Serialization in Popular Culture

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4   The Logic of the Line Segment
Continuity and Discontinuity in the Serial-Queen Melodrama

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In the context of the massive transformation of cinema in the 1910s from the early, spectacle-oriented "cinema of attractions" (Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction") to the more narrative-based mode of the classical Hollywood style, serialization emerged as an important means of navigating changes in the technical, aesthetic and socioeconomic aspects of filmic construction and consumption.[1] What Ben Singer calls the "serial-queen melodrama" initially dominated this new form of cinematic production, with series such as *The Perils of Pauline* (1914) and *The Hazards of Helen* (1914–17) offering in weekly installments sensational images of damsels in distress—but also strong, heroic women—to keep moviegoers (including female audiences) coming back for more.[2] For Singer, these serialized story-films were in many ways continuous with the larger cultural discourses surrounding the so-called New Woman, serving both to reflect and envision changes in the construction and experience of gender roles in the early twentieth century. Moreover, according to Singer, the staging of the serial-queen melodrama continued traditions of melodramatic narration established in a variety of other media, including literature (e.g., dime novels), theater (10-20-30 melodrama) and popular newspapers (which contained both sensationalistic reporting and fictional story-telling).[3] Without denying these cultural and (media-) historical continuities, however, I would like to rethink the serial-queen melodrama in terms of the *discontinuous* aspects that are downplayed in Singer's perspective: namely, the overt demonstration of the serial-queen melodrama's specifically filmic nature on the one hand, and the interrupted seriality of its narration on the other. The self-reflexivity of the serials, as I shall argue, served to set the medium—to some extent—apart from the other media with which it was undoubtedly connected, thus rendering the film serial distinct and discontinuous with respect to print and theatrical mediations of the New Woman.[4] And the simultaneously cultural and medial discontinuity introduced through such self-reflexivity was bound up in important ways with the formal discontinuity at the very heart of the serials—with their technique, that is, of narrating a story in fits and starts, of developing the spatiotemporal continuities of an ongoing tale through the discontinuous structures of discrete episodes characteristically and dramatically interrupted by what has come to be known as the cliffhanger.[5]

As I will show in this chapter, linking these cultural, medial and formal discontinuities together has important consequences for our conception of the cinema of the 1910s as a "transitional era." More generally, it also challenges us to consider the relations of serialization processes to historically concurrent media transformations. As Roger Hagedorn has argued, narrative *seriality* and the particular *mediality* of a given serial form tend to maintain special relations with one another, as serial narratives often "serve to *promote the medium in which they appear*" (5). A non-diegetic (and often narration-disrupting) self-reflexivity is, then, in a sense a natural facet of the serial's role in helping "to develop the commercial exploitation of a specific medium" (Hagedorn 5). In the context of 1910s cinema, this meant promoting *narrative film* (as opposed to early film's primarily non-narrative spectacles, as well as the narratives of non-filmic media), and promoting it to an audience undergoing processes of transformation in terms of both class and gender. These processes resulted in the rise of both a female audience and a gentrified spectator, while transitional-era cinema nonetheless continued catering to the mass audiences of the working-class nickelodeons.[6]

Thus, despite the fact that the serial-queen melodrama was clearly influenced by conventions established in other media, it also continually reflected on the medial *difference* of serialized film narratives and concerned itself with *demonstrating* how such narratives worked. And by bringing this self-reflexive dimension to bear on Singer's argument about the serial queen's gender representations, I contend, we discover surprising intersections between gender discourses and media practices that reveal transitional-era serials as highly overdetermined sites of cultural negotiation. Here the feats of female bodies are made into spectacular images that can either (a) be admired in their own right, (b) serve to display the still spectacular medium of film, (c) attract a female audience or (d) be imbued with the media-didactic function of acquainting audiences with the new emphasis on filmic narration. In this overlap of nonmutually exclusive functions, the serial-queen melodrama exemplifies the rich and multifaceted potential of serial forms to negotiate changing relations among popular narratives, social formations and media in the midst of transition. Above all, it is the course and trajectory of such transitions that is problematized by the film serials of the 1910s, as their characteristic mechanism of the cliffhanger institutes what I call a "logic of the line segment": a logic of interruption that challenges at once the linearity of the films' narratives and the linearity of teleological histories of media and culture more generally by exploiting the productive tension between principles of continuity and discontinuity at the heart of the serialization process.

TRANSITIONS: BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

At stake in my argument for a revisionary perspective on the genre of the serial-queen melodrama is, in accordance with the foregoing, a larger set of

questions about the dynamics of serialization and the meaning of "transitionality"—both as regards the specific historical context of 1910s cinema and, more generally, in terms of what I see as serial forms' special relations to, and complex negotiations of, uncertain media transformations.[7]

Poised between the fairground origins of moving pictures and the stylistically and socially more refined cinema of the 1920s, the American cinema of the 1910s is widely referred to today as "transitional-era cinema."[8] Among other things, the transition in question is defined by changes in the film industry, which moved during this time from the East Coast to Hollywood; by changes in the consumption of films, including the change of venues from the nickelodeon to the film palace, which went along with the emergence of new audiences, notably including female audiences; and by changes in film itself, which in this decade went from one-reel novelties to five-reel feature films constructed in accordance with a perfected system of continuity editing. This is just a sampling of the changes that occurred in this period, but we see already that the transitional era was a time of sweeping, overdetermined change, which in many ways makes the era difficult to assess historically.[9]

We can describe two basic, largely incompatible perspectives on the era. On the one hand, there is a teleological view of cinematic maturation that sees the transition as a smooth development from point A to point B: from so-called "primitive" film, which grew with the help of geniuses such as D.W. Griffith into a novel—but in many ways "classical"—art form during this era. The goal or telos of the transition, according to this view, was more or less predetermined by the filmic medium's unique propensities for expression. Accordingly, the transitional era was the period in which this maturation unfolded as a continuous movement. On the other hand, this linear view has been seriously challenged over the past three decades by a view that sees pre-transitional and post-transitional cinema as embodying radically different paradigms. Tom Gunning has famously termed the cinema in its first decade of existence a "cinema of attractions," a cinema in which the medium itself was the attraction, in stark contrast to classical Hollywood's narrative focus and its virtual erasure of the materiality of the medium through its institution of continuity editing. Accordingly, early cinema was not a *primitive* form of the mature Hollywood style, but a radically *different* mode of cinema altogether.[10] And so the transitional era marked not a developmental continuity, but instead a clash between incompatible models, intersecting and competing in a historical space of nonlinear and discontinuous juxtaposition.[11]

In any case, the notion of a developmental transition *from* one determinate state *to* another is a perspective that can be maintained only in hindsight. At the time, *during* the transition, many people indeed felt that things were changing, but no one was in a position to say where exactly things were heading. In this context of uncertain and overdetermined experimentation, I contend, the film serial emerged as a means of navigating changes in the technical, aesthetic and socioeconomic aspects of filmic production and

consumption. If the transitional era was following an ambiguous and non-linear course, the formal linearity of the film serial's narration may itself be seen as an attempt to negotiate the transition, to provide the missing continuity and bridge the gap between a quickly fading paradigm and a novel one still in the process of emerging. This would mean, then, that serial narration answered questions, or attempted to answer questions, about the uncertain transformation of the medium of film.

THE SERIAL QUEEN AT THE NEXUS OF
SERIALITY AND MEDIALITY

By what means, then, or on what basis could the serial-queen melodrama help viewers navigate the transition? After all, these serial products were themselves caught up in this context of uncertain transformation, determined (indeed, overdetermined) by the changes underway. How could they transcend these determinations and provide a perspective on the as-yet-undetermined course of the transition? At stake here is a particular nexus of seriality and mediality, which I claim was instantiated by the transitional-era film serial.[12] Writing about serial narration more generally, as I mentioned earlier, Roger Hagedorn has emphasized the special relations between seriality and mediality: these are grounded in the promotion, by serial forms, of the media in which they appear. This is especially pronounced at moments of media innovation; ongoing series serve to sell new apparatuses (e.g., radios, TVs) by providing recurring content that give consumers a reason to tune in and to stay tuned for more. But because such series are concerned to promote not just themselves but also the specific media that frame them, medial self-reflexivity is a natural correlate of the serial's role in helping "to develop the commercial exploitation of a specific medium" (Hagedorn 5).

In the context of the transitional era, serials can be seen as promoting a new form of cinema: they develop, explore and promote the relatively recent innovation of *narrative film,* marking it as different from the sheer spectacle of "moving pictures," and they promote it to an audience that is itself in transition (occasioned, above all, by a shift from the lower-class, ethnically distinct nickelodeons to more respectable venues catering to more refined spectators, including an emerging female audience). Clearly, then, the transitional-era nexus between seriality and mediality that I am identifying here is not one of purely formal relation, but one that is crucially entrenched in the historical moment and its social situation, specifically in the relations of film, as a medium and an institution, to issues of class and gender. In this context, it is highly significant that the film serial was initially dominated by the serial-queen melodramas such as *The Perils of Pauline* (1914), *The Exploits of Elaine* (also 1914) or *The Hazards of Helen* (1914–1917), the heroines of which were serial attractions in their own

right. Accordingly, though I am concerned to show that the serialized narratives of the serial-queen melodrama were self-reflexively concerned with their own filmic mediality, I am also arguing that this medial self-reflexivity did not take place *at the expense of* engagement with issues of gender, but in a way that was *attuned to the social and sexual inflections of the medial transformations then underway*. As processes that unfold over time, these transformations, in turn, could best be charted serially, narrated over time, and thereby negotiated in the process of their unfolding.

It is above all with respect to the roles of, and relations between, serial narration and medial self-reflexivity that my perspective on the serial-queen melodrama diverges from that of Ben Singer. As I indicated previously, Singer stresses historical and cultural continuities, ultimately emphasizing the serial queen's thematic development from the broader cultural background, but he downplays the figure's medial specificity and the role played by seriality. For Singer, serial-queen melodramas served both as "sociological [. . .] reflections" and "utopian fantasies" with respect to changes in the lived realities and discursive constructions of gender (233). He sees the serials as following in the traditions of narration and staging established in a variety of popular, melodramatic media (including an abundance of tales revolving around daring young women venturing out of the domestic sphere). In addition to the continuities pointed out by Singer, we could add that the seriality of the serial-queen melodrama was nothing new either. Story papers and dime novels had long serialized their narratives, and pulp magazines were in the process of serializing Westerns, adventure tales and detective stories on a massive scale at exactly the moment when film discovered the serial form for itself. The film serial in general, and the serial-queen melodrama in particular, can be seen as fitting into a continuum that would lead also to comics' serialized narration, to the radio serial and, of course, to the TV series.[13]

However, this view of seriality oversimplifies the processes at work, and it overlooks the possibility that the explosion of seriality in various media was itself related to the changes that each medium faced in the wake of the emergence of other, competing media in the context of a modernity defined, in part, by a constant pressure toward media-technological innovation. Seriality, accordingly, is tied to mediality in transition, offering itself as a form of medial self-observation at times of media change and as a means of negotiating a medium's place within a changing media landscape. This, at least, is how I am suggesting that the film serial functioned in the transitional era of 1910s cinema, and I see the formal and thematic continuities that link the serial-queen melodrama to social changes and to cultural antecedents in various media as quite real, but tempered by important instances of discontinuity: above all, by self-reflexive moments that implicitly insist on the medial difference and specificity of the film serial—differences highlighted all the more against the backdrop of broader sociocultural and medial continuities.

A CINEMA OF GENDERED ATTRACTIONS

To put it a bit provocatively, we might make a case for the serial-queen melodrama as instituting a sort of "cinema of *gendered* attractions" through the seriality/mediality nexus that the genre traced. The idea is not that these films functioned in accordance with early cinema's mode of "attraction" (i.e., early film's self-reflexive focusing of attention on the novel apparatus of film for its own sake, privileging the spectacle and the sheer fact of moving pictures over their depicted content, whether visual or narrative). Above all, the earlier "attractions" paradigm, as described by Gunning for an era when film was still largely a fairground attraction, no longer applied in the 1910s: the initial novelty of film had quite simply worn off by then. With the institution of the nickelodeon around 1905, the narrative content of film accordingly took an increasingly central position, and story films progressively became the dominant attractions, edging out trick films, actualities and shots of trains steaming through tunnels.[14] The film serial, which was centrally defined by its ongoing narrative, was thus unthinkable apart from this shift away from the early film paradigm and toward narrative film. But if the classical Hollywood style, which became dominant by around 1917, distinguished itself from the cinema of attractions by constructing its narratives in self-contained and integral diegetic realms designed to absorb spectators whole, thus forbidding medial self-reflexivity and the attendant awareness of the mediating apparatus, it is important to note that this revolution had not been completely executed in transitional-era narratives, which continued to expose the mechanisms of their own construction, as we shall see shortly.[15]

On a more basic level, though, the narrative worlds of the serial-queen melodramas failed to achieve diegetic closure because of their serial exhibition and consumption practices. These implied not only the inherent incompleteness of the individual episodes, which would be taken up and continued at the next week's showing, but also the interruption between the installments by the real-life work week, by household chores, cooking, shopping, factory work and all the other familial and professional duties that viewers had to attend to before they could see what happened next in the ongoing adventures of Pauline, Elaine or Helen. As Singer emphasizes, these interruptions were compensated by other means of integrating the stories into the daily lives of (female) viewers: for example, there were fictional tie-ins with print media and advertising campaigns that kept the stories present in viewers' imaginations throughout the week.[16] But if the serialized world of fiction could thus take up residence in the world of fact, the boundary was porous in the other direction as well: the serial-queen melodrama could itself be appropriated as a form of advertisement, and the ostentatious display of fashion, in particular, provided an extra-diegetic attraction specifically geared to women viewers *qua* consumers.[17]

Other gendered attractions were the female protagonists themselves. The daring feats of these women provided fascinating spectacles in their own

right, quite apart from any narrative function they might have had. Female bodies in motion became objects of fascination for audiences of both sexes. This was tied, of course, to the utopian fantasies pointed out by Singer, but also to a significant development in the function of the female image: for these were emphatically filmic images, frenzied and frenzying moving pictures. Among other things, of course, the serial queen was an opportunity for the frenetic display of action, narratively unredeemed, and thus a means of focusing attention on images *as* images—as products of cinema in a strict sense, but overlaid with both sex appeal and emancipatory hope. In other words, the gender aspect, which Singer sees as the central interest of the genre, cannot be separated from the genre's insistence on its own cinematic means of mediating these themes. The cinema, I am suggesting, was not just a container, or the accidental venue, for the genre's display of sensational images, but something that was centrally at issue—and at issue specifically *for women.*

Consider, for instance, that serial-queen melodramas functioned as a demonstration of a woman's ability to "play," much in the sense that a figure like James Bond gets to play—but with the important difference that 007's playful relations to technical gadgets and beautiful women is sanctioned by patriarchal structures, whereas the serial queen's adventures constantly strain and challenge those structures. *The Perils of Pauline* provides a paradigmatic example. Following the obligatory death of her father-like guardian, Pauline declines an immediate marriage, opting instead for a year of adventure. In an intertitle, Pauline muses: "I suppose I'll marry Harry someday, but first I want to live a life full of excitement and adventure!" Unhampered by financial worries, she is free to play. Her dangerous escapades worry her future husband, but they are encouraged by the serial's villain, who is after her money and has no moral qualms about bumping her off to get it. Pauline's adventures, which include wild balloon rides, car races and run-ins with pirates, Indians and gypsies, are thus framed by male concerns and masculinist conceits—those of a patriarchal benefactor, a fiancé and a scheming villain—but it is Pauline herself who embodies the active agency that animates the serial. Her actions define a certain *Spielraum*, a space of play that is coterminous with the serial's narrative and visual interest.

What we have to keep in mind here is that the ability of women to engage in "play," and specifically the right of female audiences to engage in the leisure activity of moviegoing, was centrally at stake in transitional-era cinema. Offering vicarious adventures to those with a bit of expendable income and some momentary freedom from the domestic sphere, the cinema, as Miriam Hansen has argued, became an alternative public sphere for women, who were increasingly employed and might take in a movie on the way home from work or while out shopping.[18] The serial-queen melodrama courted women viewers and demonstrated, in a reflexive and exaggerated way, what it would mean for women to play, to engage in fantasy and adventure—or, in

more down-to-earth terms, to partake in entertainment without the supervision of their fathers and husbands. As an institution, the cinema in general had a great stake in all of this. While the nickelodeons had fallen into disrepute as "dens of iniquity," certainly no place for a woman,[19] the cinema sought a more respectable—and incidentally more lucrative—middle-class clientele in the transitional era. The presence of women was taken to be a sure sign of success.[20] And, in line with Hagedorn's thesis about the media-economic function of serial narratives, the seriality of the serial-queen melodrama then served to keep these new-found audiences hooked. Of course, the hook only worked if there was indeed a narrative appeal and concern for the plight of characters. And it is here that it might seem most tempting to view serial queens as the vehicles of a (teleological) transition toward the classical paradigm. The narrative techniques employed to tell their stories are, in comparison to early cinema, quite sophisticated: cross-cutting is employed to create a much-expanded space of narration, and shots are combined so as to create a more or less coherent temporality.[21]

But what sets these narrative practices definitively apart from the classical paradigm, in which all of this must take place invisibly, is a demonstrative function, as if the films are pointing out to viewers: "This is how we construct a story." This is similar in some ways to early films' demonstration of the then-novel apparatus of the cinema, a function that often eclipsed the mediated "content" of the films by foregrounding visual spectacles and trick effects. But in the serial-queen melodrama it is not so much the cinema itself as it is narrative film that is being demonstrated: that is, the emerging practices of discursive construction that will eventually form the core of classical cinema, but only when they become habitual and invisible. By explicitly demonstrating these principles, the serial-queen melodrama serves a didactic function: the genre provides training in the proper use of the changing medium. Such training requires practice, repetition and drilling. This is precisely what seriality provides. Moreover, this is a "gendered attraction" in the sense that the genre channels its media-didactic training through the female figure of the serial queen, directs it in large part at women (as an emerging audience), and defines general audiences in gendered terms (men and women alike need to learn to watch movies like women, i.e. like the gentler sex, the symbol of gentrified or middle-class respectability, in contrast to the raucous patrons of those earlier "dens of iniquity").

If this media-didactic function prevents the serial-queen melodrama from completing the diegetic integrity required by the classical paradigm, it also prevents the genre from reverting to the early paradigm's purely spectacle-based style, which offered narrative frames only as an excuse for cinema magic (as Méliès said of his own filmmaking).[22] The serial-queen melodrama is truly transitional, in a non-teleological sense—"historically anomalous," as Singer once put it. In the same context, Singer also wrote that these melodramatic serials "can be seen as a resistance to the emergence of the feature film" ("Female Power in the Serial-Queen Melodrama" 90). This is true,

I believe, but only partially: for as I have been arguing, the genre was *also* preparatory training for the classical feature. The contradiction or anomaly of transitional-era seriality is not so easily resolved.

THE LOGIC OF THE LINE SEGMENT

Finally, with reference to several examples from *The Perils of Pauline*, I would like to demonstrate briefly how the serial-queen melodrama instituted what I call the "logic of the line segment," a particularly serial logic closely related to the genre's characteristic "cliffhanger continuity" (as a form of interrupted, punctuated and hence *discontinuous* continuity).[23]

In Figure 4.1 we see Pauline climbing down a rope, escaping from a runaway hot-air balloon (top left image), followed by her fiancé Harry scaling a cliff to come to her rescue (top right). However, the bad guys cut the rope (bottom left), and Harry falls. In the final image (bottom right), Harry and Pauline examine the rope, demonstratively motioning the action of cutting in a close-up shot that demonstrates to viewers an essential fact about the serial's narrative structure: namely, the fact of the story's relentlessly linear logic, coupled with its segmented presentational form. This is the principle of the cliffhanger, the serial's trademark device for segmenting ongoing
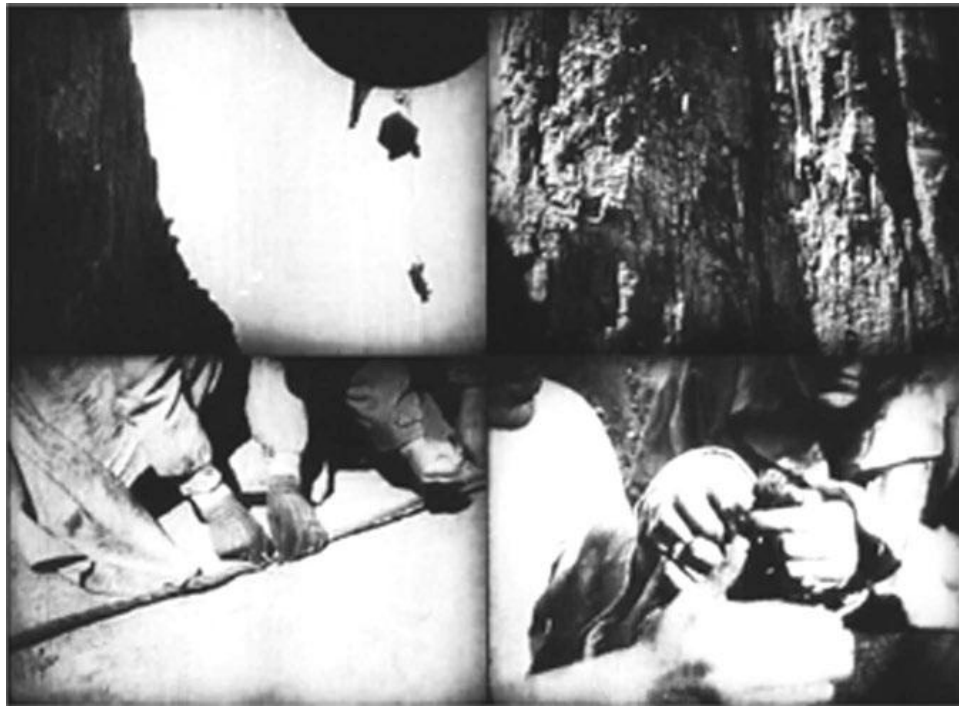

Figure 4.1   Scenes from the first episode, "Trials by Fire," from *The Perils of Pauline*.

narratives, demonstrated here on the face of a cliff. Indeed, the segmented line can be seen as the central form of the serial's overall narration. *The Perils of Pauline* is predominated by lines and linear segments, both narrative and visual: from the ropes that structure these images to the linearized chase sequences that lead inevitably to an episode's climactic peril. We can contrast this with the classical paradigm, which anchors its stories in a closed, self-sufficient diegetic universe (conceived as a preexisting and unquestionable frame within which events unfold). In the transitional-era film serial, on the other hand, the narrative world itself emerges from the intersecting line segments, the cut ropes of serially unfolding action: the fictional world seems to be constructed, piece for piece, by the linear strands that dominate both story and screen.

A serial such as *The Perils of Pauline* is very much aware of its mode of narration, and it continues to demonstrate this self-reflexive awareness in scenes like the one that opens episode three, "The Pirate Treasure," in which we again find the villain and his associate plotting Pauline's death. A title card reads: "Here's an interesting looking character who we can try to use in our plan." The words belong to the onscreen characters, but they could equally be attributed to the film itself, which demonstrates—almost as insistently as the two men ostentatiously pointing—that this "character" is now to play a role in the story (see Figure 4.2, left: a scene from *The Perils of Pauline*, episode 3, "The Treasure Hunt").

The role he plays, as we soon find out, is similarly self-reflexive. He is to "tell the young lady [that is, Pauline] some tall tales," which he does in a scene that resembles a flashback but which is clearly marked as a piece of fictional storytelling. Thus, the serial demonstrates to us a relatively complex technique of storytelling being developed in the transitional period, a technique unknown to the cinema of attractions, which will be central to the classical Hollywood style. But the tension remains unresolved between what André Gaudreault has identified as filmic narration and monstration,
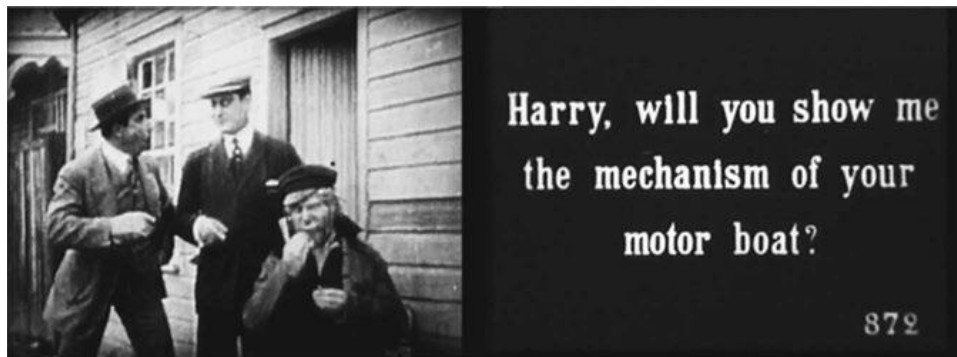

Figure 4.2   A scene from *The Perils of Pauline*, Episode 3: "The Treasure Hunt" (left), and an intertitle from Episode 9: "The Floating Coffin" (right).

between telling a story and showing it—which in this case involves the entanglement of showing how the telling will be conducted, and doing so from within the showing/telling vehicle itself (compare Figure 4.2, right: a highly self-reflexive intertitle from episode 9, "The Floating Coffin"). The serial line segment, which is the formal precondition for the cliffhanger, seems particularly well suited to this hybrid mode, because it generates continuity—posits the inevitability of something "to be continued . . ."—even in the midst of the discontinuity and uncertainty that attaches to an upheaval of media or their narrative paradigms. It is in this sense that the serial itself can be seen as a means of navigating, if not steering, a large-scale media transition.

Seriality, according to observations made by Umberto Eco, can be seen as an ongoing interchange between repetition and variation.[24] At stake are not just formal principles of sameness and difference but, as I have tried to illustrate here, historically, socially and medially specific forms of continuity and discontinuity. Serial forms repeatedly rehearse a variable series of confrontations, trade-offs, negotiations or mediations between different types or forms of continuity and discontinuity: linear narration and segmentation, diegetic integrity and self-reflexive demonstration, continuity editing and primitive attractions (or special effects), sociocultural continuities and medial specificities. In the case of the transitional-era film serial, as I have argued, the thematic and social continuities that link the serial queen to the broader cultural construction of the New Woman across a variety of media have to be set side by side with moments of discontinuity and insistent demonstrations of medial specificity. On this basis, we might even say that gender transformation was itself serialized in the serial-queen melodrama, as the genre both repeated preexisting images and varied them by subjecting them to specifically filmic mechanisms of mediation. Moreover, by instituting this cinema of gendered attractions, the serial-queen melodrama exploited the characteristic formal tension of the line segment—the serial conjunction of continuity and discontinuity—in order to negotiate the shift of paradigms from early to classical cinema, mediating the transition through a gendered nexus of serial narration and medial self-reflexivity.[25]

NOTES

1. On early cinema as a distinct paradigm, see Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction"; for a more detailed history of film in its earliest years, see Musser. On the classical Hollywood style, see Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson.
2. Singer introduced the term "serial-queen melodrama" in his article "Female Power in the Serial-Queen Melodrama," before developing the concept further in his book *Melodrama and Modernity* (in particular, Chapter 8: "Power and Peril in the Serial-Queen Melodrama," 221–262).
3. See Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity,* Chapter 8. More generally on the topic of tie-ins during this period, see Singer, "Fiction Tie-Ins and Narrative Intelligibility 1911–1918."

4. The quite real connections between serial-queen melodrama and other media in this context are both diachronic and synchronic in nature, as Singer makes clear in *Melodrama and Modernity;* that is, the serials were not only related by way of imitation and influence to historical models such as dime novels and stage melodrama, but they were also intertextually connected to simultaneous magazine tie-ins, newspaper re-caps and previews, and celebrity crossovers between film and fashion campaigns. See also Stamp, who claims that "serials offer perhaps the most complete model of heterogeneous textuality available in the early motion picture period" (120).

5. The term cliffhanger is of more recent vintage, generally thought to have become common only in the mid-1930s. Lambert, for example, follows the OED as well as Ackerman in this assumption, and yet usefully applies the term "cliffhanger continuity" to film and comics of the 1910s, defining the concept as involving a key "innovation" in the form of ongoing serial narratives, namely: the "transform[ation of] the break between episodes into a *suspenseful* pause, one that obliged readers to return for the following episode in order to satisfy their curiosity about the narrative's resolution—a narrative technique that can be labeled, anachronistically but not inaccurately, as cliffhanger continuity" (8).

6. On the changes in film and their audiences in this period, see the works of Bowser and of Hansen.

7. Transitionality in both the narrower and the broader senses has been the subject of previous work. In my "Between Technology and Art," I consider the transitional-era film aesthetics of Vachel Lindsay and Hugo Münsterberg as attempts to navigate highly uncertain "techno-phenomenological" changes of the period, and my *Postnaturalism* extrapolates a broader, media-philosophical theory of media-technical change and transitionality as aspects of anthropotechnical becoming and cosmogenesis.

8. Assessments of the transitional era's time frame vary. Miriam Hansen locates the period between 1909 and 1917, while Eileen Bowser's study of the period covers the years 1907–15. In her chapter "From Primitive to Classical" in Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema,* Kristin Thompson places the "transitionary phase" between primitive cinema (itself broken into two phases, 1895–1902 and 1902–8) and classical cinema in the years 1909 to 1916 (159). Charlie Keil, in *Early American Cinema in Transition,* claims that "the years 1907 to 1913 constitute the period of transitional cinema" (3), though he respects the general consensus that 1917 marks the firm establishment of classical cinema, thus leaving room for an additional undefined phase between 1913 and 1917. These disagreements over periodization are not, in my opinion, insignificant, for they attest to the transitional era's highly overdetermined nature and uneven development.

9. Bowser's study remains the most comprehensive history.

10. Drawing on Gunning, Hansen provides one of the strongest statements of this view.

11. In Gunning's words, the transitional era was "less a gradual fade into the classical paradigm than a period of ambivalence and contestation" ("Early American Film" 40).

12. I have also explored the notion of a nexus of seriality and mediality in the context of comics (in "Frame, Sequence, Medium" and in "Marvel Comics' Frankenstein") and, more generally, in relation to plurimedial serial figures such as Frankenstein, Tarzan, Sherlock Holmes, Dracula or Batman (see "Grenzgänger," jointly authored with Ruth Mayer).

13. In currently ongoing research, Ilka Brasch has begun developing a notion of film serials' articulation of a specifically "pre-televisual screen seriality," highlighting the significant medial and cultural continuities at play without thereby obfuscating the differences, distinctions and discontinuities that I see as equally important.

14. See the works of Hansen and of Bowser for more detailed accounts of these changes.

15. It is worth noting in connection with the idea of a cinema of gender-inflected attractions that the transitional era was marked in many ways by an uneasy sort of medium-sensitivity, which was thematized in terms of class and ethnonationalistic categories. For example, the composition of shots was changing as the so-called "French foreground" gave way to the "American foreground": whereas the camera had been placed at a distance of approximately 12 feet in the French-dominated productions prior to 1910, more recent cinema, in which American productions enjoyed a greater market share, tended to place the camera at 9 feet (Bowser 94). The difference may not seem dramatic to us, but the "closer views" struck many early viewers as shocking, rendering images of actors as "monstrous" (Bowser 97). On the other hand, though, this was accompanied by a change in acting style, which shifted from full-body gesticulations to a greater emphasis on facial expression. The former style, termed "Latin," was increasingly seen as melodramatic exaggeration suited to a lower-class theater and contrasted with the more restrained or refined "Saxon" acting style of the legitimate theater (Bowser 88).

16. See Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, Chapter 8, as well as, more generally, Singer, "Fiction Tie-Ins and Narrative Intelligibility 1911–1918."

17. This gendered address is, accordingly, structurally split between an ideal, narratively integrated (or proto-classically "sutured") spectator on the one hand, and the real, embodied and empirically identifiable viewer on the other. Thus, cinema itself is here caught up in an oscillation between the physical space of the theater and the ideal space of the screen, which Miriam Hansen has shown to be characteristic of the transitional era.

18. See Hansen, Chapter 3.

19. In 1910, Magistrate Frederick B. House claimed that "95% of the moving picture places in New York are dens of iniquity"; "more young women and girls are led astray in these places than any other way" (*Moving Picture World,* 11 June 1910, 982, 984; qtd. in Bowser 38).

20. Hansen 115.

21. Quite unlike early story films, which might offer separate views of the same event twice or otherwise fail to respect or positively violate the temporal consistency of the story. Moreover, whereas the intertitles of a few years prior had more or less done all the work of storytelling by informing the viewer what he or she was about to see in advance of scenes that were often very much in need of interpretation, transitional-era titles began to serve a variety of functions (e.g., presenting midscene dialogue, reproducing the text of letters or signs, etc.) and photographed images began doing more of the narrative work. On the changing nature and function of titles, see Bowser 137–47.

22. Méliès, as quoted in Gunning, states: "As for the scenario, the 'fable,' or 'tale,' I only consider it at the end. I can state that the scenario constructed in this manner has *no importance,* since I use it merely as a pretext for the 'stage effects,' the 'tricks,' or for a nicely arranged tableau" (64).

23. The term "cliffhanger continuity," to which I add an emphasis on discontinuity, was coined by Lambert.

24. See Eco, "The Myth of Superman"; "Innovation and Repetition."
25. This chapter has benefited greatly from discussions with fellow members of the DFG Research Unit "Popular Seriality—Aesthetics and Practice." I especially thank Frank Kelleter, Ruth Mayer, Daniel Stein and Andreas Jahn-Sudmann. I also thank the editors of this volume and the participants at the conference "The Mechanics of Serialization" for their valuable comments on an earlier draft.

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