
Leigh Goldstein

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complex ways—e.g. economically, politically, internationally—than a trajectory from birth to growth to maturity belies. Furthermore, these metaphors often result in teleological assumptions about what the cinema in its maturity is or should be. If “the real sound cinema is born” only with the advent of optical sound in the late 1920s, as Learning to Talk contends, what then was the sound cinema that preceded it? Or similarly, if applied coloring techniques, despite being “ingenious and poetic,” were only “stopgaps” until one could reproduce “life’s natural colors” on film, why did so many of these methods continue into the 1930s in feature film production and even longer in experimental and avant-garde traditions? And what is one now to make of the recent and widespread mutations (to lapse into biology) of the color film image through digital effects?

I raise these objections because such issues are inconsistent with the broader emphasis and overall achievement of Discovering Cinema, which is to show the parallel developments and amazing diversity of sound and color technologies present during the first decades of cinema history. At this, it succeeds remarkably well, for it reminds us once again that the cinema did not have to be what it became, and does not have to stay what it is.

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2. Ibid.
Tributes to abundant flesh are not easy to come by, these days at least. While images of toned and athletic bodies are ubiquitous within contemporary media production, the plump form is one that must be sought out. And even in the rare instances where a rounded figure is on display, it is likely to be kept under literal wraps, harnessed and constricted by shape-molding garments into an hourglass. Ample curves trussed in fabric might be offered up for visual consumption, but unadorned, bulging thighs? Out of the question.

When you see the exuberant, flapping breasts of the naked woman who whips through the countryside in An Exciting Hunt (Eine Aufregende Jagd), a 1906–07 short film produced by Saturn, it is hard not to wonder why that particular visual spectacle has fallen out of favor.

An Exciting Hunt is one of twelve shorts available through a Pal VHS cassette that the Filmarchiv Austria produced and released in 1999. Entitled Projections of Desire, Saturn: The Erotic Beginnings of Austrian Cinematography, the cassette is intended as an introduction to Saturn, a film production and distribution company established in Vienna in 1906 and generally regarded as the start of Austrian-based film production. The films vary in length but are all under ten minutes. The source material was 35mm films from Filmarchiv Austria’s collection, as well as the Bundesarchiv/Filmarchiv in Berlin, the Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde in Wiesbaden, and the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin.

Founded by Johann Schwarzer, Saturn made a place for itself within the early twentieth-century European film market by producing only erotic films. While the company’s films were often modeled on Pathé shorts made just a few years earlier, Saturn upped the ante by offering more female nudity in its output. An emblematic example would be the film Swimming Forbidden (Baden Verboten, 1906–07). Women bathing together was a narrative situation exploited by several film companies of this era, each looking for an opportunity to show off semi-naked female bodies cavorting in water.

To be sure, the Saturn version of this chestnut devotes ample screen time to ladies engaged in water-frolicking. But the extra titillation comes when a man (clothed of course) arrives on the scene and orders them out of the water. The three naked women do as told and then make a big production of walking back and forth at the edge of the swimming hole to collect their clothes and find the proper direction to exit. Occasionally one of the women looks towards the camera, as if in search of some indication that their bodies have been on display long enough. The narrative twist also affords an irascible, if not exactly side-splitting, laugh at the expense of censorship. Personified by the huffy man who balks at the naked bathing, the attempt at curtailing what can be done or seen in public only results in a less obstructed view of the naked female body.

The informality and humor that Swimming Forbidden evinces is characteristic of Saturn’s output. Each of the twelve films in Projections of Desire can be read as a gleeful celebration of naked female flesh in motion. A stomach might jiggle, or a breast bounce up and down, and the delight that the sights should inspire is often indicated by the reaction of a diegetic spectator. For instance, in Living Marble (Lebender Marmor, 1908–10), a group of men pay a waitress to pretend to be a statue. She arrives at an apartment and then leaves the room, only to reappear completely naked and wearing a white wig. Once she is in place on a pedestal and standing still, a gentleman who is meant to be the object of their prank walks in. Thinking he is alone with an inanimate object, he walks over to the statue and appreciatively pats one breast, then the other, and also cops a feel of her haunch for good measure. Abruptly the woman breaks her statue pose and jumps off the pedestal, shocking him with her ability to
A clear, if covert case is being made in *Living Marble* for the virtues of the moving over the arrested female form. Other Saturn films, such as *At the Photographer’s Studio* (Beim Fotografen, 1908–10) and *The Vain Parlor Maid* (Das eitle Stubenmädchen, 1908–10), incorporate similar juxtapositions between erotic cinema and other forms of visual spectacle that foreground female nudity. Akin to an unabashed boast of the “look what I can do!” variety, the films call attention to their ability to show off naked bodies to their best advantage. *The Vain Parlor Maid* is a return to the living sculpture joke, presenting a parlor maid so tickled by the sight of a nude statue that she decides to strip off her clothes and recreate the pose. The last laugh is had by her employer who walks in to his sitting room to find her naked and awkwardly sprawled on the floor. She leaps up in embarrassment and tries to flee, only to return for her clothes. The employer holds them ransom for a kiss, and then goes chasing after her once she’s grabbed her things and made a beeline for the door.

While the film represents the possibility of enjoying sculpture for its erotic possibilities, and in the process argues for the commonalities between the more respected plastic arts and only recently established moving pictures, there is a distinct hierarchy put into place as far as the different forms of representation are concerned. Both the female statue and the maid are embodied by actresses, and it is clear that the invigorated and mortified maid inspires more desire in the employer than the impassive marble sculpture that served as her model.

*At the Photographer’s Studio* is a more explicitly self-reflexive text in which the process of producing erotic photographs is depicted along with the actual photographs themselves. The film opens with an older photographer and his young male assistant attempting to coerce a somewhat obstinate model into adopting the right evocative poses before the camera. While they talk her into removing a few layers of clothing and a hat, the model becomes exasperated with their requests and storms out before much skin is uncovered. The older photographer then makes a phone call, quickly procuring a new, slightly younger model. More pliant than her predecessor, this woman strips with ease and dutifully adopts the poses and gestures that are requested of her. In the following scene, the photographer and his assistant welcome a group of potential male clients to the studio. After showing men gathered around a desk looking at images, the film follows a principle of alternation, cutting between shots of naked women standing still and shots of the men. Presumably these images of women doing their best to hold static poses are the photographs that the men are looking at. The final scene is a shot of a woman entering the studio, aggressively gesturing at the men, in what is perhaps a rebuke for their having sought out the salacious material.

The comedy in *At the Photographer’s Studio* arises from the tension between the banal and querulous attitude of the photographing scenes and the more glamorized, tranquil images representing the photographs taken. Once again, the film can be read as extolling the particular pleasures of moving pictures as erotic spectacle. By depicting erotic postcards as the realm of static thighs and artful poses, the film presents itself as a more accessible, less stylized form of fantasy.

Along with the twelve Saturn films, the Filmarchiv Austria cassette includes a short documentary on the history of the company. The documentary was produced by the archive and argues for the place the company should be afforded in Austrian film history (the film is in German and without subtitles). Writing about the history of the company, Michael Achenbach and Paolo Caneppele, also producers/directors of the documentary, have indicated that the reticence to acknowledge Saturn as the first Austrian company to mass-manufacture films stems from the erotic nature of its output. In their efforts to advocate for the company’s rightful place in national histories of Austrian cinema, both their article and the documentary distance Saturn from the genre of pornography, labeling the films “far away from any relations with pornography.” To be sure, there are no depictions of naked bodies engaged in...
sexual acts in the films available on this cassette. However, the prevalence of naked female bodies, not only on display, but running, jumping, jiggling, bending, and unabashedly cavorting, raises certain questions about the genre distinction. Whether or not these films are labeled porn, they certainly offer and argue for the pleasure of flesh in motion. The joy in these depictions of the body is akin to what Linda Williams has identified as the "specific and unprecedented cinematic pleasure of the illusion of bodily motion."2

An Exciting Hunt, the last of the twelve-film selection, is perhaps the best example of the appeal of the dynamic female body that these films deftly exploit. The film opens with a woman tossing off her clothes to go for a swim in a public swimming hole. Once she enters the water, a man and a woman collect her clothes and run away with them. The following scenes constitute a chase in which the naked woman dashes through the pastoral setting, turning over picnics, accosting strange men, in an effort to evade the police officer pursuing her. To follow the logic or motivation behind these actions seems like a lost cause, but the sight of the woman’s limbs flying and her breasts swinging from side to side is nevertheless a captivating one. Nothing more or less than an excuse for a chase, the film invites wonderment at what the body is capable of.

While the object of the exciting hunt ultimately eludes her pursuer, the fate of Saturn was less charmed with respect to its censors. Beginning in 1909, the Viennese government faced complaints from other countries about the erotic content of Saturn films. By 1911 the company was shut down. While extant films produced by the company are dispersed in different collections, the Filmarchiv Austria’s cassette has thankfully made accessible some indication of this body of work. As a result, scholars of Austrian national cinema have reassessed their histories. Perhaps it’s time a similar endeavor was made on the part of porn scholars.

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