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Modernity, Parallel Editing, and the Flâneuse: Examining the White Slave Narrative in Early and Contemporary American Cinema

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Modernity, Parallel Editing, and the Flâneuse:
Examining the White Slave Narrative in Early and Contemporary
American Cinema

by

Alex Bordino

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

MODERNITY, PARALLEL EDITING, AND THE FLÂNEUSE: EXAMINING THE WHITE SLAVE NARRATIVE IN EARLY AND CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CINEMA

by

Alex Bordino

Adviser: Professor Robert Singer

This thesis explores cinema and the conceptual presence of Charles Baudelaire’s nineteenth century flâneur; in particular, it examines how this modernist notion relates to cinematic technique and issues associated with female spectatorship through an analysis of the white slave genre in both early and contemporary American cinema. Seven early films are examined: How They Do Things on the Bowery (Porter, 1903), The Boy Detective, or The Abductors Foiled (McCutcheon, 1908), The Fatal Hour (Griffith, 1908), The Miser’s Heart (Griffith, 1911), The Musketeers of Pig Alley (Griffith, 1911), The Inside of the White Slave Traffic (Beal, 1913), and Traffic in Souls (Tucker, 1913). Three contemporary films are examined: Taken (Morel, 2008), Holly (Moshe, 2006), and Trade (Kreuzpaintner, 2007). The focus is on formal issues such as film editing techniques like parallel editing, and demonstrates how this creates a self-reflexive critique regarding hegemonic norms.

This thesis also argues that the development of feature-length film production is intimately connected with developments in urban modernity and American social problems in the early twentieth century, namely sex trafficking, therefore presenting an important historical moment in which the rethinking of narrative storytelling norms simultaneously, and often self-reflexively, challenge social traditions regarding women. Furthermore, it illustrates how the reemergence of the white slave genre in the twenty-first century is linked to social anxieties regarding paternal dominance in a post-9/11 milieu and likewise addresses the problematic nature of the flâneuse in a digital culture.
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Lastly, and above all, I would like to thank my wife, Chelsie. Her presence in my life is all that I need to muster up the enthusiasm and mental energy to pursue my work.
Table of Contents

Introduction.................................................................1

Chapter 1
White Slavery and the Single-Reel Film.............................7

Chapter 2
Traffic, Technology, Detection........................................24

Chapter 3
Paternal Heroes and Digital Culture.................................44

Notes..............................................................................66
Filmography....................................................................71
Bibliography.................................................................73
List of Figures

Figure 1: *The Muskateers of Pig Alley* (Griffith, 1912).............21
    Still taken from Kino on Video, 2002. DVD

Figure 2: *Traffic in Souls* (Tucker, 1913)..........................38
    Still taken from Flicker Alley, 2002. DVD.

Figure 3: *Traffic in Souls* (Tucker, 1913)..........................38
    Still taken from Flicker Alley, 2002. DVD

Figure 4: *Traffic in Souls* (Tucker, 1913)..........................40
    Still taken from Flicker Alley, 2002. DVD.

Figure 5: *Taken* (Morel, 2008)......................................49
    Still taken from 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2009. DVD.

Figure 6: *Trade* (Kreuzpaintner, 2007)..............................63
    Still taken from Lionsgate, 2008. DVD.
Introduction

In the development and institutionalization of American cinema, parallel editing becomes a vital component, one that not only empowers the medium of film with its own unique storytelling mechanism but one that also mirrors anxieties regarding modernity and women’s reform in the early twentieth century. According to Miriam Hansen, “Parallel Narration itself sets up the basis for a radical critique of the conservative oppositions it set out to restore.”¹ From this perspective, we might approach an analysis of early parallel editing developments with a self-reflexive bent, examining the technique in terms of its relationship to the spectator in a new urban milieu.

Drawing from the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, and later the writings of Walter Benjamin, the identification of the urban flâneur has significant scholarly value in thinking through issues of modernism and consequently offers an interesting perspective in relation to the development of cinema.² Like Baudelaire’s flâneur, meandering the streets of nineteenth-century Paris, detachedly observing, the cinema spectator participates in a form of flânerie, exploring various locales and characters, albeit from a seated position. But, according to Tom Gunning, this flâneur possesses qualities strikingly different from its Baudelairean predecessor:

As an observer *par excellence*, the *flâneur* attempted to assert both independence from and insight into the urban scenes he witnessed. Benjamin’s famous example of *flâneurs* walking turtles on leashes stands as an emblem of the figure’s unhurried pace, a practice which in a later world of increased urban traffic became, as Buck-Morss felicitously phrases it, “enormously dangerous for turtles and only somewhat less so for *flâneurs*.”³ Cinema then, along with the further development of modern life itself, morphed the nineteenth century flâneur into a mass audience that experienced flânerie through a faster-paced, though physically static, spectatorship.
Varying developments at the turn of the twentieth century augmented this shift, in particular the transitions to consumer culture, mass transportation, and new forms of recreation. The department store window, for example, shifted the flâneur’s gaze from people to goods being sold. The sophistication of such displays attracted viewers and, in a sense, became a form of entertainment and spectatorship. Benjamin describes this as the end of the flâneur:

If the arcade is the classical form of the intérieur which is how the flâneur sees the street, the department store is the form of the intérieur’s decay… If in the beginning the street had become an intérieur for him, now this intérieur turned into a street, and he roamed through the labyrinth of merchandise as he had once roamed through the labyrinth of the city.

Likewise, the development of urban systems such as sewers and subways, as well as communication devices such as the telephone, produced an urban modality of both faster movement and faster communication. New recreation venues such as dance halls, amusement parks, and the cinema itself seem to dispense with leisurely strolls that critically observe the urban landscape. Strikingly, our contemporary digital milieu would seem to further decay Baudelaire’s flâneur by confining the consumer’s gaze to the computer screen. However, as I shall argue, modern developments significantly affect the ontological makeup of the flâneur but does not eliminate him/her altogether. For the twentieth century spectator, a new form of flânerie persists in the cinema, which in turn extends the notion of urban perusal to rural communities and includes the participation of women.

As Gunning asserts, the cinema venue offers a space for women to participate in urban culture outside of the domestic sphere, without being perceived as a streetwalker:

Recent feminist works on the flâneur have noted that the equivalent female term “streetwalker,” carries very different connotations from the male idler who possesses the freedom to roam the city streets… A flâneuse did not exist… Beyond social strictures and possible dangers, a woman strolling alone risked being identified as a prostitute.
Nevertheless, women’s leisure sites became ubiquitous in urban America by the early twentieth century. However, it is precisely this ubiquity that seems to have correspondingly exacerbated anxieties regarding women leaving the home.

In the years between 1908 and 1916, which bridge the gap between what is generally regarded by film scholars as primitive cinema and the standardization of multi-reel film production, the trope of female endangerment to sex trafficking is prevalent and technologically self-reflexive. Kristin Whissel notes that modern technology, particularly transportation technologies, i.e., street traffic, underscore the enslavement and commodification of women as another form of traffic. We might add that parallel editing is itself a form of traffic, instantaneously transporting the viewer through space. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the popularity of the white slave narrative is concurrent with the genesis of American multi-reel films, developed through enhanced parallel narration. These films, while offering a polemical stance against white slavery, tend to diminish the role of women in the public sphere, relegating them to the safety of the domestic household lest they fall prey to forced prostitution. In this sense, the cinema, which may offer a space for the flâneuse, may conversely subvert her.

In the following chapters I shall attempt to draw a connection between modernity/technological development, parallel editing, and the female gaze through a chronological analysis of white slave narratives. Although my primary focus will revolve around the emergence of the multi-reel film in the 1910s and the subsequent standardization of the classical Hollywood narrative, I shall conclude with an examination of the recent resurgence of sex trafficking films and attempt to draw a connection to post-9/11, digital culture.

In chapter one, I will trace the origins of parallel editing and white slavery beginning with Edwin S. Porter’s 1903 film *How They Do Things on the Bowery*, a film that presents a bizarre
editorial structure and a familiar white slave plotline involving a drugged beverage. *The Boy Detective*, or *The Abductors Foiled* (McCutcheon, 1908), offers a valuable example of editorial style in the pre-Griffith Biograph era and is perhaps the first film to explicitly address the threat of white slavery. One of D.W. Griffith’s earliest single-reel films, *The Fatal Hour* (1908), depicts the enslavement of a woman and a climactic chase to rescue her. The film’s invocation of parallel editing to enhance suspense anticipates one of many Griffith trademarks while likewise exposing the potential horrors of sex trafficking. *The Miser’s Heart* (Griffith, 1911), an important yet understudied work, explores the urban tenement milieu from the perspective of a little girl who is held captive and rescued by a vagabond. Remaining in the same environment, *The Muskateers of Pig Alley* (Griffith, 1911) reinforces the trope of the naïve woman who leaves home, in this case to the streets of the Bowery where she is very nearly drugged then fought over in a gang war. Each of these films depict a woman who is liberated then captured; on the one hand progressivist but also expressing anxiety toward women leaving the domestic space. Their position film-historically is equally vital, namely the development of parallel editing, which shall prove to be intimately linked with these white slave narratives. Through close analyses of these films, a connection may be drawn, bringing to light the evolution of tropes and editing techniques that will provide a firm ground for my subsequent investigations.

In 1913, George Loanne Tucker directed the first originally scripted multi-reel film in America, *Traffic in Souls*. Chapter two will thoroughly examine this film alongside *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* (Beal, 1913), released only several weeks after *Traffic in Souls*. Both films reflect the societal anxiety regarding sex trafficking far more explicitly than their predecessors. However, *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* and *Traffic in Souls* differ remarkably in their approach to the subject matter. This dichotomy underscores key elements in
the development of classical Hollywood. *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* allows no space for female agency. Here the woman who leaves the home, or in this case is forced out of the home, is irrevocably bound to the fate of a life of prostitution. In *Traffic in Souls*, parallel editing develops along with a specifically feminine gaze. As Shelley Stamp asserts, “part of the appeal these films held for women lay in their ability to ‘transport’ viewers through various regions of urban life… to traverse the streets in safety.” Due to its subject matter, *Traffic in Souls* not only produces space for a flâneuse but also denounces the conception of flâneuse as prostitute, demonizing the white slave traffic and situating a woman as the hero who destroys it.

Lastly, chapter three shall focus on the recent popularity of sex trafficking films, in particular the French production *Taken* (Morel, 2008), which grossed over $145 million domestically and spawned two sequels. Despite being a French production, the film portrays an ex-CIA agent, Bryan Mills (Liam Neeson), attempting to save his daughter, Kim (Maggie Grace), from Albanian sex traffickers; clearly a narrative for American audiences in a post-9/11 milieu. Less popular recent films that I will examine include *Holly* (Moshe, 2006) and *Trade* (Kreuzpaintner, 2007). Critical to my analysis will be an investigation of the use of technology, parallel editing, and the female gaze in these films and how this compares to our earlier examples. Unlike the latter, I will explore these films non-chronologically as *Holly* and *Trade* prove to be more fruitful example for my discussion. Notably, *Trade* implicates the Internet in sex trafficking practices, which underscores the connection between technology and sex trafficking already established in earlier white slave narratives. Here female exploitation is exacerbated by digital technology. However, it is important to note that the same technology does in fact assist the protagonists in fighting against this exploitation. Furthermore, the role of
the paternal hero will be explored as a response to second wave feminism and the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In a sense, it is my intent in this thesis to counterpoint a moment of film history with the present in an attempt to illustrate that little has changed. Furthermore, it is my hope that this historical juxtaposition will generate an optimistic future for technology, cinema itself, and women. Technology, though ostensibly more advanced today, still presents the paradox of exacerbating evil while also preventing individuals from evil. It is from this perspective, and perhaps from the haunting echoes of Benjamin’s skepticism, that we may approach studies in modernity and technology. With regard to cinema, parallel editing contributes to the poeticizing of a progressivist message while also necessitating the formalization of feature-length film structure. Such a paradox has established a long-standing contention between film art and formalized Hollywood norms, a contention that may in fact be abolished by digital media. Lastly, the role of women in the cinema is equally liberating and enslaving. Through an investigation of the films outlined above, the ambivalent nature of the flâneuse shall be traced.
Chapter 1
White Slavery and the Single-Reel Film

David Bordwell notes that despite cinema’s ability to transverse various temporal layers, for the most part “classical film normally shows story events in a 1-2-3 order.” ¹ Although flashbacks are often permissible they are rarely used. And even in contemporary cinema it is difficult to find an abundance of works that diverge from traditional linear storytelling. Instead, the cinema’s power often derives from a manipulation of space, not time, particularly through the use of parallel editing. Gunning offers a succinct definition of parallel editing:

First, it alternates two separable series of shots (and in 1908 was referred to as ‘alternating scenes’), setting up what is most often described as an $a-b-a-b$ pattern. In addition, parallel editing indicates specific temporal and spatial relations. The actions shown alternately are signified as occurring simultaneously in different places, most frequently fairly distant locals.²

Bordwell further asserts that such editing may be classified into one of two categories; parallel editing or cross-cutting, the latter to be distinguished by temporally simultaneous actions while the former does not require simultaneity.³ It is my contention that such a distinction is superfluous. For example, *A Corner in Wheat* (Griffith, 1909) depicts an arduously dreary wheat farm juxtaposed with “The Wheat King” (Frank Powell) enjoying the “gold.” Such a juxtaposition, though not necessarily simultaneous cross-cutting in Bordwellian terms, nevertheless becomes narratively simultaneous through the inextricable link of the cut itself, and the $a-b-a-b$ structure naturally insinuates simultaneity. In the case of *A Corner in Wheat* it is impossible for the spectator to determine that these events are not occurring simultaneously. Therefore, the notion of parallel editing is innately linked with simultaneity and does not warrant a secondary distinction. *A Corner in Wheat* possesses a unique juxtaposition, however, one which we may refer to as *symbolic parallel editing*. It is important for my subsequent arguments
to make this clarification. Symbolic parallel editing functions similarly to chase-and-rescue parallel editing; both challenge the norms of spectatorship by instantaneously transporting the viewer back and forth between locations.

*How They Do Things on the Bowery* (Porter, 1903) represents an interesting challenge to temporal logic, one that both necessitates the later development of parallel editing while also addressing the dangers that lurk in the new urban environment. A woman walking the Bowery drops her handkerchief (intentionally?) as a man passes her by. He kindly, though naively, retrieves the handkerchief for the woman and is invited for a drink. Her request that he pay for the drinks is not disputed, and while he makes the transaction, back turned to the woman, she slips a mickey into his drink. Once the drug takes effect, he is robbed by her and later ejected from the saloon.

This film provides an important grounding in terms of both editorial style and plot. The editing of the final two shots utilizes what Gunning refers to as “repeated action edits,” a prevalent technique prior to 1908. From the moment the man awakens to the moment his suitcase is lunged out of the door by the saloon proprietor, approximately six seconds have elapsed. The following shot depicts a police carriage arriving outside of the saloon. In this shot the proprietor hands the man over to the police, exits screen right, then we see the suitcase emerge from off-screen. This shot is approximately eighteen seconds long. On the one hand it could be argued that the entire action repeats itself. In other words, the proprietor’s actions in the previous shot are simply seen once again from an exterior angle. However, based on an earlier exterior shot, the architecture of the saloon would make this impossible. Nevertheless, the length of the second shot indicates an overlap of action here. As the man is being ejected from the saloon, the police carriage is arriving simultaneously. In other words, the cut is a cut back in
time, approximately five to ten seconds back in time (it would be impossible to determine the precise amount definitively). The prevalence of repeated action edits prior to 1908 is significant insofar as parallel editing had not yet been fully developed. Had this film invoked parallel editing, the narrative might unfold as follows:

1) Interior – man is drugged and awakened by saloon proprietor
2) Exterior – police carriage arrives
3) Interior – man is ejected from saloon
4) Exterior – man is taken into police custody

Equally important in this film is the representation of the woman. She is notably independent and removed from the domestic sphere but is also villainized. Her ability to be independent is predicated on the notion that she has to essentially prostitute herself (we may even assume that she is in fact a prostitute) for financial support. This problematically reinscribes the notion that a flâneuse did not exist.

A film review for *The Boy Detective or The Abductors Foiled* (McCutcheon, 1908) appears in *Moving Picture World* as well as *Biograph Bulletin*:

With The Boy Detective the Biograph starts a series of film stories which will be presented periodically, recounting the experiences of Swipesy, the newsboy, whose astute sagacity wins for him fame as a juvenile Sherlock Holmes. The first of the series, issued this week, is “The Abductors Foiled,” and tells of the thwarting of a plan to kidnap the daughter of a wealthy broker by a couple of pusillanimous scoundrels. The scheme is well planned, and would have been successfully carried out, but for the ubiquitous Swipesy.⁵

Although Biograph failed to continue the series, this first installment offers one of the earliest examples of the lurking threat posed by potential procurers. By 1908, the white slave scare was present but not yet prevalent, arguably reaching its height within the next two to three years with the signing of the *White Slave Traffic (Mann) Act* (1910) and the publication of Jane Addams’
“A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil” (1911). To address white slavery in *The Boy Detective*, albeit in a less obvious way than its successors, marks an important development in social problem filmmaking that pre-dates Griffith. Notable in this film is the association of power and detection to specific gender roles.

The film opens with Swipesy winning a revolver in a game of craps, a phallic acquisition that empowers Swipesy with the ability to detect danger, an ability the female protagonist does not possess. Two men pursue this woman as she exits a store. The visual motif of the store window is important here and points toward the commodification of women, which we will later see in *Traffic in Souls*. In other words, the woman’s presence within the store window puts her on display for prospective procurers. Swipesy follows the men as they follow the woman home. Visual dominance is restricted to the male gaze only. Swipesy’s attempt to get the procurer’s attention with his newspapers fails, but he is able to inconspicuously tail them to a nearby saloon. What occurs next is virtually impossible to understand without the assistance of the Moving Picture World review:

They enter a saloon and immediately the messenger boy is called. As he comes out of the saloon he is accosted by Swipesy, who persuades him to let him see the mendacious message. “Hully gee! Just as I thought” says Swipesy; for the message read: “Dear Mary-Badly injured in auto accident. Come to hospital at once. Am sending a carriage for you. Ruth”6

The presumption, of course, being that the messenger boy (Robert Harron) will be communicating this message to the woman from the deceitful procurers, posing as Ruth, who will use the carriage to lure her to them. Current technologies are strikingly absent from this film, unlike later white slave narratives that heavily rely on new technologies for the trafficking of women. Here the procurers use carriage and written message to capture their prey, and the simplicity of this method is easily foiled as Swipesy intercepts the message. Indeed, this film
serves to illustrate how the white slave trade required technology to develop and likewise how the medium of film required further development in its storytelling technique (i.e., parallel editing).

The film continues as Swipesy races to the woman’s home to alert her of the danger. In an interesting gender reversal, Swipesy dresses as the woman, gets in the carriage, and confronts the procurers in a rural area. Using his revolver he is able to control the men until the police arrive. Importantly, it is Swipesy himself, the man/boy, who is needed to confront the procurers. While it would be much simpler for Swipesy to give the woman his revolver rather than dress in her clothes, the latter is not an option. She remains relegated to the safety of the home. However, it is interesting that Swipesy needs to feminize himself in order to be the hero. Furthermore, we discover in the final shot that his revolver is fake, merely an apparatus for holding cigarettes. In this sense the film addresses a growing gender ambivalence, which persists as motion picture narratives evolve into the transitional period.

Gunning indicates that a shift in narrative storytelling between 1908 and 1913 is linked to the motion picture industry attempting to attract middle-class customers:

Attracting a middle-class audience entailed more than lighting the theatre and brightening the content of the films. The narrative structure of the films would have to be brought more in line with the traditions of bourgeois representation. One of the clearest signs of this is the films made in 1908-9 based on famous plays, novels and poems… Parallel editing, with its fracturing of the natural continuity of the actions, is one of the most important of these new techniques and the film technique with which the name of Griffith is most clearly tied. Through parallel editing we sense the hand of the storyteller as he moves us from place to place, weaving a new continuity of narrative logic. The development of parallel editing can be seen not simply as the product of Griffith’s individual genius, but as a response to the demand for a more complex narrative style.

It is perhaps fitting that Griffith, coming from a middle-class background, epitomizes this shift. Growing up in rural Kentucky in the late nineteenth century, Griffith’s father, “Roaring Jake” Griffith, a Confederate Colonel during the American Civil War, exposed the young man to the
world of arts and letters.\textsuperscript{10} It was in his youth that Griffith possessed an affinity for popular literature of the time, and subsequently his adolescent and early adult years found him working in the theatre as both actor and director/playwright. It was in these later years that Griffith essentially lived the life of a vagabond. Additionally, his father’s death when he was ten years old left the Griffith’s impoverished. This amalgam of both southern affluence and poverty situates Griffith himself as a fitting representative of the cinema’s transition from a cinema of attractions to a cinema for the middle-class. After appearing in \textit{Rescued From an Eagle’s Nest} (Dawley, 1908) for the Edison Company, Griffith began acting for the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company. After Wallace McCutcheon fell ill, Griffith began his directorial career with \textit{The Adventures of Dollie}, released in July of 1908. \textit{The Fatal Hour}, premiering only one month later, presents one of the earliest examples of Griffith’s parallel editing while Likewise addressing issues regarding the white slave traffic.

A synopsis/review of the film is provided by \textit{Biograph Bulletin} with the subtitle “A Stirring Incident of the Chinese White-Slave Traffic.”\textsuperscript{11} It is important to note that the slave traffic is depicted here as an international problem, one that only becomes a domestic problem once an “other” infiltrates our land. In subsequent white slave narratives the traffic is often domestically-centered, and in more contemporary narratives sex trafficking becomes a global issue. In \textit{The Fatal Hour} sex trafficking is an issue caused by the Chinese “other” and therefore evokes anxieties concerning mass immigration to the United States in the early twentieth century. As the \textit{Biograph Bulletin} claims, “Much has been printed by the daily press on the subject, but never has it been more vividly depicted than in this Biograph production.”\textsuperscript{12} Being perhaps the first film to explicitly depict sex trafficking, while furthermore pioneering cinematic narrative techniques (i.e., parallel editing), proves its value.
The film opens on a rural cliffside where a woman is captured by two men, Pong Lee (Harry Solter) and Hendricks (George Gebhardt). The juxtaposition of urban danger with pastoral beauty is a common Griffithian trope, notably invoked in his 1910 film *A Child of the Ghetto* as urban characters infiltrate the countryside. As Hendricks is left behind to divert the police, an on-looking woman, privy to his scheme, follows. She seductively invites Hendricks for a drink, at which point she slips him a mickey, revealing, as he awakens, that she is a police officer. It is important to note the recurring trope of the drugged beverage. In *How They Do Things on the Bowery* its use is somewhat ambivalent, though clearly harmful. Here it is used to seek justice. Furthermore, in these two instances, it is the woman who seduces and drugs the man, contrary to the norm of sex trafficking captivity in which the man inconspicuously drugs the woman, as we will later see in *The Muskateers of Pig Alley* and *Traffic in Souls*. In the progressive era, the danger of alcohol was a prevalent topic, and it is therefore difficult to overlook the insinuation that saloon culture was harmful and more specifically that alcohol consumption itself posed potential risks. Nevertheless, in *The Fatal Hour* the mickey is clearly used to serve a pious cause. In a broader sense this addresses the ambivalence of scientific and technological development, which can be both beneficial and harmful.

The subsequent series of events is not entirely clear. According to the Biograph Bulletin, “she secures the letter written by Pong, which discloses the hiding place of the Chinaman.” However, Hendricks somehow arrives at the stash house before the police to warn his cohorts. Upon the police raid, Hendricks and Pong hide underneath the structure then abduct the female detective. She is taken to another location where she is literally bound within the trajectory of a revolver connected to a clock. The clock, which reads 11:40, will trigger the revolver once it strikes twelve. The indication of both a central conflict, i.e., the detective needs to escape or be
rescued, and a fixed duration to reach that conflict’s climax, i.e., she will either escape, be rescued, or be killed in twenty minutes, predates what would become a formulaic Hollywood storytelling norm. As Gunning asserts, “The film exhibits one of the earliest examples of the temporal deadline which forms a basic element of closure in the later classical Hollywood cinema.” Furthermore, the utilization of parallel editing in this final sequence not only augments the suspense but also fractures time for the spectator.

As Pong and Hendricks arrive back in town via trolley car, one of them appears to drop something (perhaps the letter the detective found earlier), which the nearby police officers quickly retrieve. After physically detaining Pong and Hendricks, the officers are shown where the men have hidden the detective. They race to capture her from certain death, enhanced by the a-b-a-b structure, which intercuts the bound woman with the police en route. They arrive to save her with virtually no time to spare. It becomes quite clear that the effect of parallel editing in this case is an increased awareness of the stakes at hand, which therefore engages the spectator on an emotional level. Gunning notes, “By delaying the immediate completion of an action, suspense invokes spectator expectation and plays with it by threatening not to fulfill it.” In a sense parallel editing, though engaging, involves a fragmentation of time. This is made clear through the use of the clock, which begins at 11:40 and ends at 12 less than two minutes later. Therefore, film time, i.e., spectator time, does not equate to diegetic time. Parallel editing foregrounds this, which in turn foregrounds the storyteller him/herself. According to Gunning, “This interrupting cut reveals the narrator system; it establishes the power and independence of discourse over story and also displays the tie that binds spectator to the narrator’s suspenseful unfolding of the action.” Furthermore, *The Fatal Hour* presents an interesting representation of women. The woman detective is initially victorious but is ultimately victimized for her attempt at heroism.
She is just as susceptible as any woman to the sex traffic and therefore requires the rescue of her male colleagues.

Between 1908 and 1911, Griffith further developed parallel storytelling. Films such as *Lonely Villa* (1909), *Lonedale Operator* (1911), and *The Girl and Her Trust* (1911) almost become formulaic depictions of the woman in danger/rescue scenario initiated by *The Fatal Hour*. *The Miser's Heart* (Griffith, 1911) continues this trend. However, unlike the aforementioned films, the setting is urban, and although it is ostensibly not a white slave narrative, it is perhaps the most striking example of anxieties regarding women leaving the home. Through the use of parallel editing, the film depicts a female, albeit a child, exploring the world outside of the home and encountering danger. We first see three women, a mother (Linda Arvidson), two others, presumably sisters or aunts, and the child, Little Kathy (Ynez Seabury). Because the mother is ill, Little Kathy has to play by herself, which in a sense liberates her from the home. Her first reaction is to ascend the stairs in her tenement hallway, but she quickly retreats to her door, indicating a hesitancy toward her newfound independence. We are then introduced to the Miser (Adolph Lestina), who drops a piece of bread that Little Kathy swiftly retrieves from the floor. The Miser is initially disturbed but easily finds it in his heart to share his sustenance with the girl. In this short exchange, the opening intertitle is affirmed: “how wealth is meaningless when danger threatens loved ones.” As we later see, wealth motivates the burglars seeking the Miser’s small fortune and is inextricably connected to the danger they represent. “Danger,” therefore, represents a broader, symbolic threat; young girls leaving the domestic sphere on their own.

The story then juxtaposes two narratives as we are introduced to Jules (Lionel Barrymore), a petty thief being released from prison and ordered to leave town. Jules, lacking
grace but stealthy nevertheless, heists some baked goods from a young man (Robert Harron) outside of a bakery. It is important to make a distinction here between Jules stealing to fill his empty stomach, arguably a result of his milieu, and the burglars merely seeking wealth. The film clearly sympathizes with the former and demonizes the latter, indicating a moral ambiguity that questions societal norms. Although both stories are intertwined, their paths diverge after Little Kathy and Jules part ways in the tenement alleyway. Parallel editing serves to not only enhance plot suspense but also the film’s allegorical promulgation. Intercutting narratives allows an omniscient flânerie that transcends normal, linear human experience. Although Little Kathy’s eventual return to safety (i.e., the home) offers a superficially conservative resolution, the film self-reflexively challenges hegemonic norms through its narrative construction. It is interesting to note that Jules’ appearance in the tenement initiates Kathy’s path to danger. Despite his generosity in offering food to the girl, it is this incident that sends Kathy off to the Miser to compensate for his earlier favor (i.e., she brings him some of Jules’ food). Jules’ crime, though petty and insignificant, spreads through the tenement like a virus. And although he will ultimately be portrayed as the unsung hero, the film presents a world that is nevertheless riddled with corruption, where the dichotomy between Jules, the petty thief with a heart, and the dangerous burglars is obscured.

Before visiting the Miser, Little Kathy returns to her mother, who is now utterly incapacitated. As the maternal figure fades away, Kathy leaves the home and seeks comfort in a paternal figure. However, her naïve, childish prank leads her into a dangerous situation. The Miser assumes she has left and returns to his adult business, looking through his safe full of wealth, but Kathy has discreetly re-entered the room. Her foolishness in overstaying her welcome, so to speak, in this paternal world initiates a parallel to the burglars descending the
building’s roof and entering the Miser’s apartment via the fire escape. Here, and as we will later see in *Traffic in Souls*, the urban landscape, particularly the tenement exterior, offers new modes of voyeurism, detection, and intrusion, not unlike the motion picture itself.¹⁹ Once the burglars have infiltrated the Miser’s apartment and held him captive, Little Kathy, still present, has the opportunity to escape and seek help. Instead, she confronts the burglars. In so doing, Kathy confounds the traditional role of women in danger (e.g., Blanche Sweet in *Lonedale Operator*), albeit through innocence and lack of guile. Although this leads to her enslavement and possible demise, her willingness to confront threatening men challenges patriarchal norms. However, we might conclude that Kathy’s motivation is to find a paternal figure, hence her affection for the Miser. In other words, the anxiety surrounding her involvement in the world outside of her home is suppressed by her desire for paternal comforts.

Little Kathy is hung from a rope outside the Miser’s window. Although she has left the home she has not left the tenement itself. The threat of her potential plummet is equated to the threat of her physically exiting the tenement. She drops her doll (intentionally?) to the alley below where Jules has taken refuge. He promptly seeks help but is spotted by the bakeshop assistant he stole from earlier. The urban milieu, which has oppressed Jules into a state of poverty and criminal activity, continues to work against him as he seeks piety. The parallel construction here is intensified as the burglars hold a burning candle to the rope sustaining Little Kathy’s life. Like *The Fatal Hour*, suspense is built through the utilization of parallel editing as well as a specific temporal countdown within which Kathy will either be saved or killed. Jules ironically returns to the police station to inform them of the girl’s precarious situation. The bakeshop assistant has followed to accuse him of his larceny. The police are swayed by the
young man’s story but seem less inclined to ignore a potentially dangerous situation. Authority is depicted here as sensible, heroic, and just. Despite moral ambiguities, law works in this world.

As the Miser finally gives up the combination to his safe, Little Kathy is returned to safety by the burglars. Despite Jules’ effort to save the girl, it is the Miser’s willingness to forego his wealth that saves Kathy. Of course, the intervention of the police supplies justice, a safe return home for Little Kathy, and the Miser’s ability to maintain his fortune and ultimately share it with Kathy and her mother, who now appears spry and healthy. The offering of money to Mother for “medicine and maybe even a doll” indicates two things: 1) she will return to full health; 2) Kathy’s doll, having fallen into the hands of Jules, is irretrievable. The film ends with a shot of Jules in the alley, alone, receiving no glory for his heroic deed. Perhaps Little Kathy will no longer need to return to his world.

*The Miser’s Heart* portrays a world dominated by male gaze and authority. Little Kathy, removed from the domestic sphere, experiences this world but finds no clear position in it. She is autonomous but encounters danger and ultimately enslavement. In a superficial sense, her return to the home, along with her mother’s return to health, indicates a restoration of traditional domestic norms. On another level, she has a gained a paternal figure. In later films, notably *Traffic in Souls*, though more strikingly in contemporary films such as *Taken*, the role of the paternal figure is paramount. Although Little Kathy discovers no position for herself outside of the home, she unequivocally affects it positively. As a child, she must return to the home, but it is conceivable that one day, when Kathy is an adult, she could impact the world positively. Nevertheless, her yearning for paternal comfort in a male-dominated world constricts her empowerment.
“New York’s Other Side” is the intertitle that opens The Musketeers of Pig Alley, evoking an immediate sense that the film will not only offer us a glimpse of the other side of New York but also that the film may present an other side of narrative storytelling itself. Indeed, the film invokes parallel action, by late 1912 already a Griffith staple, as well as a keen visual development of geographical space. For example, Snapper Kid (Elmer Booth) opens a door in the tenement hallway. The film then cuts to the saloon where Snapper enters, finishing the action from the previous shot. We might call this inter-location matching action, through which one can situate and mentally map each location; the musician’s apartment, the tenement hallway, the saloon, the quintessential New York avenue, the dance hall, and of course pig alley itself with all of its nooks and dark corners. Such a technique places emphasis on the neighborhood itself as a specific milieu, presumably somewhere on or around The Bowery, the “other side” that viewers are privileged to explore, like Baudelaire’s flâneur, only seated in a movie theatre.

A Musician (Walter Miller) temporarily leaves to seek his fortune. His wife, Little Lady (Lillian Gish) stays home with Mother (Clara T. Bracy). In the immediate vicinity outside of their home (the tenement hallway) gangsters lurk. Both the Musician and Little Lady encounter them when they exit. First the Musician passes by members of the rival gang, and then later Little Lady encounters the Musketeers, led by Snapper Kid, who inappropriately makes a pass at her. She slaps him and is on her way; indicating an independent, strong will despite her domestic position. While Little Lady emerges onto the crowded and diverse city street, the Musician’s whereabouts are completely unknown. It is clear then that this is a film about the woman’s journey. However, it is not her gaze that we experience. Rather, we only follow Little Lady because Snapper follows her. His gaze denotes the primary point of view of the narrative. Meanwhile, Mother is left “alone,” as a brief intertitle succinctly puts it, and perishes as a result
of some unidentifiable physical pain. In the short time that Little Lady leaves the home, she is nearly assaulted and loses her mother. While discovering her dead mother, the film cuts to the Musketeers emerging from a crevice in pig alley. A keen observer will note the exchanged glances between rival gangs, though we have not yet been introduced to Snapper’s antagonist. The Musician enters and carelessly flaunts his recent earnings to a friend (Lionel Barrymore), which gets him assaulted by the musketeers as he returns to the tenement.

As the Musician sets out, “determined to recover his stolen money”, Little Lady is left alone, like her mother before her. But unlike Mother, Little Lady belongs to a generation of women who leave the home to participate in urban culture and recreation. She is cheered up by a friend (Madge Kirby) who takes her to a dance hall hosting the “gangster’s ball.” The dance hall, like the cinema itself, offered a recreational venue in which women could participate. Such recreation venues, however, posed a problematic paradox. According to Shelley Stamp, “entertainments like the cinema… redrew such boundaries and redefined the ground upon which women might participate in urban life.” But Stamp also notes, “There as patrons and consumers, women were also looked at and traded upon in sexually charged recreation venues.” In Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls: or, War on the White Slave Trade (1910), Ernest A. Bell suggests, “the danger begins the moment a girl leaves the protection of home and mother” and regards dance halls in particular as “truly the ante-room to hell itself.”

As we will see in Traffic in Souls, Little Sister is seduced and drugged in a dance hall. In The Musketeers of Pig Alley, Little Lady very nearly falls victim. The rival gangster (Alfred Paget) first appears half off-screen as Snapper and the Musketeers enter the ball. Snapper recognizes Little Lady, who is quickly seduced by the rival. Distracted by a photograph, the rival
discreetly slips a mickey into Little Lady’s drink. However, Snapper’s interest in the girl allows his voyeuristic gaze to spot the rival’s ploy, and in a timely manner he prevents Little Lady from taking the drink. This leads to a feud between Snapper and his rival that will fuel the remainder of the film. Due to “fear of the Big Boss,” the rivals postpone their battle.

This incident involves three vital elements: the photograph, the drug, and the “Big Boss.” Firstly, the employment of a photograph to distract the victim is a self-reflexive device. Female spectators risked victimization at the cinema. In a way the photograph acts as a warning to female spectators, to avoid allowing the cinematographic images to distract them from potential danger. Secondly, the doped drink is reminiscent of both *How They Do Things on The Bowery* and *The Fatal Hour*. As previously addressed, these films indicate an ambivalence toward the motives for drugging a beverage. In *The Musketeers of Pig Alley*, the depiction of a gangster
male doping a woman’s drink in a dance hall is a clear indication of some sort of sex trafficking operation. Jane Addams observes that most dance halls were connected to saloons, and this was a popular locale for procurers who would take on the role of “the sympathetic older man or that of the young lover.” It is noteworthy that both of these roles promise domestic security, either paternal safety or the promise of marriage. Therefore, although this incident serves to demonize participation in urban pleasures such as dance halls and more specifically the consumption of alcohol, within which lurk unknown dangers, it equally demonizes the woman yearning for domestic security. This paradox will be addressed more thoroughly in chapter two. Thirdly, the introduction of a “Big Boss” is interesting in that we never see this character nor does the film present any authority figures whatsoever until the gangs disobey the Big Boss.

Despite their “fear of the Big Boss,” the remainder of the film parallels Snapper’s gang and the rival’s gang as they stealthily patrol the urban landscape seeking each other. Space becomes a critical component. Of particular note is a location adjacent to pig alley that resembles a barn. In the emerging metropolis, a vestige of primitive life remains and exists in the space these gangsters inhabit. The climactic, western-esque shootout further promulgates this notion. This sequence also allows the Musician to retrieve his wallet from Snapper, who will ultimately let him keep it, perhaps based on his affection for Little Lady. When a policeman catches Snapper, he attempts to use the couple as a phony alibi. An intertitle reads, “one good turn deserves another,” Snapper’s good turn being his earlier rescue of Little Lady, and the couple obliges him. In this sense Snapper may be perceived as a redeemable character. Nevertheless, the ominous hand that enters frame in the final shot of the film offers Snapper money through “links in the system.” The hand, a synecdoche for the pervading yet invisible power of the Big Boss, implicates Snapper as part of “the system.” Therefore, the film portrays an urban milieu that,
like *The Miser’s Heart*, is morally ambiguous. The final payoff insinuates the persistence of corruption, and although Snapper’s arc supplies a potentially hopeful future, this future does not yet exist. Additionally, the payoff through “links in the system” may allude to the white slave traffic and perhaps a larger, corrupt political system. The presence of the police occurs only once the gangs have disobeyed the Big Boss. This indicates a system in which the Big Boss controls the police force, who are never present for earlier crimes, only those involving disobedience of the Big Boss. In this sense, one might think of the Big Boss as foreshadowing the man higher up, Trubus, in *Traffic in Souls*. Furthermore, it is clear, based on the rival gangster’s attempt to drug Little Lady, that he, like Trubus, promotes the procurement of women.

The films outlined in this chapter are all linked chronologically through narratological developments during American cinema’s transitional period. Interestingly, technology plays a minimal role in these early films compared to their successors. As we will see, the prevalence of technological representations will increase as cinema evolves. In the single-reel film, a character’s economic status often precludes technological availability. With the development of the multi-reel film, in particular *Traffic in Souls*, the ubiquity of technology presents itself in a manner that, despite economic status, one cannot help but be subsumed by modernity. Furthermore, the treatment of women in these films evokes cultural anxieties regarding their position in this new world, anxieties that not surprisingly coincide the height of the white slave scare with the standardization of the multi-reel film.
Chapter 2
Traffic, Technology, Detection

Traffic in Souls is regarded as the first American multi-reel film with an original story.\(^1\)

Despite reluctance by American film producers to indulge in multi-reel filmmaking, longer form narratives were proving successful in Europe, particularly Italy; films such as Quo Vadis? (Guazzoni, 1913) and Cabiria (Pastrone, 1914).\(^2\) While Traffic in Souls presents an early attempt at multi-reel film production, it nevertheless appears contemporaneously with shorter form white slave narratives such as By Man’s Law (Cabanne, 1913) and The Inside of the White Slave Traffic (Beal, 1913). Therefore, while examining these films in the context of modernity, parallel editing, and women, I shall likewise attempt to address the nature of feature-length storytelling and how this corresponds to the developing Hollywood system.

Walter MacNamara and George Loane Tucker conceived the story for Traffic in Souls, though Tucker’s actual contributions to the script are somewhat ambivalent. According to Terry Ramsaye, “Tucker approached the head of universal, Carl Laemmle, for authority to put the picture into production. It would be a feature-length picture—an idea Laemmle opposed. The prospect of spending $5,000 on a single film—an amount that would pay for ten one-reelers—was, to Laemmle, the height of stupidity. He rejected Tucker’s proposal.”\(^3\) Tucker and MacNamara, presumably behind Laemmle’s back, were able to raise the funds and produce the film, which Tucker would direct. The film opened at Joe Weber’s theatre in New York City (Broadway and 29th) on November 24, 1913 and became immediately controversial.\(^4\) The announcing advertisement read:

TRAFFIC IN SOULS—The sensational motion picture dramatization based on the Rockefeller White Slavery Report and on the investigation of the Vice Trust by District Attorney Whitman—A $200,000 spectacle in 700 scenes with 800 players, showing the
traps cunningly laid for young girls, by vice agents—Don’t miss the most thrilling scene ever staged, the smashing of the Vice Trust.

Despite the brazenness of this advertisement, contemporary reports were often hesitant to explicitly state the film’s content. George Blaisdell’s review of the film in Motion Picture World indicates this discretion, refraining from using terminology like “vice trust” or “white slavery” and referring to the traffic simply as “the system.” In the summer prior to the release of Traffic in Souls, two Broadway plays addressed human trafficking, The Fight and The Lure, and indeed the signing of the White Slave Traffic (Mann) Act in 1910, as well as Jane Addams’ 1911 publication in McClure’s Magazine, had already informed the public of the social evil several years prior. However, the sensation of Traffic in Souls seems to have occurred at a seminal moment in American cultural history in which white slavery subsequently became a popular topic for the screen. Notable among these subsequent (though essentially contemporary) films is The Inside of the White Slave Traffic.

This film is strikingly different than Traffic in Souls, exposing the traffic beyond the confines of New York City and concluding despondently. A brief analysis of the film will provide a fruitful segue to Traffic in Souls. Firstly, The Inside of the White Slave Traffic opens with a title claiming, “This is the only authentic white slave picture ever made,” drawing from sociological research by Samuel H. London “And many others including every sociologist of note from Atlantic to Pacific.” Despite this somewhat facetious introduction, these assertions are perceived as true, and thus the tone of the film borders on naturalism. Annie (Virginia Mann) is “a good girl with a strong work ethic” but is nevertheless seduced and drugged by a procurer, George (Edwin Carewe). However, it is not this incident that leads her into the world of vice. Because she has stayed out all night, she is disowned by her father, allowing George to “save her from disgrace with a proposal of marriage.” The film, therefore, becomes a polemical statement
regarding not merely the traffic itself but more specifically the cause, in this case what is referred to as the “out of my house” policy, which forces Annie back into the hands of George and ultimately to an irrecoverable life of vice. Stamp observes the position of women such as Annie:

…young working-class women were dependent upon courtship and marriage for excitement and social advancement. Annie’s odyssey implies that the dependency inherent in such arrangements could render women vulnerable to abuse. And the film clearly demonstrates that without a family network to fall back upon, young women could quickly find themselves out on the streets, forced to rely on the marketability of their bodies.

Therefore, the film critiques hegemonic values regarding women and domesticity but presents a world in which overcoming this is impossible. The marriage between Annie and George is a farce, and Annie is left with his “friends” while he leaves town. Of course this is merely a scheme to get her into the hands of her next procurer, who again promises marriage if she move with him to New Orleans. It is important to note the ubiquity of the traffic throughout the country. Alternatively, in Traffic in Souls the vice ring never appears to operate outside of New York. This points to a dichotomous reading of the two films. Traffic in Souls restricts white slavery to New York and ultimately suppresses it, while The Inside of the White Slave Traffic presents an inescapable system with no geographical limits. Annie eludes the New Orleans brothel and finds herself first in Denver, then Houston, but is inevitably caught by “the underground system.” Using coded language (e.g., “gillete blade” = girl), the traffickers are able to manipulate modern communication technologies to expand their network across the country. It is in this way that the traffic becomes a ubiquitous detective, not unlike the cinema spectator his/herself. Annie is incarcerated and replaced by another girl, whom George once again procures and sends to New Orleans. After rehabilitation, Annie finds a job in a department store, but her wages are meager, and she inevitably returns to the brothel. An imaginary vision of
herself with two daughters cheerfully enjoying a meal with her parents is contrasted by her true fate, a nameless grave in potter’s field.

New York City police raided the Park Theatre during a screening of *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* in late 1913 for violating state obscenity legislation. It is interesting that this film was deemed obscene by authorities while *Traffic in Souls*, released several weeks prior, was not despite being just as explicit. The controversy surrounding both films is exacerbated by the society-based causes highlighted in *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic*. *Traffic in Souls* addresses societal and cultural issues but focuses on the Barton sisters. It is concerned with character-based causes, namely Lorna’s incompetence and naïveté, which leads to her procurement. Furthermore, *Traffic in Souls* promotes a positive ending in which the hero/heroine can overcome the vice ring and even abolish it. Avoiding sensationalized, melodramatic moments, *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* is pure naturalism in the sense that Annie’s captivity is inevitably unsalvageable, while *Traffic in Souls* is a realistic melodrama. This dichotomy is essential to the evolution of American cinema. Grieveson alludes to the prevalence and popularity of the sensationalized, triumphant ending over the melancholic ending:

*The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* was produced as a prototypical documentary or propaganda film in its engagement with “truth and fact” and its lack of a “fictional indulgence” and was condemned for this. *Traffic in Souls* was sanctioned precisely for its *fictional indulgence*, its framing of fact within the parameters of fiction and within certain narrative paradigms. Regulators were beginning to see this framing as a way of providing ideological security, transforming indexicality and realism into socially acceptable fantasies. *Traffic in Souls* and *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* were effectively caught in the midst of a divide in the process of formation. The creation of a boundary line with the two films on either side stands as an important moment in a wider discursive delineation of the function of cinema at the inception of the developing multireel classicism.

Thus, classical cinema is predicated on a film’s ability to dramatize and characterize. *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* fails to provide Annie with any individual agency. Despite her
attempts to escape, she is inextricably bound to her position in the world. Furthermore, her envisioned alternate reality, while perhaps more desirable, nevertheless restricts her to the domestic sphere. *Traffic in Souls*, on the contrary, provides a scenario that appropriately sets in motion multireel classicism, in which triumph is not only possible but also achievable through female intellect.

*Traffic in Souls* opens by presenting us with an alternative label for the film, *While New York Sleeps*, with the subtitle, “A Photodrama of Today.” Immediately the film insinuates an urban underbelly that is typically not experienced. Urban developments in the latter nineteenth century such as sewers, electrical/telephone cables, and mass transportation connected people while likewise disconnecting them, creating an invisible underworld that, as Gunning claims, “served as a metaphor for the subterranean world of urban underclasses, the city of dreadful delights.” By the turn of the twentieth century, the motion picture would provide a form of flânerie to witness these delights, as evident in this particular film. The further categorization of *Traffic in Souls* as “a photodrama of today” highlights this underbelly as current and, in the case of the New York spectator, occurring in his/her immediate vicinity. Indeed, the abduction of the Country Girl outside of Penn Station occurs only several blocks from Joe Weber’s Theatre. Thus, although the film does provide an educational resource for young women, it paradoxically exacerbates the white slave scare. Historically, the cinema exhibition space itself became a place where, according to Stamp, “women maintained a delicate balance as both spectator and spectacle, customer and commodity. There as patrons and consumers, women were also looked at and traded upon in sexually charged recreation venues.” Kathryn Fuller notes, “Dark nickelodeon auditoriums posed not only something of a safety hazard but, in the opinion of social critics, also a moral hazard. Wild rumors circulated in some cities that nefarious evildoers
stuck young women with syringes or narcotic-tipped pins in the dark theaters and spirited them away into white slavery.”

But it seems, however, that these were nothing more than rumors. Stamp further argues that the white slave scare was an exaggerated social construction: “concern over women’s safety in movie theaters suggests less any real danger of abduction—of which there is very little evidence—than the difficulty of imagining women’s willful engagement in an eroticized milieu.”

This appears to be a plausible deduction given the social resistance to the film and the potential necessity to demonize the cinema, as well as the lack of any real evidence that such abductions occurred in cinema venues. Nevertheless, white slavery was not a myth created from anxieties regarding women in the public space. We might perceive these narratives as such, but white slavery was real. According to Ruth Rosen, “the actual existence of white slavery, as opposed to merely a widespread belief in it, is supported by abundant records of criminal convictions. For example, from June 1910 to January 1915, 1,057 persons were convicted of white slavery in the United States.”

Therefore, the white slave narrative, *Traffic in Souls* in particular, may be perceived as both an allegorical representation of women’s position in the modern world as well as a commentary on, and perhaps a resolution for, a serious social problem that tarnishes human progress and continues to do so in the twenty-first century.

The film first introduces us to our protagonist, Mary Barton (Jane Gail), described as “the head of the family,” her sister, Lorna (Ethel Grandon), and her father, The Invalid Inventor (William H. Turner). It is interesting to note that the intertitle here reads “her father” and not “their father.” This distinction, I would argue, implicates Mary as the film’s primary protagonist. Lorna is barely awake while Mary, already finishing breakfast, scolds her from afar. The distinction between the strong, independent woman, who in this case is the head of the household, and the lazy, foolish woman, which will become a pivotal dichotomy later in the film,
is established early. Parallel editing is employed here to contrast Mary, dutifully bringing her father a cup of coffee, and Little Sister, struggling to put herself together. Mary leaves the home before Little Sister, and we are introduced to her fiancé, Officer Burke (Matt Moore). Mary is hesitant to allow Burke to kiss her in public, as a young man washing windows is present. The young man heeds Burke’s request to look away, and the couple proceed to kiss each other. This moment marks a crucial establishment of milieu. As Gunning maintains, “this incident sets up an axiom of the film: in the city all actions are exposed to possible observers situated somewhere off-screen.” Such exposure problematizes women leaving the home, putting them in a position vulnerable to male gaze and consequently potential abductors.

As Little Sister finally leaves for work, Mary is seen already arriving, along with several other women, at her place of employment, Smyrner’s Candy Store. Parallel editing is employed here to contrast the dutiful sister with the idle sister. In a broader sense, this narrative construction will become a consistent and necessary storytelling technique throughout the entire film. As Brewster asserts, “The constant deployment of alternating editing, between the heroine, the police, the sister as victim, and the gang, with the last divided into a whole series of locations and activities… similarly serve to homogenize and unify the film.” Such editing provides a ubiquitous flânerie for the spectator while also creating an elongated web of connecting narratives in order to achieve a multi-reel story.

The fact that the sisters work in a candy store is significant. The store window will provide a place for one procurer to partake in the visual spectacle, not of the candy, but of the women. It is important, again, to assert the importance of the store window in early twentieth century urban American culture. Anne Friedberg contends, “The female flâneur was not possible until a woman could wander the city on her own, a freedom linked to the privilege of shopping
alone… The great stores may have been the flâneur’s last coup, but they were the flâneuse’s first.” This freedom, of course, becomes problematic when the woman becomes the object of the gaze, like the Barton sisters in Smyrner’s. According to Jane Addams:

> It is perhaps in the department store more than any other situation that every possible weakness in a girl is detected and traded upon. For while it is true that ‘wherever many girls are gathered together, more or less unprotected and embroiled in the struggle for a livelihood, near by will be hovering the procurers and evil-minded,’ no other place of employment is so easy of access as the department-store.

Paramount here is the public nature of the department store. Unlike the factory or office worker, the department store employee is subject to the gaze of any public eye. The female employees become the spectacle. Like the products being sold, the women are commodified. Indeed, a newspaper clipping later in the film reads, “Is it possible our candy stores can be used as a market for this infamous traffic?” Moreover, the store window’s ability to capture the spectator’s gaze is not unlike the cinema itself. As Friedberg notes, “the shop window succeeded the mirror as the site of identity construction, and then—gradually—the shop window was displaced by the cinema screen.” In a self-reflexive way, then, the spectator uncomfortably embodies the gaze of the procurer. Our spectacle of the women on screen is simultaneous with his spectacle of the women in the store window. Furthermore, we might add that in contemporary digital culture, the site of spectacle and identity construction has extended to the computer/tablet/phone screen.

Later in the film, after Lorna has been abducted, it becomes clear that her situation is not a result of her milieu but of her individual volition, or perhaps more accurately her lack of volition, i.e., her inadequacy as a workingwoman. As Janet Staiger argues, “Sister has yet to learn the value of paying attention to social regulations imparted by male superiors.” I would argue, however, that Lorna’s behavior here, though certainly based on her apprehension to obey male-dominated rules, has more to do with the fact that she is unwilling to leave the home. Her
eventual entrancement by the dance hall culture, as well as her inevitable capture, stems initially from her innate disinterest in the working life. Staiger furthermore asserts, “Just being a clerk in a candy store is not sufficient to warrant the charge of promiscuity. No, rather the error by Sister was her individual behavior once in that public sphere.”27 I would agree here with an addendum that Lorna should not be perceived as morally corrupt but morally corruptible because of her inability to work. Addams observes that a majority of women who fell victim to white slavery were employed in domestic service positions, women who were “unadapted to skilled labor and are least capable of taking care of themselves… they are belated morally and industrially.”28 Unlike Annie in The Inside of the White Slave Traffic, who is “a good girl with a strong work ethic,” Lorna’s apprehension toward the working life leads to her corruptibility. For Annie, strong character becomes superfluous when faced with a societal problem. For Lorna, her lack of character, or perhaps more appropriately her inability to evolve into the New Woman, results in her captivity. Traffic in Souls, therefore, demonizes the woman indifferent to leaving the home and participating in working life, leaving her vulnerable to moral corruptibility, as opposed to the woman who willfully leaves the home, Mary, who appears incorruptible.

Nevertheless, the figures of both Mary and Lorna are characterized ambivalently. Addams claims that white slave victims were often enticed by promises of marriage and domestic delights, as we see in The Inside of the White Slave Traffic. Lorna paradoxically does not wish to leave the home but is ultimately seduced by the dance hall culture, not the promise of domesticity. Additionally, Mary partially embodies the New Woman while likewise clinging to traditional domestic values, i.e., her engagement to Burke as well as her paternal servitude. A purely polemical reading of the film might essentially situate the “good” sister versus the “bad”
sister. However, their ambivalent characterizations posit a cultural representation of America in the early 1910s that is itself ambivalent, as Staiger observes:

Traffic in Souls also provides a new regulation for the Good Woman that is not a repetition of the old Victorian features of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity… that this movie has only one cultural meaning, that Traffic in Souls merely repeats middle-class, patriarchal values, cautioning women to stay out of the public sphere and at home where they cannot be threatened. That would be a very narrow reading of the film’s contradictions and dislocations in representing women as cultural transfer points in debates about a changing America.”

Mary represents both the New Woman, responsible and enthusiastically active in the workplace, and the domestic woman, assuming her role as head of the family. Lorna represents the domestic woman, uncommitted to joining the workplace, as well as the morally corruptible one, entranced by the culture of dance halls. It is these ambivalent, somewhat contradictory traits that exemplify the transformation of America at this historical moment, strikingly concurrent with cinema’s shift from the short subject to the feature-length subject and ultimately the Hollywood system.

Little Sister eventually arrives at Smyrner’s and is “reprimanded,” which segues to our first introduction of William Trubus (William Welsh), or “The man higher up.” A letter and a newspaper clipping indicates Trubus’ position as head of a “Citizen’s League” fighting “the infamous traffic in souls,” a dubious position as we later discover. Barely visible on screen right are the letters N-O-V, indicating perhaps that this fictitious paper is intended to occur simultaneously with the release of the film itself (November, 1913). We are then introduced to his wife, daughter, and her fiancé, “Bobby Kopfman, the greatest society catch of the season.” This engagement furthermore declares Trubus’ high status in society. However, this moment is juxtaposed with “they who traffic is souls,” our first glimpse into the inner workings of the vice trade. What at first may appear an editorial counterpoint is in fact a connection, established via editing, between Trubus and the traffic. This juxtaposition is emphatic, as well, entering the
brothel just as a Madam slaps one of the girls. What follows is a series of images displaying the hierarchy of the traffic: the cadets, the Go-between (Howard Crampton), and ultimately Trubus himself. Gunning identifies the invisibility of such a system, which is only possible in a modern, urban world:

“This system cannot be seen, would not be visible, from any one vantage, but is plotted by the co-ordination of many viewpoints, a vast network, like the city itself. The urban experience no longer dwells in the flâneur’s observation of the spectacle of streets and squares, but is structured by the invisible paths of power and deceit… The position from which the truth of the city can be seen and organized is no longer that of human vision. It is a purely technological position which a human can occupy only by becoming subject to an all-seeing, all-hearing technology.”

For the spectator, he/she already occupies the position of all-seeing, all-hearing technology, the ultimate flâneur/flâneuse, while the characters in the film must invoke technological apparatuses, for Trubus his dictograph and for Mary her father’s invention “for recording dictagraph sounds on a phonographic record,” to occupy this space.

Trubus takes his position as the man higher up, literally one floor above the Go-between, in an office fraudulently labeled “International Purity and Reform League.” Based on the earlier newspaper article, the League has been formed to attack the white slave traffic, which we soon discover is a disguise for the traffic itself. Because we only see the League’s title on the door from the inside, it is inverted, which, as Stamp deduces, points to Trubus’ “double-dealing existence.”

Trubus commences his business, which consists of nothing more than listening to the Go-between and taking notes via a dictograph. Although not directly referencing motion pictures, this process does self-reference voyeuristic technologies. This will become a primary motif in the film, which furthermore posits the ambivalent benefits of technology. On the one hand, technology aids the vice ring in their daily business, but on the other hand this same technology is utilized by Mary to defeat them.
The primary narrative thread digresses slightly to portray the story of two Swedish immigrant sisters arriving in New York by ship, as well as the story of a Country Girl arriving at Penn Station. However, these stories are in fact connected to the primary narrative via parallel editing and simultaneity. Firstly, the vice ring’s business is paralleled with Burke and his cohorts at the police precinct. This presents a symbolic juxtaposition between good and evil while also positioning Burke as the slave ring’s antagonist, foreshadowing his inevitable heroism. Next, as one cadet is “off to watch the railroad station,” where he later spots the Country Girl, another cadet informs the Go-between of Lorna. This latter action is assumed through the intercutting of this scene with an image of Lorna in Smyrner’s. Therefore, the capture of the Swedish sisters and the Country Girl are nearly simultaneous with the capture of Lorna. It is from here that the film transports us to “just outside the harbor,” where the two Swedish sisters unknowingly encounter a procurer who promises them employment once they reach America. Unlike Lorna, the Swedish women are eager to work, which ultimately leads to their abduction by the traffic. This further corroborates the ambivalent characterizations of women who are caught, or not caught (Mary). Likewise, this incident promulgates the immigrant’s alterity as a cause for white slavery.

Unaccustomed to American culture, the Swedish sisters are easy prey. Lorna, as an American, is somewhat responsible for her abduction while the Swedish sisters are not. It is, nevertheless, important to point out that each scenario is connected to work. Lorna is an incompetent Smyrner’s employee, which leads to her captivity. The Swedish sisters need work, which fallaciously leads them to a brothel masquerading as a Swedish employment agency. In both cases, the inability to work leads to the world of vice.

The message that two potential abductees, the Swedish sisters, have been spotted is relayed through another procurer and a telegrapher, the telegraph inevitably finding its way to
Trubus. Again, the invocation of technology is a vital element in the traffic. In fact, it is clear that such a massive organization could not exist without these communication technologies. We might say that the technology itself is a procurer. This is true in the case of transportation technology, as well. The Country Girl arrives at Penn Station and is immediately introduced to a procurer, as if waiting at the station for unsuspecting tourists to arrive is his sole task in the vice ring. A policeman takes note of the procurer and temporarily rescues the Girl. The procurer and his colleague look on as the Girl exits, absorbed by the street traffic. This second procurer follows her onto a streetcar. It is important to note the prevalence of the locale, Penn Station, a distinguishable New York landmark, only several blocks from Joe Weber’s where the film first screened, as well as the Manhattan streetcar. The Country Girl’s immersion in urban traffic leads to her immersion in the traffic in souls. According to Kristin Whissel, “the film suggests that technological modernity brings with it the difficulty of distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate traffic, of never knowing whether one is an agent of or a commodity within traffic, and it highlights the horror of becoming permanently absorbed into its unceasing movement.”

Likewise, the fate of the Swedish Sisters highlights this horror. Arriving on Ellis Island, the Sisters are immediately subsumed by pedestrian traffic and ultimately hauled off to a brothel via streetcar. Here, Stamp astutely observes:

“…shots of women and their predators in the same frame emphasize the women’s obliviousness to their danger, and editing patterns that place women and traffickers in separate shots with the men looking out of frame emphasize the male gaze, even though not employing traditional optical point-of-view cutting… Such strategies dramatize how Trubus’s syndicate occupies the position of visual mastery…”

This statement reasserts the dominance of the male gaze while also pointing out the pervasiveness of Trubus’ operation. The ubiquity of the slave traffic allegorizes the ubiquity of literal traffic, and vice versa. And for the female émigré to America, this produces both a culture
shock as well as the literal shock of being looked at and preyed upon. Jane Addams discusses the story of Olga, a Swedish immigrant who came to Chicago and was followed for months by two men. Olga very nearly committed suicide but was arrested instead.\(^{34}\)

Like Olga, the sisters and the Country Woman are saved by the police. Officer Burke’s intuition leads him to the brothel where he turns down a bribe and arrests several cadets and a madam single-handedly. As Grieveson notes, “the film offers a culturally affirmative vision that directly contradicts evidence in the real world to show police as honest and heroic and to show criminals brought to justice.”\(^{35}\) Like the early Biograph pictures, the police force is heroic, incorruptible, and always present just in time to restore law and order. This representation of law is important in the establishment of classical Hollywood filmmaking. Grieveson continues, “The film internalized a policing in representational and formal terms and so mirrored the broader institutional goals to self-police the industry.”\(^{36}\) The piety of the police force, then, in some ways becomes a self-reflexive device for censorship and the formalizing of Hollywood codes, as well as self-aggrandizement.

The film returns to Lorna, who mysteriously departs from Smyrner’s with the same procurer that spotted her earlier.\(^{37}\) Their mode of transportation is taxicab, reasserting the theme of absorption through literal traffic. The film then cuts between Mary, rationally worrisome, and Lorna laughing and gullibly enjoying a meal with her date/procurer. This parallel between the two sisters will continue until the conclusion of day one.\(^{38}\) A second taxi transports them to a dance hall. This moment recalls Little Lady nearly consuming her doped drink in *The Musketeers of Pig Alley*. Lorna is not quite as lucky. Awed by the dancers, she becomes oblivious to her procurer’s scheme. As Gunning succinctly notes, “Dazzled by the kaleidoscopic display of urban sights, these women lack the *savoir faire* of the *flâneur* or the detective’s
penetrating x-ray-like gaze needed to alert them to their growing entrapment.” Moreover, the potential dangers of alcoholic consumption once again become paramount. However, George Kibbe Turner, writing contemporaneously, observes, “Contrary to the common belief, intoxicating liquor plays but a small part in securing girls from this particular type of place.” In the vein of Addams, Turner insists that the promise of marriage was more persuasive than alcohol. Again, the dichotomy between fact and fiction is intentionally blurred in *Traffic in Souls*, illustrating a changing and therefore disjointed milieu in urban American society. As this sequence concludes, parallel editing continues as Lorna’s nearly dead body is taken to a brothel while Mary lingers at home in utter dread. Stamp observes, “Shots of Mary draped across her bed sobbing and praying for her sister’s safety censor and contain the sexual associations manifest in the brothel images…” As discussed earlier with regard to *The Fatal Hour*, parallel editing suspends time, often for the purpose of climactic suspense. Here, however, the suspension of time and space is invoked to bar the audience from witnessing something that they should not, and perhaps do not want to, be witnessing.

*Figs. 2 & 3*

*Traffic in Souls* (Tucker, 1913)

*Parallel editing to Mary praying (left) censors Lorna’s experience in the brothel (right).*
The film shifts drastically when Mary is “discharged” from Smyrner’s “on account of her sister’s disgrace.” Mary is a “favorite” of Trubus’ wife, as described earlier in the film, and coincidentally she enters the store as Mary makes her final exit. Brewster notes that coincidence occurs in the film to connect each story thread in a manner that would become the norm for feature-length storytelling. This scene succeeds a scene in which Trubus’ secretary has been fired for engaging in a romance with the Go-between. It is interesting here that Trubus, who has witnessed the couple kissing earlier in the film, is only now inclined to fire the secretary since his wife is present. Trubus’ wife then catches Mary leaving Smyrner’s and offers her the position. Additionally, the secretary’s behavior recalls Mary’s kiss with Burke. Mary is careful to conceal her romance in public, while the secretary’s inability to do so results in her termination and replacement by Mary herself. This, of course, ironically places Mary in the headquarters of the vice ring that has abducted her sister. Listening through Trubus’ headphones while he is in a meeting, Mary “recognizes the voice of the man who took her sister away.” She keenly detects the wire leading from the dictograph upstairs to the office downstairs by climbing down the fire escape. Two elements are important here: 1) the use of dictograph technology both augments the slave traffic while also allowing for easy surveillance upon itself 2) urban architecture, i.e., the fire escape, allows Mary to perform her detection. In other words, Mary can only perform her detection in the modern world. In what may be the film’s quintessential image, Mary (foreground) peers into the office (background), observing the Go-between and Lorna’s procurer. Stamp notes how this image “reverses the patterns of surveillance at work in the film, very neatly turning the surveillance back on Trubus’s empire at the film’s climactic moment, making him the victim of his own methods.” In other words, Mary’s determination and intellect allows her to challenge the dominance of the male gaze in this world, surveying them instead of
the vice versa. As Stamp continues, “Even though women in the on-screen dramas are preyed upon by slave rings employing various means of covert surveillance, female spectators at the cinema reversed the dynamics of this controlling gaze.”45 This image offers a point of entry for Mary into the world of the slave traffic while likewise allowing the spectator to associate with Mary’s gaze.

Furthermore, Mary accomplishes this feat through work. Little Sister is doomed to the slave ring because of her inability to work, while Mary, through her competence in the workplace, is able to infiltrate them. As Gunning asserts:

Mary displays the detective’s x-ray-like powers of observation, finding the traces of what the miscreants have tried to conceal… it is interesting to note that Mary conceals her powers of observation under the cover of work, rather than idleness, and that she gains access to the male world of the city as one of the new class of female clerical workers, rather than as a middle-class shopper.46

The department store window, in the latter nineteenth century, first allowed the flâneuse to exist in the middle-class shopper. By the twentieth century, the flâneuse could exist despite socio-
economic background via the cinema spectator. Mary’s work, therefore, is self-reflexively analogous to the female cinema spectator who ironically does not work at all in her static position.

The Invalid Father’s invention of a device “for intensifying sound waves and recording dictograph sounds on a phonographic record” is perhaps the most significant representation of technological achievement in the film. After Trubus is arrested, Burke’s Captain explains to him that “the invention of the father of the girl you sought to ruin will convict you.” It is the invention, the technology itself, that results in the convictions, not Mary’s detection or Burke’s heroics. This notion reinforces the hegemonic tradition of paternal dominance. Although the father is incapacitated, his heroism is necessary. In a sense, this highlights the disjointedness of both dissipating and preserving paternal hegemony in the modern world. Furthermore, Father’s invention is self-referential to the cinema itself. Staiger equates Father to Thomas Edison, the “real inventor of the phonograph and dictaphone,” who is strikingly also responsible (et al.) for the invention of the motion picture camera. Technological innovation, including the cinema, is situated paradoxically as both enhancing the white slave traffic and hindering it. I would further argue that the very techniques the film invokes, primarily parallel editing but also eye trace and point of view, foreground these ambivalent relationships. As Whissel observes:

When the film resolves its narrative crisis through a technology that arrests dangerous mobility and converts fragmentation into unity and wholeness, it thematizes the cinema’s own technical solution to the formal and structural problems associated with the multireel feature-length film. It is precisely the unseen work done by the cinematic apparatus to regulate multiple and intersecting story lines that converts the six-reeler’s unprecedented fragmentation of space, time, and story into a manufactured unity. In other words, the film portrays progressive era America as an historical milieu with unclear moral dichotomies. By self-reflexively invoking filmmaking techniques that at first fragment time and space then unite them, the film illustrates cinema’s ability to resolve these issues. These
techniques were technological innovations themselves, which in turn altered the way humans thought and perceived both narrative storytelling and reality.

In the end, *Traffic in Souls* is a film that glorifies the successful workingwoman but also positions her in a clearly male-dominated world. The traffic in souls is abolished first through Mary’s skills of detection, reversing the male gaze, but ultimately via Father’s invention and Burke’s ability to infiltrate, along with his cohorts, the brothel where Lorna is being held captive. Nevertheless, the film presents a female gaze that perceives truth and believes in what is morally just. Stamp observes, “although technology is associated with a resurgence of patriarchal authority… and women are presented as perpetually endangered in the urban sphere, the very structure of the film itself promised female patrons commanding views of city streets and the urban underworld.” In other words, the film asserts a *flâneuse* and allows her autonomous moral and philosophical ambitions for a new world. Moreover, it is interesting that Mary is not only present during the final raid but is also the one who finds Lorna first. In this sense, the film promulgates a future without gender hierarchies. Neither Mary nor Burke is the sole hero/heroine. Instead, they represent a coexisting team, a new family structure in which both can be the head of the family.

The development of cinematic storytelling, initiated primarily in the first decade of the twentieth century and escalating rapidly in the 1910s, can be viewed as simultaneously developing an associative gaze for female spectators. *Traffic in Souls*, as the first multi-reel film in America with an original story, underscores this notion while also exposing the properties unique to the film medium, parallel editing above all but also visual motifs that address gaze, surveillance, and detection. In other words, the film highlights the fact that the motion picture medium is about the *look*; where characters are looking and perhaps more importantly where the
spectator is looking. *Traffic in Souls* stands not as *the* significant moment in this development but certainly *a* significant moment. In subsequent decades, such techniques would be standardized by Hollywood. In particular, the notion of an urban underbelly would become prevalent and popular in the hard-boiled detective and film noir genres. However, advancements in parallel editing would ultimately, though temporarily, be subverted by the development of talking pictures.

One item that has not been fully addressed is the connection between white slavery and capitalism. It is noteworthy that Trubus, as head of the International Reform and Purity League, looks strikingly like John D. Rockefeller Jr., perhaps the most prevalent vice crusader of the time. The insinuation that Trubus, in his double-dealings, is Rockefeller is likely a misreading, but the film certainly posits a connection between white slavery and capitalism. As Staiger contends, “it might be said that an international conspiracy to enslave *does* exist and that the gigantic, vertically integrated economic system run by Trubus-Rockefeller is what is behind that enslavement. Thus, the conspiracy exists in a social structure—monopoly capitalism.” Films such as *By Man’s Law* (Cabanne, 1913) and *Intolerance* (Griffith, 1916) present this notion far more emphatically. The latter demonizes a capitalist system while ironically serving as one of the founding texts of classical Hollywood cinema. The problematic capitalist system that filmmakers like Griffith and Tucker examined would ultimately procure the industry that they developed. The white slave narrative would dwindle in American cinema in subsequent decades, perhaps to re-establish a new form of slavery to system. Fortunately, recent film efforts have revived this primitive genre.
Chapter 3
Paternal Heroes and Digital Culture

*Taken* (Morel, 2008) grossed over $226 million worldwide, $145 million in the United States alone, and spawned two lucrative sequels. Despite being a French production, the film appeals to a specifically American sensibility in its use of Hollywood notables such as Liam Neeson as well as its presentation of American heroism in a post-9/11 milieu. But to situate this film as a recovery of American dominance, “us” defeating the international evildoers, would be a narrow, albeit partially accurate, reading of the film. Instead, *Taken* more specifically promulgates a return to the traditional hegemony of patriarchal authority and the restoration of woman’s position in the domestic sphere. Of course, we might say that this notion is culturally bound by the events of 9/11, which symbolically castrated American society, thus necessitating paternal heroics in its aftermath. In this contemporary environment, unlike earlier white slave narratives, the role of the flânuise is far less ambivalent; she simply cannot exist.

The film opens with home movie footage. It is Kim’s fifth birthday (her adult counterpart played by Maggie Grace). She receives a toy horse, foreshadowing the real horse she will receive from her stepfather on her seventeenth birthday. Bryan Mills (Liam Neeson), her biological father, awakens, as if the home movies were a dream, or perhaps more accurately a memory that he yearns to restore. Although this opening sequence represents the idyllic, a time and place in which Kim remains safe, a stark contrast to the world she is ultimately procured into, it nevertheless positions her to-be-looked-at and problematizes motion pictures as a surveillance mechanism. Likewise, in a self-reflexive way this moment links film to dream and memory. Flânerie, for Bryan, simply involves natural mental processes. However, in connecting these conjured up dreams with surveillance, the ubiquity of Bryan’s protective gaze becomes akin to
the ubiquity of surveillance in a contemporary world of advanced video technology and more
strikingly indicates the exposure of young girls to this ubiquitous gaze. Paradoxically, this gaze
can be beneficial in Bryan’s case and harmful in the case of Kim’s inevitable capture. And
although she is not actually spotted via surveillance technology, the invocation of home movie
footage as memory, not simply memory itself, insinuates that Bryan is not the only one looking
at her.

It is interesting that the plotline begins with Bryan purchasing a karaoke machine, a
childish gift for her seventeen year old daughter, from an Arab man. As Baker notes, “Taken is
bookended with Arab men, initially in the store where Bryan buys the karaoke machine, and at
the end when the sheik buys his daughter for half a million dollars and Bryan confronts and kills
him in the bedroom where the sheik plans to have sex with her.”2 Bryan’s friendliness toward the
storeowner, contrary to the sheik, the penultimate villain of the film, whom he kills, indicates
that Bryan’s motives are not racially biased or necessarily oriented toward the war on terror. His
sole ambition is to keep Kim safe under his protection. Indeed, he has given up his life as a CIA
operative to be with Kim. Nevertheless, his ability to restore his personal domestic order acts as a
synecdoche for the domestic security of America. Additionally, the film does not demonize one
group but a host of non-American groups: French, Albanian, and Middle-Eastern.

Bryan’s ex-wife, Lenore (Famke Janssen), coldly dismisses the gift as something she
would have wanted when she was twelve. Immediately there is a clear dichotomy between the
parent who still sees the daughter as a child and the parent who sees her as an adult. Of course,
Mom is wrong and Dad is right. Kim even claims to Bryan, with discretion, that she still wants to
be a singer, indicating a propensity for childlike behavior that will become apparent throughout
the film, particularly when her stepfather, Stuart (Xander Berkeley), arrives with his gift, a horse.
This incident, along with Lenore’s emasculating disposition, asserts Bryan’s central conflict. As Eate and Szövrényi succinctly put it, “He represents the White American male in crisis, struggling to find a place in the world of financial competition and feminised values. Soon it will emerge that this struggle can be managed through the reclamation of his position as representative of superior US masculinity, facing racialised others in defence of ‘his’ women and children.”

It is interesting that Stuart’s gift, though clearly trumping the karaoke machine, represents the pastoral while Bryan’s gift is electronic. Perhaps another way to read this dichotomy is in terms of the horse allowing Kim to freely meander as she pleases, while the karaoke machine glues her to the childish dreams of her past. Clearly Bryan possesses a technological dominance, particularly once Kim is taken and he is forced to employ a series of sophisticated tools. His use of a disposable camera to take pictures is especially thought-provoking, and it would be somewhat narrow to simply perceive Bryan as old-fashioned or out of touch with current technology in light of his technological expertise elsewhere. Instead, I would argue that Bryan’s use of a disposable camera is intentional. Returning to my earlier point regarding home movies and surveillance, Bryan enjoys taking pictures of his daughter to cherish them in his memories and dreams. In fact, we later witness him placing the developed picture in a photo album dedicated to Kim’s birthdays throughout the years. However, these photos are for his eyes only. The disposable nature of the camera seems not only appropriate for an ex-CIA operative but also symbolizes a limited surveillance. A disposable camera’s film is developed once and does not exist in the digital realm, subject to the preying gaze of anyone. The open-access of digital photography and the Internet, as we will see in Trade (Kreuzpaintner, 2007), does in fact aid and exacerbate sex trafficking. Here the ability to survey belongs solely to the
paternal figure. Indeed, what appears to be a lack of technological savvy is actually quite ingenious. One could even envision Bryan burning the original negative once the pictures are developed.

Kim’s request to travel to Paris in some ways recollects earlier films; Little Kathy exploring the tenement, Little Lady exploring the crowded New York City streets and dance hall scene, as well as Lorna Barton escaping her undesirable working life. In each case, like *Taken*, independence ironically leads to captivity, thus demonizing the notion of women leaving the home. *Traffic in Souls* attempts to reverse this trope by linking Lorna’s inability to work with her susceptibility to procurement and furthermore situates Mary as the heroine, albeit with the assistance of Father and Officer Burke. *Taken* is less uncertain of its stance. Bryan’s ideal of paternally dominant hegemony contends with Kim’s desire for independence. He is right, and she is wrong. Of course, Bryan does make the mistake of ultimately allowing her to go, under the condition that he keep tabs on her via an international phone. Despite this error, had he not agreed, Kim would not have been taken, and his heroic rescue to restore his masculinity and domestic order would not have occurred. In a sense, one can almost conceive of Bryan orchestrating the entire sequence of events to achieve this ultimate goal. He agrees to let Kim travel to Paris but insists that she carry the international phone, which he calls her on at the precise moment of her capture so that he can locate the men that take her. This, of course, is absurd but nevertheless conceptually illustrates the authority this paternal character possesses.

With regard to flânerie, it is notable that Kim and her friend, Amanda (Katie Cassidy), are traveling to Europe to follow a U2 tour, although Bryan only discovers this just prior to their flight. For these girls, true independence involves traveling to Paris (notably Baudelaire’s old stomping grounds) then following a rock band around the rest of Europe. However, this
conception of independent flânerie paradoxically involves repeatedly seeing the same concert. Their inability to become flâneuses is indicated by their inability to genuinely spectate. When the girls arrive in Paris, they are spotted by Peter (Nicolas Giraud) and are taken before they can even experience flânerie. Likewise, Bryan notes that Lenore lives in a bubble, and indeed she never leaves Los Angeles. True flânerie belongs to men only. *Taken* portrays a world in which the flâneuse is utterly impossible.

In terms of parallel editing, *Taken* achieves the effect of this technique without actually employing it. It is first important to note that the sequence in which Kim and Amanda are taken does utilize parallel editing. Here we see the girls arriving at their Paris apartment intercut with Bryan attempting to call Kim from Los Angeles. Amanda wants to sleep with Peter. Kim’s skepticism forces Amanda to claim, “ya gotta lose it sometime,” insinuating Kim’s virginity, which will become important as Bryan’s race to save her is also a race to save her virginity. It is clear that Amanda is the less responsible of the two. In fact, Kim’s reticence to dance foolishly with Amanda allows her to see the second call from Bryan. As the girls are taken, Bryan remains on the line to record the conversation and ascertain as much information as possible. In this sense, the film is akin to earlier Griffith films such as *Lonely Villa* and *Lonedale Operator*, which invoke telecommunication technologies, via parallel, that are necessary to save the woman in danger. More accurately, however, *Taken* is comparable to *The Fatal Hour* in that the climax is given a time-specific requirement. Bryan’s former CIA colleague, Sam (Leland Orser), informs him that he has ninety-six hours to rescue Kim, and the duration of the film is devoted to this rescue as in the final sequence of *The Fatal Hour*. But unlike the latter, *Taken* jettisons parallel editing as soon as Kim is captured and loses her phone. It is at this precise moment that Bryan loses his paternal grasp over her, thus ensuing his journey to recover it. Suspense is
created by *not seeing* Kim’s journey. Moreover, in the climactic sequence in which Bryan must track down and infiltrate The Sheik’s boat, he is often framed in the foreground while the boat retreats in the background. Here sophisticated framing techniques abolish the need for parallel editing, amalgamating what could be juxtaposed via the cut into one image. The effect of parallel editing is essentially collapsed into one image, as Bryan is framed in the foreground while the yacht he is chasing is framed in the background. Likewise, cinema-vérité-esque camera movements emphasize Bryan’s chaotic point of view, thus enhancing suspense. Tracing the archaeology from Griffith’s early film to this contemporary blockbuster brings to light a consistently popular trope, namely the chase and rescue sequence, and illustrates the prevalence of editorial savvy over other cinematic properties in the early days, perhaps due to the relatively unchanging art of film editing, despite advancements in the tools used, and the lack of sync-sound technology.

![Image](image.png)

*Fig. 5*

*Taken (Morel, 2007)*

The effect of parallel editing is essentially collapsed into one image, as Bryan is framed in the foreground while the yacht he is chasing is framed in the background.
As outlined in earlier chapters, modern technological developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries profoundly impacted human culture, and the development of the film medium played a vital role in this. This was a unique period in the history of technology that strikingly parallels the emergence of digital culture in the past twenty years. In assessing this parallel from a feminist film studies perspective, Catherine Russell uses the term “parallax historiography.” I will return to this point later, but it is important to introduce here as I assess technology and how it intersects with the role of women in these contemporary white slave narratives. In *Taken*, technological dominance is restricted to men. More specifically, the ability to survey and detect is a male trait. Bryan records his phone conversation with Kim and, with Sam’s assistance, detects the voices of the men who have taken her, tracking their origins to a very specific area of Albania. When Bryan arrives in Paris, he first visits the girls’ apartment, climbing onto the building ledge, like Mary in *Traffic in Souls*, to gain entry. He begins experiencing flashbacks of the event. Of course, Bryan was not present to witness it. Instead, these images seem to be deductions in his brain. This poses various questions regarding detection and one’s ability to become a flâneur/flâneuse. If one can imagine seeing something that *may* have occurred, does this involve truth? In the case of cinematic representation, there is a third party: the spectator. As a spectator we have seen what occurred in the apartment. Bryan has only *heard* the incident over the phone. His visual detection, i.e., his attempt to connect the phone recording to the space visually, is tested by the omniscient flâneur, the film spectator, and indeed we applaud his accuracy. Invoking this unique editorial technique further points to Bryan’s visual/spatial mastery. One final note regarding Bryan’s detection abilities should be made with regard to his discovery of Peter. After retrieving the SD card from Kim’s broken cell phone (once again, Bryan’s insistence that she have the phone becomes paramount in his investigation),
Bryan locates a photograph taken by Peter displaying his reflection in the background. Here the photograph, akin to the cinema, self-reflexively provides detection.

Dodds and Kirby trace the prevalence of the vigilante film in the 1970s and posit this as a cultural response to both the war in Vietnam and the decaying of urban America: “Like the western film genre before it, the vigilante films of the 1970s were informed by a cultural critique of the city as an urban frontier needing the decisive presence of the reluctant vigilante hero.”

One may recall figures like Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) and Paul Kersey (Charles Bronson). More poignantly, in relation to Taken, one might recall Travis Bickle (Robert DeNiro) in Taxi Driver (Scorsese, 1976) who not only goes on a murderous rampage in an attempt to cleanse New York City but also rescues an underage girl (Jodie Foster) from her life of prostitution. Indeed, Bryan approaches a Parisian prostitute posing as a John in order to plant a mic on her pimp, which is reminiscent of Travis’ awkward attempt to infiltrate the Lower East Side vice ring operated by Sport (Harvey Keitel). Bryan’s vigilantism becomes apparent as soon as he confronts Peter outside of the airport, but there are two moments in particular that seem almost irredeemably overt; first when he tortures Marko (Arben Bajraktaraj) via electrocution, which the film clearly promotes as an effective procedure, and secondly when he shoots Jean-Claude’s (Olivier Rabourdin) wife, Isabelle (Camille Japy), in their home. The latter incident is particularly telling of Bryan’s vigilantism in that he has now brought violence into the domestic sphere, harming an innocent to achieve his justice. Among other things, he single-handedly kills more than a dozen people, evades Parisian police (albeit corrupt Parisian police), and unlawfully borrows several vehicles. It is questionable how his return to the United States is even possible!

This “any means necessary” methodology in some ways reflects Bush-era American foreign
policy. Unlike its 1970s predecessors, *Taken* presents a milieu in which the vigilante no longer needs to cleanse the American streets. He needs to cleanse the rest of the world.

Hannah Hamad compellingly argues that a new genre of film, the paternal melodrama, formulated in the late 1970s as a response to second wave feminism, beginning with *Kramer Vs. Kramer* (Benton, 1979) and evolving in the 1980s and 90s. Such films often include single or widowed fathers despite the fact that a marginal percentage of American families are headed by single fathers. *Taken* arguably belongs to this subgenre, assuming the genre’s essential criteria to be the self-aggrandizement of masculinity in an increasingly feminized culture. Furthermore, amalgamating this subgenre with both a white slave and vigilante narrative becomes a uniquely twenty-first century, post-9/11 attribute, as Hamad contends:

> An augmented discourse of ideal masculinity emerges in the action genre after 9/11, which successfully offsets its reactionary ideological backpedaling through judicious recourse to the universality and affective negotiability of fatherhood. Postfeminist fatherhood thus remains a key facet of the post-9/11 masculine identity formation of what Sarah Godfrey and I elsewhere term “resurgent protective paternalism”…

As I have argued, earlier white slave pictures were a response to cultural anxieties regarding women in the workplace, and more generally anxieties regarding industrialized America. *Taken* addresses the cultural anxieties of a post-feminist, post-9/11 American culture in which the independent woman must become a slave and the heroic, superhuman father-figure is necessary. It is, therefore, not unusual that Bryan Mills is played by Liam Neeson, who was fifty-six years old at the time of the film’s release. While a forty-year-old actor could just as easily play Kim’s father, Neeson’s age is essential in representing a *resurgent* protective paternalism (his contemporaries being the vigilante stars of the 1970s) in a post-feminist world that subverts the flâneuse. *Taken 2* (Megaton, 2012), however, slightly reverses the role of paternal hero when Bryan is taken by Marko’s father (Rade Serbedzija) who seeks vengeance for his son’s death.
Kim is allowed to temporarily play the heroine and rescue him. Of course, it is still necessary for Bryan to assert his masculine heroics to some degree, just as Mary Barton needs Officer Burke to ultimately abolish the slave ring in *Traffic in Souls*. As Dodds and Kirby note, “Thus, he tells Lenore that, ‘I need you to focus,’ and Kim that, ‘I need you to calm down and pull yourself together.’ Even when female characters are given greater agency, then, the traditional binary between emotionless, logical men and emotional, hysterical women is retained.”8 In my subsequent films of analysis, although the paternal figure is prominent, he is also fallible.

*Holly* (Moshe, 2006) opens with a chase sequence in which Holly (Thuy Nguyen), a twelve-year-old Vietnamese girl, has escaped from a brothel. As she reaches a split in the alleyway, she has to choose a direction. The two men in pursuit have to do the same. Although one begins down the path Holly did not choose, the second man overrides his decision, and Holly is caught. It seems as if Holly has a choice and she simply made the wrong one. However, there is a sense that neither choice could have evaded her captors. Likewise, Patrick (Ron Livingston) is a professional gambler with a streak of bad luck, as if he were born to be unlucky. Both characters lack control over their choices. They are victims of fate.

Patrick is an American who has been hiding in Phnom Penh, Cambodia for fifteen years because of an undisclosed incident. When his motorcycle breaks down he unknowingly stumbles into a brothel where he befriends Holly. Unlike Bryan Mills, Patrick is not there to rescue anyone. In fact, his intentions are utterly ambivalent throughout the film, despite his insistence that he does not sleep with children. Nevertheless, *Holly* is similar to *Taken* in its representation of sex trafficking as otherworldly and non-American. When attempting to befriend Klaus (Udo Kier), Patrick discovers that children are being prostituted, and he is so disgusted that he returns
the soup Klaus recommended. Indeed, Klaus, a non-American, is depicted as the brothel’s usual clientele, whereas Patrick is later referred to as a “foreigner.”

Once Patrick’s bike is fixed the following morning, he teaches Holly to ride it, a quintessential fatherly moment. Likewise, Patrick has a pedagogical moment when Holly explains that she is being punished for sins from her past life and he insists that she only gets one life and should make the most of it. This conversation posits an important dichotomy between American and non-American sensibilities, one that is explored further in Trade. Patrick’s contention is a synecdoche for the American way, ostensible free will. Holly’s assertion seems linked to an archaic belief in determinism and spirituality. In Trade, Ray (Kevin Kline), through his journey with Jorge and Adriana, is perhaps able to see beyond his rational perspective to the spiritual. Patrick naively clings to his ethos not realizing that his and Holly’s paths are both bound by fate. Furthermore, according to Baker, Holly’s belief system justifies her position as a child prostitute:

In contrast to the simple portrayal of religion in Trade, where all the Mexican characters are constantly praying for help and forgiveness (even the trafficker), Holly suggests how religion might be used as a justification for trafficking. At one point Holly speaks of how she is in her situation because of karma. Furthermore, the film portrays the justifications that Western buyers often give for their behavior; that Cambodians have a “different set of morals” and that the girls go willingly.  

Sex trafficking is therefore depicted here as a cultural invariable, linked to an ancient practice that is endlessly inescapable. In this sense, Holly is a film steeped in naturalism.

When Patrick returns to the brothel later in the film, Holly has been sent away. Another young girl accosts him with the hope that he will buy her, and in return she will provide domestic services such as cooking and cleaning. Her only option is to be sold into another form of servitude. And indeed, when Patrick finally tracks down Holly, she requests the same. First Patrick has to pay for his time with her. Then she suggests that he buy her, “wife her,” and go to
America with her sister. For Holly, the way out is domestic slavery in a place (America) where Patrick no longer belongs. The deranged nature of such a marriage notwithstanding, Holly’s happy ending is impossible. Jozwiak provides an apt analysis of this sequence:

For Holly, rescue looks like marriage and a life in America, while for Patrick, this version of salvation constitutes another form of oppression. However, Patrick discovers that Holly’s sexual propositions are not altogether unwelcome: in a sequence during the night, we see Patrick arrive back at the hotel where they are staying and lay in bed next to Holly. She turns to face him, and the camera holds them both in a medium shot, light flickering in from the window rhythmically illuminating their faces. The image lingers a bit too long, and begins to take on a sexual connotation. Then, Patrick stands abruptly, and the next scene finds him in the proverbial cold shower, the film here pointing towards Patrick’s desperate attempt to quell his desire for Holly.10

And in an earlier scene as the two dance together, Klaus calls Patrick a hypocrite. Jozwiak goes on to argue that Patrick’s ability to subvert his desire for Holly reestablishes his masculinity. I would argue instead that this is part of the film’s attempt at naturalism. At the risk of traditional character identity and development, Patrick is occasionally awkward and utterly indecisive. His moral code is only superficially righteous as his profession involves gambling and theft. His relationship with Holly often teeters between pervert and paternal hero simply because he could be either but becomes neither. Like most humans, his identity is ambivalent. In this milieu, people like Bryan Mills probably do not exist. Furthermore, his methodology for rescuing Holly is flawed. Marie (Virginie Ledoyen) insists that buying Holly supports and augments the traffic. Patrick, however, notes that he is only trying to help one girl, not all of them. In a sense, this sentimentality fuels all three films analyzed in this chapter. Taken is not a polemical film. It is a film about a father saving his daughter and restoring domestic order. Trade involves a paternal figure and an older brother figure attempting to rescue one girl. Holly, though clearly the most polemical of the three films, nevertheless possesses this trope. However, unlike Bryan and Ray/Jorge, Patrick’s paternal ambitions fail, and the film becomes a polemical statement because
of his inadequacy. To put it another way, *Taken* supplies the viewer less with a concern regarding sex trafficking, as our focus becomes Bryan’s triumph. The melancholic and naturalistic conclusion to *Holly* evokes the need to seriously address the issue of human trafficking.

The concluding sequence of the film begins when Holly escapes from the shelter. This recalls Holly’s earlier attempts to escape the brothel. In a way, the shelter is just as much of a prison as the brothel. Parallel editing is employed as Patrick encounters a police officer in a bar that notices his photograph of Holly and claims that he took her virginity. Patrick assaults him with a glass, a brief moment of triumph and perhaps heroism. As he flees on foot, the film intercuts Patrick and Holly running. Screen direction dictates that they are running toward each other, Patrick toward screen-left and Holly toward screen-right. It is noteworthy that the soundtrack here consists only of the two characters’ breathing, as if the outside world does not exist at this moment. In terms of the traditional chase and rescue sequence, it would appear that the paralleling spaces will ultimately coalesce, and the pair will find each other and escape. On the contrary, Patrick is caught, only spotting Holly for a brief moment from the backseat of a police van. Unlike Bryan, Patrick cannot get away with violent behavior. In the final moment of the film, Holly abruptly looks toward camera, reminding the audience of Patrick’s response when Freddie (Chris Penn) asks him why he did it: “It was just an accident, but I stopped, and I looked into her eyes.” And Freddie’s response is strikingly reminiscent, albeit antithetical, of Benjamin’s description of Baudelaire’s flâneur: “You can’t stop Patrick. You gotta keep moving otherwise life moves right by.” Conversely, the true flâneur stops and observes, which according to Benjamin can be dangerous in the modern world.\(^\text{11}\) In Patrick’s case, it became extremely
dangerous, but it also allowed him to truly see. The penultimate, self-reflexive image of Holly’s address to the audience, though brief, forces us to stop and look.

Before moving on to *Trade*, I would like to briefly note the role of technology in *Holly*, namely that it is virtually non-existent! Like Bryan and Ray, Patrick carries a photograph of Holly, but we never see the technology used to create it. Patrick’s motorcycle represents one of the few pieces of modern technology in the film, and it malfunctions. This malfunction leads him to the underworld of child prostitution and in a way to a pre-industrialized age. In fact, Klaus notes that the Cambodians have a different set of values and that this has “gone on for ages.” By losing his piece of modern technology, Patrick is forced to return to a time, akin to Baudelaire, that moves much slower. Unlike earlier films such as *Traffic in Souls*, modern traffic and technology does not enhance the sex trade. A propensity for archaic values and no technology is what keeps the trade alive in this milieu. In a way, perhaps, the film’s polemical solution to the problem of sex trafficking is through modernization, more specifically bringing Westernized/Americanized values to the region of Southeast Asia. The Internet only exists as an afterthought when the final image of Holly segues to an ad for redlightchildren.org.¹² Abstractly speaking, digital technology may be the solution.

According to Eate and Szövrényi, “*Trade* is explicitly based on a controversial 2004 *New York Times* investigative report by Peter Landesman. His article reported his findings on ‘sex slavery’ in the USA… *Trade* then, like *Taken*, is as much a film about the USA as it is a film about trafficking.”¹³ For American audiences, therefore, the film becomes somewhat more provocative than films like *Taken* and *Holly*. Here sex trafficking occurs right in our backyard. And although the film is global in scope and the majority of the characters are non-Americans, everything and everyone is positioned in relation to American culture. The film’s opening credit
sequence depicts a series of Mexico City exteriors. An emphasis on statues and symbolic landmarks is strikingly apparent, foreshadowing a dichotomy between the third-world and the first-world. For the former, spirituality is paramount while the latter’s perspective is more reason-based. Likewise, the first scene of the film presents several tropes that will dominate the duration of the film. It is Adriana’s (Paulina Gaitan) thirteenth birthday. Like Kim in *Taken*, the birthday seems to paradoxically evoke a sense of innocence while, literally speaking, indicating maturity. This maturity leads to a desire for independence that neither girl is prepared for. For Kim, this independence involves traveling to Europe, while for Adriana her independence is achieved simply by leaving the home on a bicycle her brother, Jorge (Cesar Ramos), has acquired (stolen?) for her as a gift. This contrast further points to a first-world/third-world dichotomy, but it is also notable that Adriana’s danger lurks nearby. Like Little Kathy in *The Miser’s Heart*, leaving the home altogether is unsafe. Their mother is skeptical of the gift and notes that Zocala is dangerous because of foreigners. The Russian mafia, of course, abducts Adriana, but Mother is specifically addressing this comment to Jorge who will subsequently encounter and rob an American tourist. Is she referring to Americans as the dangerous foreigners? This would make sense since the Russians operation ultimately ends in New Jersey, justifying Ray’s later comment, “We are the fucking gringos, aren’t we?” Lastly, this opening scene initiates an important familial backstory. Jorge’s pugnacious attitude toward his mother incites her to state, “you wouldn’t talk to me like that if your father were here.” Although we hear nothing more of the missing father, Jorge’s need for a paternal figure, which he ultimately discovers in Ray, is an important motif that is clearly consistent in the contemporary white slave narrative. Ray’s paternal qualities (i.e., not allowing him to use profanity, keeping the car clean, and etcetera) allow Jorge to become a hero, and consequently Jorge’s passion and vigor allow
Ray to become a hero. Both characters need each other to be at their best. The film’s most poignant moment occurs in the final scene where Jorge murders Vadim in the streets of Mexico City. Jorge looks on as Vadim’s little boy sorrowfully proclaims, “Papa!” Without Ray, Jorge regresses, and we may presume that Ray does the same without Jorge.

Evocations of Christianity, particularly the Virgin Mary, are most explicitly illustrated throughout the journey of Adriana, Veronica (Alicja Bachleda), and their procurer, Manuel (Marco Perez). However, it is noteworthy that Jorge offers a sign of the cross in his bedroom early in the film. All of the Mexican characters share a faith in Christ unlike everyone else, including other non-Americans. Veronica, a Polish émigré, is promised entry to America via Mexico but is abducted by Vadim (Pasha D. Lychnikoff) and Manuel at the airport. Structurally, *Trade* is similar to *Traffic in Souls* in that multiple abduction stories are told and ultimately intersect. Here Veronica and Adriana’s stories connect quite early as they are both prescribed to the same entourage bound for New Jersey. Similarly, we might compare Adriana to Lorna Barton in that her older sibling will rescue her. However, there is a striking difference between Jorge and Mary Barton, namely a gender difference. Additionally, Ray is akin to the Invalid Father, whose paternity and inventiveness is not unlike Ray’s fatherly advice as well as his ability to transport Jorge to New Jersey via mechanical means. And lastly, in the same vein we might equate the police to Officer Burke and the police force in *Traffic in Souls*. In both cases legal, governmental intervention is necessary.

As the girls’ journeys coincide, we horrifyingly witness Vadim rape Veronica. This recalls the sequence in *Traffic in Souls* in which parallel editing is invoked to depict Lorna arriving at the brothel while Mary worries from home. Cuts to Mary temporarily suspend time, therefore censoring the viewer from the horrors occurring in Lorna’s scenario. For Veronica,
flashbacks of her planning the trip to America are intercut with the present. Parallel editing takes on a more sophisticated form of censorship. Broadly speaking, this editorial technique allows the flâneur/spectator to not only transcend space but also transcend time and infiltrate one’s consciousness. Cinematic flânerie here involves experiencing the character’s thoughts. From a censorship perspective, the flashback images censor us as well as Veronica herself from the rape. By conjuring these images, which include memories of her son, she avoids, as does the spectator, acknowledging what is actually occurring. Of course, we do in fact witness the rape (and the final image of the scene returns to Veronica after she has been raped), which also indicates strikingly different censorship codes and etiquette between 1913 and 2008, though this is perhaps an obvious assumption.

Adriana prays to the Virgin Mary asking for her brother to find her, which is echoed later in the film during the online auction. Just as the bidding closes, Jorge prays, swearing to never lie or rob again, and they win the bid, which leads them rescue Adriana. The act of prayer is never denigrated. In fact, it appears to be productive. When the girls attempt to cross the border for the second time, they encounter a large cross, and all of the Mexican characters, including Manuel, stop to pray. Veronica notices this, though she does not pray herself. This privilege is delegated to the Mexican characters only. However, her sacrificial death inextricably links her to the spiritual. Before jumping, she notices a beacon of light along the horizon. This beacon can be seen periodically throughout the duration of the film, notably ascending beyond the New York City skyline when Jorge and Ray arrive in New Jersey. Veronica’s final assertion to Manuel, “you’ll pay for this,” is thus of great import. Her transcendence to the spiritual, represented by the beacon, is not necessarily indicative of a Christian spirituality but nevertheless lingers in the conscience of Manuel and ultimately coerces him to do the right thing. Veronica’s lack of
Christianity is therefore important. The film does not necessarily propagate a religious solution but at least one that involves spiritual values.

In tracing the white slave narrative, Manuel appears to be the only well-developed character involved in the sex trafficking operation, with the notable exception of Trubus, who is in charge of his operation, not working for it. If we pose the question, “why does sexual slavery exist?” a relatively simple answer might be, “because there are people that traffic women against their will.” So who are these people? How does one become involved in a sex trafficking operation? Jane Addams’ sociological work in the 1910s is useful in this regard. She notes, “The entire system of recruiting for commercialized vice is largely dependent upon boys, who are scarcely less the victims of the system than are the girls themselves.”

Although nearly a century apart (and Manuel is not a “boy”), Addams’ assertion is nevertheless striking in that Manuel is indeed a victim just like the girls. It seems appropriate to compare him with Jorge. Both are victims of a third-world upbringing, presumably without a father, and therefore must resort to criminal activity. However, unlike Jorge, who is somewhat redeemed by his paternal figure Ray, Manuel’s redemption comes in a maternal form. When he discovers Adriana, who has intentionally forced herself to bleed in order to appear as if she and Ray have had intercourse, Adriana convinces Manuel that it is not too late for him and that Veronica (presumably the Virgin Mary, as well) watches over him. It is unclear what Manuel’s destiny will become, but his decision to lie to Laura (Kate del Castillo), thus preserving Adriana’s virginity, indicates that some semblance of salvation is possible. Furthermore, Adriana offers her spirituality to Ray, the rational-minded American, by giving him her necklace.

It is quite clear that the film intends to demonize America to some degree. Firstly, the American tourist that Jorge and his gang rob is not only perceived as a dangerous foreigner but
also a pervert. He is lured to the alleyway with the promise of Mexican prostitutes. Contrary to Holly, Americans are depicted as perverse while the third-world is not. Moreover, the Mexican boys are not actually dangerous. Their guns are water pistols. Jorge also makes a poignant point when he discovers that Ray only has one Mexican friend. He claims that all Mexicans are Americans, as Mexico is geographically in Central America, and therefore all of his friends are Americans. In a sense, this is almost like saying, “all earthlings are earthlings,” and any form of division therefore seems irrational.

Globalization is a term that is invoked occasionally in this film. First, when the boys visit Don Victor to ascertain information regarding Adriana’s abductors, he claims that they are Russians but part of a globalized entity. Second, when Ray visits his contact in New York, their reluctance to respond to his search is due to the global nature of the traffic and the multiplicity of jurisdictions working on it. This passivity in a way reflects American sensibilities toward sex trafficking: it is a global problem that we cannot solve. However, the problem is centered in the United States (and let’s not forget that this story is loosely based on true events), thus Ray’s statement, “We are the fucking gringos, aren’t we?” Typically, globalization is a term used in relation to global communication technologies such as satellites and perhaps more commonly the World Wide Web. Here globalization refers to the global sex trade but is nonetheless linked to the Internet in its practices.

To address the utilization of technology in this film, we must first slightly rewind technological history. The camera is used to take pictures of Adriana for potential buyers. She is essentially commodified via the camera. In a poignant moment thereafter, an American girl visiting a prison Adriana has been taken to for illegally crossing the border offers her a Glamour magazine. This further posits American ignorance but also, in a broader sense, indicates the
cultural barrier between the first-world and the third-world. Adriana’s commodification is media-historical in the sense that first she is captured via the camera then sold via the Internet. Ray and Jorge discover this after assaulting a pedophile in a rest area bathroom. The website (flesh4sale) requires two passwords, which they receive from the pedophile in exchange for not being turned over to the police, though Ray turns him over to the police anyway. Detection is accomplished here via means that are unique to digital culture. Unlike previous white slave protagonists that require physical sight, Ray and Jorge merely require virtual site. Flânerie, in the digital age, involves perusal of the computer screen.

Johnston, Friedman, and Schafer offer a cogent analysis:

…mass media and the global sex trade are inextricably linked. Mass media technology, primarily the Internet, enables advertising of the global sex trade to flourish and far-flung traffickers to coordinate their activities. The proliferation of Internet pornography and users’ ability to transmit events in real-time has significantly expanded the ways in which traffickers exploit women and children, while also providing additional sites for journalistic surveillance. Further, scholars have argued that the mass media’s glamorized
depictions of life in industrialized nations contribute to an environment that is conducive to trafficking, allowing traffickers to pose as people who can help economically disadvantaged women to migrate and obtain legitimate employment.\textsuperscript{16}

This latter point adequately describes Veronica’s story. In a broader sense, the dawn of the Internet has augmented the commodification of human beings while also increasing the space, via limited mobility, for women to be looked at. However, Ray and Jorge utilize the Internet to infiltrate and abolish the slave ring and rescue Adriana. Thus the paradox of technological development continues. Lastly, an important point can be made regarding the setting of Manuel and Ray’s meeting, an abandoned strip mall parking lot. The setting arouses a post-apocalyptic evocation. Though conceivably a real place in New Jersey, it is more accurately a depiction of a world where walking and shopping, in the nineteenth century Baudelairean sense, no longer exist. Flânerie is now done remotely via digital technology.

* * * *

The turn of the twenty-first century has been profoundly impacted by digital technology in a way that parallels changes in modernity at the turn of the twentieth century. It has been my attempt to address this parallel by assessing a narrative subgenre that appears to have become prevalent during some moment in each respective period. What we discover is that the development of cinematic language in the early twentieth century paved the way for new perspectives regarding space and time while coinciding with a progressive movement in America that was dedicated to altering the role women have played in society for centuries. Of course, the trafficking of women against their will is clearly an issue that continues and is perhaps more
prevalent today. Consistent tropes throughout the history of the white slave narrative have continued to problematize the issue with no real solution, as Baker asserts:

Films have the potential to educate viewers about important social issues. But films can mislead as well as educate. Films that sensationalize and simplify sex trafficking may draw people in and motivate them to become more involved with the issue or to donate money to antitrafficking organizations, but they also reinscribe many of the ideologies that lead to trafficking in the first place: ethnic, racial, or gender oppression, as well as ideas of Western superiority that fuel the global inequalities at the root of trafficking.¹⁷

As we have seen, technological developments present positive and negative applications.

Likewise, film representations of white slavery pose the same problem; on the one hand creating a space to address the issue while often subverting it.

Catherine Russell’s notion of “parallax historiography” is one that I wish to address in summation:

…the flâneuse is a figure who may well be fictional, who may even be a parodic figure, but is above all a projection of feminism onto a history of oppression… The flâneuse did not exist, because she could not be recognized within the construction of the modernist gaze. Now that we know who she is, we can go on to locate her in the new media of the twenty-first century. The institutional form of classical cinema is potentially disappearing along with the analogue technologies that held spectatorship in place. Thus, the parallax historiography of early and late cinema is a fundamentally utopian feminist projection.¹⁸

Attempting to trace the flâneuse in early cinema is, therefore, a purely historiographical endeavor. Tracing the white slave narrative involves applying a category to early cinema, namely the flâneuse, which did not exist. In so doing, we discover that she has changed very little; often apparent (e.g., Mary Barton and Adriana) but also weakened (e.g., all victims of sexual slavery). Now that we know who she is, perhaps she can prevail in the twenty-first century.
Notes to Introduction

3 Ibid, 28.
5 Quoted in Gunning, 31.
7 Gunning, 42.
8 I use the archaic term “multi-reel” as it was used in the 1910s to refer to what we now call “feature-length.” This approach to filmmaking was first established in Italy. Films such as *The Last Days of Pompeii* (Caserini and Rodolfi, 1913) and *Cabiria* (Passtrone, 1914) had an immense influence on American filmmakers, particularly D.W. Griffith.
10 The films in chapter four, which will not be examined chronologically, are a noteworthy exception.

Notes to Chapter 1

6 Ibid.
7 It is worth noting the gender reversal in Griffith’s 1910 film *The House with Closed Shutters*, in which a young woman fights and dies in the civil war, posing as her cowardly brother to avoid family shame.
8 This shot is strikingly reminiscent of the close-up in Edwin S. Porter’s *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), used at the beginning or end of the film at the prerogative of the projectionist.
Here the use of this shot at the beginning of the film would ruin the payoff, which further indicates the development of a less ambivalent narrative structure within a five year period.


12 See ibid. It is perhaps also noteworthy that Harry Solter was not Chinese, though it would have been rare indeed to cast minorities during this time period.

13 Ultimately leading to the National Prohibition (Volstead) Act in 1919.


16 Ibid, 103-104.

17 Ibid, 115. Here Gunning is specifically referring to The Barbarian, Ingomar (Griffith, 1908), but the notion is universal to the broader scope of parallel editing.

18 This theme foreshadows later films, particularly Alfred Hitchcock’s Rear Window (1954).

19 Sources often erroneously credit Lillian’s little sister Dorothy as Little Lady. Dorothy would have only been fourteen years old when the film was released.

20 It is unclear, however, whether her sadness is due to her mother’s death or the loss of her husband’s wallet, or perhaps simply a compound of the two.


22 Stamp, 48.

23 Ibid.

24 Quoted in Staiger, Janet, Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 123.


Notes to Chapter 2


8 See ibid, 42 for an extensive list of such films, most of which are lost.

9 Ibid, 88.


11 Ibid, 183-84.


13 Ibid, 48.

14 Fuller, Kathryn H., At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 60.

15 Stamp, 50.


18 Although the film does not refer to little sister as Lorna, according to Lee Grieveson, Tucker’s original notes and screenplay refer to her as Lorna. See Grieveson, Lee, Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 158.

19 According to one Motion Picture World reviewer, Tucker produced an earlier film titled The Big Sister, which appears to foreshadow the trope of the one sister who goes wrong. See “Independent Specials,” in Moving Picture World 18 (1913), 382.

20 Gunning, 46.

21 Brewster, 231.


23 Addams, 234.

24 Friedberg, 422.


26 Staiger, Janet, Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 132.
The editing is too quick, perhaps intentionally so, to deduce how Lorna is captured, though it seems plausible that footage from the original print may be missing here.

Ben Brewster notes that the film is broken up into three days. See Brewster, 231. I would add that, despite the length of each day (day one: 47 minutes, day two: 15 minutes, day three: 23 minutes), this structure in some ways foreshadows the three-act structure that would later dominate Hollywood cinema.

Turner, George Kibbe, “The Daughters of the Poor,” in McClure’s Magazine (November 1909), 56.

See Addams, 8.

Grieveson, 164.

Ibid, 165.

See Brewster, 231-233.

Stamp, 81.

Stamp, 77.


Stamp, 78-79.

See Addams, 8.

Grieveson, 164.

Ibid, 165.

Stamp, 74.

Ibid.

Stamp, 74.

Ibid.

Gunning, 47.

Stamp, 77.

Gunning, 52.

See Gunning, 57.

Staiger, 137.

See Drew, William M., D.W. Griffith’s Intolerance: Its Genesis and Its Vision (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1986), in particular chapter 5, which outlines Griffith’s influence by progressive leaders in the 1910s while also pointing toward the film’s lack of popularity in the more conservative era from World War I through the 1920s. Drew also notes that the film was extremely influential for the less-conservative Soviet filmmakers of the 1920s.

Notes to Chapter 3


3 Eate, Penelope and Anna Szövrényi, “Saving the USA: Heteronormative Masculinities and the Securitisation of Trafficking Discourse in Mainstream Narrative Film” (*Social Semiotics*, 24:5, 2014), 612.
5 Dodds and Kirby, 5.
7 Ibid, 48.
8 Dodds and Kirby, 13.
9 Baker, 216.
12 *Holly* co-writer Guy Jacobson founded this non-profit organization. Their mission statement reads as follows: “RedLight Children is a global human rights nonprofit organization aiming to end the demand for child slavery and exploitation. In 2002, while traveling in Cambodia, the organization’s founder, Guy Jacobson, was approached by a barrage of young girls as young as five offering themselves for sex. Horrified by this encounter and by the lack of action taken to address the problem, Jacobson initiated the most comprehensive global mass media campaign ever launched on the issue of human trafficking. RedLight Children’s work has been featured in over 5,000 major media sources throughout the world, including ABC, Fox, CNN, BBC, Showtime, the NY Times, the Washington Post as well as multiple channels on Dutch TV, Israeli TV, German TV, Ecuadorian TV, Brazilian TV and numerous more. It is estimated that over a billion people have been exposed to the issue of child sexual exploitation as a direct result of RedLight Children’s efforts.” See [http://redlightchildren.org/about-us/](http://redlightchildren.org/about-us/).
13 Eate and Szövrényi, 615-16.
17 Baker, 224.
18 Russell, 564-66.
Filmography


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