

Rendezvous for Particular People

The Local Roots of Mass Culture

There was no age, I venture to say since the world began, in which the people would not have flocked to the moving picture shows. It remained for this age to produce this marvel, . . . If we continue along the lines followed in the present times we shall yet see in Toronto and other Canadian cities moving pictures as real as life.

—Editorial, *Star Weekly* June 3, 1911



ONE OF THE FIRST THEATORIUMS in Toronto to advertise regularly was the Garden on College Street. Opening July 30, 1910, it ran a small ad in just one of the city's six daily newspapers, the *Star*, initially for the theater's roof garden where a "good musical program" could be enjoyed nightly, admission ten cents. Throughout September and October 1910, ads for the Garden's moving pictures and vaudeville appeared in the same paper, each naming a live performer but describing the films only through various brand names of the technical apparatus, the kinetograph, the cymograph, and the cinematograph. Alfred and William Hawes constructed the theatorium for \$8,000, replacing a store-front picture show they had opened only months before (*Building Permits* April 3, 1909, and November 25, 1909). The Garden was located neither

downtown nor uptown, but on a neighborhood shopping street, bridging working-class and immigrant-associated areas to the south and middle-class suburban districts to the north. The University of Toronto nearby provided a consistent clientele for many decades (in its last years in the 1970s, it was an important art house called the Cinema Lumière). In 1911 the Garden was leased by a growing U.S. chain of picture shows, “which cater to the best class of citizens rather than the transient or tourist traffic, . . . situated in the best residential localities” (*Toronto World* [henceforth *World*] June 11, 1911, 9). Still, the Garden, even with its rooftop garden, was only a modestly sized picture theater, neither the largest in the city nor the one with the most elaborate façade.

The theater’s new manager was showman Leon Brick from Buffalo, and he was anything but modest when it came to promoting the neighborhood picture show. “Superior presentation, . . . first-class music, . . . just the place to spend an hour”; *World* October 30, 1911). It was rumored that Brick kept track of the number of automobiles lined up outside the theater to drop off patrons from uptown and the suburbs (*MPW* November 28, 1914, 1257). With automobiles still a rare luxury, a traffic jam outside the Garden would indeed have been a measure of his boastful claims. In 1912, Brick’s ad began to use the phrase, “A Rendezvous for Particular People,” explaining in detail what to expect:



Figure 1.1. Leon Brick’s ad in an American film trade paper prominently called the Garden Theatre, “A Rendezvous for Particular People.” Photos of the façade and roof garden later appeared in a Canadian architecture journal. (Top: *Moving Picture World*, June 28, 1913. Bottom: *Construction*, April 1915.)

Devoted Exclusively to a High-class Exhibition of Motion Pictures which Include Travel Scenes, Interesting Dramatic Creations, Humorous Comedies and Novelties as Issued. Music of a High Order by the Garden Theatre Orchestra, which Is Composed of Versatile Performers. A Miniature Symphony Orchestra. (*Toronto Star Weekly* [henceforth *Star Weekly*] October 12, 1912, 32)

Gradually the description of the film and music program was shortened to "Motion Pictures—Music," but the slogan, "A Rendezvous for Particular People" stuck, appearing in ads for the Garden until 1914. A newspaper article introducing plans for the new season at the Garden in 1913 noted the audience was three-quarters "ladies," described the policy as "a clean show in a clean house," and reported that Brick would personally select films to ensure "thrillers and sensational, blood-curdling dramas are eliminated" (ad in *Star Weekly* August 2, 1913, 21). Brick even took the exceptional step of buying a large, half-page ad in the New York film trade paper *Moving Picture World* inviting other showmen to visit when vacationing in Canada (*MPW* June 28, 1913, 1395). The particular people of Toronto could accommodate American visitors easily.

The Garden's slogan is a crystallization of the question at the core of this study: Is a local case study of filmgoing particular to that place? On its surface, however, it is a deceptively simple marker of the upwardly mobile character of movie audiences at the time, described by Brick in the *Moving Picture World* ad as "representing the most respectable and influential element of Toronto." The act of moviegoing, too, was upwardly mobile, signaled not only by Brick's rhetoric, but also by the simple existence of ads in daily papers where there were almost none before. The Garden's slogan is one example of many, from almost any locale, of how moviegoing at small picture shows transformed from a cheap novelty to a mass practice with a specifically middle-class appeal. In every big city and many smaller towns and suburbs, authorities and moral reformers began censoring films and limiting children's attendance. Film-makers, and in turn regional film exchanges and local showmen, carefully refined the moving picture program to appeal to the middle-class, especially women, the very same "particular" people who had been most active in agitating for regulation of the early nickel shows. On the surface, then, there is nothing particular to the Garden Theatre about its claim to be a rendezvous for particular people. The emergence of "refined" moviegoing was as much a transnational, standardized process as the parallel transition to a formally conglomerated Hollywood.

Although some Canadian theater chains had formal and arm's length ties to U.S. film interests, particular people in Toronto almost always

managed, legislated, and advertised moviegoing with genuine concern for what was best for their own city. The general similarity between this process and what happened elsewhere, if not everywhere, cannot be explained by the “branch plant” links to the transnational companies that distributed and produced films. Especially during this transitional decade when regulations and routines specific to film were first articulated, there was an active process of deciding how to *import* this still-novel global export commodity. The form and forum of gathering for filmgoing, regardless of the film, allowed audiences, authorities, and showmen to treat the social context of viewing as equal in importance to the specific story or scenes viewed. Leon Brick himself explained this was exactly the premise of his management of the Garden Theatre and proposed that the role he played in exhibiting films to the particular people of Toronto was on par with the earlier production of the images. “The artistic presentation of a moving picture is now conceded to be in importance equal to its original reflection on the sensitive film” (*MPW* June 28, 1913, 1395).

The central premise of *Now Playing* is that the standardization of filmgoing in Toronto was articulated in forms of showmanship, regulation, and promotion that were indeed particular to Toronto. But then how did a global, mass culture take root in spite of such attention to local particularity? One commonsense explanation might be that the mass character of cinema was determined by its technology and production: because projection apparatuses and film prints, sheet music and song slides, were manufactured industrially and mass distributed, moviegoing of course had the same basic form everywhere. One might suppose in turn that mass communication would follow: because people saw similar films in similar ways, a type of universal spectatorship resulted. Neither of these approaches allows for a sense of the ways local and regional efforts to shape cinema seem instead to have contributed to its mass appeal, helping along the understanding that what we do here is the same as what they do there.

Of course, the apparatus and images were widely distributed and generally came from far away; but that aspect was not seen as problematic in local debates. Concerned about possibly immoral stories, people called for censorship to aid good parenting and civic education without assuming indecent images similarly affected everyone. Sometimes aspersions of profiteering were directed at showmanship, calls to discriminate against frivolous entertainment in favor of a more educational cinema, and concerns about flag-waving films from other countries. Even these local debates rarely questioned the technological apparatus, viewing format, or commercial and capitalist basis of moviegoing. Regional and municipal decisions about the movies dwelt almost entirely with regional and municipal

concerns: the built spaces of theaters, the policing of indecent public conduct or its depictions, fair business practices, and moviegoing's intrusion onto the spaces and times of churchgoing, schooling, or family life. These local matters—the conditions of moviegoing, its places, rhythms, and manners—were not mere tangents and obstacles in the way of mass culture but were its building blocks. The process of setting local conditions *sanctioned* the practice in the dual sense of stipulating limitations but thus adding a stamp of legitimacy.

The Matter on Its Merits: Preempting the Problem of Moving Pictures

The first histories of film appeared almost immediately after the introduction of the apparatus to the public. As early as 1897, histories of film such as Cecil Hepworth's *The ABC of the Cinématographe* reviewed the technology as a scientific invention, framed by the biographies of its innovators (Chanan 1996; Popple & Kember 2004). In 1895 several machines debuted with varying degrees of success in an attempt to take Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope peepshow films and project them to an audience. Auguste and Louis Lumière perhaps most famously patented their Cinématographe and had a first public performance in Paris in December. In London in January 1896, Robert Paul and Brit Acres provided a demonstration of moving pictures to the Royal Photographic Society. In the United States, Edison purchased the rights to a similar adaptation of the existing technology Thomas Armat devised, renamed it the Vitascope, and gave it a commercial premiere in New York in April 1896. Most local histories of filmgoing, too, begin with the first projected film shows, making the technology the foundation for the subsequent social practice. Canadian film histories usually begin by citing the introduction of these technical apparatuses within the nation's borders. The first film show was long taken to be a demonstration of Edison's Vitascope in Ottawa on July 21, 1896. In fact, Lumière's Cinématographe had surfaced even earlier in Montreal on June 28, 1896, a day before its first showing in New York (Gaudreault and Lacasse 1996; Lacasse 1984; Morris 1992, 1–13). Histories of film in Toronto begin in this way, too, citing the appearance of the Vitascope at the Musée Theatre on August 31, 1896, just a day before Lumière's apparatus debuted at the Toronto Industrial Exhibition (Gutteridge 2000, 7–32; Morris 1992, 7–11).

From this origin, a conventional history of film proceeds to recount the patterns of progress of an industrial technique of storytelling toward the mature “institutional” cinema with the classical Hollywood style and studio system. On the one hand are the accounts of the history of filmmaking

technique and narrative style (Bordwell 1985; Gunning 1991; Keil 2001). On the other hand are the business histories of the transnational industry, which ended up in the 1930s and 1940s fully vertically integrated, a global oligopoly with direct chains of management from film production through distribution and local exhibition (Balio 1976; Gomery 1992). Perhaps most numerous are local histories of theater building. The prototype remains Ben M. Hall's *Best Remaining Seats* (1966) and the Theatre Historical Society of America's magazine *Marquee*, which Hall helped create. Although the degree of nostalgia can vary greatly, these all recognize that movie theaters are important sites of local heritage. In this vein, I have examined the emergence of the movie palace in Canada and have read it as a signifier for downtown and urban history itself (Moore 2004). These variants of film history treat film as a technology that arrives in communities fully formed. The focus on the invention of the apparatus thus ignores how the arrival of the technology might have prompted a social process particular to the site, let alone how the apparatus helped institute a practice that was adjusted over time as part of the local situation.

Yet, many studies demonstrate that the technology of projected film from 1895 was just part of a long-standing technological, commercial, and social fascination with visual representation and illusion (Boyer 1994; Crary 1992; Friedberg 1993). In a less abstract way, this translated into film at first being attached to existing forms of exhibition and amusement. The first film shows in Canada demonstrate how the new technology was carefully inscribed within existing places of modern entertainment and spectacle: a variety show at an established theater in Montreal and later Toronto, a suburban amusement park in Ottawa, and the industrial exhibition in Toronto. A familiar air was felt when the Lumière Cinématographe was briefly set up after the Exhibition in a space of its own on the city's main shopping avenue, Yonge Street, in October and again in December 1896. Empty storefronts such as this were often used for temporary, special exhibits of artistic or novelty attractions. For example, a temporary art gallery was put in the same Yonge Street storefront as the Cinématographe, and promoted in the same tone: "The Rage of the Day—Historical Paintings, No Canadian Should Miss Them" (ad in *Star* November 6, 1896). The novelty of the attraction was initially carefully mediated through existing local practices. Film did not at first prompt local efforts to regulate and normalize its relation to society.

One succinct measure of how the 1896 introduction of film technology to Toronto was a moment of social continuity, rather than rupture, is the license fee schedule municipal authorities set to manage and monitor business operations in Toronto. The general category for enter-

tainments charging admission had been set a yearly license fee of \$50 before 1890 (Toronto Bylaw 2453). This license category, which would later apply to moving picture shows, was thus introduced more than a full decade before the first nickel show and years before the first projection using film technology. Commercial amusements were a regular and regulated part of the modern city before film technology came along. The novelty of cinema was not in itself socially problematic. Before the theatatoriums opened in 1906, there was perhaps just one incident prompting a debate to regulate film in Toronto.

In August 1897, tickets for “Veriscope” pictures of the Corbett–Fitzsimmons fight were widely advertised as a forthcoming sensational extra attraction at the Toronto Opera House. The prizefight had taken place in March in Nevada where it was legal. But prizefights were illegal in Canada. In Toronto at the time, even amateur fights needed special permission from the chief constable. The week before the filmed attraction was set to open, Mayor Fleming became determined to stop the “disgraceful and demoralizing thing.” The issue was addressed at a meeting of the Board of Control where the mayor was relieved to discover that Alderman Sheppard, manager of the Princess Theatre, had refused to book the films. The City Solicitor was instructed to draft a bylaw prohibiting the attraction, although not everyone agreed (*Toronto News* [henceforth *News*] August 6, 1897). The bylaw drafted was a \$500 penalty per day for any exhibition or representation of any fight between individuals or of any prizefight “by means of a kinetoscope, cinematograph, veriscope, or any other instrument or otherwise,” including pictures, drawings, photographs, models, wax works, or other devices.

Described in one report as a prohibitive license, all acknowledged that the city could not prohibit the film from being shown and could only impose penalties afterward. The managers of the Toronto Opera House arranged a special Saturday screening for councilors to view the moving pictures in preparation for an impromptu city council meeting Monday morning. If the bylaw failed, shows would begin just hours later. Because of the rushed timing, the bylaw required two-thirds consent of council to come into effect the same day as it was introduced (*News* August 7, 1897). The debate was lively, with the *Star* putting a small note within its synopsis to make the issue explicit, “The City Getting too Good.” Alderman Sheppard, the theater manager, interrupted debate over proper jurisdiction, wanting first simply to know how many thought the picture actually should be banned. Alderman Hallam called out, “Never mind what I think. What do you think, yourself?” To which Sheppard parlayed, “Well, you have been to Paris, and seen everything which the human eye could see. Therefore I take [you] as a high authority” (*Star* August 7, 1897, 1).

The bylaw failed to get two-thirds support of council and the fight pictures played for two weeks to a packed house. The *Star* summarized the episode with the headline, “Fad Legislation Beaten by a Technicality,” adding that the councilors were thankful that the two-thirds rule let them “escape the necessity of dealing with the matter on its merits and adjourn in good humor” (*Star* August 9, 1897, 1). Decades later columnist W. A. Craik (*Toronto Telegram* [henceforth *Telegram*] June 2, 1961) recalled this civic debate over the regulation of film in Toronto, noting that the Canadian federal parliament earlier in 1897 had considered a revision to the criminal code specifically to bar films of prizefights nationwide. No such federal provision was ever introduced and any federal concern over film had an impasse similar to what happened in Toronto. The failure to reckon with moving pictures “on its merits” is a sign that the place of film in society was still undefined. Because prizefights were prohibited, should films of them be banned, too? The answer was not obvious. Less obvious was the question of jurisdiction—federal, provincial, or municipal. Whereas prizefights were a special loophole, police had long been able to seize any representation of indecent or immoral conduct as a criminal matter just as they could arrest any person for indecent or immoral acts.

Even with theatoriums open in 1906, a full year elapsed before controversy erupted. By 1907 police were already inspecting and censoring films “on the beat” as they patrolled the city more generally for indecent acts. This time film censorship was considered in general for the city, not just for prizefight pictures but for everyday shows at the cheap theatoriums, a novel space of consumption that had existed in Toronto for only a year. In April 1907, a moving picture called *The Unwritten Law* was censored after playing a few days at the Star burlesque theater (*Toronto Mail & Empire* [henceforth *Mail & Empire*] April 13, 1907; *News* April 12, 1907). It depicted the notorious murder of Evelyn Nesbitt Thaw’s lover Stanford White at the hands of her husband. Harry Thaw’s defense was a supposedly unwritten law that a husband had a right to slay his wife’s seducer. The film included a fictionalized not-guilty verdict, although the trial was still underway and making front page news (more recently popping up in the plot of the novel and musical *Ragtime*). Lee Grieveson (2004, 37–77) proposes the emergence of movie censorship in Chicago and throughout the United States can be traced directly to the controversy surrounding this film. As controversial as the trial itself, the film nonetheless played without getting censored in places such as Montreal and even in smaller cities in Ontario.

Soon after police banned the Thaw–White film in Toronto, a city councilor on the legislative committee proposed a city bylaw to specify police censorship of amusements and allow for an official play censor

(*Star* April 17, 1907). Just a week later, an amusement license application for a proposed theatorium was referred by the Board of Police Commissioners to the Board of Control. The *Star* (April 25, 1907) reported that Mayor Coatsworth and other controllers, with one exception, had no knowledge whatsoever of what went on in the moving picture shows. Although told they had nothing to worry about, they decided to temporarily require the property commissioner to inspect all proposed theatoriums. The legislative committee of the city council discussed the morality of plays as well as moving picture shows, considering inflammatory anecdotes about corrupted children who thieved and lied to get nickels to go to the picture shows (*Star* April 27, 1907; *World* April 27, 1907). Although picture shows were thoroughly mixed with stage theater in the discussion, Toronto clearly had potential to seize on moving pictures as an urgent problem in the city. This did not happen. Because it was embedded in the prospect of theater censorship, a forceful editorial in the *Star* compared the proposal to despotism and fought the idea as part of a “dangerous and growing tendency to meddlesome legislation, interfering with individual liberty, and substituting legal restraint for self-control and judgment” (*Star* April 25, 1907, 8). Another paper reported that the city’s four or five picture shows were already well supervised by the police, who assured city officials no problem was beyond their capable grasp. The police made clear they already had been censoring and destroying scenes from films even before the recent Thaw–White picture (*News* April 27, 1907). The *Mail & Empire* (May 4, 1907) sent a reporter to spend time in the city’s handful of five-cent theaters. The report provided a detailed survey of the inside and outside decorations, style of show available, some habits of the audience, and description of the film stories. Nothing objectionable was found, however. The headline read, “Five Cent Theatre Harmless Here, Merely Creates Taste for an Entertainment.” Toying with stage censorship in tandem with film review, the newspapers refused to back the measures or enflame any sense of moral panic. The proposed regulations were abandoned.

These two incidents show how, after their bow in 1896, films continued for more than a decade without becoming problematic. Even when cinema became the focus of debate, the problem was not serious enough to meet the required consensus to take action. An impasse occurred with regard to articulating a solution to the problems raised, even in 1907 when a more generalized sense of some need for oversight was apparent. In 1897 technicalities preempted the disagreement about the harmful effects of represented images of fighting. In 1907 the public was relieved to have the assurance that police officers were already handling the problems raised. But in both cases, everyone was relieved that regulation addressing

the particularity of film in society was not yet required. Avoiding novel regulation became the order of the day unless the need could be solidly verified. For film this verification came in 1908 with a law mandating the fire safety measures discussed in the next chapter. By then, two years had passed since the first five-cent picture shows opened in the city, and more than a decade had passed since Torontonians first had a chance to view films.

When local authorities were first prompted to regulate the fun and amusement of film, the concern was not with the commercial or technological form of cinema or its showmanship. The moral effects of viewing possibly indecent moving pictures were the first concerns. This puts the urban and regional process of regulating cinema in line with later academic studies of its media effects. Emilie Altenloh (2001) conducted an exceptionally early sociology of cinema through survey methods in Germany. Originally published in 1914, *Zur Soziologie des Kino* has only recently been recovered and translated into English; it is presented as an early model for the ethnographic study of the cinema audience. Much more widely known is Hugo Münsterburg's (2002) popular book from 1916, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*. And, of course, popular and trade journalism from the period is full of colloquial theories and propositions about the proper place of movies in society (Stromgren 1988). For the most part, however, communication studies happened from the 1920s onward after film was already firmly established as an everyday space for mass gathering, after the struggle to define its place in society had subsided, and bureaucratic regulations or self-imposed norms of production had been well instituted. Studying links between mass culture and the formation of the social self, especially of children, these "media effects" projects involved massive amounts of ethnographic work, especially with the Payne Fund Studies, including (all 1933) Blumer's *Movies and Conduct*, Charters's *Motion Pictures and Youth*, Peterson and Thurstone's *Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children*, and Cressey and Thrasher's *Boys, Movies and City Streets*. These titles from the series betray the search for the effects of movies on delinquency and socialization, although no significant results could support those claims (Jowett, Jarvie, & Fuller 1996). Other sociologists developed survey methods to study mass audiences at the movies, from Alice Miller Mitchell (1929) to Paul Lazarsfeld (1947; with Merton 1948) and Britain's Jacob Mayer (1946; 1948). These studies of the mass movie audience were key to refining population survey techniques and public opinion research that in turn contributed to sociology's development into a quantitative social science.

These later surveys of moviegoing reflected earlier, stronger links between U.S. urban sociology and forms of social work and moral reform

in the Progressive movement. Almost as soon as the picture show took root, Jane Addams wrote about children and movies in relation to her work at Chicago's Hull House, which had briefly operated an educational nickel show of its own (Lindstrom 1999). Addams's *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (1909) included an essay on the influence of movies, "The House of Dreams." The reform imperative of early sociological study of "social forces" led to an interest in studying children at the movies. Especially in urban areas, children were both able to work for some disposable income and also spend significant portions of the day without direct parental supervision. Only in these years were laws written to limit child labor. Even children forced to work, often to support families living in poverty, would still have found some limited version of spatial and fiscal independence from the family and the home. Such independence in modern American childhood brought moving picture shows to the attention of reform movements, which existed alongside and often cooperated with the development of government censorship and regulation. In Chicago, Addams's Hull House and other social work committees were active providing amusements and consulting with city officials (Lindstrom 1999; McCarthy 1976). In New York City, John Collier and the People's Institute took on a burden far beyond their own metropolis when the National Board of Censorship was established to alleviate conflict between city authorities and film showmen (Czitrom 1984; Fisher 1975). Both prominent reformers published their own essays about amusements and public health in important early social work journals such as *Charities and the Commons* (Addams 1907; Collier 1908). Typical metaphors of cleanliness and godliness were used, such as Collier's 1910 essay in *The Survey* that shed "Light on Moving Pictures."

Regional Differences and the Particularity of Toronto

This early sociology of cinema focuses on children's attendance, especially poor children in immigrant and working-class enclaves. The demographics of nickelodeon audiences remain a key debate in the study of early cinema. Very little is actually known about the degree to which nickelodeon audiences comprised women, children, immigrants, or the working classes; but contemporary journalists, reformers, and authorities often associated the cheap amusements with any or all of these socially marginalized groups. Many have tried to verify or dispute the notion that nickelodeon audiences were primarily working-class immigrants (Allen 1979; Jowett 1974; Singer 1995; Sklar 1988). The early audience has also been considered in terms of gender, arguing that young working women could find some lifting of family's restraints while at the show if only for

a short time and in commercial ways (E. Ewen 1980; Hansen 1991, 60–89; Mayne 1982). Much of the impetus for regulation and reform was founded upon concerns for the policing or protection of these audiences, which were perceived as prone to deviance. The source of the cheapness of filmgoing was the celluloid film strip, the material basis of its mass production and distribution. The material form also made evident that film could be easily and bureaucratically controlled. Even as regulations were introduced, this cheap amusement was preferable to gambling or drinking, which were thought to be the more traditional forms of working-class leisure. The saloon and the billiard parlor, the race track and the shooting gallery were domains of rowdy and lewd behavior, rarely inclusive of children or women; these places encouraged addictions that could drain a man's nickel faster than any "Idle Hour" or "Happy-Half Hour" picture show. In this respect, sports and recreation, such as parks and playgrounds, were preferable to movies. But, these cornerstones of public education and health were just becoming commonplace, partly in response to the growing significance of commercial amusements.

Showmen, often active participants in their own regulation, tried to elevate the character of their audiences and shows as they sought higher profits. Like amusements before movies, such as theater and vaudeville (Butsch 1994), this can be seen as selling out, both appeasing authorities and abandoning the early audience in favor of upward mobility (Ross 1998; Uricchio and Pearson 1993). Many accounts of the nickelodeon period, especially books providing a wide overview of film history, argue that moral concerns prompting repressive crackdowns hindered the almost natural progress of mass moviegoing. Protests are, in a sense, framed as the middle class walling itself off from a specifically working-class pastime. But then how did movies end up a mass practice inclusive of the middle class? The question is phrased to have an empirical answer—if only we knew the demographics of actual audiences! However, even if the statistics were there to study, it still would not explain how very different types of people came to understand and even appreciate how they were participating in a common pastime with others. Theaters big and small, lavish and drab, in far-flung towns, were charging many prices to see hundreds of different movies—at some point these actually separate audiences became aware that they were part of an apparently mass audience. The answer to the question of how and when the movie audience shifted from class to mass is best answered by describing emergent norms and standards of moviegoing, its conditions, regulations, and promotion. As much as through movie studios and distributors, that process also had to be instituted locally and regionally.

Much discussion occurred surrounding the social problems found at the nickel show, where ages and genders mixed freely at working-class or ethnic-identified spaces. Nickelodeons were, in fact, cast as darkened denizens of vice, and this evidence was key to surveilling not only what was shown, but also the venue (L. Jacobs 1968, 62–66; May 1980, 43–59; Sklar 1975, 18–32). Regulations specific to moving picture shows were first imposed from about 1907 to 1911 as storefront nickel shows introduced a novel, cheap way of viewing films regularly, everyday, all day, in cities and larger towns. If censorship and regulation was meant to protect the juvenile and foreign-born audience and protect society against them, then why would the result be a mass audience mixing in the middle class, too? One answer requires foregrounding how the five-cent show was at first just one place among many to see movies for an initially wide range of purposes. Only over time did entertainment at a movie theater become the recognizable norm. One key factor was that regulation tended to make projecting films outside of licensed, commercial spaces more difficult. Of course, industrial factors were also present: increased costs, more stringent control of who could distribute and exhibit films, and gradually longer, more elaborately produced movies.

Aside from the established place of moving pictures on the vaudeville program, at industrial exhibitions, and amusement parks, numerous sporadic attempts were made at alternative, educational forms of cinema. In a sense small versions of the more professional traveling illustrated lectures, picture shows were set up in churches, schools, and settlement houses, sometimes without profit for civic improvement. Various attempts at such alternatives occurred in Toronto, too, including several of the earliest showmen accommodating religious film shows and social meetings in their auditoriums. Especially for nonfiction attractions, as late as 1913 films such as *Paul J. Rainey's African Hunt*, advertised in *Moving Picture World* how picture theaters were just one suggested location for exhibiting films. Churches, schools, the YMCA, clubs, colleges, resorts, department stores, and natural history societies were equally depicted as possible contexts for such films because these organizations could claim a higher purpose than mere amusement (*MPW* December 13, 1913, 1239). On the other hand, fiction narrative was already the norm; for example, weeks later in the same magazine, an ad promoted a change in format for Melies General Films. The “old style” was depicted with a sparsely attended theater showing “Scenes in Java,” while a packed auditorium next door showed the new style “comedy, drama, etc.” (*MPW* January 24, 1914, 437). As commercial films became more predictably a matter of fictional narratives, melodramatic and adventurous films, advocates for a

more civic form of moviegoing seemed always to fall back on nonfiction “attractions” as the solution to commercial moviegoing as a social problem. An August 1910 editorial in a Toronto paper wrote, “it is most unfortunate that the moving picture entertainments could not rely upon their own best attractions for their audiences” (*World* August 24, 1910, 6). It listed all the wonders of the world that might be caught in moving pictures before claiming this infinite variety of social life “might have been expected to supply an unending series of attractions, both interesting and amusing, instructive as well.” The problem with moving picture shows, according to the editorial, was that “whether it be the fault of the audiences or managers,” the commercial and fictional emphasis meant the tone of the pictures was steadily falling.

However, a “cinema of attractions” is a concept associated with film before the nickel show, emphasizing the experience of wonderment and surprise of early nonnarrative cinema. Introduced by Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault, the term positions the shorter actuality films of early cinema as a distinct form of spectatorship, against conceiving of early cinema as simply an immature stage in the progress toward fictional, narrative film (Gaudreault 1990; Gunning 1990 and 1993). The term takes on a critical edge on top of aesthetic description when considering how such “attractions” were sanctioned for middle-class educational uplift, a tool in the fight against the affordable amusement of early nickel shows and their new forms of narrative cinema. “Attractions” became associated with noncommercial, refined moviegoing just when narrative film was becoming the norm. The theory of the cinema of attractions does more than distinguish temporally between early nonfiction cinema and the transition to narrative; alternative social practices are also implied, sometimes overtly called into force when certain venues and films competed for audiences by appealing to different class-associated modes of spectatorship. In particular, “attractions” were used briefly to work out how film was to be integrated with everyday routines of family, church, and civic life. Associated with the earlier, more costly, and refined entertainments of variety theaters, exhibitions, and summer parks, the cinema of attractions was subsequently seen as a possible way to ensure respectable, middle-class values counterbalanced the creeping commercialization of leisure at the theatriciums.

Government regulation and police inspection would not restrict films to nonfiction actualities. Quite the opposite. Lee Grieveson’s thorough history, *Policing Cinema* (2004), illustrates in detail how governments prohibited nonfiction prizefight pictures and nonfiction “social problem” films depicting the evils of prostitution. American courts in particular supported censorship and local control of problematic moving

pictures by legally defining films to be subject to federal interstate law because they were commercial products. The dominant role for film—harmless entertainment—was thus legally mandated as courts denied films the protection of free speech under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Grieverson 2004, 124–35). That Supreme Court case is just one extreme example, at the national level, of how local particularities were instrumental in making moviegoing a mass practice. The interplay of showmanship and governance in the particular case of Toronto was a careful, iterative process of determining how this novel urban practice was best managed. Management included the organization of finances and of audiences. Both the business people who ran nickel shows and the public officials who monitored them had to compromise to arrive at standards and norms. To some degree, all could agree on safeguarding the people of the city, the mutual source of audiences and public. The measures taken to manage theaters and audiences in Toronto adopted, improved, and sometimes rejected precedents set elsewhere. The terms framing the discussion of film in Toronto were largely set by events in large U.S. cities; for example, when the first Ontario statute of 1908 adapted a recent Massachusetts law. However, care was always taken to adapt measures to suit what was perceived as the particularity of English Canada.

Early municipal measures in Chicago and New York are cited in many social histories of film as influential metropolitan cases. By 1907, middle-class magazines, fascinated with “the poor man’s elementary course in the drama,” had latched onto “the nickel madness” trying to understand the allure of cheap amusements to the working class on the one hand and the moral crusades against moving pictures on the other (Currie 1907; Patterson 1907). In November 1907, Chicago began requiring every film to obtain a police permit before showing it. This instituted a system of censorship that was vastly more centralized and bureaucratic than the general prohibition of scenes of crime and immorality of a year earlier (Grieverson 1999). In December 1907, a New York court decision temporarily shut down a wide variety of amusements on Sundays. Moving picture shows were shut down as a result, yet taverns and saloons remained open. A compromise was soon instituted where theaters could hold educational or religious shows on Sundays. This was minor compared to what occurred a year later, when New York’s mayor unilaterally closed all nickel shows following a public hearing regarding their moral and physical conditions. The mayor’s revocation, without notice, of more than 500 business licenses was so drastic that New York’s showmen successfully gained a court injunction against the measure (Gunning 1991, 151–55; Uricchio and Pearson 1993, 32–33). Both Chicago and New York saw hundreds of nickelodeons open in the few short years after the electric

theater was introduced around 1905. There were simply too many to ignore, especially in light of prominent advice in magazines and from well-known reformers.

In New York and Chicago, nickel shows drew reformers' attention because they were often located in areas populated by the working-class and ethnic groups, places of concern to social workers. Reform surveys of five-cent shows and their audiences could lead to muckraking journalism and in turn regulatory measures. For example, the *Chicago Tribune* printed a sustained profile of the alleged dangers and vices of nickel shows early in 1907, months before the police instituted film censorship (Grieverson 1999). The nickelodeons had drawn scattered attention throughout 1906, but it amounted to nothing at those times (*Chicago Tribune* February 14, March 29 and October 5, 1906). The difference in April 1907 was the recent election of a new mayor whose platform advocated moral reform of petty graft and commercial amusements (Ruble 2001, 155–67). The new mayoralty (and newly appointed police chief) went hand-in-hand with attention paid to cheap entertainments on the part of social reform groups in Chicago. The *Chicago Tribune* then put the five-cent show alongside a wide range of public entertainments that required municipal action, pushing for reform of ticket scalpers, dance halls, slot machines, boxing, roller skating, as well as five-cent theaters. No doubt in those first largely unregulated years of fierce entrepreneurial expansion, ministers, settlement social workers, police patrolmen, even mayors, could easily find enough trouble emanating out of some nickel theaters to justify repressive sanctions against all of them. After all, there were hundreds to search through, and these were most densely visible in poor, ethnic neighborhoods such as Manhattan's Lower East Side, which had been sites of social and moral concern long before the nickel theaters opened, most famously in Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890). But in April 1907, coinciding with the *Chicago Tribune* articles, the morality of moving pictures and theatoriums in Toronto attracted similar attention. Although the discussion began with many of the same concerns as in Chicago, the debate over moving pictures in Toronto, as already noted, was quickly defused. Existing police supervision and censorship of five-cent theaters had the matter well under control. Chicago had celebrity reformers, an infamously graft-laden police force, a new mayor fulfilling promises, and hundreds rather than a handful of nickel shows. The way concerns about film were handled reflected the particularity of a city, even if there was something generalized about film technology and the entertainments of nickel shows.

Attention to regional differences has found its way into recent social histories of film. Studies of filmgoing in rural areas, small towns, and in

cities in the southern United States argue for an entirely distinct character of filmgoing outside New York and large cities such as Chicago (Aronson 2002; Potamianos 2002; Waller 1995). "Manhattan Myopia" was a phrase Robert C. Allen (1996) used responding to a reevaluation of his own revision of the myth of the ethnic working-class character of the early film audience. But of course, more than myopias of geography have been corrected as scholars consider the distinctive viewing situations of, for example, blacks in Chicago, young immigrant women, or Jewish families (Bertellini 1999; Stewart 2005; Thissen 2002). The overtly collective and communicative form of moviegoing makes it almost tautological that cinema acted as an alternative social institution, a school of citizenship, provider of language and cultural lessons, and instructor in the American Dream. But even a handful of cases of ethnic, educational, or racially segregated theaters demonstrates that this process easily varied among neighborhoods and even among theaters. Still, New York's Lower East Side ghettos supplied many mythic, social, and material origins of practices that came to define modern urban American culture, and not just in the movie business (Heinze 1990). The perceived need for institutions of assimilation and regulation of those places of ethnic congregation in New York City certainly provided both example and counterexample of how smaller cities such as Toronto wanted to shape their public spaces and police conduct in neighborhoods.

Between the censuses taken in 1901 and in 1921, Toronto had grown from a population of just more than 200,000 to well in excess of 500,000, and incorporated outlying suburbs into expanding city limits accompanied by massive residential building. This growth came not from any one primary industry but from the general, metropolitan expansion of a wide array of services and small factories, especially for foods, furniture, clothing, and finished consumer goods. Most of the population growth came from immigration, with Toronto's 38 percent foreign-born population in 1910 higher than Chicago or Boston and a close second to New York among the largest cities on the continent. And yet, the official count recorded fewer than 10 percent as "foreign-born," because the vast majority of Toronto's immigrants were "British-born," counted in a separate category (Harris 1996, 23–25). Although Canada became a politically independent "Dominion" in 1867, Toronto was still very much a British colonial city in its character. By 1921, census records show religious affiliation at 11 percent Jewish, 14 percent Roman Catholic, and more than 70 percent Protestant, overwhelmingly the Anglican Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Fully five out of every six people in Toronto claimed "British" as their ethnic origin, a racialized category that included Irish Catholic (Careless 1984, 200–202). Although

these numbers provide a container or skeleton to consider its particularity, they only begin to describe the public culture of the city at the time.

Toronto had an enduring concern for moral, social, and civic purity, with the strictest of Protestant, Anglo-Saxon propriety expected from the city's relatively small Jewish, Italian, Chinese, and "Colored" populations, living primarily in the poorest parts of town (Strange 1995; Valverde 1991). A later chapter examines how marginalized people and their amusements received a disproportionate amount of attention. In general, however, amusements were rarely associated with problems of ethnicity and class, the "downtown problem" in the contemporary language of Protestant churches. This was partly because the poorest ethnic district, known as the "Ward," was immediately adjacent to middle-class shopping and leisure downtown just steps from the major department stores. Unlike the rich histories of Yiddish vaudeville in the ethnic ghettos of Chicago and New York, the Ward in Toronto had only a single theater of its own; the theaters of the Ward were the many downtown small shows. A more significant factor in diffusing the ethnic and class problem of filmgoing in the city was their initial ownership; John Griffin, an older, Toronto-born, Irish Catholic, owned almost all of Toronto's first moving picture shows. Griffin was no upstart entrepreneur prone to pushing the boundaries of propriety. After a career as a traveling circus manager, he used moving pictures as a way to settle down and finally live at home. Overall, in Toronto the five-cent shows became a social problem because the commercial public amusement was restructuring middle-class childhood and family life, as opposed to concerns for the deviant conduct of poor ethnic audiences. In turn, reform was primarily directed at curtailing any tendency to risk unsafe or salacious practices arising from the profit-seeking basis of showmanship.

Toronto and English Canada tentatively upheld a sense of uniqueness in the lack of social evils relative to large cities in both the United States and England (Valverde 1991, 16–17). Although heavily regulated and patrolled, moving pictures were rarely a contentious hotbed of anxiety in Toronto even compared to other amusements such as burlesque and melodrama theatricals at stage theaters (Campbell 1996). Strict regulation of five-cent shows was largely achieved through the collaboration of business, government, reformers, and the public audience itself. On the whole, standards for moviegoing were achieved by "forging a consensus" as did the more official institutions of the city (Russell 1984). Few dissenting voices are found in the documents that inform this study: journalism and advertising, municipal building and assessment records, the police Register of Criminals, letters and reports of the chief constable, minutes of the Board of Control and City Council. Complaints are found

on occasion in U.S. film trade journalism, but even there some claimed the strict regulation of filmgoing in Toronto was actually conducive to business. The strongest local protests against any extension of government regulation seem to have lasted only a day in the newspapers, as if following journalistic convention requiring two sides in every debate reported. Taken as a decadelong process, about 1907 to 1916, many more than two sides to the debate surfaced. Indeed, a wide range of people voiced their own vision of the proper place of moving pictures in the city and the role of film in society.

Toronto the Good, or at Least, Toronto the Better

The starkest difference between Toronto and New York or Chicago was that these U.S. cities were then the major production sites for filmmaking and in turn the location of head offices for film distributors. Perhaps a result of safety in numbers, another key difference was the litigious and confrontational independence of theater-owning showmen in these big cities. Toronto showmen's status as importers and renters of other people's film



Figure 1.2. Standard Theatre, "High-Class Moving Pictures." 482 Queen Street West. ca. 1909. (Photograph by William James. City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, Item 332.)

product might have predisposed them to cooperation in censorship and theater inspections. However, showmen in other cities such as Cleveland or Philadelphia, even Montreal and Vancouver—none of them film production centers—were also consistently protecting their interests in court. In Toronto even measures that affected finances directly such as license fees and fines for violating bylaws went largely uncontested. It helped that regulatory measures were reasonable compared to those other cities used. The annual license fee in Toronto was minimal and stayed constant, in contrast with smaller Ontario cities such as Hamilton or St. Catharines whose councils cashed in on increased competition by raising license fees and limiting how many were granted. Showmen fought usurious license fees in courts, such as in 1911 when Montreal (*MPW* January 14, 1911, 94) and Pennsylvania (*MPW* December 2, 1911, 701) each raised picture show licenses to \$500, fully ten times more than those levied in Toronto.

Some key showmen in Toronto actually invited government inspection, even before the first fire safety law in 1908. In return, the police force was consistent and predictable, famously free of corruption. For five-cent shows, fairness was easy because the city's small number of shows could still be monitored regularly "on the beat." For example, asked to comment on the New York order closing hundreds of nickelodeons at Christmas 1908, the Toronto officer in charge of morality, Staff Inspector Stephen, claimed proudly to the *News*, "there is no lesson for Toronto to learn. . . . The pictures shown in this city are fit for most people to see, and if there were any flagrant violations of good taste, I am sure the police would hear of it within an hour. No; I shall not take action here, as did the Mayor of New York" (*News* December 29, 1908, 3). Stephen was personally sure all shows were already meeting superior standards.

While the directness of such a statement that there was nothing to learn from New York was rare, newspapers reported measures south of the border with a detachment afforded by regional difference. The *World* (December 25, 1908) put a brief recap of the incident in New York on the front page, while the *Toronto Globe* [henceforth *Globe*] picked up an Associated Press dispatch of the subsequent "indignant" protest of "many angry showmen" (December 26, 1908). Finally, the *World* (December 28, 1908) reported New York shows reopened after proprietors were granted an injunction against the mayor. A year earlier, when New York amusements were closed on Sundays while taverns stayed open, the *Star* published an editorial distinguishing Toronto's somber Sunday from New York's amusement habits, linking the difference to problems of police corruption and improper influence. "The fact is that public opinion is stronger against the saloon than against the theater and concert hall, but also that there is a stronger vested interest behind the saloon. Probably