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Specters and Spectacles:
The Crime Serials of Louis Feuillade

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Specters and Spectacles:
The Crime Serials of Louis Feuillade

By

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B.A., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2007

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Specters and Spectacles: The Crime Serials of Louis Feuillade
By Matt Levine

This thesis stems from a basic question: why were Surrealist writers and thinkers in the early twentieth century so entranced by the crime serials of Louis Feuillade? These shocking, violent serials—*Fantômas* (1913-4), *Les Vampires* (1915-6), and *Judex* (1916)—were decried by some as witless, torrid popular entertainment, but were enshrined by the Surrealists as awe-inspiring embodiments of cinema and of the modern age. In characteristic Surrealist style, such writers and thinkers lauded Feuillade through grandiose prose, but provided scant explanation for their infatuation with him.

While this thesis, at the most general level, attempts to answer that question, it will do so by venturing down several related paths. "Specters and Spectacles" will place Feuillade's crime serials within the context of a cinematic transitional period that spanned the 1900s and 1910s—a period that often teetered between the shocking, exhibitionist displays of a "cinema of attractions" and a rapidly coalescing narrative cinema that would soon come to dominate international filmmaking. This project will also relate Feuillade's crime serials to the "modernity thesis," which hypothesized that the cinema in general manifested the numerous social, cultural, economic, technological, political, and artistic transformations engendered by the onset of industrial modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally, this thesis will attempt to link together these interrelated concepts through the broad theory of a "cinematic mode of uncertainty"—a broad paradigm that essentially forces us to question the veracity of cinematic vision and knowledge, to recognize the heavily mediated nature of all cinematic production, and to reconsider the generic, narrative, and conceptual taxonomies that tend to dominate the field of Film Studies.

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History written by a phantom

> Yes, the kingdom of apparitions is of this world, today it *is* this world, and the serious or mocking men who handle the creaking gates open them to new phantoms, who carry strange rays of light in their footsteps, in the folds of their mantles. Watch out for the period that's coming! This world is already cracking, it bears within it some unknown principle of negation, it is crumbling. Follow the rising smoke, the specters' lashings in the midst of the bourgeois universe. A bolt of lightning is lurking beneath the bowler hats. Truly, there is diabolism in the air.
>
> – Louis Aragon, "Challenge to Painting," 1930[1]

These words, written by the Surrealist Louis Aragon in his preface to the first exhibition of collage art in France, gave voice to a culture that saw itself changed from the inside out. Aragon and his fellow first-generation Surrealists came of age in Paris during the *fin de siècle*, as French society was undergoing turbulent upheaval in its socioeconomic structure; its conceptions of crime, the family, religion, and education; its modes of vision, knowledge, and science; its political relationships in regards to its own citizenry, neighboring European nations, and its international colonialist territories and protectorates; its entrenched forms of artistic expression and newly-developing written and visual media; its ambivalent relationship towards the modern urban space and its interconnectivity with suburban areas; and a seemingly boundless number of related transformations. "Challenge to Painting" in particular concerned questions of what comprised worthwhile, socially acceptable, institutionalized art—no longer confined to painterly compositions framed and enshrined in respected galleries, the visual media were by this time (in 1930) *bricolage* of a number of concordant influences, culled from newspapers and tabloids, consumer goods, typographical arrangements, still photography and the cinema, non-

representational imagery (such as Cubism and Fauvism) and more classical forms of painting and sculpture. One need only think of Marcel Duchamp's "readymades," the first of which—"Bicycle Wheel," assembled in 1913—was comprised simply of an inverted bicycle wheel mounted on a common stool. The visual arts were evolving, transforming, bizarrely transmogrifying. With "Challenge to Painting," Aragon was quite directly confronting individuals' (and France's) opinions regarding what art *really* was. The "creaking gates" being opened were the musty entryways to new forms of expression; the world that was cracking and crumbling was that of stolid, classical, representational painting. These new specters, taking the form of eclectic collages and seemingly quotidian images and objects, were "lashing out" at the bourgeois universe by toppling artistic assumptions about the rupture between high art and a rapidly-expanding mass culture. The diabolism in the air was the unsettling aura of the Surrealists, Futurists, Dadaists, Cubists, and other artists who sought to foreground the material, compositional nature of artistic form itself, thus revealing its implicit connections with inner psychological states and with the spectacles of cultural ideology promulgated by the modern capitalist state. "Challenge to Painting" indeed.

But Aragon's words may be just as aptly applied to the films of Louis Feuillade. Though written at least a decade after most of Feuillade's celebrated works, Aragon's challenge neatly encapsulates the discombobulating effect of Feuillade's peculiar crime thrillers in particular. Existing halfway between realism and Surrealism, popular art and subversive anti-art, and troubling our conceptions of a cinema of attractions in stark opposition to a narrative cinema, Feuillade's first three crime series made during the teens—*Fantômas* (1913-14), *Les Vampires* (1915-16), and *Judex* (1916-18)—concerned underground criminal gangs terrorizing the Parisian bourgeoisie, criminal masterminds who had a seemingly preternatural grasp of both the modern urban space and sinister magical forces, respectable heroes attempting to uphold virtues of justice and order in the face of

such terrorism, car chases and mysterious murders and befuddling spectacles of violence and destruction.[2]

Aragon and many other Surrealists saw in Feuillade's crime serials the epitome of the oneiric world of cinema. Their endorsement of Feuillade as the voice of their cultural and artistic movement is perhaps most succinctly conveyed by Robert Desnos, who claimed that only three films lived up to the Surrealists' "mission" of discovering a cinematic screen that "perhaps might be the equal of our dreams."[3] These three films were *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Les Mystères de New York*—the last of which was a trio of American crime serials starring Pearl White (*The Perils of Pauline* [1914], *The Exploits of Elaine* [1914], and *The Romance of Elaine* [1915]) reedited into a single serial released in France under its new name by the Pathé-Frères company in 1915. Only these three films, according to Desnos and his Surrealist peers, had lived up to the Surrealist potential of film at the time of this article's writing in 1927. The transgressive appeal of Feuillade's crime serials was further emphasized by the fact that they were primarily denounced by mainstream French critics as lowbrow, tawdry hackwork, in sharp distinction to the prestigious *films d'art*—adaptations of literary classics, prominent stage plays, and biblical stories—then being endorsed as the most respectable form of cinema.

The following project, then, attempts to answer this question: Why were the Surrealists so fascinated by the crime serials of Louis Feuillade? For, in a style characteristic of such writers as Aragon, Desnos, Guillaume Apollinaire, André Breton, Maurice Raynal, and others, the Surrealists' endorsements of Feuillade often lionized the director and his serials through grandiloquent proclamations, abstract prose, and striking dream imagery that offered no textual evidence or theoretical context to support their awed hero-worship. (Since their aim was not film analysis but an immediate and raw appraisal of a visceral modern world and its troubling undercurrents, this

should not necessarily be read as a flaw of the Surrealists.) It is my hope that further exploring the linkages between Feuillade's crime serials and contemporary Surrealist concepts may elucidate the kinetic, mysterious appeal that Feuillade's films hold even today, as well as the benefits we may gain from exploring both early cinema and *fin de siècle* society through a Surrealist lens.

In some ways, the reasons for the Surrealists' love of Feuillade are readily apparent by viewing his crime serials of the teens. Thinkers like Aragon and Desnos saw in Feuillade's films a revelation of the "marvelous" forces lurking beneath the vestiges of everyday life. The "kingdom of apparitions" which Aragon writes defined the modern world could be espied in Feuillade's works. The narratives of his films hurdle forward from one implausible spectacle to the next, though they are conveyed to us with seemingly irrefutable naturalism. These new phantoms, embodied by the glamorous but vicious villain Fantômas, the magnetic and malevolent strength of Irma Vep, the incorruptible morality of the caped crusader Judex, indeed burst open the creaking gates of cinematic form and narrativity, emitting "strange rays of light" through the fissures that were created between two cinematic paradigms: that of "attractions," and that of the classical linear narrative form that would soon be perfected and consolidated by the Hollywood film industry. Indeed, as the Surrealists may have been awed by the unsettling juxtaposition of spectacular and shocking events portrayed in a realistic fashion, we may similarly be struck by Feuillade's historical placement in a transitional period that combined the exhibitionist aspects of a cinema of attractions with the representational clarity of an increasingly narrative cinema. Recognizing films' unique blend of attractions and narratives during this transitional period (a duality hardly limited to Feuillade, as we will shortly see) is certainly clearer to modern-day film historians and theorists than it would have been to contemporary Surrealists experiencing a rapidly transforming cinema firsthand.

Louis Feuillade was the premiere studio filmmaker, as well as the artistic director, for the Gaumont company, which was second only to Pathé-Frères as France's most economically dominant studio during the teens. Born in 1873, Feuillade was raised in the small southern town of Lunel. Fascinated by cycling and bullfighting at an early age, Feuillade experienced a conservative education that would seem to contradict the unsettling, shocking aspects of his later films. He moved to Paris in 1898 to pursue a career in journalism, and—to add to the paradox of his conservative upbringing in relation to his later filmmaking—was quickly allied with several politically right-wing publications, in which he published amateur poetry and articles about bullfighting.[4] He was hired as a scenarist by Gaumont in 1905 and replaced Alice Guy as head of production in 1907. Over the next seventeen years (Feuillade would leave Gaumont in 1924, passing away only a year later), the astonishingly prolific Feuillade produced more than 800 films encompassing most contemporary film genres.

Throughout his entire career, Feuillade would readily proclaim that he made films for the masses—he never separated himself from the popular culture context in which he worked. Indeed, Feuillade considered the ultimate vocation for the cinema to be its storytelling aspects, its ability to relate a narrative more compellingly than any other art form had been able to accomplish. He embraced this tenet with increasing adamancy as his career progressed, stating in 1921, "The only thing that counts is to know if, in its twenty-six inert reels, there lies a sleeping princess whom a magician eventually will awaken with the beam of his marvelous lamp—I mean a good story. That is the sole point: the story, the tale, the fiction, the dream."[5]

This being the case, one may wonder precisely how "Surrealistic" Feuillade's films truly are. For, while his reckless narratives, shocking setpieces, unexpected flashbacks, and formal abstractions can be read as defying a nascent narrative film form, *Fantômas, Les Vampires*, and *Judex*

remain essentially conservative entertainments, firmly placed in the context of mainstream popular cinema and dedicated to resolving their serialized stories (though often through prolongation, recursion, and jarring cliffhanger endings). This apparent disparity may be partially explained by the Surrealists' desire to uncover a fantastic allure in the most banal and commonplace of items, a desire exemplified by Aragon's article "On Décor," originally published in the journal *Le Film* in 1918. In it, Aragon praises film for using "the false harmony of machines and the obsessive beauty of commercial inscriptions, posters, evocative lettering, really common objects, everything that celebrates life, not some artificial convention that excludes corned beef and tins of polish."[6] Perhaps, then, it's little surprise that the Surrealists would find such paradoxical pleasures in the hackneyed serials of Feuillade and his contemporaries—the cinematic embodiments of "really common objects."

Categorizing Feuillade's crime serials as "Surrealistic" may also be supported by a basic overview of their narrative structures, which I will here articulate as both an example of the mystifying appeal that the Surrealists saw in this most mainstream of filmmakers, and more simply as a preface for the analyses I will soon undertake. The irony of Feuillade as a cinematic storyteller is that in some ways the narrative was indeed paramount in Feuillade's films, while in other ways it did not matter in the least. On the one hand, narrative progression propels the entirety of his crime films: we move from one spectacle to the next in (mostly) sequential order, observing scenes that are stitched together in a jerky cause-and-effect pattern. *Fantômas*, throughout the five films that comprise the series, concerns the obsessive attempts by the police inspector Juve and his faithful journalist accomplice Fandor to catch the eponymous archcriminal, whose arsenal of disguises allows him to evade the police throughout his sinister jewel thefts and grisly murders. *Les Vampires* is like a recursive echo of *Fantômas*'s storyline, as the upstanding journalist Philippe Guérande and his

comical sidekick Oscar-Cloud Mazamette track the underground criminal gang known as the Vampires. (This underground gang, and others like it in similar French crime serials of the teens, were based on real-life criminal bands known as *apache* gangs, which had been terrorizing France's urban centers—particularly Paris's Montmartre district—since the late nineteenth century, instilling fear in the hearts of the upper class by regularly mugging and shooting members of the bourgeoisie.) *Judex* is a departure from its two predecessors, but in some ways functions as their mirror image: this time it is the heroic vigilante Judex who evades capture and terrorizes France's legion of criminals, whether they be shady lower-class thugs or slimy capitalists who rape and kill for economic gain.

Yet while all three of these series tirelessly follow these overarching storylines, there are also frequent diversions, sudden interstices in narrative progression allowing for spectacular attractions and prolonged action scenes, characters who are abruptly excised and others who are just as abruptly thrust into the plots' action. The epitome of this is certainly *Les Vampires*, with its shifting roster of villainous "Grand Vampires," numerous gadgets, mysterious objects, and puzzling clues that receive prolonged screen time. In the second episode of the serial, "The Ring That Kills" (1915), Guérande's fiancée, the ballerina Marfa Koutiloff, is introduced only to be killed off by a jealous Vampire a mere fifteen minutes later. A *second* fiancée is introduced with equal suddenness in the ninth (and second-last) episode, "The Poisoner" (1916)—her introduction arranged merely to provide the last two episodes with a romantic subplot for our hero (and to reassert the significance of the traditional nuclear family as a moral anchor in modern French society, an example of Feuillade's traditional moral conservatism that will reappear in *Judex*'s themes of violent sins redeemed by familial love and romantic compassion).

Perhaps the strangest plot development in *Les Vampires*, however, is the introduction of

Mazamette's son Eustache in the eighth episode, "The Thunder Master" (1916). Eustache had been expelled from his boarding school, we are told in an intertitle, due to his "laziness and penchant for practical jokes of the foulest nature." The character of Eustache performs several functions in the context of *Les Vampires*: firstly, he is played by René Poyen, a child star who had earlier headlined Feuillade's massively popular *Bout-de-Zan* comic series (1913-16)—leading us to conclude that his reappearance in *Les Vampires* is an attempt to capitalize on that series' success; and secondly, Eustache is a mischievous prankster whose misbehaving undercuts the serial's more traditional affirmation of the sanctity of the bourgeois family, mentioned above. This is made readily apparent by the conclusion to "The Thunder Master," in which Eustache, after infiltrating the foyer of the sinister Grand Vampire named Satanas, fires a pistol at the villain and accidentally shoots his father in the face. Emerging from his hiding place (a piece of luggage that had been stowed in Satanas's entryway) with a face smeared in blood, Mazamette proceeds to smilingly embrace his son as Guérande and several policemen amusedly look on—a strange juxtaposition of familial love and gruesome violence that is typical of Feuillade's conflation of the conservative and the transgressive.

There are numerous examples of unexpected narrative complications and diversions in both *Fantômas* and *Judex* as well, many of which will be discussed later in this thesis. While the narrative capriciousness of these crime serials, the sputtering of plot points and the drastic shifting of the ensemble cast, can partially be attributed (in the case of *Les Vampires*) to exigent production pressures imposed by World War I (actors suddenly being called off for duty, a sporadic shooting schedule to accommodate armed conflicts throughout France), they can also be attributed to a shifting and uncertain mode of cinematic storytelling that was caught between an earlier cinema of attractions paradigm and a burgeoning narrative cinematic mode. Indeed, while Feuillade's narratives are astonishing in their simultaneous clarity and bizarreness—their shuffling between a

distinctly traceable story arc and an exhibitionist tendency to provide us with numerous visceral diversions—they are not alone among cinematic narratives of the transitional period in tenuously balancing between the attractions and the narrative paradigms. Theories regarding these two distinct modes and the transitional period between them are something I will return to shortly in this introduction.

While the messy narrative patterns of Feuillade's crime serials and the Surrealists' love for common consumer goods may help us understand why such a mainstream filmmaker was embraced by such an anti-establishment cultural movement, I should emphasize here that this project is *not* an attempt to reiterate the claim that Feuillade's crime serials represent a Surrealist mode of filmmaking. Indeed, in my opinion, the inability to easily place *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* in this mode is yet another of the delirious dualities we may find in Feuillade: his crime serials are *both* disconcertingly surreal and resolutely narrative. Therefore, the following thesis is not an analysis of Feuillade as a Surrealist, but an analysis of a Surrealist interpretation applied to Feuillade. While this may seem like an inconsequential distinction or a mere difference in semantics, it is precisely this distinction that I find so fascinating in analyzing Feuillade's crime serials: they can not be easily placed into any paradigm (surreal or narrative, cinema of attractions or narrative cinema, high art or low art, etc.), but may nonetheless be illuminatingly approached through a number of disparate analytical modes (surrealism, sociohistorical contextualization, gender studies, the modernity thesis, a national cinema approach, and so on).

One may question my decision to limit my analysis of Feuillade's first three crime serials to a Surrealist approach. After all, these serials are remarkably rich and multivalent, and (as stated above) can be approached through any number of conceptual paradigms. I have chosen to limit my analysis to an aspect of Feuillade that I feel has been underrepresented in existing literature;

therefore, I cannot and do not attempt to offer a comprehensive and exhaustive interpretation of Feuillade, primarily because many of the paradigms through which we may analyze his serials have already been extensively and perceptively explored by other theorists. For example, a gendered analysis of *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* in particular has been wonderfully articulated by Vicki Callahan and Elizabeth Ezra, among others, with particular attention to notions of female criminality and the blurring of gender lines achieved by Irma Vep throughout many of her disguises and charades in *Les Vampires*[7]; a thorough contextualization of Feuillade's shorts and serials in their sociohistorical epochs has been undertaken by Richard Abel, especially in his excellent history of early French cinema, *The Ciné Goes to Town*[8]; a thorough, perceptive, and remarkable formal analysis of Feuillade's distinct aesthetic has been explicated by David Bordwell in *Figures Traced by Light* and by Francis Lacassin in his monograph *Louis Feuillade*[9]; and a broad conceptual analysis of issues of identity and mediation in Feuillade has been forged by Tom Gunning in "The Intertextuality of Early Cinema: A Prologue to *Fantomas*."[10] These are only a few of the most remarkable analyses of Feuillade that have previously been published.

Conversely, while broader studies of Surrealism in early cinema have been achieved (with particular insight by Robert Short in *The Age of Gold: Surrealist Cinema*, for example), they do not generally appear to draw correlations between French Surrealist thinkers and the man that many of them perceived as the fullest embodiment of their cultural theories: Feuillade.[11] The exception may be Haim Finkelstein, whose *The Screen in Surrealist Art and Thought* briefly yet compellingly recognizes Feuillade's use of urban spaces and modern architecture as unsettling in their conflation of the realistic and the surreal.[12] A fuller analysis of the correlations between Feuillade and Surrealism will, I hope, yield unexpected insights into the unique power of his crime serials, and will of course also draw out many of the theories and insights previously elucidated by the

aforementioned theorists.

Mention must be made, however, of an additional theoretical paradigm that has often been applied to Feuillade and will indeed reappear often throughout this thesis. This concept is that of the "modernity thesis," which essentially attempts to elicit the ways in which certain tenets of urban modernity in *fin de siècle* culture manifested themselves in early cinema. At this point I would like to offer a brief introduction to some of these tenets of cinematic modernity. The emphasis here, however, is on "brief": in this introduction I hope merely to provide a contextualization for the rapidly-transforming modern culture into which Feuillade's crime serials were released by Gaumont (and into which other like-minded serials were released by France's quickly-multiplying film distributors). Therefore, it is to an exposition of this vast theoretical framework that I now turn.[13]

THE MODERNITY THESIS AND LOUIS FEUILLADE

The analysis of modernity as manifested in early cinema is an enormous topic, and, as several theorists have pointed out, a particularly problematic one. David Bordwell, for example, emphasizes that film theorists should "examine the circumstances that impinge most proximately on filmmaking—the mode of film production, the technology employed, the traditions and the craft routines favored by individual agents"—rather than attempt to formulate broad theories that trace film style to a spirit, an age, an ideology, national culture, or epochal conditions.[14] Bordwell certainly has a valid point: it is not enough to say that *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* are so powerful because they embody the massive sociocultural upheaval of the age of modernity, which is likely the most universally unsettling advancement across nearly all realms of social life at least since the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In particular,

Bordwell disparages the association of rapid editing and abrupt leaps in time and space with the sensorial overload of modernity, and it's true that such a broad association does a disservice to many filmmakers' and editors' deliberate and precise use of rapid editing to serve a narrative, visceral, or thematic function. Bordwell recognizes that the "modernity thesis" has been applied to Louis Feuillade in the past, particularly by Tom Gunning, but claims that such a conceptual associative analysis produces "no new knowledge but simply [uses] the case at hand to reaffirm commitment to a large-scale doctrine."[15]

Bordwell's criticisms of the modernity thesis are certainly valid, but let's take another look at Feuillade. We may recognize in the majority of his filmography (but especially in the crime serials that I will be analyzing): the predominance of modern forms of communication, particularly the telegraph and telephone, as appropriated by both heroes and villains; the concern with speed and rapid transportation, especially railroads; the aesthetic collapsing of disjointed spaces as an embodiment of the lack of privacy in the modern urban space; the conflict between the lower class and the bourgeoisie; Feuillade's love for the magnification of everyday objects and consumer goods; and so on and so forth. It seems obvious that Feuillade *is* intimately concerned with the impact of modernity on urban life, or at least that it seeps its way into the befuddling worlds of Feuillade's texts. Indeed, I can think of no other pair of films that embodies the disorienting effects of modernity as powerfully and creatively as *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires*. Modernity is indeed a vast, somewhat vague, conceptually amorphous topic, and attempting to delineate the precise relations between this phenomenon and specific textual instances may be a somewhat quixotic task; but it conversely seems like a dissatisfying gap to ignore it completely. I believe an interrelationship between Bordwell's formal and industrial analysis and Gunning's conceptual approach would yield the most fertile overall conceptualization, and is indeed what I will be attempting here (as aesthetic

analysis, industrial pressures, and theoretical inquiry all certainly find themselves articulated through a study of Surrealistic interpretation).

First, then, we must ask ourselves what the process of modernization actually entailed. This broad theory is often applied with only a vague understanding of the sociocultural transformations that were actually experienced. Here, then, I would like to outline an *extremely* brief history of the process of modernization, since a thorough historicization is unfeasible for this project. David Harvey's *Paris, Capital of Modernity* is extremely helpful here. In his thorough and perceptive social history, Harvey cites 1848 as perhaps the most significant year of Paris' process of modernization. In this year, city planner Baron Haussmann transformed France's urban spaces from an inchoate medieval urban infrastructure to a modern network of architecture and city avenues. Also in 1848, realism and impressionism in painting and the sparse, hard-edged prose of Flaubert and Baudelaire in literature began to dominate the arts. In the same year, dispersed artisanal manufacturing industries gave way to machinery and modern industry. 1848 also experienced the construction of towering department stores built upon widening avenues, as well as the replacement of previous mindsets like utopianism and romanticism by a particularly modern scientific pragmatism. These and other concurrent transformations make it apparent that nearly all spheres of life in France and many other countries were experiencing turbulent upheaval in the mid-nineteenth century, a trend of modernization that would have been firmly entrenched by the dawn of the new century (and, of course, the dawn of cinema).[16]

One of the foremost tenets of the modernity thesis is the revolutionizing of conceptions of space and time as a reaction to new forms of technology and communication. In *Zones of Anxiety*, Vicki Callahan notes what she calls the "changing parameters of time" in the modern age.[17] These changing parameters included the disparity between "public versus private time," as well as the

conceptualization of time as either a fluid, ceaseless flow or a compendium of discrete, segmented units.[18] These reconceptualizations of temporality were primarily influenced by innovations such as the railroad, automobile, telephone, telegraph, phonograph, and radio—advancements that "collapsed" the distances between physical spaces as well as the junctures between discreet times.

To provide some statistical evidence of these transformations, France, around 1850, had fully committed itself to "the era of massive investment in transport and communications throughout the whole of what was then the advanced capitalist world," in David Harvey's words.[19] By 1870, the country's railway system amounted to approximately 17,400 kilometers in total. The volume of traffic expanded twice as fast as industrial output during the intervening decades, thus consolidating most of France's transportation at the time within the railway system. The telegraph system, meanwhile, had expanded to 23,000 kilometers of wiring by 1866, only ten years after the innovation was introduced in France. With the rise of the telegraph system came the revolutionizing of financial interactions, as the fluctuating prices of consumer goods in various markets became instantly transmittable between distant cities. During the same decades, France sought to establish a new world market by investing about one-third of its disposable capital into purchasing foreign lands, as French railway and telegraph systems spread through the Italian and Iberian peninsulas, and across central Europe into Russia.[20] Given these swift and overwhelming transformations, it should not be too surprising that modes of vision, knowledge, and communication changed along with them.

Such innovations indeed play repeated and central roles in Feuillade's crime serials. For an example of the significance of the telegraph in his films, we may turn to the third episode of *Les Vampires*, entitled "The Red Codebook" (1915). Halfway through the episode, Philippe Guérande's mother (who shares an apartment with her son—a familial closeness that acts as a shorthand marker

for Guérande's morally upstanding heroism) is lured out of Paris by a telegram informing her that her brother has recently been in a catastrophic car accident. Too late, however, she realizes that this telegram is an elaborate ruse orchestrated by the Vampires, who intend to kidnap and imprison her in order to reclaim their titular codebook, which has fallen into Philippe's hands. (Mme. Guérande escapes from her captors by stabbing her deaf-mute guard with a pen given to her by her son—a pen filled not with ink, but with lethal poison! If this brief plot summary seems somewhat knotty and labyrinthine, it's nothing compared to the episode itself.) For an example of the predominance of the railroad as a site of treachery, meanwhile, we may turn to the second film in the *Fantômas* series, entitled *Juve contre Fantômas* (1913). Here, our central villain orchestrates an elaborate train accident by studying the timetable for France's entire railway system, then separating the rearmost car of a train containing his pursuers, simply to elude capture.

If the aforementioned inventions of the modern age (the telegraph, the railroad, etc.) led to a reconceptualization of discreet temporal linearity, Michiel Schwarz and Jeremy Millar claim that these same innovations led to an anxiety over *proximity*, literal and figurative, in the modern age.[21] In David Harvey's words, in France during the turn of the century (and before), "urban space was seen and treated as a totality in which different quarters of the city and different functions were brought in relation to each other to form a working whole."[22] The sudden collapsing of physical spaces engendered an anxiety that instilled a social fear in the urban area, a fear that one was always being followed, watched, preyed upon, simply because of the ubiquity and physical closeness of urban crowds. It was an era assaulted by a "fierce bout of space-time compression," in Harvey's words.[23] The numerous chase scenes in *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex*—which undergo a variety of permutations (heroes chasing villains, villains chasing heroes, chases on foot, in cars, on trains, etc.)—are testament to the uneasy suspicion that the modern city could harbor sinister forces

within its ubiquitous forms of transportation and communication.

More specifically, Feuillade conceives of the modern urban space as a network of interconnected passageways and windows, out of which sinister forces may emerge at any moment. This is perfectly manifested in Feuillade's deep-space aesthetic, which often composes several simultaneous planes of action in one tableau—a static perspective observed in a long or medium shot that allows the entirety of a scene's action to play out within a rigid frame. This aesthetic is especially powerful in *Les Vampires*—for example, the scene in the fifth episode, "The Specter" (1916), in which Irma Vep, posing as a secretary at a bank, is oblivious to the arrival in the background at the center of the frame of the aristocrat Metadier, whom she and a gang of Vampires had "killed" on a train the day before. (It turns out this new Metadier is the criminal Moreno in disguise, who had stolen the corpse of Metadier and posed as him in order to withdraw an obscene sum of money from the dead man's bank account.) By filming this scene through a succession of simultaneous spatial planes collapsed into one deep-space tableau, Feuillade achieves the aesthetic corollary of modernity's troubling "collapsing" of physical spaces in the urban milieu. The coexistence of Irma Vep and the living corpse of the man she had supposedly killed in the same static shot achieves the uncanny echo of the modern city's thrusting-together of individuals within the same space—an uncanny effect that, we will see, is essential to the Surrealists' love for Feuillade.

Interestingly, Richard Abel further applies these theories of spatiotemporal proximity in the modern urban space to *national* contexts: he claims that crime thrillers that focused on "the criminal who preys on [modernity's] new systems of mobility and circulation" were associated in the popular press and by film producers as distinctly French, while American crime thrillers typically concerned "the detective, whose intelligence, knowledge, and perspicacity allow him…to

uncover crime and restore order."[24] This conclusion seems mostly accurate, in fact: while Feuillade's crime serials do indeed feature criminal gangs who have a preternatural grasp of modern forms of technology and communication, the American crime serials sampled for this analysis glorified the heroic detective as a figure whose innate logic, intelligence, and reasoning capabilities make him or her a formidable opponent against "tech-savvy" criminals. For example, Thomas Edison's 1913 short *The Diamond Crown*, part of the Kate Kirby detective series starring Laura Sawyer, concerns (in the words of the *Moving Picture World*) "the clever young daughter of a police officer" who foils an attempted robbery through sheer luck, pluck, and perspicacity.[25] Or we may think of the most well-known example of this kind of plucky American detective: Pearl White, in her incarnations as both Pauline and Elaine (*The Perils of Pauline* [1914], *The Exploits of Elaine* [1914], *The New Exploits of Elaine* [1915], and *The Romance of Elaine* [1915]), who found herself embroiled in one sinister and exciting criminal plot after another, escaping only through feats of athletic agility and quick-witted cleverness. In any case, we can see in both American and French detective serials that the modern space is the essential locus wherein this battlefield of technology versus human intelligence plays out.

Related to this theory of the collapse of space and time in the modern age is a concern with the velocity of new forms of transportation, a rush of speed totally refiguring conceptions of movement and sensation in the modern age. Perhaps the clearest embodiment of this fascination with speed comes from a prose-poem by Blaise Cendrars, written in Cannes in 1917 (and thus a firsthand account of theories of modern speed as embedded within one's immediate experience). Cendrars writes:

> Since the origin of the species, the horse moves, supple and mathematical. Machines are already catching up, moving ahead. Locomotives rear and steamships whinny on the water…
>
> Cosmogenies find a new life in trademarks. Extravagant sideboards over the multicoloured city,

> with the ribbon of trams climbing the avenue, screaming monkeys hanging on to each other's tails, and the incendiary orchids of architectures collapsing on top of them and killing them. In the air, the virgin cry of trolleys![26]

Screaming monkeys aside, Cendrars' poem seems like an incredibly concise encapsulation of speed as a particularly modern fascination, primarily stemming from new forms of transportation "catching up to" the supple and mathematical movements of the horse—in other words, of nature's design. This concern with the simultaneous beauty and deadening overload of modern speed and architecture (as towering, "incendiary" buildings collapse on top of trams, killing aforementioned simians)—"the maelstrom," as Millar and Schwarz label this velocity—indeed represents the ambivalence with which Feuillade regards speed in the modern age.[27] On the one hand, Feuillade delights in showing us the precise functions of the modern railway system and the interconnectivity of roads in metropolitan Paris. The very mobility and beauty of the many shots filmed from moving vehicles—from railway cars, or especially from vehicles behind or in front of automobiles involved in car chases—suggests that Feuillade saw great beauty in the moving vistas provided by the windows of trains and automobiles. One astonishing example takes place in the ninth episode of *Les Vampires*, "The Poisoner" (1916), in which the most bewitching member of the Vampire gang, Irma Vep, escapes out of the rear window of a moving car. We observe Irma's entire escape from a moving perspective, filmed from a platform affixed to a vehicle driven behind the one we see onscreen. The primary visceral appeal of this scene, of course, is Irma's daring stunt, performed by the actress Musidora herself, as she covertly slides down the window, crawls onto the running board, and leaps from the moving automobile. However, a complementary and integral aesthetic attraction in this scene is the very kinetic mobility of the shot, the movement not only of the car onscreen and of Irma Vep, but also of the camera itself; these three confluent movements (of machine, of human, of perspective) exhibit the visceral excitement that can be accomplished by a

mobilized visual image. As an analogy, we may think of the invigorating (though, of course, morally disquieting) ride to the rescue performed by the Ku Klux Klan during the climax of D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), in which the extremely rapid motion of the stampeding horses onscreen, filmed by a camera placed upon a speeding vehicle, astonishes us by aligning us with the perspective of the moving vehicle itself. On display here (and in the aforementioned scene from *les Vampires*) is the kineticism of both the cinematograph (an image in motion) and the automobile (a machine in motion). Released the same year as *Les Vampires*' initial episodes, *The Birth of a Nation* indeed offers a remarkable comparison to Feuillade's crime serials—an analogy to which I will soon return.

If Feuillade conceives of modern forms of transportation as beautiful in their mobility, however, he also envisions trains and automobiles as offering opportunities for criminal masterminds to orchestrate their murderous plots. The example of the train catastrophe in *Juve contre Fantômas* was raised above, but we may also cite the tossing of a corpse over a bridge from a moving car by the criminal Moreno in *Les Vampires*, or the concealment of the deranged banker Favraux aboard a ship commandeered by the villainous Diana Monti and her gang in *Judex*. This sense of movement, then, is beautiful from a distanced perspective in the cinematic vistas it creates, but also dangerous in an immediate context, as it may conceal sinister forces and transport them throughout the urban space with ease.

We find another example of the simultaneous beauty and peril of new forms of transportation in Feuillade's 1912 short film *La hantise*. Here, the seabound journey of upstanding patriarch Jacque Trevoux to the United States is made suspenseful by his wife's conviction that something tragic will happen to him during the journey. Halfway through the film, a cut-in to a close-up of a newspaper article reveals the impending tragedy of Jacques' voyage: the ship he is set

to take to America is the Titanic! Or so we think: this close-up and the continued anxiety of Jacques' wife lead us to assume that he is indeed boarding the Titanic, but a twist ending reveals that Jacques was forced to switch to the Carpathia at the last moment, which arrived in the States without a hitch.

Feuillade is obviously in awe of these monstrous sea vessels: several *actualité*-influenced scenes feature actual documentary footage of French passengers boarding a towering ship moored at a French seaport. The camera observes the even sloping contours of the ship in gawking admiration, moving slowly along the docks in order to convey the immense size of this ship. But the recreation of the Titanic's disastrous voyage (achieved through the use of models most likely shot in a fish tank at the Gaumont studio—actually quite a beautiful visual effects shot, if not at all convincing) reminds us that our awe towards such seemingly miraculous innovations, our faulty confidence in the infallibility of the human intellect, can end in ironic and disastrous tragedy.

This all refers back to another of the central tenets of the modernity thesis, and the last one I will be discussing here. This final tenet conceives of the cinema itself as the epitome of modern forms of vision and knowledge—the cinematograph as embodying modernity. This idea is succinctly reiterated by Leo Charney (who has addressed the concept of modernity in the cinema on several occasions); he writes:

> The emergence of cinema at the end of the nineteenth century crystallized into one form of technology, narrative, and experience the attributes of modernity expressed across the board in other discourses and phenomena… If we cannot understand the birth of cinema without the culture of modernity, we also cannot conceive modernity's culture of moments, fragments, and absent presents without the intervention of cinema, which became a crucible and a memorial for modernity's diverse aspects.[28]

This intimate link between cinema and modernity was similarly hypothesized by the

filmmaker and theorist Jean Epstein in 1921, who concluded that the "machine aesthetic," in its embrace of velocity, light, and the harmony of interlocking mechanisms, "created its masterpiece" in the cinema.[29] Their theories of presences and absences, of the ceaseless mechanical flow of the interior of the film camera, suggest a prioritization of fragments over durations, a celebration of brevity. In other words, the mobile vision accommodated by the film camera, the transformations that cinema made possible in shifting perspectives and temporal leaps, offered an apt parallel to the sensorial overload and reformations in time and space engendered by the modern city. Tom Gunning sees this "machine aesthetic" as cultivating an unpredictable delight out of the immediacy of the moment, which he in turn connects back to the cinema of attractions and its sudden flashes of spectacular moments.[30]

This "machine aesthetic" may become a bit clearer if we apply a concept articulated by David Harvey in *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. Although Harvey expresses severe reservations regarding the modernity thesis as a whole, he cites the theory of "creative destruction" as a site of agreement among numerous analysts of the age of modernization. This theory suggests that the new social configurations created by modernization necessitated the superseding or even wholesale destruction of the past: modernity created a tabula rasa "upon which the new [could] be inscribed without reference to the past."[31] In this quote, I find a certain similarity to the aforementioned theorists' notion of a cinematic "machine aesthetic," whereby the ceaseless flow of a strip of celluloid enabled a constant rewriting process that mobilized fragments of time—"shocking moments," in Gunning's conception—into a seamless illusion of smooth linearity. If we link Harvey with these aforementioned theorists, we may conclude that both cinema and modernity essentially incorporate "creative destruction"—a process of rewriting that must necessarily displace what came before it.

Fantômas, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* may in general be seen as embodiments of spectacular moments enabled by the mobility of spatiotemporal perspectives in cinema, but a particularly unsettling example occurs at the climax of *Juve contre Fantômas*. Here, Inspector Juve, his journalist sidekick Fandor, and the Parisian police have tracked Fantômas to an abandoned villa on the outskirts of Paris. Having trapped his pursuers in the manor by diverting their attention via a gigantic python released in the heating ducts, Fantômas escapes from the villa through a basement window and races to a nearby garage, where he had previously connected the activation device to a bomb placed in the manor's kitchen. With our heroes trapped inside, Fantômas activates this sinister device, causing a breathtaking explosion that foregrounds the villain against a red-tinted conflagration of dancing flames and skyrocketing debris. This is an astonishing cliffhanger ending to the second film in the *Fantômas* series, one that, as Tom Gunning points out, is clearly meant to horrify, baffle, and shock viewers into an invigorated frenzy. "How many of us, even today," asks Gunning, "can imagine the nightmares provoked in a darkened theater by the triumphant gesture of the 'man in black' at the explosion which ends *Juve contre Fantômas*?"[32] Undoubtedly, this sequence comprises one of Feuillade's most impressive cinematic feats. Yet while we are certainly awestruck by this scene's narrative progression—surely our heroes could not have succumbed to Fantômas's brilliant malevolence so early in the series!—as well as by the seamless visual effects used to portray this tremendous explosion (René Navarre, as Fantômas, is placed in front of a rear projection of the explosion, though the fusion of the two cinematic spaces is flawlessly convincing), we are equally overwhelmed by Feuillade's rapid editing structure and fluid spatiotemporal linearity between separate spaces. Each shot lasts approximately two to four seconds as Feuillade cuts from a long shot of Fantômas emerging from a basement window (Figure 1.1), to a long shot of the supervillain racing from the villa to the nearby garage (Figure 1.2), to a full shot from within

Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2

Figure 1.3

the garage that foregrounds Fantômas in a dim silhouette against the mansion erupting in a mad geyser of white flame and billowing smoke (Figure 1.3). Therefore, it is the literal machine of the bomb as well as the "machine aesthetic" of the film camera, fragmenting space and truncating time, that provoked nightmares in darkened theaters in 1913 France.

The interrelationship between the "machine aesthetic" of modernity and the cinema of attractions—which I will shortly be discussing in greater detail—suggests why I am exploring the modernity thesis at such length yet largely dismissing other theoretical frameworks: approaching the crime serials of Louis Feuillade through a Surrealist mode of interpretation relies upon the coexistence of a cinema of attractions and a narrative cinema, which are themselves inextricably tied to notions of the modernity thesis (as Gunning himself points out). Indeed, I believe we cannot truly understand the artistic and cultural concepts of Surrealist thinkers outside of the context of modernity. Furthermore, I believe that the crime serials of Louis Feuillade as existing *between* the cinemas of attractions and narrativity makes possible many of their unsettling effects, which the Surrealists embraced and cherished. In other words, Feuillade, Surrealism, modernity, and the attractions-narrative duality form a tangled web that, in conjunction, provides for much of the mystifying power that *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* still exert.

This foregoing appraisal of the modernity thesis has been far from comprehensive; indeed, perhaps I may be accused of the sort of massively broad and inconclusive association between

modernity and film that Bordwell rightfully criticized. In my defense, I claim that an analysis of Louis Feuillade in the context of the modernity thesis is not my primary aim with this project; such an analysis, in fact, would likely require its own full-length dissertation. I repeat, then, that I am establishing the groundwork for the modernity thesis in film simply to make it apparent how intimately connected this theoretical framework is to conceptions of early film history, concurrent artistic movements (Surrealism in this case), and Feuillade in particular—an intimate connectivity that will become increasingly apparent as this thesis progresses.

The modernity thesis is also connected to a broad cinematic concept that I will explore in greater detail in my conclusion: that of the "mode of uncertainty," especially as articulated by Vicki Callahan.[33] While I will save my analysis of Callahan's concept for my conclusion, here I would like to point out that the innovations and transformations of modernization themselves instilled great doubt and uncertainty in French thinkers and scientists in the late nineteenth century. Though this age was known for its scientific positivism, as David Harvey points out, it was a peculiar brand of positivism that was "beset by doubt, ambiguity, and tension."[34] Many thinkers and artists in nineteenth-century France—poets, economists, artists, historians, philosophers, and so on—aspired to create a "science" out of their field of study. Yet this wave of scientific positivism was itself tied to the lingering power of traditional class structures and sociopolitical mindsets (religion, monarchical authority, pre-modern economic and labor structures, etc.).[35] We may tie these aspirations towards scientific positivism and its straddling between two historical paradigms to the cinema itself, which partially grew out of a desire to meticulously document forms of movement (recall Eadweard Muybridge's 1879 zoopraxiscope and early attempts to record the stages of a horse's movement) and would soon be straddling two of its own historical paradigms: that of attractions and of the narrative tradition. The crime serials of Louis Feuillade, and other like-

minded French films made during the transitional period, could thus be said to occupy a cinematic mode of uncertainty that echoed the scientific doubt experienced by French culture as a whole in the mid-nineteenth century and beyond. Again, this concept will be more fully discussed in my conclusion.

There is, of course, one aspect of this "tangled web" that I have yet to discuss, and that is the transition from a cinema of attractions to a narrative mode of cinema. A topic of great debate in previous analyses of early film history, this transitional timeline is difficult—perhaps impossible—to trace definitively, and the specific aspects of both cinematic modalities are often problematic in locating precisely within filmic texts. In other words, where does a presentational cinema of attractions end and a representational narrative cinema begin, especially when both modes are coexisting within the same film? This question is especially difficult to answer in the context of Feuillade.

TRANSITIONS

Louis Feuillade began directing films for Gaumont in 1906—a time when, according to David Bordwell, the cinema was undergoing a massive transformation.[36] At the beginning of this "transitional" period, most films ran only one reel—fifteen minutes or less—and featured a tableau camera setup that typically presented action via an unchanging long-shot distance to accommodate the full movement of actors and objects through the frame. Over the next several years, however, as films grew in popularity and cinematic audiences expanded, films grew to several reels in length, thus garnering greater ticket sales from more "respectable" (read: upper-class) audiences who desired a full night of entertainment, thus bringing the cinema closer to staged theater. How were films expected to fill these extended running times, considering that prior one-reel exhibitions had

primarily showcased brief displays of shocking scenes (a la Thomas Edison's 1903 film *Electrocuting an Elephant*, which consists entirely of its titular act) or theatrical performances (William Heise's 1895 *Serpentine Dance*, also made for the Edison company, a hand-tinted presentation of a somewhat erotic female dancer sporting a flowing garment)?

The answer was a turn to narrative cinema. Drawing upon the classical tradition developed by representational literature and stage plays, the technological marvel of the cinematograph began applying its recording function to the telling of tales. As narratives grew in length and complexity, an arsenal of filmmaking tools was developed in order to establish clarity and increase visceral impact. This evolution of film language infused multiple camera angles into one scene (which previously would have been accomplished through a single tableau setup), edited together with increasing subtlety and power. Bordwell argues that this system of continuity editing was successfully calibrated, primarily by American filmmakers, by 1917.[37]

This transformation from a cinema of attractions to a cinema of narrativity has been influentially analyzed by Noël Burch and Tom Gunning (to name only two theorists who have covered this transitional period). Essentially, Burch conceived of a "primitive" era of filmmaking that began to formulate the techniques of cinematic representation that would later be amalgamated by the classical Hollywood system. This somewhat teleological concept suggests that, from its infancy, cinema was predestined to tell stories, to serve a primarily narrative function, and that the early years of presentational display (instead of *representational* verisimilitude) reflected a coming-to-terms with the very newness of this vastly innovative visual art.[38]

In charting the aesthetic transformation from a primitive mode of cinema to an institutionalized mode dominated by narrative, Burch conceives of a corollary primitive and institutionalized mode of *representation*, which he abbreviates to a PMR and an IMR. The former

would include the aforementioned unchanging tableaux, direct address to the audience, images that were often *not* centered in the frame, and general effects of "exteriority" and the lack of any narrative or developmental closure; the latter would incorporate a wide range of compositional and editing structures, ultimately alternating between varying shot scales, perspectives, and filmic spaces in order to maintain the linearity and clarity of the narrative. Burch concludes, "There really was…a *genuine* PMR, detectable in very many films in certain characteristic features, capable of a certain development but unquestionably semantically *poorer* than the IMR."[39] However, I believe it *is* questionable that the semantics, the cinematic language, of a primitive mode of representation are *poorer* than the attributes of the institutionalized or narrative mode of representation that we would come to know so well; semantically *sparer* or even *simpler*, maybe, but Burch appears to be applying a qualitative statement to a quantitative development. A greater variety of shots, or more frequent edits, does not inherently mean a richer cinematic language. As we will see in Feuillade, the tableau setup and other components of the primitive mode can be used for powerful thematic and visceral effects, even as they fluctuate and share screen time with a more "advanced" mode of representation.

Gunning, in contrast to Burch's concept of a linear (if turbulent) cinematic evolution, hypothesizes an early period of film history that can be separated into several distinct phases or modalities. He conceives of a "cinema of attractions," a phase of cinema's infancy that comprised its first years (often marked as 1895, though such inaugural timelines are always spotty) to 1906. This cinema of attractions, as briefly mentioned before, displayed or *presented* brief subjects through a tableau camera setup limited to one reel or less. Its emphasis, as the name implies, was on spectacle rather than narrative, featuring an overall aesthetic of shock, surprise, and direct address. This period was and is fascinating, Gunning argues, because of its "illusory power and exoticism."[40]

Following this early "cinema of attractions" period, Gunning conceives of a transitional period from 1908 to 1913, in which such attractions coexisted (sometimes contentiously) with the narrative mode, as both paradigms vied for cinematic supremacy.

Richard Abel, in his comprehensive history of the French film industry, *The Ciné Goes to Town,* conceives of a slightly different historicization of early film evolution. According to him, the cinema of attractions actually encompassed the years 1896 to 1904, and was especially dominated by *actualités* (scenes of everyday life that highlighted the realistic and mechanical recording function of the camera as an attraction in itself—early films of trains arriving at stations and workers leaving factories by the Lumière brothers would be the earliest and most telling examples); trick films (epitomized by Georges Méliès, whose accidental discovery of cinema's transformative power—his camera jammed while shooting, interrupting the recording of a horse-drawn carriage, an inadvertent jump which, when projected, "transformed" the carriage into a hearse that happened to pass by afterwards—resulted in displays of the film camera as prestidigitator, transforming bodies into skeletons, women into mermaids, and so on); *féeries*, or short fantasy films set in enchanted locales (forests, castles, etc.); and short comic acts or burlesques. The narrative system began to be developed between 1904 and 1907, Abel argues, when the Pathé-Frères company began producing "story films" in order to wrest editorial control away from exhibitors (who had been cutting or amending distributors' films, much to the chagrin of the latter). The consolidation of the narrative model was further advanced with the pre-feature single-reel story film between 1907 and 1911. Between 1911 and 1914, finally, the American system of continuity editing began to dominate, thanks especially to the advance in film language articulated by D.W. Griffith; it was also during this time that multiple-reel feature-length story films became popular.[41]

Whichever particular timeline we choose to adopt, it should be clear that, around 1910,

the dominance of the single-reel "attractions" film began to give way to the consolidation of the multiple-reel feature narrative, whose style was influentially developed by American filmmakers and the nascent institutionalized industry of Hollywood. In "Integrated Attractions: Style and Spectatorship in Transitional Cinema," Charlie Keil asserts that, in place of the spectacular and exhibitionist aesthetics of the cinema of attractions, narrative films during this transitional period were often conveyed in a relatively low number of shots, with editing primarily functioning to maintain movement in and between spaces (especially between interior and exterior locales).[42] While "shocking" or spectacular aspects of the cinema of attractions were sometimes infused into narrative filmmaking (particularly in trick visual effects or in astonishing action scenes that seemed to exceed their narrative function—two things we see plenty of in Feuillade), Ben Brewster argues that such attractions had to be "stripped of their previous [exhibitionist] function and neutralized before they [could] be reintroduced within a narrativizing context."[43]

But I find Keil's conclusion arguable; it seems as though we can indeed find numerous examples of shocking or spectacular attractions in narrative cinema, both in this early transitional period as well as in the later classical Hollywood studio system, that are neither neutralized nor stripped of their exhibitionist function. Tom Gunning, in fact, argues that the cinema of attractions *does not* disappear with the onset of a predominantly narrative cinema, but rather reappears in many avant-garde films as well as in certain genres of narrative (especially Hollywood) cinema, namely the musical and the action film.[44] In such cases, the cinema of attractions paradigm—the overall effect of sensationalism, shock, surprise, and spectacle—does not necessarily need to be neutralized or stripped of its exhibitionist function; it remains, albeit more intermittently, a display of pure kinetic onscreen movement (of the camera, of objects, especially of human beings), of astonishing feats and events, of non-narrative performances and stunts. In fact, given the narrative unevenness

of Feuillade's films, the cinema of attractions paradigm sometimes unifies his crime serials into cohesive texts more ably than their stories do. In this way, the narratives of Feuillade's films are "attractions" in themselves—spectacular displays of unpredictable cause-and-effect patterns, in which we are awed by the succession of barely-related, often preposterous, but completely stunning events forming a wild cinematic fabric.

Granted, one may claim that the majority of narrative filmmaking offers spectacular displays of unpredictable cause-and-effect patterns. Much classical Hollywood cinema, for example, is pleasurable precisely because it constructs its narratives so fluidly and often even unpredictably; the representation of a cohesive and clearly traceable story arc was perfected by the Hollywood studio system. Undoubtedly, however, the narratives in Feuillade's crime serials are markedly different than most Hollywood plotlines. To use the example of *Les Vampires* again, improbable or impossible events in the *syuzhet* often remain unexplained on a pragmatic level (*how* did these things actually happen?!), but they nonetheless follow a distinct and in some way logical narrative progression. When, in the episode "Satanas" (1916), the Grand Vampire Satanas draws a full-sized cannon from a secret panel in his apartment's sitting room and proceeds to fire upon a nearby Montmartre nightclub from his private balcony, we are never told how he could conceal this monstrous weapon within his cramped domestic space, nor where the nightclub is in relation to his apartment, nor how this most conspicuous of ploys could have gone unnoticed by everyone in the immediate area; nonetheless, it makes some sort of sense when we follow Mazamette out of the resultant rubble, or when we observe Satanas and his henchmen quickly placing the cannon back within its concealed space in the walls—cause, effect. Similarly, in the episode "The Thunder Master" (1916), Irma Vep supposedly flees from a prison ship embarking for Algeria by hiding in the infirmary as her fellow Vampires destroy the sea vessel with (again) a full-sized cannon—an

implausible tactic, yet one that we accept as having taken place when we soon see Irma return to Paris by clinging to the underside of a moving train. In other words, while narrative events are implausible at best throughout much of Feuillade's crime serials, their linear succession nonetheless forms a clearly constructed story progression. This odd duality of narrative clarity and absolute improbability forms, in my opinion, an attraction in itself—what Gunning called "an unpredictable delight [in] the immediacy of the moment."[45] For an analogy in the Hollywood studio system, then, we may compare Feuillade's crime serials to Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946), which is notorious for its deliriously intricate plotting—so intricate, in fact, that Hawks, screenwriters William Faulkner and Leigh Brackett, and even the author of the original novel, Raymond Chandler, could not determine who killed one of the story's victims.

The appearance of the cinema of attractions in later representational narrative filmmaking may be partially elucidated by Sergei Eisenstein's "The Montage of Film Attractions," the 1924 essay from which Gunning culled his terminology. In it, Eisenstein describes the cinematic or theatrical attraction as "any demonstrable fact (an action, an object, a phenomenon, a conscious combination, and so on) that is known and proven to exercise a definite effect on the attention and emotions of the audience"—a categorization that mostly agrees with the aspects outlined by Gunning's theory.[46] What distinguishes Eisenstein's essay from Gunning's later conception, however, is Eisenstein's emphasis on the "*montage*" of attractions. A concept that he explored throughout much of his written film theory and in his productions, Eisenstein argues that the interrelationship of montage elements in fact comprises the root of cinema's effect upon its audience. In contrast to the theater, which Eisenstein argues bases its effect upon "the physiological perception of an actually occurring fact," the cinema:

> …is made up of the juxtaposition and accumulation, in the audience's psyche, of associations that

> the film's purpose requires, associations that are aroused by the separate elements of the stated (in practical terms, in 'montage fragments') fact, associations that produce, albeit tangentially, a similar (and often stronger) effect only when taken as a whole.[47]

Eisenstein's emphasis on associations raised between "montage fragments" through their juxtaposition and accumulation—an accumulation which, Eisenstein argues, "does not make this a cinema of polished style," but rather a heterogeneous and overwhelming amalgamation of attractions (which Eisenstein then affirms is integral to mobilizing the proletariat in Soviet society)—raises the concept of *bricolage* that is so fundamental to Feuillade's crime serials, to Surrealism, to the transitional period between the cinema of attractions and the narrative cinema, and to the cinematic "mode of uncertainty" that I will eventually be exploring in this thesis.[48] If the cinema does indeed depend upon the interrelationship of numerous attractions working together (either through association or through juxtaposition), then we may cite Feuillade's crime serials as some of the most remarkably polyvalent, eclectic, troubling, and uncertain "montages of attractions" to come out of the transitional period. They infuse concepts of Surrealism, which itself is defined by associations between high and low art, between reality and non-reality, between the "presenting" word or image and the "representing" word or image. They are firmly placed in the transitional period that infused many elements of a spectacular, exhibitionist, non-narrative cinema of attractions with the nascent institution of a narrative form and content. And, because of the interrelationship of all of these elements, they create a "mode of uncertainty" that makes us perpetually unsure about the veracity of cinematic vision and human knowledge in general—and, on a more basic level, we are also unsure about what "kind" of a movie *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, or *Judex* really is—the genre or cinematic paradigm to which they belong. I will be discussing all of these eclectic sources throughout this thesis.

Although Vicki Callahan asserts that *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* "began a rich tradition of

questioning narrative certainty," Feuillade's crime serials (including *Judex*, in my opinion) were hardly alone in doing so during the transitional period. Indeed, numerous crime serials produced (in France as well as in the United States) during the teens were distinguished by unpredictable, rampaging narratives often comprised of ludicrous or improbable events in the *syuzhet*.[49] The underlying premise of two concurrent serials—Éclair's *Riffle Bill* (1908-9) and the Kalem Company's *Arizona Bill* (1911) in the United States—transplanted the modern detective into the old American west, often supplying their heroes with befuddling cases combining urban criminality with tropes familiar from the popular Western genre. These bizarre narrative formats, then—simultaneously spectacular and resolutely linear—must be contextualized within the transitional period between a cinema of attractions and a narrative cinema. Feuillade was not alone in formulating such peculiar *syuzhets*, but he is perhaps the clearest example of their invigorating unpredictability—an aspect which certainly endeared him to the Surrealists.

This transitional period provides the context for Feuillade's most active and most celebrated phase of filmmaking. *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* are narrative films, but we cannot so easily place them in the later narrative model; a number of aesthetic and visceral qualities place them quite firmly in the attractions paradigm, as will become clear throughout my following analyses.

Callahan tellingly contrasts Feuillade to the work of D.W. Griffith in America, the filmmaker most often celebrated for combining parallel editing, point-of-view shots, close-ups, and other aesthetic techniques into a cohesive and precise language for cinematic storytelling. The release of both *The Birth of a Nation* and *Les Vampires* in 1915, argues Callahan, represented "two distinct modes of cinematic expression and two separate paths for cinema history."[50] While the path forged by Griffith and *The Birth of a Nation* led to the classical Hollywood narrative (and, thus, the

narrative pattern for much industrial international filmmaking), the twisting, ominous, phantom-strewn path of *Les Vampires* is less clear. In the former paradigm, Griffith's narratives were not *simply* stories, but carried thematic and sociopolitical weight as well, purporting to speak about entire historical epochs, races of people, or cultural events; it was this ambition and semantic innovation that led American president Woodrow Wilson to proclaim that *The Birth of a Nation* was "like writing history with lightning."[51]

"If *The Birth of a Nation* gives us history written 'with lightning,'" Callahan concludes, "*Les Vampires* gives us history written by a phantom."[52] We may return, then, to the Louis Aragon quote that opened this project, which regarded the intrusion of phantoms carrying strange rays of light into the creaky gates of artistic tradition. Although Feuillade was firmly placed in the context of the transitional period of early film history and in the genre of the crime serial, it nevertheless remains true that he represents a style of filmmaking that is *both* narrative and spectacularly shocking—a mode of filmmaking that is troublingly and excitingly difficult to pin down. Certainly, this does not make him superior to Griffith, nor inherently more confrontational—both Griffith and Feuillade envisioned themselves, in vastly different ways, as morally conservative filmmakers working within a mainstream studio system. However, the greater indeterminacy of Feuillade *does* mean that, while Griffith forged a path that would lead to the thriving international success of the classical cinematic narrative, Feuillade's path leads to a mode of filmmaking that exists *between* cinematic paradigms. Callahan, then, places Feuillade in the "cinema of uncertainty," a mode in which not only the visual world before us is made strange, but the pattern of events itself is abstracted through the use of randomness and recursion.[53]

This cinema of uncertainty is admittedly a vague concept, precisely because it is so uncertain. It would seem to entail a refutation of all categories of filmmaking, even at a time when

such categories were only initially being constructed; films within the cinema of uncertainty would seem to be both realistic and non-realistic (if not necessarily Surrealistic), presentational and representational, occupying both the cinema of attractions *and* an institutional narrative cinema. The irony here, however, is that the cinema of uncertainty is obviously a *category* in itself, a method by which we may correlate and succinctly conceive of a group of like-minded films that, at first glance, avoid categorization. This irony is something I will discuss in greater length in my conclusion, for I believe this framework of the "cinema of uncertainty"—broad and vague though it may be—may help us understand not only why the Surrealists cherished Feuillade's crime serials, but also why he is perceived as inaugurating a cinematic legacy that has persevered to this very day throughout numerous international cinemas.

Yet it is crucially important to reiterate the point that I raised earlier: Feuillade was not alone in making crime serials, nor even in making crime serials that were troubling, aggressive, and surreal. The serial format in general was quite common and popular during the teens, partially due to an attempt to provide sufficient programming for movie theaters desperate to satiate the demand of an ever-widening cinematic audience. Before moving on to my analysis of a Surrealist approach to Feuillade, then, I must further discuss the generic and sociohistorical context in which his crime serials were released, if only to firmly establish the point that the power of his serials was not simply the result of a boldly iconoclastic auteur (though I do feel that Feuillade remains unique even in these contexts), but also the result of concurrent filmmaking genres and styles.

A Legacy of Crime

The detective serial was perhaps the most pervasive genre in French filmmaking during the teens. Episodes in detective serials were initially released irregularly on single reels, making for a

disjointed and extended narrative that centered around a male central figure. The most popular of these early serials were the *Nick Carter* series (produced by the Éclair studio from 1908 to 1912) and Pathé's semi-parodic *Nick Winter* series, produced from 1910 to 1914. Both of these series focused on the eponymous private detectives, urban professionals who sought to uphold law, order, and justice, protecting France's Third Republic from a ubiquitous and shape-shifting criminal threat.

Beginning in 1911, French detective serials began to switch to a multiple-reel format, concordant with the general trend in French cinema (and other international cinemas) at the time. As their lengths increased and popular tastes began to shift, the central character of these serials gradually switched from that of the heroic detective to the anti-heroic master criminal of the modern city—or, more topically, urban underground criminal gangs, which were in fact terrorizing Paris at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

Tied to the cinema of attractions' frequent indulgence in sensational scenes of violence and grotesquerie, such villain-centered films shaped detective serials into an offshoot of France's *grand guignol* tradition, which was itself a celebrated concept for Surrealist writers and artists. The *grand guignol* combined the melodramatic genre with tawdry *faits divers* crime stories of the era, often brutally invoking grotesque violence as a direct attempt to affront common conceptions of good taste. Pathé-Frères, the leading French production and distribution company at the time, was especially well-known for indulging the *grand guignol* tradition across a number of its genre pictures—for example, the melodrama *Le Moulin maudit* (1909), in which a miller discovers that his wife is having an affair and proceeds to kill her lover, strapping his corpse to the turret of a windmill and forcing his wife to watch it circle endlessly. (Unsurprisingly, this film incited great controversy in France and was heavily censored upon its release in the United States.)[54] In the *grand guignol* subgenre, according to Vicki Callahan, *visceral* rather than *visual* knowledge is key—a

conception which itself refers back to the duality between presentation and representation, attraction and narrative.[55]

The most wildly successful of these tawdry criminal-focused serials was Éclair's *Zigomar*, which, according to Richard Abel, "radically transformed the adventure film series almost single-handedly in September 1911."[56] Accused of glorifying its vicious central character, *Zigomar* pitted the master criminal against his nemesis, the Paris Chief of Police, Paulin Broquet. The serial was based on Léon Sazie's popular serial novel, which had appeared weekly in *Le Matin* from December 7, 1909, to June 22, 1910. For his cinematic adaptation, Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset "retained and even strengthened Sazie's conception of Zigomar as evil reincarnate in the modern dress of a bourgeois gentleman," according to Abel; Zigomar is a "capitalist entrepreneur pushed to the point of excess and completely at ease anywhere he happened to appear in contemporary society."[57] Glamorized as omnisciently powerful and perpetually elegant, vilified as mercilessly greedy and totally corrupt, Zigomar became a compelling embodiment of both the repugnant criminal class (for conservative viewers) and of the noble, self-sacrificing, anti-establishment vigilante (for more radical viewers). His evil/courage is manifested in the scene in which Zigomar and Chief Broquet meet unexpectedly at the Moulin Rose nightclub; in order to conceal his escape, Zigomar blows the place up, killing dozens, yet makes sure to lift the jewelry off of their corpses before stealing away.

To be sure, the overall synopsis of the *Zigomar* series is echoed quite closely by *Fantômas*, which was put into production by Gaumont in order to compete with the successful Éclair-Jasset serial. Feuillade certainly retained Jasset's ambivalent depiction of a central character who was both repugnantly evil and irresistibly debonair, who terrorized the bourgeoisie and seemed to infiltrate and control the modern urban space with superhuman ease. While Jasset provides us with few close-ups to break the tableau setup in *Zigomar*, he does cut between these tableaux with

remarkably fluid parallel editing. In a 1912 sequel to the *Zigomar* series, *Zigomar contre Nick Carter*, for example, Jasset stages a scene in which a piano is thrown down a flight of stairs by a gang of Zigomar's henchman in order to crush the detective Nick Carter (making an intra-studio crossover appearance). Jasset's cutting between the gang of villainous piano-tossers, Carter's desperate escape, and the piano's hurtling, reckless path, is indicative of the crosscutting that Griffith would further develop three years later in *The Birth of a Nation*, and that would come to define much later action filmmaking.

With *Fantômas*, meanwhile, Feuillade breaks up his tableaux much more frequently, providing the viewer with close-ups of not only significant narrative information, but also of objects (and occasionally even of human figures) that are simply remarkable in their magnification. If his use of parallel editing is less advanced than Jasset's, his variety of shot scales and unique perspectives provides an alternative tactic for escaping the "autarchy" of the tableau which had dominated the cinema of attractions. Furthermore, the grisly violence in Feuillade's *Fantômas* series is even more brutal, more shocking, and the concentration of that violence upon apparatuses of the French state makes the serial's confrontational aspects even more unavoidable. An example is the climax to the first *Fantômas* film, *À l'ombre de la Guillotine* (1913), in which Fantômas, after being apprehended by Inspector Juve, covertly smuggles the famous actor Valgrand (who happens to look almost exactly like him) into his jail cell on the night before his scheduled execution at the guillotine. Poor Valgrand is rescued at the very last moment by Juve, who is so obsessed with his evil nemesis that he can recognize the physical difference between him and Valgrand from the "audience" of the public beheading. (Tense as this climax is, it pales in comparison to the original novel *Fantômas* by Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre: the climax in the novel has Valgrand successfully decapitated, only to have Juve leap upon the guillotine's platform, hold the severed

head in his hands, and realize too late that Fantômas has escaped again![58]) Fantômas's elaborate ploy in order to make the French government responsible for the decapitation of an innocent man is typical of Fantômas's utilization of the French state as a weapon against itself; we see this again in the third film in the series, *Fantômas contre Fantômas*, when the eponymous villain's gang of thieves kidnaps Inspector Juve by infiltrating the Palais du Justice via a network of scaffolding erected outside of the judicial building for its planned remodeling. The sensational violence in Feuillade's *Fantômas* series turned out to be a double-edged sword: while the series was wildly popular in France (particularly among young audiences, and of course the Surrealists), it was a drastic failure in the United States, where its aggressive violence and moral ambivalence were deemed as essentially (and ethnocentrically) "European." This will be discussed more fully in my conclusion.

If Feuillade was heavily influenced by detective serials released by Gaumont's competitors (both in France and in the United States), he was also, of course, influenced by the literary sources from which he culled his fantastic stories. While *Les Vampires* and *Judex* were original scenarios, *Fantômas* was adapted from a series of novels written by Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre beginning in 1911. (By the end of the novels' run in 1913, they had published 32 installments in the series, all of which were sprawling tomes at about 400 pages each—over only two years!) Wildly popular with French readers, the *Fantômas* books were approached as sources for cinematic adaptations by both Pathé and Gaumont in 1913, with Gaumont winning out by a sizable sum of money.[59]

There is some irony in the decision to adapt *Fantômas* onto film. After all, literary adaptation had been initiated in 1907 (the same year that a United States court first recognized copyright violation in a motion picture: the Kalem Company's *Ben Hur*) as a fertile source for the greater number of cinematic narratives that audiences were demanding; but it was also approached

as a way to incorporate some much needed respectability into the cinema, which had been perceived as a "low" form of art populated by members of the lower class who were (supposedly) easily amused by its sensationalism. This disparity between a "low" cinematic art defined by its sensationalism and a respectable cinematic art defined by its prestigious literary and theatrical sources certainly influenced, quite strongly, the continuing transition from a presentational cinema of attractions to a representational narrative cinema. Of course narratives transposed onto film from prestigious sources were not inherently a higher art form than the cinema of attractions, but this is how these different filmmaking modes were widely perceived by filmmakers, studios, writers, and audiences during the transitional period (from approximately 1905 to 1915) and even much later—arguably even until today. (We may think of the cultural cache attached to cinematic adaptations of acclaimed novels like *Atonement* [2007] or the film-to-Broadway-to-film adaptations of *The Producers* [1968 film, 2001 musical, 2005 film]). The desire to adapt well-known literature and drama to film, then, was a desire to put movies on the same level as novels and the theater: an attempt to lure the middle and upper classes into cinemas by denoting some kind of literary pedigree. But of course, the *Fantômas* novels were seen as tawdry, trashy pulp fiction immediately upon their release; their displacement onto movie screens would certainly not attract the reputable audiences that film producers were then aiming for.

But of course, as Tom Gunning cites in "The Intertextuality of Early Cinema: A Prologue to *Fantômas*," film studios were equally desirous of the working class attendance that already comprised the majority of film audiences.[60] This, in fact, is precisely why early westerns, melodramas, and detective films were so popular in both France and the United States (on the whole, more economically successful than their "high art" counterparts culled from respectable literature, stage plays, and biblical stories): despite the widening of cinematic demographics, the

majority of moviegoers continued to desire the titillating stories that popular culture had to offer.

Another telling comparison may be made between Feuillade's crime serials and their most successful American counterpart—*Les mystères de New York*, the first episode of which was released by Pathé-Frères in 1915. As noted earlier, this French release was actually cobbled together from three serials that had been produced in America (see page 3). Truncated and reedited by Pathé (who had also produced the three American versions through their stateside branch, as they had set up a joint production and distribution firm in the United States with the Edison Trust Company), *Les mystères de New York* received a solid publicity campaign and regularly scheduled screenings that coincided with serialized publication of the French adaptation of the original stories by Pierre Decourcelle. (Their American antecedents were inaugurated by Charles W. Goddard in his novel *The Perils of Pauline*.) Partially because of this well-funded and well-organized marketing campaign, *Les mystères de New York* was extremely popular in France—prompting Gaumont and Feuillade to rush another crime serial, *Les Vampires*, into production as competition. Thanks to advanced knowledge of *Les mystères de New York*'s release and Feuillade's incredibly rapid production style, Gaumont was actually able to release one episode of *Les Vampires* before the release of the American serial. However, *Les Vampires*—plagued throughout its production by shortages of production equipment and actors due to World War I, as well as censorship pressure exerted by mayors and prefects throughout France—was far less successful than *Les mystères de New York*.[61]

The popularity of the American serial in France was partially due to its introduction of Pearl White, the actress who starred as adventurous, resilient, self-reliant Pauline (and Elaine). An embodiment of the "new woman" phenomenon, White was seen as a fascinating signpost for American culture, as her fashionable, more masculine attire and ceaseless athleticism were seen as evidence of the newness of American culture.[1] Yet if the serial was seen as compelling for its unique

"Americanness," it was also distinguished by its relatively less advanced aesthetic techniques (at least in relation to *Zigomar* and Feuillade's serials) and its surprising moral conservatism. In the first episode of *The Perils of Pauline* (included in *Les mystères de New York*), "Trial by Fire," for example, the film never breaks out of its tableau setup except to provide us with close-up cut-ins of narratively significant text (particularly the will of Pauline's guardian, Mr. Marvin, which promises that she will inherit his vast fortune only upon marrying his son). One would assume, perhaps, that the serial would be somewhat more liberal in its moral viewpoint, seeing as how Pauline is often empowered during action scenes, and by the very fact that she refuses to marry Mr. Marvin's son Harry (at least initially) so that she may live a life of adventure first. However, peculiarly, the serial often provides her with the thrilling spotlight only until the conclusion of each episode, wherein she often becomes ludicrously fatigued or incompetent and relies upon the aid of her prospective husband to rescue her from her captors. (For example, at the end of "Trial by Fire," after she has escaped from a wayward hot-air balloon headed for a rocky cliff by releasing the anchor and climbing down the entire rope, she calls to Harry—observing her plight from a cliff high above—that she is too tired to make it the rest of the way down, necessitating his descent down the cliff, and her rescue in his arms.) So while *Les mystères de New York* was peculiar in its perceived American qualities, and successful due to its powerful Pathé-backed marketing campaign and other cultural fascinations, it also seems less innovative (by today's standards) in relation to many of its French counterparts.

The crime serials of Louis Feuillade, then—and the director's signature style in general—can be seen as *bricolage* of a number of different commingling influences. The detective story, the *grand guignol*, the *faits divers* drawn from scandalous affairs sensationally documented in tabloids, as well as the "fantastic" nature of supernatural horror stories (Edgar Allen Poe, H.P. Lovecraft) and

the melodrama's comparative moral conservatism and reaffirmation of French law and order—all of these influences found their way into Feuillade's scintillating shockers. Such a polyvalent wellspring of influences thus parallels the troubled (or, maybe more accurately, troubling) existence of these films *in between* the paradigms of a cinema of attractions and a narrative cinema. Though not alone in this indeterminacy, specifically amongst both French and American crime serials during the teens, Feuillade's films powerfully and invigoratingly represent a mode of filmmaking that is difficult to pin down. They are both high art and low art, presentational and representational, real and unreal—an assortment of paradoxes that, we will soon see, appealed to the Surrealists' taste for art that confronted dominant perceptions regarding cultural respectability. We may not be able to simply regard Feuillade's films as Surrealistic, since they were simultaneously conservative and mainstream, and may be grouped with a number of similarly unsettling crime serials. However, it remains true that *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* represent the "new phantoms" of which Louis Aragon wrote in "Challenge to Painting": electrifying forms of art that carry "strange rays of light" in their footsteps.

My following chapter, entitled "Specters and Spectacles," will attempt to link Feuillade's crime serials to the aesthetic and sociopolitical concerns of Surrealism. Why, indeed, were so many Surrealist artists and thinkers so entranced by the films of Feuillade? For although his narratives are dynamic, steamrolling patchworks flitting from one setpiece to the next, there is nothing explicitly *surreal* about them. In an improbable and sinister world, the events we see would not be impossible—and Feuillade's subversive tactic is that he *is* telling us that our world is improbable and sinister. He fashions a spectacular, shocking, and fantastic world out of a mode of filmmaking that he considered the cinema's foremost aim: to tell a story. The following chapter, then, discusses

elements of *grand guignol* violence and the notion of the "fantastic" or "the marvelous" in his films. Furthermore, it reiterates several Surrealist writers' beliefs in the deconstruction of typography and the human body as formal elements to be rearranged, as well as the belief that the modern urban space could conceal ominous and sinister forces within its landscapes and architecture. This chapter will not merely be an endorsement of Surrealist values, for the essence of a Surrealistic approach is a sociopolitical one. Surrealism seeks to topple entrenched cultural values of the bourgeoisie regarding art, education, religion, morality, and other cultural values. "Specters and Spectacles" will attempt to delineate the subversive elements in Surrealist writings and in Feuillade, while reiterating the point that a Surrealist approach to his crime serials (even if they are not categorically Surreal themselves) may illuminate previously uncovered aspects of *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex*.

Finally, my conclusion will ask what any analysis of historical cinema always should: why is this study still relevant? My framework here will predominantly focus upon the concept of "national cinema," with Olivier Assayas's 1996 film *Irma Vep* my primary point of analysis. A "pseudo-remake" of *Les Vampires*, Assayas's film casts Hong Kong actress Maggie Cheung in the role of Irma Vep—a character who, according to one character in the film, "is Paris. She's the Paris underworld. She's working-class Paris. She's Arletty!" By casting a non-French actress in this, supposedly, quintessentially French role, Assayas is asking many of the questions regarding the concept of national cinemas that I will also address: What do Feuillade and his films, and Irma Vep, say about the history of a French national cinema? Does such a thing still exist, especially given the increasingly globalized industry of international filmmaking at the time of *Irma Vep*'s production? Did such a thing ever exist? Many French cinematic theorists and writers over the last century have considered Feuillade as an instigator of a specifically French mode of filmmaking: even Andre

Bazin, for example, has claimed that Louis Feuillade (along with Jean Renoir and Georges Méliès) "is probably the sole Mr. Cinema that France has ever had the privilege of knowing."[62] This rather astonishing and humbling assertion forces one to ponder what is essentially "French" about Feuillade, though such broad and essentialist national characterizations are always precarious slopes to scale.

In order to analyze if and how Feuillade and his crime serials represent a specifically French mode of filmmaking, I will look at several editorials and reviews from both the American and French popular press in the teens in order to provide a firsthand account of early conceptions regarding national cinemas on an international scale. These primary sources offer revealing insights into the sociopolitical contexts and perspectives of early national cinemas.

Lastly, in my conclusion I will be readdressing Vicki Callahan's assertion that Feuillade's crime serials exist in a cinematic "mode of uncertainty." What does this mean, exactly? Though *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* certainly resist easy categorization—as I've mentioned, they may variously be deemed presentational and representational, real and surreal, high art and low art, and so on—they nonetheless may certainly be categorized, especially within the context of French crime serials in the transitional period of early cinema. The cinema of uncertainty presents us with a paradox: it is a category of film that resists categorization, a label of cinema that resists labeling. Is this kind of paradoxical mode of filmmaking, like Feuillade's crime serials, "French" by nature? How has it permeated various national cinemas, especially in the last decade? By exploring these questions, I hope to achieve my aforementioned goal: to answer why this study of Louis Feuillade through a Surrealist lens is still relevant.

Notes to the Introduction

[1] Aragon, Louis. "Challenge to Painting." *Surrealists on Art*. Ed. Lucy Lippard. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970. 38.

[2] Feuillade's subsequent crime serials—*La nouvelle mission de Judex* (1918), *Tih Minh* (1918), and *Barrabas* (1919)—would certainly add great insight to this project as well, but I will not be addressing them for two reasons: the scope of this thesis, since an analysis of all six of Feuillade's serials during the teens would need to encompass an epic-sized tome (which, hopefully, will be attempted by someone at some point); and availability, since these three films have not yet been released in the United States by the Gaumont company. In any case, the three series/serials I will be analyzing offer a succinct and telling encapsulation of the issues I wish to address.

[3] Desnos, Robert. "*Fantômas, Les Vampires, Les Mystères de New York*." *French Film Theory & Criticism, 1907-1939*. Ed. Richard Abel. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. 398.

[4] This biographical background on Feuillade is indebted to two works: see Vicki Callahan, "The Innovators 1910-1920: Detailing the Impossible," *Sight & Sound* April 1999, www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/154 (no pagination); and David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*: *On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 43.

[5] Feuillade, Louis. "Introduction." *French Film Theory & Criticism, 1907-1939*. Ed. Richard Abel. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. 225.

[6] Aragon, Louis. "On Décor." *French Film Theory & Criticism, 1907-1939*. 165.

[7] See especially: Vicki Callahan, *Zones of Anxiety: Movement, Musidora, and the Crime Serials of Louis Feuillade* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005); and Elizabeth Ezra, "The case of the phantom fetish: Louis Feuillade's *Les Vampires*," *Screen* 47.2 (Summer 2006): 201.

[8] Abel, Richard. *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896-1914*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994.

[9] See: Bordwell *Figures Traced in Light* (op. cit.); and Francis Lacassin, *Louis Feuillade* (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1964).

[10] Gunning, Tom. "The Intertextuality of Early Cinema: A Prologue to *Fantômas*." *A Companion to Literature and Film*. Ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 127-143.

[11] See: Short, Robert, ed. *The Age of Gold: Surrealist Cinema*. London: Creation Books, 2003.

[12] Finkelstein, Haim. *The Screen in Surrealist Art and Thought*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007. See especially 15, 36-8, and 41.

[13] One may question my decision to infuse an analysis of the modernity thesis into the middle of my introduction instead of, say, devoting a whole chapter to it (as, in fact, an earlier draft of this thesis did), but as we will see, issues of modernity are so prevalent in Feuillade's films, and the dislocating transformations of the modern age so heavily inform the Surrealist movement, that the concepts of the modernity thesis will in fact be reappearing often throughout this thesis.

[14] Bordwell 40.

[15] Ibid 246-7. Bordwell cites two separate articles by Tom Gunning, which are: "Early American Film," *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 268; and *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 105. Another telling example of Gunning's application of the modernity thesis to Feuillade's films is "Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives, and Early Cinema," *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

[16] See Harvey, David. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 2003. 3-19. Of course, summarizing the transformations of modernization in Paris in only one paragraph can only achieve the most limited of all possible histories. I mean only to briefly assert that historical evidence makes it unavoidably apparent that modernization did indeed entail pervasive transformations across nearly all spheres of Parisian life.

[17] Callahan *Zones* 58. She here cites the theories of nineteenth-century philosopher Henri Bergson, particularly the fourth chapter, "The Cinematographical Mechanism of Thought and the Mechanistic Illusion—A Glance at the History of Systems—Real Becoming and False Evolutionism," in his book *Creative Evolution*. She does not, however, provide citational information.

[18] Callahan *Zones* 58.

[19] Harvey 110.

[20] These statistics are drawn primarily from Harvey 109-10.

[21] See: Schwarz, Michiel, and Jeremy Millar. *Speed: Visions of an Accelerated Age*. London and Amsterdam: The Photographers' Gallery, the Trustees of the Whitechapel Art Gallery, the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, and the Netherlands Design Institute. 1998. 28.

[22] Harvey 111.

[23] Ibid 114.
[24] Abel, Richard. *Americanizing the Movies and 'Movie-Mad' Audiences, 1910-1914*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006. 185-6. Abel here is drawing upon the theories of Tom Gunning. He cites Gunning "Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives, and Early Cinema" 20.
[25] "*The Diamond Crown*." *Moving Picture World* 17.1 (5 July 1913): 138.
[26] Cendrars, Blaise. "Profound Today." Quoted in Schwarz and Millar 24. No citation.
[27] Schwarz and Millar 21.
[28] Charney, Leo. *Empty Moments*: *Cinema, Modernity, and Drift*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998. 7.
[29] Epstein, Jean. "The Senses I (b)." *French Film Theory & Criticism, 1907-1939*. 241.
[30] See Gunning, Tom. "Now You See It, Now You Don't: The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions." *Silent Film*. Ed. Richard Abel. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996. 71-84. 81-2.
[31] Harvey 1.
[32] Gunning "The Intertextuality of Early Cinema" 138.
[33] See especially Callahan, Vicki, "The Innovators 1910-1920: Detailing the Impossible," and "Screening Musidora: Inscribing Indeterminacy in Film History," *Camera Obscura* 48:16.3 (2001): 59.
[34] Harvey 253.
[35] For more information on this scientific uncertainty in nineteenth century France, see Harvey 253-66.
[36] See Bordwell 45.
[37] Ibid 45-6.
[38] For a representative overview of Burch's concepts regarding this topic, see: Noël Burch, "How We Got Into Pictures: Notes Accompanying *Correction Please*," *Afterimage* 8/9 (1981): 24-38; and *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: British Film Institute, 1990).
[39] Burch, Noël. "A Primitive Mode of Representation?" *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*. Ed. Thomas Elsaesser. London: British Film Institute, 1990. 220.
[40] Gunning, Tom. "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde." *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*. Ed. Wanda Strauven. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2006. 381-8. 382.
[41] See Abel *The Ciné Goes to Town* xv.
[42] See Keil, Charlie. "Integrated Attractions: Style and Spectatorship in Transitional Cinema." *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*. 193-203. 196-7.
[43] Brewster, Ben. "A Bunch of Violets." Unpublished paper, 1991. Quoted in Keil 197.
[44] Gunning "The Cinema of Attraction[s]" 382.
[45] Gunning "Now You See It, Now You Don't" 81-2.
[46] Eisenstein, Sergei. "The Montage of Film Attractions." *The European Cinema Reader*. Ed. Catherine Fowler. London: Routledge, 2002. 26.
[47] Ibid 26.
[48] Ibid 26.
[49] Callahan "The Innovators 1910-1920: Detailing the Impossible" no pagination.
[50] Ibid.
[51] This oft-cited quote can be found in Callahan "The Innovators 1910-1920: Detailing the Impossible" no pagination.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Callahan "Screening Musidora" 66.
[54] See Abel *The Ciné Goes to Town* 205-6.
[55] See Callahan *Zones* 26-7.
[56] Abel *The Ciné Goes to Town* 358.
[57] Ibid 358.
[58] Allain, Marcel, and Pierre Souvestre. *Fantômas*. New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1986. 324.
[59] See Abel *The Ciné Goes to Town* 371.
[60] See Gunning "The Intertextuality of Early Cinema" 129-30.
[61] For further information on the production and distribution background of *Les mystères de New York*, see: Callahan, Vicki. *Zones of Anxiety*: *Movement, Musidora, and the Crime Serials of Louis Feuillade*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2005. 99. See also: Canjels, Rudmer. "Localizing Serials: Translating Daily Life in *Les mystères de New York*." *Early Cinema and the National*. Ed. Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini, and Rob King. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University

Press, 2008. 215-25.

[62] Bazin, Andre. "*The Last Vacation*, or The Style is the Man Himself." *Bazin at Work: Major Essays & Reviews from the Forties & Fifties*. Ed. Bert Cardullo. Trans. Alain Piette & Bert Cardullo. New York: Routledge, 1997. 16.

Chapter One

Specters and Spectacles

> It's a cinema more marvelous than any other. Those who have a gift for dreaming know full well that no film can equal, in either unforeseen contingencies or tragedy, that indelible life to which their sleep is consecrated. From the desire to dream comes the thirst for and love of the cinema. For lack of the spontaneous adventure which our eyelids let escape on wakening, we go into the dark cinemas to find artificial dreams and perhaps the stimulus capable of peopling our empty nights.
>
> – Robert Desnos, "Dream and Cinema," 1923[1]

The artificial dreams of cinema coinciding with the inauguration of Surrealism: Desnos was not the only writer to appreciate the synchrony. Indeed, many Surrealist writers and thinkers conceived of the cinema as a site for the visual manifestation of the oneiric qualities of everyday life. Here, in the cinema, an *impression* of reality reigned supreme (the mechanical recording by an impartial eye of what was physically in front of the lens), but it was not tethered to reality as we know it. As Richard Abel writes, what attracted the Surrealists to the cinema "was its power to overturn the laws of logic and social convention."[2] "Its singular power of disorientation," wrote André Breton in perhaps the most famous endorsement of cinema by a Surrealist, "cast us outside ourselves and at the same time awakened in us forces of which we were unaware."[3] The Surrealist credo of delving into one's own unconscious could thus be accommodated by the cinema, which—in its darkened theaters, in its uninterrupted flow of images that did not abide by spatiotemporal reality, and in the paradox of an isolated community of film watchers banding together silently as receptacles for cinematic images—represented the interiorization of the dream state. In theories of

Surrealism applied to film, first articulated by such writers as Philippe Soupault and Louis Aragon in the late teens, the storehouse of images supplied by the projector "gave access to the unconscious and to unexpected conjunctions."[4] As poetry transposed the inner consciousness of the writer into a non-representational dream facsimile via text, so did the cinema equally transmogrify human vision as we typically experience it into a dreamlike distortion, particularly human vision as it processes the modern urban space.

The Surrealists were especially entranced by the cinema of Feuillade; this was a fascination that can clearly be seen in a number of their writings from the 1910s. So compelling did they find the character of Fantômas in both the source novels and Feuillade's adaptation—compelling in his manifestation of the bridled anxieties and stifled frustrations of modern Parisian life—that Guillaume Apollinaire and his circle of literati at *Les Soirees de Paris* formed a special club in his honor: the "Société des Amis de Fantômas."[5] Maurice Raynal, a member of Apollinaire's circle, gushingly proclaimed his love for Fantômas upon the release of the series' fifth episode, *Le faux magistrat*, in 1914: "What nobility! What beauty! It's one of those things that stuns you; its serene majesty, like inimitable brilliance, leaves you breathless, dazed, and mute."[6] Raynal continues by praising the character's original creators, Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre, for having "discovered, recognized, understood, and (should I say?) loved him."[7]

Feuillade, it seems, loved the character of Fantômas too, despite the fact that the eponymous criminal is a completely heartless villain who (for example): murders an innocent merchant and hides his chemically embalmed corpse in a trunk in an abandoned apartment; kills a painter and makes a glove fashioned from the corpse's flayed skin in order to leave the fingerprints of a dead man at crime scenes; and strands a jewel thief in the middle of a massive bell in a church tower, sending a shower of blood and stolen jewelry onto a church service when the bell is struck

the following morning. Why did Feuillade and many Surrealist writers embrace this heartless murderer so unabashedly? Perhaps because he is an elegant gentleman who orchestrates his villainous plots with superhuman ease—he is a paradox, the sort of dapper supervillain that was in fact characteristic of numerous French crime serials of the 1910s (see *Zigomar*). Perhaps because Fantômas often directed his villainy at the Parisian upper class and institutions of the French state that were instrumental to a new and economically stratified modern capitalism—thus, at an institution that was villainous itself. Or perhaps more simply because Fantômas's merciless stunts enabled an indulgence in the prurient allure of the cinema of attractions, the allure of observing astonishing spectacles vibrantly played out on a movie screen.

The opening scene of the first *Fantômas* film, *A l'ombre de la Guillotine* (1913), has Fantômas emerging from the flowing curtains of a posh hotel room—a site of elegance and wealth that immediately refutes the notion that he is simply a thug, a lower class practitioner of crimes of avarice and greed. On the contrary, he emerges from these curtains and introduces himself to the horrified Princess Danidoff, a *petit bourgeois* who seems simultaneously entranced and horrified by the dapper man before her. At this early point in the film, Feuillade breaks with his tableau setup in order to provide us with a medium close-up of Danidoff's ambivalent reaction to this intruder.[8] Before swiftly stealing a stack of money from her locked armoire, Fantômas leaves her with a calling card. Following his brusque disappearance from the hotel (he escapes undetected by quickly killing a bellboy in the elevator and donning his uniform before the lift reaches the bottom floor), Princess Danidoff holds the calling card before her (and us) in an extreme close-up—only to reveal that it is blank on both sides. After a few moments of Danidoff's puzzled astonishment, however, a single word appears on the white piece of paper: FANTÔMAS!

This is our introduction to the mysterious villain, following a prologue that features a series

of dissolves showcasing the numerous disguises that Fantômas will utilize throughout the episode—a sequence that explicitly recalls the cinema of attractions in its direct address (as René Navarre, in the role of Fantômas, stares directly at the camera in a medium shot) and in its emphasis on the uniquely cinematic technique of the dissolve. (See Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3) It is, however, also narratively significant, as these disguises offer us clues by which we can "solve" the central mysteries of the episode, *if* we can recall which specific disguises are donned by Fantômas during this preparatory prologue. Here, then, is a perfect example of Feuillade straddling the cinemas of attractions and of narrative storytelling. This attention-grabbing (attraction-displaying) prologue piques our interest by forcing us to question who Fantômas *really* is. His first interaction with Princess Danidoff answers our rhetorical question by presenting us with a ludicrously debonair thief who even conveys his *name* in a fascinating, seemingly magical way. We're helplessly attracted to Fantômas by the end of the second scene of the series.

As a matter of fact, this form of opening credits sequence, in which the actors performing in the film are presented to the audience most typically in a frontal medium shot, was common for narrative films functioning within the transitional period. This technique embodied quite clearly the middle ground between the cinema of attractions (with its presentational exhibitionism, its direct address, and its embrace of human movement as recorded and projected by the cinematic apparatus) and the narrative cinema (in providing us with a clear exposition of the figures and characters who will be prominent in the following story). However, no other opening credits prologue that I am aware of introduces us to actors and/or characters by dissolving between the numerous incarnations that they will inhabit throughout the film. By opening his *Fantômas* series in such a way, Feuillade not only emphasizes the significant function that disguises and role-playing will have in the narrative; he additionally emphasizes several tenets of the cinema of attractions that

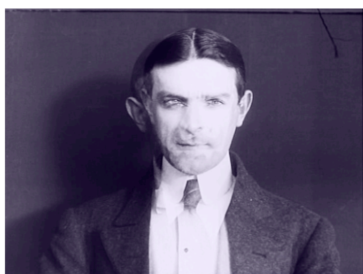

Figure 2.1

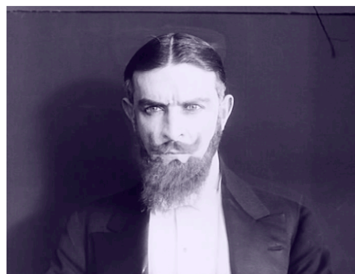

Figure 2.2

Figure 2.3

will reappear prominently throughout the *Fantômas* films (and that reappeared often in many crime serials during the transitional period), as well as suggesting the themes of uncertainty and indeterminacy regarding individual identity and the veracity of human vision that underlie *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and (to a lesser extent) *Judex*.

Another telling example of Feuillade's admiring representation of Fantômas occurs in the second film of the series, *Juve contre Fantômas* (1913). At the beginning of the third part of the episode ("The Haunted Villa"), the wealthy aristocrat Lady Beltham, who has initiated a reckless love affair with Fantômas after he's killed her husband, covertly steals away to an abandoned mansion, where she and Fantômas have been rendezvousing every Wednesday at midnight. By this point alarmed by the sinister acts he is forcing her to carry out, Lady Beltham moves frenetically and anxiously through a number of exterior spaces in static full shots in order to arrive at the abandoned mansion (the "haunted villa" of the title). Though Feuillade's tableaux are static, there is still great movement through the frame, thanks to Renée Carl's skittish performance as Lady Beltham at this point in the series. After a series of four such tableaux, edited together with comparative rapidity (the shot duration for each tableau is about six seconds), we suddenly cut to an interior tableau featuring Fantômas—disguised as Lady Beltham's past husband, Gurn—staring directly at the camera in an "American shot" (from the knees up). He is placed almost directly in the center of the frame, slightly to screen right. The dynamism in this editing pattern is incredibly

powerful. Following a succession of shots featuring the distanced movement of a tragic character through exterior tableaux, we have a comparatively close shot in an interior space that suddenly switches to direct address. (See Figure 2.4) Through the juxtapositions elicited here, we can only conclude that Fantômas has complete control over not only Lady Beltham and over *us*, the audience, but also on the form of the film itself—the movie literally stops in its tracks when Fantômas looks the camera in the "eye." When Raynal claims that there is nothing in the *Fantômas* films but "explosive genius," he is referring to both Fantômas himself, the master criminal, and to Feuillade, the master craftsman.[9]

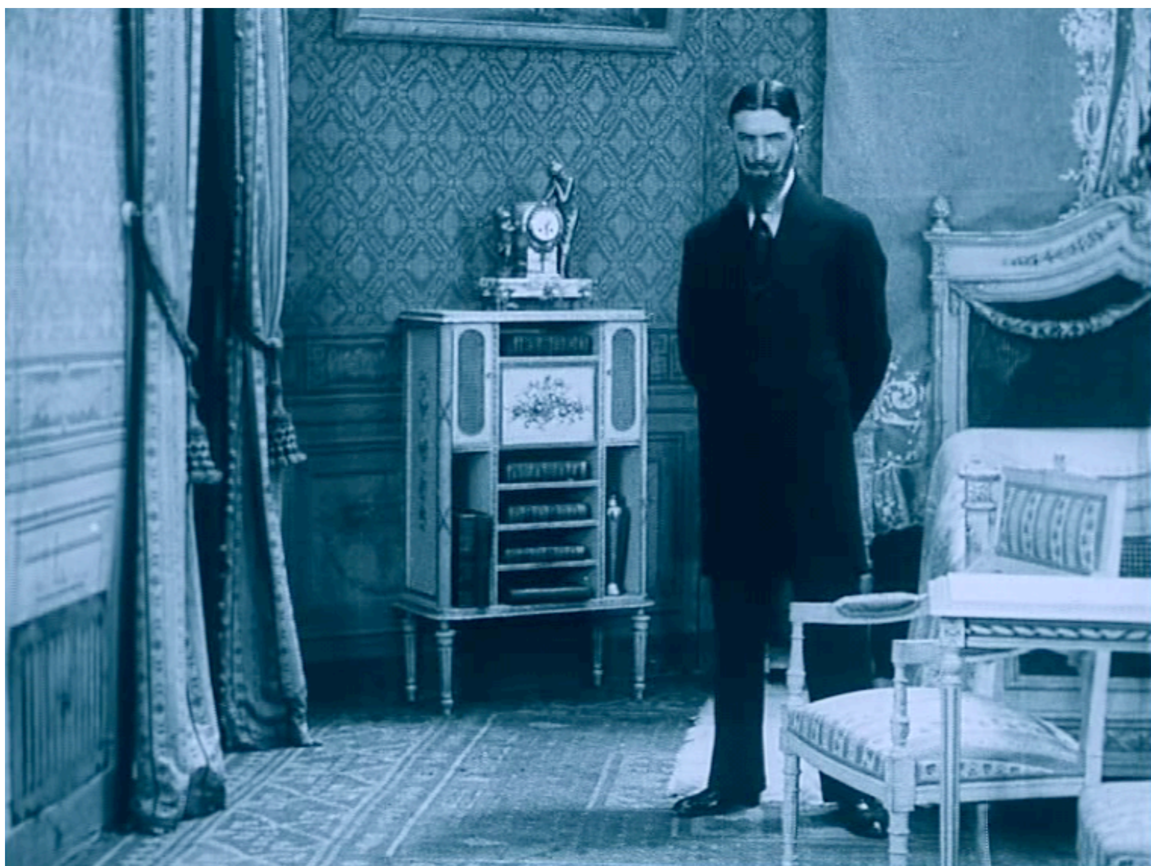

Figure 2.4: ***Juve contre Fantômas*** **literally stops in its tracks as its titular supervillain stares down the camera—and the audience.**

VISIONS OF THE FANTASTIC

Throughout this chapter, I will further discuss the Surrealists' love for Feuillade's utilization of techniques from the cinema of attractions, as well as their celebration of the "explosive genius" of Fantômas's villainous exploits (which themselves are presented to us with unsettling power through the cinema of attractions paradigm). First, though, I must explore a significant concept that reappears throughout much Surrealist theory, a concept not only confined to cinema. Crucially, the Surrealists loved Feuillade because of his evocation of the "fantastic," which, to quote Richard Abel, "explored the fantastic, diabolical powers surging beneath the surface [of reality] and charging the most ordinary objects of modern life."[10] Described as "the evil twin of melodrama" by Vicki Callahan, the fantastic seeks to obfuscate conceptions of clarity and certainty on all registers.[11] It is, then, the specifically Surrealist manifestation of the cinematic mode of uncertainty prevalent throughout many French crime serials of the transitional period. Within the sphere of the fantastic, narrative patterns are unpredictable, seemingly impossible actions are portrayed with disconcerting naturalism, and the aesthetic mode switches often between the cinema of attractions' presentational display and the narrative cinema's representational diegesis.

The concept of the "fantastic" gains some clarity if we recall Tzvetan Todorov's 1973 analysis of it. In our real world, Todorov argues—"a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires"—there occurs an event that cannot be explained by the laws of science as we know them. Those who experience such a disconcerting event, Todorov argues, have two interpretations available to him or her: he or she can conclude that they are the victim of some kind of sensory illusion or play of the imagination, in which case the laws of reality remain as they are and human preconceptions remain unchanged; or he or she can accept that the event *did* take place, that this "unreal" event is in fact an integral component of reality, but that this reality is not yet fully known

to us. The second interpretation, of course, is the one the Surrealists favored—an interpretation that allows for a dynamic, changing system of knowledge, in which we are not constrained by theories of "reality."[12] Further unsettling aspects of the cinematic fantastic include non-realistic movement (flying, slithering, oozing, etc.), dislocation, and alterity. The unsettling effect of the synthesis of these unnatural elements, argues Rosemary Jackson, is that "a 'bourgeois' category of the real is under attack," a sociopolitically-charged confrontation that the Surrealists also appreciated as essentially subversive.[13] As we will see, the "fantastic" treachery committed by Fantômas and the Vampires is often indeed directed at bourgeois individuals or institutions—a literal manifestation of Jackson's theory that the fantastic essentially confronts the bourgeoisie and its traditional conceptions of what defines reality.

A concept closely related to that of the fantastic is "the marvelous," an eerie, intangible quality of non-reality that existed behind and within the quotidian reality visible to us every day. In "Challenge to Painting," Surrealist writer Louis Aragon embraces the concept of the marvelous and attempts to elucidate it. He writes: "The real nature of the marvelous is that man is without doubt the least amazed. It suffices for him to think that this or that returns to the marvelous so everything is in order and he can go back to sleep."[14] In other words, "man's" characteristic reaction to the marvelous would represent the first of the two possible interpretations available for the individual who experiences an event that defies reality (according to Todorov). In the face of supernatural events, the majority of people would assume it to be a trick of the eye, a play of the brain; they would assume that there *must* be some kind of rational explanation for it.

In *Les Vampires*, such individuals would be the supposed "heroes" of the story, the blandly bourgeois journalist Philippe Guèrande and his wacky sidekick Mazamette. In pursuing the Vampire gang, Irma Vep, and the Vampires' criminal archnemesis Moreno, Guèrande and Mazamette are

perpetually confronted with events either mysterious or inexplicable. For example, in episode five of *Les Vampires*, "Dead Man's Escape," Moreno has been captured by Guèrande and Mazamette, but before he can be imprisoned he swallows a cyanide capsule and dies in the magistrate's office! The jailers stow his corpse in a prison cell overnight. That night, however, we observe Moreno's lifeless body as it suddenly reanimates itself from beneath a shroud-like white sheet—first a twitch of the leg, then a raising of the torso. He waits until the following morning, then suffocates one of the prison guards and escapes undetected.

The audience could assume that Moreno's "cyanide" pill was simply a fake, that it was only a temporary paralytic instead of lethal poison. However, he had been proven dead in the magistrate's office by the house physician, and in any case, that would not explain how a reanimated "corpse" escaped from a well-guarded prison undetected. In any case, the conclusion that one adopts in response to this fantastic act comes to distinguish whether or not the laws of reality hold true, or if our conceptions of science and knowledge have been completely violated. Is it possible, within this alternative reality, that the criminal Moreno could somehow reanimate his own corpse and invisibly steal away from a well-guarded prison? Must we forge new opinions regarding the rules of science and reality by which society traditionally operates? The fact that we are faced with such questions makes it apparent that *Les Vampires* takes place in the realm of the fantastic. This idea is further clarified by a subsequent scene: Guèrande, unaware that Moreno has vanished from prison, is seated at an outdoor café. Moreno himself boldly walks directly to Guèrande, who, after a moment of surprise, simply calls to two policemen to (re)apprehend the criminal. But another level of the improbable is folded into this scene: these two policemen are actually Moreno's own henchmen, wearing rented police uniforms. Guèrande responds to all of this with, at most, a puzzled hesitancy; he is indeed "the least amazed" at this marvelous

happenstance.

The man who *does* notice the marvelous, continues Aragon, "appears to be the person who can consider it slowly as a dialectical urgency born of another, lost urgency."[15] The incorporation of dialecticism here, with its connections to Marxist socialism, evokes the socioeconomic aspects of Surrealism. Indeed, we may think of Marx's famous quote: "If everything were as it seems on the surface, there would be no need for science."[16] The unexpected connections between Marxism and Surrealism may be gleaned from this quote: since reality as we know it cannot be easily ascertained or understood simply through sight or experience, one must attempt a fuller understanding of it through science (as Marx and other sociopolitical theorists attempted); or, for the Surrealists, through concepts such as the fantastic and/or the marvelous. Through this linkage, we may figuratively deem Surrealism a "science" in itself—a concept of alternative realities that attempts to forge a fuller understanding of a world that is impossible to easily fathom. While Louis Aragon's conception of the marvelous as a dialectical urgency is remarkably vague, it seems to point towards the manifestation of the marvelous born out of its antithetical interaction with a bourgeois society constrained by overly restrictive notions of science, knowledge, the laws of the universe, etc. This cultural hegemony, this suppression of inquisitiveness in the face of the marvelous, would seem to be the dialectical force that instigates the presence of the marvelous, the preternatural, in the first place.

We may shed some light on this topic if we apply Aragon's concept of the marvelous to *Judex*. This third crime serial by Feuillade is, in many ways, the mirror image of its two predecessors: in *Judex*, it is the eponymous vigilante superhero, upholder of law and order, who can wield the powers of the marvelous, and it is the villains around him (the greedy capitalist banker Favraux, the lower-class criminal Diana Monti and her gang of thugs) who do not notice or don't

want to notice his awesome power. The most surreal component in *Judex* is a magical typewriter that literally inscribes its text in flames: as Judex types, his words supernaturally manifest themselves in a burning specter of text in the jail cell of Favraux. We eventually learn the backstory to the antagonism between them through a flashback: when Judex was only a young boy, Favraux destroyed his family by withholding money made on financial speculations (the flashback is quite unclear) from Judex's father—all because his mother resisted Favraux's sexual advances. This drives the family to financial ruin and eventually impels Judex's father to commit suicide. Decades later, then, this typewriter of Judex's seems to have adopted mysterious and magical powers directly as an outgrowth of Judex's noble crusade against the injustices of an avaricious capitalist industrialist modernity. With the new economic structures imposed by industrial capitalism, Favraux has turned into a monster, a grotesque embodiment of the villainous capitalist drive to cheat and exploit due to one's excessive wealth and sense of entitlement. Out of this dialectical antagonism, then—the antagonism between an excessively wealthy bourgeoisie and the middle or lower classes that it exploits in order to preserve its superiority—Judex (and his typewriter) have been imbued with supernatural powers. A conceptual stretch? Perhaps. But aside from this admittedly skewed dialectical reading, the only explanation for Judex's inflammatory writing instrument is a kind of randomly floating supernatural aura that has simply decided to alight itself in Judex's contraption—which, it must be said, is an equally feasible interpretation in the bizarre world of Feuillade's crime serials.

These concepts of the fantastic and the marvelous are manifested in numerous ways throughout *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex*; indeed, one could say that these crime serials in general operate by showing us spectacular actions that could not exist in our reality as we know it, and by forcing us to decide whether the existence of such fantastic acts is the result of tricks of the

imagination, or of a separate and unknown reality existing within the one we know. The manifestation of fantastic or marvelous forces in Feuillade's crime serials is a concept that will run throughout this chapter, since the visual presence of such non-real forces was certainly one of the aspects that endeared him to the Surrealists.

COMMON OBJECTS

If the Surrealists loved Feuillade for his evocation of the fantastic and the marvelous—an ethically rooted reality existing within our own reality that topples all of our preconceived notions—they also embraced him for his awed appreciation of everyday objects, advertisements, and consumer goods: the beauty to be found in the banal. Aragon, again, can help clarify this concept; in an article published in the Parisian journal *Le Film* in 1918, Aragon wrote:

> Before the appearance of the cinematograph hardly any artist dared use the false harmony of machines and the obsessive beauty of commercial inscriptions, posters, evocative lettering, really common objects, everything that celebrates life, not some artificial convention that excludes corned beef and tins of polish… Those letters advertising a make of soap are the equivalent of letters on an obelisk or the inscription in a book of spells: they describe the fate of an era.[17]

Aragon concludes by claiming, "only the cinema which directly addresses the people could impose these new sources of human splendor on a rebellious humanity searching for its soul."[18] The Surrealists were in the minority in considering such everyday consumer goods "sources of human splendor," but this embracing of popular, "low" culture defined the Surrealists' desire to break down pre-established boundaries separating commercial objects from artistic objects. Although corned beef and tins of polish are nowhere to be found in Feuillade, he does foreground the presence of commercial signs and banal objects quite frequently, especially in *Fantômas* and *Les*

Vampires. The most exciting example occurs in the second *Fantômas* film, *Juve contre Fantômas.* The journalist Jerome Fandor is seated at an outdoor café, trailing the mysterious Josephine, who (we will soon find out) is a member of Fantômas's gang. As he waits for Josephine to emerge from an elegant-looking apartment building, we watch Fandor wait in the foreground, situated in the center of the frame. Behind him, suddenly, a large truck passes through the frame from screen right to left. This vehicle can hardly escape our attention, as it's the only source of movement in the frame and features a gigantic black design on its trailer adorned with white lettering: "ORIFLAMME AUTOMOBILINE," the moving advertisement reads. (See Figure 2.5) It's actually quite possible that this moment was included in the film inadvertently, since Feuillade cuts almost as soon as the truck passes all the way through the frame. (Filmed via an *actualité* approach—on location in the streets of Paris, with non-actors who were unaware of the production and with unarranged objects passing through the frame—it is indeed almost certain that Feuillade did not intend to include the advertisement.) But nonetheless, it is here in the film, and it is incredibly successful at placing us in a modern urban space that is simultaneously invigorated and suffocated by ubiquitous advertisements and commercial objects.

An odd subversion of Feuillade's love for commercial goods can be seen in an earlier short film entitled *Buying a Cow* (1908), which, argues Richard Abel, demonstrates the Gaumont company's predilection for turning genre stories into sly social commentaries.[19] In this short comedic film, a bourgeois couple impulsively decides that they want to buy a cow for their Parisian apartment. After much consternation and haggling, they finally do succeed in buying *just the right* cow (as, the film suggests, wealthy bourgeois can find a way to buy just about anything they desire), only to return to their apartment and have the concierge deny the cow access. An altercation ensues. A mischievous bystander, meanwhile, replaces the live cow with a toy pig, a replacement

that the bourgeois couple ludicrously don't even seem to realize—happily, they bring the toy pig into their elegantly decorated apartment, seemingly content that they have at least acquired *some* material item with which to populate their living space. Here, the commercial product is used as a tool to lampoon the urban bourgeoisie. Neither a sign of beauty nor an indication of the exciting eclecticism of the modern city, this ugly toy pig is instead a satire of the wasteful and petty compulsion to *consume* for those with money in the modern age.

While the common commercial object serves a satirical function in *Buying the Cow*, it receives a more positive treatment in Feuillade's crime serials. In addition to the aforementioned ORIFLAMME AUTOMOBILINE advertisement that scuttles across the screen in *Juve contre Fantômas* (inadvertent though its inclusion may have been), Feuillade often provides cut-ins to extreme close-ups of common objects—hats and other items of clothing, pistols and other weapons, trunks and briefcases concealing human bodies and other significant materials, etc.—that evoke the "obsessive beauty" (in Aragon's words) of mundane, everyday objects. In fact, in the first film in the *Fantômas* series, *Á l'ombre de la guillotine*, a cut-in to a close-up of the tag inside the brim of a hat serves not only an aesthetic function, but a narrative one as well. We inspect the tag along with Inspector Juve and discover two significant pieces of information: the initial "G" (which we will soon discover stands for the name "Gurn," the false identity that Fantômas is currently assuming); and the name and address of the haberdashery from which Fantômas bought this piece of clothing. (See Figure 2.6.) At the most basic level, Feuillade's cut to an extreme close-up of this tag allows the audience to play detective along with Juve, thus serving a primarily narrative function; yet it also imbues this most common of objects with a sinister and mysterious quality, foreshadowing the violent antagonism that will soon occur between Juve and Fantômas, alias Gurn.

Figure 2.5

Figure 2.6

DASTARDLY PLOTS

We have seen that Feuillade incorporates elements of the fantastic, of the marvelous, into his films, yet we still have to analyze *how* such elements are conveyed. What is it, precisely, that made these crime serials so gleefully disconcerting for the Surrealists—certainly not simply their stunt-filled action scenes (throwbacks to the cinema of attractions) and their absurdly breakneck plotting?[20]

That plotting, in fact, is seen by Vicki Callahan as the central element to the Surrealist atmosphere evoked in Feuillade's crime serials. She recognizes, not only in Feuillade but also in earlier examples of French literature (Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* in particular—no relation to *Les Mystères de New York*), a "sinusoidal" narrative structure defined by recursion: "tension, resolution, renewed tension, further resolution, and so on."[21] This sort of recursive plotting leads to a disconcerting sense of déjà vu—in *Les Vampires*, for example, four different characters are dispatched by being lured out of windows, ensnared by ropes tossed into the air by Vampires waiting on the sidewalk, and tugged into a freefalling, twisting plummet to the concrete below. In Callahan's estimation, the excess of events, the preponderance of plot, lead once again to a cinema

of uncertainty effect. This is achieved, she argues, because "there is a displacement of anxiety from one object to another each time the narrative is repeated."[22] In other words, the excitement and unpredictability of the narratives do not so much lie in *what* will happen but *to whom or to what* it will happen. The broad narrative pattern of Fantômas escaping from his captors, or the various Grand Vampires assassinating police magistrates, is reiterated in a cyclical nature. In a general way, audiences know the narrative progression that will shape each episode of *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, or *Judex*: the villains will concoct an elaborate ruse, the forces of law and order will discover these plots and chase after their nemeses, said criminals will often be apprehended, but each episode will end with a cliffhanger that allows the villains to escape, often by placing our heroes in extreme danger. The effect of "uncertainty" achieved by the recursive plots thus stems not from the overarching narrative progression but in the specific forms these reiterated narrative patterns will take: *who* will die at the hands of Fantômas or the Vampires*, what* bizarre weapon the villains will use, *how* these nefarious criminals will make their spectacular escapes.

In order to further explain Callahan's concept, *Les Vampires* can again be used as an example. At the end of the sixth episode, "Hypnotic Eyes," the criminal Moreno has abducted Irma Vep from the Vampires and has taken her back to his lair. After originally intending to hold her for ransom, Moreno finds himself falling hopelessly in love with Irma, and uses his fantastic powers of hypnosis to force her to love him in return. As proof of his awe-inspiring powers of hypnosis (achieved, as the title to the episode suggests, via his uncanny ocular prowess), Moreno orders Irma to shoot the next man who walks into the room, and tricks the Grand Vampire—the head of the Vampire gang, who has donned a roster of disguises throughout the serial so far (we've known him alternately as Count Kerlor, Dr. Nox, the Baron de Mortesalgues, and others)—into walking into Irma's room before he does. Irma does indeed shoot and kill the Grand Vampire, and we wonder

for a moment if the head of the Vampires is really dead!

But one of *Les Vampires*' primary recursive tactics is introduced at the beginning of the next episode, "Satanas." There are, in fact, a number of successive Grand Vampires, seemingly lying in wait in case any tragedy should befall his predecessor (and tragedies befall Grand Vampires with alarming regularity in this serial). The episode begins with the *new* Grand Vampire—Satanas—approaching Moreno's apartment. We are treated to a gorgeous extreme close-up, as Satanas gingerly positions a needle laced with a paralytic toxin in between his bare palm and his glove, with the tip of the needle protruding through the fabric. (*Les Vampires* is maybe the earliest example I've seen of a "tactile" cinema—a cinema so revealing in its close-ups of textures, bodies, fabrics, surfaces, and the like, that the viewer imagines he or she can simply reach out and experience the sensation of touch.) Satanas and Moreno converse tensely in Moreno's sitting room, in a scene that's remarkably similar to the altercation that ended the previous episode. Will Moreno once again hypnotize Irma into killing her "leader"? Will he perform the lethal act himself? Or will Satanas, prepared for such villainy, inject Moreno with his debilitating poison? We know violence is around the corner; the unsettling and uncertain effect created is that we *know* we've seen this basic pattern before, but the shapes and figures have changed. Anxiety is displaced, to use Callahan's phrasing, from the pistol fired by Irma Vep in the previous episode, to the deadly needle protruding through Satanas's glove.

Callahan similarly cites the numerous chase scenes in *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* as examples of this disconcerting recursive nature. Indeed, she claims that these chase scenes are so redundant in nature that a narrative resolution of them is virtually impossible, at least on a broad scale: we know that the chase structure will recommence either later in the same episode or in the next, and although different characters may be involved in these chases, the end of each individual chase does

not offer a conclusion so much as an intermission before the next recursion.

A particularly befuddling example can be found in the fourth *Fantômas* film, titled (in a somewhat fantastic play on recursion and identity in itself) *Fantômas contre Fantômas* (1914). The title receives its manifestation during a masked ball held by the Duchess Alexandra, who has been working secretly with the police in order to capture Fantômas. Hoping to lure the brilliant criminal to the festivities, the journalist Fandor and a member of the police both dress in Fantômas's trademark costume: a tight-fitting black jumpsuit complete with a black hood. (This is somewhat similar to the black *maillot* worn by Irma Vep in *Les Vampires*, although in that case Irma's body is heavily eroticized—we are meant to desire Irma and her criminality.) At one point during the costume ball, two of these three Fantômas figures walk outside conversing; since there appears to be no sense of urgency to their interaction, we assume that it is simply Fandor and the other nameless policeman. We react with some anxiety, then, when a *third* Fantômas figure emerges from the costumed ball and follows close behind them. This third figure tails the other two Fantômases for several moments, then loses them in a thicket of foliage deep in the woods. Then, the terrible reveal: the nameless policeman lying on the ground, knifed by Fantômas; and the third figure who had pursued them removes his hood, revealing the face of Fandor. Indeed, the "real" Fantômas has already escaped. The police's experiment in trapping him through a masquerading of his identity has proved lethally unsuccessful. If, as Callahan argues, general narrative structures are repeated with anxiety displaced from one figure onto the next through the uncanny effect of repetition, that receives its sinister epitome here: the repetition not only of chase structures but of human figures, refracted into a multiplication of appearance and identity.

The recursive nature of the narrative in Feuillade's crime serials thus serves a surreal or fantastic function in itself: by repeating broad narrative strategies (the chase, the cliffhanger ending,

the assassination plot) yet emphasizing the refractions or slight alterations between them, *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* instill an uncanny déjà vu sensation. We may know on a general level how the plotline of each episode or film will progress, but the specific iteration of those plotlines achieves the effect of anxiety by concealing from us the actual form those chases, murders, or figures will take, until the latest possible moment. Here, then, I should reiterate that the uncanny effect of these narratives was not limited to Feuillade's crime serials; indeed, other French films within this genre during the transitional period similarly progressed along a similar recursive narrativization (dastardly plot, chase, cliffhanger, repeat), and many of them achieved a similarly unsettling effect via this sense of déjà vu. We may conclude, however, that *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* may have been the most absurd in their repetitive nature, the most uncannily cyclical in the truly bizarre forms those broad narrative structures would take. When we witness a seemingly unending roster of Grand Vampires concoct a succession of similarly spectacular criminal plots, the improbability of those schemes reiterated over and over again indeed instills an uncanny and fantastic effect. This improbability in fact leads us to the next manner in which Feuillade's crime serials achieve a sense of surrealism.

ACTUALITY AND IMPOSSIBILITY

Perhaps the predominant way in which Feuillade achieves the effect of the fantastic, the marvelous, and/or the uncertain is through the seemingly realistic depiction of events that could never happen (at least, in the world we know). *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* in particular are heavily influenced by an *actualité* style of filmmaking, shot on location in a documentary style, simply observing an event as it unspools before the camera's watchful eye. Feuillade's adept control of a naturalistic aesthetic is further achieved by his continuity editing techniques, which become

increasingly frequent and confident as the films progress (as continuity editing was in general on an international scale). Variations in shot scale are cannily edited together in order to maintain a linearity in space and time, but that linearity, that clarity, is refuted by the outlandishness of the plots. This creates what Todorov deemed "ambiguous vision"—vision that is irrefutable, but seemingly impossible, a central tenet of a cinema of the fantastic.[23]

Again, I should clarify that such "ambiguous visions" are not peculiar to Feuillade. Indeed, Richard Abel cites a similar juxtaposition between realism and non-realism in Jasset's *Zigomar contre Nick Carter*. In this 1912 film (which doubtlessly influenced Feuillade heavily), location shooting in and around Marseilles and Toulon, particularly of panoramic mountain ranges and desolate seaside docks, places us in obviously real locales. But the film is also an "orgy of sensationalism" (according to the American film journal *Bioscope*), in which the astonishing preternatural powers of Zigomar (who can literally make objects appear out of thin air, such as a team of servants and a greyhound in one scene) and Nick Carter (who has the ability to change disguises in seconds flat—aided by stop-motion camera techniques, of course) are conveyed through trick effects left over from the cinema of attractions.[24] "Together with all the melodramatic coincidence and violence [in *Zigomar contre Nick Carter*]," Abel concludes, "this conjunction of fantastical acts and demonstrably real spaces creates a fascinatingly schizoid vision of the world as simultaneously normal and abnormal, as marvelous as it is disorienting."[25]

Fascinatingly schizoid is an apt summation for *Zigomar contre Nick Carter*, yet it also suits Feuillade incredibly well. Again, *Les Vampires* offers numerous shocking examples of fantastical acts taking place in demonstrably real spaces. In the final episode, "The Terrible Wedding," Mazamette trails his inamorata, the recently widowed Augustine Charlet (despite the fact that her late husband had just been poisoned by the Vampires, Mazamette wastes no time in striking up a flirtatious

Figure 2.7

Figure 2.8

rapport), to a building of some apparent disrepute in the region of Montmartre. Feuillade includes a considerably lengthy scene in which Mazamette simply follows her around the streets of Montmartre, a sequence obviously shot on location. Indeed, Feuillade cuts between a number of extreme long-shots that heavily accentuate the urban milieu; movement in and between frames is certainly linearized, but the real purpose of these shots is to observe the developing architecture that acts as a background to Mazamette's chase. Scaffolding is erected in front of a number of these half-constructed buildings, like skeletons protruding through architectural flesh. The verisimilitude of these images is striking: by simply following Mazamette and Augustine through the streets, we seem to come to know these avenues intimately. (See Figure 2.7.)

We return to this locale later in the episode, as Augustine leads Mazamette and Guèrande back to the Montmartre building we observed in the earlier scene. It turns out she had been lured there by the Vampires, who attempted to hypnotize her into releasing lethal poison into the bedroom of Guèrande and his newly-married wife (the plan was almost successful—it was only stymied because Mazamette, thanks to his jealous surveillance, was aware of the ruse). Irma and Moreno, trapped on the top floor of this towering building, desperately search for a way out.

Astonishingly, Irma finds a long coil of rope, anchors it to a corner of the roof, and proceeds to wrap herself within it; then, she literally rolls off of the roof of the building, and we watch in extreme long shot as the rope unravels—twistingly, jerkingly, violently—all the way down the façade of the tall building, with her plummeting to the earth far below within the coils of the rope. (See Figure 2.8.) It seems like there truly is a human figure inside of the rope as it unravels down the side of the building, though of course it's hard to tell from such a distanced vantage point. In any case, this spectacular stunt, played out in a locale which had previously been presented to us in such matter-of-fact, naturalistic detail, can only act as a disconcerting anomaly—a "fascinatingly schizoid" conflation of unreal acts in real spaces, forcing us to doubt the validity of what we're seeing onscreen. This scene is likewise a perfect encapsulation of the transitional period's balancing of presentation and representation: Irma's astonishing stunt is exhibited for us in an unbroken extreme long-shot that retains the exhilaration of its movement and its magnitude, but this sequence is also *represented*—contextualized into the narrative and conveyed through apparent verisimilitude.

Mention should be made of a similar scene in *Judex*. In "The Licorice Kid," the sixth episode of the serial, little Jean, the absurdly precocious young son of tragic widow Jacqueline Favraux, is staying in Paris with the private detective Cocantin. (Cocantin is played by Marcel Lévesque, whose broad comedic mugging made Mazamette into such a charming character in *Les Vampires*. This fine comedic actor also makes a compelling character out of the oft-buffoonish Cocantin.) The criminal genius Diana Monti (played inimitably by Musidora, who was immortalized as Irma Vep in *Les Vampires*) attempts to kidnap young Jean in order to lure Judex out of hiding (she wants to kill Judex and release his captive, the banker Favraux, in order to cheat Favraux out of his fortune). But

Figure 2.9

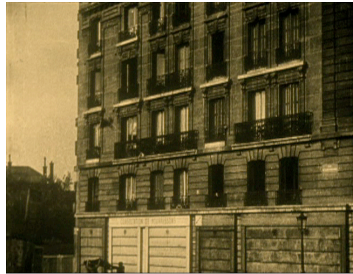

Figure 2.10

Figure 2.11

"the Licorice Kid"—a young rapscallion played by another standout from *Les Vampires*, René Poyen (the child star who had also headlined Feuillade's comic *Bout-de-Zan* series)—attempts to rescue young Jean, whom he had befriended upon Jean's arrival in Paris. Working with Judex and his noble brother Roger (played by Édouard Mathé—Guèrande in *Les Vampires*), the Licorice Kid is able to sneak Jean out to Cocantin's balcony by presenting a note from Judex asking for "proof" that the child is indeed in Cocantin's office. Here is where we experience a stunning stunt: from Cocantin's balcony, dizzyingly high in the air, with a vista of Paris visible in the background (if this is a rear projection or a background matte, it's incredibly seamless), the Licorice Kid hurls adorable moptop Jean off of the vertiginously high balcony! Feuillade then completes the illusion with two very quick edits: first, to a long shot of Judex and Roger waiting with a net far below; then, rapidly, we cut to a full shot of Judex and Roger catching Jean's plummeting body in the net. It's an effect that's remarkably similar to the one previously achieved in *Les Vampires*, made powerful due to the seamless incorporation of visual effects and Feuillade's untypically rapid use of continuity editing. Of course, the fact that this adorable young boy may be plummeting to his death also adds to the disconcerting effect. (See Figures 2.9, 2.10, and 2.11.)

Yet the real/unreal paradox conveyed in so much of Feuillade's cinema (and in *Zigomar contre Nick Carter*) reverts back to a broader conception about reality in the movies. In his introduction to *The Age of Gold: Surrealist Cinema*, Robert Short cites the cinema as "an antidote

for…the prevailing 'cancer of the mind' according to which certain things incontrovertibly 'are,' while others that welcomely might be 'are not.' This is because film is naturally ambiguous; all events—the dream as much as the document—can be presented as equally real."[26] A Surrealist cinema, then, need not be markedly or self-consciously unreal—indeed, a naturalistic document of a city street (like those in Montmartre, featured in *Les Vampires*) may be as Surrealistic as a Lynchian dream sequence, and conversely a willfully abstract cinematic moment may accurately be deemed realistic or naturalistic. That is the paradoxical nature of film spectatorship: the mechanical function of the cinematograph records images so faithfully that even the most bizarre events transpire with some naturalism, while the experience of watching three-dimensional scenes projected onto a two-dimensional surface necessitates a forced perspective that makes even the most realistic documentary footage innately *un*real, or untrustworthy.

We see a surprisingly metacinematic representation of this in *Les Vampires*, as Guèrande and Mazamette attend the cinema in the sixth episode, "Hypnotic Eyes." The interior space of the movie theater is initially conveyed through a long shot that is almost entirely comprised of the diegetic movie screen; we can only barely see the tops of moviegoers' heads at the bottom of the frame. As soon as the projector flickers on, however, we cut to an unexpected reverse shot representing the onscreen audience: a dozen or so individuals in the audience, all returning the camera's gaze (as they're looking up at the screen). As soon as the "film" starts, however, the diegetic space of the movie screen suddenly turns into a three-dimensional theatrical stage. The film that begins to play is a newsreel of the Vampires gang, but this is no newsreel: Irma Vep herself, along with the Grand Vampire and some other members of the gang, can be seen standing onstage at the front of the theater, ostensibly appearing on the two-dimensional plane of the movie screen. (See Figures 2.12, 2.13, 2.14, and 2.15.) What a discombobulating moment! One of the most

Figure 2.12

Figure 2.13

Figure 2.14

Figure 2.15

complex *mise en abîme* compositions in the history of cinema, Feuillade is here conflating the cinematic and the theatrical space, questioning modes of spectatorship in both art forms and, in doing so, neatly summarizing a decade of film theory regarding the multifarious differences between the two art forms.[27] In essence, we have a stage play within a film within a film; such a heavily deconstructive moment makes us firmly aware of our own act of "looking," whether it be cinematic, theatrical, or otherwise. At one point, the onstage/screen Vampires begin reenacting one of their more sensational murders, leading Feuillade to cut in to a medium shot of Irma Vep leaning "out" of the screen, nearing the edge of the stage apron on which the Vampires are currently "acting." Whether it's the close distance achieved through the medium shot or Irma's literal breaking out of the film-within-the-film's space, this moment causes Mazamette to leap from his seat in a panic: "It's Irma Vep!," he shouts, waving his arms frantically and disrupting the other moviegoers. Guèrande quickly ushers him out of the theater, though he too seems somewhat unsettled by this bizarre screen/stage space. The complex interplay of representational forms here leads us to wonder if Mazamette's outburst was caused by the sudden leap from an expected cinematic projection (rays of light shone upon a flat surface) to what the moviegoers actually received: real live flesh-and-blood individuals cohabiting the same diegetic space. With this uncanny sequence, Feuillade simultaneously undercuts the cinema as untrustworthy in relation to the stage (echoing what Short wrote: every filmic image is ambiguously real, and therefore also

ambiguously unreal) and enshrines it as magnificently transformative in its ability to transcend more stagebound limitations of space and time. Guèrande and Mazamette's cinematic excursion is certainly the most surreal scene in *Les Vampires*, with the possible exception of a sudden flashback to a bullfighting sequence set during the Napoleonic wars (thinly presented as the Grand Vampire's wholly fabricated anecdote about his nonexistent great-grandfather, the scene was actually included simply because Feuillade had previously shot it for a project that was ultimately scrapped). In questioning the validity of both cinematic and theatrical vision, and in emphasizing the anxiety regarding knowability that the arts may instill in its audience, this sequence serves the Surrealist purpose of confronting and subverting established conceptions of traditional representational art.

This purpose itself may be linked to the cinema of attractions, which, at least in retrospective analysis, may be held in contradistinction to the narrative mode that began to predominate the cinema in the 1910s. It is reasonable, then, to hypothesize that Surrealist writers and thinkers were more closely aligned to the cinema of attractions than to the subsequent narrative cinema, not only because the attractions paradigm delighted in presenting to us shocking and spectacular acts that were not embedded into a narrative context, but also because those shocking and spectacular acts resisted the forms of traditional representation that were formulated through increasing precision during the transitional period.

An Ominous Architecture

There are two more issues I would like to raise in relation to Feuillade and Surrealism: one is the concept of the Surrealists' fascination with the modern urban space as concealing (and potentially revealing) the sinister forces of the marvelous within city architecture; and the other is their deconstruction of both written text and the human body into discreet objects that may be

rearranged into collage-like compositions.

Paris during the *fin de siècle* was itself conceived as a marvelous force, whose twisting streets and rows of interconnected buildings seemed like they *must* be concealing something within their concrete architecture. As Annette Michelson writes, through the Surrealist conception of the urban space, Paris "is suddenly revealed as everywhere dangerous, the scene and subject of secret designs. The trap door, secret compartment, false tunnel, false bottom, false ceiling, form an architectural complex with an architectural structure of middle-class culture."[28] Louis Aragon in particular would embrace this fantastic concept of modern Paris, claiming as one of the foremost examples of cinematic poetry "the vertiginous, thousand-eyed façade of the thirty-story house"—an idea that becomes especially striking when human figures are being tossed down those vertiginous façades, as discussed above in both *Les Vampires* and *Judex*.[29]

Robert Desnos echoes Aragon's endorsement of the modern city as a form of cinematic beauty, albeit a potentially grisly one. In his 1922 text "Pénalités de l'enfer ou Nouvelles Hébrides," Desnos experiences the following fantasy upon entering a crowded movie theater:

> Furiously, I wanted to take a closer look. I climbed toward the screen. I was blinded by the light coming from the projector and saw in the screen two holes that were big enough to allow passage. I put my head through one of them. A panorama of the city spread out before my eyes. Aragon and [Surrealist writer Jacques] Baron were trussed up through their bellies on two cathedral spires.
>
> I understood that they too had wanted to see what lay behind the screen and the very beauty of their suicide was revealed to me.[30]

In Desnos' estimation, it is the city itself that the movie screen conceals from our view, yet it also enticingly presents it to us; it is this disjuncture between an impregnable two-dimensional screen and the three-dimensional world that lies beyond/within it that makes the cinema so transfixing, and in this case even lethal. If "entering" the urban spaces evoked by the cinema would

ultimately end in gruesome impalement, the Surrealists (or Desnos, at least) conceived of this as a worthy sacrifice—the attainment, finally, of that hidden world beyond the appearance of things, which the Surrealists always strove for.

Aragon conveyed a fuller fascination with the nooks and crannies of the urban space in his 1926 novel *Le Paysan de Paris*. This "autobiography" (the name of the main character is Aragon, but the work itself is a Surrealistic compendium of hallucinations, dreamscapes, and fantasies) features a scene in which Aragon, in an inebriated state, strolls through the Passage de l'Opéra (a sort of antecedent to the modern department store), displacing his desires onto the consumer goods that he sees framed in the glass windows of the shops. At one particular window lined with candy canes, Aragon envisions the specter of a German prostitute that he had visited during the war, beckoning to him. The image of this woman, Aragon writes, is "just beyond the windowpane."[31] The windows of the modern city, then—specifically in commercial sectors where consumer goods are put on display before screen-like windows—allow for the displacement of individuals' desire onto and into the objects visible through those "screens." We see in this segment from *Le Paysan de Paris* a conception of windows as both enticingly erotic and disappointingly illusory—a site for voyeurism and infiltration, shattering notions of the private space in both erotic and phantasmagoric ways.

The simultaneous allure and danger of windows take on a primary role in both *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires*. In the former, a scene early on in the fifth and final film of the series, *Le faux magistrat* (1914), provides us with one of the most thrilling shots of the entire series. Fantômas, having just reentered French territory on a locomotive after escaping from an Austrian prison, descends from the train onto the platform. He proceeds to walk along a diagonal line parallel to the stopped train, from the center of screen left to the lower right corner of the frame. Behind him, barely visible through a narrowly open window of the train, we can see the face of a man, a splotch

of white protruding from the darkness of the train interior, watching Fantômas's every move. (See Figure 2.16) It's a brief but meticulous composition, and it makes us firmly aware of windows serving as tools of surveillance, appropriable by both sinister villains and morally upstanding heroes. (This moment also, of course, reminds us of the significance of trains in Feuillade's films—a new form of transportation accommodating the swift maneuvering of space and time. The train in this instance also makes possible some sort of sinister surveillance, as adjoining passenger cars and the inability to escape while in motion necessitate a close, and potentially perilous, proximity.)

The function of windows in *Les Vampires* has already been briefly discussed (the Vampires' preferred mode of ensnarement seems to be provoking unwitting souls into leaning their heads out of open windows so they can be lassoed from a Vampire waiting on the sidewalk below), but another example is pertinent here. In the final episode of the serial, "The Terrible Wedding," several members of the Vampire gang attempt to kidnap Guèrande's wife, Jane. (Guèrande and Mazamette have just left to fetch the police—a somewhat foolhardy decision, considering their home has just been sprayed with poisonous gas by their maid, Augustine, under hypnosis from the Vampires.) Jane waits in bed with a pistol under her pillow, pretending to sleep yet keeping a wary eye on her window. For good reason: one Vampire scales the wall of Guèrande's apartment building, with the camera tilting upwards in order to observe his full ascent in long shot. A foreboding close-up of this Vampire thrusting his cane between the shutter and the windowpane—thus undoing the latch that locks the window—is intercut with a medium shot of Jane observing his attempted infiltration with increasing alarm, clutching her pistol, ready to fire. Instead of shooting, though, she waits and watches (as do we, in an agonizingly prolonged close-up) as the Vampire cuts a square hole into her window with a small blade. As he reaches in to open the window, Jane finally bolts from bed and shoots him, sending him plummeting to the street below (offscreen). (See

Figure 2.16

Figure 2.17

Figure 2.17.) Foolishly, however, Jane proceeds to lean her head out of the window, at which point the other Vampire, waiting down below, ensnares her with a trusty lasso, and thus yanks her out of the window as she plummets down the façade of the building. This scene ends, of course, with a tactic the Vampires have employed previously, but before this happens, we have an extended scene foregrounding the role of the window as a perilous and easily pregnable boundary between supposedly separate urban spaces. If, in Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris*, windows serve to frame one's desire, in Feuillade they serve to frame one's vulnerability in regard to the sinister and marvelous forces lurking within the urban space.

Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* is significant in yet another way, in conveying the interior domestic space itself as mysteriously linked through its passageways, corridors, heating ducts, and the like. In the novel, Aragon describes a hotel of lascivious reputation—a "romantic lodging-house," he calls it—thusly:

> Long corridors, like theater wings, are strung with boxes, I mean rooms, all on the same side overlooking the passage. A dual system of stairways provides access to the passage at two separate points. Everything is contrived to facilitate hasty departures, to conceal from casual observers the trysts which will muffle some huge secret behind the faded sky-blue wallpaper of a banal décor.[32]

This description of conjoined passageways and rooms, in which erotic rendezvous are being "muffled" by banal sky-blue wallpaper, reiterates Aragon's conception of an insularly conjoined modern space, in which the marvelous (or in this case the sexual) can take concealed yet ever-present forms.

One example of this fantastic interconnectivity of the modern domestic space in *Juve contre Fantômas* takes us back to the cinema of attractions. Halfway through the episode, Fantômas attempts to kill his archnemesis Inspector Juve by releasing a gigantic anaconda into his living room via his open bedroom window (but of course). Expecting some kind of assassination attempt, Juve had equipped himself with a corset made of spikes, thus injuring the snake when it attempts to crush him. After Juve's stunned surprise wanes, he heaves the huge snake from his bedroom, thus escaping certain death.

The anaconda makes a spectacular return near the end of the episode, however. Fantômas, trapped in the abandoned mansion in which he and Lady Beltham have been holding their covert rendezvous, retreats to the cellar, with the police (including Juve and Fandor) close on his tail. Ingeniously, Fantômas shatters the bottom of a glass wine bottle and hides in the cellar's cistern, using the hollowed-out wine bottle as a breathing apparatus. The police, however, hear something large, something desperate, rattling around in the heating ducts that extend from the cellar to the main bedroom upstairs. Eager to finally apprehend Fantômas, the police race to the upstairs bedroom, hoping to interrupt his attempted escape; but what do they find emerging from the heating duct but the massive, slithering snake! We then have a shot of one policeman shooting the snake several times, an act which is not simulated, followed by a close-up of the snake bleeding profusely, and finally dying, its body limp and lifeless. This rather disturbing spectacle, in its shocking and gruesome subject matter and the gratuitous extent to which the close-up lingers on

the dying snake, places us once again in a cinema of attractions—the python' death is displayed to us with great sensationalism. (See Figure 2.18.) While the subject matter is extremely morbid, this is perhaps the clearest example in the *Fantômas* series of the labyrinthine spaces within modern domestic interiors concealing sinister forces within their nooks and crannies. Furthermore, the morbidity of this particular attraction likely would have appealed to the Surrealists, who were often concerned with perverse or unflinching portrayals of death as a rebuttal to what they saw as overly stolid traditional artworks. We may clearly recognize this morbid fascination with death in Maurice Raynal's gushing celebration of *Le faux magistrat*, the fifth and final film in the *Fantômas* series: lauding the scene in which Fantômas strands a jewel thief inside of a massive bell in a church clock tower, Raynal describes "this sublime spectacle of a rain of blood, pearls, and gold down on the church faithful."[33]

A less grisly example of the sinister forces concealed within modern domestic spaces takes place in the eighth episode of *Les Vampires*. In "The Thunder Master," we are briefly introduced to Mazamette's son Eustache, who has come to live with his father after being expelled from school for laziness and obscene pranksterism. This unexpected plot development makes possible a standout setpiece from this episode: Eustache, eager to help his father and Philippe Guèrande's crimefighting enterprise, discovers the apartment of the Grand Vampire, Satanas, by stumbling across a mortar shell being delivered to Satanas's apartment in a hatbox. Eustache enters Satanas's foyer; Feuillade shoots this scene in a full shot perpendicular to two adjoining rooms, with a thick vertical beam near the center of the frame demarcating the wall that separates them. Already, we have an image of adjoining interior spaces that are unsettling in their abuttal of extreme villainy (Satanas, who is waiting in the interior space at screen left) and the precocious curiosity of youth (Eustache). This theme is further elucidated when Satanas approaches the wall separating his space

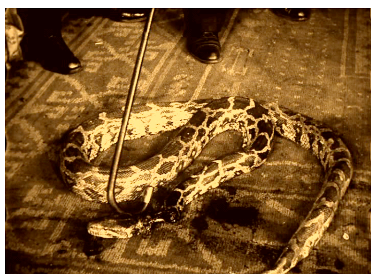

Figure 2.18

Figure 2.19

Figure 2.20

from the foyer; he spies on Eustache by leaning into a mask that is affixed to the other side of the wall. A moment later, we have an extreme close-up taken from a frontal position, directly in front of the mask (which features a grotesque, deformed, and offensive stereotype of an East Asian visage), in the space of the foyer. (See Figure 2.19.) We can see Satanas's eyes darting back and forth in the mask's eyeholes. This is perhaps the clearest indication of the sequestered spaces of modern architecture allowing for concealed surveillance, a dangerous proximity that is ever-present in modern urban and domestic spaces. (See pages 14-15 of my introduction for a fuller appraisal of some theorists' concept of perilous spatial proximity in the modern age.)

Satanas observes as Eustache covertly opens the door for his father, who enters the foyer and hides himself in a large chest positioned against the wall, in the background of the shot. (See Figure 2.20.) The scene ends when Satanas confronts little Eustache about his duplicity, stating outright (in an intertitle) that he knows someone is in the trunk—at which point Eustache takes out a pistol and fires at Satanas! He misses, but the police proceed to storm Satanas' apartment and capture him. (For once, the Grand Vampire doesn't escape—he will be replaced in the next episode by a Grand Vampire named Venomous. In fact, Louis Leubas, the actor portraying Satanas, had been called off to military duty at the height of World War I, thus necessitating his hasty departure from the serial.) The final gag in this scene (briefly mentioned in my introduction) was likely greatly appreciated by the Surrealists, as it represents an unexpected conflation of traditional

French morality and grisly violence: after Satanas is ushered from his apartment by the police, Mazamette emerges from the trunk in which he had been hiding—only to reveal that his son, by missing Satanas with his gunshot, had inadvertently shot Mazamette in the face! Initially frustrated with Eustache and in a great amount of pain, Mazamette nonetheless proceeds to kneel next to his son and lovingly embrace him, as blood unnervingly gushes down his face all the while. The moral anchor of familial relations (a father's love for his son) in traditional French society that was endorsed by numerous melodramas produced during the 1910s thus receives a subversive contradiction here: the sight of a father and son in loving, bloody embrace, as Mazamette gingerly cranes his neck in order to avoid further aggravating his facial gunshot wound.

TYPOGRAPHY AND THE BODY

If the modern urban space, interior and exterior, was fragmented by the Surrealists and by Feuillade into a complex network concealing and revealing the forces of the marvelous, the human body itself was also split into a segmentation—a collage, in fact—of discreet parts that could be deconstructed and rearranged. In fact, Aragon met fellow Surrealist André Breton at Val de Grâce in 1918, where both men were serving as *médicin auxiliares* for the French military. While serving, both Aragon and Breton would have experienced scenes of bodily horror and trauma that (while certainly overwhelming on a humanistic or visceral level) also would have demonstrated the human body as a container of flesh and bone, callously appropriated by the French state into so many fighting automatons. After the war, a museum was set up at Val de Grâce that staged reenactments of bodily reconstruction on French soldiers—an exhibit which, as Amy Lyford argues in her article "The Aesthetics of Dismemberment," directly reemphasized the existence of human beings as nothing more than amalgamations of flesh and bone during times of war.[34]

This Surrealist predilection for parsing the body into its anatomical components was displayed by Aragon in his poem "Advertisement for Nothing," which he describes as being "written on a gray envelope open like a belly."[35] The rest of the poem, writes Lyford, "is suffused with references to bodies opened and objectified, embodying trauma in a manner that emphasizes evisceration as a critical aesthetic method."[36] Implicit in this assertion is the fact that, for Aragon, such dismemberment of the human body would carry a critical edge, as he had experienced firsthand the objectification of human beings by the French state into mere troops of fighting machines.

Several of Feuillade's earlier short films exhibited this aesthetic dismemberment of the human body in troubling ways. In *Judith et Holophernes* (1909), for example, Judith decapitates her husband only after moving the upper half of his incapacitated body offscreen, thus figuratively severing his head from his body with the frame of the movie screen. This sly conflation of aesthetic and literal dismemberment is repeated in *L'orgie romaine* (1911), in which the repugnant and tyrannical ruler Heliogabale is speared to death by his own troops at the climax. While we do see this violent spearing onscreen (albeit obscured by a number of human figures blocking our view—though the scene is still incredibly violent), we do *not* see the subsequent beheading of Heliogabale's corpse by his own wife, who similarly shoves his body offscreen. The decision to reframe these corpses to an offscreen space at the moment of their decapitation was partially due to concerns regarding excessive onscreen violence, yet it was also Feuillade's aesthetic attempt to parallel both characters' literal decapitation with a figurative "beheading" by the film frame.

While such examples of bodies severed literally and aesthetically play a less significant role in Feuillade's later crime serials, we can still detect Feuillade's fascination with the decapitation and objectification of human heads. The clearest example arrives in the very first episode of *Les*

Vampires, tellingly titled "The Severed Head." In this premiere episode, Guèrande is called to a rural chalet in order to investigate the disappearance of a local constable who had been investigating the Vampires. Guèrande stays at the manor of Dr. Nox, who, we will soon find out, is actually the Grand Vampire himself, having killed the original tenant and assumed his identity. "Dr. Nox" is also responsible for having killed the missing police officer, a fact that Guèrande finds out in terrifying fashion when he discovers a secret passageway in his bedroom, concealed behind a large oil painting. (The thematic motif of the interconnectedness of the domestic space is thus reiterated.) Within this hidden passageway, Guèrande finds a mysterious hatbox, which contains the severed head of the police inspector! This shock is revealed to us by Guèrande, who helpfully tilts the hatbox downwards and towards the camera, offering us a fuller view of the constable's limited remains—a cinema of attractions moment that most definitely displays and presents this shock to us, instead of representing it to us realistically. With this human head being contained—framed, even—within not only the mysterious hatbox, but also the secret passageway behind the painting, we have a multiple delimitation of a human body part as *object*, not as a living anatomical component. Like the gruesome reenactments of bodily reconstruction that were displayed at the Musée du Val de Grâce in 1917, this fracturing and containment of the human body served to posit human beings as objects to be deconstructed and rearranged. "The collections of Val de Grâce," writes Lyford, "proposed a grammar of the human body that parsed the human form into pieces that could be manipulated for aesthetic purpose just as words and parts of speech were mobilized in the process of poetic reconstruction. In this way, dismemberment became one of surrealism's primary aesthetic models."[37]

The dismemberment of both human bodies and of "words and parts of speech" in his crime serials allow us to recognize another significant reason for the Surrealists' love for Feuillade. By

exposing both human anatomy and text as objects that could be deconstructed and recontextualized, the Surrealists sought to confront dominant representational modes of art by downplaying the significance of human characters within the narrative (emphasizing them instead as mere objects to be rearranged and picked apart) and by foregrounding the nature of textual or visual mediation, stressing words or images as *presentational* rather than *representational*. Again, we find the Surrealists' conceptual project as unexpectedly linked to the transitional period between the cinema of attractions and the narrative cinema: human characters and cinematic images existing as both components of the plot occupying a traditional representational capacity, and as abstract objects existing merely to be exhibited for film audiences as attractions in themselves.

The mobilization of words and parts of speech in the service of poetic reconstruction is the final topic that I will address in this chapter. In addition to his love for close-ups and for the appearance of common, banal objects in film, Louis Aragon professed his love for typographical arrangements in the cinema—not only urban signs and advertisements, but also (and particularly) the playful and punning rearrangement or deconstruction of onscreen text. In his typically engaging and effusive style, Aragon celebrates "the capital letters of unreadable and marvelous words" in film.[38]

Such rearrangement and deconstruction was often exhibited by Aragon in his own poetry. For example, in the first part of his 1926 book *Le Mouvement perpétuel*, Aragon composed a poem in which he "metaphorically kills himself as a poet." The poem, in its entirety, reads:

> A b c d e f
> g h i j k l
> m n o p q r
> s t u v w
> x y z[39]

We may find a slightly more playful (and, perhaps, substantive) example of Aragon's deconstructionist writing in his feature-length *Treatise on Style*. In it, Aragon writes, "The sentence 'Man is descended from the apes' will always carry more weight than Darwinism, since the former is a fact and the latter is not. A word, a phrase. These are the true intellectual acquisitions. It is childish to combat them. Pink Pills for Pale People: how can you refute that? Nothing can stand in the way of Pink Pills for Pale People."[40]

The primacy of text as aesthetic object is displayed in two invigorating sequences in *Les Vampires*. In the first instance, a man who happens to be passing by the Howling Cat nightclub (the habitual hangout for the Vampire gang) notices a large signboard advertising the performances of IRMA VEP. The signboard simply features a large illustration of her, and her name at the bottom in capital letters. As the man leans in close to the text written at the bottom, he helpfully points at the letters and scratches his chin. At this point, the thick black letters literally animate and rearrange themselves, forming the anagram underlying Irma Vep's name: VAMPIRE. (See Figure 2.21.) This playful deconstruction of written text also harkens back to a cinema of attractions, as the mode of representation in this scene is certainly one of display and exhibitionism—the display of letters as life, moving of their own volition.

A second and similar instance of textual deconstruction occurs in the eighth episode of the serial, "The Thunder Master." As Irma Vep is about to be transported to Algeria on the prison ship Jean-Bart for life imprisonment in a penal colony, a mysterious Catholic missionary named Father Joachim enters the holding cell of the female prisoners, purporting to spread literature about their souls' salvation. One look at Father Joachim and Irma knows something is afoot: this man is actually Satanas in disguise. Father Joachim/Satanas offers Irma a religious pamphlet, which she begins to

Figure 2.21

Figure 2.22

pore over intently. The pamphlet reads: “DIEU VOUS VOIT—LA VERITE SERA A NU (GOD SEES YOU—THE TRUTH WILL BE REVEALED).” With a seemingly innate gift for textual deconstruction, Irma immediately recognizes the anagram lying within the words on the pamphlet, as the letters printed on the page begin to animate and rearrange themselves, skittering throughout the frame, eventually reading: “LE NAVIRE SAUTERA—THE SHIP WILL BLOW UP.” (See Figure 2.22.) And indeed, in the following sensational sequence, Irma is able to escape life imprisonment by shielding herself from an impending cannon blast in the infirmary of the ship, swimming to shore, and riding back to Paris on a train by desperately hanging on to the underside of the locomotive. In both of these instances (Irma Vep’s name on the Howling Cat’s signboard, and the pamphlet given to Irma on the Jean-Bart) the Surrealists’ love for formal deconstruction and textual play are embodied by a presentation of filmic movement that harkens back to the cinema of attractions. Such scenes amount to cinematic puzzles in which the audience is asked to play along.

The reasons for the Surrealists’ love for Louis Feuillade extend far beyond the reasons I have elucidated above. Some of the additional reasons I will elucidate in my following conclusion. Many other reasons, however—possibly even more influential for the Surrealists—reflect an unnamable, indefinable quality in Feuillade’s crime serials, a transgressive spirit and hurtling

narrative propulsion that seem to embody the sinister and oneiric forces existing beneath the everyday lives we lead. While this indefinable quality, this narrative spontaneity, and this transgressive "common art" spirit were not confined to Feuillade's films alone—they may be recognized in some other French crime serials from the transitional period—the Surrealists' particular endorsement of Feuillade (and their general dismissal of the character of Zigomar, for example) suggests that Feuillade was able to control and convey these fantastic forces through film more powerfully and profoundly than any other director of his time.

The artificial dreams that the Surrealists hoped to find in the cinema were given life—kinetic, exciting, erotic life—by *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex*. We watch these films—their special attention to everyday objects and consumer goods, their dynamic and recursive chase scenes, their naturalist portrayals of phenomena that are far from natural, their evocation of sinister urban and domestic spaces, and their bodily and textual deconstruction—and find filmmaking that is unsettling and vivifying, subversive and purely entertaining, intimately real and intimately unreal. The crime serials of Louis Feuillade are defined by such contradictions, which may be one of the main reasons the Surrealists (to use the words of Maurice Raynal) found in them such nobility, such beauty, inimitable brilliance, and explosive genius.

Notes to Chapter One

[1] Desnos, Robert. "Dream and Cinema." *French Film Theory & Criticism, 1907-1939*. Ed. Richard Abel. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. 283.
[2] Abel, Richard. *French Film Theory & Criticism, 1907-1939*. 205.
[3] Ibid 205.
[4] Ibid 205.
[5] Abel, Richard. *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896-1914*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994. 371.
[6] Raynal, Maurice. "Cinema Column: *Fantômas*." *French Film Theory & Criticism*, *1907-1939*. 89.
[7] Ibid 89.
[8] For my analysis of shot scales in Feuillade's films, I will be drawing upon Richard Abel's terminology, in which: a close-up is the shot of a face or object; a medium close-up is a shot of a person from the chest up; a medium shot observes a person from the waist up; an American shot observes them from the knees up; a full shot observes them from the feet up; and a long shot allows us to see their entire body with some extraneous space on either side. See Abel *The Ciné Goes to Town* xxiii.
[9] Raynal 90.
[10] Abel *The Ciné Goes to Town* 387.
[11] Callahan, Vicki. "Screening Musidora: Inscribing Indeterminacy in Film History." *Camera Obscura* 48:16.3 (2001): 59. 62.
[12] Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973. 25.
[13] Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Methuen, 1981. 26.
[14] Aragon, Louis. "Challenge to Painting." *Surrealists on Art*. Ed. Lucy Lippard. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970. 37.
[15] Ibid 37.
[16] Quoted in Harvey, David. *Paris, Capital of Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 2003. 93.
[17] Aragon, Louis. "On Décor." *French Film Theory & Criticism, 1907-1939*. 165.
[18] Ibid 166.
[19] See Abel *The Ciné Goes to Town* 219.
[20] In regard to the essentially Surrealist nature of Feuillade's plotlines, Robert Short, in *The Age of Gold: Surrealist Cinema*, raises the point that, while on leave from military duty during World War I, Andre Breton and Jacques Vaché would wander from one movie theater to another, buying tickets without looking at the marquee, entering and leaving on a whim, and culling together a single collage-like film from the disjointed snippets they saw. The disjointed, wild, careening "narratives" that such experiments likely resulted in must have been something like the storylines of Feuillade's crime serials. See Short, Robert, ed. *The Age of Gold: Surrealist Cinema*. London: Creation Books, 2003. 8-9.
[21] Callahan, Vicki. *Zones of Anxiety*: *Movement, Musidora, and the Crime Serials of Louis Feuillade*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2005. 61. Callahan cites Umberto Eco, "Rhetoric and Ideology in Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*," *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, 125-43 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 132.
[22] Callahan *Zones of Anxiety* 74.
[23] Todorov 33.
[24] "The Pick of the Programs," *Bioscope* 278 (February 8 1912), 399.
[25] Abel *The Ciné Goes to Town* 361.
[26] Short 10.
[27] In terms of this scene reflecting film theory written about the differences between theatrical and cinematic spaces, see especially Münsterberg, Hugo, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 64-78 and 120-127.
[28] Michelson, Annette. "Breton's Surrealism: The Peripeties of a Metaphor or a Journey Through Impossibility." *Artforum* 1 (September 1966): 72-77. 75.
[29] Aragon "On Décor" 166.
[30] Quoted in Finkelstein, Haim. *The Screen in Surrealist Art and Thought*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007. 15.
[31] Quoted in Finkelstein 37.

[32] Quoted in Finkelstein 68.
[33] Raynal 90.
[34] See Lyford, Amy. "The Aesthetics of Dismemberment: Surrealism and the Musée du Val de Grâce in 1917." *Cultural Critique* 46 (2000): 45-79.
[35] Quoted in Lyford 54.
[36] Ibid 54.
[37] Lyford 51.
[38] Aragon "On Décor" 165.
[39] Quoted in Adereth, Max. *Elsa Triolet and Louis Aragon: an introduction to their interwoven lives and works*. Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1994. 181.
[40] Aragon, Louis. *Treatise on Style*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. 35.

Framing France: Louis Feuillade and *Irma Vep*

> Irma Vep is Paris. She's the Paris underworld. She's working-class Paris. She's Arletty! Irma Vep is street thugs and slums!
>
> – José Mirano (Lou Castel), in Olivier Assayas's *Irma Vep* (1996)

In Olivier Assayas's "pseudo-remake" of *Les Vampires*, the director José Mirano is enlisted to take over production of the film-within-the-film—itself a remake of *Les Vampires*—from the notorious (fictional) arthouse auteur René Vidal. Vidal is played by Jean-Pierre Léaud, the distinguished actor best known for immortalizing the character of Antoine Doinel in François Truffaut's *Les quatres cents coups* (*The 400 Blows*, 1959), *Baisers volés* (*Stolen Kisses*, 1968), *Domicile conjugal* (*Bed & Board*, 1970), and *L'amour en fuite* (*Love on the Run*, 1979). Already, it should be apparent that we are in the realm of the metacinematic—that Assayas's film is meant to address and complicate notions of France's cinematic legacy by referencing and recasting films and performers seen as embodiments of a particularly French filmdom. This brief description of the film, though, barely begins to scratch the surface of Assayas's inquisition into what it means to be a "French film"; ultimately, he is concerned with many of the questions posed by Feuillade and his crime serials in the teens—what it means to occupy a national cinema, what it means to inhabit a cinematic "mode of uncertainty" that cannot be easily confined to one genre or paradigm, what it means to simultaneously portray and question reality in the movies. This conclusion, then, will begin with an analysis of Assayas's film.

Mirano voices the words quoted above to a French actress named Laure (Nathalie Boutefeu), whom he is asking to take over the role of Irma Vep from Hong Kong actress Maggie Cheung (playing herself) after the problematic Vidal is booted from the project by his producers. Vidal had originally asked Cheung to portray the role of Irma due to her performance in Johnnie To's *Dung fong saam hap* (*The Heroic Trio*, 1993), a spectacular and fantastical Hong Kong action movie featuring Cheung, Michelle Yeoh, and Anita Mui as a trio of super-heroines who join forces to stop an evil villain from kidnapping male newborns (!). Vidal, it seems, had recognized in Cheung's performance the enigmatic nature that Vicki Callahan ascribes to the character of Irma Vep: in her black bodysuit, claims Callahan, Irma Vep symbolizes indeterminacy as a different mode of knowing, and as an extension she symbolizes a distinct and separate mode of cinematic representation.[1] Scrambling over the rooftops of Paris, the truly “grand” Vampire Irma Vep is neither male nor female, hero(ine) nor villain(ess), but a liminal space that serves to dissipate all traditional boundaries.

Similarly, Cheung in *The Heroic Trio* portrays a shifting character that is violent and graceful, villainous and heroic, ultimately a mystery. These are the qualities that Vidal recognizes in Irma Vep as well: in his words, “mystery, beauty, magic, strength.” If Callahan conceives of Irma Vep as a locus wherein traditional boundaries of gender, morality, and cinematic representation break down, then the casting of Cheung (in the film-within-the-film and *Irma Vep* itself) extends this indeterminacy to the level of nationality as well: Irma Vep can be both French *and* Chinese, not on a literal multiethnic level but on a more metaphysical, amorphous level. Through the figure of Cheung, Irma may still represent the French underclass (specifically the *apache* gangs that terrorized French cities at the turn of the century), but she does so in a way that reveals ethnic categorizations as essentially problematic or inconclusive. Irma Vep, then, is not essentially French, nor is

Cheung's Irma Vep essentially Chinese, nor simply French-Chinese, but something necessarily in between. While Callahan's conception of Irma Vep as indeterminate is more metaphysical or theoretical, Assayas (and Vidal) are approaching her national indeterminacy as partially the result of cinematic representations in a globalized and mediated age—something that will soon become clearer.

Irma Vep begins with a telephone conversation: a producer, Desormeaux (Alex Descas), is haggling with someone about percentages of box office profits, contracts to be signed, cast and crew members to be shuffled to and from the airport, the logistical miscellanea that audiences usually push as far from their minds as possible while watching a film. During this conversation, a prop master holds a revolver in front of the camera, asking for approval from one of the producers; at the same time, a woman offscreen holds another phone conversation, describing how "the film" (presumably the one whose production we will soon observe) is an "art movie" with "cultural" issues. Within the first minute, then, Assayas suggests the production of cinema as something naturally polysemous, the combination of numerous and disparate creative decisions. This polysemous nature, Assayas will soon suggest, may lead to a cinematic text that is essentially amorphous, shifting, unclassifiable—and thus may ultimately embody a cinematic "mode of uncertainty."

Following Cheung's arrival at this film studio and several further discussions regarding logistical minutiae, Assayas cuts to a lengthy clip (approximately one full minute) from *The Heroic Trio*. It is markedly different from the metacinematic dialogues that opened the film; to oversimplify, the cut from the opening scene to this clip from *The Heroic Trio* marks a leap from the art cinema paradigm (layered discussions foregrounding the nature of cinematic construction) to the generic, mainstream action film. We soon discover the narrative context for this clip's

inclusion: René Vidal is screening it for Maggie Cheung in order to demonstrate why he wanted to cast her as Irma Vep. But Assayas's point is that the clip from To's film is no less satisfying, no less stimulating, and possibly more visually intoxicating than the scene that opens *Irma Vep*. He does not disparage a conceptual art-cinema approach, nor an exciting and thrilling spectacular approach, but values the stimulation to be found in both.

What I find especially wonderful about the inclusion of this clip from To's film is that the transfer is beautifully imperfect: the scene we watch from *The Heroic Trio* appears to be transferred from a beat-up VHS copy with blurry subtitles barely-visible at the bottom of the screen. Perhaps the scene is transferred from Assayas' own overused, treasured copy of *The Heroic Trio*. In any case, the technical imperfection of this transfer and Vidal's effusive description of his love for this film (it is a fight scene between Cheung and another masked female warrior, complete with wire stunts and superhuman feats of agility common to Hong Kong action movies) serve to posit film as something highly *personal*, for the filmmaker as well as for the viewer; despite the logistical nightmares that opened the film, the completed cinematic products can amount to some of our most beloved cultural artifacts, with videocassettes of action movies from the early 1990s sparking theoretical forays into the meanings of cultural identity, cinematic representation, the essence of art and its relationship with reality, and so on.

After sharing his love for *The Heroic Trio* with Cheung (and with us, the audience), Vidal shows a clip from *Les Vampires* in order to further prove his point. We observe the scene from the sixth episode, "Hypnotic Eyes," in which Moreno confronts and kidnaps Irma Vep in a hotel room, replacing her with his own secretary. (Both of them are dressed in the same full-length black bodysuit.) The similarities between *The Heroic Trio* and *Les Vampires*, unexpected though they may be, extend beyond the similarities in costuming (Cheung wears a black bodysuit in the Hong Kong

film as well). Both Feuillade's and To's film embrace mainstream narrative filmmaking and the action genre as a springboard for a foray into fantastic, spectacular, non-realistic phantasmagoria; these movies inhabit *both* the cinema of attractions and the narrative cinema. The awesome and unsettling effects of impossible actions portrayed "realistically" in *Les Vampires* can be correlated to the seamless use of wire stunts, martial arts choreography, and fantastic visual effects in To's majestic genre film (and in many other Hong Kong action films).

Cheung later visits a Parisian sex-paraphernalia shop with the film's costume designer, Zoé (Nathalie Richard), in order to find the appropriate bodysuit for the *Les Vampires* remake. The eroticism of Irma Vep in the original serial did not go unnoticed by Surrealist writers such as Robert Desnos, who composed a tribute to the actress who inimitably played her: "Musidora, how beautiful you were in *Les Vampires*! Do you know that we dreamed of you and that when evening came you entered our bedrooms without knocking, dressed in your black tights, and on awakening the next morning we searched for a trace of the disconcerting 'hotel mouse' that had visited us."[2] This seems somewhat contradictory in relation to Callahan's assertion that Irma Vep remains a sexually indeterminate character in her black bodysuit. Perhaps we can explain this seeming disparity by recognizing several disguises that Irma Vep dons throughout *Les Vampires* as male relatives of the Grand Vampires: as the son of "Count Kerlor" in episode six, "Hypnotic Eyes," or as the nephew of the Baron de Mortesalgues in episode five, "Dead Man's Escape" (1916). (This gender-shifting motif is repeated in *Judex*, when Diana Monti—also played by Musidora—arrives at Judex's Mediterranean estate disguised as the son of her criminal cohort, Morales, in the ninth episode, "When the Child Appears" [1916]). It seems, then, that Irma Vep (and Musidora in several of her incarnations) has the ability to portray both a sexually alluring female and an inconspicuously disguised male persona; her gender is indeed permeable, according to her own volition.

If Irma Vep is sexualized in her bodysuit in *Les Vampires*, Cheung is even more explicitly fetishized as Irma Vep in Vidal's remake. Zoé shows her a photograph of the prototype that she has been asked to duplicate by Vidal: a picture of Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman in *Batman Returns* (1992), in a slick latex dominatrix outfit that leaves none of her bodily contours to the imagination. "This is the idea of Irma Vep, right?," Zoé rhetorically asks Maggie—but of course it's not. Even if the character was received as a sexual "hotel mouse" by Desnos and other Surrealists, Musidora and Feuillade presented her as a strong, mysterious figure who could be both feminine and masculine (or if not masculine, at least occupying traditional patriarchal positions of power in relation to other male members of the Vampires); she is not explicitly fetishized as a wholly feminine sexual object in *Les Vampires*. Assayas's utilization of the publicity still of Pfeiffer from *Batman Returns* seems like a sly critique of a modern globalized cinematic culture in which national cinemas increasingly adopt the images and characteristics of Hollywood films, either as an attempt to garner greater ticket sales (given Hollywood's international economic predominance) or as a self-conscious recognition of the increasingly eclectic cultural sources that inform international filmmaking. Indeed, both Assayas and Vidal (who in many ways acts as Assayas's counterpart in *Irma Vep*) seem to be practicing a mode of countercultural resistance practiced by some French filmmakers in response to the hegemony of Hollywood filmmaking on the international scene: a mode in which France "counter[s] current American cultural hegemony and the threat of European absorption by looking to its own past distinction," according to Elizabeth Ezra and Sue Harris.[3] Both Assayas and Vidal adopt this particular influence of Hollywood filmmaking in order to make Irma/Maggie explicitly fetishized, but in doing so they infuse it with a character that is seen as embodying the legacy of French silent cinema. This may seem like an insignificant example of Hollywood's impact upon international cinemas, but in some ways this is precisely Assayas's point: that these minor

manifestations of American cinema reappear often in international cinemas of all kind, and that these manifestations are not necessarily deleterious. They can contribute to the kind of *bricolage* eclecticism that also, in part, made Surrealism so innovative, and attracted the Surrealists to Feuillade's crime serials.

Zoé admits that she does not like the kind of Hollywood mainstream filmmaking that *Batman Returns* represents—"I think everything is too much decoration, too much money," she says—but shortly thereafter, Maggie is equally lukewarm towards Vidal's brand of pontificating arthouse metacinema. Directly asked to give her opinion of Vidal, Maggie resignedly says that his filmmaking is "weird, but good." Again, neither one brand of cinema nor the other is validated; both are seen as problematic, and (more importantly) both are seen as valuable. They contribute to the patchwork that is *Irma Vep*.

At heart, Assayas's film may more fully represent Vidal's kind of arthouse metacinema. This is epitomized in the scene in which we observe the shooting of the sequence that Vidal had earlier screened for Maggie, in which Moreno kidnaps Irma Vep in a hotel room and replaces her with his own secretary. On the way to the set, Maggie—in her skintight latex bodysuit, and anomalously smoking a cigarette—bumps into the stuntwoman who will be filling in for her. Of course, both performers are costumed and made up exactly the same. They have a rather mundane conversation regarding how uncomfortable their bodysuits are. The irony here—Assayas's cinephiliac in-joke—is that in the original *Les Vampires*, there are indeed two "Irma Veps" in this scene, Irma herself and Moreno's secretary. More than simply a self-congratulatory parody of Feuillade's film, the doubling of Irma Vep—or, in fact, her quadrupling, since both Maggie and the actress portraying Moreno's secretary have their own stunt doubles—in this sequence reveals how metacinematic *Les Vampires* was in the first place. By presenting us with a character whose identity may be so swiftly multiplied

and transformed, by representing astonishing feats through seemingly naturalistic tableaux, Feuillade's crime serials ask us to question our modes of vision and knowledge as cinema spectators. Can we discern the identity of a cinematic character simply through sight? Is what we're seeing actually happening? Can we "trust" anything that a film shows us? One could argue that such themes are simply culled from Feuillade's serials by later film analysis, that Feuillade was simply working in a genre and a historical paradigm (the crime serial in the transitional period) that inherently foregrounded questions of attractions, astonishment, presentation versus representation, and the like, yet this argument does Feuillade a disservice. We may point to the scene, mentioned in the previous chapter, in which Philippe Guèrande and Mazamette see an *actualité* short featuring the Vampire gang in the episode "Hypnotic Eyes." As soon as the film begins to play, the movie screen suddenly transforms into a theatrical proscenium stage, with live flesh-and-blood individuals (including Irma Vep) appearing within the filmic "space." Mazamette is terrified, convinced that he is sharing physical space with the Vampires themselves—which, thanks to Feuillade's odd conflation of visual media, he is. This is the clearest example of Feuillade's quite deliberate play with questioning modes of cinematic vision and knowledge.

As the crew of the film-within-the-film shoots the aforementioned scene in Moreno's hotel room, Assayas and cinematographer Eric Gautier's camera—the camera through which we see, not the diegetic camera—is remarkably mobile, tracking behind the onscreen crew members and eventually "infiltrating" the scene, moving into it, until we end with a close-up of the actress portraying Moreno's secretary. This aesthetic is of course markedly different from Feuillade's in the original: no longer confined to a tableau setup, Gautier's camera demonstrates its ability to move within and out of the diegetic space. But does this shifting perspective, this liberation of the camera, provide us with a superior or privileged perspective? Has the cinema's evolution from the tableau

perspective articulated in the cinema of attractions to a mobile camera and a fluid cinematic space developed through decades of (especially American) narrative filmmaking led to a fuller or more artistic cinematic representation? Not inherently, no—as I mentioned in my previous chapter, Feuillade often uses the tableau setup for his own specific narrative, visceral, and thematic purposes; I used the example of the sequence from *Juve contre Fantômas* (1913) in which Feuillade's rapid cutting between various shot scales and onscreen movements as Lady Beltham retreats to an abandoned villa for a rendezvous with Fantômas makes us firmly aware of the villain's superhuman power over other individuals and the audience, an effect achieved solely through camera angle and editing patterns.

In *Irma Vep*, René Vidal ultimately concludes that he may have indeed made a mistake in liberating Feuillade's aesthetic for his remake of *Les Vampires*. During a tirade after viewing the rushes from the first day of production, Vidal confesses that he's furious with himself for creating "only images, no soul." Feuillade had "the right eye," Vidal claims. "He had the right distance. If you change the distance, everything gets fucked up." Maggie tries to reassure him by saying, quite rightly, that it's 1996, eighty-one years after the premiere of *Les Vampires*. Cinematic language has evolved; camera mobility may not be inherently superior to the tableau setup, but that does not mean that a static long-shot perspective that allows action to play out within its rigid frame is the foundational essence of cinema. These conclusions—which, one would hope, few serious studiers of cinema would today disagree with—amount to yet another in-between space that *Irma Vep* inhabits. Utilizing neither the static long-take camera setups familiar to the arthouse cinema (we may think, for example, of the austere films of Hou Hsiao-hsien or Michael Haneke) nor the flashier aesthetics we may see in some modes of mainstream filmmaking (Guy Ritchie, Tony Scott, Michael Bay, etc.), *Irma Vep* argues that there is no one predominant aesthetic mode through which

films should be presented or represented: film is an eclectic *bricolage* filled with opportunity, and dogmatic strictures prescribing which aesthetic approach is ideal can only be limiting, suffocating.

Similarly, while Feuillade utilized the tableau setup precisely and powerfully, he also valued the excitement possible within onscreen diegetic movement and the mobility of the camera—the vivacity of Irma Vep escaping from a moving automobile, for example, or of Irma spiraling down the facade of a tall building by unraveling herself from within a coiled rope. By claiming (through Vidal) that Feuillade had "the right eye," "the right distance," yet also "liberating" the tableau aesthetic to be found in the majority of his crime serials, Assayas is subtly applauding Feuillade's indeterminate or eclectic approach—a cinematic "mode of uncertainty," as Vicki Callahan would say, that I will soon discuss more fully.

Assayas proceeds to provide us with more examples of wildly disparate cinematic paradigms. At a party held at Zoé's apartment after the first day of shooting, for example, a group of people watches a movie on television. For approximately two minutes, we cannot see the images that they see; we simply observe them in conversation, as one man claims that the "political" film they're watching can no longer be made in *any* national cinema. Then, as has happened previously with both *The Heroic Trio* and *Les Vampires*, Assayas leaps into a lengthy clip (a minute and a half) taken directly from this film. We observe a group of editors laboring at a Steenbeck machine. A handheld 16mm camera then pans to a banner strung up against the wall; it reads: "CINEMA IS NOT A MAGIC. IT IS A TECHNIQUE AND A SCIENCE. A TECHNIQUE BORN OF SCIENCE AND AT THE SERVICE OF A WILL. THE WILL OF THE WORKERS TO FREE THEMSELVES." This dogmatic motto is held in sharp distinction to René Vidal's cinephiliac love for *The Heroic Trio* or for Feuillade, or indeed to the sense of subversive magic the Surrealists felt in regard to Feuillade's crime serials. Assayas, of course, does not include this segment in order to validate the words on the banner; he includes it in

order to incarnate yet another paradigm that is a potentiality in the art of cinema. Film is not a display of attractions or a narrative form or a conflux of the two, Assayas is arguing; it is also a political tool, it *is* a magic *and* a technique. It cannot be easily essentialized.

After the party, Maggie returns to her hotel, and we experience yet another leap into a bizarre and indeterminate cinematic mode. Donning her latex bodysuit, Maggie listens to a Sonic Youth song ("Dreaming / Dreaming of a girl like me," blare the lyrics) in order to enter the character of Irma Vep. Now seemingly fully inhabiting her role, Maggie prowls the corridors of her hotel—becoming, indeed, Desnos' "hotel mouse"—until she sneaks into the room of a woman, entirely nude, who holds a tense conversation on the telephone with her lover. As the camera gingerly approaches this naked woman, framing her through an open doorway, her nude body is offered to us unabashedly for our voyeuristic gaze. It is as though the sexuality of Irma Vep in her black bodysuit, enjoyed so thoroughly by Desnos and other Surrealists, has been displaced onto this naked female body. Here, Assayas seems quite directly to be addressing the theories of such psychoanalytic theorists as Laura Mulvey, who, in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," argues that the threat of castration posed by the female figure in representational cinema has been neutralized by an essentially male gaze in the classical Hollywood narrative—a gaze that serves to objectify the female body, offering it to (male) cinematic spectators for their voyeuristic enjoyment.[4] Indeed, the full frontal female nudity in this scene is entirely gratuitous; even on a conceptual level, it is not immediately apparent why Assayas would objectify this figure so overtly. Does he intend to posit *all* cinema as essentially voyeuristic, as objectifying identity by transforming it into mere visual mediation, thus reiterating (even exploiting) Mulvey's thesis? Does he intend to transplant Feuillade uncomfortably into the modern age by extending his (Feuillade's) sexually penetrative gaze to include explicit nudity—one step beyond the revealing latex bodysuit worn by

Maggie/Irma? Does he intend to self-consciously indulge in the kind of sexualized, even decadent, French art cinema that is seen by some American audiences as gratuitously shocking? (This conception was apparent even from the inauguration of cinema, a point I'll be returning to shortly.) Most basically, and most pertinent to my point, this sequence asks us to refer to a psychoanalytic paradigm that represents *yet another* approach we could take in making and watching films. In the remarkably eclectic *bricolage* of Assayas's film, there are few modes of production or analysis that are not at least implicitly evoked.

It is probably a futile effort to discern what is the strangest scene in Assayas's incredibly strange film, but this sequence may hold that distinction. After quietly observing the nude woman's highly intimate conversation with her lover, Maggie/Irma steals one of her opulent jeweled necklaces and departs from the room. But did this even happen at all? The scene (possibly even a dream sequence) ends with Maggie/Irma tossing the nude woman's jewels over the roof of the hotel into a raging rainstorm; if the theft did in fact take place, monetary gain was obviously not the motivation. We could surmise that Maggie was simply trying to embody the transgressive criminality that makes Irma Vep such a powerful and mysterious character in *Les Vampires*. Subsequently, we see Maggie sleeping in her latex bodysuit the next morning, shaken awake from a groggy daze by one of the film's producers, Maïté (Dominique Faysse). What's significant here is not whether this sequence actually took place, but that its possible existence within a number of disparate paradigms (narrative, conceptual, psychoanalytical, oneiric, epicurean, etc.) posits cinema, yet again, as a conflux of a seemingly limitless number of approaches—a *bricolage*, a mode of uncertainty.

It is shortly hereafter that the director José Murano is brought onto the project by its producers, after a scandalous domestic altercation between Vidal and his wife ends in her being

hospitalized. The in-joke to the introduction of Murano's character is that his name is a near-exact echo of Juan-José Moreno, the mysterious criminal in *Les Vampires* who abducts Irma Vep, hypnotizes her, forces her to fall in love with him (though when her somnambulism subsides her affections do not seem to have lessened—a paradox that adds to the surrealistic allure of *Les Vampires*' narrative), and is ultimately executed by the French police. Vidal had conceived of Irma Vep as indeterminate, mysterious, graceful, unknowable; Murano conceives of her as essentially French: she "is street thugs and slums!" The fact that two such disparate interpretations may be feasibly ascertained is a testament to the indeterminate and liminal nature of Irma Vep (and thus closer to Vidal's conception). She is, as Vicki Callahan concludes, a receptacle or screen for all forms of cinematic desire (the desire to mystify and befuddle, the desire to essentialize and symbolize, and of course sexual desire as well).[5]

What's significant here, I feel, is that these two film directors attempt to forge a distinct identity for Irma Vep through their disparate conceptions. Paradoxically, the distinct identity that Vidal had hoped to forge was one of *indistinctness*, an amorphous persona that he may nonetheless conclude is "mystery, beauty, magic, strength." Murano interprets her identity as a sociopolitical emblem, a metaphor for specifically French womanhood, criminality, economic stratification, and urbanity—an interpretation that is partially confirmed by *Les Vampires* (Musidora and Feuillade do indeed present her as a strikingly confrontational figure from the Parisian underclass), yet largely contradicted by the serial as well (Irma Vep can in fact transmute sexual and economic boundaries, as I demonstrated in my previous chapter). The presence of these two director characters in *Irma Vep* would seem to suggest the cinematic auteur as the overriding author who may forge cinematic identity, but the contradistinction between their two approaches to Irma Vep ultimately reaffirms her character as unknowable, undefinable, amorphous. The strength and mystery that we may

cherish in *Les Vampires*'s Irma is indeed reestablished by Assayas and by Maggie Cheung in *Irma Vep*—even the directors whom we may assume are "in charge" of portraying her cohesively cannot encapsulate her persona.

In the quest to refashion Irma Vep through a remake of *Les Vampires*, however, René Vidal has the last laugh. *Irma Vep* ends with the only footage that Vidal had completed before being ejected from the project. We see silent black-and-white footage of Maggie as Irma Vep scrambling over the rooftops of Paris; like similar scenes of Musidora as Irma in *Les Vampires*, we are struck by the pure and simple beauty of cinematic movement, as we observe the fluidity of both Maggie's body and of light and shadow as it transforms itself upon celluloid. At this point, Vidal's depiction of Maggie as Irma does not seem altogether different from Feuillade's depiction of Musidora as Irma (although Eric Gautier's camera is more mobile than that of Feuillade and his cinematographer, Manichoux, which pans along with Irma from a distanced perspective).

Suddenly, though, *Irma Vep* explodes into a pattern of jagged scrapes and cuts etched directly into the celluloid. A loud burst of static erupts upon the soundtrack. Scrawled lines and shapes continue to appear, and the soundtrack continues to assault us with a succession of harsh shrieks and blares. Assayas uses the techniques of avant-garde experimentation, particularly cameraless animation, in order to aggressively assault traditional cinematic representation. Lasers emit from Maggie's eyes; novae burst around her; she reigns over the Paris cityscape. (See Figure 3.1.) Vidal's/Assayas's point here, it would seem, is that Irma is such an indeterminate, unknowable character that she can only be *presented* rather than *represented*; one must refer to the techniques of the cinema of attractions rather than of narrative cinema in order to convey her mystery, her strength. While her depiction is still undoubtedly in the hands of Assayas or Vidal, they envision Irma as so profoundly enigmatic that she may only be presented through abstraction.

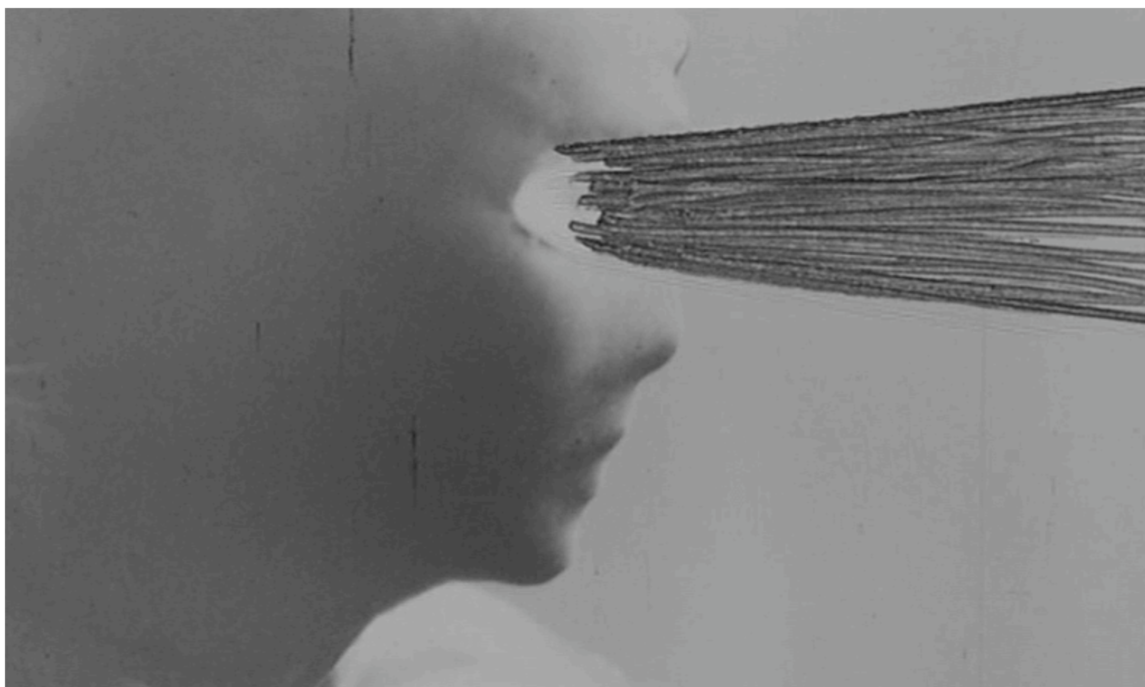

Figure 3.1: Irma Vep presented through abstraction in Olivier Assayas's 1996 "remake" of *Les Vampires*.

This could be viewed as an insensitive depiction of a female figure by a male auteur: her alluring mystique so exotic that "She" cannot be represented traditionally. More sympathetically, though, Irma's presentation may be viewed as a respectful admission that *no* individual identity can be comprehensively forged on cinema, that although the cinema is convincing in its verisimilitude, striking in its visual resemblance to reality, it essentially occupies a middle-ground between reality and non-reality, in which representation can never really be complete.

We return, in a roundabout way, to Tom Gunning's claim that the cinema of attractions did not disappear with the onset of traditional modes of narrative representation, but would reappear later in the avant-garde and in certain modes of mainstream filmmaking (the musical, the action film, etc.).[6] Assayas would certainly agree that the paradigms of attractions and of narrativity coexist in numerous films, and obviously in the crime serials of Louis Feuillade. The Surrealists, too, were entranced by the cohabitation of these two paradigms in Feuillade's films; part of their

embracement of Feuillade was the disjunction between realistic representation and spectacular presentation, between the real and the non-real. Assayas explicitly demonstrates this by closing *Irma Vep* with a presentation of this most legendary of French film characters through avant-garde techniques—through attractions that foreground the astonishing appeal of film form itself (shapes scratched directly onto celluloid, non-representational soundwork). If the identity of Irma Vep cannot be ascertained by traditional cinematic representation, perhaps we can extend this to Assayas's overarching theme in *Irma Vep*: that cinema itself is “unknowable,” uncategorizable in an essential way. Realistic and non-realistic, a series of attractions and narratives, popular and experimental and artistic and political, film is a *bricolage* that was generally embraced by the Surrealists precisely because of its eclecticism, its underlying “mode of uncertainty.”

It is precisely this mode of uncertainty that I have yet to address. This vague but tempting concept, evoked by Vicki Callahan and (in her estimation) inaugurated by Feuillade, may indeed be recognized in *Irma Vep* and throughout a number of national cinemas since the crime serials of the transitional period of the 1910s (not only Feuillade’s).[7] It is, by no means, an exclusively French conception. Though somewhat linked to Surrealism and its evocation of fantastic or marvelous forces within the everyday confines of reality, the mode of uncertainty in Callahan's estimation exists outside the realm of Surrealism as well. It entails, most basically, a breakdown in vision and knowledge, an acceptance that what we see is not necessarily physically real. It is, therefore, intimately linked to certain concepts within the modernity thesis, having to do with the transformations in movement, vision, communication, and the urban space engendered by the modern age. (These transformations were briefly outlined in my introduction.) I realize, it must be admitted, that the concept of the mode of uncertainty is precariously vague; however, I believe linking it to Feuillade and Surrealism will allow us to answer why Feuillade's crime serials still

matter, and why his influence may still be felt in modern cinema.

Before further exploring this mode of uncertainty, however, I must address the questions raised by *Irma Vep*'s and Feuillade's placement within the context of a French national cinema, for it turns out that conceptions of an essentially French cinema are related to the conceptual framework of the mode of uncertainty. Assayas's film in many ways posits Feuillade as one of the godfathers of a French cinematic legacy. At one point in the film, Zoé voices her exasperated critique of this heralded figure: "Enough of Feuillade! Feuillade's a drag. Unless I just don't get it."

"Even *Les Vampires*?," someone asks.

"Yes. I saw two episodes on video. Thank God I could fast-forward! It's pretty flimsy stuff."

Later, Zoé bashfully apologizes to her partner, Mireille (Bulle Ogier), for offering even this timid criticism. "I went too far railing on Feuillade before," she says.

"Too late," responds Mireille, with apparent sincerity. It's as though the saint of French cinema had been blasphemed.

Assayas's very decision to comment upon the liminal, eclectic nature of modern cinema (French as well as international) through the lens of *Les Vampires* indicates the esteem that Feuillade and his crime serials continue to hold upon some French audiences (and obviously for Assayas in particular). *Fantômas* has been remade numerous times, notably by André Hunebelle in a James Bond-ish French/Italian coproduction in 1964 (with Jean Marais portraying the lead). A French television series based on the character premiered in 1980, and an upcoming remake is slated for release in 2011. *Judex* received a masterful and overtly surreal adaptation by Georges Franju in 1963, which focused on the serial's more fantastic elements (especially Judex's astonishing typewriter that inscribes its words in fire). And Callahan argues that the recursive and cyclical narrative structures of *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* are rearticulated, in a peculiarly deconstructionist

fashion, by Jacques Rivette in *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* (*Celine and Julie Go Boating*, 1974)—though such serialized narrative patterns were not confined strictly to Feuillade, as they characterized many of the crime serials released in France (and, to a lesser extent, in America) during the transitional period.[8] Furthermore, André Bazin's quote regarding Louis Feuillade bears repeating here: Feuillade (along with Jean Renoir and Georges Méliès) "is probably the sole Mr. Cinema that France has ever had the privilege of knowing."[9]

If this is the case, what about Feuillade and his crime serials is essentially or uniquely French? Was the eclectic *bricolage* nature of crime serials during the teens a peculiarly French phenomenon? If these crime serials did indeed inaugurate a cinematic mode of uncertainty, is this paradigm specifically French? Can it be found in other recent national cinemas? In a modern globalized entertainment industry, can we still say that an essentially French mode of filmmaking persists? These are the questions I will now address, largely by analyzing primary sources published in both France and the United States during the time of these serials' release in the 1910s. These newspapers and trade publications offer remarkable firsthand accounts of contemporary conceptions of what made American or French serials peculiar to their country of production—accounts that are made even more fascinating by concomitant social forces and predominating stereotypes that undoubtedly effected public reception of these serials in both countries.

National Systems of Signification

In their introduction to the anthology *Early Cinema and the "National"*, Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini, and Rob King raise the hypothesis that "when 'systems of signification' began to coalesce within early cinema, they emerged as articulations of 'the nation,' perhaps most clearly in the development of visual and narrative forms charged with national and racial connotations."[10]

Their significant point is that concepts of national cinemas were ingrained into cinematic production and reception from the very beginning of the art form, and that such conceptions were often articulated through narrative structures and visual representation. In analyzing the disparities between French and American crime serials, and between responses to them published in the French and American press, we may recognize debates within the national cinema paradigm from nearly a century ago that remain somewhat unabated to this day.

A particularly telling example of one American journalist's conceptions regarding the French crime serial may be found in W. Stephen Bush's "Advertising and Criticising," an op-ed piece published in the *Motion Picture World* in 1912. Bush's editorial was primarily a response to the release of Éclair's *Zigomar* serial in the U.S. in 1911, and is worth citing at some length. He writes:

> We refer in particular to a large and recent influx of foreign 'features' and to some domestic film abortions dealing with crime and gunplays, with prison horrors and life in the underworld. The makers of these films call them 'features.' If there is anything to distinguish these productions from others it is only their bad preeminence. They are lurid and sensational in the worst sense of the word and, as a rule, they are plainly and frankly immoral. They appeal directly to the ignorant, the morbid and the depraved. They are a stench in the nostrils of the audiences in the ordinary American motion picture theater.[11]

These predominantly foreign features that leave a stench in the nostrils of American theatergoers are thus seen as tawdrier, more illicit and sordid, than most of their American counterparts. Not only do such films indulge in the most sensational and immoral of subject matter, but they attract an audience that is "ignorant, morbid, and depraved"—a base appeal that, at a time when film producers and moral watchdogs were attempting to present the cinema as a respectable art form to be attended by the upper classes, was particularly troubling. Bush continues:

> We wish to make it clear that we are not prejudiced against foreign features as such. On the contrary, [*Motion Picture World*] has been the first to recognize and proclaim the superior merits of

> such features as 'Dante's Inferno,' 'Homer's Odyssey,' 'The Crusaders, or Jerusalem Delivered,' 'The Miracle,' and other great classic, historic, allegorical and spectacular productions. One cannot, however, look through the columns of the motion picture journals of Europe without a fear lest many of the 'sensational features,' now exploited there to the disgust of the friends of the motion picture, will find their way here. The advance guard seems to have reached here. It will be our unpleasant duty to refuse them the hospitality of these shores…
>
> The methods of European censorship, however rigorous they may be in shutting out films which seem to belittle 'duly constituted authority,' are notoriously lax in matters of morality. Almost anything will pass muster. The resulting licentiousness in film productions has raised storms of protest even in Continental Europe, and the public, whose morality is underestimated by the police, will have no more of these offensive 'features.' It is a great mistake to try and market them here. What is too raw for Continental Europe will not get past an American board of censorship.[12]

Bush's passage is remarkable in several ways. First of all, the European productions that he lauds as morally respectable—'Dante's Inferno,' 'Homer's Odyssey,' and the like—were exactly the kind of adaptations that were being culled from literary and theatrical sources with an inherent cultural pedigree. These *films d'art*, as they were called, were held in stark opposition to the westerns, burlesques, melodramas, and detective films that ostensibly appealed to lower class audiences who were merely seeking a thrilling diversion—audiences that were "ignorant, morbid, and depraved," in Bush's estimation. The *films d'art* productions represent the turn in early cinema from the cinema of attractions paradigm to an institutionalized narrative cinema, which was partially borne out of a desire to provide expanded cinematic entertainment for a greater variety of theatergoers (particularly those situated in the middle and upper classes, as mentioned above). Bush recognizes this in his editorial when he criticizes the "sensational features" of the immoral productions being produced in France and exported into the States. These "lower" forms of cinematic production—westerns, detective films, etc.—featured numerous characteristics of the cinema of attractions, especially showcases of violent or shocking behavior presented directly to the audience in order to elicit its awe and titillation.

What is truly remarkable in Bush's article, however, is the jingoistic undercurrent that runs

throughout the piece. Seeking to "refuse" immoral European productions the "hospitality" of American shores, Bush endorses a distinctly American mode of cinema that features none of the moral laxness of continental releases. In claiming that films which are "too raw" for Continental Europe have no chance of being released in the United States, Bush voices the opinion that European (specifically French, given this article's publication in response to the release of *Zigomar*) films are somehow naturally more sordid and decadent than their American counterparts. As a matter of fact, Bush's mindset is neither particularly surprising nor confined to American critics (and, furthermore, is an opinion held by some critics to this very day). This article was published at a time when national cinemas were first beginning to industrialize themselves, in concordance with the institutionalization of a narrative mode of filmmaking. From the onset of the cinematic narrative, France and the United States vied for international economic superiority in distributing their films, a history that I will soon outline. It made economic sense, then, to posit the other's cinematic output as somehow inferior (whether morally, artistically, politically, etc).

Bush is indeed correct when he claims that "friends of the motion picture" in France—or, at least, certain cultural commentators—were disgusted by the prurience of shocking crime serials produced in their own country. Numerous French critics were indeed harshly criticizing the gruesome, base subject matter of films like *Zigomar* and *Fantômas*. As early as 1916, Feuillade was denounced by some French critics as indulging in the kinds of disreputable subject matter that the French cinema should have been resolutely avoiding. The weekly trade paper *Hebdo-Film*, for example, asserted, "the crime film has been fatal to M. Feuillade. He has sacrificed everything to Fantômas, Skeletons, Ghosts, Vampires who bore us today. He tries desperately to exploit an exhausted mine, the products of which could not be sold anymore."[13] In a different article, the same writer—a certain "M. Ballot"—reiterated his frustration with Feuillade's indulgence in tawdry

subject matter: "That a man of talent, an artist, as the director of most of the great films which have been the success and glory of Gaumont, starts again to deal with this unhealthy genre, obsolete and condemned by all people of taste, this remains for me a real problem."[14] (Ballot may have been referring to Feuillade's *La Vie telle qu'elle est* series: fourteen films produced for Gaumont in 1911 and 1912 that sought to create stark and simple "slices of life" in specific social milieu. In these films, according to Richard Abel, "the threat of destitution and its social causes often now came to the fore."[15])

In addition to their denunciation in the popular press, the crime serials of Feuillade and others were faced with considerable censorship woes. For example, in the summer of 1912, numerous mayors in southeastern France (namely in Lyon, Marseilles, and Avignon, among other towns) banned the exhibition of crime films such as *Bandits en automobile*, *L'Auto grise*, and *Hors la loi*, all of which were produced and distributed by Éclair and which detailed the sensational exploits of the Bonnot *apache* gang.[16] Radical politician and Lyon mayor Edouard Harriot would soon lead the campaign to censor such films, claiming that such "scandalous and demoralizing spectacles" set bad examples for the French youth.[17] Harriot's use of the word "spectacles" should remind us that such crime serials were still tied to the cinema of attractions paradigm, though of course they had begun their transition to a narrative mode of cinema as well; it is somewhat too simple, yet mostly accurate, to say that the move towards a narrative cinema constituted a move towards the cinema's respectability in the eyes of contemporary moral protectors and cultural watchdogs.

Perhaps the most interesting criticism of Feuillade published in the French press, however, was filmmaker Jean Epstein's article "The Senses I," written for the cultural journal *Bonjour Cinema* in 1921 (and thus, of course, several years after the release of the crime serials I am analyzing—Feuillade was still producing serials in the early 1920s, though he had largely abandoned the

shocking crime spectacles in which he had earlier indulged). Writing of early crime serials, Epstein describes:

> a time when the cinema was a holiday diversion for schoolboys, a darkish place of assignation, or a somewhat somnambulistic scientific trick. There's a dreadful danger in not knowing chalk from cheese. And duped the sages were in not realizing sooner that those popular, foolish (that goes without saying), novelettish, blood-and-thunderish, serialized *Exploits of Elaine* characterize a period, a style, a civilization. No longer, thank goodness, in vogue. Good yarns that go on endlessly and then start all over again…
>
> Serious gentlemen, rather too lacking in culture, applauded the lives of the ants, the metamorphoses of larvae. Exclusively. As educational for younger minds.[18]

In other words, the cinema had to grow up. While earlier crime serials may have been valuable in characterizing a particular epochal mindset, that epoch had passed—the boys who had enjoyed such "cheese" were now men who should devote their talents to more "advanced" subject matter. Indeed, in Epstein's conception of a "somnambulistic scientific trick," we find an indirect allusion to the cinema of attractions, which could, perhaps, be broadly (and unfairly) categorized as a "somnambulistic scientific trick," attempting to hypnotize or stun its audience through a display of what the scientific innovation of the cinematograph could alone accomplish. And in his concluding jibes at "serious gentlemen" who applauded, ludicrously, the lives of ants and larvae, I find a veiled attack on the Surrealist writers who grandiloquently proclaimed these crime serials as the soul of the age, the new cinematic experience embodied. The ants and larvae they deigned to applaud were seemingly the members of the lower class, the thugs and the modern urban population itself, not the respectable bourgeoisie whom the cinema was now trying to attract into its "darkish places."

Equally interesting in Epstein's article, I find, is his direct reference to *The Exploits of Elaine*, the most popular *American* serial that had been released in France. Though Epstein's evocative language implicitly references the crime serials of Jasset and Feuillade, it was Pearl White's

American serial that received the direct brunt of Epstein's condemnation. If W. Stephen Bush specifically chastised the European cinema for its moral laxness, Epstein is here claiming that both French and (especially) American filmmakers needed to mature into a consideration of more respectable themes.

The moral concern over disreputable subject matter, the censorship of crime serials and criticisms of them in the popular press, and especially the anxiety among some French and American writers regarding the distorting influence of imported pictures—all of these topics become a bit clearer when we consider the historical context in which they held sway. I briefly mentioned before that both the French and American film industries were attempting to assert their economic dominance as international distributors in the early years of cinema; I will now discuss this phenomenon more fully.

Richard Abel argues, in his thorough and compelling history of early French cinema *The Ciné Goes to Town*, that French films in the first two decades of cinema could be deemed the first instance of a contiguous national cinema, thanks to the specific social, economic, and legal constraints being imposed upon French society at the time.[19] In the realm of film exhibition, such social characteristics included the popularity of film screenings in fairgrounds and on café-concert or music hall programs by 1902. These forms of exhibition rapidly evolved into the construction of numerous permanent theaters by 1907 (a trend that would culminate, in 1911, with the opening of the Gaumont-Palace theater, which was the largest and most opulent venue in France, able to accommodate 3,400 moviegoers). Concurrently, the Pathé-Frères company was distributing its films worldwide at a greater rate than any other international distribution company. Indeed, between 1902 and 1907, Pathé tripled its production output (being able to produce six new films a week by 1905) and began marketing reliable film cameras and projectors. The year of 1907 marked

"the year of the cinema in France," according to Abel; more than that, he adds, it was "the dawn of a new age of Humanity," since, by this point, with Pathé achieving the first standardized mode of production in 1905, France had secured its predominant position in the international production and distribution market.[20] From 1907 to 1911 (the first years of the "transitional" period), Pathé sought to extend its position by exerting greater control over distribution and exhibition by renting instead of selling its products to exhibitors. These advancements continued between 1911 and 1914, although during these years Pathé's attempts to monopolize the film industry were successfully challenged by the Gaumont and Éclair production companies. Indeed, by this point, there were a number of smaller, loosely related production firms, distribution companies, and exhibition circuits, comprising what Abel terms a "cottage industry" for French cinema during the teens. At the start of World War I, France was no longer the predominant international distributor of films, but it was a close second behind the United States.[21]

In 1908, Pathé had initiated a deal with the Edison Trust Company (soon to become the Motion Picture Patents Company, or MPPC) whereby the Trust would exclusively distribute Pathé's films widely in the United States, leaving imported pictures by Gaumont and Éclair to be distributed by the significantly smaller George Kleine Company. This arrangement meant that, from 1909 to 1910, nearly all films imported into the United States were French, and the majority of *those* were from Pathé.[22]

Unfortunately, however, Pathé's exclusive arrangement with the Trust meant that it was especially vulnerable to fluctuations within the American film industry. These fluctuations took the form of numerous American independent producers and distributors who started to gain a foothold in the U.S. industry in the first years of the 1910s. Consequently, Pathé was increasingly excluded from the American market. At the same time, the company experienced stronger pressure from the

National Board of Censorship in the United States to "clean up" its purportedly immoral reputation. Due to these concurrent circumstances, by 1911, Pathé's film titles accounted for less than ten percent of all films released in the United States. Conversely, American releases in France were becoming increasingly prevalent and popular; in fact, by 1913, American releases were outnumbering French releases *in France*.[23]

To return the conversation to Feuillade: the competition between American and French companies became particularly heated in the genre of the detective film. In *Americanizing the Movies and "Movie-Mad" Audiences*, Richard Abel writes that in American newspaper articles and among film exhibitors in the U.S., "French crime thrillers…came to be seen as quite different from their American counterpart—and *foreign*."[24] An explicit example of this is the Bush article quoted above. The distinction between what was validated as American in contrast to what was perceived as disconcertingly foreign was heightened by increasingly pronounced differences between distribution patterns and a nascent star system, both of which were becoming heavily industrialized (and thus, quite powerful) in the United States.[25]

These nationalist opinions continued to be published in the popular press during the teens. For example, in 1913 the *New York Dramatic Mirror* printed an article by Herbert Blaché, vice president of the Gaumont company (and husband of Alice Guy, who had previously been the head of production at Gaumont until Feuillade's hire in 1907). Blaché claimed, "foreign manufacturers [outside of the United States] have been taught their lesson. More and more care is being shown in preparing films for the American market… They are eliminating objectionable scenes, and through their American agents, who strive to give clear, decisive criticisms of the films sent here, the European producers get closer to the American ideal."[26] If that "American ideal" was morally respectable filmmaking with no objectionable scenes, then Blaché's assertion was resoundingly

refuted by the importation of Feuillade's *Fantômas* serial six months later—while the serial experienced little controversy in France, it caused a major outrage in the United States. Indeed, marketing for *Fantômas* in the United States downplayed the serial's sensational aspects, advertising it as a "cracksman vs. detective series," with the cracksman—Fantômas—depicted as an elegant, black-masked bourgeois gentleman.[27] After harshly criticizing the first installment of the serial, the *New York Dramatic Mirror* actually refused to review any of the subsequent episodes.[28] *Fantômas* controversy notwithstanding, Blaché's article is fascinating for asserting that *all* foreign production companies outside of the United States were manufacturing their products with an eventual stateside release in mind, or at least agreeing to excise objectionable matter in order to procure a wide release. Given the economic gain to be reaped by an American release, Blaché's assertion is not difficult to believe.

The *Dramatic Mirror* and *Motion Picture World* published several more articles regarding the disparity between morality in the United States and Europe, with both publications assuming a "European public…not yet educated up to the American standard."[29] These publications cited as "evidence" to this claim the perceived criminal activity, excessive violence, and morbidity of French crime thrillers. While French crime thrillers were indeed marked by these unsettling aspects, it goes without saying that such distinguishing features are hardly evidence of a less advanced public education. The increasingly contentious ethnocentrism in these articles seems evidence of some American writers' desire to firmly establish the American cinema as the predominant national cinema in numerous ways (morally, aesthetically, economically, etc.).

Abel synthesizes all of these criticisms of French detective films in the American popular press as evidence of a "repudiation of a 'foreign' *other* that definitely could not be assimilated as *American*."[30] Furthermore, he argues that the sense of cultural superiority articulated through these

articles "would support the U.S. film industry's 'invasion' of Europe and other countries, just then getting under way, and ultimately sell U.S. cultural imperialism as a 'global good.'"[31]

While such conceptions and criticisms of foreign cinemas in the American and French press may be understood on an economic and institutional level (as both countries were attempting to construct themselves as the foremost cinematic superpower), it bears asking whether or not such conceptions were at all accurate. Were French crime serials actually more immoral, more decadent, less culturally respectable than their American counterparts? Can we conceive of an essentialist "French cinema" that is somehow inherently more transgressive than the American cinema?

My conclusion is that we cannot—that such conceptions voiced in the popular press must be viewed within the context of the development of national cinemas during the first two decades of cinema. It must be noted that several American crime films experienced censorship woes and were accused of prurient immorality by newspaper articles. A telling example is the 1912 film *Lieutenant Petrosino*, released by the Feature Photoplay company, which concerned a real-life Italian-American detective assigned to rid the New York docks of underground criminal activity (and eventually killed in Palermo, Sicily). *Lieutenant Petrosino* was declared as objectionable by the mayor of Cleveland, who arrested a local exhibitor for refusing to halt a three-day exhibition of the film.[32]

Perhaps more remarkably, several French crime serials that were considerably more shocking and violent than later releases initially received no condemnation or criticism in the American press. The most obvious example is Éclair's *Zigomar* serial, directed by Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset, which was released in France and the United States beginning in 1911. Zigomar was a shockingly violent antihero, a murderer as well as a sexual predator who had no qualms about killing dozens of people in public places simply in order to conceal his escapes and criminal plots.

Indeed, *Zigomar* was possibly the only serial to rival Feuillade's *Fantômas* films in terms of sensational violence and sordid spectacle. While Éclair may have excised some material from *Zigomar* for its stateside release, its cuts were actually quite limited—in total, the episodes of the serial amounted to almost the same running time as their French release.[33] There appeared to be no moral outrage in response to *Zigomar* in the United States, at least as expressed in the popular press. The *Motion Picture World* in fact described it as a "notable film" that skillfully "[held] the mirror up to modern life."[34] *Zigomar* received quite a successful run at numerous theaters throughout the Midwest, where the serial was distributed by the Cleveland-based Feature & Educational Films company.[35]

Why would a crime serial as shockingly violent as *Zigomar* play without comment in the United States in 1911, only to have numerous American writers denouncing European (especially French) crime films as morally corrupt only a few years later? French releases had not become any more violent over these few years; indeed, given the censorship troubles experienced by several crime films in southeastern France in the summer of 1912, production companies like Pathé, Éclair, and Gaumont were attempting to produce films that more heavily emphasized their moral rectitude. The logical conclusion, then, is that such denunciations of European cinematic immorality in the American press were primarily the result of a desire to construct a dominant American film industry at the same time that Hollywood was beginning to erect itself as the foremost producer and distributor of films on an international scale.

The foregoing discussion of the sociohistorical context of American and French production and distribution and the opinions voiced in both nations' popular press should allow us to make several conclusions regarding Feuillade and his crime serials as specifically or fundamentally French. First off, we must concede that, despite the enshrinement of Feuillade as a sort of godfather to a

French cinematic legacy (as deconstructed in *Irma Vep*, as voiced by Bazin in his aforementioned quote, as suggested by the numerous remakes of his serials at various points throughout the history of French cinema, and as held by numerous modern-day cineastes), we *cannot* easily claim that Feuillade and his crime serials represent a specifically French mode of uncertainty, surrealism, or spectacle. As I have mentioned before, Feuillade was not the only French filmmaker working within the context of crime serials during the transitional period that featured both narrative structures and characteristics from the cinema of attractions—Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset and *Zigomar* being the most notable evidence to the contrary. Furthermore, some crime serials made in the United States featured similarly unique narrative patterns that were partially steeped in the cinema of attractions, and that emphasized violent spectacles. They were certainly less frequent and perhaps less unsettling than their French counterparts, but the controversy over the American release *Lieutenant Petrosino* and the massive popularity (in both France and the United States) of Pearl White's *The Perils of Pauline*, *The Exploits of Elaine*, and *The Romance of Elaine* in 1914 and 1915 force us to acknowledge that Feuillade's brand of crime serial was an eclectic *bricolage* influenced by multivalent sources from France *and* America. Indeed, if Assayas's *Irma Vep* posits modern filmmaking as necessarily the conflux of numerous international sources (Hollywood spectacles, French art cinema, Hong Kong action filmmaking, political filmmaking from Latin America, etc.), then Richard Abel's *The Ciné Goes to Town* and the rich patchworks that are Feuillade's crime serials allow us to see that such multinational influences manifested themselves in film production from its very beginning. The increasing globalization of the modern film industry may have exacerbated this transnational eclecticism, but globalization did not itself give rise to it.

A telling comparison may be made between Feuillade and Fritz Lang's two-part crime serial *Die Spinnen* (*The Spiders*), released in its homeland of Germany in 1919 and 1920. One can

recognize in *The Spiders* Feuillade's influence on Lang, specifically in its portrayal of an underground criminal network of black-cloaked thieves that features wealthy businessmen and respectable public figures as its prominent villains, whose spree of befuddling and violent crimes leaves the police force baffled.[36] In addition, Vicki Callahan claims that the influence of Irma Vep may quite directly be traced to the character of Lio Sha (Ressel Orla) in Lang's serial: like Irma, Lio Sha is sexually, morally, and ethnically amorphous—both an alluring female figure and a powerful androgynous figure occupying traditionally patriarchal positions, both hero(ine) and villain(ess), Chinese and German and an indeterminate amalgamation of nationalities in general, a site wherein traditional boundaries break down.[37] Feuillade's influence may indeed be felt throughout Lang's lengthy, thrilling, and unpredictable crime caper, but its influences are not confined to specifically French sources. Michael E. Grost additionally recognizes the influences of late-nineteenth century pulp fiction writers such as Harry Blyth and Frank Packard, as well as that of earlier American western films: in the first episode, "The Golden Sea," *The Spiders'* American hero, Kay Hoog, journeys to the American west and battles villainous bandits and cowboys while under the employ of the Spider gang.[38]

Lang would later be recognized as particularly emblematic of Weimar Germany's cinematic output, notably in his epic reworking of the legendary nationalist myth *Die Nibelungen* (1924) and in his delirious parable of German excess and modernity, *Metropolis* (1927). Most pertinent to my point, Lang would infuse the influences of French and American crime fiction with a uniquely German allegory of tyranny, terrorism, and cultural madness in his Mabuse films: *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler—Ein Bild der Zeit* (*Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*, 1922) and *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (*The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, 1933). (Lang's 1960 resurrection of Mabuse, *Die 1000 Augen des Dr. Mabuse* [*The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*] is a different beast altogether.) While Lang's Mabuse films

articulate themes pertaining to Germany's specific contemporaneous sociopolitical culture (most generally, the ease with which mass populations may be "hypnotized" or duped by those in power, and how rapidly society may destroy itself from within), even these crime films are of course *bricolage* of numerous multinational sources. Similarly, Feuillade's crime serials may be seen as direct responses to criminal *apache* gangs then terrorizing French cities and to the increasing economic stratification of the French classes engendered by modern capitalism, but they may not be classified as essentially or foundationally French. My overarching point here is actually quite simple: most films can be simultaneously aligned with their specific national sociocultural milieu and tied to an eclectic patchwork of multinational influences. Any attempt to forge a filmic analysis through the national cinema paradigm should keep this duality in mind.

At a broader level, to determine whether or not we may recognize Feuillade's influence primarily in subsequent French filmmaking and/or in numerous other national cinemas, we must ask whether or not the analytical framework of "national cinema" is still a valid approach. Jonathan Auerbach, for example, has profound reservations regarding the continued application of this mode of analysis, claiming that, following the Vietnam War and the liberation movements of feminists, African Americans, and other minority groups beginning in the late 1960s, the crumbling of American exceptionalism led to a questioning of the very idea of the nation as a basic unit of analysis. Since then, argues Auerbach, the geopolitics of the nation-state has been replaced with an emphasis on Diaspora, hybridity, and borderlands.[39]

This is certainly the case, but Auerbach's conclusion may be countered by theorists such as Susan Hayward, who explores similar issues in her essay "National Cinemas and the Body Politic." Hayward concludes that even if we *wanted* to eliminate the concept of a national cinema it would never happen, if only for economic reasons: a nation's cinematic output is always partially defined

by the manner of state funding it receives, or by the economic model it emulates, or by the interpenetration and alliances of several countries in order to make a multinational picture. "National identity," she argues, "is an integral component of cinema, necessary to its survival."[40]

In attempting to formulate an analysis within the context of national cinemas, then, we must find a middle ground between Auerbach's borderlessness and Hayward's conception of national identity as necessary to cinema's survival. As I noted above, we must refrain from drawing essentialist, sweeping conclusions regarding what necessarily constitutes a French (or American, or Canadian, and so on) cinema; yet we must also recognize that every film is produced within the social, cultural, political, and economic milieu of a given country (or countries) at a given time, and therefore implicitly conveys national identity. To reiterate, then: my most basic claim regarding the "Frenchness" of Feuillade's crime serials and his mode of uncertainty is that they draw from a number of both French and American influences (many of which have been previously articulated in this project) and that their indiscriminate nature may be recognized in numerous French productions since the 1910s; however, that mode of uncertainty may also be recognized (perhaps more overtly) in many films from other national cinemas, suggesting that it is not an essentially French mode of production at all, but simply the conflux of a number of eclectic multinational sources and cinematic paradigms manifesting themselves in various ways.

This basic claim is admittedly vague and inconclusive, so in order to further chart the influence of Feuillade's mode of uncertainty throughout French and various other national cinemas, it is precisely this mode of uncertainty I now must explore. I am, perhaps, faced with a daunting and quixotic task: to categorize a paradigm that resists categorization, to try to define a cinematic mode that seeks to break down rigid definitions. Nonetheless, I believe attempting to do so will most fully convey the staggering power of Feuillade's crime serials, not to mention reveal the

intimate linkages between Feuillade, Surrealism, and the national cinema framework.

UNCERTAINTY

Vicki Callahan raises the concept of the "mode of uncertainty" in relation to Feuillade in two essays: "The Innovators 1910-1920: Detailing the Impossible" and "Screening Musidora: Inscribing Indeterminacy in Film History." How, precisely, does she classify this rather broad cinematic paradigm? At a most general level, the titles of the essays themselves offer us a substantial hint: the mode of uncertainty in film is demarcated by the disparity between the apparent veracity of the cinematic image and our perpetual awareness that we are simply seeing visual mediation. Cinema in general and Feuillade in particular "detail the impossible," offering us convincing illusions of a reality that does not exist. Furthermore, indeterminacy is inscribed into many filmic texts, not only in the manner mentioned above (is what we see onscreen *really* happening?) but also in their eclectic *bricolage* nature, which draws upon the influence of numerous genres, cinematic paradigms, polyvalent creative decisions, and other commingling factors.

This generalization is, of course, impossibly broad; by this estimation, *all* cinema operates within an overarching mode of uncertainty, whereby we are always aware of the disjunction between reality and illusion, and in which no filmic text can be essentially traced back to one predominant influence or wellspring. We must, therefore, analyze Callahan's theory in greater detail.

Callahan explicitly places Feuillade within the context of the transitional period from the cinema of attractions to the nascent narrative cinema. The disparity between these two modes of filmmaking, in which the display of shocking spectacles shares screen time with the cohesive representation of distinct narrative events, in Feuillade's crime serials "began a rich tradition of

questioning narrative certainty," claims Callahan.[41] I would actually argue that this tradition of questioning narrative certainty is not traceable to Feuillade specifically, but is instead the result of the broader phenomenon of the transitional period (Jasset's *Zigomar* again provides a helpful example of a filmmaker operating within this mode *before* Feuillade's crime serials). Nonetheless, it remains true that Feuillade's straddling of these two cinematic paradigms forces the audience to question the reality of what we're witnessing in his crime serials; films from the transitional period could neither be wholly convincing in their illusion of verisimilitude (an effect that is commonly sought after in the majority of narrative filmmaking) nor simply shocking in their exhibitionist display of awe-inspiring spectacles removed from a narrative context.

Callahan's conception of the transitional period recognizes both a system of unpredictable, unclassifiable *formal* patterns (the static long-shot tableaux of the cinema of attractions fracturing into a multitude of perspectives, onscreen spaces, and temporal patterns as the cinema began to develop its complex formal semantics); and a concomitant *narrative* of uncertainty and unpredictability.[42] The wildly lurching narrative patterns of *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* were discussed in the previous chapter, and it seems reasonable to tie this "uncertain" mode of narrativity to the transitional period. Callahan's point here is that, during the transitional period and afterwards—even until today—there exists not one easily classifiable narrative mode of filmmaking, but in fact numerous offshoots of this narrative mode. This concept will be more fully explored in a moment.

While Callahan traces the mode of uncertainty to the formal and narrative patterns of the transitional period, she also describes the mode of uncertainty as a uniquely and disconcertingly modern concept. "Cinema as a process of knowing and, more importantly, not knowing," she writes, "is based on a thorough uncertainty, which is a function of film's potential unpredictability

from frame to frame."[43] Here, then, we must refer back to the tenets of the modernity thesis that I outlined in my introduction. Cinema as inherently unpredictable from frame to frame—as a process whereby the speedy and ceaseless flow of still images propelled into motion offers uncertainty as the very foundational base of "motion pictures"—recalls the "machine aesthetic" theories of Jean Epstein (in 1921), Tom Gunning (in 1996), and Leo Charney (in 1998).[44] According to this concept of the machine aesthetic, since the cinema is based upon a technological process that is itself comprised of temporal fragments, mechanistic movement, chemical processes, the physical presence of light, and so on, film as a whole is the most "modern" of art forms in echoing the sense of displacement and unknowability engendered by modernity. (See pages 19 to 22 of this thesis for a more complete synopsis.) Again, we may see the underlying premise of Callahan's mode of uncertainty: that we can never be sure, in Feuillade's crime serials, that what we are watching unfold is actually happening.

Gunning notes that the machine aesthetic's prioritization of fragments of time propelled into motion itself foregrounds the shocking and unpredictable aspect of the "moment" in cinema. We are never sure, from moment to moment, from frame to frame, of what will happen next. This rapt anticipation of cinematic movement can in turn be applied to the cinema of attractions paradigm (argues Gunning): shocking moments are displayed to us, sometimes linked by a logical cause-and-effect progression, sometimes not.[45] As I argued in my introduction, then, the cinema of attractions, the modernity thesis, the mode of uncertainty, and Surrealism are all inextricably connected: in conjunction (especially in Feuillade's crime serials), they lead to a perpetual awareness that the apparent veracity of cinematic images cannot actually ever be trusted, even as illusions.

In many ways, Callahan's theory of a mode of uncertainty may be aligned with the

Surrealist conception of cinema as innately oneiric, as constructing a second yet equally "real" (that is, visually manifested) reality within the world we know. We may think of Tzvetan Todorov's theories regarding the "fantastic" and the "marvelous," also discussed in the previous chapter: our sense of uncertainty and unease after witnessing or experiencing something that seemingly could not be physically real. To repeat Todorov's quote (cited in my previous chapter):

> In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences this event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination…or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us.[46]

Feuillade's crime serials accomplish this sense of the fantastic with staggering power, which is partially why the Surrealists embraced them: they could visually reveal to us those elements of our world that do not abide by the reality we know. I believe that the linkage between Todorov's conception here and Callahan's writing allows us to understand her conception of the mode of uncertainty as fully as we can (which is still, unfortunately, not as satisfying an understanding as we might hope). In Callahan's words, "the universe in the mode of uncertainty is not legible."[47] We can see, but we cannot fully understand the world in Feuillade's crime serials. Her quote is remarkably akin to Todorov's, and more generally to the Surrealist concept of the fantastic as embodied in the cinema. Yet Callahan's mode of uncertainty may also be applied to films that do not operate explicitly within a Surrealist context, as I will soon explore in greater depth.

These are the main tenets of Callahan's mode of uncertainty thesis: that the formal and narrative patterns of the transitional period; the existence of the cinema as the most modern of art forms, made possible through the mobilization of fragments of time into a seamless illusion of

realistic movement; and the conception of the fantastic as the existence of a visibly perceived event that could not possibly take place in our reality as we know it, engender an overwhelming uncertainty regarding the veracity of our own vision and knowledge. Callahan does not discuss the mode of uncertainty more fully than this. Therefore, we may respond, perhaps rightfully so, that this concept remains unhelpfully vague, especially since it seems as though *all* films (to varying extents) occupy a mode of uncertainty stemming from the disparity between the seamless illusion of the cinematic image and its essential non-reality.

Further clarification of this mode of uncertainty, however, may come from an unlikely source. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Mikhail Bakhtin analyzes what he considers the polyphonic foundation of Fyodor Dostoevsky's remarkably eclectic and complex literature. More important than the seamless advance of the narrative or the construction of a monologic authorial voice in Dostoevsky's works is the simultaneous coexistence of numerous distinct characters and their dialogic interactions, all of which are considered equally significant in constructing the world of the novel (whether it be *Crime and Punishment* [1866], *The Brothers Karamazov* [1880], or any of his other late-period works). While Dostoevsky was often accused of being a shapeless stylist who jumped between voices, ideas, and styles for no reason other than self-conscious artiness, Bakhtin argues that this polyphonic nature was actually integral to Dostoevsky's heterogeneous view of the world.[48] In detailing the polyvalent nature of one of Dostoevsky's major structural influences, the Menippean satire, Bakhtin articulates the following description of a Menippean mode of writing:

> [The Menippean satire rejects] the stylistic unity (or better, the single-styled nature) of the epic, the tragedy, high rhetoric, the lyric. Characteristic of [this genre is] a multi-toned narration, the mixing of high and low, serious and comic; [it makes] wide use of inserted genres—letters, found manuscripts, retold dialogues, parodies on the high genres, parodically reinterpreted citations; in some [Menippean satires] we observe a mixing of prosaic and poetic speech, living dialects and jargons…are introduced, and various authorial masks make their appearance. Alongside the

> representing word there appears the *represented* word; in certain [satires] a leading role is played by the double-voiced word. And what appears here, as a result, is a radically new relationship to the word as the material of literature.[49]

Now, I certainly don't mean to imply that Feuillade is to cinema what Dostoevsky is to literature; that would be an absurd proclamation on a number of different levels. I do believe, however, that Bakhtin's description of the Menippean satire can be reasonably extended to an interpretation of Callahan's mode of uncertainty theory. Feuillade's crime serials, and his mode of uncertainty, certainly do reject the "single-styled nature" that we may see later on in more traditionally narrative films, especially following the construction of a precise and complex cinematic language for conveying narratives by the Hollywood studio system. Furthermore, as I have demonstrated, Feuillade's crime serials combine a number of disparate genres and artistic tropes (melodrama, broad comedy, crime fiction, *grand guignol*, the detective film, the cinema of attractions more generally), in contradistinction to later narrative films within certain genres that may be seen as functioning predominantly (sometimes almost exclusively) within the conventions of that genre. The existence of a film within a distinct and clearly classifiable genre is certainly *not* a negative attribute in itself: John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), for example, abides quite closely to the conventions of the western genre, but it remains a staggering masterpiece; F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), to use a non-Hollywood example, firmly established many of the conventions of the horror film and rarely steps outside of its horror classification, but is (I believe) one of the most influential, striking, and audacious films ever made. The utilization of a "multi-styled nature," in contrast to the single-styled nature of which Bakhtin spoke, does not automatically make a film superior; I only mean to assert that Feuillade's mode of uncertainty clearly adopts this multi-styled nature in both its narrative structure (infused as it is with the cinema of attractions paradigm) and

its generic elements. To be clear, Feuillade's crime serials are of course classifiable—otherwise I would not be able to deem them "crime serials." But simply labeling them as such neglects numerous other significant elements that make them so powerful (and that endeared them to the Surrealists), especially their adoption of *grand guignol* violence, broad comedic elements, melodramatic narrative tropes (the absurdity of Mazamette's relationship to his son Eustache, for example), experiments with typographical forms and movement, and other elements that do not contribute to the serials' overarching criminal storylines.

The "mixing of high and low" that Bakhtin recognizes in Menippean satire can clearly be found in Feuillade's crime serials, specifically in the coexistence of spectacular moments of violence and more traditional melodramatic conventions denoting characters' morality (for example, Lady Beltham's crisis of conscience immediately before she lures the actor Valgrand to his imminent beheading in place of Fantômas in the first film of the series, *À l'ombre de la guillotine* [1913]). Similarly, we may discover Feuillade's mixing of the serious and the comic throughout much of *Les Vampires*—for example, the final two episodes of the serial, in which the murder of the maid Augustine's husband by the Vampires is almost immediately negated by Mazamette's clownish courtship of her.

Feuillade's crime serials also feature a "wide use of inserted genres," by which Bakhtin means various modes of narration or literary forms in contrast to the single perspective of an omniscient narrator. Feuillade's films are rife with significant letters and telegrams, cut-ins to codebooks and cryptic puzzles, abrupt flashbacks and cuts to seemingly unrelated diegetic spaces. While the predominance of some of these features may be tied to crime serials in the transitional period more generally, Feuillade certainly emphasizes such "inserted genres" more heavily than any other crime serial of the time that I have seen. One notorious example from *Les Vampires* features a

flashback of more than a century to an unrelated anecdote from the autobiography of Count Kerlor's nonexistent great-grandfather (Kerlor himself is a false identity, assumed by the Grand Vampire). Essentially an extended bullfighting sequence, this flashback is totally unrelated to the storyline of this episode of *Les Vampires* ("Hypnotic Eyes") and was included simply because Feuillade had filmed it for a previous project, which was ultimately shelved.

Perhaps most significant in the relationship between Bakhtin's quote and Feuillade's mode of uncertainty is the interrelationship between the "representing word" and the "*represented* word." In Feuillade, of course, we have the cohabitation of the representing image and the represented image—in other words, one aesthetic mode that is meant to clearly represent the unfolding of narrative events along a clearly discernible progression, and another aesthetic mode that foregrounds the nature of the cinematic image itself, which reveals to us the underlying function of the cinematic apparatus. The most literal embodiment of this "representing versus represented" dichotomy occurs in *Les Vampires*: the scene mentioned in the previous chapter in which a pedestrian walking past the Howling Cat nightclub observes a signpost advertising the performer Irma Vep. We watch through his point-of-view as the onscreen letters animate and rearrange themselves into their anagram: VAMPIRE. This scene is most certainly a display of the non-realistic movement enabled by the film camera, yet it's also contextualized within the narrative of the episode, as we soon cut into the Howling Cat nightclub and are visually introduced to the character of Irma Vep. More broadly, though, Feuillade's crime serials as a whole function within this dichotomy between the represented image and the representing image, which itself can be correlated to the transition between the cinema of attractions and an institutionalized narrative cinema.

Perhaps our conception of Feuillade's mode of uncertainty remains incomplete—precariously vague and broad, and seemingly not confined to Feuillade himself. For indeed, as I

noted above, this mode of uncertainty seems quite intrinsic to the transitional period of early cinema itself. In any case, it seems clear that *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* operate within this mode of uncertainty, which we may conclude depends upon: the anxiety engendered by the disparity between the seamless illusion of the cinematic image and its non-reality; the cohabitation of the cinema of attractions and narrative cinema paradigms, which is itself linked to the functioning of the cinematic image as both representing and represented; the peculiarly modern forms of vision, movement, and temporality entailed by the "machine aesthetic" of the cinema; and lastly the multi-styled nature of these serials' generic conventions (high and low, serious and comic, *grand guignol* and melodrama, etc.) and modes of narration. If we cannot claim that Feuillade indeed inaugurated this mode of uncertainty, this tradition of questioning narrative certitude, then I would at least assert that Feuillade achieved this mode of uncertainty more creatively, more strikingly, more invigoratingly than any other filmmaker working during the transitional period.

The question now is whether this mode of uncertainty is specifically French, which I am absolutely hesitant to assert. If we *can* label this a "French mode of uncertainty," then we would arrive at a paradox of sorts: this paradigm of uncertainty—whose appeal is that it resists easy categorization, it resists an essentialist labeling as narrative *or* attraction, crime serial *or* melodrama, etc.—would thus be labeled as categorically, essentially belonging to one national cinema and no other. This is similarly why I am hesitant to label this as "Feuillade's" mode of uncertainty, since it was contemporaneously articulated by other filmmakers working during the transitional period; it's also why I doubt that we can even label the troubling aspects of Feuillade's crime serials as operating within a French mode of uncertainty, since he himself infused his films with a polyphonic assortment of multinational influences. My conclusion, then, is that this mode of uncertainty cannot be easily nationalized, and that the sensation of uncertainty by which we are struck in

Feuillade is likewise *not* essentially French.

Yet I must resort to the middle-ground of national cinema studies that I referred to earlier, for we may look to subsequent filmmakers who indeed practice a nationally specific mode of uncertainty, and may thus concede that it *can* be nationalized. For example, several later Surrealist filmmakers may be seen as specifically operating within their national sociocultural contexts. The most well-known example may be Luis Buñuel, who—although he worked within several different national cinemas (specifically French, Spanish, and Mexican) throughout his career—often imbued his Surrealist filmmaking with specific critiques of the societies in which his films were produced. He often worked from sources that were specific to those nations of production: for example, the French *L'Âge d'or* (1930) was heavily influenced by the Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*, while his subsequent Spanish production—*Las Hurdes: Tierra Sin Pan* (*Land without Bread*, 1933)—uniquely portrayed an actual group of peasants located near the Spanish town of La Albarca. This documentary subtly attacked the conventions of Spanish cinematic production by boldly refuting onscreen visual material with contradictory voiceover narration. (In a way, this disjunction, which forces us to question the validity of what we're seeing onscreen or hearing on the soundtrack, itself refers to the mode of uncertainty.) One can see similar infusions of a national cinema context with the mode of uncertainty or Surrealism in Buñuel's second French period, which included films such as *La Voie Lactée* (*The Milky Way*, 1969) and *Le Fantôme de la liberté* (*The Phantom of Liberty*, 1974). In the former film, a French/German/Italian coproduction, two men undertake a pilgrimage along the Way of St. James from France to the Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain, experiencing heresy and discussing Catholic tenets such as the First Council of Nicaea. The latter film is a French/Italian coproduction featuring a series of surreal and often darkly comic scenes ridiculing, among other things, French history (via abrupt flashbacks to the Napoleonic years) and the

Communist movement in France, Italy, Spain, and Germany throughout the twentieth century. Both films feature surreal, ambiguous, and/or non-linear narratives, and specifically satirize the traditions and histories of the European nations in which they are set.

Another example of a filmmaker working within both the mode of uncertainty and a national cinema context is the Spanish director Carlos Saura. His "Flamenco Trilogy" of the 1980s—*Bodas de sangre* (*Blood Wedding*, 1981), *Carmen* (1983), and *El Amor brujo* (1986)—adopts specific techniques of Latin American dance and, by adapting well-known theatrical and operatic works (Federico García Lorca's play *Blood Wedding*, Bizet's opera *Carmen*, Manuel de Falla's ballet *El amor brujo*), foregrounds the nature of cinematic spectatorship in relation to other forms of visual and aural performance. Questions of Spanish and Latin American history are infused with broader theories regarding the mediation and construction of cinema. (Tellingly, Saura claimed that his favorite of his own films was his documentary on Buñuel, titled *Buñuel y la mesa del rey Salomón* [2001], which is a Surrealistic celebration of the director based entirely on conversations held between him and Saura.)[50]

Furthermore, if we conceive of the mode of uncertainty as a multi-styled *bricolage* that questions the veracity of cinematic vision and infuses numerous genres, narrative modes, and theoretical paradigms, we may discover linkages between several modern-day French filmmakers. In addition to the obvious example of Olivier Assayas, I find unexpected and indirect correlations between Feuillade's mode of uncertainty and directors such as Claire Denis and Arnaud Desplechin. Assayas often infuses elements of what is perceived as high art (a purportedly French brand of metacinematic, thematically heavy, ambiguous and cryptic mode of art cinema) and low art (the influence of Hong Kong action movies, Hollywood crime thrillers, and a recursive, serialized narrative structure familiar not only from Feuillade, but also from numerous television

programs). Often in his films, the combination of thrilling action stories culled from popular fiction and ruminations on the nature of cinematic construction and the ubiquity of modern mediation does indeed lead to a mode of uncertainty, a juxtaposition that exposes the duality inherent in all cinematic spectatorship. Telling examples of such a filmmaking mode include *Demonlover* (2002), a techno-thriller about numerous international corporations' competition for financial control of interactive animated pornography; and *Boarding Gate* (2007), which has been labeled "Eurotrash" by some writers, starring Michael Madsen as an underworld kingpin and Asia Argento as his drug-runner, prostitute, and hit-woman—a bizarre thriller that careens through its uneven plot in a manner not unlike Feuillade's crime serials, and infuses its chase scenes and kinetic gunplay with an interest in the international flow of capital in the modern globalized capitalist age.[51] *Irma Vep*, discussed earlier, would of course be another pertinent example here.

Claire Denis, meanwhile, often provides her audiences with only the slimmest thread of a plot, around which she builds impressionistic, beautiful, and cryptic scenes relating to the simple beauty of light and movement onscreen, or the enigmatic and essentially unknowable relationships between human beings. While one may glean a vague narrative progression throughout her films, they are predominantly structured around fleeting impressions and correlations drawn between seemingly unrelated images and moments. While her films may be more typically categorized as French arthouse cinema—they mostly avoid the tawdry or prurient "low art" aspects of Assayas's narratives (with the exception of the existentialist horror film *Trouble Every Day* [2001], a bleak foray into two lovers' experiments in cannibalism)—they, too, are unsettling combinations of narrative and "attractions," though the attractions here are comprised of the sheer beauty or visual power to be achieved through purely formal cinematic elements. They are experimental narratives, existing within numerous genres and transcending them at the same time. They succinctly embody

Vicki Callahan's conclusion, quoted earlier, that there is not simply one made of narrative cinema in contrast to other filmmaking paradigms, but an assortment of in-between narrative modes that are comprised of patchworks of numerous cinematic approaches (arthouse, experimental, political, and so on). Standouts among her work are *Beau travail* (1999), a loose adaptation of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* set among the French Foreign Legion stationed in Djibouti, concerning elements of violent masculinity and repressed homosexuality that frequently and disarmingly leaps back and forth in time; and *L'Intrus* (*The Intruder*, 2004), a gorgeous but difficult adaptation of philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's "autobiographical essay," concerned more with the joyful beauty of observing an infant smiling in its father's arms than with the context of such an image within the narrative of the film.

Finally, Arnaud Desplechin's films may be described as excessively narrative: epic constructions featuring the interactions of sprawling ensemble casts, his lengthy movies conflate a number of seemingly incongruous generic modes (screwball comedy, weepy melodrama, euphoric romance, muted character study) and include numerous short scenes that establish characterization yet are completely extraneous to the progression of the narrative. Inspired by the films of Alain Resnais and François Truffaut (among others), Desplechin's plots hurtle forward from one grand event or altercation to the next, leaving us little time to catch our breath in between remarkably polyphonic scenes that are often filmed with an extremely mobile handheld camera. In a way, Desplechin's films are tributes to a century of cinematic genres, paradigms, and aesthetics, imagining, perhaps, what would happen if dozens of disparate filmmakers collaborated on one rapidly paced project. His films include *Rois et reine* (*Kings and Queen*, 2004) and *Un conte de Noël* (*A Christmas Tale*, 2008), both of which are familial melodramas that provide plenty of room (in their two-hour-plus running times) for broad physical comedy, blunt depictions of destructive sexuality,

jealousy, and angst, tributes to hip-hop music and painters of the French Renaissance, and any number of seemingly spontaneous additions.

These French filmmakers are markedly different from each other in numerous ways, so it may seem somewhat simplistic or insensitive to lump them all together into the category of the "mode of uncertainty." If I am giving in to the sort of overly broad or essentializing categorizations that the mode of uncertainty attempts to resist, or for which analyses within a national cinema framework can be criticized, I repeat that I am not labeling the mode of uncertainty as fundamentally French; nor that I am claiming that all of these filmmakers are referring to the crime serials of Louis Feuillade; nor that resisting traditional boundaries of generic conventions, the narrative or arthouse paradigm, or other modes of film production can only be understood as a French phenomenon. I *am* claiming that, in Feuillade's crime serials and in many of the works of the filmmakers I've cited above, we may recognize Callahan's mode of uncertainty concept through their infusion of numerous, seemingly contradictory generic tropes; through their alternating utilization of narrative, arthouse, experimental, purely formal, or cinema of attractions modes; through their foregrounding of the cinematic image (the image as *represented* and *representing*) in numerous ways; in short, in the *bricolage* aspects of both their formal and narrative patterns. (This is not even to mention the numerous films of the French Nouvelle Vague and many of their antecedents, specifically works by such directors as Truffaut, Jean-Pierre Melville, and Henri-Georges Clouzot, who sought to construct cohesive narratives while infusing elements of the classical Hollywood studio system into a deconstruction of those narratives' institutionalized mode of production.)

Yet as I mentioned above, this mode of uncertainty cannot be deemed essentially or exclusively French. Indeed, this mode's foregrounding of the cinematic image as represented and

representing, its multi-styled nature of polyvalent genres and filmmaking paradigms, can be referenced in numerous other national cinemas. Some Canadian filmmakers, for example, seem to complicate our notions of easily classifiable cinemas in similarly audacious ways. Guy Maddin utilizes the formal attributes of silent filmmaking—the use of intertitles; black-and-white, tinted, or hazily colored footage manipulated to take on an antiquated, besmirched tone covered in scratches; a typically emotive style of acting given to emphatic gesticulation; and so forth—yet deconstructs them by placing them in wildly surreal narratives that often indulge in psychoanalytic theory, perverse sexuality, and frequent visual and textual puns. Simultaneously retro and adamantly postmodern, Maddin's films strongly feature the cinematic image as something representing and represented, forcing us to question the veracity of cinematic vision simply by aestheticizing their images into something completely non-realistic. Maddin's 1988 feature-length debut, *Tales from the Gimli Hospital*, is framed as a tale orally told to two young children by their Icelandic grandmother; subsequently, within this embedded narrative, two characters proceed to tell an attractive nurse increasingly bizarre and surreal mini-stories, thus creating a complex structure of Russian doll-like storytelling in which the very act of representing cinematic narratives is deconstructed. *Cowards Bend the Knee* (2003), meanwhile, began as an art installation in a Toronto gallery yet was later expanded into a feature-length film for theatrical release. This story, too, is embedded within a framework of sorts, though this framework is considerably more bizarre: the film begins with a close-up of a drop of semen on a microscopic slide, in which the remainder of the film ostensibly takes place. This psychosexual and surreal framing device prepares us for a bizarre story involving murder, abortion, revenge, amnesia, and ice hockey. By contrasting the aesthetics of silent film production with narrative patterns that are perversely sexual and aggressively surreal, Maddin's films indeed make us entirely uncertain about what we're seeing: narrative or

experimental, psychoanalytically profound or simply playfully surreal, ponderously deconstructive or merely pranksterish and sarcastic? Like Feuillade's crime serials and the aforementioned French films, Maddin's work evokes a number of genres, paradigms, and filmmaking modes, ultimately existing within and among them, yet transcending beyond them, shifting between them.

I would like to use one final example of a filmmaker who I believe operates within the mode of uncertainty: the Canadian director David Cronenberg. His cerebral brand of art-horror contradicts the popular notion that the horror genre necessarily constitutes a "low" art form, divorced from complex thematic ideas or philosophical rumination. Drawing upon predecessors in the European art-horror genre (particularly Georges Franju's *Les yeux sans visage* [*Eyes without a Face*, 1960], which is itself a surreal and wholly unnerving *grand guignol* tale that treats impossibly horrific events with the utmost naturalism) as well as the heady writings of Marshall McLuhan, Friedrich Nietzsche, William S. Burroughs, J.G. Ballard, and others, Cronenberg's oeuvre is perhaps the most unsettling example of high and low art intermixing. His films are grisly horror tales about the gruesome evisceration of the human body, the nightmarish nature of intense sexuality, about mind-blowing psychokinetic powers and the manifestation of psychosexual urges in murderous dwarfs. However, these horror narratives are used as springboards in order to discuss the nature of human violence, relationships, corporeality, and so forth. They are absolutely horror films, and absolutely arthouse exercises. Uncertainty reigns indeed: we see grisly mutilations of the human form in such unflinching detail that we are distressed and shocked by their seeming irrefutability, but this commingles with our awareness that in many of his films (though not all, especially given his recent productions) we are essentially watching a pulpy horror story. The reemergence of the cinema of attractions in some otherwise resolutely narrative horror films—shocking spectacles of extreme violence displayed prominently to the audience—can be clearly recognized in many Cronenberg

films: for example, in the exploding head that occurs near the beginning of *Scanners* (1981), or in the oozing and morphing television set that features prominently in *Videodrome* (1983). Cronenberg's polyvalent utilization of both high art and low art influences is well-demonstrated by *The Brood* (1979), a seemingly generic horror film that repeatedly references Sigmund Freud and eventually reveals a monstrous presence that literally embodies Freud's "return of the repressed"; and *Naked Lunch* (1991), a disturbingly surreal adaptation of numerous works by William S. Burroughs, populated by gigantic humanoid insects and typewriters that feature unnervingly suggestive orifices.

Given the numerous examples I have raised regarding the cinematic mode of uncertainty, it may still seem like this concept is too broad, too adaptable to many disparate kinds of filmmaking, to helpfully provide us with an analytical framework in regard to specific films. However, I do not believe this is the case. I approach Callahan's conception of the mode of uncertainty not as a genre-of-sorts, nor as an offshoot of Surrealism, nor as a distinct paradigm under which films may be produced or received (a la the arthouse cinema, the experimental or avant-garde cinema, or the politically impassioned "third cinema"). I approach this mode instead as a broader *conceptual* tenet that may in fact accommodate numerous different genres, paradigms, and cinematic movements. Closer to the level of a "cinema of attractions" conception (which of course included a number of wildly disparate films produced during the first two decades of cinema), the cinematic mode of uncertainty allows us to acknowledge that some films simply cannot be easily categorized, that they must be approached and analyzed as a distinct entity that may be related to but not fully conceptualized within various analytical frameworks. It may seem paradoxical to forge a category for films that resist categorization, yet this is precisely why the cinematic mode of uncertainty may seem so broad and amorphous: it is a way of correlating disparate films that attempt to foreground

the nature of cinematic presentation and representation, question our trust in the apparent veracity of the cinematic image, and confront dominant structures that may sometimes suffocate or overshadow specific and illuminating film analysis in favor of constructing simple taxonomies.

Let me be clear: there is nothing wrong with film categorization in itself. It is a helpful and often revealing way in order to chart the historical and cultural progression of filmmaking practices, an increasingly difficult task given the vastly diverse number of films released throughout the foregoing 120 years of cinema. Genre conventions, theories regarding the cinema of attractions and the institutionalization of the narrative cinema, and conceptual paradigms of the arthouse or avant-garde allow us to draw correlations between like-minded artists and movements; they are, in fact, a necessary method for conceptualizing the diversity of filmmaking practices that are possible in the cinema. This is why the conception of a mode of uncertainty—broad, vague, or problematic though it may be—is a necessary tool for conceiving of films that cannot be simply thrust into more precisely defined categories in which they do not actually belong. What is unfortunate or deleterious about film categories is when the classification of a film stands in for serious analysis, when the more difficult aspects of a film's generic, narrative, formal, or theoretical construction are dismissed in favor of inapt classification.

Louis Feuillade's crime serials, as well as the examples I have listed above, feature numerous difficult aspects, though those difficulties are precisely what make these films bold, striking, unforgettable, invigorating, and creative. Despite the undeniable pleasure to be had by experiencing and analyzing a masterfully constructed classical narrative, an introspective European arthouse exercise, and/or a completely abstract avant-garde exploit, I have always been particularly partial to films within this broad concept of the mode of uncertainty: films that question traditional categories, the method of cinematic representation, and the nature of cinematic vision itself. It is

ultimately reassuring to know that, after more than a century of filmmaking, there are still unexpected directions that new films and filmmakers may traverse, a complex pathway that can be traced back to the troubling crime serials of the transitional period of the 1910s, if not to Feuillade himself.

NEW PHANTOMS

This thesis has attempted to elucidate the complicated conjunction of Louis Feuillade's crime serials, Surrealism, the cinema of attractions, the modernity thesis, and the cinematic mode of uncertainty. It originated as a very basic question—why were the Surrealists so entranced by *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex*?—yet quickly branched out into a number of related yet vast and problematic avenues of analysis.

Feuillade's serials were created during a period of incredible transformation for international producers, distributors, and exhibitors of film. The transitional period from a cinema of attractions to a narrative cinema bore a number of striking films that could not be easily classified: they were both presentational and representational, tentatively breaking out of a rigid tableau aesthetic into a remarkably complex cinematic language that would ultimately be articulated by the Hollywood system as the most effective method of telling stories through film. This transitional period coincided with the attempt by numerous production companies to create respectable narratives culled from prestigious literary and theatrical sources—an attempt that sought to bring the middle and upper classes into rapidly proliferating movie theaters, thus refuting the conception of the cinema as nothing more than a spectacular diversion for the lower classes who simply wanted to be entertained. It was also during this period that both France and the United States were attempting to assert themselves as the foremost cinematic superpower, thus leading to

a (mostly inaccurate) conception voiced in some of the American press regarding French crime serials as mired in the tawdry and titillating aspects of the cinema of attractions, less advanced and more immoral than their American counterparts. Thus, the coexistence in many crime serials during the transitional period of a shocking attractions paradigm with a more traditional or representational narrative paradigm became a hotly debated issue intricately tied to the institutionalization of the international film industry.

The coexistence of these two paradigms engendered a number of films that were both realistic and shockingly non-realistic, that questioned the nature of cinematic representation. The unsettling effect of the disparity between the seamless illusion of the cinematic image and the often fantastic elements of crime serials during the transitional period was cherished by the Surrealists, who indeed conceived of film as the foremost medium for conveying an oneiric and fantastic world within the reality we know. Feuillade's films, in particular, featured close-ups of mundane, everyday objects that were suddenly transformed into magical and momentous phenomena; they featured a succession of impossible but vivid events and attractions whose apparent veracity force us to reconsider the laws by which our reality is governed; they experimented with typographical and bodily arrangements, turning letters and human beings into objects that could be deconstructed, reorganized, refashioned; and they conveyed a modern urban space that was treacherous in its labyrinthine city streets and ominous architecture, which could conceal marvelous forces within its doorways and windows. Feuillade's crime serials may not have been the only films during the transitional period to occupy this unsettling in-between space of reality and non-reality, but Feuillade's formal ingenuity and palpable fascination with the artifacts of the modern city made *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* into the most astonishing (re)presentations of a rapidly evolving cinematic space and narrative that was both definitely real and definitely unreal—decidedly

uncertain.

This anxiety, this uncertainty, over the "reality" of the cinematic image in the crime serials of the transitional period was itself intimately linked to the fluctuations engendered by modernity. If cinema was indeed the fullest embodiment of new forms of vision, knowledge, and art in the modern age, then films themselves echoed the reformation of time, space, communication, and sensation experienced by modern urban populations. This, perhaps, is why the uncertainty bestowed by crime serials in the 1910s was so disturbing, and thus so thoroughly embraced by the Surrealists: as Robert Desnos wrote, "Generations are born under a sign: love, liberty, life, poetry, and even the parabolic curve of an era are subject to it."[52] For the age of modernity in the early twentieth century, that sign was cinema. Films reflected not simply new modes of art and vision, but the entire generation—the entire age.

Have I answered the question that spawned this project? Maybe: the Surrealists embraced the crime serials of Louis Feuillade because they served as intersections of new forms of vision and knowledge in modernity; because they embodied the transition from the cinema of attractions to a narrative cinema that accomplished a real/non-real effect that made audiences question their own world, that made them conceive of the possibility that the laws of science and society that they believed to be true no longer held sway in modernity (or at least in the movies of modernity). This is why modernity, the transitional period, Louis Feuillade's crime serials and others like them, and Surrealism are so intricately connected: together, they engendered a mode of visual and ontological uncertainty that remains powerful even for modern audiences, and that can be traced to numerous national cinemas to this day.

Specters: phantoms, vampires, Judex. Spectacles: attractions, violence, the marvelous, the Surreal. Maybe the Surrealist writers who lionized Feuillade had it right when they boldly

proclaimed that *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, and *Judex* were the soul of an age, when they gushingly proclaimed of Feuillade's crime serials and others like them: "What nobility! What beauty! It's one of those things that stuns you; its serene majesty, like inimitable brilliance, leaves you breathless, dazed, and mute."[53] Maybe the staggering effects of this rapidly transforming art form of film in the 1910s could only be conveyed through such effusive prose. And maybe, to return to the quote that opened this thesis, Louis Aragon offered the most appropriate description of Feuillade and his crime serials when he warned of "new phantoms, who carry strange rays of light in the folds of their mantles."[54] Maybe—but one can never be certain.

Notes to the Conclusion

[1] See Callahan, Vicki. *Zones of Anxiety: Movement, Musidora, and the Crime Serials of Louis Feuillade*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005. 145.
[2] Desnos, Robert. "*Fantômas, Les Vampires, Les Mystères de New York*." *French Film Theory & Criticism, 1907-1939*. Ed. Richard Abel. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. 399.
[3] Ezra, Elizabeth, and Sue Harris. *France in Focus: Film and National Identity*. Oxford: Berg, 2000. 1.
[4] See Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Ed. Laura Mulvey. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 14-30. This oversimplification of Mulvey's essay does not do it justice, nor does my brief analysis of this scene in *Irma Vep*—a lengthy work could be written on the objectification of the female body in Assayas's film. Here in my conclusion, however, I mean only to establish that Assayas incorporates yet another cinematic analytical framework into the remarkably eclectic work that is *Irma Vep*, and therefore do not have sufficient space in order to attempt a fuller psychoanalytic or gendered analysis of this scene in relation to Mulvey's article.
[5] See Callahan 151.
[6] Gunning, Tom. "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde." *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*. Ed. Wanda Strauven. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2006. 381-88. 382.
[7] See Callahan, Vicki. "The Innovators 1910-1920: Detailing the Impossible." *Sight & Sound*. April 1999. 13 Aug. 2009. <https://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/154>. No pagination.
[8] See Callahan "Innovators" no pagination.
[9] Bazin, Andre. "*The Last Vacation*, or The Style is the Man Himself." *Bazin at Work: Major Essays & Reviews from the Forties & Fifties*. Ed. Bert Cardullo. Trans. Alain Piette & Bert Cardullo. New York: Routledge, 1997. 16.
[10] Abel, Richard, Giorgio Bertellini, and Rob King. *Early Cinema and the "National."* New Barnet, UK: John Libbey Publishing Ltd., 2008. 2.
[11] Bush, W. Stephen. "Advertising and Criticising." *Motion Picture World* 23 Nov. 1912: 750.
[12] Ibid 750.
[13] Ballot, M. "Des têtes de types: Louis Feuillade." *Hebdo-Film* 24 (1916): 6-7.
[14] Ballot, M. "Prenez l'avance." *Hebdo-Film* 8 (1916): 6-7.
[15] Abel, Richard. *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896-1914*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994. 302.
[16] Ibid 57.
[17] Ibid 365.
[18] Epstein, Jean. "The Senses I (b)." *French Film Theory & Criticism, 1907-1939*. 241-2.
[19] Abel *The Ciné Goes to Town* xiii-xiv.
[20] Ibid 25.
[21] Ibid 7-10.
[22] Ibid 44.
[23] Ibid 111-2.
[24] Abel, Richard. *Americanizing the Movies and "Movie-Mad" Audiences, 1910-1914*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006. 5. Emphasis in original.
[25] Ibid 5.
[26] Blaché, Herbert. "Foreign Films in the American Market." *New York Dramatic Mirror* (12 Feb. 1913): 29.
[27] See Abel *Americanizing the Movies* 201.
[28] See "Feature Films on the Market." *New York Dramatic Mirror* (25 June 1913): 25.
[29] In *Americanizing the Movies*, Abel here cites: "The Dangers of the Foreign Market," *Motion Picture World* (16 Dec. 1911): 877-78; and "Spectators' Comments," *New York Dramatic Mirror* (10 Jan. 1912): 112. Cited in Abel *Americanizing the Movies* 185-6.
[30] Abel *Americanizing the Movies* 202.
[31] Ibid 209.
[32] Ibid 196.
[33] Ibid 191.
[34] "Reviews of Notable Films." *Motion Picture World* (14 Oct. 1911): 108.
[35] See Abel *Americanizing the Movies* 25-6.

[36] This general narrative similarity between Feuillade's crime serials and *The Spiders* has been mentioned by critics such as Scott Tobias ("*Spiders*," *The Onion* 29 March 2002, <http://www.avclub.com/articles/spiders,20063/>) and Michael E. Grost ("*The Spiders Part 1: The Golden Sea*," *The Films of Fritz Lang*, < http://mikegrost.com/lang.htm# Golden>).
[37] See Callahan *Zones of Anxiety* 145.
[38] See Grost no pagination.
[39] Auerbach, Jonathan. "Nationalizing Attractions." *Early Cinema and the "National."* 18.
[40] Hayward, Susan. "National Cinemas and the Body Politic." *France in Focus: Film and National Identity*. 97-114. 103.
[41] Callahan "Innovators" no pagination.
[42] Callahan, Vicki. "Screening Musidora: Inscribing Indeterminacy in Film History." *Camera Obscura* 48:16.3 (2001): 59. 66.
[43] Callahan *Zones of Anxiety* 4.
[44] See footnotes 23, 24, and 25 from the introduction for citational information regarding these works.
[45] See Gunning, Tom. "Now You See It, Now You Don't: The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions." *Silent Film*. Ed. Richard Abel. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996. 71-84. 81-2.
[46] Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973. 25.
[47] Callahan "Screening" 69.
[48] See especially Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. 5-46.
[49] Ibid 108. Emphasis in original.
[50] Mishra, Bikas. "Camera is My Memory: Carlos Saura." *Dear Cinema*. 16 Apr. 2008. <http://dearcinema.com/ camera-is-my-memory-carlos-saura>
[51] One commentator who labeled the film as Eurotrash—although he used the term in an ironically complimentary way—is Steven Shaviro, "*Boarding Gate*," *The Pinocchio Theory* (5 Apr. 2008). < http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/ ?p=627>
[52] Desnos 398.
[53] Raynal, Maurice. "Cinema Column: *Fantômas*." *French Film Theory & Criticism, 1907-1939*. 89.
[54] Aragon, Louis. "Challenge to Painting." *Surrealists on Art*. Ed. Lucy Lippard. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970. 38.

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