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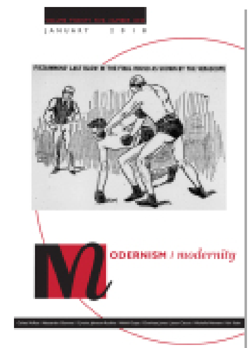

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Modernism/modernity, Volume 25, Number 1, January 2018, pp. 161-184 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2018.0007

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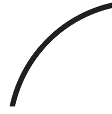

What the Veriscope Saw: Stephen Crane, the Prizefight Film, and Unreliable Spectatorship

Yair Solan

MODERNISM / *modernity*
VOLUME TWENTY FIVE,
NUMBER ONE,
PP 161–184. © 2018
JOHNS HOPKINS
UNIVERSITY PRESS

In a personal reminiscence of Stephen Crane published on the brink of the author's critical rediscovery, Joseph Conrad describes his late colleague as anticipating, almost clairvoyantly, the thrust of cinematic narration, concluding that Crane "must have been unconsciously penetrated by a prophetic sense of the technique and of the very spirit of film-plays of which even the name was unknown then to the world."[1] Making this claim about Crane as well as himself, Conrad writes from the vantage point of a thriving moviegoing culture dominated by fictional "film-plays," his remark projecting forward to what the medium will become but eliding what it had already been. For while Crane's death in 1900 preceded cinema's institutionalization as a narrative form, the ties between his work and motion pictures need not be restricted to the level of the prescient or the predictive, as Crane's literary career was contemporaneous with film's rise as a mass entertainment.

Yair Solan recently received his PhD in English from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and currently teaches at Queens College. This article is part of a larger project that examines US writers' critical engagement with the screen from pre-cinematic media to early motion pictures.

Provocative as it is, in its emphasis on future developments over technological origins, Conrad's assertion mirrors the once marginal position of early cinema within the scholarship on modernism and film, which has traditionally viewed the 1890s as a liminal moment across media: literature that is not yet modernist in relation to film that is not yet film. However, Crane's work allows us to recognize how the motion picture engendered the newly filmic vocabularies of literary texts before montage, before Hollywood, before film narrative—indeed, before cinema's belated acceptance as the seventh art.[2] Just as soon as the reproducible image began to move, and well ahead of its consolidation

as a system of narration, the motion picture would present intriguing possibilities for the literary imagination. David Trotter has shown how modernism's turn to cinema was in fact a response to the "original neutrality of film as a medium," reflective of the film camera's status as an impartial recording instrument with an immediate and automatic view of the world (*Cinema and Modernism*, 5).[3] Yet at the dawn of cinema, it was realized that the mechanical vision of the motion picture could also be thwarted by the hardly unambiguous act of film spectatorship. Cinema's veracity was called into question through the discourse on what might be termed *unreliable spectatorship*, or the confounding interaction between the inhuman lens of the film camera and the subjective perception of the human eye. As this article will argue, Stephen Crane's writing suggests that the literary practice of the period had been deeply influenced by the same skepticism toward the moving image as an authoritative mode of visual representation that marked early accounts of cinematic media.

Whereas scholars tend to see a debt to photography and impressionist painting in Crane's visual aesthetic, my reading is more closely aligned with an overlooked thread of contemporary criticism of his work that defined his style by citing new optical media, with Crane's imagery said to "have something of the spasmodic jerkiness of the kinetoscope," Thomas Edison's early moving picture device.[4] Crane himself reportedly set forth his philosophy of literary form by way of an analogy to media spectacle, calling his ideal novel a series of "clear, strong, sharply-outlined pictures, which pass before the reader like a panorama, leaving each its definite impression."[5] But if many of his recurring preoccupations—subjectivity and impressionism, realism and illusion, visuality and perspective—lend themselves to metaphorical correlations with cinema, direct reference to film in Crane's fiction is limited to a single instance: the violent brawl in the middle of his celebrated story "The Blue Hotel" (1898), where the character named Mr. Blanc, or "the Easterner," observes the fierce adversaries of this battle "like a film."[6] As one of the first nods to cinematic technology in Anglo-American literature, Crane's allusion and its conflation of screen media, physical combat, and subjective observation tells us much about (to use Conrad's phrasing) the "very spirit" of cinema as seen at the point of its emergence.

This article introduces a media archaeology approach to Crane's work by taking this moment in "The Blue Hotel" as an entry into turn-of-the-century fiction's newfound engagement with the moving image and cinematic aesthetics, relating Crane's reference to "film" during this altercation not merely to film technique in the abstract sense, as Conrad posits, but to the genre of the prizefight film which dominated the formative years of the motion picture. Specifically, I read Crane's story within the context of the production and reception of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* (1897), one of the earliest feature-length films and by far the most significant title from the inaugural cycle of fight pictures, released just months before Crane began writing "The Blue Hotel." At a time when films often lasted for a few short minutes and boxing subjects centered on staged or rigged bouts performed for the camera, the Veriscope Company's *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* stood out as an elaborate production that documented in full a controversial real-life heavyweight match. An oversized film actuality screened

at legitimate theaters in addition to fairgrounds and amusement parks, the enormously successful *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* generated as much publicity as the championship contest it reproduced.[7] Crane's association of cinema with fistic violence thus comes at a juncture in which this popular prizefight film brought both pugilism and the motion picture to larger and more diverse audiences.

Beyond the text's historical proximity to a groundbreaking film that arguably constituted the first standalone motion picture program, Crane's story poses questions about spectatorship, perception, and media representation that similarly arose out of this early landmark in commercial filmmaking. In what follows, I am therefore less concerned with definitively establishing Crane's presence among this film's theatrical audiences than with tracing how his work tapped into a new discourse on the cinematograph that was profoundly shaped by the reception of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*. As evident in the wide coverage of its exhibition and the quarrels over the authority of its screen image, this prizefight film came to play a foundational role in the debates on the indexical charge of moving pictures. The literary recapitulation of this discourse in "The Blue Hotel," I contend, signifies the story's intermedial dimensions and, subterraneously, its intertextual resonances. Situated at the crossroads of naturalism and an incipient modernism, Crane's text enacts the tension between photographic empiricism and subjective viewing that had pervaded discussions of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*. By examining Crane's fiction as well as his journalistic ventures dating from the beginnings of cinema, this article shows how this sensitivity to the contingencies of vision—and, above all, to the precarious instability of spectatorship—was inseparable from a media ecology that fundamentally altered the parameters of visual experience.

Intermediality and Impressionism

"The Blue Hotel" famously depicts the arrival of a man known as "the Swede" in what he sees as the rough western outpost of Fort Romper, Nebraska, where, in due course, he will meet his untimely end. Appropriate to a story structured around misconceptions and misreadings, the Swede's fight with Johnnie—whom he has accused of cheating at cards, and whose father, Patrick Scully, operates the hotel and referees this melee in the thick of a snowstorm—is written as seen through the eyes of the Easterner watching from the sidelines. Immediately before the scuffle, he sizes up the fighters:

> The contestants had not stripped off any clothing. Each was in his ordinary attire. Their fists were up, and they eyed each other in a calm that had the elements of leonine cruelty in it.
>
> During this pause, the Easterner's mind, like a film, took lasting impressions of three men—the iron-nerved master of the ceremony; the Swede, pale, motionless, terrible; and Johnnie, serene yet ferocious, brutish yet heroic. ("Blue Hotel," 816)

Critics have long remarked upon the Easterner's function as an engrossed bystander in this scene, his passivity during this vicious brawl understood as "a failure of mascu-

linity" that reflects his complicity in the incidents leading up to the Swede's eventual death.[8] When mentioned, this allusion to media technology is generally related to the character's role as the story's observer figure, where such "filmic associations" are read as demonstrating the Easterner's "impartial cinematic detachment" and "culpable neutrality."[9] Accordingly, James Nagel views this passage as an example par excellence of Crane's impressionist style, interpreting the scene as "the objective presentation of sensory data as it is received, in cinematic terms, by a 'camera eye.'"[10] Yet this camera eye is a perceptual mode that is both subjectively embodied and, metaphorically, technologically mediated, symbolizing the Easterner's posture of inaction and his collusion in the events he witnesses.

Just as the story briefly pauses before the fight erupts, it is worthwhile to pause over this reference to "film" here. Crane's use of the term has been anachronistically read through later filmmaking techniques like the freeze frame, but the word occupied a more fluid position at the time.[11] Rather than denoting one particular medium, "film" emphasized the materiality and the plurality of photographic technology, whether in the film strip of a photographic camera or that of projected moving images. Prior to notions of cinema's medium specificity, such terms invariably overlapped, and it was not uncommon for the earliest films to be labeled animated or continuous photography.[12] Invoking the photographic camera along with the cinematograph, Crane's reference suggests the wider intermedial context of such visual modes at the turn of the century, which extends to the scene's subsequent play with stillness and movement. With Scully's shout of "Now!" this still, pictorial "prelude" abruptly jerks into motion, as Johnnie and the Swede "leaped forward and crashed together like bullocks" ("Blue Hotel," 817). The manner in which Crane's visual trope relies on this dialectic of stasis and movement recalls a presentational practice in some of the first screenings from 1895–96—chiefly those of Auguste and Louis Lumière—when films were introduced as static images and then thrillingly set into motion by the turn of a projector.[13] In much the same way, what is initially shown as a grave tableau in this scene is quickly roused into furious motion by the exclamation of the "iron-nerved master of the ceremony" while being perceived "like a film" by the Easterner, who is described as one of the eager "spectators" of the action ("Blue Hotel," 816, 817).

Though Crane's allusion to "film" implies that the Easterner is akin to an embodied camera, a startling thing seems to happen to his camera eye as the scene progresses. Whereas early filmic representations of physical battles were often touted in advertisements for their scientific precision, this report of the fight in "The Blue Hotel" is indistinct and impressionistic: "for a time the encounter in the darkness was such a perplexity of flying arms that it presented no more detail than would a swiftly-revolving wheel" (817). In contrast to the stark tableau of the men, the ensuing altercation is composed of brief glimpses into the chaotic battle, bearing fragmented images that sporadically surface above the fray before becoming submerged again. This maelstrom cannot be adequately processed; to the Easterner, the tussle is "a monotony of unchangeable fighting that was an abomination," its particulars remaining thoroughly obscure until its decisive end when Scully finally declares, "Johnnie is whipped" (817,

819). For Crane, the mechanics of the camera were not at all inconsistent with such subjectively inflected scenes. In his deft examination of Crane's work in relation to the recreational culture of the 1890s, Bill Brown has shown how Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage* acts at once as camera and spectator, the soldier's photographic mental impressions symptomatic of a proliferating image economy and representative of the text's "will-to-photography."[14] This camera points inward as well as outward, producing a record of the world that is refracted through an observer's gaze. But where Brown suggests that *The Red Badge of Courage* "rewrites the problematic of impressionism as a question about the impressions of the camera," in "The Blue Hotel" this impressionist strategy comes to be refigured around the then-novel impressions of the moving picture camera, the screen no less a part of Crane's "material unconscious" than the still photograph (*The Material Unconscious*, 127).[15]

In its presentation of action through the Easterner's limited perspective, this passage has been associated with a similar scene from a Crane story published the previous year, "A Man and Some Others," in which a "stranger" witnessing a gunfight between a cowboy and a group of Mexicans acts as the observer through whom the tumultuous shootout is seen: "The fight, and his part in it, had to the stranger only the quality of a picture half drawn. The rush of feet, the spatter of shots, the cries, the swollen faces seen like masks on the smoke, resembled a happening of the night."[16] Unlike the Easterner, this character is a participant in the battle; he kills a man during the frantic confrontation. Yet if we regard the brawl in "The Blue Hotel" as an evocative reworking of this earlier impressionistic moment of action, Crane's insertion of "film" as a mediating mode in the later story—and his substitution of the men's "fists" for the shots of gunfire—is even more striking given the filming and exhibition of the popular *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, which had occurred in the interim. Reading the Easterner's apparently deficient "camera eye" together with the debates surrounding this film will reveal how Crane both draws upon and contributes to the period's emerging cultural discourse on mass spectatorship, new media technology, and the disputed reliability of the motion picture camera.

The Veriscope at Carson City: The *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*

Shortly after Crane's "A Man and Some Others" was published in the February 1897 issue of *The Century* magazine, the Corbett-Fitzsimmons prizefight was staged to great fanfare by promoter Dan A. Stuart in Carson City, Nevada. Documenting this long-awaited heavyweight match between reigning champion James J. Corbett and challenger Robert Fitzsimmons that took place on March 17, 1897, the film of the bout was first screened publicly at New York City's Academy of Music on May 22 of that year and then opened in other cities and small towns throughout the country during the summer (fig. 1). By the fall, the film was being exhibited around the United States as well as in the United Kingdom and would play return engagements in theaters the next year. The *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, then, was in continuous circulation while

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CORBETT
---FITZSIMMONS
SPARRING CONTEST.
PRODUCED BY THE VERISCOPE COMPANY,
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TWO PERFORMANCES DAILY.
AFTERNOONS, 2:30. EVENINGS, 8:45.

▲
Fig. 1. Advertisement for the initial run of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* at New York City's Academy of Music, New York *Sun*, June 1897.

Crane was writing "The Blue Hotel," and during much of the 1897–98 season.[17] To understand the varied associations evoked by film technology at this time, it is necessary to take into account the production and the contentious reception of this prizefight film, especially considering the unprecedented attention it received in the press.

Though it is not known if Stephen Crane had seen the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*—or whether Crane viewed any film during his short life—its highly promoted release made it difficult to ignore, while the very public debates on this fight picture's realism correspond to Crane's concern with modes of representation and his recreational interest in popular athletics.[18] Crane seems to have followed James Corbett's career in particular. One of Crane's local news reports from the New Jersey coast celebrates Corbett's arrival in Asbury Park in the summer of 1892, praising this "prominent figure" for his "gentlemanly bearing and quiet manners," a portrait that echoes Corbett's enduring sobriquet, "Gentleman Jim."[19] Corbett would become the world heavyweight champion later that same year, holding the title until his much heralded fight against

Robert Fitzsimmons in Carson City. Despite being the odds-on favorite, Corbett lost the bout in the fourteenth round after Fitzsimmons delivered a bruising solar plexus punch that cost Corbett the championship, a knock-out that came to be intensely scrutinized owing to the latest advances in motion picture technology.

The *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* was a bold cinematic experiment as much as it was a record of a major pugilistic grudge-match (fig. 2–3). Recorded by film technician Enoch Rector using three stationary "Veriscope" 63-millimeter motion picture cameras set up in parallel so as to capture the bout in its entirety, the film of the Carson City battle has been lauded as an early milestone of cinema.[20] This is not just due to its immense popularity, though Charles Musser has credited it with revitalizing the film market following cinema's commercial slump toward the end of 1896–97 (*The Emergence of Cinema*, 225). Technically innovative, the film was produced in a widescreen format specifically devised to fit the boxing ring within the bounds of the frame. In those early histories that chronicled silent cinema through an overtly developmental teleology, the success of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* marked a pivotal cultural moment; as Terry Ramsaye proclaims in his 1926 *A Million and One Nights*, cinema upon the release of this film "became definitely low-brow, an entertainment of the great unwashed commonality."[21] Ramsaye's comment on the film's "low-brow" status notwithstanding, during the first wave of its exhibition, the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* was frequently shown in high-priced venues such as the Academy of Music and the Toronto Opera House, where film programs were a comparative novelty.[22] From the perspective of exhibition practice, the film's feature-length running time—eleven reels, or approximately one hundred minutes—led most exhibitors to present it as the sole attraction of a program, unusual in this period when motion picture exhibitions were often comprised of a series of short film actualities projected between live stage performances.

Equally important in the annals of early cinema history, the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* stimulated a remarkable level of debate during its production and circulation. In his analysis of the silent era's prizefight genre, Dan Streible maintains that the film was "one of the earliest individual productions to generate and sustain public commentary on the cinema," its exhibition provoking discussion of issues such as "the quality of cinematic reproduction, the results of the contest, the social effects of the fight picture, and the nature of its audience."[23] The illegal status of prizefighting throughout the United States made the film particularly divisive and had delayed the bout itself, the fight's promoter at one point entertaining the possibility of holding the match just across the Mexican border. Though Nevada would legalize the sport in January 1897 in an effort to boost the state's flagging economy, objections to prizefighting were exacerbated when the film was being prepared for distribution, in the process sparking the first serious debate on film censorship.[24] Another aspect of the film's reception history that has been examined by recent film historians concerns the widely reported presence of women in early screenings. As Miriam Hansen has shown, the film allowed access to a previously unavailable arena of spectatorship that "afforded women the forbidden sight of male bodies in seminudity, engaged in intimate and intense physical action."[25] The *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* offers an exemplary case of early cinema's potential

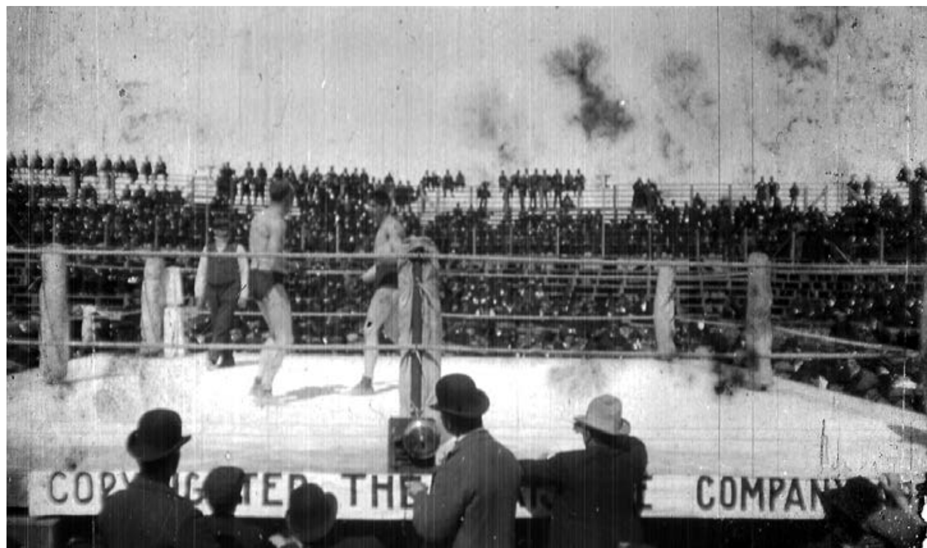

Fig. 2. Frame enlargement from the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* showing Robert Fitzsimmons (left) and James Corbett (right) in action. Note the inscription on the prizefight ring—"Copyrighted the Veriscope Company"—an effort to deter unauthorized reenactments. Courtesy of George Eastman Museum.

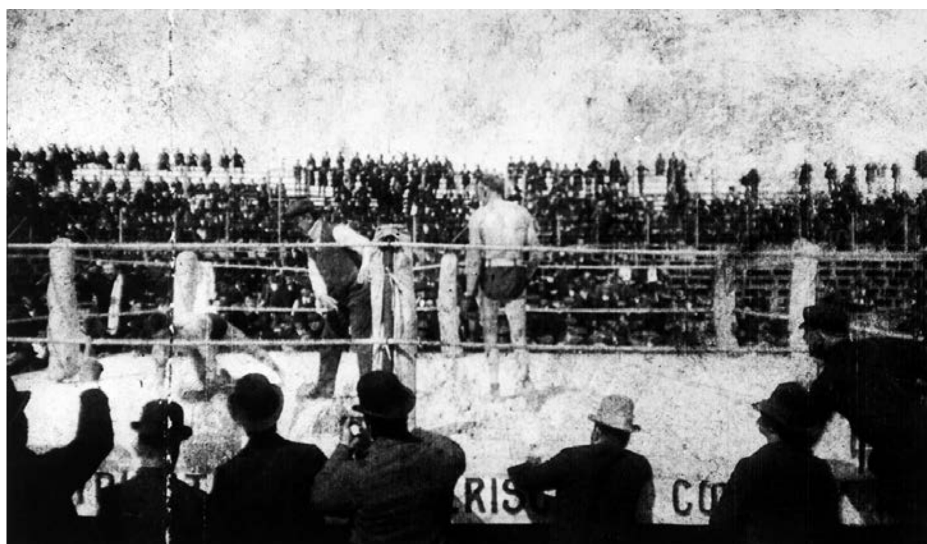

Fig. 3. The aftermath of the knock-out in the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*. Courtesy of George Eastman Museum.

for transgressive spectatorship, a facet of the fight film genre that was not lost on contemporary authors.[26] The peculiar comment in Crane's story just before the Swede's battle with Johnnie commences, "the contestants had not stripped off any clothing" (an odd statement considering the "tumbling and wailing flakes" of the blizzard raging

all around them), might be viewed in light of the Carson City contest and other filmed boxing bouts, which were bodily as well as athletic spectacles ("Blue Hotel," 816).

If the film of this championship match was for many, according to Streible, their "first memorable contact with cinematic presentation," this was also true for writers of the time; notably, it was the first film that Henry James saw (*Fight Pictures*, 53).[27] As the Veriscope Company reached out to large-circulation newspapers in advance of its release, the film received substantial publicity in the national press, enabling even those who did not attend screenings of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* to encounter and engage with the cultural discourse on film exhibition and its social implications.[28] A film recognized as "one of the most popular and profitable cinema texts of any genre produced up to that point" that in turn informed mainstream conceptions of film technology, this cinematic reproduction of pugilistic battle became in 1897–98 synonymous with the new medium of the motion picture.[29] Stephen Crane certainly would have been aware of the debates over the film's release. In fact, when it debuted in May 1897, he was in the employ of William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*, which was providing some of the most extensive reports on the film's exhibition.

The Cinematograph on the Battlefield

In the spring of 1897, while the *New York Journal* was reporting on the impending release of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, Stephen Crane was among the cadre of journalists that the newspaper sent to Greece to cover the short-lived Greco-Turkish War. This practice of hiring a team of correspondents to cover a big news event, which had also been the *Journal*'s approach to covering the bout in Carson City, made use of Crane's considerable celebrity during the war.[30] In the paper's sensationalist dispatches from the battlefields of the Greco-Turkish conflict, Crane's reporting—and Crane himself—would often take center stage.

Crane's tenure as a reporter for Hearst's *Journal* came at a time in which journalism and the cinema were beginning to exhibit their close ties as mass media, bringing greater attention to issues of media representation such as those that would surround the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*. While Bill Brown proposes that the popularity of both war films and athletic subjects like the Carson City fight picture was indicative of the "inextricability of American war and American sport as a more general media effect" at the turn of the century—concretized by the *Journal*'s immersion in war reporting and sports coverage—this media environment and its slippages between news and entertainment just as strongly reflected the enmeshed discourses of textuality and visuality.[31] If film actualities (of prizefights or war scenes, real or reenacted) took on a journalistic as well as a spectacular function, news organs themselves assumed the new language of the motion picture. In promoting its dispatches from Greece, the *Journal* relied on cinematic metaphors to emphasize the picturesque quality of its war reports. As an editorial ballyhooed, its journalists—including the "brilliant writer of descriptions of battle," Stephen Crane—promised to "make the *Journal*'s columns a veritable kinetoscope picture of the scene of war."[32] Crane's war correspondence was

thus explicitly framed in spectatorial terms, reversing the paradigm of early cinema as a "visual newspaper" back onto print media.[33]

This intermingling of war and mass entertainment is vividly expressed in a *Harper's Monthly* article by journalist Richard Harding Davis that relates Crane's later experience as a reporter in the Spanish-American War through the metaphorics of the motion picture. Despite his alleged rivalry with Crane, Davis deems the author "the coolest man, whether army officer or civilian, that I saw under fire at any time during the war," detecting in him "the assurance of a fatalist."[34] Davis's portrait culminates with an evocative image of Crane, calm and aloof, looking at San Juan Hill in the midst of battle: "with his hands in his pockets and smoking his pipe, he was as unconcerned as though he were gazing at a cinematograph" ("Our War Correspondents," 942).[35] This article, Brown reminds us, positions Crane "on the battlefield that saw the first appearance of the moving picture camera," putting forward a heroic vision of warfare (and of the romantically reckless war correspondent) which would be similarly perpetuated by the cinema (*The Material Unconscious*, 135). One of Crane's own news reports, and among his last, concludes with a sardonic reference to the use of the film camera during wartime to produce such images of courage and bravado. Discussing a series of defeats suffered by British forces in the Boer War, Crane quips that it would be less costly to show the Boers "the steady valor of the British troops by means of a cinematograph" than through actual combat.[36] While satirically undercutting the superior stance of the British, Crane's remark points to the propagandistic properties of the camera, presenting the motion picture as a potential vehicle for political intimidation.

In Davis's sketch of Crane, however, the symbolic cinematograph also comes to signify an unsettlingly dialectical mode of perception in the relation between an observer and his subject—a sense of being at once inside and outside the scene of action, producing an unreality which renders the battle uncanny. Using this profile of Crane as a model, Jonna Eagle characterizes its dynamic as playing into the new form of "the strenuous spectator" that she defines as "negotiating the passivity and relative immobility of mass spectatorship by emphasizing the risk inherent to the spectatorial position."[37] This mode of spectatorship is here conveyed by a detached view of a genuine spectacle, by the blurring of the real and the unreal. Davis's arresting image of Crane positioned in the thick of combat but gazing at the fighting as if looking at a cinematograph gets at larger questions about vision and epistemology that new visual technologies such as the motion picture had prompted. How might an event witnessed on the film screen be differentiated from an event perceived via the naked eye? Even when presented metaphorically, such jarring analogies refer to popular conceptions of mediated experience and expose their vexed relationship with lived reality.

Crane's initial stint as a wartime correspondent can be viewed as an attempt to resolve this opposition between direct experience and the mass-mediated event. As discussions of his war journalism often note, Crane's work as a reporter for the Hearst syndicate during the Greco-Turkish War stemmed from his desire to see whether the fictional impressions of battle in *The Red Badge of Courage* would still seem true to life after experiencing combat himself.[38] This connection was not lost on Crane's colleagues

at the Greek front. In a May 1897 article for the *Journal*, John Bass, who headed the newspaper's brigade of correspondents, observed "the well-known novelist" during the fighting at Velestino to see how the author "would act in a real battle."[39] In a possibly fictionalized moment in the piece, while Bass "sought shelter in a trench and cautiously watched," Crane "seated himself on an ammunition box amid a shower of shells and casually lighted a cigarette" ("Novelist Crane," 35). This article presents Crane as being simultaneously there and not there, much as Davis equates Crane's gaze out at the battlefield to a spectator gawking at a motion picture screen. Davis's portrait of Crane, in particular, suggests the way in which war at the turn of the century, as Katherine Biers argues, was "becoming a virtual experience," the press's coverage taking on a "theatrical aspect" while accentuating "what it felt like to witness war."[40] Crane himself was implicated in the media circulation of war spectacle as both producer and consumer, from his role in covering international conflicts to writing his successful war novel not out of personal experience, but through inspiration from popular accounts. Yet Davis's report disturbingly overlaps the vicarious experience of war (achieved through mass cultural channels) onto the very real experience of war on the battlefield. In associating Crane's view of combat with the cinema—and therefore with the mass cultural networks that reproduce and disseminate the spectacle of war—Davis strikingly elucidates the reciprocal nature of mediated experience. Whereas mass media brought images of war home, the cinematograph's metaphorical appearance on the battlefield signals the infiltration of mass cultural modes of representation into the experience itself. Centrally situating Crane within this framework, Davis's article dramatically illustrates prevailing anxieties about the inseparability of the observed event from its mass-mediated representation at a point when emergent media technologies were irrevocably complicating notions of perceived experience. This concern with mass media and its contested documentation of reality brings us back to the epistemological tensions at the heart of Crane's "The Blue Hotel" and the controversies surrounding the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*.

The Phantom Foul and Unreliable Spectatorship

In the same edition that featured Bass's article on Crane's actions on the Greek front, the *Journal* reported on the debut of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, which took place the previous night at New York's Academy of Music for an audience of over 2,000 spectators.[41] In covering the film's exhibition, the *Journal* concentrated on the camera's role in evaluating a technical dispute arising from the championship match. After Corbett's loss to the Cornish Fitzsimmons, some of Corbett's supporters maintained that Fitzsimmons had been down and out in the sixth round—saved, they claimed, by the referee's long count—and later fouled Corbett by hitting him in the jaw after the knock-out punch at the conclusion of the fight. While it had not been foreseen that it could be used for this purpose, the film was said to hold the proof, fueling public demand for the motion pictures taken at Carson City. As Corbett declared at the time of the film's debut, "Let the people judge for themselves. Let them look at the pictures and see if I am not entitled to another fight."[42] This pervasive extra-filmic

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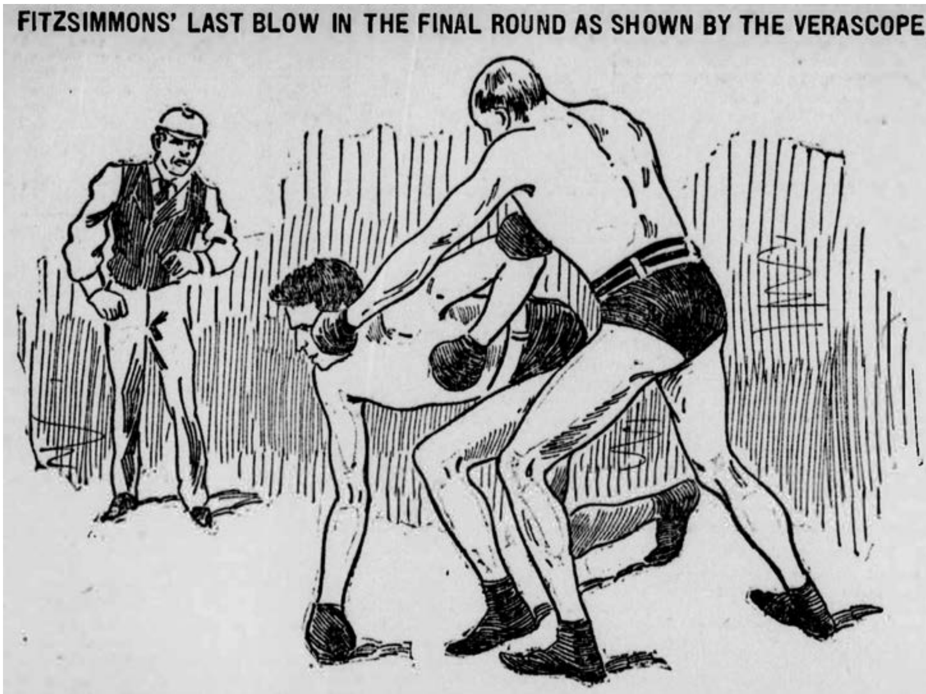
PRICES—25c, 35c, 75c.

Seats on sale Friday, July 9 at 10 a. m.

Fig. 4. Advertisement that refers to the disputed foul in the Veriscope film, *Kalamazoo Gazette*, July 1897.

commentary suggests that the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* presages certain elements of the film-as-evidence genre, where the camera, in Tom Gunning's words, serves as "the nonhuman agent of truth."[43] While Luke McKernan has shown how athletic subjects straddled "the changeover from film as a medium of scientific study to a medium of entertainment" and that cinematic records of sporting events represented the shift from "studies of athleticism to athletic display," audiences' scrupulous inspection of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* for evidence of the foul blow reflects a continued interest in the use of the camera to expose what could not be readily observed by the naked eye.[44] The comments of the press, the bout's organizers, and the pugilists on how the film taken at Carson City could function as an impartial recorder of reality not only comprised a promotional strategy for the picture, but also effectively opened up a significant public conversation on the workings of cinematic technology (fig. 4). These debates would intensify once the film began to be circulated and conflicting assessments of its footage surfaced, challenging assumptions of cinematic realism and triggering a growing skepticism toward the perspective of the motion picture camera.

If the very name of the apparatus that recorded the bout—Veriscope, or "truth viewer"—stressed the mechanism's impartial authority, newspaper coverage of the film often indicated that the camera did not quite live up to its lofty moniker. Reports differed on what the Veriscope pictures actually disclosed. The *Journal*'s full-page spread on the film's debut presents a microcosm of these accounts, offering the assorted viewpoints of the fighters and of several personalities from the boxing world. While one piece reprinted an article from days earlier promoting the film by announcing that the "camera reveals a foul blow," the newspaper's review of the screening at the Academy of Music observes that the footage remains inconclusive, the *Journal*'s coverage thus characteristic of the press's variable views.[45] The press's treatment of the film repeat-



▲
Fig. 5. The *New York Journal*'s illustration of the alleged foul in the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* would be copied and reprinted by newspapers around the country. This image is from the Los Angeles *Herald*, May 1897.

edly foregrounded issues of visual representation, paying exceptionally close attention to the various media reproductions of a singular event. Just prior to the picture's exhibition, the *Journal* and the *New York World* published line-drawing illustrations which they contended were taken from the Veriscope footage. These renderings of Fitzsimmons's final-round foul punch were splashily featured in both papers only to be summarily derided by the new champion as "doctored" and "manufactured" by the news media (fig. 5).[46]

Revisiting the melee in "The Blue Hotel" in light of the press coverage of the Carson City match, Crane's passing reference to "film" becomes a more loaded allusion, one which intervenes in these ongoing debates on the veracity of the film camera. Just as the Swede's fistfight in Crane's story transitions from the sharp, ominous "lasting impressions" of its "prelude" to a hazy "perplexity of flying arms" at the moment of battle, accounts of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* emphasized the disparity between the clear presentation of the contest's prologue and the more intangible, shadowy images of the fight in action. "For five minutes the principals, clad in long bathrobes, can be seen walking up and down on opposite sides of the ring," the New York *Sun* reported upon the film's debut, noting how Fitzsimmons's "stride is deliberate" while Corbett "appears to be anxious for the fight to begin."[47] In contrast, once the knock-out punch was delivered, the audience erupted in confusion: "'Where's the foul?' shouted the crowd. 'Fake!' howled many persons" ("Cannot See a Foul Blow," 4).[48]

The reception of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* typifies the "disorienting and destabilizing effect" that Michael North asserts early films had on audiences, an effect heightened by this fight film's presumed role as the arbiter of the real.[49] "The picture appeared life-size and with every resemblance to life in perfection except that there was no noise," the *World* stated, maintaining that "the most remarkable feature in the exhibition was the impossibility of distinguishing the foul blow," since the Veriscope pictures "appeared and disappeared so rapidly that the eye could not catch them."[50] While the images "imitate the movements of the fighters with fidelity to life," they nonetheless "went whizzing across the field of vision just as fast as the events happened in the ring at Carson" ("Faster than the Eye," 4).[51] Promising an exhaustive vision, the camera's view became hopelessly blurred for spectators with the rapid motion of the fight, much as the Easterner's metaphorical "film" provided a clear-cut view of the combatants only when the Swede was "motionless" prior to the action.

The expectations set for the film's reproduction of the bout and the reactions to its screenings may be better understood through Jonathan Crary's influential work on the subjective models of vision that began to take hold earlier in the nineteenth century. According to Crary's genealogy, in this new scopic regime, visual perception came to be recognized not as a fixed process but as fallible and embodied. Crary locates a "widespread preoccupation with the defects of human vision" throughout the period, ushering in the invention of visual technologies that relied on these very defects for their optical attractions while they also attempted to impose "a normative vision on the observer" by standardizing the perceptual field.[52] Crary's formulation maps out the media landscape into which cinema would emerge, the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* signifying how these embodied and technological modes of vision were both reflected and complicated by the advent of the motion picture. The response to Veriscope's film—and, likewise, the metaphorical representation of camera vision in Crane's story—demonstrates that this visual discourse continued to be reframed as new technologies entered the existing media ecology.

Closely wedded to its commercial imperatives, the film's resonance with this discourse of vision was overtly publicized, one early newspaper account pronouncing that the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* "illustrates a triumph of science over that poor, imperfect instrument, the human eye, and proves that the veriscope camera is far superior."[53] Yet as the multifarious impressions of the film's viewers indicate, the camera could not tame the corporeal eye, the film not only reproducing the prizefight but also its problematic reception. Indeed, Tom Gunning has shown that while the photographic image's indexical logic intimates a connection to the real, the medium is "so rich in indexical and iconic information" that it still presents pitfalls for the observer tasked with interpreting it ("Tracing the Individual Body," 24). This implies a dichotomy between photographic media's claims to truth and the observer's subjective act of looking that is mirrored in the spectatorial gaze of cinema. The film camera's images are thus always already mediated; as Vivian Sobchack affirms, the "original materiality" of motion pictures "mechanically projected and made visible for the very first time not just the objective world but the very structure and process of subjective, embodied vision."[54] If

photography and cinema seem to displace vision outside of the body and into the realm of an uncorrupted visual space, this is merely a denial of vision's subjective properties, an illusion that Crane cannily shatters by sketching out a fragmented film produced in his character's mind.[55] Crane's story and the commentaries on this fight picture, then, collapse the vision of the naked eye onto that of the camera, revealing the limitations of subjective perception by reference to an ostensibly objective visual technology. In these disputes on the cinematic representation of the heavyweight contest's closing moments, the prizefight's mass-mediated reproduction became, in one important way, visually indistinguishable from the event itself, as the phantom foul remained as hotly debated following the film's release as it was after the final knock-out at Carson City.

Where visual illegibility, in both Crane's story and in the reception of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, may be traced to the moving picture's reproduction of action, the problem of film spectatorship was compounded by the idiosyncrasies of the early cinematic image and the prizefight film's static camerawork. At the bout's finish, the knock-out was said to be "hampered somewhat by the prominence of the side post of the ring during the last rush of the fighters," implying that the Veriscope's perspective was as limited as a spectator's in this obstructed view, perhaps even more so considering the film cameras' rigid immobility.[56] Much attention was paid to the film's projection device and its deficiencies. The motion of the film frames was liable to disclose and distort the mechanical operation of the apparatus, highlighting the material presence of the image thrown on the screen. A typical review states that the picture "vibrates unpleasantly, so as to take the sharpness from the images"—bringing out the "black and light spots on the film rolls that pass before the eye like a rain"—and notes that the film "changes position slightly" during its projection.[57] The novelty of images in motion contributed to the disconcerting perspectival effects observed by the fight film's spectators. The figures on the screen were reported to be "larger and more life-like at Corbett's side," one account remarking that "it is curious to see the gradual increase in the size of Fitzsimmons as he comes into his opponent's ground," determining that "the most realistic group of all" is the front row at ringside rather than the film's starring pugilists.[58]

Any discussion of the Veriscope's realism was thus tempered by the uncanny sense of its reproduction of reality. As with the vague scene of action in Crane's story, the press frequently conveyed the haziness of the film's images through spectral allusions. Journalist Winifred Black's account of the picture —published in the *Journal* a week after its debut and appearing alongside Crane's lighthearted missive from the Greek battlefront, "The Dogs of War"—is among the most thorough reports on its New York exhibition. Defending the film against reformers' attempts to suppress it, Black relates how some of its earliest audiences viewed the figures projected on the screen as both realistic and slightly otherworldly. "There was something uncanny about it," Black writes, "the men on the screen were exactly like living men, except that you could not hear them step, when they walked," dubbing the pugilists brawling in silence "fighting shadows."[59] Black likens the experience to watching "a company of gray ghosts," concluding that "the whole thing was so shadowy—yet real, vividly, dreadfully real" ("Does

Modern Photography Incite," 17). In expressing cinema's eerie realism, Black's article recalls Maxim Gorky's famous reaction to a screening of Lumière films in 1896, which labels the cinematic image as "not life but its shadow . . . not motion but its soundless spectre."[60] Similarly, the action recorded by the Easterner's mind-film in "The Blue Hotel" takes on an ethereal, ghostly quality. As an "encounter in the darkness," the fistfight occupies the same ontological space as a film exhibition, evincing a play with light and shadow that also bears the stamp of the photographic camera; as Crane writes, "occasionally a face, as if illuminated by a flash of light, would shine out, ghastly and marked with pink spots." Unlike the silent fight picture, in the Easterner's "film" of the fight "the cushioned sound of blows" was heard, Crane suggesting this distinction: "the men might have been known as shadows, if it were not for the involuntary utterance of oaths that came from them in whispers" ("Blue Hotel," 817).

If, as one critic has noted, "despite the Easterner's mind working 'like a film,' there is little realistic detail" in the scene, this seems to be precisely the point.[61] Crane's depiction of the fight is consistent with contemporaneous impressions of the cinematic image, which describe it as both astonishingly real and mistily phantasmagoric. Comprised of images that appear to move in and out of focus, the story's blurry scuffle can be juxtaposed against the blunt realism of Johnnie's collapse after a crushing blow: "There was a sudden loud grunt, incomplete, cut-short, and Johnnie's body swung away from the Swede and fell with sickening heaviness to the grass" ("Blue Hotel," 817). Such discontinuous views of bodily movement had also been evident in accounts of the prizefight film's exhibition, where the nagging uncertainty of Fitzsimmons's foul was contrasted with "the picture of Corbett on his hands and knees, his face horrible with agony," which at its premiere "quickly silenced" spectators vigorously debating the knock-out ("Cannot See a Foul Blow," 4). Though the action itself was all too fleeting, its effect was obvious and immediate.

Photographic motion was explicitly associated with Crane's work in an enthusiastic review of *The Red Badge of Courage* by novelist Harold Frederic, who attested to the book's authenticity by declaring of its author, "at last, along comes a Muybridge, with his instantaneous camera, and shows that the real motion is entirely different."[62] Frederic's remark alludes to photographer Eadweard Muybridge's pioneering motion sequences of the 1870s and 1880s, which captured the galloping gait of horses when rapidly photographed in successive poses, overcoming visual indecipherability through the rationalization of temporality and movement. Technologically significant for the cinema, Muybridge's motion studies occupy a transitional point in the history of spectatorship. In their systematic isolation of sequential moments in time, Muybridge's photographs enable the close scrutiny of bodies in motion. But Muybridge's work, amenable to motion projection by use of his pre-cinematic zoopraxiscope from 1879 onward, also anticipates the action on the film screen identified by Walter Benjamin as a mode of distraction which "hit[s] the spectator like a bullet"; the viewer looks at the screen and "no sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed."[63] The push and pull of this dynamic at the turn of the century, however, evokes something more than a purely oppositional duality; as Crary has noted, "attention and distraction

cannot be thought outside of a continuum in which the two ceaselessly flow into one another."[64] This is what Crane's spectator, the Easterner, finds himself caught up in, a struggle between attentive and distracted spectatorship familiar to the audiences who gazed at the rousing views of the Veriscope.

Just as Muybridge's still photographs utilized the camera to uncover processes of locomotion and perception, the sole article in the *New York Times* that mentioned the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* upon its debut predicted a comparable role for film technology. It surmised that with improvements to the camera and its projection, the motion picture would come to provide "the solution of many scientific problems for which the unaided human eye is too slow to furnish the necessary data."[65] In fact, in accordance with Benjamin's theory of distraction, spectators found the prizefight film's passing images too ephemeral to unequivocally resolve the key issue; as the *Journal* reported of the foul, "it came and went so quickly that you could not really say it was there. Where you will swear by one veriscope picture the next four hundred and ninety-nine will convict you of falsification."[66] In contrast to the scientific materialism of Muybridge's serial photography, the Veriscope's images underscored the perceptual shortfalls of film spectatorship, problematizing easy analogies between cinema and objective vision. Not exactly "a Muybridge" in the way Frederic suggests, Crane is concerned with representing how bodily movement is perceived by an individual spectator, producing the kind of visual instability that was apparent in the commentaries on early film exhibition.

In its representation of physical combat, "The Blue Hotel" engages with questions of legality in sport and competition that had also overwhelmed public discussions of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*—that is, the adherence to (and transgression of) the proper rules of the game. Near the end of the fight in Crane's story, the brawl's soon-to-be victor would have delivered a "foul" of his own if it was not for one of the fight's spectators, the cowboy who helped "prevent the mad Swede from flinging himself upon his prone adversary" ("Blue Hotel," 817–18). The fight was itself motivated by the "three terrible words" uttered by the Swede during his card game with Johnnie—"You are cheatin'!"— which denote the violation of a social code, not just in the allegedly deceitful game but also through the Swede's very act of articulating this indictment (813).

Like the rumored foul of the Carson City bout, for much of the story the Swede's charge is left open-ended, as Crane maintains a narratological silence around this accusation. But it should be noted that while the disputes around the heavyweight match were never satisfyingly settled even as Fitzsimmons held onto the championship title, at the end of Crane's story the Easterner finally divulges that Johnnie was indeed cheating. This confession follows the Swede's death by a gambler's dagger in a saloon brawl which acts as the brutal inverse of his earlier altercation with Johnnie. At this surprising revelation, the text turns to the question of moral responsibility. As the Easterner mulls over the fight he witnessed and the Swede's fate, he admits guiltily, "I refused to stand up and be a man. I let the Swede fight it out alone," informing the cowboy that it was not only the gambler who was responsible for his death, but that "we, five of us, have collaborated in the murder of this Swede" ("Blue Hotel," 827). While the Easterner's

speech is couched in moralistic tones—"every sin is the result of a collaboration," he states—the story avoids simple answers (827). It instead acknowledges the mutability of these characters' impressions and the impossibility of synthesizing their divergent points of view, best encapsulated in the cowboy's disavowal of his comrade's "fog of mysterious theory" on which the tale ends: "Well, I didn't do anythin', did I?" (828).

Media Representation and Mass-Mediated Vision

Crane's story proposes, though, that the Swede is not fully exempt from responsibility. The text's escalating violence is initiated by the fearful Swede, an outsider from New York who envisions Fort Romper and Scully's hotel as the lawless West. The Swede's assumptions are directly linked to the influence of turn-of-the-century popular culture: "it seems to me this man has been reading dime-novels," the more well-traveled Easterner observes, "and he thinks he's right out in the middle of it—the shootin' and stabbin' and all" (809). Reading his unfamiliar surroundings through the lens of Western myth, the Swede overlays this mass cultural representation of the frontier onto the real West.

Correlating the Swede's actions to romantic dime-novel conventions, "The Blue Hotel" considers the growing authority of mass culture, dramatizing anxieties that were similarly provoked by the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*. The mass-mediated West became central to the discourse on the fight picture in the press. Critics blasted "barbarous Nevada" for staging the prizefight and allowing it to be filmed, proclaiming that "civilization is shamed" by the revival of boxing in the wake of the film's success.[67] One article, entitled "Contagion by the Kinetoscope"—and so among the earliest instances where the circulation of media footage is conveyed through viral metaphors—predicted before its debut that the film "would prove more demoralizing than the reality," as it "reenacts before ten thousand audiences the whole fight, motion by motion, blow by blow, with a graphic fidelity hardly second to life itself," arguing for the morally brutalizing effects of the prizefight's cinematic reproduction.[68]

Yet in Crane's narrative, the same forces of modernization behind motion pictures are put forward as evidence for the West's civilization. As with many Westerns, frontier fantasies are placed in tension with the rising tide of industrial modernity, so much so that in order to refute the Swede's preconceptions prior to the scuffle, Scully assures him that the town will soon see "a line of illictric street-cars" and "a new railroad," telling him, "why, in two years Romper'll be a met-tro-*pol*-is" ("Blue Hotel," 806–7). In this way, Crane's preoccupation with what biographer Paul Sorrentino calls "the Easternization of the American West" takes on added meaning in light of the visual-technological modernity of the cinema.[69] In its broadest terms, "The Blue Hotel" presents a collision between the mythic American West and the rise of American modernity, one which came to be reconciled in this new medium. If the seemingly ubiquitous *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* exemplified the motion picture for its viewing public, it may be said that this contested bout was fought on multiple fronts, as in addition to the prizefight on display, the film as a cultural phenomenon effectively affirmed the legitimacy of such violent spectacles—a dispute decided on this intersection of Western myth and

technological modernization. Making possible the distribution and exhibition of this heavyweight match, the industrial forces cited in Crane's tale as countering frontier illusions ironically reinscribed the mythology of the Wild West through popular cinematic attractions. Press accounts of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* noted that the film camera enabled a rough vision of the West to travel to theaters around the country. Referring to Veriscope's production as "the very latest metropolitan sensation," Winifred Black describes how this film tapped into the national imaginary of the West and brought it to the city, claiming that as a spectator "you can be just as brutal and just as eager for the 'knock-out' as if you were a wild Westerner" ("Does Modern Photography Incite," 17). Comparable to this report in which the film is said to elicit a bloodthirsty response from its spellbound audience, the cowboy's reaction to the fight "film" pitting Johnnie against the Swede is marked by "a holocaust of warlike desire" that moves him to shout, "Kill him, Johnnie! Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!" ("Blue Hotel," 817). Much as the Swede's dime-novel view of the West compels his behavior and appears to spread to those around him, the exploitation of frontier tropes in the publicity for the prizefight film shaped audiences' responses to the action on screen and their presumptions about the fight itself. In both the Corbett-Fitzsimmons bout and "The Blue Hotel," reality is ultimately inextricable from its mass cultural representation.

The Veriscope's pugilistic sensation, then, figures as something of a shadow text for Crane's story, as its cinematic double. Their various underlying associations can thus be seen as paradigmatic of how allusions to film during these novelty years hinge on its symbolic import, implicitly echoing the era's lively media debates. For if the arrival of cinema was greeted by the rhetoric of technological revolution extolling the medium as a comprehensive means of recording the world, the controversy around this prizefight film shows that, from nearly its invention, the motion picture was also interrogated for its distortions and deceptions, a crucial aspect of early film discourse that entered the new cinematic language of literary fiction. At this moment when impressionist and modernist innovations were themselves beginning to unsettle orthodox models of representation, for writers the moving image was noteworthy not simply in its simulacrum of reality, or its effortless reproduction of the real, but in how it revealed the inevitable subjectivity of spectatorship.

Notes

1. Joseph Conrad, introduction to Thomas Beer, *Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters* (New York: Knopf, 1923), 1–33, 30. Conrad is specifically recalling an aborted collaboration between the two from early 1898, a story titled "The Predecessor" that Crane envisioned as a stage play or, failing that, a novel. Even critical commentary on Thomas Beer's influential yet dubious account of Crane's life would be rendered in cinematic terms: "The facts are distorted, and gaps in the chronology are disguised by Beer's tricks of camera, by kaleidoscopic effects and cinematic shadow-work" (Robert Wooster Stallman, *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, ed. Robert Wooster Stallman [New York: Knopf, 1952], xi).

2. Recent scholarship on literary culture's interrelations with the early motion picture includes David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007); Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Paul Young, "Telling Descriptions: Frank Norris's Kinetoscopic Naturalism and the Future of the Novel, 1899,"

Modernism/modernity 14, no. 4 (2007): 645–68; Jonathan Freedman, "Henry James and Early Film," *Henry James Review* 33, no. 3 (2012): 255–64; Andrew Shail, *The Cinema and the Origins of Literary Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Katherine Fusco, *Silent Film and U.S. Naturalist Literature: Time, Narrative, and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Donna M. Campbell, *Bitter Tastes: Literary Naturalism and Early Cinema in American Women's Writing* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016); and Sarah Gleeson-White, "Hamlin Garland, Multimedia Modern," *Modernism/modernity Print Plus* 2, no. 1 (2017): doi.org/10.26597/mod.0029.

3. Trotter contends that later high modernist texts, such as those of T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, and Virginia Woolf, "look back" to the neutrality of early motion pictures.

4. From an unsigned review of *The Third Violet*, by Stephen Crane, *The Spectator*, May 29, 1897, 771. This is not an isolated example, as much other turn-of-the-century criticism employed imagistic optical metaphors in discussing Crane's writing. For instance, an appraisal of *The Red Badge of Courage* relates Crane's "scattered bits of description" to the projected "stereopticon views" of a dissolving magic lantern, while another notice likens the book to a "procession of flashing images shot through the senses into one brain and fluctuating there with its rhythm of exaltation and fatigue" (Nancy Huston Banks, "The Novels of Two Journalists," *The Bookman* 2, no. 3 [1895]: 217–20, 219; George Wyndham, "A Remarkable Book," *New Review* 14 [1896]: 30–40, 33). Although references to impressionist art predominate in Crane scholarship, criticism has begun to gesture to such stylistic affinities with the screen's "disjunctive images"; see Nancy Bentley, *Frantic Panoramas: American Literature and Mass Culture, 1870–1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 296.

5. From an undated letter by Crane to an unknown recipient, quoted in *The Sullivan County Sketches of Stephen Crane*, ed. Melvin Schoberlin (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1949), 20.

6. Stephen Crane, "The Blue Hotel," in *Prose and Poetry*, ed. J. C. Levenson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 799–828, 816.

7. Veriscope's fight film reportedly earned a net profit of over $120,000, or about $3,500,000 in today's currency; on this film's exhibition, see Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 197–200. Less than a third of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* is extant in incomplete prints at several film archives.

8. John Dudley, *A Man's Game: Masculinity and the Anti-Aesthetics of American Literary Naturalism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 80–81.

9. Martin Scofield, "Theatricality, Melodrama and Irony in Stephen Crane's Short Fiction," *Journal of the Short Story in English* 51 (2008): 41–49, 47.

10. James Nagel, *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 50.

11. For such a reading, see David Seed, *Cinematic Fictions: The Impact of the Cinema on the American Novel up to World War II* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 8.

12. For example, the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* was described as a boxing contest shown "by the now familiar process of instantaneous and continuous photography" and applauded as "an achievement of animated photography" ("A Phantom Fight," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 4, 1897, 30; "The Great Fight at the Aquarium," *The Era*, October 2, 1897, 18).

13. See Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 114–33, 118.

14. Bill Brown, *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane, and the Economies of Play* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 158. In the novel, Fleming's mind takes "a mechanical but firm impression" of warfare, illustrative of this intersection between photographic technology and mental processes (Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*, in *Prose and Poetry*, 79–212, 183).

15. While wartime motion pictures are noted in Brown's account of *The Red Badge of Courage*, they are situated in the "post-history of the novel's own production" (145).

16. Stephen Crane, "A Man and Some Others," in *Prose and Poetry*, 772–86, 785. On the relations between Crane's "A Man and Some Others" and "The Blue Hotel," see Nagel, *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism*, 51.

17. Crane finished writing "The Blue Hotel" by early February 1898 after working on it for about two months; see *The Blue Hotel*, ed. Joseph Katz (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1969), 2. The story was published in *Collier's Weekly* on November 26 and December 3, 1898 and collected in *The Monster and Other Stories* (1899).

18. It is possible that Crane attended some of the earliest US film screenings, which took place in New York City in the spring of 1896 when he was living in Manhattan; thanks to Paul Sorrentino for pointing this out to me.

19. "Crowding into Asbury Park," *New York Tribune*, July 3, 1892, 28. Some biographers claim that in January 1894, Crane was present at Corbett's exhibition bout in Madison Square Garden; see John Berryman, *Stephen Crane* (Cleveland, OH: World-Meridian, 1962), 74; and Beer, *Stephen Crane*, 104–5.

20. "Veriscope" referred to the widescreen camera and its projector as well as to the company that produced the film. At Carson City, three cameras were positioned next to each other so that before the film ran out in one, the following camera would begin recording, which turned out to be a necessary precaution for this fourteen-round prizefight. Indicative of its stature in film history, the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* was selected in 2012 for inclusion in the Library of Congress's National Film Registry, which annually recognizes US-produced films that are "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant." Corbett had prior experience in front of the film camera, having battled Peter Courtney at Thomas Edison's Black Maria studio in 1894. *Corbett and Courtney Before the Kinetograph* was staged so that Corbett would win in the sixth round; each round lasted one minute. Corbett later toured in vaudeville and appeared in films in the 1910s and 1920s.

21. Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture* (1926; rpt., New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 289.

22. The picture's controversial exhibition at the Toronto Opera House is covered in Paul S. Moore, *Now Playing: Early Moviegoing and the Regulation of Fun* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 23–24.

23. Dan Streible, *Fight Pictures: A History of Boxing and Early Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 52.

24. On the legal issues around prizefighting at this time and the attempted suppression of the film, see Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 194–95, and Streible, *Fight Pictures*, 62–67.

25. Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 1.

26. For example, in David Graham Phillips's *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise* (written in 1904–11), when the novel's eponymous heroine gazes at a brawny man "dressed only in trousers and a pale blue silk undershirt," she observes that "his figure was like that of the wonderful young prize-fighters she had admired at moving picture shows" (David Graham Phillips, *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise* [New York: D. Appleton, 1922], 2:121–22). This scene links taboo displays of physicality previously confined to the private sphere with the newly formed public space of the picture show and the salacious sights presented to its audiences, such commentary on these various sexual economies resonating with the novel's frank treatment of prostitution.

27. In an 1898 letter, Henry James refers to this exhibition of the "cinematograph—or whatever they call it," recalling that "we quite revelled" in the film of the prizefight (quoted in Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Treacherous Years, 1895–1901* [Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1969], 175). According to Adeline Tinter, the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* was the first film exhibition James saw, informing the cinematic metaphors of his late story "Crapy Cornelia" (1909). Symbolically reading the protagonist's choice of women in the tale as "the choice between the image of the cinematograph . . . and that of the photograph," Tinter suggests that much of James's early understanding of cinema derived from the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* (Adeline R. Tinter, *The Museum World of Henry James* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1986], 188–91).

28. On Veriscope's dealings with the news media and its use of press screenings, see Streible, *Fight Pictures*, 73–77. In addition to the press reports that were published upon its debut, the film continued to be covered in local newspapers as the picture made its way across the country and abroad.

29. Travis Vogan, "Irrational Power: Jack Johnson, Prizefighting Films, and Documentary Affect," *Journal of Sport History* 37, no. 3 (2010): 397–413, 398.

30. On Crane's career as a journalist and war correspondent, see Michael Robertson, *Stephen Crane, Journalism, and the Making of Modern American Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

31. Within a discussion of Crane's war writings and the media conflation of military and athletic battle, Brown mentions the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* alongside other sports films and war actualities that would "establish moving pictures as a genuinely mass amusement" (*The Material Unconscious*, 136).

32. "The *Journal*'s War Correspondence," *New York Journal*, April 30, 1897, 8. Demonstrating the yellow press's deep imbrication with film technology in the late 1890s, Hearst's *Journal* would also boast of its use of "the resources of modern science" in outlining its state-of-the-art method of reporting. One piece details the newspaper's usage of an elaborate train car outfitted with typewriters, photographers, and phonographs—a special locomotive where "the newspaper science of the Earth was concentrated" ("The New Journalism at 106 Miles an Hour," *New York Journal*, March 7, 1897, 31). This article highlights the role of the vitascope (an early motion picture camera) in journalistic practice, declaring that "the principle of the vitascope could be adapted to photograph accurately any animated scene and preserve it forever" (31).

33. On early film as a "visual newspaper," see Robert C. Allen, "Contra the Chaser Theory," in *Film before Griffith*, ed. John L. Fell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 105–15. For more on this term, especially in relation to the Spanish-American War, see Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 225–61.

34. Richard Harding Davis, "Our War Correspondents in Cuba and Puerto Rico," *Harper's Monthly*, May 1899, 942.

35. Newspaperman Rufus Coleman in Crane's novel of the Greco-Turkish War, *Active Service* (1899), was based in part on Davis. Coleman's war dispatches are described through yet another allusion to optical technology, the correspondent acting as "a cheap telescope for the people at home . . . one spectator, whose business it was to transfer, according to his ability, his visual impressions to other minds" (Stephen Crane, *Active Service* [New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1899], 95–96).

36. "Stephen Crane Says: The British Soldiers Are Not Familiar with the 'Business End' of Modern Rifles," *New York Journal*, February 14, 1900, 8. Aside from "The Blue Hotel," this is Crane's only other direct reference to cinema.

37. Jonna K. Eagle, "A Rough Ride: Strenuous Spectatorship and the Early Cinema of Assaults," *Screen* 53, no. 1 (2012): 18–35, 18.

38. As Joseph Conrad would later recount, after returning from the war in Greece, Crane remarked that *The Red Badge* "is all right" (quoted in Conrad, introduction to *Stephen Crane*, 11).

39. John Bass, "How Novelist Crane Acts on the Battlefield," *New York Journal*, May 23, 1897, 35.

40. Katherine Biers, *Virtual Modernism: Writing and Technology in the Progressive Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 40.

41. One of Crane's own war dispatches—under the headline "Stephen Crane and Julian Ralph Tell of War's Horrors and Turkey's Bold Plan"—is also prominently featured in the issue that covers the New York debut of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, just above Bass's article on Crane (*New York Journal*, May 23, 1897, 35).

42. "Concerning that Veriscope 'Foul,'" *New York Journal*, May 23, 1897, 43.

43. Tom Gunning, "Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives, and Early Cinema," in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 15–45, 36. This recurrent trope would be used in later fictional narrative films such as *The Story the Biograph Told* (1904), *Falsely Accused!* (1908), and *The Evidence of the Film* (1913).

44. Luke McKernan, "Sport and the First Films," in *Cinema: The Beginnings and the Future*, ed. Christopher Williams (London: University of Westminster Press, 1996), 107–116, 109.

45. "The Fight is on at Last," *New York Journal*, May 23, 1897, 43. The reprinted article, "Camera Reveals a Foul Blow," originally appeared in the *New York Journal*, May 13, 1897, 10.

46. "Fitzsimmons Cries Fraud," *New York World*, May 23, 1897, 4. This concern with faked images and cinematic (mis)representation is also relevant to one film that took advantage of the assured suc-

cess of the *Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight*, Siegmund Lubin's *Reproduction of the Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* (1897), which reenacted the bout with hired stand-ins for the pugilists and was released a week before the debut of the Veriscope film.

47. "Cannot See a Foul Blow," New York *Sun*, May 23, 1897, 4.

48. Calling the fight fair, the *Sun* said of the foul: "whether he landed it or not nobody could tell, for the pictures did not show it" ("Cannot See a Foul Blow," 4).

49. Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25.

50. "Faster than the Eye," *New York World*, May 23, 1897, 4.

51. Questions of cinematic authenticity were also tied to the film's projection speed. It was said that at one New York screening, Corbett's manager William A. Brady instructed the projectionist to slow down the film at the moment Fitzsimmons was knocked down, the picture appearing to confirm those who accused the referee of an illegal long count that favored Fitzsimmons. Brady later related in his memoirs, "movies were new then and you could get away with monkey-business that wouldn't go now, because nobody knew anything about how they worked" (William A. Brady, *Showman* [New York: E. P. Dutton, 1937], 179). With the film projected by "one of the early hand-cranked machines," Brady notes, "we could slow down the film at will without anybody's being the wiser" (179).

52. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 16. Crary traces this rupture with classical models of vision to around 1810–40, prior to the development of photography.

53. "Extracts from the Record by the Veriscope of the Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight at Carson City," *New York World*, May 22, 1897, 3–4. Though inconsistent with some of the *World*'s subsequent reports on the film's exhibition, this statement was typical of the hype surrounding its debut.

54. Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 149. The screen image's association with embodied vision, however, is also evident in the considerable literary discourse on pre-cinematic media such as phantasmagoria and magic lanterns; see Yair Solan, "'Striking Stereopticon Views': Edith Wharton's 'Bunner Sisters' and Nineteenth-Century Magic Lantern Entertainment," *Studies in American Naturalism* 7, no. 2 (2012): 135–50.

55. As Crary argues, the photographic camera "preserved the referential illusion more fully than anything before it," as the invention of photography "made the new camera an apparatus fundamentally independent of the spectator, yet which masqueraded as a transparent and incorporeal intermediary between observer and world" (*Techniques of the Observer*, 133, 136).

56. "Camera Reveals a Foul Blow," *New York Journal*, May 13, 1897, 10. This admission indicates how the difficulties posed by early film spectatorship were articulated even in press accounts that claimed the foul was visible on screen.

57. "A Phantom Fight," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 4, 1897, 30. Although modifications had been made to projectors and new prints were issued a month after the film's debut, these problems seem to have persisted; see Streible, *Fight Pictures*, 78.

58. "Corbett and Fitzsimmons at the Lyric Hall," *Freeman's Journal*, April 12, 1898, 2.

59. Winifred Black, "Does Modern Photography Incite Women to Brutality?" *New York Journal*, May 30, 1897, 17.

60. Maxim Gorky [I. M. Pacatus, pseud.], "A Review of the Lumière Programme at the Nizhni-Novgorod Fair," trans. Leda Swan, in Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 407–9, 407. This article was originally published in *Nizhegorodski listok*, July 4, 1896.

61. Michael Kowalewski, *Deadly Musings: Violence and Verbal Form in American Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 125.

62. Harold Frederic, "Stephen Crane's Triumph," *New York Times*, January 26, 1896, 22. Another review from the same year, an unsigned article on Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* often attributed to Frank Norris, describes the novel as being comprised of "short, terse epigrams struck off in the heat of composition," observing that its style is reminiscent of "scores and scores of tiny flashlight photographs" ("Stephen Crane's Stories of Life in the Slums," *The Wave*, July 1896, 13). Paul Young

proposes that Norris's metaphor, as with Frederic's review of *The Red Badge of Courage*, is redolent of photographic motion studies, yet this analogy also evokes the dissolving tableaux of magic lantern presentations that could employ images produced by instantaneous flash photography, suggesting the range of media technologies to which Crane's work was compared in the 1890s; see Young, "Telling Descriptions," 652.

63. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 2007), 217–51, 238.

64. Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 51. Benjamin's idea of spectatorial distraction would be central to Tom Gunning's seminal work on the early cinema of attractions, contrasted with a later classical cinema of narrative absorption; see Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Cinema, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI, 1990), 56–62. Conversely, Charles Musser has proffered a cinema of contemplation and discernment in this period as a counterpoint to Gunning's attractions model. Much as Crary places attention and distraction within a fluid continuum, this suggests the intertwined relations among attraction and contemplation in early films; see Charles Musser, "A Cinema of Contemplation, a Cinema of Discernment: Spectatorship, Intertextuality and Attractions in the 1890s," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 159–79.

65. "The Veriscope," *New York Times*, May 26, 1897, 6.

66. "The Fight is on at Last," *New York Journal*, May 23, 1897, 43.

67. "The Metropolis Disgraced," *New York Journal*, May 30, 1897, 42. Despite its coverage of the bout and the film's exhibition, the *Journal* began supporting the ban of boxing in New York. Pugilism also became allied with the West as a means of establishing a commercial identity for the controversial sport; it was widely publicized that famed gunslinger Bat Masterson and the legendary Wyatt Earp (reporting for the *New York World*) had attended the Corbett-Fitzsimmons match (Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema*, 195–6).

68. "Contagion by the Kinetoscope," *Western Christian Advocate*, March 31, 1897, 386.

69. Paul Sorrentino, *Stephen Crane: A Life of Fire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 158.