The Glittering Machine of Modernity: The Chinatown in American Silent Film

Ruth Mayer

> "Ever been to a studio before?"
> "Never have."
> She liked it. There was no heavy closeness of grease-paint, no scent of soiled and tawdry costumes which years before had revolted her behind the scenes of a musical comedy. This work was done in the clean mornings, the appurtenances seemed rich and gorgeous and new. On a set that was joyous with Manchu hangings a perfect Chinaman was going through a scene according to megaphone directions as a great glittering machine ground out its ancient moral tale for the edification of the national mind.
>
> —F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922)[1]

Gloria Patch, Fitzgerald's ambivalent heroine of *The Beautiful and the Damned*, is hoping, in vain, for a career in film at the time of her visit to the movie set. It may very well be that Gloria likes the set for the wrong reasons—her reaction seems to qualify her for the role of the consumer rather than producer of images. Her fascination with the "glittering machine" of movie-making mirrors the fascination expressed by people the world over at the time—it is the smoothly running mechanism that attracts her, the world in which the chaos and clutter of everyday reality has been converted and aestheticized into a perfect arrangement—a dream factory.

The splendor of this dream is conveyed by means of a Chinese setting in Fitzgerald's scene, and his choice of subject matter and site is in keeping with the film industry of the day.

Chinese themes, and in particular Chinatown scenarios, were hugely fashionable in the film industry of the 1910s and 1920s, and their popularity survived the silent-era film industry's move from the east coast to California. This popularity had to do with the Chinese presence in the United States, with fears related to immigration, overseas expansion, the international labor market, and the ensuing processes of cultural diversification, as numerous critics have pointed out.[2] But the vignette from Fitzgerald's novel may serve as a reminder that the anxieties and apprehensions about the Chinese and about Chinese America in the first third of the twentieth century were mixed with desire and fascination—that the logic of orientalism is as much about attraction as it is about repulsion.

Most of the critical work devoted to early Chinatown films has focused on the fact that these urban enclaves are generally represented as cauldrons of crime and perversion. Opium dens, brothels, joss houses, and dark alleys are made out as the classical sites of the genre, while the films' Chinese protagonists are hatchet men and opium addicts, slave traders, and corrupt tong bosses. But there is one standard setting with its stock figures, which has gained far less critical attention, even though it was just as popular as the above repertory: the Chinatown antique or curio shop, with the Chinese merchant or storekeeper as its central occupant. *The Social Buccaneer* (1916), *Mystic Faces* (1918), *The City of Dim Faces* (1918), *Broken Blossoms* (1919), *The Tong Man* (1919), *A Tale of Two Worlds* (1921), *The First Born* (1921), to name just a few examples, all revolve around the Chinese store. This is not to say that the stereotypical Chinatown of vice and depravity does not come into view in these silent-era films—it does, and quite starkly so—but it is mixed up with comparatively neutral imageries of economic exchange, consumption, exotic display, and cultural contact. In what follows I would like to reflect upon the function of commercial sites and scenarios of consumption in the Chinatown film, the function of themes, that is, that are less fraught with immediately negative associations than the settings which have attracted most scholarly attention.

Up to now, commercial themes and sites have largely interested critics working on so-called art films of the period, such as Cecil B. DeMille's *The Cheat* (1915) or D. W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919). Here, the topic has been approached against the backdrop of melodrama studies and with a view to the function of filmic mise-en-scène. *Broken Blossoms* will also be central to my analysis, but by setting it into a slightly different context I hope to bring to light some implications of its aesthetics and ideology that have not been discussed before.

Where does this fascination with commercial sites and commodity culture in the Chinatown film come from? In the very first place, the choice of site and character reflects the historical fact that during the time of Chinese Exclusion (1882–1943), merchants were one of the few professional groups exempt from the immigration restrictions.[3] In addition, the 1910s and 1920s were a period in which an American consumer culture consolidated and diversified.[4] Yet the Chinatown film is not exactly known as a paragon of social realism, so there is clearly more to this focus and theme than its putative correspondence to real-life conditions. A detailed reading of the films

might help to get a grip on the function of images of consumption in this context. Before I turn to the films, however, I will map out a context for this reading, by focusing on two quite different ways of visualizing and evaluating the logic of commerce and consumption at the turn of the twentieth century: the figure of the ornament and the idea of decadence. Significantly enough, both concepts, as different as they are, are closely, if indirectly, connected to the discourses of orientalism.

Ornamentalization

The antique or curio store is a site which in its very function epitomizes the aesthetic dimensions of commerce. It encourages the indulgence in exotic splendor, lavish decoration, and luxurious excess, epitomizing the kind of self-serving, dysfunctional spectacle which caught the eye of Fitzgerald's protagonist in *The Beautiful and the Damned*. Silent-era Chinatown films are stuffed with exotic things; Chinese objects or ornaments often form a central point of reference for the plot or even the title of such films (for example, *The Sable Lorcha* [1915], *The Forbidden Box* [1919], *Mandarin's Gold* [1919], *The Purple Cipher* [1920], and *The Scarlet Dragon* [1920]), often seeming to stand in for Chinese people—signifying Chineseness, as it were. In the vignette from Fitzgerald's novel, the gorgeous "Manchu hanging" comes into view before the "perfect Chinaman" meets the eye, and as a consequence the Chinese decorative object and the Chinese person seem to form a pleasurable entity—embodying the joyful experience of smooth interaction which forms the core impression of the scene. This logic of a concatenation of things and beings has been characterized as a more pervasive phenomenon in the cultural scene of the early twentieth century. For Siegfried Kracauer, the principle of reification, exemplarily expressed in the figure of the "mass ornament," evolves as a central element of a global aesthetics of capitalist production:

> A change in taste has been taking place quietly in the field of physical culture . . . . It began with the Tiller Girls. These products of American "distraction factories" are no longer individual girls, but indissoluble female units whose movements are mathematical demonstrations. Even as they crystallize into patterns in the revues of Berlin, performances of the same exactitude are occurring in similarly packed stadiums in Australia and India, not to mention America. Through weekly newsreels in movie houses they have managed to reach even the tiniest villages. One glance at the screen reveals that the ornament consists of thousands of bodies, sexless bodies in bathing suits. The regularity of the patterns is acclaimed by the masses, who themselves are arranged in row upon ordered row.[5]

These observations, which open Kracauer's 1927 essay "The Mass Ornament," bring to the fore how the differences between the living body and the lifeless arrangement, subject and object, are being systematically dissolved in the world of popular media and entertainment. Ornaments are purely formal arrangements—superficial, intricate, dazzling figures, which are pleasing and puzzling to the eye, yet hard to "read," since at least in their modernist variation they do not rely upon an overarching authoritative semiotic system.[6]

Kracauer's observations could be complemented with another diagnosis of the ornamental (or, as this author has it, "hieroglyphic") aesthetic of modern mass culture, a diagnosis which explicitly (and exclusively) relates its subject matter to film. In 1922, Vachel Lindsay published the second, revised edition of *The Art of the Moving Picture*, a study in which he reflects upon the same developments which Kracauer discusses, yet comes to different conclusions than his Marxist contemporary. In the movies, according to Lindsay, "while the actors tend to become types and hieroglyphics and dolls, on the other hand, the dolls and hieroglyphics and mechanisms tend to become human."[7] Lindsay thus brings to the fore a reciprocity of the process of ornamentalization (or hieroglyphic transfiguration) which was not foregrounded in Kracauer.

The early filmic depictions of Chinatown, I shall argue, exemplify the process that Kracauer and Lindsay trace. Time and again, in these films, things and people merge into ambiguous arrangements, with people being displayed like things and things taking on a considerable degree of agency. In addition, the very boundaries between things and people are constantly called into doubt. In what follows, I draw attention to the *processes* of ornamentalization, to the techniques and strategies which are used to turn ordinary beings and things into exotic ornamental arrangements. My understanding of the "ornament" thus deviates from Kracauer's model in that it pays more attention to the ornamentalization of individual bodies or characters. In contrast to Kracauer, I am less interested in an exploration of general principles of reification or alienation, but in the aesthetic and ideological effect which this principle may have on a more singular level.[8] On these grounds, Lindsay's approach is closer to my own. After all, modernist ornamentalization might involve a general "draining" of reference, but it never discards the referential function altogether—the Tiller Girl display evoked by Kracauer would not work if the ornamental form effectively effaced the individual bodies (or "units," in Kracauer's vocabulary) that constitute it.

The processes of ornamentalization are intricately connected to the emerging urban realities of the early twentieth century.[9] The Chinatown presents a particularly fraught version of modern urbanity in its configuration of periphery and center, inclusion and exclusion, West and East. Seen in this way, filmic Chinatowns constitute an exemplary instance of the negotiations of modernity, figuring a paradigmatically modern space that corresponds with the "hyperstimulus of the modern metropolis," which Ben Singer designates as a characteristic feature of modernity in the early twentieth century.[10] In this, the filmic sites resemble their real-life counterparts, even though real and filmic Chinatowns have otherwise little in common.[11]

In addition, ornamentalization may be associated with the very unfolding of a filmic aesthetics at the outset of the twentieth century, an aesthetics which hovers uneasily between representation (of an extra-filmic social reality) and self-reference (to filmic technology, filmic modes of perception, and the star system). The Chinatown film captures the workings and the logic of the dream factory particularly well: it signals both social reality and the practices and circumstances of film production in the early twentieth century, and does so by means of an elaborate concatenation of things and bodies. However, as will become clear, I disagree with Kracauer's estimation of the effect

of modern ornamental displays. I argue that there is more to these enactments than stupefaction and stultification, that they do not just mirror a social reality of capitalist production. Rather, the films act as ambiguous configurations that variously disguise and disclose the character of materialism around which they revolve.

Chinese Things

At the turn of the twentieth century, Bill Brown argues, "the invention, production, distribution, and consumption of things suddenly came to define a national culture" in the United States.[12] He cites an anonymous writer in *The Atlantic Monthly* of 1906 who calls the new century "the age of things." A logic of possession was taking over in this period, and it was increasingly seen to cut both ways: "We realize that we don't possess [the things], they possess us," the writer continues.[13]

The idea that "things own us" is charged with various degrees of anxiety. In these and many similar reflections, a development with a momentum of its own is envisioned—a process of commodification and commercialization which is no longer controlled by people. Neither producers nor consumers have full command over its workings. Karl Marx saw as early as 1867 that the circulation of goods tends to become self-serving and that in the world of consumption the "products of the human hand" become "autonomous figures which have a life of their own, and interact among themselves and with man."[14] By the turn of the century, this insight was widely accepted. Many shared Marx's skepticism toward the universal growth of commodity fetishism, even if they might not have agreed with his final conclusions.

The German physician and cultural critic Max Nordau's voluminous assessment of the European fin de siècle, *Entartung* (published in 1892 and titled *Degeneration* in the English translation of 1895), is a case in point. The book resonated not only with German and French, but also with American fears and phobias of the period.[15] Nordau's work is concerned with the condition of the arts and of literature at the turn of the twentieth century—a condition that Nordau considers to be marred by decadence, nervous overstimulation, and hysterical sensationalism.

For Nordau, the pathological effect of a globalized and mediatized culture is brought to the fore most clearly in the practice and self-fashioning of artists—who, according to him, are not so much geared towards exploring the world of the future but rather caught in morbid self-reflection. It is in the private homes of these "unscrupulous copyists and plagiarists" that their true nature becomes most obvious.[16]

> Here are at one stage properties and lumber-rooms, rag-shops and museums. The study of the master of the house is a Gothic hall of chivalry with cuirasses, shields and crusading banners on the walls; or the shop of an Oriental bazaar with Kurd carpets, Bedouin chests, Circassion marghilehs and Indian lacquered caskets. By the mirror on the mantelpiece are fierce or funny Japanese masks. Between the windows are staring trophies of swords, daggers, clubs and old wheel-trigger pistols. Daylight filters in through painted glass, where lean saints kneel in rapture. In the drawing-room the walls are either hung with worm-eaten Gobelin tapestry, discoloured by the sun of two centuries (or it may be by a

> deftly mixed chemical bath), or covered with Morris draperies on which strange birds flit amongst crazily ramping branches, and blowzy flowers coquet with vain butterflies. . . . Startling is the effect of a gilt-painted couch between buhl-work cabinets and a puckered Chinese table, next an inlaid writing-table of graceful rococo. On all the tables and in all the cabinets is a display of antiquities or articles of vertù, big or small, and for the most part warranted not genuine; a figure of Tanagra near a broken jade snuff-box, a Limoges plate beside a long-necked Persian waterpot of brass, a bonbonnière between a breviary bound in carved ivory, and snuffers of chiseled copper. (D, 10)

The description, which runs on for well over another page, ends with the conclusion that "[e]verything in these houses aims at exciting the nerves and dazzling the senses. . . . All is discrepant, indiscriminate jumble" (D, 11).

In many respects, this setting could be read as a scenario of globalization run wild, representing a world where the periphery hit home with a vengeance, inundating the metropolitan scene with things that do not allow for distanced contemplation but overwhelm, excite, and eventually root out what appears as the essence of respectable Europeanness: rationality, distanced contemplation, and level-headedness. In particular, "Oriental" features determine this new aesthetics of indulgence, sensationalism, and luxurious languor.[17]

In Nordau's list of decadent arts, one is missing, for it was too early for him to conceive of it in terms of the fundamental upheaval that it would finally effect: film. However, this medium and its public reception capture the very dynamics mapped out by Nordau. Film exemplifies an artistic engagement which does not aim at education or elevation but stimulates, excites, envelops, and arouses, which does not cater to reason but to sensuality, and which mingles with parts of the modern world that are neither respectable nor clean. When Nordau describes a fashionable trend in his contemporary theater world, he might as well have been describing the world of early film:

> The new school fetch the puppet theatre out of the nursery, and enact pieces for adults which, with artificial simplicity, pretend to hide or reveal a profound meaning, and with greater talent and ingenuity execute a magic-lantern of prettily drawn and painted figures moving across surprisingly luminous backgrounds; and these living pictures make visible the process of thought in the mind of the author who recites his accompanying poem, while a piano endeavours to illustrate the leading emotion. And to enjoy such exhibitions as these society crowds into a suburban circus, the loft of a back tenement, a second-hand costumier's shop, or a fantastic artist's restaurant, where the performances, in some room consecrated to beery potations, bring together the greasy habitué and the dainty artistocratic fledgling. (D, 15)

Undoubtedly, Nordau's cultural pessimism would have been further confirmed and entrenched had he witnessed how in the United States people of all classes and races would soon mix in dingy movie houses to watch sensationalist scenarios of low life, corruption, criminality, and licentiousness. He would not have been surprised to learn that one of the most favored settings of these scenarios was oriental to the core: the Chinatown, and, even more particularly, the Chinese curio store.

Nordau's description of the decadent artist's home rings with disgust, but it extends over two pages, registering in minute detail every facet of the corrupt world under investigation, revealing in the accuracy and close attention to detail, a paradoxical and indubitably unconscious attraction to that world, which Nordau would have been loath to admit. His obsessive mapping resonates with the equally ambiguous attention which Chinatown films lent to the processes of commodification and consumption. While the images of the contact zones between Chinese and white America, the sites where goods and money are exchanged and where things and bodies touch, are undeniably fraught with racist overtones and phobias, they just as clearly reveal the forces of attraction and desire, particularly when these scenarios are approached indirectly, mediated by the "dream factory" of cinematic production.

Ornamental Death: *Broken Blossoms*

Most critical writings about Chinese images in silent era American film take on, in some way or other, D. W. Griffith's Broken Blossoms (1919), a film that did indeed come to constitute a landmark for the field of cinematic representations of Asian Americans.[18] But when it comes to the popular genre of Chinatown films, Broken Blossoms is far from typical. As John Kuo Wei Tchen has pointed out, the film's release was announced as "the Art Sensation"; rather than focusing on the film's story line, the film's advertising enthused about "the 'poetic delicate work of art, a tragedy of the first order,' by Griffith."[19] Broken Blossoms is indeed too sophisticated in its techniques and markedly "artistic" approach to fit fully into the generic frame. It came to be received as an "art film" by film critics throughout the twentieth century, many of whom approached the film in close connection with Griffith's controversial Birth of a Nation of 1915.[20] This film-analytical and film-historical framing might also be responsible for the attention that the representation of objects—props, outfits, sceneries; in short, the film's mise-en-scène—has garnered in the critical debate about the film. And though I will profit from many of these observations in what follows, I take a different approach to Broken Blossoms than previous analyses by placing the film in the context of the Chinatown film genre in spite of the obvious divergences. I contend that Broken Blossoms unfolds an aesthetic repertoire which can also be found in other films of the time that deal with Chinatown. But I argue that in Broken Blossoms these techniques are employed for different ends than in the majority of films belonging to the same genre. To make this point, I will turn to a more typical example of the Chinatown genre film of the day: The Tong Man, which came out in the same year as Broken Blossoms. Finally, I will sketch some further implications of the comparison by discussing another silent Chinatown classic, A Tale of Two Worlds (1921).

Griffith's film is set in a Chinatown, but it is not set in the United States—Broken Blossoms takes place in the Limehouse District of London. And yet, as Susan Koshy observes, "Griffith's Chinatown [although] geographically located in London . . . is discursively located in the U.S."[21] The setting owes to the fact that Griffith based his

film on an English short story, Thomas Burke's "The Chink and the Child" from the 1917 collection *Limehouse Nights*. In line with Burke, Griffith enacts a melodramatic fairytale world furnished with a cruel brute of a father, a beautifully suffering child-heroine (played by Lillian Gish), and a mysterious "Yellow Man" (played by the white actor Richard Barthelmess) as a highly ambivalent savior figure.

Much has been written about the ambiguity of the Yellow Man (whose name in the story, Cheng Huan, is never used in the film's intertitles). It has been observed that his intervention on behalf of "the Girl" (whose name, Lucy, is also dropped) is marred by his obvious sexual attraction to the white victim.[22] The reflections on the representation of, or rather circulation around, the theme of miscegenation in Griffith's film have been developed with close reference to the film's obvious fascination with the world of commerce and consumption.[23] After all, one of the film's main settings is a Chinese store, run by the Yellow Man, and it is this store that provides shelter to the Girl after a particularly brutal beating by her father. She is then nursed back to health in the storekeeper's private quarters, which "are opulent and ornate, redolent of ritual and consumption" and in which she is gradually transformed into an oriental object herself—becoming one of the Yellow Man's "shop window dolls on display for his visual contemplation and adoration, an object of lust and veneration."[24] (Fig. 1)

The Chinese store, and even more so the living quarters above the store, assume the connotation of a world apart, a beautiful retreat from the brutal reality of working-class life, as Sandy Flitterman-Lewis points out:

> From its most obvious signifiers (the lines of poetry in the intertitles, the floral references of its central metaphor) to its more oblique (the circulation of figures that link this sequence to its predecessor at the shop: doll, flower, window/mirror, and desiring gaze), to the materials of its construction (ethereal, chiaroscuro lighting, gestures of pantomime, expressive close-ups), the sequence is an apotheosis of religious and sexual ecstasy, the ineffable inscribed.[25]

"Style itself becomes a character" in Griffith's film, concludes Flitterman-Lewis.[26] Indeed, the film's implementation of mise-en-scène anticipates what Thomas Elsaesser has marked as a characteristic feature of the 1950s family melodrama: in its very excess and plenitude, the mise-en-scène of *Broken Blossoms* expresses insights about the characters which the film and its producers do not want or dare to address openly.[27]

Yet while the Chinese store and living quarters figure as a kind of fairy-tale retreat, in stark contrast to the Girl's dingy abode, they are simultaneously made out as a site of misery and degradation for the storekeeper himself—the earthly equivalent to the "hell" about which an eager missionary warns the immigrant early in the film. This contrast is amplified by Griffith's decision to begin his narrative in China rather than London (where Burke's short story is exclusively located) and to depict the Yellow Man's rich spiritual past in the film's opening scenes—presenting a world of calm, peace, and patriarchal protection. By juxtaposing these scenes to the scenes in the Limehouse District, the film seems to first establish a marked dichotomy between

Fig. 1. The Girl (Lillian Gish), looking at dolls in the shop window, and The yellow Man (Donald Barthelmess), looking at her from inside the shop, in Broken Blossoms.

spirituality—associated with the East—and materialism—associated with the West, only to collapse this distinction in turn.

After all, in the course of the film the Yellow Man comes to stand not only for spirituality but figures also as the representative of the fascinations of the material world. By this token, Griffith's film eventually replicates the logic of Burke's story, in which the Chinese protagonist is never equipped with a spiritual past to begin with, but is instead made out as a "poet," "tinged with the materialism of his race."[28] Still, what sounds like a contradiction or paradox is easily suspended on the grounds of aesthetics—the extremes of spirituality and materialism, subject world and object world, souls, bodies, and things, merge in the aesthetics of the ornament.

This becomes particularly apparent in the representation of the Girl. The Girl is not only "orientalized," as Gina Marchetti has shown, but also "ornamentalized": in the strange back and forth of the scenes of convalescence and restoration, the Girl is simultaneously transformed from a suffering waif into a beautiful object and from a "poor thing" into a person. Dressed in a rich robe, adorned in flowers, and equipped with a Chinese doll, the Girl is obviously reified, but when she looks at herself in the mirror and smiles her first and only natural smile of the film (elsewhere she pathetically and melodramatically uses her fingers to force her mouth into a sad semblance of a smile in order to please her father), she also reveals what every spectator of the day knew all along to be there, underneath the tattered clothes and dirty make-up: the glamorous, beautiful star, Lillian Gish. (Figs. 2 and 3) True, the scene is sexually charged as it is framed by the Yellow Man's lustful gaze, but he is as inert and para-

Figs. 2 and 3. The Girl's tragic smile and her transformed "star" personality in Broken Blossoms.

lyzed by Gish's beauty as the spectators in front of the screen—it is not his agency that brought about the transformation, but the agency of the things—the robe, the flowers, the doll, the candles—that emphasize the Girl's true nature. Along these lines, Vachel Lindsay's assessment of the power of the moving image—to make "all the inanimate things which, on the spoken stage, cannot act at all, the leading actors"—is almost triumphantly driven home.[29]

While things gain human agency in this scene, the role of the human being onscreen becomes increasingly more complicated. After all, this scene is hinged, eventually, no longer upon the diegetic plausibility of the Girl, but involves, more and more, an appreciation, conscious or unacknowledged, of Lillian Gish's performance skills.[30] We must not forget that the first "true" smile of the film is also the actress's signature smile—so that the epitome of spontaneity simultaneously points to the performative aspect of the entire scene. By dint of the logic of ornamentalization, the Girl is presented as both orientalized object and commodified (star) image in this scene, figuring forth a space at a distance from the real world that invites the audience to retreat to an enclave of self-indulgence and beauty, which may take the form of Chinese quarters here but is really nothing but the realm of the dream factory itself.

In the course of this scene, however, not only the Girl is transformed. Much has been written about the objectification or fetishization of the Girl in the film, who acts as a "token of property, power, and moral legitimacy that circulates" between the film's male characters.[31] But it should also be noted that the Yellow Man undergoes the same fate—shrinking back from the temptation of sexual contact, he becomes part of the setting, an automaton playing a flute, a life-sized doll at the command of the beautiful being in his bed, who eventually takes his own life shortly after the Girl's life ends. Richard Barthelmess's bloodless performance and lethargic demeanor underscores this effect of reification—this is not an agent, but a decorative object. The uneasy position between subject and object marks the figure from the very beginning of the film, but this becomes most apparent in a central scene in which a friend of the Girl's father has some business in the Yellow Man's store and discovers the Girl's presence upstairs while the Yellow Man has gone out to get change. When the storekeeper returns, the customer, who is viciously pleased with his discovery, approaches the astonished Chinese and picks a speck of lint off his jacket. This is the one and only moment of physical contact between a white man and an Asian in the film; even the scenes of violence take place at a distance. Set in the store, the contact zone between whites and Asians, it marks the Chinese body's object status—he appears like a piece of the store's fittings, a doll or mannequin—unknowing and inert, a plaything for the film's evil white men.

In the course of this transformation of the main figures into things, the inanimate objects onscreen gain even more weight and significance. The audience is invited to enjoy the interaction of people and things as a pleasurable, thrilling spectacle. The fact that the action is set in England contributes to the effect of a far-away puppet-play rather than an engagement with a contemporary real space. This logic culminates in the film's ending, when the Yellow Man lays out the Girl's dead body with a final flourish of decoration, before he kills himself—his own dead body falling to the ground

to allow for a last long shot of the Girl's beautiful corpse. The Yellow Man's last arrangements of the Girl's dead body reverberate with allusions to an earlier scene in the film, in which the Girl collapsed on the floor of the store and the Yellow Man, in an opium trance, stared uncomprehendingly at her prostate body—already the Girl is more ornament than living being. The film's audience is invited to share the Yellow Man's drugged perspective at the end of the film, to passively take in the perfection of the dead body on display and—by extension—to perceive the titillating story of miscegenation and subjugation as a beautiful tragedy set in a far-away region at a safe distance from contemporary debates and laws in the United States. This is precisely where contemporary Chinatown films set in the United States differ most glaringly: they shape audience perspective not so much by highlighting the exotic distance, but by suggesting expertise where strangeness rules.

Images of Chinatown

Perhaps it is far-fetched to read the Yellow Man's dumb stare when under the influence of opium as a comment on the moviegoer's oblivious immersion. Yet to approach the entertainment industry in terms of intoxication and addiction was far from unusual at the time of the release of *Broken Blossoms*, as Sabine Haenni has pointed out with reference to popular writing about the mass media in the early twentieth century: "According to these accounts, opium smoking had the same kinds of effects that Hollywood would later be accused of producing through such institutions as the star system. It may therefore be no surprise that opium smoking was associated with leisure tout court . . . ."[32]

Haenni raises this point while reflecting on the popularity of the Chinatown in white middle-class culture of the early twentieth century. She starts from the observation that tourism and the media, the two most popular, and in many respects contiguous, modes of approaching Chinatown from a white perspective, had problematical implications— aiming ultimately at the consolidation "of the middle-class, imperial nation."[33] But this very effort at consolidation and hierarchization, she argues, goes along with an interesting reconceptualization of the ideas and functions of cultural difference. In particular, the figure of ornamental excess, the idea of a sensory overload stimulated by the Chinatown setting came to function as a crucial element in the context of Chinatown enactments:

> Ultimately, such accounts of Chinatown's surface aesthetic point to the fear that "Chineseness" may be beyond the bounds of an intelligible identity or a coherent self, especially when excessive decorations seem to mark mere profusion and lack of order. In such a context, Chinatown and the Chinese are marked as "queer," an epithet . . . meant to evoke the indescribability of the neighborhood's identity, its incapacity—or unwillingness—to conform to commonly available concepts of identity itself. And yet, even as Chinatown's gaudy surfaces raised questions of intelligibility and self-coherence, even as it challenged American journalists' ability to describe it without descending into confusion, the neighbor-

> hood's impulse to decorate also resulted in an aesthetization of difference that ultimately promoted the quarter's attractiveness.[34]

The Chinatown of the sensational press is characterized by an overabundance, an excess, an ornamental surplus, which does not allow for rational or logical decoding, especially since the signs, instead of suggesting a carefully conceived design, appear to have sprung from the sheer plenitude of people and things in the neighborhood. To try and decode the messages behind these colorful displays would be futile and pointless. On these grounds, Chinatown turns out to be an exemplarily aesthetic site, as Haenni contends. In a way, Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* addresses this very same experience and phenomenon when the film dwells obsessively on the object world of the Chinese store. But Griffith's "art film" tries to gain control over the plenitude of signs by arranging them into ornaments which are ultimately lifeless formations—it is no accident that his film ends with the long shot of a corpse.

Chinatown in its very unreadability, contingency, and sensory plenitude encapsulates the world of the future, a world in the process of emerging, as also Nordau had evoked it. Nordau's response to the phenomena of the new, which I see as oddly resonating with Griffith's approach, was to call for a concerted effort at control and reorientation. By contrast, many other participants in the cultural scene of the early twentieth century might have shared the assessment, and yet chosen to embrace modernity instead of trying to curb it. The nexus of film production and film reception is a case in point, since "the cinema to some extent absorbed the functions of the utopian imagination, albeit in a diminished, alienated, and depoliticized form," as Miriam Hansen has claimed.[35]

Reading filmic representations exclusively in terms of clear-cut ideological positions, as has been the case with many Chinatown films, might thus bear the danger of disregarding some of the most powerful implications of these films. While it is undeniable that the anxieties and prejudices of the day are reflected on the screen, the films may also be seen in terms of their correspondences to an increasingly complicated reality, allowing for a pleasurable experience of the dislocation and alienation particular to the modern urban scene: the modern spectator, writes Siegfried Kracauer, taking up the popular parallel between drug consumption and cinematic entertainment, "sits as an artificial Chinaman in an artificial opium den, he turns into a trained dog which performs ridiculously clever tasks to impress a film diva, he assembles into a thunder- storm in the high mountains, he becomes a circus artists and a lion at the same time."[36] Again, as in "The Mass Ornament," Kracauer reads this phenomenon in exclusively negative terms—"you forget yourself gaping, and the big dark hole is animated with the illusion of a life which belongs to nobody and which consumes everyone."[37] But one can easily invert the scenario and highlight the transformative power emanating from the movie theater, which allows for a brief identification with beings and lives which otherwise seem at best exotically distanced, at worst irreconcilably alien. This comes to the fore in the enactments of Chinatown in the filmic Chinatown genre of the 1910s and 1920s.

Ornamental Masquerade: *The Tong Man*

Like Broken Blossoms, The Tong Man came out in 1919.[38] Directed by William Worthington, it starred the Japanese-born actor Sessue Hayakawa in the title role and the white actress Helen Jerome Eddy, decked out in Chinese outfits, as his love interest Sen Chee, daughter of the Chinese merchant Louie Toy (played by another Japanese actor, Toyo Fujita). In many respects, the film is more typical of the Chinatown film fashion of the day than Broken Blossoms: apart from the fact that it focuses on a world of extortion, violence, drug abuse, and illegal trade, The Tong Man also openly addresses the subject matter of an illicit love affair—although by contrast to many other films of the genre, it does not depict interracial attraction but presents two "Chinese" lovers separated by bounds of status and affiliation. Most of the action is set indoors, in Chinese temples, opium dens, and in the stores and storage rooms of a Chinatown that seems to tolerate a white presence only through undercover police agents and the occasional cop on a street corner. The love story between Luk Chen (Hayakawa), a hit man for the local Tong who has the intention of leaving his criminal career behind, and the merchant's daughter is played out against the backdrop of the criminal conflict between the corrupt Tong bosses and Louie Toy, the merchant who is unwilling to pay the bribes that the Tong demands. Nevertheless, Louie Toy is clearly a shadowy figure himself—an intertitle introducing him informs us that he "has grown rich trafficking in curios—and smuggling opium"—and at his first appearance on screen he is seen counting his money. He runs a lavish store of Oriental antiques, and his beautiful daughter and "most-prized possession" clearly figures as one of them.

Like many white actresses "playing Chinese" in Chinatown films (Leatrice Joy in A Tale of Two Worlds would be another case in point), Helen Jerome Eddie does not really attempt to come across as ethnically Chinese, emanating a vague and stylish exoticism instead. Throughout the film (and again, like the heroine in A Tale of Two Worlds), Eddie wears "Chinese" costumes with pants, and the outfits suggest a mix between orientalism and chic new womanhood—this Chinese girl is a flapper. Indeed, Sen Chee is the perfect match for Luk Chen, whom Hayakawa plays in cool pre-Valentino gangster style, smoking his inevitable cigarette and wearing his American dress hat in stark contrast to the dowdy Chinese caps all around.

Most of Sen Chee's scenes take place in the store, where she is seen in elegant poise next to the elaborately carved furniture, heavy draperies, Buddha figures, and the ornate cash register which time and again seems to form the perfect visual link between storekeeper, customers, and wares. At one point in the action-laden plot, the merchant's daughter is abducted and packed into a crate, which is then declared to contain "China" bought from Louie Toy. Trades and deals involving and connecting people and things mark the film on several levels, and they extend well beyond the sphere of Chinatown. After all, Luk Chan declares at some point that he is going to quit his Tong job and return to China—not in order to abandon the commercial world altogether but rather to become a "merchant prince." At the end of the film, the two lovers are on their way "home," and from their relaxed appearance we might well expect that they will resume their comfortable American lifestyle in China, trading goods

which will eventually end up in a Western curio store—so that China does not figure as a perfect world apart (as the film's happy ending vaguely suggests), but rather as an extension of the Chinatown reality we were acquainted with before.

Even more than *Broken Blossoms*, *The Tong Man* insists upon the materialism and materiality of Chinese and Chinese American culture. As in Griffith's film, the setting of the Chinese store allows for a focus on processes of cultural encounter and material exchange—exemplified by the encounters between the lovers. Their tryst evolves, significantly enough, when Sen Chee flirts with Luk Chan by hiding behind and peeking through the heavy ornamental curtain which divides the living space from the sales room of her father's store, marking a boundary between private and public which seems far from solid. This is by no means the only transitional site in *The Tong Man*. Central scenes are played out on the balcony, others take place on the thresholds between store and street, opium den and alley; doorways, entrances, and windows repeatedly frame the audience's view.

The film relies heavily on a spatial logic, suggesting a divide between insiders and outsiders, the ones in the know and the ones who are kept out, and the sites and processes of transition between these extremes. Of course, the Chinese store itself constitutes the paradigmatic intermediate space, a space of crossing, and again, as in *Broken Blossoms*, a space with transformative potential: people may easily turn into things here—as Sen Chee's enactment exemplifies. And in this film, too, reification is marked by ornamentalization. In particular, the scenes set in intermediate sites—the curtained entrance, the balcony, the thresholds—are subjected to a mise-en-scène which highlights the ornamental arrangements of people and things. The effect is most obvious in the curtain scene with the two lovers, when the draperies' ornamental pattern is seen to correspond harmoniously with Sen Chee's stylish Chinese outfits and becomingly frames her smiling face, while in the scene's countershots we see Luk Chan watching Sen Chee through a shop window decorated with tassels which then frame and dissect his gaze. (Figs. 4 and 5) The balcony is another case in point, as it features a rich growth of ferns and other "oriental" plants, a Japanese-style rice paper window screen, and an elaborately carved chair, and thus suggests a remote location of romance and exotic difference, which is then reanchored in turn in the film's diegetic world when we learn that the site is under observation. Several times the audience shares a jealous neighbor's perspective of surveillance, and again the gaze is framed by a curtain and a window which add further ornamental features to the scenario. Finally, the big Chinese letters which mark the entrance of Louie Toy's store come into close view whenever dramatic encounters are played out on this threshold, highlighting the unreadability and ominous significance of the characters who are presented against this backdrop. All of these transitional sites point to the ultimate threshold which is, however, not openly addressed in the film: the film screen which functions as the contact zone between the diegetic world and the audience. This final framing, which goes beyond diegetic functions, is also evoked in the correspondence between the Chinese letters of the film's diegesis and the American intertitles which are decoratively framed by oriental ornaments.

Figs. 4 and 5. Sen Chee (Helen Jerome Eddie), flirtatiously peeking through the curtains, and Luk Chen (Ses- sue Hayakawa), looking at her through the shop window, in The Tong Man.

As in Griffith's film, people are shown as elements of aesthetic arrangements in *The Tong Man*. But where *Broken Blossoms* stopped short in the pursuit of this effect of reified perfection, the *nature morte* or still life—in other words, ornamental death— *The Tong Man* suggests a more complicated logic of ornamentalization. Here, things and beings might enter a complex ornamental interaction, yet the individual elements constituting the whole are in constant flux, their significance and status depending very much on who is looking and who is being looked at. The camera perspective continually changes to reveal point of view shots which lend additional or new significance to certain arrangements, encounters, or exchanges. Thus, the persons on the balcony are either being watched or themselves come to engage in watching or overhearing others. This is also characteristic of the film's narration on a more general level, with respect to the very inscription of an implied audience into the film. Repeatedly, the assessment of a character, his or her function as active agent or passive object, is explicitly marked in the film as depending on specific points of view.

For example, at one point early in the film, Louie Toy decides to hide a young sailor, who has just killed another man in an impulsive act of revenge and comes running to the store, closely followed by the police. To disguise his complicity, Louie Toy steps into the entrance of his store, smoking his pipe. A close-up shows him coolly and unsmilingly surveying the scene outside, leaning in the doorframe with its Chinese lettering until he calls out to a policeman running by. (Fig. 6) His following lines are the only intertitles in the film which use the pseudo-language going for Chinese English in American films and literature of the time: "Him lun up Dupont, down Saclamento; you no like stop dlinkee tea?"

Here, ornamentalization takes effect on the most immediate visual level—Louie Toy is framed by "unreadable" Chinese signs and he "speaks" the "ornamental" language of filmic Chinese. But there is more to the scene than just ornamentalization. The (white) policeman in the film may perceive an inert and "ornamental" Chinaman; yet the (white) viewer in the movie house whom the film addresses sees a Chinese character secretly in command. And while the standard dichotomy of oriental passivity and oriental depravity is clearly being called upon here, the scene goes beyond it. After all, this episode may be about the devious act of hiding a criminal, but the criminality of the action is not highlighted, since the sailor on the run is a pretty boy who has been carefully invested with sympathetic significance beforehand—he is presented as a victim rather than a perpetrator in the scenes leading up to his escape, and he later becomes Luk Chan's likeable sidekick. Perhaps the most important dimension of the scene thus consists of the fact that it allows the white viewer to see what the white men of the film's diegesis cannot see, to penetrate the ornamental arrangement and to decode the very signs which seem meaningless to the film's naïve white "outsiders." This effect of an inside perspective is further enhanced by the language games of the intertitles, which convey "Chinese" dialogue smoothly and clearly, transcending the very linguistic differences which obstruct the understanding of the film's white people. By dint of this turn, the comprehensibility of Chinatown seems to be closely hinged upon the medium of film, since understanding depends upon the intertitles which make up for the limits

Fig. 6. Louie Toy (Toyo Fujita) misleading a policeman outside his shop in The Tong Man.

of the diegesis and for the white audience's putative limits of linguistic and cultural knowledge. Moreover, the technique of disclosing different points of view, changing perspectives, and modes of secret observation and surveillance in Chinatown, none of which the film's characters ever register, both emphasizes the ornamental surfaces of an alien world and suggests means of penetrating them, rendering the viewer an expert observer (or "reader") in a world of misinformation, lies, masquerade, and deceit. In Broken Blossoms, the ornament was all there is; in The Tong Man, it is merely a curtain which may be withdrawn.

This logic of the glance behind the curtain, which places the viewer in the position of the initiate, the expert, the person behind the scene, is also apparent on another level of thefilm's aesthetics: just like Broken Blossoms, The Tong Man is an excellent example of an early engagement with the star system, which is complicatedly entangled with the film's diegesis. Both in Broken Blossoms and in The Tong Man we see white actors of both genders playing Chinese. In addition to this, in Broken Blossoms, the twenty-five-year-old star actress Lillian Gish plays a fifteen-year-old waif. The promo- tion of both films clearly revolves around their stars' reputation—Sessue Hayakawa, Lillian Gish, and Richard Barthelmess were well-established actors in 1919. Indeed, it is important to reflect on the fact that "[w]ith Sessue Hayakawa an authentic and popular Japanese leading man [was] on hand in Hollywood," when Griffith decided to cast Barthelmess for the role of his Yellow Man.[39] By 1919, Hayakawa had managed to make himself known as the "generic Oriental" in American film, his representation of Japanese, Chinese, Siamese, Arab, and Indian characters "blurring the national boundaries and cultural differences among Asian countries" which he had meant to dutifully

represent in the first place.[40] Where Barthelmess plays Chinese by means of affected gestures and miming, Hayakawa is much more sophisticated, as Daisuke Miyao points out: "Luk Chan . . . always stands straight, walks actively, and never places his hands in front of his chest. He deviates from the 'Oriental' postures and facial expressions represented by Barthelmess."[41]

But this difference in acting styles should not be taken as an indication that *The Tong Man* is somehow more authentic than *Broken Blossoms*. After all, in *The Tong Man*, too, a white actor plays a central Asian role—Mark Robbins was cast as the villain Ming Tai—and resorts to exactly the same devices of effeminate-sly stylization as Barthelmess before him.[42] Audiences of the 1910s were very well used to the obvious maneuvers around age and ethnicity on screen—the grown woman playing a girl, the Japanese playing a Chinese, the white men and the white woman playing Asians would not have disturbed the reality effect of the films. However, while the machinations of casting would not have confused the films' viewers, their layered implications (gesturing simultaneously, though unevenly, to the films' fictional universe and to the no less fictional world of the Hollywood star system) address an implied audience which is both at ease with the standard plotlines of filmic narration and with the star system and its connotations—an audience familiar with the workings of the dream factory.

In many respects the mobilization of the star system in *The Tong Man* coincides with the effects at work in *Broken Blossoms*. The skilled and moving impersonations which point to their artifice, their actors' stardom, rely upon the ongoing vacillation between diegetic immersion and extradiegetic appreciation (of performances, techniques of representation, filmic technology, star reputations). To this day, this is an intricate part of the movie experience, but it was particularly important in the movies of the so-called transitional period, before the emergence of the classical Hollywood system.[43] Yet again, Griffith's film artfully resolves the dichotomy between story-telling and film technique, between diegesis and extra-diegetic reality, aiming at a diegetic totality as it marks, exemplarily, the perfection of its last tableau (thus anticipating, arguably, the aesthetic closure of the classical Hollywood phase). But in the less sophisticated filming of *The Tong Man* there is no such resolution. Here diegetic and extra-diegetic realities are juxtaposed rather than merged, transitions and discrepancies marked rather than smoothed over. The film joins together different acting styles and different images of Chineseness when it allows for the divergent performances of Hayakawa and of Roberts, and it presents a Chinatown that is varied, heterogeneous, and messy. Throughout the film, the very old and authentic exist next to the new and stylish, just like the antique furniture, the Joss figures, and Buddha statues in the store of the old Chinese smoking his pipe are seen next to the sleek outfit of the young Chinese smoking his cigarettes or the pantsuits of the heroine. Again, this is not to say that *The Tong Man* represents a more truthful picture of the contemporary reality (or experience) of Chinatown than *Broken Blossoms*—it does not, and it is certainly as fraught with clichés as the former film. But *The Tong Man* does convey a pleasurable (and thrilling) image of the unchecked workings of difference and diversity, while Griffith's film seems anxious to evoke these forces only as long as they remain contained by the modes of fairy-tale storytelling.

Expertise and the Ornament: *A Tale of Two Worlds*

I end these observations on the Chinatown film with a quick glance at another representative of the genre, a film which I see in close correspondence to The Tong Man: A Tale of Two Worlds, which came out in 1921, directed by Frank Lloyd.[44] The film enacts a classical topos in that it revolves around the illicit love story between a white man and a Chinese girl, which is then melodramatically resolved when we learn that the girl is really white herself, having been abducted as an infant in China from American parents. The same story was told in the same year in Wing Toy and with some variations a year later in East is West—it allowed, of course, for the elaborate enactment of biracial attraction while eliminating its attendant risk. Like The Tong Man, A Tale of Two Worlds is set in a sphere of crime and deviancy, the American Chinatown. And like many other films of the genre, A Tale of Two Worlds has an antique store as its main location, where a proud merchant father lives with his beautiful daughter ("the most prized and guarded of all his treasures" as the intertitles reveal). I contend that like The Tong Man—and in contrast to Broken Blossoms—A Tale of Two Worlds tries to mediate a "correct" approach to Chinatown and to Chinese America as exemplary instances of American modernity to its target audience of white viewers. These films do not only aim at entertainment, but also mean to reassure their audiences about a complex and heterogeneous modern urban reality and to instruct them in possible ways of negotiating this reality.

Again, the themes of deception and sophistication, of cultural naïveté and of cultural expertise are pivotal in the film; they are played out on the level of plot, casting, acting, and mise-en-scène, and they involve once more the logic of ornamentalization. At one point we thus see the film's white hero and love interest, Robert Newcombe (J. Frank Glendon), who is introduced as a "student of Chinese literature and art," being approached by a young Chinese store assistant in Chinatown. The young man, played by Yukata Abe, tries to cheat Newcombe into buying an antique scroll, for which he asks one hundred dollars, while Newcombe, who has recognized the seller's fraudulent intentions, is willing to pay only one. Later in the film, the two meet again, this time in the antique store where the young man is engaged in some handicraft work. Upon noticing Newcombe's interest, the boy looks up, grins and declares that he's "making an antique bowl." Newcombe smiles back and tells him to let him know "when it gets to be a thousand years old"—both men are laughing. Later in the same store, we see a fat matron, richly dressed, with her well-kempt husband in tow, examining the bowl, obviously impressed when she learns from the sly-looking young man that, "It was the favorite bowl of the great-grand-mother of the Emperor Chi Yang, and it is now a thousand years old." She orders her husband to pay what he wants—a hundred dollars.

Once more, the audience, which by dint of language skills and expertise would most likely be in the same situation as the buyers, is invited to side with the expert, the insider, and to laugh, together with the white man, but also the Chinese boy, at the naïveté of people who are at a loss about what is really going on. This scene echoes an earlier episode in the film which introduces the reality of Chinatown by showing a

group of white tourists who are led through the neighborhood and fooled into seeing crime and deviance when really acting and make-belief abound. "But no tourist will ever see the real life of Chinatown" runs the intertitle following this scene—and the film's plot begins for real. Of course, what "tourists" cannot see, the film's audience (which, ironically, might be constituted by the very tourists of Chinatown derided before) gets to see and decode easily and coolly.

Where *Broken Blossoms* epitomizes distance, Chinatown films like *The Tong Man* and *A Tale of Two Worlds* insinuate expertise; where ornamentalization in *Broken Blossoms* evokes alienation and non-communication, in *The Tong Man* and other similar films the same principle aims at fostering new modes of communication and exchange, and at familiarizing its audiences with a world that is different, yet more abstractly fascinating than personally threatening. It is important to stress once more that this is a fictional world, and that the Chinatown films by no means capture an authentic Chinese American experience of the day. The target audience of all of these films is white—Chinese American concerns and perspectives are not explicitly addressed or sought. But they are not categorically excluded either.[45] Thus, while films such as *The Tong Man* or *A Tale of Two Worlds* cannot be seen as challenges to the measures of immigration restriction and racist segregation of the time, and while they undeniably draw on the catalogue of racist stereotypes and cater to all kinds of anxieties and reservations, to reduce them to this racist agenda would be to miss much of what made (and makes) them fascinating.

In their ceaseless display of changing arrangements and flexible constellations between people and things, these films (inadvertently) also highlight the problems involved in identity politics of any sorts. Stereotypes are here not consolidated and cemented, but rather juggled around. Seen thus, the fact that the representation of difference in many Chinatown films is framed by the settings of commodity culture and commerce, and that the aesthetics of ornamentalization rules supreme might also indicate an uneasy awareness that ethnic diversity is produced, constructed, and subject to constant rearrangements and reappropriations. After all, identities and ethnicities in the Chinatown film are often constituted by nothing but (obviously enacted) props, such as fake beards, pant suits, dress hats, or silk gowns—they are tangibly and glaringly made-up.

The insight that the value judgments and assumptions about identities are as volatile and malleable as the things (the props and commodities) which often take center stage in the films need not raise anxieties, however. At any rate, any such anxiety is alleviated through the films' strategy of addressing their implied audiences in the roles of insiders and experts, who know how to read the complicated signs and signals of modernity and are not misled and fooled like the outsiders in the films' diegesis. They see through the tricks of the trade, as it were, and this is exactly what constitutes the pleasure of the Chinatown film set in the United States: "the commodification of Chinatown made it the locus of Chinese American modernity rather than a traditional authenticity," as Sabine Haenni concludes her observations about a different repertory of Chinatown images.[46] The popularity of these Chinatown films attest to the fact, as I hope to have

demonstrated, that early-twentieth-century audiences (and producers) were as thrilled with the advent of the new as they were frightened by contact with the unfamiliar.

Notes

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1. *The Beautiful and the Damned* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966 [1922]), 323. On the intricate interrelations between Fitzgerald's novel and the themes and techniques of movie making, see Jonathan Enfield, "'As the Fashion in Books Shifted': *The Beautiful and Damned* as Arc-Light Fiction," in *Modernism/Modernity* 14:4 (November 2007), 669–85.
2. See Eugene Franklin Wong, "The Early Years: Asians in American Films Prior to World War II," in *Screening Asian Americans*, ed. Peter X Feng (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 53–70; K. Scott Wong, "Chinatown: Conflicting Images, Contested Terrain," in *Melus* 20:1 (Spring 1995), 3–15; Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Robert G. Lee, *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999); Susan Koshy, "American Nationhood as Eugenic Romance," in *Differences* 12:1 (2001), 50–78; Peter Stanfield, "'American Like Chop Suey': Invocations of Gangsters in Chinatown, 1920–1935," in *Mob Culture: Hidden Histories of the American Gangster Film*, eds. Lee Grieveson, Esther Sonnet, Peter Stanfield (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 238–62.
3. See Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882–1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Lucy Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigration and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
4. See Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1976) and Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
5. Siegried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament" [1927], transls. Barbara Correll and Jack Zipes, in *New German Critique* 5 (Spring 1975), 67.
6. Kracauer does not address the cultural history of the ornament in any depth, but apart from the clear connections between an ornamental aesthetic and the Arabic Islamic tradition, the nineteenth- century British design bestseller *The Grammar of the Ornament* (1856) by Owen Jones, which relies upon the conjunction of orientalism and ornamentalism, forms an obvious backdrop to Kracauer's, and other modernist, approaches to the phenomenon. See Stacey Sloboda, "The Grammar of Ornament: Cosmopolitanism and Reform in British Design" in *The Journal of Design History* 21:3 (2008), 223–36.
7. Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Motion Picture* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000 [1915]), 95. My reading of Vachel Lindsay is indebted to Shane Denson's excellent analysis of Lindsay's study in "Between Technology and Art: Functions of Film in Transitional-Era Cinema," in *Funktionen von Kunst*, eds. Daniel Martin Feige, Tilmann Köppe, Gesa zur Nieden (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), 127–42.
8. The ornamentation of modernity is "an end in itself," as Kracauer puts it; by contrast to ornamental traditions in folk art and ritual, the modern ornament does not refer to a larger frame of meaning. Instead, it is entirely self-referential, and in this respect expresses the logic of its time—the logic of capitalist production: "The commodities which it creates are not actually produced to be possessed but to make unlimited profits. Its growth is bound up with that of the factory. . . . The producer works for the expansion of the business; values are not produced for values' sake." Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," 69–70.

9. See Henrik Reeh, Ornaments of the Metropolis: Siegfried Kracauer and Modern Urban Culture (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
10. Ben Singer, Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 90.
11. On this issue see Ruth Mayer, Diaspora: Eine kritische Begriffsbestimmung (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2005), 123–68.
12. Bill Brown, A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4.
13. Quoted in Brown, A Sense of Things, 5.
14. Karl Marx, Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, ed. Benedikt Kautsky (Stuttgart: Kroener, 1957), 51—my translation.
15. The original German title of Nordau's study, Entartung, was borrowed later by the Nazis to demarcate art which did not fit their narrow parameters of definition—the fact that the core term of Nazi art criticism thus stemmed from the work of a famous Zionist went largely unnoticed.
16. Max Nordau, Degeneration (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1993 [1892, tr. 1895]), 32. Henceforward abbreviated D.
17. On this logic and its unfolding in the United States see also John Kuo Wei Tchen, New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776–1882 (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 3–24 and Mari Yoshihara, Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 15–44.
18. Broken Blossoms, dir. D.W. Griffith, perf. Richard Barthelmess, Lillian Gish, United Artists, 1919. For criticism see, in particular, Marchetti, Romance and the "Yellow Peril"; Lee, Orientals; Koshy, "American Nationhood as Eugenic Romance."
19. John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Modernizing White Patriarchy: Re-Viewing D. W. Griffith's Broken Blossoms," in Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts, ed. Russell Leong (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 1991), 133–43 (138); see also Charles Affron, Lillian Gish: The Legend, Her Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 132–33.
20. For a particularly convincing reading, see Koshy, "American Nationhood as Eugenic Romance."
21. Koshy, "American Nationhood," 69.
22. See especially Nick Browne, "Griffith's Family Discourse: Griffith and Freud," in Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 223–34; Dudley Andrew, "Broken Blossoms: The Art and Eros of a Perverse Text," in Quarterly Review of Film Studies 6:1 (1981), 81–90; Julia Lesage, "Artful Racism, Artful Rape: Griffith's Broken Blossoms," in Home Is Where the Heart Is, 235–54; Marchetti, Romance and the "Yellow Peril."
23. See especially Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, "The Blossom and the Bole: Narrative and Visual Spectacle in Early Film Melodrama," in Cinema Journal 33:3 (Spring 1994), 3–15; Marchetti, Romance and the "Yellow Peril"; Lee, Orientals.
24. Lee, Orientals, 130 and Marchetti, Romance and the "Yellow Peril," 42; see also Lesage, "Artful Racism, Artful Rape."
25. Flitterman-Lewis, "The Blossom and the Bole," 10–11.
26. Flitterman-Lewis, "The Blossom and the Bole," 8.
27. Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in Home is Where the Heart Is, 43–69; see also Frank Kelleter and Ruth Mayer, "The Melodramatic Mode Revisited: An Introduction," in Melodrama! The Mode of Excess from Early America to Hollywood, eds. Frank Kelleter, Barbara Krah, Ruth Mayer (Heidelberg: Winter, 2007), 7–17.
28. Thomas Burke, "The Chink and the Child," in Limehouse Nights (New York: Robert M. McBride & Company, 1926 [1917]), http://gaslight.mtroyal.ca/chnkchld.htm, accessed August 27, 2008.
29. Lindsay, The Art of the Moving Picture, 7.
30. On Lillian Gish's star personality—on- and off-screen—and on Hollywood stardom in general see Richard Dyer, "Lillian Gish: A White Star," in The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation, second edition (London: Routledge, 2002), 149–157.
31. Marchetti, Romance and the "Yellow Peril," 35.

32. Sabine Haenni, "Filming 'Chinatown': Fake Visions, Bodily Transformations," in *Screening Asian Americans*, ed. Peter X Feng (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 21–52 (32).
33. Haenni, "Filming 'Chinatown'," 23.
34. Haenni, "Filming 'Chinatown'," 28.
35. Miriam Hansen, *Babel & Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 112.
36. Siegfried Kracauer, "Langeweile" (1924), in *Das Ornament der Masse*, 322—my translation.
37. Ibid.
38. *The Tong Man*, dir. William Worthington, perf. Sessue Hayakawa, Helen Jerome Eddy, Marc Roberts, Toyo Fujita, Superior Pictures, 1919.
39. Affron, *Lillian Gish*, 126.
40. Daisuke Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent Cinema and Transnational Stardom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 175–76.
41. Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa*, 185.
42. Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa*, 184.
43. See Shane Denson, "Tarzan und der Tonfilm: Verhandlungen zwischen 'science' und 'fiction'," in *Ich Tarzan. Affenmenschen und Menschenaffen zwischen Science und Fiction*, eds. Gesine Krüger, Ruth Mayer, Marianne Sommer (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 113–30; Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction[s]," in *Wide Angle* 8:3/4 (1986), 63–70.
44. *A Tale of Two Worlds*, dir. Frank Lloyd, perf. Wallace Beery, Leatrice Joy, J. Frank Glendon, Goldwyn Pictures Corporation, 1921.
45. It would be interesting to learn about Chinese American responses to the Chinatown film, but in spite of the often cited claim that early film acted as a means of assimilation for all kinds of ethnic audiences, it is difficult to locate detailed demographic data for early and transitional-era movie audiences—let alone to records of audience responses. "Because of its chameleonlike quality, the cinema seems to have assumed a certain threshold function, oscillating between the tradition of family-centered ethnic entertainment and the more anonymous, more modern forms of commercialized leisure," writes Miriam Hansen about film in the 1910s and 20s (Hansen, *Babel & Babylon*, 104–105), and her observation might very well extend beyond the Jewish and Italian audiences she addresses explicitly, and also apply to Chinese Americans of the day, who participated actively in the processes of modernization described by Hansen. See also Anthony W. Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
46. Haenni, "Filming 'Chinatown'," 43.