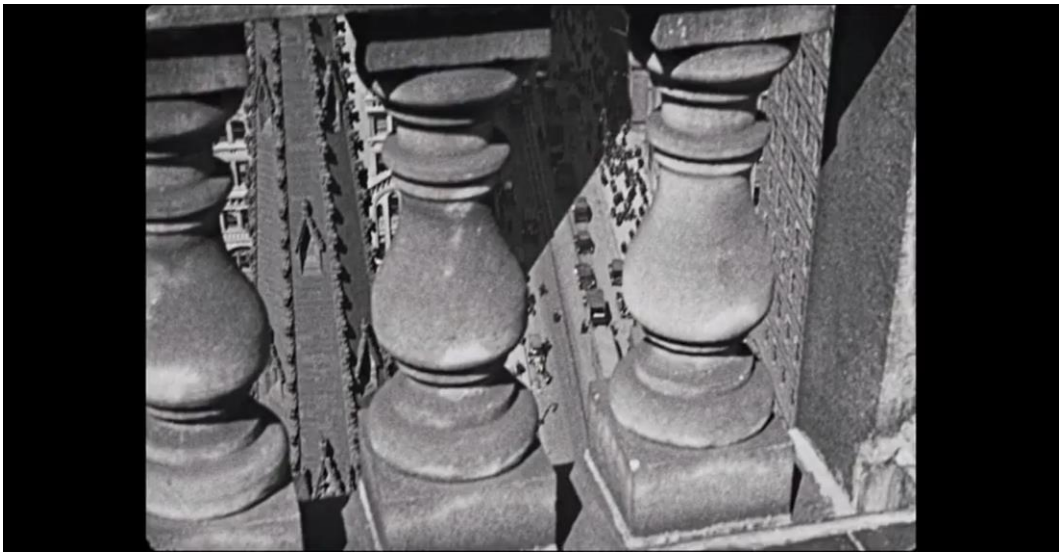

Figure 4: The spectator's newly heightened perspective above the city's streets, framed in relation to stone pillars, 00:10:28. Public domain, 1921.

Figure 5: Viewing the kinesis of the city from above, 00:10:45. Public domain, 1921.

If the skyscrapers, returning to the film's initial images, are meant to physically embody and represent the promise of success and American vitality, then it is these idealizations that serve to imprison the city's crowds within its constructs. The city's inhabitants are framed in relation to, if not consumed by, the city's vast architecture; either directly compared or obscured by the architectural embodiments of success. Horak describes those on the ground as "'antlike [*sic*]…insects crawling between skyscrapers."[21] Horak's description, while dehumanizing, is apt. The proletarians are perceived less as a community of individuals with their own lives, desires and struggles, but as a part of the crowd, entities that make and make up the city. Their experiences are defined particularly by their service to the city; they are placed as agents of commercial consumption and work. The image of smokestacks, which signify the "smoke of industry" and consumption,[22] (i.e. the burning of coal for heat, engines, etc.) serves as a visual motif throughout the film (Figures 6 and 7). Not only does smoke emit from the houses and businesses the proletarian crowd resides in, but also the steamships and trains that surround the city's periphery, creating a visual association between the industrial machines of commerce and the working-class. The crowd, thus, is placed as simply a piece of a larger, city-wide puzzle that contributes to the greater economic flow, and thus, architectural expansion. They share the same status as the machines, means towards a commercial end rather than an end in themselves through their existence as human beings.

[21] Horak.
[22] Oehlrich, 35.

Figure 6: Steam emerging from smokestacks, likely from commercial or residential buildings, signifying consumption of energy, 00:05:35. Public domain, 1921.

Figure 7: Steam emerging from ships. A group of smaller ships push a larger barge, a signifier of the travel industry, 00:08:47. Public domain, 1921.

Beyond the urban vitality embodied by the skyscraper, Sheeler and Strand celebrate the process of its creation, by placing particular emphasis on the workers who build the city's skyscrapers: "these films highlight the quality of the material used, the workmanship involved, and the unique characteristics of the particular building."[23] They are framed either *en masse*, with

[23] Jon Gartenberg and Alex Westhelle, "NY, NY: A Century of City Symphony Films," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no. 2 (2014): 248–76, https://doi.org/10.13110/framework.55.2.0248, 253.

their backs to the camera, or in relation to large machines or industrial properties that dwarf if not minimize their placement within the space. It matters not who these individuals are, but rather what they do for the city. This lack of individuality (although not necessarily agency) is also reflected in Whitman's poetry employed by the film in its intertitles, namely, Whitman's emphasis on the crowd. As expressed by Cordes, "[Whitman's] vision also reveals a poet who, while submerged into the streets, is yet mentally distant from them…withdrawn from the immediate experience of urbanity."[24] Through the lens of a detached bourgeois voyeur, both the subjectivity and experiences of the city's proletarian inhabitants are reduced in relation to the totality of the city and its commercial and industrial goals.

Whereas the spectator's attachment to the immigrants prompted the spectator to connect with the city and its peoples, the spectator's newfound perspective above the city prompts the viewer to disconnect. This notion of disconnection is not prompted by a state of disapproval akin to Browne. The spectator does not (metaphorically) look down upon or despise the proletarian crowd in the same manner Lucy does to Dallas in *Stagecoach*. Rather, in detaching the spectator from the crowd by means of physical and emotional distance, the spectator is invited towards a mode of *indifference* about the crowd they were once associated with. While the spectator relishes in the magisterial view offered by the proletarian workers who constructed the skyscraper, the spectator is not driven to approve of their labor. The film seems more interested in the processes of its construction and the fact that it exists rather than the contributions of its workers. Instead, the cinematography seemingly encourages the separation between the spectator and the crowd. It is in their separation that the spectator is able to relish in the panoramic views of the city, and that the film is able to exist in the first place.

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[24] Cordes, 336.

Thus, the heightened perspective of the spectator not only suggests a sense of mastery and classist superiority over the proletarian crowd they once associated with, but more so, akin to Chauncey's slummers, a sense of mastery and superiority over the cityscape itself. As Michel de Certeau describes in his 1984 essay "Walking the City," where he imagines viewing Manhattan from the top of the World Trade Center:

> To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city's grasp…When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators. An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below. His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god.[25]

The heightened position of the spectator allows them to reduce the space into an assemblage of forms -- less of an actual place where people reside and lives are lived, but more as a spectacle. The ideological significance of this cinematic detachment from the city's streets and its inhabitants can be best expressed in relation to Albert Boime's discussion of the magisterial gaze. In evaluating the paintings from the Hudson River and Rocky Mountain schools during the mid-19th century which depict the Westward landscapes of the United States, Boime notes of the heightened perspective from which the paintings placed the spectator. Boime reads this heightened perspective, which he calls the magisterial gaze, as an embodiment of American ideology during the time of Manifest Destiny, namely, a belief of one's control over and ability to conquer a landscape. The elevated placement of the spectator in relation to the rugged, seemingly-untouched landscape grants the spectator a commanding gaze over the landscape and those (particularly Native Americans) who resided and established culture within

[25] Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," essay, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 91–110, 92.

it. Encoded within the landscapes are notions of futurity and progress; they are something to be controlled and subjugated as a means of American ideological and territorial expansion. Thus, in viewing them from a heightened distance, complex landscapes are reduced into a representational form that allows itself to be presented as accessible and within reach, especially given the expansion of railroad infrastructure. The heightened position of the spectator grants them visual mastery and control over the landscape and those residing within it, in the same manner that the spectator's placement above the city grants them a powerful gaze in *Manhatta*.

This reduction of (particularly new, "exotic" Westward) space into an accessible format was not new to the cinematic medium either by the time of *Manhatta*'s creation. Prior to the establishment of narrativization, during the era labeled by Gunning as the cinema of attractions, panoramas, phantom rides and other actuality films sought to render spaces into easily-digestible and accessible attractions. These spaces were spectacles partially due to their placement as exotic, from representations of unfamiliar Western landscapes to newly-obtained colonial ecosystems. Lauren Rabinovitz, in her evaluation of films between 1903 and 1908 that presented views of amusement parks at night, notes that the only possibility for the viewer to regard the mechanical space as an exotic spectacle was through a mode of detachment, both in terms of height (physical) and psychological connection. These films "often emphasized the importance of spatial detachment from the [subject] for the full effect of bedazzlement," rooting the essence of the spectacular in the spectator's distance from the pictured space.[26] She states "[w]hat is offered as an ideal vantage point [in these films] would have been difficult to achieve as a lived experience" for those on the ground, and as such, "could not be fully realized from within the

[26] Lauren Rabinovitz, "The Miniature and the Giant: Postcards and Early Cinema," essay, in *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012), 97–134, 132.

crowd." Rather, one "could regard [the space] as spectacle…only when the viewer [or camera] could step outside" of it.[27] Similarly, the city in *Manhatta* is cinematographically presented as a spectacle particularly as a result of the spectator's/camera's detachment from the space. The city-symphony's spectator, like Chauncey's bourgeois slummers, are prompted to view the city and its streets as less as a space where people inhabit, and more as an idealized construct where they can enter and escape at will. The city's streets are placed as something to be consumed, along with the people that occupy it.

This detachment also manifests itself in relation to the film's lack of a "central perspective" used to "orient and position the viewer in the concrete and recognizable geographic space of the film's narrative."[28] Without a physical attachment to the city, or to a central 'protagonist' within the city, the camera is free to roam wherever it may please, not bound or motivated by any particular subject or perspective. The entire city then, and its inhabitants, are subject to the camera's/spectator's magisterial gaze. All views are accessible to the spectator, and thus are all at the risk of being reduced to simply a mode of spectacle, primarily in their detachment from the central perspective of the proletarian crowd. To return to the opening images, after the point-of-view shot from the ferry, the camera is placed on a dock and captures the arrival of the proletarians/immigrants aboard, motivated by our attachment to the immigrants' gaze. The camera, still motivated by the attachment, follows the proletarian crowd into the city. As the camera detaches itself from the proletarian subjects, however, the viewer's understanding of and relationship with the city is as a result disoriented. Despite the longer length of the shots aforementioned, placed by the camera in many different locations in a short time-frame, the audience is unable to familiarize themselves or connect with the various

[27] Rabinovitz, 133.
[28] Horak, 271.

locations. The city becomes a "fractured space"[29] both in terms of its representation, but also in the spectator's relationship to it. They cannot truly identify with the space itself, nor the individuals that inhabit it, before the camera moves the spectator into another unidentifiable or unrecognizable space. The lack of an orienting placeholder "induces a sense of temporal and spatial inertia"[30] in the viewer, who is instead subjected to a vast amount of stimuli. The spectator cannot fixate themselves within the city outside of their magisterial gaze over it, and thus cannot identify with the space or its inhabitants below the summits. The film, in forcing this mental distance between spectator and human subject, prompts the spectator to adopt a blasé attitude. This notion of the blasé is not a result of overstimulation a la Simmel, but through said distance between spectator and crowd.

Figure 8: A negative of the panorama at the film's opening intertitles, meant to exemplify the city at night. Taken from a heightened perspective from beyond the shoreline, 00:11:30. Public domain, 1921.

The film's final image (Figure 8), which also serves as the backdrop for the intertitles, consists of a wide panoramic of the city at night (achieved through creating a negative of the film's initial panoramic image/backdrop), assumedly taken from the position of a ferry or liner

[29] Suarez, 99.
[30] Jiliani.

seen throughout the film. This image calls back to the introduction in which the spectator inhabited the perspective of the proletarian crowd arriving via ferry. While not necessarily a point-of-view shot to the same degree (due to the image's height from the waterline), the spectator remains detached from the city's interior, outside of the city and thus the lives of its inhabitants. Once again, the spectator is placed in an elevated perspective, contributing to the rendering of the city as a spectacle.

As Rabinovitz states, it is within this "idealized, detached" gaze of the spectator that the cityscape "delivers its utopian promise."[31] For the spectator of the amusement park's panoramic views at night (i.e. *Coney Island at Night*), the utopian promise was that of illumination, of modernity's sweeping overhaul of one's perception of nighttime space. For the heightened spectator atop New York's tallest skyscrapers, that utopian promise is less clear. The detached position of the spectator serves to contradict the celebratory nature of the film in general. The idealized, utopian notions of democracy and the melting pot derive from a sense of attachment with the city and its people who engage directly with it and live their lives in accordance with it, being on the ground and an active member of the city, not detached and removed from it. The spectators themselves are unable to engage with said melting pot, fixed to the perspective of the skyscrapers and those who inhabit them instead. Rather, the melting pot is something that is diminished, considering that the (assumedly) diverse identities of those in the crowd are not visible due to the spectator's physical distance, as is the architectural and commercial vitality of the city, reduced into a spectacle meant for digestible and exhibitionary consumption. The promise of success embedded within the film's opening image is unfulfilled, and instead seems

[31] Rabinovitz, 133.

impossible to obtain as a result of the camera's, and thus the spectator's, physical and psychological detachment from the city and its peoples.

Thus, the dual positioning of the spectator, which serves to place the spectator outside of the city in a detached, bourgeois position of perceived superiority over the city and its proletarian inhabitants, effectively contradicts the celebratory and utopian nature of the city-symphony genre. The spectator is unable to truly identify with or (to use Browne's rhetoric) approve of the proletarian public nor the public spaces in which they occupy that serve as the subject material of these films. Rather than serving to connect the spectator to the space and its peoples, *Manhatta* effectively reduces or denies the spectator's attachment to it, creating a mental distance between spectator and on-screen action, resulting in the adoption of a blasé attitude. While industrial modernism and the comradery of the proletarian crowd is celebrated through the filmmakers' appeal to Whitman, it is celebrated as a means for the bourgeoisie to maintain magisterial control, the means to which they interact with the city, and their perception of the city itself. Unable to truly access the city and interiority with the proletariat, the spectator fails to truly recognize the city's utopian promise. Instead, they are forced to remain an outsider, or a slummer, existing outside of the city and its new processes of modernity.

This essay, focusing only on *Manhatta*, is understandably unable to capture the entire genre as a whole, nor does it seek to generalize the argument towards other city symphony films. More evaluation needs to be done with respect to the wide selection of other films in the city-symphony genre in understanding how the camera, not just the editing, places the spectator within the text and in relation to the genre's ideological goals.

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