
Jan Olsson

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Abstract
This chapter discusses the overlaps and differences in how film audiences encountered feature films – projected in one stretch or via breaks for reel changes. By charting the trade discourse, the text shows that American film theaters gradually adopted a two-projector system during the early to mid-1910s and thus screened multi-reel feature films without pauses. In contrast, Swedish film theaters retained the one-projector model with breaks well into the 1920s, and some did not switch over to two projectors until the breakthrough for sound. This non-uniformity for exhibition practices challenges notions about a hegemonic regime for audience absorption in the engagement with the story world. Breaks during projection clearly offset such a mindset and instead offered modes of intermittent and distracted engagement in fictions presented as recorded rather than just given.

Keywords: projectors, early audiences, film experience, Swedish cinema, exhibition practices, early cinema

The theatrical moving-picture experience is shaped by the interaction between two fundamental components of the cinematic apparatus: the projector (one of cinema’s ‘hardwares’) and the film base (a ‘software’ of sorts) divided into reels on which images have been registered. By primarily riveting the attention to the 1910s, the manners in which films, and mainly multi-reel features, were screened, with or without pauses between reels, will be elucidated via the trade press. Exhibition practices, in this the most basic sense, define the premises for the film experience and, in turn, theories of spectatorship, which additionally are framed by such dispositive factors as theater location and architecture, marketing and
programming, musical accompaniment, the level of light in the auditorium, Jim Crow practices or other forms of seating segregation, etc. I will focus on two national cinemas for comparative purposes: cinema in the US, as ‘Hollywood’ gradually turned into a dominant model for storytelling during the 1910s, and Swedish cinema, which was a miniscule film environment in terms of local production and heavily depending on American imports, especially after the onset of World War I.1

The American exhibition market exploded in the wake of the nickelodeon boom leading to the regulation of the market after the formation of the so-called Edison Trust, based on a pooling of patents. These licensed companies soon ran parallel to an independent production conglomerate and both gradually operated from the West Coast and from what, with geographical license, we now collapse into the notion of Hollywood. Numbers apart, American cinema is one of the best documented due to its rich trade discourse, which here will be used for gleaning pertinent information concerning basic features of the movie-going experience. Indirectly, however, as a backdrop for the professional discourse from the perspective of the booth, as it were, one can extrapolate useful information regarding how audiences experienced films in the auditoria in the most basic sense: with or without breaks during reel changes, with or without light in the auditorium during projection. My claim here is that theories of spectatorship seldom address such experiential issues.

Much of the theory concerning the theatrical experience has been developed from an American perspective, most influentially in Miriam Hansen’s scholarship regarding spectatorship and, in a later phase, her theory on the vernacular; that is, how other cinemas came to emulate salient aspects of the classical Hollywood model, albeit with a local inflection spelled out in terms of the vernacular.2 The unrivaled analysis of the classical (Hollywood) model is Bordwell et al, (1985).3

In order to analyze the correlation between aspects of production and film exhibition, I have singled out one national production and its exhibition environment to compare against the dominant American one, namely, the Swedish. This choice is not arbitrary or grounded in my own citizenship, but due to the fact that no other country can offer such a level of systematic material documentation concerning the pivotal factor for my analysis, reel length. The background for this is the Swedish censorship system that measured every reel from every film copy that was screened in Sweden after December 1911. Thus, the problem this essay hopes to clarify is whether the American production/exhibition model had a vernacular counterpart in Sweden with minor modifications only, or whether the Swedes operated on
a different protocol that also affected the exhibition of imported American titles. At the heart of this matter is the extent to which the model of spectatorship posited by Hansen and others enjoyed a universal application as a lingua franca for film experience and whether it needs to be vernacularly qualified. That is, from the perspective of exhibition practices, was cinema in Sweden ‘speaking’ in a different tongue – or just with a bit of an accent? The Swedish censorship documentation makes it possible to ascertain how American features were translated in material terms, i.e. if they were modified concerning reel length and if the number of reels for the same amount of footage was adapted to fit into a local system for exhibition.

The critical factor for ushering in spectatorship in the feature era, in the sense defined by Miriam Hansen’s landmark research, was a collective forgetting of the theatrical situation and a blocking out of the exhibition context for a full-fledged mental investment in the story world and its characters via identification or alignment with the projected camera work. The posited experience resulting from such a generalized mindset was filmic rather than cinematic, at a time when the term photoplay gradually gained currency. This utterly privatized address, if we accept the premise, circumvented the publicness of the theatrical event by suppressing local and personal contingencies due to the configuration of narrative devices and strategies designed to mentally pull patrons to the threshold of the diegesis. How this came about, or not, was, arguably, also a consequence of how films were projected and how the cinematic interaction between hardware and software played out in the theatrical space as film style and narrative met audiences. A shift of focus away from abstract spectators to corporeal audiences and patrons pushes the analysis from pure theory to the perhaps not-so-uniform historical exhibition practices. The comparative approach here is designed to address these issues by way of the trade discourse supplemented with newspaper accounts.

Breaks, Pauses, and Waits in the Trade Discourse

Scholarly discussions concerning both the US and other national cinemas seemingly take for granted that films, at least features, were projected continuously from booths equipped with two projectors and without breaks between reels, unless the films were excessively long, say Birth of a Nation in twelve reels. In such cases, the films were divided into sections, acts, or parts with one or two intermissions matching the legitimate theaters breaks between acts.
Scant research has been devoted to the many variations in projection practices in the 1910s. Especially if we also take into account vernacular models for film exhibition outside the metropolitan landmark venues for first-run attractions in the US. Scholarly exceptions to the lack of attention to the dialectics between the one- and two-projector models for screening are Ivan Klimes’ analysis of screen practice in Czechoslovakia and Ben Brewster’s discussion of multi-reel titles on the American market as a backdrop for his analysis of *Traffic in Souls*. The trade discourse concerning pauses and breaks, waits and delays during exhibition bears on the many strands of film culture and its historiography and metapsychology and it is correlated with exhibition and programming at large. My thesis is that the analysis of filmic interpellation and spectatorship needs to be supplemented with insights into actual exhibition practices, picked up via fragments from the trade discourse in lieu of informants. As will be evident, the practices were not ushered in or negotiated in a uniform fashion, not in the US, and especially not in several European countries.

Scholars allow for an extensive period of negotiation in the US before classical cinema was fully codified in a decade-long and far from teleological reframing of the medium and filmic storytelling. Arguably, these extremely convoluted processes should not be read top down from the make-up of films only. We need to take into account the full panorama of exhibition practices and the phalanx of local factors influencing them, hence the turn to studies of local exhibition the last decade or so. The physical properties of theater architecture, the regulatory framework stipulated by city ordinances and state laws as well as their policing, and how exhibitors – metropolitan, suburban, and rural – presented their programs for their patrons are critical factors to consider. Such constraints and variations are key issues for understanding film experiences in their diversity.

Here, the attention is limited to the impact of interrupted screening between reels. Severing of immersion at regular intervals in the projection between reels strongly militated against the unencumbered psychological and ideological investment in the diegetic world posited by theories of spectatorship. An uninteruppted, continuous screening of a feature offers a very different experience than if the mental investment in the story is suspended by recurrent breaks.

Charles Musser was one of the first to argue that in the early days, before the nickelodeons, the showmen, and exhibitors played a decisive role for programming within the context of screen practice. The gradual standardization of the product, as analyzed by theories of spectatorship,
however, did not always work in smooth tandem with a standardization of the presentation in local exhibition practices.

Hence, several aspects of film exhibition, and especially two at times interrelated practices, militated against the forgetfulness and experiential delocalizing Hansen defined as a *sine qua non* for spectatorship. Namely, the breaks in projection between reels when screening multi-reel titles, and so-called daylight screening with some level of lighting in the auditorium during projection. Individually or together, these prevalent practices grounded and localized the film experience. Apropos light, which I have discussed elsewhere, Hugo Münsterberg elaborated on its relation to immersion:

Stage managers [in legitimate theaters] have sometimes tried the experiment of reducing these differences [in lighting levels between hall and stage], for instance, keeping the audience also in a fully lighted hall, and they always had to discover how much of the dramatic effect was reduced because the feeling of distance from reality was weakened. The photoplay and the theater in this respect are evidently alike.

Given breaks in projection and/or auditorium light in the mid-1910s, the sense of place and theatrical awareness were, in many ways, heightened and thus perhaps even stronger than around 1908, which I will return to. Daylight screening, adopted to prevent mashers from operating in the dark as well as policing consensual interaction, seems to at least partly undermine and offset the absorption required for a sense of private connection to the screen and story world, if we side with Münsterberg’s contention. The rationale for adopting light ordinances was to facilitate patron surveillance by supervision and policing from theater staff, which redefined the spatial awareness in multiple respects. Daylight screening was therefore correlated with a heightened interpersonal perception, binding patrons to a shared theatrical situation during projection. In the spring of 1913, the so-called Folks ordinance was adopted in New York City and, subsequently, a bill from Senator Griffin spread it across the state. This ordinance included one of the most detailed regulations of light in the auditorium:

Every portion of the motion-picture theater, including exits, courts, and corridors, devoted to the uses or accommodation of the public, shall be so lighted by electric light during all exhibitions and until the entire audience has left the premises, that a person with normal eyesight should
be able to read the Snellen standard test type 40 at a distance of twenty feet and type 30 at a distance of ten feet; normal eyesight meaning ability to read type 20 at a distance of twenty feet in daylight. Cards showing type 20, 30, and 40 shall be displayed on the side walls together with a copy of this paragraph of the ordinance."

In his *Cyclopedia*, published in 1911, David Hulfish describes how American picture theaters operated by offering a series of examples from model theaters. On top of his exhibition pyramid was the ‘Large Exclusive Picture House’ situated in the shopping district in “one of our largest cities.” Theories of spectatorship run in smooth tandem with experiences for patrons in such venues. Hulfish’s model house offered three first-run reels and two illustrated songs with three programs change a week and operated fourteen hours per day. The booth was equipped with two film projectors and one projector for the slides. In terms of projection, the slides blended into the tailpiece of the first reel and the second reel blended into the last slide. After the continuous and mixed program follows a short intermission. Seemingly, all titles here were one-reelers. Hulfish wrote before the debate about daylight screening took off. Clune’s Broadway Theater in Los Angeles operated exactly along the lines outlined by Hulfish.

Similar exhibition practices were in place in Cleveland already in 1909: “All theatres in the downtown section are using two machines [...] there being no delay in the shows from the time the door are opened until last

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Fig. 2.1: Clune’s Broadway Theater, Los Angeles. Published in *Moving Picture World*, 23 December 1911, p. 985.
performance at night.” This mode of operation was, however, in no way representative for exhibition practices at large in 1909.

The bulk of the American discourse on pauses and breaks and on one or two projectors can most conveniently be gleaned from F.H. Richardson’s columns in Moving Picture World, which later turned into a handbook in several editions, the first one from 1910. Judging from Richardson’s column from 3 July 1909, it is evident that two alternating machines were already in use in some theaters, which the Cleveland note claims. Richardson offered advice on how to arrange the electrical wiring to best serve the reel change between projectors. Seemingly, the model from Cleveland’s downtown houses spread rapidly or was adopted more or less at the same time in many metropolitan areas. For example, it was reported that the Lyric Theater in St. Louis had “two machines and operators working constantly” in 1911. The rapid establishing of the two-projector model as default in many first-run houses in the US is clear from Richardson’s detailed response to a letter from California in August 1910:

There is just one thing I do not understand about this letter. Apparently this house is running with but one machine, else why speak of 25-second changes? If this is so it certainly is a matter of surprise. In a house such as is described there should be two machines, with one spare mechanism, and the pictures should dissolve one into the other, the helper starting one machine as the end of the film appears which is running on the other. By this I mean the second machine should be started before the picture on the screen has entirely run out, thus dissolving the title of the new film into the tail-piece of the one running.

As European multi-reel features began their inroads into the American market at this juncture, exhibition practices were discussed in passing in trade journals and mainly from the perspective of metropolitan venues on par with Clune’s booth resources. The review of the Danish film Ved fængslets port (Temptations of a Great City, Nordisk, 1911), published in June 1911, is a case in point as the reviewer argues for a Clune-like exhibition practice matching the highly integrated narrative of European multi-reel features: “The interest is so strong that one actually becomes impatient while the reels are being changed. We would advise exhibitors to use two machines, if possible, when showing this film.”

Evidencing a gradual change in exhibition practice in tune with this proposal as a burgeoning market for features took off, a reviewer, again in passing, praises the novelty of continuous projection without breaks after
the opening in New York City of the spectacular Kinemacolor production of *Delhi Durbar*. The film was screened at the New York Theater in March 1912:

The exhibition was remarkably smooth; it had been carefully rehearsed and much praise is deserved by those who supervised the details of it. Two projection machines were used. One picked up where the other left off with such nice precision that the pictures were thought by many to be one long continuous film. ²⁰

A comment in *Moving Picture World* from June 1912 weighed in on changes in exhibition practices in more general terms:

The number of motion picture theaters discarding their intermission slide is steadily on the increase. No recent innovation in the conduct of the exhibiting business has found favor with the public so quickly and widely. Nothing is more tiresome than a long wait between reels. ²¹

This ‘recent’ innovation can be attributed to a gradual relaxing of one-reelers as default commodity in the US and the increase in import of multi-reel titles from Europe, which exacerbated novel exhibition strategies, not that all imports were projected without breaks and not that everybody approved of the novelty.

‘The Film Man’ in *New York Dramatic Mirror*, for example, was considerably less enthusiastic than the writers in *Moving Picture World* in this regard in December 1913:

The possession of two machines and the chance to rush the programme through and get rid of those patrons whose dimes are already in the till, leads many an exhibitor to danger by showing a four or five reel film without a break. Of course there are some patrons who will complain against too many long waits. But here should be a medium between no waits and too long waits. Two reels and even three may be shown continuously without danger, but when you see, as I did on Broadway last week, a six-reel melodrama [*Traffic in Souls*] without a pause in the unfolding of the film, then I defy any men to have more than a feeling of weariness at the close. The average feature film loses much of its effect when shown to the physical torture of the spectator. ²²

From a historiographic standpoint, the discourse around the wait, the pause, the break, and discontinuous projection has mainly been ignored
in the transitional blending of different regimes of cinema irrespective of periodization and its labels. The quilt of simultaneously co-existing exhibition practices outside the biggest metropolitan houses, attested to by my small roster of examples below, evidences non-uniform practices and a gradual shift to the two-projector model and continuous projection. This lack of uniformity should not be eliminated from our understanding of how film experiences were negotiated in the 1910s. Examples from only the grandest of venues gleaned from the trade discourse are hence not indicative of a brisk and universal shift from one to two projectors in US theaters overall.

In early 1913, for example, an itinerant showman (Geo. L. Wilson) writing from West Virginia claimed that he had toured “this state and N.C., S.C. and Va.” with the Sarah Bernhardt films. “I find few up-to-date operating rooms; only one house, The Virginia, Charleston, using two machines.”23 An exhibitor from North Dakota claimed in early 1914 that he had “two machines in the booth to do away with the long waits or rather any wait […] As near as we can find out, we are the only house in the State running two machines.”24

Reflections on how audiences may have reacted to the innovation were recorded in passing by exhibitors in trade columns about projection: an Ohio exhibitor described his method in the spring of 1913: “We have no stops or intermissions, and find the people like it much better than waiting for reel changing, while looking at advertising slides.”25 A Texas exhibitor claimed a year later, May 1914: “Intermissions of three minutes after every thousand feet were the custom some time ago; nowadays it is nothing unusual to run a four reel feature without any intermission, and there has been nothing from the public except commendation.”26 The Aerodome, Buntington, Indiana, was outfitted with two machines in mid-1914, since the management “believing an audience dislikes intermissions during which the change of films take place.”27 And from Kentucky in the fall of 1914:

We have long discarded the habit of showing pictures in separate sections. We run the multi-reels as one continuous reel, never allowing the ‘part one, etc.,’ to show. We have often been accused of only running three reels where we really had four. We never allow advertising slides to interrupt our performance, running these after each show when we have an intermission of two or three minutes.28

These examples from the trade discourse evidences several different models simultaneously in play across the US during the first half of the
1910s, but a gradual shift to the two-projector model and continuous projection pushing outwards from the first-run metropolitan houses to smaller houses in small towns. Several small-town and rural theaters still continued to operated with only one machine and changed to two projectors very late. Jeff Kleontic has shown that the Strand Theater in Milford, NH bought its second projector in 1920: “With the new equipment and two machines there will be no delays between reels. Heretofore there has been a short delay after a reel was shown before the next one could be loaded. The enterprising proprietors will do away with even this slight annoyance.”

Sweden and the One-Projector Model

I’ll return to US theaters after a detour to Sweden and an exhibition context mainly unaffected by the discourses concerning breaks, pauses, and waits during the 1910s. Key question when we move to Sweden against the backdrop of the American discourse: how much awareness of the theatrical context can audience members experience and still remain in the realm or zone of spectatorship? This vexing concern is particularly relevant as multi-reel titles were much more common here than in the US in the early 1910s in theaters invariably operating with only one projector throughout the 1910s. To reiterate: If the homogeneity of the storytelling’s address posits a uniformly fixed position via a complex mechanism of obliviousness delocalizing the viewing subject and propelling her or him into the diegetic world by bracketing the awareness of the theatrical situation – what happens when this process is temporarily suspended by default due to wait between reels, a practice lasting well into the 1920s in Sweden? In the light of such a model of exhibition, do we need to modify our conceptualization of spectatorship in the vernacular context of Swedish film exhibition (and in many other similar exhibition cultures) and regard it as deferred or diffused based on the universal one-projector model, which, in turn, had repercussion for local production practices?

In a flippant sketch on Stockholm’s film culture published in 1912, the author notices that the audience does not seem to mind multi-reel features making up the entire program. The author himself, in contrast to what is available at theaters proper, only bemoans that alcoholic beverages are not served in the intervals in the projection. “The movies have to contend themselves with a youngster parading the aisles during the bright-lit intermissions offering printed programs and candy.”
This succinct description paints an exhibition model with time enough for selling programs and candy during bright-lit intermissions for reel change. The information is otherwise scant regarding what went on in the intervals. Apart from the sale of programs and candy here, advertising slides are quite regularly mentioned in the US discourse, and presumably there was music. And the breaks seemingly lasted from 25 seconds up to three minutes per the American examples above – unless it was a regular intermission.

The very first indication of a Swedish booth with two projectors that was actually used for continuous projection of features was at Palladium in Stockholm, which opened on 26 December 1918. In the meantime, presumably due to the lack of alternatives practices, I have found no complaints, and no discourse concerning breaks and pauses. Appraising the novelty, technical authority Axel Waldner wrote:

> Each performance consists of circa 2,300 meters and as the magazines takes 600 meters, the machines are alternating. The switch [...] was executed with such a precision, even if taking place in the middle of the drama, that it was absolutely unnoticeable by the audience unless one was looking at the rear of the auditorium and the ports in the wall.\(^3\)

It’s clear from this article that projection from alternating machines was an absolute novelty. News traveled slow in Sweden, the old one-projector model thus held its own also after Palladium’s innovation. The year before, a Swedish trade reporter had familiarized the readers of Filmbladet with American exhibition practices in a celebratory account from a show at Samuel Rothapfel’s Rialto in New York City. From the long article, the passage about the booth reads:

> Here, like everywhere in America [with some exception, as noted], two projectors alternate; one starts at as the other runs out of film. In this manner, a long feature in five or six reels melts together, given the audience the proper overall impression and the audience is oblivious regarding how many reels the film consists of. This exhibition practice is superior to our domestic method with many superfluous pauses.\(^3\)

An editorial in the trade paper Filmbladet in late 1920 offered the most circumspect discussion of the pros and cons of breaks in the projection, and there’s no mentioning of the existence of the type of the two-projector model demonstrated at Palladium:
Audiences seem to prefer short breaks, some would even forego them to have the film screened uninterrupted. For many spectators, the mechanical chopping up of the film in projection adversely affects the mood of the film...

[For example] The first act ends with a tender scene between lovers. On the cusp of the kiss, the first act ends, the auditorium is awash with light, the candy sellers run between the aisles, doors slam, people come and go, and musicians tune their instruments. Suddenly the lights are dimmed. On the screen is flashed Second Act, perhaps the film’s title, director, and studio. And soon the film continues. Same environment, same people, and the kiss, annoyingly interrupted by the pause, is delivered [...] Neither we, nor the audience, allege that a 90-minute feature should be screened uninterrupted. That would be a too strenuous endeavor for a majority of the spectators.33

A few years later, in 1922, a critic described her frustration with the many breaks when attending a downtown theater with her husband:

After a long newsreel, came a long pause. Thereafter a topical film, fairly interesting, followed by a long pause, and then a musical interlude. After yet another long pause, we were finally treated to the feature, the apogee of the program. It was superior and beautiful. But due to all the waiting, the long pauses, the old and longish newsreel, we were pushed to such a state of impatience and disappointment that we both vouched nevermore to visit this theater.34

The trade discourse in passing recorded the slow inroads of the two-projector model of exhibition. In 1925, one of Stockholm’s second-run, independent theaters, Odéon, was refurbished. And according to a trade commentary, “Odéon will be a luxury venue. Two projectors will be put to work – this means no pauses.”35 In 1926, Swedish Film Industry’s second-run house, Sture, was up for a makeover. After a press screening, one of the Stockholm dailies reported that “the booth has been equipped with two projectors, which means that the program can be screened without pauses between acts just like at Röda Kvarn, Palladium, and Skandia.”36 Skandia had opened in September 1923 and came with two projectors. As surprising as this might seem, Stockholm theaters apart from this select trio of showcase places that had shifted to two projectors sometime during late 1918 and 1923, presumably operated with only one projector close to the end of the silent era.

Sweden’s leading architect for picture theaters, Axel Stenberg, comment on the light requirements in relation to reel changes in a talk
delivered in June 1923. At this time, only Röda Kvarn and Palladium operated with two machines; Skandia opened in September. According to Stenberg,

It’s advisable not to fully illuminate the auditorium during pauses for reel change in order not to shatter the mood certain good films instill in the audience. It’s better to preserve a certain dimness up until the film has ended…Those theaters that have alternating projectors, must hence be recommended as good models.37

Some theaters outside Stockholm also adopted two projectors in the mid-1920s, for example Palladium in Malmö.38 In the wake of the exhibition changes in the mid-1920s, the technical trade paper Filmteknik, lauded a double projector marketed by the German brand Nietsche, Z.S.IV. In addition, the company offered a regular machine with 1,200-meter cassettes taking four American reels. The rationale here was “the audience's steadily increasing demand for shows without annoying pauses between reels.” The double machine was presented as an alternative for small and mid-size theaters with room for only one projector.39 This is in 1927. A veteran projectionist, Oskar Pettersson, with 55 years of experience in the booth, claimed in a summation of his career, that “the last years of the silent era saw considerable improvements in the equipment – one was a shift over to the two-projector model to be able to run without intermissions.”40

The Swedish exhibition practices was part of a larger network bearing on domestic film production and the distribution of non-Swedish films, particularly American features. A critical aspect of this network of practices was the flexibility and absence of a fixed standard concerning reel length. This facilitated the correlation between production and exhibition practices with narrative breaks strategically placed between reels without a pre-set industry standard for reel length. The American standard of 1,000 feet corresponds to 305 meters. Since many Swedish reels (locally produced or reformatted American titles) were very long it was necessary to have large-size magazines. Inventory lists from Swedish booths in 1914 thus list magazines for either 400 or 600 meters. Pathé, for example, sold three sizes of magazines already in 1909, at 300, 400, and 600 meters.41

When writing on French director Paul Garbagni’s Swedish film In the Springtime of Life (1912), I noticed how symmetrically the film synchronizes its two major temporal leaps in the narrative, a decade each and advertised by intertitles, with the film’s two reel changes.42 The leap in the narrative is
thus correlated with the break in exhibition. Obviously, the film is in three reels, with almost identical length per reel – real one is 343 meters (1,125ft), while both reel two and three are 378 meters (1,240ft). The two breaks, a decade long in the narrative and a minute or so in the auditorium, prompted questions about both production practices at large in the company’s new studio at Lidingö. Garbagni was brought in to teach the newly hired Swedish directors, af Klercker, Stiller, and Sjöström, the tricks of the trade. Given Garnagni’s model example, did it become standard practice at Swedish Biograph to organize multi-reel features so that each reel was somewhat standalone in nature in order to mirror current exhibition practices?

As mentioned, the archival records from the Swedish Board of Film Censors are uniquely rich for scholars interested in material evidences in this respect. On the inspection cards (available at the National Archives – Riksarkivet), and there’s one for each distributed title from 1911 through the silent era (and on), the censors meticulously noted the length of each reel and also when additional copies were sent in for stamping. The inspection cards for Swedish Biograph’s features released in 1913 compared to the reel length for the imported Traffic in Souls, just as an example given this film historiographic status and that it was produced the same year, evidence interesting differences in this respect.

Traffic in Souls, which was inspected on 2 September 1914 and came in six standard-size reels at 328, 321, 291, 312, 319, and 303 meters, a total of 1,875 meters. In this case, the film was not reformatted by the Swedish distributor, but screened with the original reel length intact, albeit with breaks during magazine changes. Presumably, magazines taking 600 meters and thus two reels were used; this meant two breaks. If we look at the Swedish features produced at Swedish Biograph in 1913, the reel length is less consistent. The Miracle, for example, came in five reels measured at: 395, 485, 450, 401, and 314 meters and a combined length of 2,045 meters. This five-reeler is thus 200 meters longer than the six-reeler Traffic in Souls. Ingeborg Holm was measured at 438, 410, 388, 361, and 409. The five reels combined for 2,006 meters, before a scene was removed by the censors. Blodets röst was 1,826 meters and the reels were 484, 508, 479, and 355. The four reels here are more or less as long as the six for Traffic in Souls. Reel two for Blodets röst at 508 meters or 1,666 feet is the longest of all the Swedish reels from this year.

Blodets röst is particularly relevant as its manuscript was printed by the studio in a brochure as an exemplary guide to screenwriting, ‘How a Film Manuscript Should Be Written’. The preface admonishes prospective screenwriters that “each act or part should preferably attach itself
to a limited moment in time.” In the period 1912-1916, and heeding this advice, Swedish Biograph favored stories straddling considerable time spans emplotted so that the reel breaks featured clear temporal or spatial shifts, sometimes both, and often marked in calendar fashion – Y Months Later or X Years Later.

Hugo Münsterberg argued for the elimination of intertitles in his 1916 book, after comprehensive film viewing the year before, albeit with two apparent exceptions [...] It is not contrary to the internal demands of film art if a complete scene has a title. A leader like ‘The Next Morning’ or ‘After Three Years’ or ‘In South Africa’ or ‘The First Step’ or ‘The Awakening’ or ‘Among Friends’ has the same characters as the title of a painting in a picture gallery [...] In this sense a leader as a title for a scene or still better for a whole reel may be applied without any esthetic objection.44

Discussing American production practices and wastefulness in the use of film stock, Louise Reeves Harrison indirectly formulates a corresponding rationale between production and exhibition practices when lauding a novel system of planned shooting evidenced by one particular, unnamed title:

The scenes were timed in advance, so that the end of each ‘act,’ or reel, contained an element of suspense, due consideration being given to the fact that all exhibitors are not provided with two projectors. There must be tension of interest to hold an audience during an enforced wait.45

The Swedish flexibility concerning reel length inspired reformatting of imported American titles to bring down the amount of reels and thus the corresponding amount of breaks in projection. A swath of American titles in five reels, especially from Triangle but also other producers, was turned into to four reels by Swedish Biograph and thus had fewer breaks for the same amount of footage. For one title, Triangle’s Martha’s Vindication, the censor commented on the discrepancy on the inspection card: “the [film’s] main title says five acts, but the film is only in four.”

Birth of a Nation offers an excellent example of the reformatting practice. The Swedish program leaflet advertised the film as in twelve parts, which was true for the American version. When inspected by the Swedish censors, the film had been reformatted to eight very large reels and the newspaper ads for the screenings talk about three parts and eight acts; acts here meaning reels. In contrast to the twelve standardized American reels, the Swedish ones were all bumped up to lengths from 418 to 506 meters. After
the opening, one reviewer complained that the intertitles sometimes were illegible due to the brisk projection speed for this crammed program lasting 2.5 hours. The film was 3,500 meters after the censor had cut 100 meters in the second part. The submitted 3,600 meters divided into eight reels, otherwise correspond to the American original’s twelve reels at 300 on average.

The Swedish model for production, distribution, and exhibition was thus highly integrated and all its components were put in the service of the one-projector model. Before returning to the US, a few fragments indicate shifting practices across Europe; more research is no doubt called for.

When visiting France in 1913 an unimpressed W. Stephen Bush wrote back that:

> [o]utside of these show places [the largest houses in Paris], however, the projection in Paris was generally poor and the pauses between the reels about ten times longer than even the most patient of our audiences would endure without plenty of hostile demonstrations.46

A letter to F.H. Richardson’s column, also from 1913, reported from that Moscow has about

> 800 to 1,000 theatres [...] the very largest only seating about 200 to 300 and are nearly always on the second floor. As yet, there are no theatres here that can boast of having two machines, the nearest approach to this being two separate halls on the same floor with a separate machine for each. Half the program is shown in one hall and the audience then saunters into the other for the remainder.47

Films in Copenhagen were seemingly shown with only one projector just like in Stockholm. A photograph from a downtown booth late 1912 thus shows only one machine and the accompanying article is in singular throughout.48

From London, in contrast and in 1914, two projectors were seemingly at work in most theaters:

> The usual duties of the operator consists of running the machine, looking after the motor generator, fans, inside lighting, flame arcs, etc. An assistant is provided to rewind, etc., and if he has had any experience and has been with you for some time he runs the projector on alternate reels. Nearly every house has two projectors, which are run alternately.49

Let us now return to the US.
Feature Screening on the American Market

In most American theaters in 1912, projection was still mainly predicated on the variety model with breaks not only between one-reel titles, but also between acts in multi-reel titles, often with illustrated songs or vaudeville acts in between. Features soon prompted alternate projection, for example concerning the premiere run for *Traffic in Souls* in November 1913 at Joe Weber’s Theater in New York City. Prior to *Traffic in Souls*, the Helen Gardner Company produced *Cleopatra* in five reels. A comment in *Moving Picture World* for this film evidences continuous projection when it opened in New York City in tune with the previously mentioned Kinemacolor show. It is clear, however, from the description that the tailpieces between acts remained in place for *Cleopatra*: “There is no wait between parts, immediately after the inscriptive announces the end of one part, another inscriptive is flashed upon the screen announcing the part following.”

*Quo Vadis?*, the Cines production imported by George Kleine to the US, initiated a screen practice modeled after the legitimate theater that Kleine held on to for his roadshows for several years. The nine reels were divided into three parts with three reels each and between the parts there was an intermission lasting circa ten minutes. (Same practice for Kleine’s
roadshow featuring *Spartacus* in eight reels in 1914.) In a letter to Benjamin Hampton written in 1927, Kleine writes: “I standardized these roadshows, which consisted in each case of two projecting machines […].”52 Louis Reeves Harrison comments upon this practice, but for a Vitagraph title in eight reels, *The Christian*: “Intermissions, such as occur between the acts of a stage play, operate as a source of relief without breaking the continuity of interest.”53 The same exhibition model was for *Cabiria* with two six-minutes intermissions.

Samuel Rothapfel broke with this model when presenting Selig’s *The Spoilers* in nine reels without a break within a mammoth program at the Strand.

It was a happy idea of the management to put the picture on without any break whatever. *The Spoilers* as a novel is one of those books that we like to read to the end if possible, and where we cannot indulge our impulse we always lay the volume down with regret. Breaks and pauses in a running visualization of the novel would be even less welcome than interruptions in the reading. That the audience was well pleased with this new wrinkle was plain. It absorbed the story without an effort and its interest never lagged – at 11:30 we were more interested in the fate of Glenister and all the rest than at 9:15, though we had been looking intently at the screen for more than two hours.54

Six months later, Rothapfel claimed: “The old-fashioned intermission is, of course, out of the question entirely.”55

This was true for many first class theaters, but the practice was otherwise far from standardized in the fall of 1914. According to *Moving Picture World*’s capsule overview:

In many of our first-class theatres features consisting of more than one reel are now put on without any intermission whatever. The consoling assurances at the end of each thousand feet that ‘the next part will follow immediately’ are cut out and instead of a promise there is the immediate performance. It is of course ever so much better to present a great feature as a whole rather than in pieces. This applies we think to all features under six thousand feet. Where the feature exceeds this length a pause like the interval between two long acts is appropriate, but we ought to get away from the ancient phraseology such as: ‘One Minute While We Change the Reel.’ The old clumsy and undignified way of presenting a multiple reel still obtains, we are sorry to say, in even some of our best theatres in this city and
always takes away from the real merit of the performance. Let us get away from measuring films of quality as if the strips of celluloid which record so much art and effort were simply merchandise like cloth or ribbons.56

As we have demonstrated, non-standardization was obviously the standard with regard to the presentation of features in the US as continuous performances run parallel to the pauses-and-acts model from the legitimate theater, while smaller, second- and third-run houses only slowly shifted over to two projectors. The illusion, and thus the immersion in spectatorship, was ripped asunder by breaks for reel changes and even further dampened by daylight screening in the feature era. Arguably, we need to rethink and qualify theories of spectatorship by factoring in the variations in exhibition practices, and the annoyance with breaks and their impact on metapsychology in the not always dark theaters.

An Interlude: The Strange Case of Massachusetts

The discourse concerning breaks and pauses sometimes came with a medical underpinning. In 1908, the state assembly in Massachusetts limited exhibitors to 20 minutes projection not to strain patrons’ eyesight. “At the expiration of said period of twenty minutes, [exhibitors must] furnish some other form of amusement or entertainment for a period of not less than five minutes.” This led to drawn-out conflicts with vaudeville house when small nickelhouses filled the gap between reels with live entertainment and debates concerning what their licensees allowed for or not. After an unsuccessful campaign for repeal in 1913, a trade source opines: “This law practically kills the multiple reel for the State, and, of course, the possibility of feature pictures is greatly lessened by the enforced five minute wait, between reels.”57 The 1914 State Assembly session, finally, sided with the exhibitors. According to a local exchange manager:

[I]t is now possible to show a multiple-reel subject without destroying any unusual interest it may contain. Then, again, where before exhibitors had to do something for their patrons in the way of entertaining them during these five minutes’ lull, they may now simply show pictures continuously. The repeal of the intermission law killed the song and vaudeville stuff.58

This debate was not a mere Massachusetts fad, proposals along this line from the Superintendent of Schools was for example on the table in Chicago,
but was never formally considered by the City Council. In the absence of preserved records, all we know is the difficulties mentioned by Massachusetts exhibitors in regard to the screening of features. If the law was actively policed is unclear. We leave this as a topic for further research, which takes us to some concluding remarks concerning important projection issues not addressed above.

**Loose Ends**

The critical role of projectionists’ labor for the film experience has been conspicuously absent from my discussion. Timothy Barnard has brilliantly analyzed projectionists’ appalling labor conditions in several countries as evidenced in the trade discourse and also argued for how this, the last leg in the production chain, was of paramount importance for releasing the full potential of the work invested in the previous steps in the production process. Barnard’s pioneering essay pointedly questions the blocking out of the exhibition practices in the theoretical discourse regarding spectatorship and theories of film narration, especially the fine-tuning and managing of projection speed from the booth. Obviously, the experiences in the auditorium to a large extent depended on projectionists’ dexterity. Such key experiential factors deserve a study of its own along the lines opened up by Barnard’s essay.

Barnard’s observations of projection speed tie in with Terry Ramsaye’s historical observation concerning the standardization of reel length. “The reel of about one thousand feet in length, was determined by the requirements of the vaudeville bill,” writes Terry Ramsaye about the materials handed in the booth. “The pictures had to occupy about the average time of a turn, approximately twelve to fourteen minutes. The capacity of the projectors was built to meet the time requirement.” Be that as it may, but the format for film reels for long remained at circa 1,000 feet even after larger magazines and projectors with capacity to match them were available on the market. Vaudeville was a high-paced entertainment form quickly moving from one turn to the next, perhaps matching the American nervousness and restlessness posited as an aspect of modernity by George M. Beard already in the 1880s and analyzed by Tom Lutz as indicative of the mental landscape of 1903, a year when short story films began to surface.

The discursive fragments fidgeted with in this essay, and mainly picked up from MPW, suggest that the years around 1913 was a period when American film exhibition changed to a more general two-projector model in the US to the benefit of restless Americans in the big and small houses. This
The model was eminently suited to uninterrupted feature screening for audiences used to a brisk tempo between vaudeville turns, hence the discourse on waits and delays and the elimination of intermissions in metropolitan first-run houses already around 1910. In Sweden, in the absence of vaudeville culture, audiences were not primed for up tempo entertainment. And along the lines discussed by Barnard, the working conditions were presumably quite different depending on the amount of projectors to handle, which in turn prompted union interventions in many countries concerning safety measures and minimum staffing.

On a different note: was the serial film, emerging en masse in 1914, in part a response to the gradual prominence of features in first-run theaters? The serial format offered smaller theaters with only one projector an opportunity to present an alternative attraction in full by using magazines holding two reels. Ben Singer mentions that serials were rarely screened in large, first-run theaters but rather at small neighbourhood venues.63 Was this, partly perhaps, a program component that allowed also smaller theaters with only one projector to whisk out annoying breaks? Again, more research is called for. We pause for now.

Notes

1. Given the emphasis on the 1910s, I mainly analyze American trade discourse from that period. I am, for example, not taking into account the rich discourse in the trade magazine The American Projectionist, which began publication in 1923, at a time when the American practice, in the sense I am discussing, had long been established. When moving over to Europe and Sweden the materials from the 1920s is very relevant given the then ongoing exhibition shifts.
4. For an excellent account of the threshold experience, see Ben Brewster’s essay, ‘A Scene at the Movies’.
5. Kathryn H. Fuller’s research is key for the upsurge in studies devoted to small-town film exhibition, especially her At the Picture Show.
7. Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema; Keil, Early American Cinema in Transition; Keil and Stamp, American Cinema’s Transitional Era; For perspective on the breakthrough for feature films, see Frykholm, Framing the Feature Film.
8. Waller, Main Street Amusements; Abel, Americanizing the Movies and ‘Movie-Mad’ Audiences, 1910-1914; Moore, Now Playing: Early Moviegoing and the Regulation of Fun; Olsson, Los Angeles Before Hollywood.
11. Before it was formally adopted the proposal was printed in Collier, “Movies” and the Law’, 13.
13. Richardson, ‘Projection Department’, 984-985. Images on p. 985. Clune’s competitor Arthur Hyman runs his theaters in a similar fashion; see reportage with illustration from the booth at the College Theater – White, ‘Los Angeles, City of Theaters’, 86.
15. Richardson, *Motion Picture Handbook*.
28. Sargent, ‘Advertising for Exhibitors’, 178. Several smaller theaters advertised their two machines and no annoying delays as distinguishing aspect of their shows in 1914. For example, The New Model Theater (West 69th Street in Chicago), Grogg’s (Bakersfield), and Crystal (Portland, Indiana) – *Suburban Economist* [Chicago], 13 February 1914, 3; *The Morning Echo: Bakersfield, California*, 16 October 1914, 7; *Commercial-Review* [Portland, Indiana], 16 November 1914, 1.
Typed account attributed to Filmnytt, June 1925 in Olle Waltä's Collection, Swedish Film Institute.

42. Olsson, ‘Nils Kroks Social Pathos and Paul Garbagni’s Style’.
43. Magnusson, Huru ett biografmanuskrift bör utföras.
44. Münsterberg, The Film: A Psychological Study, 86-87.
47. Richardson, ‘Projection Department’, 278.
49. Richardson, ‘Projection Department’, 1237.
51. Anon., ‘“Quo Vadis” on View Today’.
52. In George Kleine Papers, Box #25, Subject File: Hampton, Benjamin, Library of Congress. I am indebted to Joel Frykholm for putting this in my hands.
57. Anon., ‘Correspondence’, 1036.
58. Anon., ‘Bost Ball a Bif Affair’, 1657.
63. Singer, Melodrama and Modernity, 203.

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**About the author**

Jan Olsson is a professor in Cinema Studies at Stockholm University. He is the recipient of multiple research grants and has been a Visiting Professor at multiple universities; mainly in the U.S. Current research interests include early cinema, television studies, celebrity studies, archival practices, and the global reach of American media. Apart from a handful of edited collections, for example *Allegories of Communication: Intermedial Concerns from Cinema to the Digital* (with John Fullerton, 2004), *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* (with Lynn Spigel, 2004), *Media, Popular Culture, and the American Century* (with Kingsley Bolton, 2010), Olsson has published five single-authored monographs, the latest *Los Angeles Before Hollywood: Journalism and American Film Culture, 1905-1915* (2008) and *Hitchcock à la Carte* (2015).