

Multi-purpose Cinema

As the 1910s progressed, the programming at American moving picture theaters offered a richly varied and profitable menu week after week—comedies and travelogues, serial episodes and romances, Westerns and literary adaptations, newsreels and historical melodramas. But for producers, distributors, and exhibitors, these formally and even ideologically diverse films were all marketed and delivered as “entertainment.” And they all had one overriding purpose: to be seen by paying customers in theaters and thereby generate revenue for the commercial film industry. In contrast, as the previous chapter demonstrated, the opportunities afforded by sponsorship allowed for and encouraged putting moving pictures to a host of other uses, depending on the particular capacities of the apparatus and film as a medium as well as on the resources, available options, and objectives of sponsors. Sponsored cinema was, in practice, multi-purpose cinema—not because an individual film could be redeployed for different ends (though that happened), but because the possibilities for how moving pictures could be put to use extended well beyond the commercially successful, culturally central model driving the theatrical film industry.¹ In St. Louis, for example, moving pictures directly suited for the occasion were called on to help sell Texas real estate, Americanize immigrants, promote good dental hygiene, advocate for the creation of a city zoo, celebrate African American accomplishments, encourage missionary activity, document the construction of a new golf course, inform union members about factory conditions across the US, and warn bankers about check forgery.² These were all instances of what has increasingly been called “useful cinema,” a formulation introduced by Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson to describe “film’s role as a functional device and range of practices” that constituted a veritable “*other* cinema.” Identifying instances of this other cinema is the necessary historiographical work at the heart of my project. But it bears keeping in mind that “the concept of useful cinema,” for Acland and Wasson, “does not so much name a mode of production, a genre, or an

exhibition venue as it identifies a disposition, an outlook, and an approach toward a medium on the part of institutions and institutional agents.”³

Extending well beyond the purview of established institutions, this concept/approach/outlook has been articulated in print discourse since the earliest days of projected moving pictures, and it flourished in the 1910s. Introducing a regular section called “The Moving Picture Educator,” an editorial from December 1911 in *Moving Picture World*, then the industry’s premiere trade magazine, waxed euphoric in asserting the unlimited usefulness of cinema: “The cinematograph is not only ornamental, beautiful, pleasing and entertaining; it is also useful. More than this, its practical value has made such bounds that it has now become an actual necessity; indeed, it is almost a question if its utilitarian value is not greater than its pleasure giving has proven to be . . . it is now fulfilling its mission as one of the greatest servants of humanity . . . as a necessity the cinematograph finds its place everywhere the human eye needs either to be taught or pleased.”⁴

Moving Picture World’s particular word choice here begs a number of questions. How to gauge the *practical value* of *useful* cinema? What constitutes its *mission*? What might render it a *necessity*—or an important *utilitarian* tool? What *place* does it occupy in the modern world? Who or what does it *serve*? These are the questions driving the period discourse that looked beyond the commercial film industry’s undeniable success in delivering the pleasures of commercial entertainment to a massive audience gathered in theaters across the US. This discourse envisioned the vast prospects for a form of cinema that took advantage of the range of subjects that could be shot with a motion picture camera, the special capacities of cinematography (e.g., time-lapse, slow motion, underwater filming), and, especially, the ends to which moving pictures might be deployed.

In this chapter I focus first on two print sources that from quite different perspectives documented, celebrated, and encouraged the multiple functionality of cinema: the film industry trade press, notably *Moving Picture World*; and *Scientific American*, a widely circulated and well respected weekly magazine that surveyed notable achievements and innovative advances in technology and applied science. These periodicals offer both speculative claims about the potential utility of moving pictures and also much information (often in bits and pieces) concerning the varied, mundane, predictable, specialized, novel, haphazard, and/or well-orchestrated ways that cinema was being utilized by, among others, educators, political activists, medical societies, researchers, explorers, lecturers, and state-run institutions.

As the essays in Patrick Vonderau and Vinzenz Hediger’s influential anthology, *Films that Work*, attest, the capacities of multi-purpose cinema were particularly attractive for corporations, manufacturers, and retailers.⁵ Here was a medium with great potential, claimed articles from the 1910s in *System: The Magazine for Business*, for training employees, boosting efficiency, overseeing workers, improving public relations, creating brand identity, and increasing sales.⁶ This chapter

concludes with a case study of the Gossard Corset Company's success in what *Business: A Magazine for Office, Store and Factory* in 1914 called "commercializing the motion picture."⁷ Like National Cash Register, 20-Mule Team Borax, the Maxwell Automobile Company, International Harvester, and General Electric, Gossard utilized moving pictures in an ambitious marketing campaign that relied on access to movie theaters.⁸

THE MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY TRADE PRESS:
HERALDING THE "EXTENSIVE USEFULNESS"
OF CINEMA

In England, France, Germany, and the United States, motion pictures in the service of scientific and medical research and pedagogy quickly emerged as legitimating proof of cinema's utility. By 1912, British author Leonard Donaldson would declare that "in a comparatively short space of time the cinematograph has become a potential and revolutionising factor in the world of Science."⁹ One highly visible iteration of this important application of useful cinema was what Oliver Gaycken calls "popular-science films."¹⁰ Titles like Kinemacolor's time-lapse *From Bud to Blossom* (1911)—featured on the cover of an issue of *Popular Mechanics* in June 1911 and billed in its theatrical run as "the most scientific botanical picture ever produced"—serve as a reminder that in practice the heterogeneity of cinema was not always reducible to an easily discerned distinction between theatrical or non-theatrical exhibition and entertainment or educational objectives.¹¹

As Gaycken and Luke McKernan detail, Charles Urban proved to be a central figure in the development of popular-science film in the United States, in part by promoting his version of cinema's calling in a series of five articles on "The Cinematograph in Science and Education," published in *Moving Picture World* during 1907, this magazine's first year of publication.¹² Microcinematography, time-lapse films, and records of surgical operations received particular attention from Urban, but he argues in these *Moving Picture World* articles that "the extensive usefulness" of moving pictures potentially reaches much further, since the cinema can show audiences "the whole world of industries," military and zoological subjects, "present-day events," and countries and peoples "from Peru to China."¹³ Taking full advantage of the medium's utility, Urban insists, requires making the moving picture apparatus a "vital necessity in every barracks, ship, college, school, institute, hospital, laboratory, academy and museum."¹⁴ While a book like Frederick Talbot's *Practical Cinematography and its Applications* (1913) highlights the profitable opportunities for "the amateur or independent" filmmaker in the "vast, fertile and promising" commercial market for "practical cinematography," Urban's articles forecast nothing less than the edifying, enlightening prospect of a world documented and revealed in new ways by the motion picture camera and then screened for a broad array of audiences including but not at all limited to the crowds frequenting nickelodeons.¹⁵

It is not surprising that *Moving Picture World* would publish Urban's clarion call for the promise of multi-purpose cinema. This trade journal was on the lookout for signs of cinema's social and cultural legitimacy in the wake of criticism leveled at dangerous nickelodeons, sensationalistic screen offerings, and children's habitual moviegoing. Earlier in 1907 *Moving Picture World* had reported favorably on what it billed as "novel uses of the medium," including motion pictures serving as a means of studying the behavior of epileptics and as an aid for coaches of football and rowing, as well as the deployment of film by the US government to train soldiers, promote military recruitment, and record for posterity the "daily life of many tribes of Indians" and vanishing wild animals in the West.¹⁶ Subsequent *Moving Picture World* articles in 1907 described successful attempts to film lightning flashes and a beating human heart, novel achievements unrelated to the practices of the commercial entertainment industry.¹⁷

As the 1910s began, *Moving Picture World* advised American film studios to take full advantage of the "boundless" opportunities afforded by the "usefulness of moving pictures."¹⁸ Although the unquestionable priority of this magazine and competitors like *Motography* and *Film Index* was to cover the business of film production and theatrical exhibition, the motion picture trade press continued to note and to encourage alternate applications of the medium that were more likely to generate cultural capital and social benefits than nickels and dimes at the box office. Scattered through the pages of *Moving Picture World* during the early and mid-1910s are brief items evincing what a 1912 editorial claimed to be "the countless benefits which the Cinematograph has conferred upon the human race," not only because of its deployment in church-related activities, public health campaigns, and formal educational settings, but also because moving pictures were being put in the service of time and motion studies, civic boosterism, microcinematography, improved agricultural practices, the training of surgeons, and the safe handling of explosives.¹⁹

The first issue of *Motography* (April 1911) followed suit, promising that its coverage would address, in addition to exhibitors, a varied mix of subscribers, including "advertising managers of large manufacturing and industrial concerns; school boards and superintendents of education"; "ministers of the gospel who are beginning to see the wonderful possibilities for the visualizing of biblical events"; and "superintendents of penal institutions and insane hospitals, who are interested in the 'motographic cure' for criminalism and mental diseases."²⁰ To this end, *Motography* (and its forerunner, *The Nickelodeon*) offered information, for example, on various Protestant churches that were taking advantage of motion pictures to present "the gospel in more vivid form," "lure indifferent passer-bys," and "punctuate" sermons.²¹ "The motion picture," declared a commentator in *Motography* in 1911, "has actually become a part of the equipment of the up-to-date church. It is almost as necessary as a janitor, an organ or the heavy and depressing looking pews of oak."²² This periodical also took particular note of what it claimed was the "latest and best cure for insanity": regularly screening motion pictures (usually comedies

and scenics) to patients at institutions like the St. Louis Insane Asylum and the Central Kentucky Asylum for the Insane.²³ Likewise, *Moving Picture News* reported on the “ever increasing number of ways the animated picture may be used,” noting in one article the parks where the New York City Department of Health would be screening its “tuberculosis pictures.”²⁴ Even the preeminent fan magazines, *Photoplay* and *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, would on occasion single out novel applications of the medium—for example, to train recruits in marksmanship and instruct railroad workers in the operation of signal apparatus.²⁵

In highlighting these practical, beneficial, diverse uses, the trade press encouraged the development and the utilization of film as a multi-purposable medium. “In the advancement of the human race,” announced Margaret J. MacDonald in *Moving Picture News*, “the motion picture shall surely have a high and honored place . . . the day is rapidly approaching when moving pictures will be used on [*sic*] instances we never dreamed of: in colleges, asylums, hospitals, and in various other unthought-of uses for the advancement of humanity.”²⁶ This high-minded vision of cinema’s boundless, utilitarian promise in the service of progress, productivity, applied science, and modernization stands as a corollary to the period’s celebration of film as a “universal language” and a “democratic art,” claims that, as Miriam Hansen analyzes in *Babel and Babylon*, carried “connotations of egalitarianism, internationalism, and the progress of civilization through technology.”²⁷ Yet the utopian promise of multi-purpose cinema did not speak to the possibility of a shared, accessible experience for all, transcending difference and distance, but rather to the prospect of countless applications serving a host of different functions across the breadth of society, potentially creating new revenue streams in the process.

According to *Moving Picture World*, the grand, manifold promise of useful cinema was being further realized every day. Thus, W. Stephen Bush, one of the magazine’s primary contributors, deemed the preliminary efforts of the United States Department of Agriculture to provide films specifically intended for farmers as “another practical instance of the ever-widening sphere of kinematographic usefulness.”²⁸ The “profitable results” generated by motion pictures “used as a means of increasing efficiency” and “vocational perfection,” *Moving Picture World* noted in 1913, “is only another credit to the kinematograph, the list of which is daily increasing. Universal in its powers, unlimited in its applications, it seems destined to become as great a help to the artisan, as to the scholar, artist or scientist.”²⁹

“Ever-widening” possibilities notwithstanding, on the pages of *Moving Picture World* and other trade magazines, multi-purpose cinema was largely conflated with or collapsed into the “educational picture.” This label typically referred to scenics (like *A Trip to Saxony* [1910]), animated weeklies (like *Pathé Weekly* [1910]), industrials (like *The Crab Industry* [1910]), and topicals (like *President Taft in San Francisco* [1910]) all produced for inclusion in regular nickelodeon programming by mainstay commercial studios like Pathé, Lubin, and Gaumont.³⁰ In addition to

running editorials lauding the pedagogic capability of the medium, *Moving Picture World* in March 1910 introduced a dedicated page entitled “Education, Science and Art and the Moving Picture,” which became “In the Educational Field” and then was renamed the “Moving Picture Educator.” Devoted to the field (or subfield) of “educational cinematography,”³¹ this regular column documented and validated the claim that “all over America, in colleges, schools, training institutions, settlement houses, hospitals and prisons, the good work of the moving pictures as an educator is one constant theme.”³² The Moving Picture Educator was largely taken up with praising select new releases and noting individual schools and churches that were acquiring projectors, thereby joining what was heralded as a veritable “educational movement.” From the perspective of *Moving Picture World*, the “educational field” bridged theatrical and non-theatrical film exhibition, which both could (and should) screen the same selection of films—thus articles like “How an Educational Picture Can Save a Bad Program” (February 1913) and “The Place and Value of the Educational Picture in the Moving Picture Business” (September 1913), as well as a three-part field-defining filmography presented by W. Stephen Bush in 1913.³³ In compiling its extensive “Catalogue of Educational Releases for 1914,” *Moving Picture World* drew entirely from titles originally intended for theatrical release, including newsreel segments as well as feature films and screen adaptations of stage plays.³⁴ These filmographies functioned as a way to encourage rental of so-called “educational” titles by sponsors and enlightened exhibitors, while giving due public relations credit to the industry for its already substantial contributions in this field.

Moving Picture News, competing for the same market as *Moving Picture World*, editorialized even more stridently during the early teens in support of what it called “cinematography as an educational agent” in and out of the theater.³⁵ In March 1914, not long after *Moving Picture News* became *Motion Picture News*, it added to its regular coverage a new column entitled “In the Educational Field.” This addition was deemed warranted because “new fields for the application of the motion picture to education are opened so rapidly that it is not surprising that the possibilities of this new development should seem almost limitless.”³⁶ Yet in *Motion Picture News*’s account of the warp-speed progress of educational cinema, certain fairly well-established possibilities predominated. A column in June 1914, for example, mentioned plans to “employ motion pictures” in the New Orleans public schools, an effort by a Parent Teachers Association in Minneapolis to screen selected films for children at a local theater, the experimental use of comedy and travel pictures to help with the “restoration of lost human minds” at a state hospital for the insane in Ohio, and the planned filming of wildlife in the northern Minnesota woods by a university instructor who intended the footage for classroom instruction.³⁷

Judging from the regular columns devoted to “educational” pictures in *Motion Picture News* and other American motion picture trade periodicals, the “unlimited” prospects for multi-purpose cinema seemed in practice to be a matter of narrowly

aimed applications largely relying on commercially produced films. It is worth noting, then, that one other important non-theatrical use of moving pictures acknowledged by the trade press was to deliver “entertainment.” Thus, a report in *Moving Picture World* claimed that “motion pictures are becoming a fixed part of every entertainment of any sort around Cincinnati, especially in meetings of business men. At the recent ‘Sommernachstfest,’ held by the Business Men’s Club on the roof of the Ohio Mechanics’ Institute, which was attended by about 600 persons, a highly appreciated part of the entertainment was that afforded by a selection of several reels showing the recent activities of the club and other Cincinnati business organizations, as well as some comedy reels.”³⁸

Incorporating local views (probably made-to-order) and what were likely slapstick comedies rented from one of Cincinnati’s commercial film exchanges, this event sponsored by the Business Men’s Club made no pretense at being “educational” and was, according to *Moving Picture World*, indicative of a broader trend when it came to entertainment gatherings in the city. This example of non-theatrical cinema constitutes another piece of evidence testifying to the ever-increasing presence of moving pictures in American public life—at least when seen from the partisan perspective of the motion picture trade press, which remained on the lookout for proof that cinema was fulfilling its multi-purposed potential in sites far removed from the moving picture theater, without in any way threatening the American film industry’s bottom line.³⁹

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN: MOVING PICTURES AND THE EXPANDING SPHERE OF USEFULNESS

The print discourse related to the utilitarian value of motion pictures extended well beyond articles, editorials, and advertisements in the motion picture trade press and the coverage in American newspapers. Relevant material appeared in a range of periodicals, all far afield of the film industry. Robert Grau claimed in *The Theatre of Science: A Volume of Progress and Achievement in the Motion Picture Industry* (1914) that “one of the first, if not indeed the first, class of publications to recognize the significance of the motion picture from various angles was the scientific and mechanical magazines.”⁴⁰ Most prominent in this class was the widely circulated weekly *Scientific American*, and its somewhat more “abstruse” and “specialized” monthly companion publication *Scientific American Supplement*, which regularly reprinted material from American sources and articles from French and British journals.⁴¹ (Unless noted, I will refer to both publications collectively as *Scientific American*.) Given its orientation toward science, technology, innovation, and utility, *Scientific American* affords a prime vantage point outside the film industry from which to sample the broader discourse concerning the promise and the emerging practice of multi-purpose cinema.

Identifying itself in 1896 as “A Weekly Journal of Practical Information, Art, Science, Mechanics, Chemistry, and Manufactures,” *Scientific American* by 1914 had become “The Weekly Journal of Practical Information.” *Practicality* was its watchword, and this meant, in addition to publishing articles by scientists and engineers and following relevant professional activities, *Scientific American* was dedicated to keeping up with the latest in applied science and mechanics, including innovations in communication and recording technologies. With much space devoted to reporting on new inventions and notable products, projects, processes, and personalities, it is not surprising to find *Scientific American* cover stories in 1896 explaining the workings of a moving picture projector (identified as the “kinetoscope stereopticon”) and a year later heralding the emergence of a new industry by describing in detail the technology and labor that goes into the complicated process of creating motion pictures to be projected using Biograph machines or made available to an individual viewer via the hand-cranked Mutoscope.⁴² These copiously illustrated articles emphasize film’s potential as a medium for commercial entertainment, and progress along these lines remained of passing interest to *Scientific American*, particularly when it came to the production of ingenious “fantastic effects” for the screen.⁴³

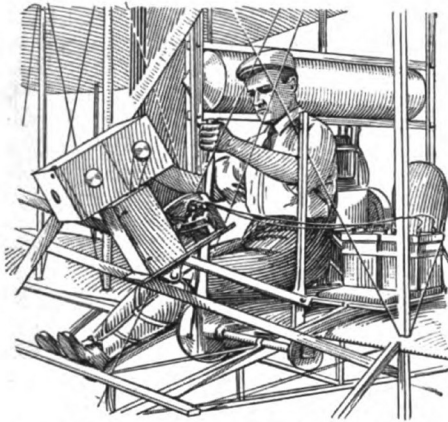
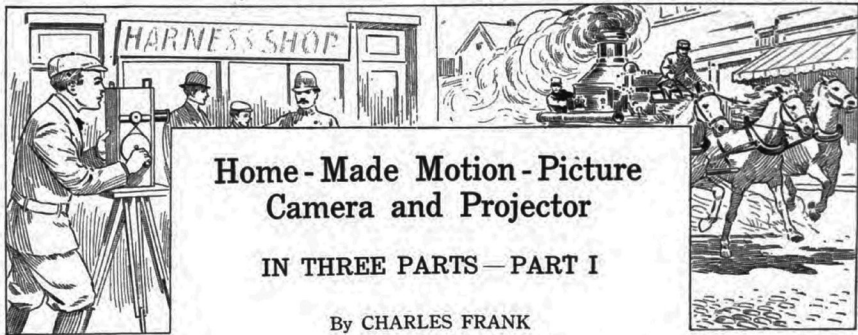
American Mutoscope & Biograph’s introduction in 1901 of the “Commercial Mutoscope,” an invention designed to “have a wide field of usefulness,” indicated for *Scientific American* that motion pictures had possible functions well beyond serving as a “mere instrument of entertainment.”⁴⁴ Always attentive to evidence of the utility and practicality of modern technology, *Scientific American* reported in 1902 on the possibilities of the kinetoscope for “scientific investigation” in the classroom as well as the laboratory, noting in particular innovations in micro-cinematography and ultra-slow-motion filming.⁴⁵ Perhaps one model for multi-purpose cinema was the automobile, which was, *Scientific American* announced in 1902, already being put to “varied modern uses” and so was contributing to an ever-expanding “sphere of usefulness.”⁴⁶ The *Philadelphia Telegraph* offered a similar analogy in reporting on the “usefulness” of moving pictures for teaching surgery: “often before have devices intended as toys become permanently useful. The steam engine was little more at first and automobiles were playthings of the rich. Moving pictures it seems are to become valuable in almost every field of science.”⁴⁷ Utility value will out, as it were.

The instrumental value of photography—including lantern slides—was similarly touted in *Scientific American*, which claimed that by the beginning of the twentieth century, photography had proven to be “useful both for scientific and industrial purposes,” extremely valuable for “purely military purposes” as much as for providing images of “the interior of the eye.”⁴⁸ A 1908 article in the *Supplement* pressed this point even further, asserting that “photography has been developed, its methods improved, its scope extended, and its field of usefulness enlarged,

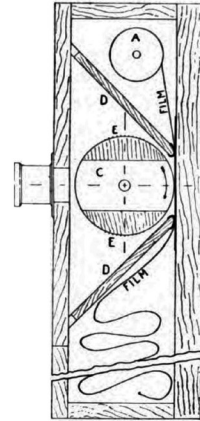
until to-day it enters into every branch of scientific research, popular education, commercial activity, legal investigation, manufacturing achievement, military and naval warfare, pathological and surgical work, and into the exposition and consequent improvement of local conditions in every section of the civilized world."⁴⁹ It is precisely the apparently unlimited, versatile functionality of photography that is praised here. With no irony or qualification, *Scientific American* heralds a modernizing world in which ever-improving, multi-purposable media—including motion pictures—can and should serve the needs of warfare as well as surgery, education, and commerce, thereby contributing in manifold ways to the progress of civilization.

As nickelodeons spread nationwide and moving pictures became a ubiquitous, lucrative, and more systematized form of affordable mass entertainment—that is, became the *movies*—*Scientific American* continued to pay attention to the burgeoning commercial film industry as well as to developments in sound and color motion pictures. Articles covered the opening of Universal City, for example, and also explained the creation of special cinematic effects that enabled “playing tricks with time.”⁵⁰ Yet it was the novel contributions of motion picture technology to the wider “sphere of usefulness” that registered most strongly for *Scientific American*. “We are constantly learning of new uses for moving pictures,” an article announced in 1912.⁵¹ *Scientific American* detailed these uses in articles on, for example, a “kinematograph target apparatus” for “training sharpshooters” and ingenious British “natural history films” that have “shaken to their foundations many staunchly rooted beliefs concerning animal, bird, and insect life.”⁵² This magazine also reported on motion pictures produced for United States government agencies and departments, like the Reclamation Service and Forest Service, whose films picturing major engineering and irrigation projects across the West were shown at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition.⁵³ Predictably, coverage often focused on what *Scientific American* called the “scientific use of moving pictures,” which could refer to filming the effect of a hydraulic press on metal, moving pictures made with an X-ray machine, time-lapse “motion picture records” of a major construction project or of plant growth, slow-motion footage of “projectiles and their effect on armor plate,” and the role of moving pictures in Frank Gilbreth’s “efficiency engineering” studies of “micro-motion.”⁵⁴

These applications of the medium often depended on the ingenious modification or radical redesigning of the motion picture apparatus, particularly the camera. For *Scientific American*, as for heavily illustrated, mass-market magazines like *Popular Mechanics*, technological innovation and practical utility went hand in hand, whether that meant new achievements in aerial cinematography or in “kinematographing tissue growth.”⁵⁵ As something of a corollary to its vision of the motion picture apparatus as modifiable and improvable, *Scientific American* also offered instructions for building a motion-picture projector and camera.⁵⁶ *Popular Mechanics*, even more geared toward the do-it-yourselfer, featured similar plans as



A Motion-Picture Camera Especially Arranged for Aeroplanes



HOW TO MAKE A MOVING-PICTURE CAMERA.

FIGURE 2.1. DIY plans and modifications for motion-picture cameras: *Popular Mechanics*, June 1911 (top); *Popular Mechanics*, August 1912 (bottom left); *Scientific American*, December 17, 1910 (bottom right).

early as 1911, reflective of a hands-on approach to technology that encouraged the development of what would become amateur cinema and home film exhibition.⁵⁷

Complementing its interest in the invention and modification of motion picture cameras and projectors (and other communication and media apparatuses) were the many covers of *Scientific American* issues by the mid-1910s that rendered technology in more dramatic terms, testifying both to the unprecedented achievements and also the potential dangers of technologically enabled modernity. In 1913 and 1914, for example, covers featured major construction projects and engineering feats like the Panama Canal, massive pieces of machinery, microscopes and other scientific instruments, and, quite frequently, topical material directly related

to the European war and American military preparedness. Perhaps the most striking aspect of these covers is how they repeatedly depict utility, technology, and progress in terms of fearless and fully capable white men in action, building skyscrapers, stoking huge furnaces, and, often, using some type of media: sending surveillance information by wireless from an airplane (January 10, 1914), intently examining an X-ray (April 11, 1914), peering into a telescope (April 4, 1914), or handling a complicated switchboard (June 6, 1914).

Clearly, for *Scientific American* the opportunities and challenges of the present moment put a premium on dedicated and resourceful masculinity, as represented by images of skilled white men performing specialized and sometimes dangerous work that necessarily involved technology. This point was also emphasized in the two *Scientific American* covers in 1913 and 1914 that highlighted novel uses of motion pictures. In both cases, the subject was not film utilized in the service of laboratory experiments, greater efficiency on the factory floor, or promoting government programs, but rather the groundbreaking efforts of entrepreneurial inventors and intrepid camera operators who had successfully captured moving images of spectacular natural environments otherwise inaccessible to public view.

The cover of the June 21, 1913, issue pictures a group of four men trekking in Antarctica, dwarfed by an active volcano and a looming iceberg, with no trace of modern technology in sight (fig. 2.2). But the caption reads: "One of a Series of Moving Pictures of the Scott Antarctic Expedition." The accompanying article, "To the South Pole With the Cinematograph," is illustrated with twenty-four photographs of "artistic and popular interest" and "no inconsiderable scientific value," identified as "part of the Gaumont moving picture film record" of the British Antarctic Expedition headed by Robert Falcon Scott, who died with the four men accompanying him in an unsuccessful attempt to be the first to reach the South Pole. Along with showing penguins and other creatures of the frozen landscape, these illustrations provide glimpses of the members of the expedition at work. The article's quite extensive text, however, is almost exclusively concerned with the experiences of Herbert Ponting, who describes at length the challenges and dangers he faced as the expedition's photographer and cinematographer.⁵⁸

Scientific American took a similar tact the following year when it covered the successful effort by J. E. Williamson (assisted by his brother George) to develop a means of taking motion pictures of the ocean's depths. This "remarkable photographic feat" warranted placement on the cover of the July 11, 1914, issue of *Scientific American*, with the caption: "Moving Pictures Under Water." A different image detailing Williamson's accomplishment appeared on the cover of the August 8, 1914, issue of the *Supplement*, with the caption: "Photograph of a Fight with a Shark Taken Under Water with the Williamson Apparatus" (fig. 2.3).⁵⁹ "Now the riddle of the deep is about to be solved," declared an article in the *Supplement* that explained in detail the design and operation of the "new apparatus" that had successfully been used to acquire "scientific motion picture film" of the "actual conditions on

SIXTY NINTH YEAR

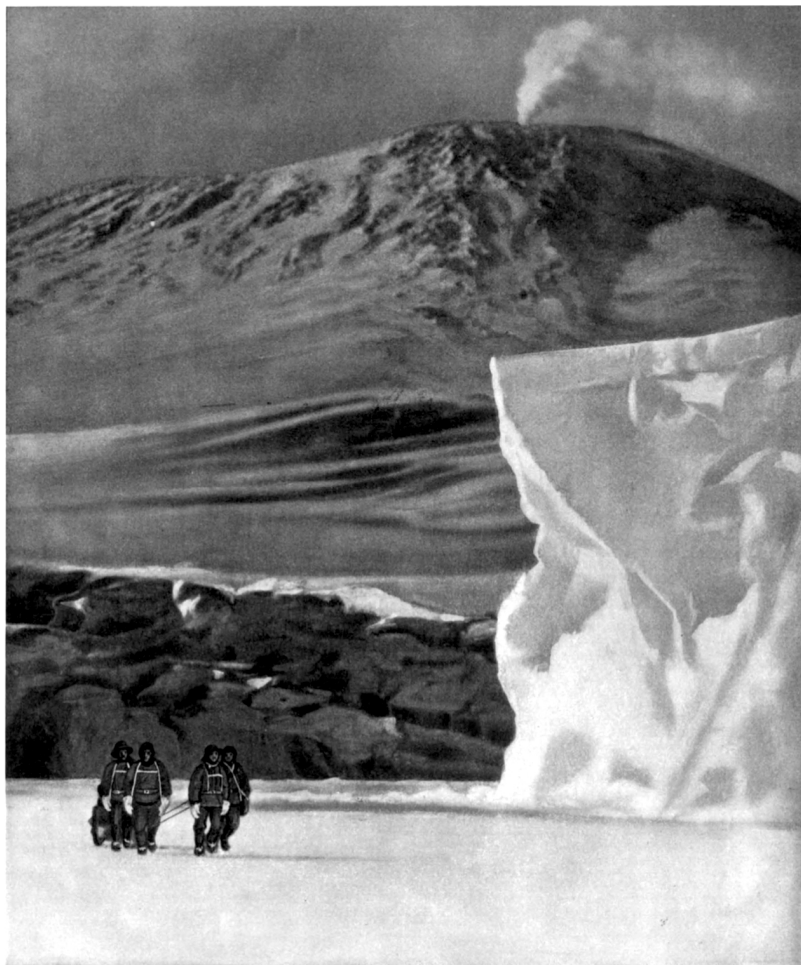
SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

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Mount Erebus, an active volcano, within the antarctic zone, appears in the background. To the right is part of an iceberg which was frozen fast before it had time to drift out to sea.

ONE OF A SERIES OF MOVING PICTURES OF THE SCOTT ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION.—[See page 560.]

FIGURE 2.2. Cover of *Scientific American*, June 21, 1913.

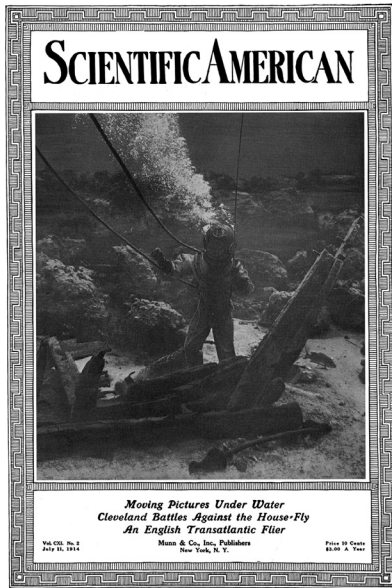


FIGURE 2.3. Covers of *Scientific American*, July 11, 1914 (left) and *Scientific American Supplement*, August 8, 1914 (right).

the bottom of the sea.” This undersea footage included a “hand-to-hand conflict” between a man and a shark (a fight that had been arranged for the camera).⁶⁰ Williamson himself authored an account for *Scientific American* that explained how he and his brother refined their father’s invention, hired the experienced commercial cameraman Carl L. Gregory, and “accomplished the conquest of the deep, with aid of a novel submarine tube and of the photographic camera.”⁶¹

It was the individual efforts of Ponting and the apparatus developed by the Williamsons that most drew the attention of *Scientific American*, which noted in both cases that the unique footage had not been acquired with an eye toward screenings at museums or other non-theatrical sites. In fact, these cinematographic endeavors—praised by *Scientific American* as innovative, scientific, remarkable—resulted not only in striking new images of hidden or far-distant natural environments, but also in feature films that were released theatrically. Gaumont’s ad in *Moving Picture News* for its two-reel *Capt. Scott’s South Pole Expedition* (1912) promised an attraction-filled, authoritatively non-fictional, box-office winner: “positively the biggest feature film ever put on the market. Wonderful pictures of the Terra Nova breaking the ice-pack, the great ice barrier, life in the Antarctic, the Midnight Sun in all its splendor, immense flocks of penguins, sports on the ice that never melts, sleighing expeditions—a perfect record of a wonderful expedition.”⁶² The film was booked during 1913 and 1914 across the United States, including theaters in New

York City, Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, and Chicago (sometimes with the “noted Shakespearean” actor Charles B. Hanford providing an accompanying lecture) as well as smaller cities and towns like Stevens Point, Wisconsin, and Coshoc-ton, Ohio.⁶³ In January 1914, Gaumont released a 6,700-foot film that combined motion pictures of the Scott expedition (billed under the title, *The Undying Story of Captain Scott*) with what it called *Animal Life in the Antarctic*, which toured the US for over a year, again prominently featuring Hanford as the lecturer.⁶⁴

The Williamson undersea moving pictures fared even better as a theatrical attraction. After well-publicized screenings at the Smithsonian Institution and the Museum of Natural History, Williamson’s footage was marketed by the Submarine Film Corporation as a six-reel feature film, under the title *Thirty Leagues Under the Sea*. In January 1914, Universal began distributing Williamson’s film—again, accompanied by a lecturer. Accurate box office records for films in the period are difficult to come by, but newspaper and trade paper accounts suggest that *Thirty Leagues Under the Sea* became one of the most widely circulated non-fiction features of the 1910s.⁶⁵ Opening in September 1914, it played at the Broadway Rose Garden in New York City for six weeks. Universal would claim in an advertisement from April 1915 that the film was seen by two hundred and fifty thousand people in an eight-week run at the Fine Arts Theater in Chicago and set a record with over twenty-five thousand admissions during the seven days it played in Denver.⁶⁶ The footage was likely also used in *The Williamson Submarine Expedition Pictures*, which *Motography* called in October 1916 a “phenomenal success” “now being shown in nearly every corner of the universe.”⁶⁷ The ad for Williamson Submarine Pictures in the 1920 edition of *Wid’s Year Book*—the industry’s essential reference book—still highlighted the coverage Williamson had received six years before in *Scientific American*.⁶⁸

It had not been box-office potential that led *Scientific American* to devote a cover story to the spectacular non-fiction motion pictures shot by Williamson—or by Ponting. Rather, this footage constituted proof positive of the beneficial, scientific utility of motion picture technology in the hands of forward-thinking, daring practitioners. Given its coverage of photography, telephony, and wireless telegraphy, it should come as no surprise that *Scientific American* devoted space to cinema, paying particular attention to the novel, innovative, extra-ordinary ways that motion pictures had proven their value in the service of scientific research and workplace efficiency, training medical students and soldiers, and adding to the body of empirical data available to botanists and zoologists. If the expanded utility of automobiles and photographs were any indication, there was for *Scientific American* potentially no end to the uses to which motion pictures might be put.

In its estimation of cinema as a multi-purpose technology, *Scientific American* was by no means unique. A 1914 handbook covering all manner of “optic projection” devices, for example, claimed that “[m]oving pictures are the offspring of science through some of the finest minds that the world has known. It is simply for

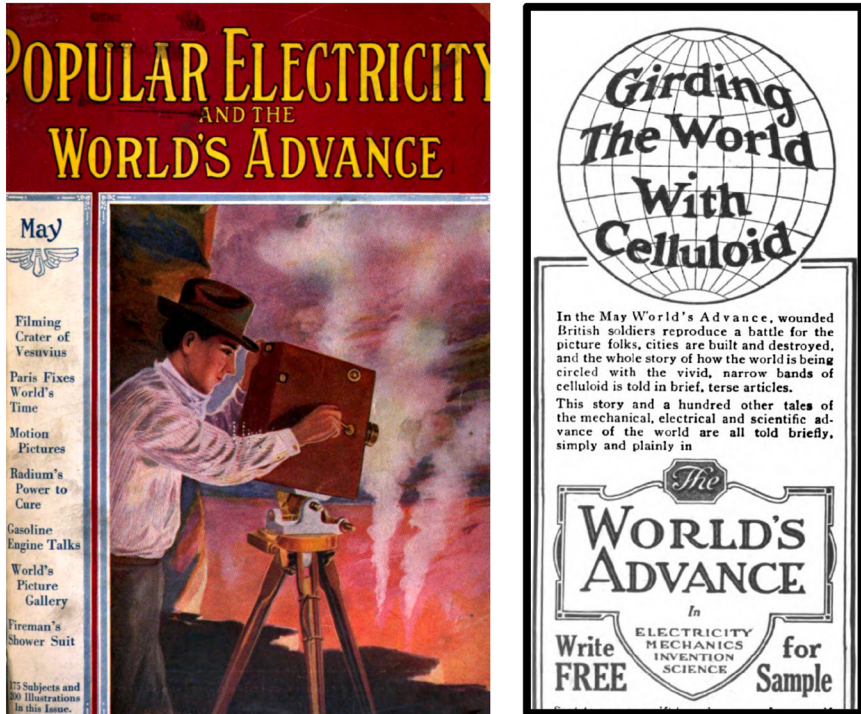


FIGURE 2.4. Cover of *Popular Electricity and the World's Advance*, May 1914 (left); ad for *The World's Advance*, *Scientific American*, June 19, 1915 (right).

the finest art, the best science and the highest aspirations of mankind to take this powerful agent—their offspring—and put it to the real service of humanity. Let it do what it is so capable of doing in the church, in general and technical schools of all grades; in scientific, educational and philanthropic societies; in the theater, in the club, and finally in the home.”⁶⁹

By pointing to a range of uses, *Scientific American* encouraged the instrumentalization of and promoted the manifold utility of cinema, which it approached from a vantage point not only outside the commercial film business but apart from any one profession, industry, or academic discipline. In its commitment to celebrating scientific progress, keeping abreast of technological innovation, and providing practical information, *Scientific American* in an ad hoc way articulated issue after issue the parameters of multi-purpose cinema in the early 1910s—as was also frequently the case for more heavily illustrated, mass market-aimed magazines like *Technical World* and *The World's Advance*, which celebrated an industrialized, ever-progressing, and technology-driven version of American modernity.

By the end of the decade, during and immediately after World War I, *Scientific American* was still noting novel uses for moving pictures, often made possible

by improvements in the apparatus—for example, a “suitcase motion-picture laboratory” likely to be valuable for the itinerant filmmaker and a machine gun with an attached camera that used motion picture film.⁷⁰ Carl Akeley’s development of a camera for location filming of rapidly moving objects drew particular attention, including the only *Scientific American* cover devoted to motion pictures during 1919, which depicted a man using an Akeley camera to capture footage of “a Record Breaking Motorboat” (fig. 2.5).⁷¹ More revelatory and scientifically valuable was the use of the medium to record the reflection and refraction of light rays passing through a lens, demonstrating, in the words of an account from October 1919, that “the motion picture has again revealed to us that which before was too swift for the human eye to discern.”⁷²

An article published in September 1919 on C. Francis Jenkins, who had patented in 1895 a mechanism that allowed film to run intermittently through a projector, made even grander claims for the far-reaching significance of cinema. This installment in the *Scientific American*’s series of articles on the “Romance of Invention” contends that the creation of a workable projector enabled the development of the enormous, global “motion-picture industry,” which—unique among the “institutions in the world”—“is at once an amusement, a news distributor, a means of education and a tool of the laboratory.”⁷³ As this article makes clear, by the end of the decade multi-purpose cinema was an established fact for *Scientific American*—evidenced as well in the attention this magazine paid to the “safety films” sponsored by the US Steel Corporation; the massive outdoor screen erected for the Methodist Centenary celebration in Columbus, Ohio; the miles of motion pictures shot by the Signal Corps during World War I; and even the transformation of a fancy dining room into a “motion-picture theater and recreation hall” when the ocean liner *Vaterland* was repurposed into a huge troop transport ship.⁷⁴

Yet in the later 1910s *Scientific American* actually paid more attention to the commercial film industry than to non-theatrical cinema, most notably by publishing three lengthy articles in 1917 on the production of feature films, authored by Austin C. Lescarbourea, a regular contributor who served as the magazine’s managing editor.⁷⁵ Lescarbourea focused not on movie stars or popular genres, but on the individual skill, coordinated labor, organizational logic, and specialized technology that made commercial filmmaking in the US a profitable, modern, grand-scale, technologically sophisticated undertaking. Hollywood filmmaking by the likes of D. W. Griffith or Cecil B. DeMille was, for Lescarbourea, more akin to bridge building or planning battlefield strategy than capturing light rays on film or documenting an Antarctic expedition.⁷⁶ The illustrated covers that accompanied Lescarbourea’s articles picture, in familiar *Scientific American* style, film directors in the midst of complex location shooting or show professionals working with the huge machines needed to develop 35mm film.⁷⁷

Lescarbourea’s detailed articles became the basis of his 1919 book *Behind the Motion-Picture Screen*, published by the Scientific American Publishing Company.

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

Entered as second class matter June 18, 1879, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.



FILMING A RECORD-BREAKING MOTORBOAT [See page 315]

Vol. CXX. No. 13
March 29, 1919

Published Weekly by
Scientific American Publishing Co.
Munn & Co., New York, N. Y.

Price 10 Cents
\$5.00 a Year

FIGURE 2.5. Cover of *Scientific American*, March 29, 1919.

Filled with more than two hundred photographs covering aspects of the production process in and out of the studio, *Behind the Motion-Picture Screen* stands as perhaps the most wide-ranging and thorough account in this period of the practice

of commercial filmmaking. In keeping with the larger preoccupations of *Scientific American*, Lescarboursa spends much less time discussing marketing, distribution, and exhibition than in describing the workings of various motion picture projectors and cameras (including the Akeley camera), explaining trick shots and color processes, detailing the efforts of newsreel cameramen, and surveying the vast resources of the “modern motion-picture studio.” But Lescarboursa also looks beyond the movie theater to what he calls “motion pictures in strange fields”—that is, several uses of cinema that had been discussed in *Scientific American* earlier in the 1910s: amateur filmmaking and home projectors; microcinematography; and film put in the service of military training, testing metals, and observing marine life.⁷⁸

MOVING PICTURES IN THE SERVICE OF ADVERTISING

For Lescarboursa, one rich opportunity that was largely unrealized as of 1919 was the potential of what he called “the motion-picture salesman”—that is, film in the service of advertising and publicity.⁷⁹ Treated in only a few pages at the end of *Behind the Motion-Picture Screen*, this field took center stage in his follow-up volume *The Cinema Handbook* (1922), also published by the Scientific American Publishing Company. The subtitle of *The Cinema Handbook* makes clear its scope: “A guide to practical motion picture work of the nontheatrical order, particularly as applied to the reporting of news, to industrial and educational purposes, to advertising, selling and general publicity, to the production of amateur photoplays, and to entertainment in the school, church, club, community center and home.” Underscoring the manifold, everyday possibilities for moving pictures beyond the theater, *The Cinema Handbook* describes available cameras, projectors, screens, and accessories and offers guidance for a range of potential users—“the naturalist, traveler, explorer, microscopic worker, teacher, engineer, and others.” Above all, Lescarboursa addresses “the nontheatrical worker” who “wishes to make use of motion pictures for pleasure or for profit,” meaning primarily the novice interested in creating “private cinema” and “amateur photoplays” (what would later come to be known as home movies and amateur cinema) and the freelancer looking to earn money with a camera.⁸⁰

Lescarboursa advises that shooting topics suitable for newsreels and news “magazines” provides the best opportunities for enterprising would-be filmmakers, since the market for this type of footage already exists within the theatrical film business. “Motion picture advertising” also offers “tremendous possibilities,” yet he cautions that too often sponsors are preoccupied with slotting their advertising films into the programming of “regular picture houses,” ignoring the many non-theatrical sites available, including conventions, schools, club meetings, factories, and retail stores.⁸¹ Traveling salespeople armed with portable projectors extend

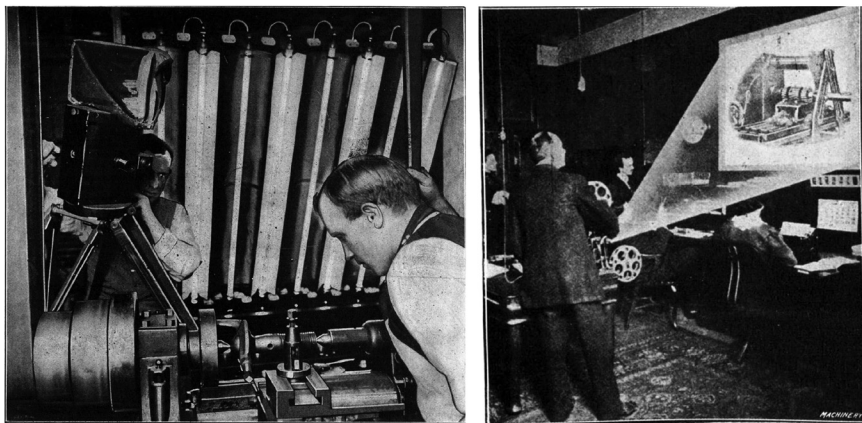


FIGURE 2.6. Illustrations from “The Moving Picture in the Machine Tool Business,” *Scientific American Supplement*, February 14, 1914.

the range of sites even further, underscoring the vast non-theatrical prospects for motion-picture advertising.

The account of screen advertising in *The Cinema Handbook* hearkens back to reports in *Scientific American* and the motion picture trade press a decade earlier concerning moving pictures whose form and function were dictated by the needs of a sponsoring corporation, manufacturer, wholesaler, or retailer. Made for the sometimes overlapping purposes of employee training, marketing, sales, and public relations, such films share much with what would become the long tradition of corporate-sponsored motion pictures in Europe.⁸² For example, *Scientific American Supplement* in 1914 reprinted an article from the trade magazine *Machinery* on the benefits of moving pictures produced for machine tool manufacturers (fig. 2.6). These films were designed to serve both as a graphic demonstration of how to assemble, operate, and repair intricate machines and also as an “aid to salesmen” who will be able to “show the prospective customer just what the advantages of the machine in operation are.”⁸³

But films made exclusively for the purposes of advertising and branding were a different matter. Unlike almost all the other uses of moving pictures described in *Scientific American*, putting moving pictures in the service of advertising could not be justified in terms of social, pedagogical, scientific, or civic utility. Advertising films were unquestionably commercial products intended to generate income for the filmmaker and profit in the short or long term for the sponsor. A 1912 article in *Scientific American* by Watterson R. Rothacker, a producer of industrials and advertising films (and tireless self-promoter), made this cash nexus abundantly clear. Rothacker trumpeted the value of “industrial uses of the moving picture,” by which he meant films intended “to advertise and standardize a name, enliven

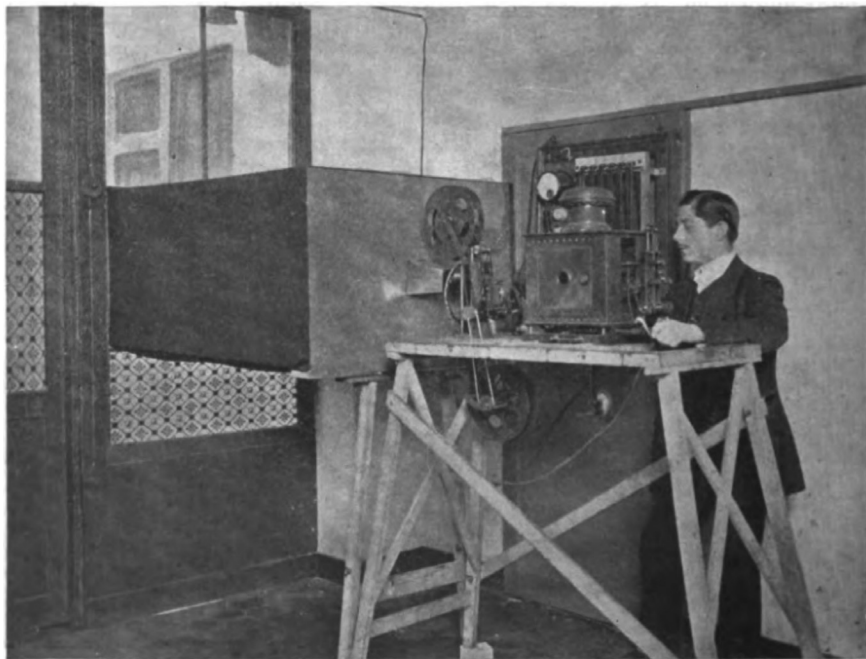
a trade mark, explain a manufacturing process, demonstrate machinery, exploit a territory and recreation resorts, attract attention to a city or place.”⁸⁴ (In articles for *The Nickelodeon*, *Moving Picture World*, *Printer’s Ink*, *Judicious Advertising*, *Motography*, and the *Paint, Oil and Drug Review*, among other periodicals, Rothacker reiterated this pitch.)⁸⁵ Among the most successful of these “industrial uses,” for Rothacker, was the DuPont Company’s widely circulated *Farming with Dynamite* (probably 1911), which, he hyperbolically claimed, had reached “millions of people who have, each one, been impressed with the name of the company thus advertising.”⁸⁶ A 1914 article in the prominent advertising journal, *Printer’s Ink*, found *Farming with Dynamite* to be evidence of “so wide and growing a demand for the educational industrial film that it is not to be wondered at that so many national advertisers are getting out moving-picture films of their plants or processes to show the public what it would see if it could visit the manufacturing center and see the plant in operation.”⁸⁷

In ways that Rothacker could not have imagined, the multi-media screening practices of the 1939 New York World’s Fair would be evidence, in Haidee Wasson’s words, of “cinema less as an apparatus for entertaining or narrating or educating and more as a complex, multiply articulated *machine that sells*” (emphasis in original).⁸⁸ According to Patrick Vonderau, we can track this actualization of “cinema’s utility” decades earlier, since “moving pictures have been inextricably linked to advertising ever since both gained social momentum in the late nineteenth century.”⁸⁹ Examples of this linkage are to be found not only in the films shot in the Edison Company’s *Black Maria*, as Charles Musser has shown, but in a range of exhibition practices.⁹⁰ A 1908 handbook for projectionists, for instance, claims that

[a]lmost every city now has an advertising stand employing motion pictures wholly or in part as their attraction. The methods in vogue are but simple modifications of ordinary lantern advertisements. Usually there are two lanterns, one to project moving picture advertising films, while the other lantern is employed to fill in the gap with single-slide advertising pictures or pictures of a purely entertaining character. Quite frequently a slide is used in the secondary lantern which projects above and below the moving picture the name of the article together with the address, etc. of the manufacturers. The moving picture is thrown upon the prearranged black blank on the screen.⁹¹

This projection apparatus suggests one way that “moving picture advertising films” might have been deployed in urban public space. As attractions in a mediated environment that included window displays, electric signage, posters, and billboards, advertising films could also have been projected on exterior walls and other improvised outdoor screens as well as in store windows, as suggested by a 1910 photograph that appeared in *Motography* (fig. 2.7).

But for Rothacker and most boosters of this branch of useful cinema in the 1910s, unlike Lescarbourea writing in 1922, the real promise of “ad. films” lay in



Projecting Apparatus for Advertising Window Display.

FIGURE 2.7. Moving-picture advertising apparatus, *Motography*, March 1, 1910.

the possibility of slotting a short film sponsored by a manufacturer or other business concern into the regular flow of theatrical programming.⁹² “A goodly number of these houses,” Rothacker confidently told readers of *Motion Picture News* in 1914, “can be induced to give ad. films splendid and far-reaching circulation if the subject is properly produced and presented.”⁹³ The “vast purchasing power” represented by the “millions of men, women, and children who attend movie theaters”—all supposedly fully receptive to any moving images that unrolled before their eyes—made the rewards for this strategy potentially enormous, claimed the 1915 article “‘Movies’ That Find Customers,” in *System: A Magazine for Business*.⁹⁴ What these recommendations don’t emphasize is the likely cost of purchasing screening time, a potential disincentive for sponsors looking to theaters as a prime venue for their films. As early as 1911, this problem was broached in *Moving Picture World* by Horatio F. Stoll, who had been involved with the production of a film promoting the California wine industry. Stoll marveled at the “many uses to which the moving picture can be put,” but explained to would-be investors that while “good industrial films are welcomed at conventions, fairs and public meetings,” theatrical exhibition was another matter entirely. Stoll pointed to a distribution company in California, for example, that charged by the month (with a six-month minimum purchase) to have a sponsored film shown from three

HIDE AND LEATHER JULY 4, 1914

When You Visit the

SHOE AND LEATHER FAIR IN BOSTON, JULY 8-15

You Are Invited

to attend the moving picture illustrated lecture, showing

“The Making of a Shoe”

(GOODYEAR WELT PROCESS)

The practical shoemaker will enjoy the benefit of a clear demonstration of the Goodyear welt shoe machinery. The uninitiated visitor will, for the first time, see an interesting, educational exposition of the intricate processes used in making modern footwear.

In addition, there will be moving-picture views of foot covering from the time of the caveman's raw-hide sandal down to the turn side-laced shoe made upon the oldtime benches of Lynn and Salem.

**Lectures each Afternoon
and Evening**

United Shoe Machinery Co.

BOSTON, MASS.



Pictures that are Easy to See
and Worth Seeing.

AT THE EMPRESS

FOUR REELS TODAY

Elsie's Uncle

OR

Three Of a Kind Makes a Pair

Corking Good Two Reel Comedy.

The Newsboy's Friend

Featuring Little Matty and De Wolf
Hopper, the noted comedlan.

The Making of a Shoe

Showing Entire Process of Making
Shoes.

FIGURE 2.8. Ads for screening of *The Making of a Shoe*, in *Hide and Leather* [Boston MA], July 4, 1914 (left), and *Huntington [IN] Herald*, October 19, 1914 (right).

to six days at theaters throughout the state. The sliding fee scale for this service was based, Stoll explained, on the relative explicitness of the promotional or sales pitch: “story film, in which your industry or business is casually introduced in a story, which has a distinct plot, \$25 per month; industrial film, treated broadly and devoted entirely to the workings of a large manufacturing plant, or the life and resources of a particular section or community, \$50 per month; pure advertising film, where you come out boldly and make your announcement so plain that all who run may read [*sic*], \$75 per month.”⁹⁵

Even with this likely added expense, aiming toward theatrical screenings remained a strategy adopted for at least some sponsored films. For example, *The Making of a Shoe* (1912), produced and circulated by the Publicity Department of the United Shoe Machinery Company, appeared on the bill as part of regular programming at moving picture theaters, like the Empress in Huntington, Indiana, where in October 1914 it was paired with a “corking good two reel comedy” and a four-reel feature film (fig. 2.8).⁹⁶ However, reports in *Shoe and Leather Facts*, *Hide and Leather*, and *Shoe and Leather Reporter*, trade magazines for the American shoe industry, indicate that the long-term success of *The Making of a Shoe* largely depended on non-theatrical exhibition, with screenings at state fairs and the Panama-Pacific International Exposition’s Palace of Education and Social Economy as well as at club meetings, churches, and gatherings of retailers, such as Boston’s

Shoe and Leather Fair. This film was even included as part of vocational instruction courses.⁹⁷ For a sponsored film like *The Making of a Shoe*, usefulness and cost-effectiveness was measured by the extent of its exhibition in and out of theaters over several years.

HOW MARJORIE WON A CAREER

The circulation of *How Marjorie Won a Career* (1914), sponsored by the Gossard Corset Company, a leading manufacturer in this field, offers a good illustration of how moving picture advertising was successfully deployed as one prominent version of useful cinema in the 1910s. Gossard's film complicates any categorical distinction between theatrical and non-theatrical cinema, but in a way different than *The Making of a Shoe*. A typical booking for *How Marjorie Won a Career* occurred on Thursday, December 17, 1914, at 2:00 p.m. at the Grand Theatre, a picture show in Lawrence, Kansas. Tickets for this free screening were available only from a local business; in this case Lawrence's most well-established department store, which carried the Gossard line of corsets. Unlike *Your Girl or Mine*, pitched toward women but welcoming all potential viewers, the Gossard program was reserved "for ladies only" (fig. 2.9). No doubt this restriction will cause a "great disappointment" for "male patrons," predicted the *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, which also observed that "there is no telling what one will see next at the movies. That they are exercising a wonderful education of influence in many lines no one can deny."⁹⁸

Whatever publicity might have been generated by screening footage showing corset fitting to only female audiences, Gossard had other reasons for relying on motion pictures for its advertising campaign. The company was invested in training the saleswomen who worked for its dealers as a way to boost the sales of higher-priced corsets. To this end, Gossard published a house-organ for retailers, employed expert traveling saleswomen who conducted "demonstration sales," and operated a school for "corsetieres" at the company's headquarters in Chicago.⁹⁹ Since it presented "the actual fitting [of] Gossard corsets on living figures," *How Marjorie Won a Career* was designed to be doubly useful, simultaneously offering instruction for the dealer's sales staff and encouragement for potential customers.¹⁰⁰ By sponsoring this screening, the local Gossard dealer could claim that it was providing a much-needed service for its clientele.

Not surprisingly, Gossard's free screening included more than footage of corset fitting. Newspaper advertisements provided to local dealers by the company identified *How Marjorie Won a Career* as a production of the Essanay Film Company, which in 1914 still had a studio in Chicago and would soon shake up the industry by hiring Charlie Chaplin away from Keystone.¹⁰¹ (*How Marjorie Won a Career* is apparently not extant, leaving open, among other questions, whether both Gossard and Essanay were identified by name and logo in the film's opening title.) Essanay's

GOSSARD CORSETS
Fitted on
LIVING MODELS

Since the first announcement of the fact that we were going to show a moving picture film of corset fittings, we have had no end of inquiries about this special matinee for ladies only.

The film will be shown at the
LAVERING THEATRE
Saturday p. m., Feb. 12th

We are one of the first distributors of Gossard Corsets to show this film. It was produced by The Essanay Film Company of Chicago and in it you see how moving pictures are made, how corsets are fitted and in addition you see a beautiful story entitled "How Marjorie Won a Career."

A few more complimentary passes can be had by calling at our Corset Department. If you have not yet received your pass, call and get it today. You can phone your reservation, if you prefer. Every Gossard Corset shown in this beautiful film can be had at our store.

Do not miss this special free matinee for ladies only

"Another Package from Booth's"

Booth Mercantile Company



Columbia
Special Matinee
FOR LADIES ONLY!
TUESDAY AFTERNOON
AT
Columbia Theatre
THE ACTUAL FITTING OF
GOSSARD CORSETS
ON LIVING MODELS

Also the Big Feature Picture **DUSTIN FARNUM** in
"CAMEO KIRBY"
IN FIVE ACTS

Any Seat 10c Any Time

COMPLIMENTARY PASS
GOSSARD CORSETS in Motion Pictures
Special Matinee Ladies Only
Pictureland Theatre
Tuesday, March 30, 2 P. M.

GET YOUR TICKETS NOW



FIGURE 2.9. Ads for Gossard Corsets: Lavering Theatre, Twin Falls [ID] Times, February 8, 1916 (left); Columbia Theatre, Warren [PA] Evening Times, January 25, 1915 (top right); complimentary pass, Daily Tribune [Fort Scott KS], March 25, 1915 (bottom right).

Chicago studio was in fact featured in *How Marjorie Won a Career*, which offered audiences the chance to watch in a familiar hometown theater a motion picture that was (1) produced by a well-known film company and yet was (2) presented under the auspices of a local merchant; a film that (3) included glimpses inside the Essanay movie studio, yet (4) unambiguously presented itself as an advertisement for Gossard corsets; and (5) provided instruction on corset fitting.

A newspaper in Hutchinson, Kansas, offered a particularly detailed summary of the film that makes clear the promotional and generic logic of *How Marjorie Won a Career*, a story not of a movie-made girl but a girl-made movie:

Marjorie Brown, living in Chicago, receives a letter from her mother, telling her that the mortgage on her old home is to be foreclosed. On entering The H. W. Gossard Company's office where she is employed, she notices a sign of \$1,000 for the best advertising idea. On her way home that evening she stops in front of a motion picture studio. She gets the idea of telling the story of Gossard Corsets in motion pictures. She submits a letter covering her idea, which is accepted. She is commissioned to make the moving picture. You then see her in the motion picture studio—you see the actual fitting of the corsets, her final reward of \$1,000 and her return home just in time to save her mother's home. The story is of real heart interest and of tremendous importance to every woman.¹⁰²

An advertising film driven by an uplifting narrative, *How Marjorie Won a Career* pictured an independent working woman preserving hearth and home through her own efforts, after being provided with an opportunity by the Gossard Company.¹⁰³ Marjorie's tribulation and triumph notwithstanding, Gossard's publicity material and various accounts of screenings in local newspapers emphasize that the educational/promotional centerpiece of the film was its footage of the "actual fitting of corsets." According to an article in *Printers' Ink*, which was always on the lookout for successful advertising campaigns, Gossard made *How Marjorie Won a Career* available to its dealers for a one-day engagement. The retailer was responsible for purchasing space for the newspaper advertising provided by Gossard and for making arrangements to have the film screened in the afternoon or morning at a local movie theater, either by renting the theater (at \$10 or \$15) or by purchasing five hundred tickets (for approximately \$12.50). The exhibitor could substitute *How Marjorie Won a Career* for one of the pictures on the bill or screen it on its own. Standard practice was to run the film more than once; the Orpheum Theater in South Bend, Indiana, for example, offered five consecutive half-hour shows, beginning at 10:00 a.m.¹⁰⁴ Gossard advised dealers to "have your corsetiere announce before the film is shown that every corset shown in the film can be had at your store"—a performative gesture that would have underscored what Yvonne Zimmermann describes as "the embedding of moving images in a marketing event."¹⁰⁵ Though *How Marjorie Won a Career* did not travel with a company-trained lecturer, an emphasis on Gossard's product line and its trained corsetieres would have been underscored by the very occasion of a screening event specially sponsored by a Gossard dealer, the newspaper ads leading up to the screening, the presence at the event of a representative of the local merchant or the Gossard Company, and perhaps even—as we saw with *Your Girl and Mine*—the décor inside the theater.¹⁰⁶

Gossard began to circulate *How Marjorie Won a Career* in August 1914, and the film was heavily booked over the next year, with theatrical screenings continuing sporadically until May 1917.¹⁰⁷ In all instances, the audience was restricted to "ladies only," leading *Moving Picture World* to report that in Sedalia, Missouri, "it was only with great difficulty that the men were prevented from breaking the doors of the theatre and entering."¹⁰⁸ In addition to apparently inflaming male desire, this policy could well have encouraged a more homosocial experience for the women in attendance, who—given the scheduled time of the screening, the ticketing procedure, and the nature of the product being advertised—were limited by class as well as sex and, of course, by race. As was the case with *Twilight Sleep*, Gossard's successful handling of *How Marjorie Won a Career* exemplifies two strategies associated with the screening of useful cinema in the 1910s, in and out of movie theaters: film exhibition understood to be a matter of idiosyncratic, limited-run screenings designated as "special" rather than the continuous, regular delivery of new entertainment product; and—as I will examine more fully in chapter 4—the

explicit targeting of a specific group of viewers rather than an ostensibly inclusive mass audience.

These strategies worked well enough with *How Marjorie Won a Career* that Gossard had Essanay produce another one-reel film, *The Social Key*, that was circulated and exhibited from August 1916 until at least September 1917 in much the same way as *How Marjorie Won a Career*.¹⁰⁹ "It's an ad, of course," wrote the *Charlotte [NC] Observer*, "but an awfully enjoyable one—especially when you get it along with the regular theater program."¹¹⁰ *The Social Key*'s requisite corset-fitting sequence relied on optical effects to simultaneously show a series of "living models" corseted and uncorseted to vividly present the "nine different types of [female] figures." This typology was a much ballyhooed Gossard innovation also being promoted in a print campaign that included a series of full-page ads featuring Triangle Film Studio's "Stars of Filmland," who "derive much of their charm from Gossard corsets."¹¹¹ Another Gossard campaign at the same time that ran in *Photoplay* featured testimonials from individual stars, like Mabel Normand.

As with *How Marjorie Won a Career*, the corset-fitting sequence in *The Social Key* was embedded in what advertisements called "a very clever little story." Unlike Marjorie, who discovers a talent—though likely not a career path—in motion picture advertising, the four daughters and their parents who inherit a "large fortune" in *The Social Key* must learn an invaluable life lesson about the importance of correctly fitted corsets. Only after they are appropriately corseted in Gossard's finest (like the stars of Filmland) can the women in the family be accepted into the ranks of "high society" that had previously snubbed them.¹¹² Not surprisingly, Gossard's nouveau riche family succeed against considerable odds by using the right product, underscoring a consumerist logic that would become a mainstay in American advertising.

CONCLUSION

For Gossard's ambitious marketing campaigns, access to movie theaters was essential. If these advertising films were to justify their cost and realize their potential utility, there needed to be some measure of flexibility on the part of theater owners and operators: at a minimum, this included leeway in determining how a theater was used and individual programs were constituted, and a willingness to profit, directly or indirectly, from sponsored screenings and other events distinct from standard day-by-day offerings. Even if purposefully built, operated to make money by exhibiting movies, and immediately recognizable and advertised as picture shows, the many movie theaters across America in the 1910s that hosted advertising events—and screenings of sponsored films like *Your Girl or Mine*—were at least occasionally open to other types of motion pictures, other programs, other admission policies, other uses of cinema. These opportunities could include not only making room for sponsored films but also for what the

St. Louis Chief of Police in 1909 denounced as the “filthy private,” “midnight exhibitions of disgusting orgies” purportedly being screened regularly at more than one hundred of the city’s nickelodeons.¹¹³ When, where, and to what extent certain exhibitors made available their venues for other uses beyond showing the nationally available output of the commercial film industry is one key indicator of the varied and flexible relation between theatrical and non-theatrical cinema.¹¹⁴

Newspaper reports and advertisements indicate that *How Marjorie Won a Career* and *The Social Key* were quite often booked at theaters in towns like Clovis, New Mexico, and Hutchinson, Kansas, where the movies were commonplace but other uses of cinema were perhaps not. Tracking this circulation points to broader questions about the social and geographical dispersion of multi-purpose cinema during the 1910s. This circulation likely varied considerably depending on region and population as well as on local factors, including the activities of merchants and agricultural organizations (like the American Farm Bureau), the availability of university extension services and state-funded mobile exhibitors, and even the policies of individual churches and schools.

Another type of circulation is also relevant as we piece together the history of multi-purpose cinema in and out of the movie theater. While Gossard’s use of film drew the attention of *Printers’ Ink: A Journal for Advertisers*, *How Marjorie Won a Career* and *The Social Key* were never mentioned in *Scientific American* and garnered only a few brief references in *Moving Picture World*.¹¹⁵ That Gossard was selling corsets was no doubt a factor, particularly for *Scientific American*. But this lack of coverage reflects a basic point about expanded American cinema during the 1910s: as largely gauged by information culled from newspapers (and, to a lesser extent, from official annual reports), the actual uses of moving pictures for purposes beyond generating box office receipts did not always or necessarily correlate with how the possibilities and parameters of multi-purpose cinema were articulated and imagined in print sources like *Scientific American*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Moving Picture World*, and *Motography*. This distinction does not mean that we should privilege practice over discourse (or the reverse) but, rather, that this history requires taking both into account, a strategy that has become much more feasible with the increased availability of digital archives.

As we have seen, the discourse concerning multi-purpose cinema unsurprisingly highlighted what *Scientific American* in 1912 called “new uses for moving pictures” and valued ways that the medium could be enlisted in the service of acquiring scientific knowledge, disseminating information, improving teaching methods, and ameliorating social ills.¹¹⁶ The category of “new uses” presupposed that there was, by way of contrast, an “old”—established, customary, familiar—use. Multi-purpose cinema was understood, implicitly or explicitly, in relation to mono-purpose cinema—that is, it was seen as something other than the movies, the major form of commercial entertainment in the US. That the film industry (increasingly based in Hollywood and New York City) by providing pleasure to audiences gathered daily

in thousands of theaters was both generating profit nationwide and also provoking strident criticism helps explain the fascination with—and perhaps the endorsement of—moving pictures put to other, non-commercial purposes. Particularly in what the author of *American Ideals* (1915) dubbed “a land where the word utility is ubiquitous,” acknowledging cinema beyond the movie theater could itself serve certain broadly useful ends: fostering alternatives to what the movies had to offer, encouraging potential users and investors, and raising the status of the medium by insisting on its usefulness.¹¹⁷

Highlighting the manifold applications and the practical benefits of multi-purpose moving pictures tapped into a broader set of values. *Multi-purpose* as a positive descriptor had begun to appear in print by the mid-1910s (and even more regularly by the 1920s), most often in advertisements for supposedly cost-effective, practical, and innovative products like the New Way Motor Company’s “multi-purpose engine” that could serve a “multitude of purposes” in the home and on the farm or E-Z Flour, “a multi-purpose flour—perfectly adapted to every kind of domestic baking.”¹¹⁸ I have found no evidence in the period of *multi-purpose* being directly applied to moving picture cameras or projectors or to film as a medium. An article in *Scientific American* describing how scientific management expert Frank Gilbreth was using motion pictures to increase the efficiency of the “human machine,” flatly declares that “man is a multi-purpose machine,” but this article does not say the same of the film apparatus.¹¹⁹

The terms that were regularly associated with multi-purpose cinema in the motion picture trade press through the 1910s were already present in the 1911 *Moving Picture World* editorial with which I began this chapter: *useful*, *practical*, and *utilitarian*. When referring to a certain type of cinema, *utilitarian* had nothing to do with utilitarianism as formulated by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham and pilloried by Charles Dickens in the nineteenth century. Nor was it associated with a kind of bare-bones austerity or merely serviceable functionality that was the opposite of, say, *artistic* or *aesthetic* or *ornamental*. When applied to the production and exhibition of moving pictures, *utilitarian* was instead a positive attribute connoting a sort of purposeful, practical usefulness, which could appear all the more efficacious and desirable in contrast to perceptions of Hollywood as the realm of luxury, excess, and extravagance. Evidence of utilitarian intent was worth drawing attention to and encouraging, as when *Moving Picture News* declared that the “innovative” screening of an industrial film at the banquet of the American Iron and Steel Institute in 1912 demonstrated the “utilitarian value of the ‘movies.’”¹²⁰

Not surprisingly, this value was most directly championed in columns like “Moving Picture Educator” in *Moving Picture World*, which deemed utilitarian cinema to be fully in sync with the practical proclivities and progressive energy of the modern age. “We are now living in times when every new invention or discovery must lose its first interest and replace it with proofs of its utilitarian

and educational nature,” “Moving Picture Educator” announced in 1914, and “along these lines we cannot have too many pictures.”¹²¹ By April 1917—a month after the US entered World War I—the success of the moving picture in “encouraging progress” by serving as “the social leader, entertainer and educator of the masses” was unquestionably apparent to the Reverend W. H. Jackson, the long-time editor of the education column in *Moving Picture World*: “Higher and higher rises the occasion for usefulness of the moving picture,” Jackson affirmed. “Riding upon the crest of popular utilitarianism it has met every advance of national importance.”¹²²

The popularity of “patriotic pictures” shown by the “high minded [theatrical] exhibitor” in New York City and thus having already found a worthy calling and a home in metropolitan movie theaters is what prompted Jackson’s enthusiasm. Jackson was surely not alone in looking for evidence of how the utility of moving pictures could be maximized to deliver the most benefits. From his perspective, with the nation beckoning, the ever-rising future for useful cinema looked bright indeed. But the fact that “the usefulness of the moving picture” was *not* bound up with the standard exhibition strategies of the movie theater vastly increased its utilitarian possibilities. And precisely because cinema was multi-purposable there was always more than one “occasion for usefulness” and inevitably other missions for moving pictures beyond inspiring patriotic fervor or facilitating scientific research—or selling corsets.