

# Introduction

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GEORGES MÉLIÈS . . . is the originator of the class of cinematograph films which . . . has given new life to the trade at a time when it was dying out. He conceived the idea of portraying comical, magical and mystical views, and his creations have been imitated without success ever since. . . . The “Trip to the Moon,” as well as . . . “The Astronomer’s Dream”. . . are the personal creations of Mr. Georges Méliès, who himself conceived the ideas, painted the backgrounds, devised the accessories and acted on the stage.

—Complete Catalogue of Genuine and Original “Star” Films, 1905

If it is as a master of trick-films and fantastic spectacles that Méliès is best remembered, by no means all his pictures were of that type.

—Iris Barry, Curator, Museum of Modern Art Film Library, 1939

*A Trip to the Moon* (1902) is certainly Georges Méliès’s best-known film, and of the tens of thousands of individual films made during cinema’s first decade, it is perhaps the most recognizable. The image of a cratered moon-face with a spaceship lodged in its eye is one of the most iconic images in all of film history and, more than a century after its initial release, the film’s story of a journey to the moon and back continues to amuse many around the world. Long recognized as a pioneering story film with an important impact on American cinema, *A Trip to the Moon* has also been claimed as a foundational entry in the history of several

long-standing film genres, including science fiction, fantasy, and even the road movie.<sup>1</sup> The film has been quoted and imitated in audiovisual works ranging from *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956), to the music video for the Smashing Pumpkins' song "Tonight, Tonight" (1996), and alluded to in literature as different as Louis-Ferdinand Céline's nihilistic interwar novel *Death on the Installment Plan* (1936) and Brian Selznick's illustrated children's book *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007).

From the beginning, *A Trip to the Moon* was a major international success. Between September and December 1902, *A Trip to the Moon* was screened in Paris "entirely in color" at the Théâtre Robert-Houdin after matinee performances on Sundays and Thursdays by the magician Jules-Eugène Legris (who can be seen leading the parade in the film's final two scenes).<sup>2</sup> In addition to showing the film to audiences at his magic theater, Méliès offered both black-and-white and color copies for sale directly through his Star-Film sales office and indirectly through the Warwick Trading Company in London. In addition, unauthorized copies soon became available through several U.S. film producers. According to one account, these copies originated from a print that Méliès—already on the lookout for buyers who intended to dupe his films and resell them—had sold to the Paris photographer Charles Gerschel for exhibition in an Algiers theater on the condition that it be sent directly to Algeria. Gerschel, however, had purchased *A Trip to the Moon* (as well as a number of other Méliès films) for Alfred C. Abadie of the Edison Company. Abadie sent the prints to Edison's laboratories in West Orange, New Jersey, where they were copied and subsequently resold to the Vitagraph Company, which made its own copies.<sup>3</sup> Vitagraph screened the film in theaters through its exhibition service, while other companies sold it as their own for several years; as Charles Musser notes, "Lubin, Selig, and Edison catalogs from 1903–04 listed many dupes . . . and gave particular prominence to Méliès films such as . . . A TRIP TO THE MOON."<sup>4</sup> Consequently, Méliès received but a small fraction of the considerable profits earned by the film through sales of prints and theater admissions.

*A Trip to the Moon* was a big hit in the United States, where it was first seen less than a month after initially showing in Paris, and could be seen through the remainder of the theatrical season. Reporting the response of enthusiastic New York audiences to the film in October 1902, vaudeville manager Percy Williams simply wrote, "Best moving pictures I ever saw."<sup>5</sup> By year's end, *A Trip to the Moon* had received similarly rave reviews from theaters in other cities across the United States, including Washington, Cleveland, Detroit, New Orleans, and Kansas City.<sup>6</sup> In January 1903, when Thomas Tally reopened his storefront Electric Theater in Los Angeles, he used *A Trip to the Moon* as the

featured presentation.<sup>7</sup> In May 1903, after a less-than-inspired batch of new films closed the show at Keith's Theatre in Philadelphia, manager H. A. Daniels commented, "We miss 'The [*sic*] Trip to the Moon.'" <sup>8</sup> When the film screened in Montreal in June 1903, it was presumably already well-known to audiences and was thus described in newspapers as the "famous trip to the moon" and advertised as the "ever-popular 'Trip to the Moon.'" <sup>9</sup>

*A Trip to the Moon* continued to be a successful subject internationally for several more years. It was distributed in Germany beginning in 1902 under the title *Reise nach dem Mond*.<sup>10</sup> In Italy, it was still being shown as a headline attraction in both permanent theaters and traveling cinemas in 1904, some two years after it had first become available in that country.<sup>11</sup> Well into 1905, *A Trip to the Moon* continued to be screened—and even showcased—in some places. At the Gaité Montparnasse in April in Paris it was part of a program of several films preceding a live performance.<sup>12</sup> Few early films achieved this sustained popularity and some of the only titles to really rival it over the next few years were subsequent Méliès *féeries* such as *Fairyland, or the Kingdom of the Fairies* (1903) and *An Impossible Voyage* (1904).

After its renown during the early 1900s, *A Trip to the Moon* largely dropped out of sight for the next two decades. In October 1929, however, Jean Mauclairé, the manager of the Studio 28 repertory film theater in Paris, obtained a print from a traveling exhibitor, adding to a cache of Méliès he had discovered in May of that year.<sup>13</sup> Studio 28 was known for screening avant-garde films such as *Un Chien andalou* (1929) and *L'Âge d'or* (1930)—both of which owe something to Méliès's style if not to his sensibility.<sup>14</sup> Mauclairé showed several Méliès films at Studio 28, including *A Trip to the Moon*.<sup>15</sup> According to Méliès, Mauclairé "obtains frequently a great success in showing this film in retrospective performances."<sup>16</sup> Although Mauclairé was reportedly loath to loan the film, he occasionally did.<sup>17</sup> It was almost certainly this print of *A Trip to the Moon* that was part of the program of the Gala Méliès on December 16, 1929, marking the initial culmination of Méliès's rediscovery in France.<sup>18</sup>

During the late 1920s and 1930s, Méliès corresponded with people researching the beginnings of cinema and collecting early films—several were themselves former film pioneers. Jean Acme LeRoy had developed a projection system in 1894, but was unable to profit from it and never received recognition for his invention; he had also been a friend of Georges Méliès's late brother Gaston when the latter lived in New York. LeRoy wanted to assemble a program of early films to show as part of a lecture series on the early history of film, although this plan was cut short when he was partially stricken by paralysis in 1928.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to collecting old films, LeRoy was “preparing a history of the early days in the business and . . . [was] trying to secure reliable data on the early men in the cinema art.”<sup>20</sup> LeRoy, along with Merritt Crawford in New York, Maurice Noverre in Brest, and Will Day in London, were film historians *avant la lettre*: each wanted to write a history of cinema that would correct the many omissions and inaccuracies of existing accounts, although their conception of history nevertheless privileged the technological and aesthetic contributions of individual (male) “pioneers.”<sup>21</sup> Each wrote to Méliès: he responded expansively to their letters, welcoming the opportunity to document his achievements for posterity. (Méliès’s answers to LeRoy’s specific queries about *A Trip to the Moon* are included in the Appendix.)

LeRoy had been “in search of ‘Trip to the Moon’ ” since 1927 at least, going so far as to send Méliès a modest sum with which to place “a small want advertisement in the French trade papers.”<sup>22</sup> Early in 1930, LeRoy at last obtained a copy of *A Trip to the Moon* from Day.<sup>23</sup> According to Crawford (who claimed to have helped LeRoy negotiate the acquisition of this copy), Day “had a good ‘dupe’ negative made from his old print . . . [and] LeRoy’s print . . . was made from this ‘dupe’ . . . of ‘A TRIP TO THE MOON.’ ”<sup>24</sup> Day’s dupe negative was to be the indirect source of most copies of the film available until recently. While Day declared that the image quality was “as good today as when first shown,” his print of *A Trip to the Moon* was incomplete.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, LeRoy’s print, which had been made from Day’s dupe negative, turns out to have been only 713 feet long, roughly 100 feet shorter than the copies originally sold around the turn of the century.<sup>26</sup>

Both Day and LeRoy realized the print they had was incomplete. LeRoy wrote to Méliès, hoping to obtain the missing footage from him.<sup>27</sup> The only person Méliès could have turned to for LeRoy’s request was Mauclair, who owned the “only print remaining in Paris,” although it too was incomplete, “the first picture, and the end, [tableaux] nos. 28–29–30, are missing.”<sup>28</sup> Mauclair’s print, like Day’s and LeRoy’s, lacked the very end, but, unlike theirs, seems to have had the penultimate scene mostly intact. Whether or not Méliès tried to get this additional scene from Mauclair, it was never restored to LeRoy’s print.

During the early 1930s, Méliès occasionally presented his films himself in Paris. On May 20, 1931, he borrowed Mauclair’s print of *A Trip to the Moon* and showed it along with three of his other films to what he described as “a splendid high class public” at the Salle Adyar.<sup>29</sup> Méliès did not own prints of any of his old films, he told Crawford, having “destroyed completely in 1923 . . . all my stock of negative and positive films.”<sup>30</sup> If he could somehow obtain enough of his longer films to fill out a program, he might be able to book regular theatrical engagements. During the

Depression, such performances represented one of the only means Méliès had to supplement his meager income from the toy and candy concession he operated in the Montparnasse train station before retiring in 1932. He especially wanted a print of *A Trip to the Moon*, a “production” that, he told LeRoy, “I believe, is unrivalled, though produced by me in 1902, so many years ago. I am sure it will entertain and interest those who see it, as it did when I produced it.”<sup>31</sup> It was, he recalled to Day, “my first great success,” a film that achieved “such success that, still now, after so many years, the magazines and cinema papers, as well as the ordinary press, remember often this famous ‘Voyage dans la lune.’”<sup>32</sup>

LeRoy died in 1932 and the Museum of Modern Art’s newly formed Film Library acquired his truncated print of *A Trip to the Moon* when it purchased LeRoy’s entire film collection (and what were termed the “non-commercial rights” to the films in it) from his widow in 1935.<sup>33</sup> The following year, the Film Library began circulating copies in 16mm and 35mm and thus it was screened for large numbers of people in the United States and Canada once again. In 1936 the Film Library’s first curator, Iris Barry, told a delegation of French film industry officials, “young college and university students in the United States have already been delighted to see, and marveled at, Monsieur Méliès’s *A Trip to the Moon*; this film is of such great importance for American cinema.”<sup>34</sup> Until 1936 the film had remained largely inaccessible apart from a few isolated screenings such as the ones mentioned previously. Thus the writers of the 1920s and early 1930s who mentioned the film treated it as just one briefly noted example of the fairy tales and magical films Méliès made during his heyday just after the turn-of-the-century.<sup>35</sup>

In 1937 the Museum of Modern Art Film Library made a copy of *A Trip to the Moon* available to the Cinémathèque française through one of its earliest film exchange agreements.<sup>36</sup> On February 10, 1937, Henri Langlois, cofounder of the Cinémathèque, celebrated this agreement with a press screening of *A Trip to the Moon* that included live commentary by Méliès himself.<sup>37</sup> The next month, after Méliès provided commentary for another screening at Langlois’s ciné-club, the Cercle du Cinéma, Langlois presented him with a copy of the Cinémathèque’s recently acquired print of *A Trip to the Moon*, which he had once believed to be lost.<sup>38</sup> The film had followed a circuitous path of duplication, from London to New York to Paris, through the hands of several collectors and institutions, in order to belatedly return to its creator. By this time, however, Méliès was fully retired and did not have much use for the film. He died less than one year later, on January 21, 1938.

Haidee Wasson argues that the Film Library transformed old films into edifying objects for aesthetic appreciation and informed historical contemplation.<sup>39</sup> The Museum of Modern Art’s educational mission

created a new mode of film exhibition and reception that fundamentally recontextualized the film viewing experience and specific individual films. The Film Library often circulated *A Trip to the Moon* as part of a program of silent films entitled “Development of Narrative,” where it was immediately followed by Edwin S. Porter’s *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). As such, it was positioned as a milestone in the history of cinematic storytelling, implying that its “importance for American cinema” (as Barry put it) should be understood largely in narrative terms. The film’s place in the Film Library’s chronological program of early narrative films was seemingly justified by Porter himself, who acknowledged in a 1940 interview with the *New York Times* that, “From laboratory examination of some of the popular story films of the French pioneer director, Méliès [*sic*]—trick pictures like ‘A Trip to the Moon’—I came to the conclusion that a picture telling a story might draw the customers back to the theatres, and set to work in this direction.”<sup>40</sup> For Porter, there was seemingly no contradiction between a “trick picture” also “telling a story,” but more recent debates about the “cinema of attractions” (discussed later) have emphasized the split between these respective impulses in early filmmaking.

Film historians concerned with narrative have mainly stressed the way that *A Trip to the Moon* joins a sequence of spatially and temporally distinct scenes to tell a continuous and coherent story. Despite this emphasis on the use of shot transitions (mainly dissolves) to shift *between* separate spaces, we should not underestimate Méliès’s reliance on substitution splices to create instantaneous and often imperceptible transitions or transformations *within* spaces. Méliès spliced together precisely matched shots to create many effects, as Jacques Malthête explains: “In fact, the stop-camera trick was always combined with a splice that was achieved and held together by a practically undetectable gluing generally found in the upper quarter or one-fifth of the frame. All appearances, disappearances, or substitutions were executed during filming, of course, but it was essential that the negative then be edited if the trick was to succeed.”<sup>41</sup> By maintaining the framing while altering selected aspects of the *mise-en-scène* between different takes and then editing these takes together, Méliès transformed the astronomer’s telescopes into stools and depicted the shell’s collision with the face of the man in the moon (among other effects).

Yet, he also used substitution splices to join performances that were filmed in separate takes into what appears to be a temporally continuous whole. Through careful attention to detail both during filming and editing, Méliès was able to achieve “precise continuity of action over a splice . . . in order to maintain the flow and rhythm of acting which a



Figure 0-1. One of a number of substitution splices in *A Trip to the Moon*.

mere stopping of the camera could not provide.”<sup>42</sup> Parts of *A Trip to the Moon* that seem to transpire entirely in long takes are actually made up of several discrete shots of performances by different actors or groups of actors. The most complete version of the film that is currently available shows evidence of more than fifty cuts—many of which often go unnoticed.<sup>43</sup> (See Figure 0-1.) Thus, the substitution splice was not only a means of extending the techniques of stage illusion, but also a way of reconfiguring existing forms of theatrical practice through the new modes of temporality and spatiality made possible by cinematic reproduction.<sup>44</sup> Méliès described the individual sections of his films neither as shots nor scenes, but as “tableaux.” Successive tableaux are not necessarily separated from one another in time or space—much less by syntactic markers such as dissolves or cuts.<sup>45</sup>

Méliès’s own catalog descriptions of *A Trip to the Moon* list thirty such tableaux. In Star-Film catalogs, *A Trip to the Moon* was given catalog numbers 399 to 411. Méliès assigned individual catalog numbers to each completed twenty-meter length of film in the order it was produced. Thus, *A Trip to the Moon*, which spans thirteen catalog numbers, corresponds to the length of “about” 260 meters given in Méliès’s French catalogs.<sup>46</sup> In various other advertisements and catalogs, the film’s length

is given as 300 meters, 845 feet, and 800 feet.<sup>47</sup> Where mentioned, the “duration of exhibit” or the “duration of the projection” is specified as sixteen or seventeen minutes, roughly corresponding to a projection speed of between thirteen and fifteen frames per second.<sup>48</sup>

While the Museum of Modern Art Film Library’s activities helped *A Trip to the Moon* to become part of the canon of world cinema and an indispensable component of countless survey courses, it has come to be known (especially in the United States) in truncated form because these copies were all struck from an incomplete print. This has long been the most readily accessible version of *A Trip to the Moon*. Over the years, it has been seen by hundreds of thousands of people through circulating prints (and other copies derived thereof). It also continues to be widely available in various iterations on the Internet. The Film Library’s print ends with the capsule being towed ashore after it returns to earth and splashes down in the ocean. This version is missing two subsequent scenes—five more tableaux. The first of these omitted scenes, the longer of the two by far, includes a parade with a marching band, a military procession, and the lunar capsule, ringed with garlands and emblazoned with the Star-Film trademark rolling past on a float, as well as an awards ceremony in which each of the travelers receives a giant medal, and the Selenite dances for the crowd. In the second of these two scenes, the parade continues in another area where a statue of Barbenfouillis, the expedition’s leader, has been erected atop a pedestal bearing the Latin motto, “*labor omnia vincit*” (work conquers all). There, the celebrations continue momentarily.<sup>49</sup> Only in 1997, some ninety-five years after its initial distribution, did a more or less complete version of *A Trip to the Moon* that had been reconstructed by the Cinémathèque Méliès become available once again.<sup>50</sup> In 2000, a colored print was discovered in Spain by Lobster Films.<sup>51</sup>

How much does it matter that so many copies of *A Trip to the Moon* that have been available since the 1930s were and are incomplete? After all, the very notion of a definitive version of any early film is rather anachronistic given that films were sold as “semi-finished products” over which their producers had largely relinquished subsequent control.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, while Méliès could determine how his films were presented at the Théâtre Robert-Houdin, the prints he sold would be supplemented with often idiosyncratic verbal, musical, and sound accompaniment, as well as projected at different speeds, combined with various types of performance, and sometimes even colored and reedited by exhibitors. Méliès implicitly tried to determine the content of the monologues that were spoken alongside his films by publishing detailed descriptions in his catalogs. He also attempted to prevent reediting of his films by using dissolves rather than straight cuts between many scenes.<sup>53</sup> Such efforts to



exercise control over how his films were seen and heard hardly entailed a notion of the individual film title as a commodity that existed in a singularly definitive form. Méliès certainly recognized—often with much chagrin, given the widespread piracy of his films—that the sheer fact of mechanical reproduction, along with the possibilities for altering a purchased film, made for many different versions of a single title.

My interest in the scenes missing from many prints of *A Trip to the Moon* has less to do with what Paolo Cherchi Usai has identified as an “obsession for completeness” in contemporary film culture<sup>54</sup>—an obsession that would have been mostly alien to Méliès and his contemporaries—than with the way the omission (or addition) of these final two scenes changes the overall impression of the film. Although it is perfectly legible without the parade, the celebrations, and the commemoration that occurs at the end—one might not even know the Film Library’s print was incomplete without reference to the catalog description—the satire of *A Trip to the Moon* is considerably muted without these two final scenes. If, as Elizabeth Ezra writes, “its depiction of the exploration of a faraway place and hostile encounter with alien life forms . . . can easily be read



Figure 0-2. *A Trip to the Moon*—the captured Selenite displayed for the crowd.

as a parable of colonial conflict,<sup>55</sup> then it is these last few tableaux that secure such a reading.

The ceremony honoring the lunar journey is quite ironic given that the explorers previously squander much of their time on the moon napping and running away—an irony that is underscored by the self-important way the explorers gesture and prance about after they each receive their medals and by the outlandish scale of the medals themselves, which are larger even than their swelled heads. Likewise, the statue erected to honor Barbenfouillis's hard work is rather absurd since a group of



Figure 0-3. Detail of caricature by Méliès [pseud., Geo. Smile], *La Griffé*, January 23, 1890.

workmen are shown constructing the capsule with no help from him or his colleagues. Moreover, they cannot even observe the work without disrupting it, overturning a vat of acid as they tour the workshops. In the end, apart from reaching the moon, their only other accomplishment would seem to be the unprovoked destruction of a number of very fragile moon-dwellers, whom Barbenfouillis mercilessly decimates with sharp blows from his umbrella. The one Selenite who does return to earth is led by a rope around its neck as part of the parade and harshly beaten with a stick until it dances for the crowd.<sup>56</sup> (See Figure 0-2.) This cruel moment, which has gone mostly unremarked to date, reveals the darker side of an ostensible voyage of exploration and unmistakably provides a pointed commentary on the unfortunate consequences of colonialism.

As a satire, *A Trip to the Moon* reprises the sensibility Méliès cultivated drawing political caricatures under the pseudonym “Geo. Smile” for *La Griffé*, the anti-Boulangist weekly published by his cousin Adolphe Méliès from 1889 to 1890. On the cover of the January 23, 1890 issue of



Figure 0-4. *A Trip to the Moon* (detail)—the statue of Barbenfouillis.

*La Griffé*, for example, Méliès satirized the British Ultimatum (which had forced the Portuguese out of territory in southern Africa) with a caricature of a tall, mustachioed, big-fisted British soldier physically intimidating the much smaller and stouter figure of Portugal. (See Figure 0-3.) In this political cartoon, Méliès highlighted an asymmetry of European military power within colonized Africa, but some twelve years later in *A Trip to the Moon*, he turned from a specific incident between rival colonizing nations to a story that engages with the larger—but no less topical—issue of Western imperial ambition. Méliès mocks the militant nationalism that undergirds such imperial ambitions not only through the massive cannon that is aimed at the moon, but also through groups of chorus girls dressed as marines. Just before the cannon is fired, several marines present the flag with a bugle call while others take their places behind them with rifles by their sides. Later, the marines march in pairs shouldering rifles right behind the capsule in the parade. The film ends with the marines flanking the statue of Barbenfouillis. The statue shows him in a conquering pose, with his foot atop a disgruntled and frowning moon-face with the capsule-bullet still wedged in its eye. One of his hands is held high in a victorious pose and the other is firmly clasping his umbrella (see Figure 0-4), the weapon with which he destroyed the hapless Selenites. Like the British soldier in the caricature, his hands are glaringly oversized, suggesting that Barbenfouillis too is a ham-fisted bully.

The satirical qualities of *A Trip to the Moon* come into even sharper relief by contrasting it with the remake that Segundo de Chomón produced for Pathé-Frères, *Excursion dans la lune* (1908). In *Excursion dans la lune*, Chomón follows *A Trip to the Moon* virtually scene for scene while imitating a number of its most striking tableaux, including the transformation of the astronomer's telescopes into stools, the loading of the capsule into the breech of the cannon, the enlarging moon as the capsule approaches, the lunar snowfall, the umbrella which sprouts into a giant mushroom, the capsule's fall from a precipice, and its plunge through space.<sup>57</sup> *Excursion dans la lune* begins with a group of astronomers in seventeenth-century garb gathered around a fountain in the courtyard of a college, discussing how to get to the moon. The film ends in this same location when the capsule (which has split in two during its return to earth) drops into the fountain. At the very end of the film, "the brave astronomers are decorated with medals and other badges of honor" (as a synopsis published in the trade press describes this scene),<sup>58</sup> but this is a rather fleeting coda that lacks the pomp of the parade, awards ceremony, and dedication of the statue in Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon*.

In a telling revision, the anthropomorphized moon-face in *Excursion dans la lune* nonchalantly swallows the approaching capsule (see Figure

0-5) and belches flames—rather than having it uncomfortably lodged in its eye. In striking contrast to *A Trip to the Moon*, women play dancing moon maidens rather than marines and perform pirouettes rather than wielding rifles. The moon-dwellers, who are described in a trade press synopsis as “peculiar imps” and “multi-colored demons”<sup>59</sup>—their variegated appearance is depicted through stencil-coloring—are not destroyed by blows from the earthlings, but instead they implode and rematerialize at will in puffs of smoke entirely of their own volition. The film concludes not with an ironic celebration of lunar conquest, but with the formation of a couple. One of the astronomers runs off with a dancing moon-maiden and brings her back to earth in the damaged capsule. Instead of being displayed and beaten like the captured moon-dweller in *A Trip to the Moon*, she is welcomed to earth with open arms and quickly betrothed to the astronaut with whom she returns.

The coupling that ends *Excursion dans la lune* looks forward to later modes of narrative closure in film much more than the celebratory parade with which *A Trip to the Moon* concludes, yet Méliès’s film has yet to entirely relinquish its important position in the so-called evolution of cinematic storytelling. Teleological models that privilege the development of narrative as the principal axis of film history, however, have mostly been displaced by the recognition that early cinema was often structured by displays of visual spectacle. As Tom Gunning argues



Figure 0-5. *Excursion dans la lune* (1908).

in his influential article on the “cinema of attractions” (developing an argument previously articulated in an essay he coauthored with André Gaudreault): “early cinema was not dominated by the narrative impulse that later asserted its sway over the medium . . . it is a cinema that bases itself on . . . its ability to show something.”<sup>60</sup> With this revisionism came a new reading of *A Trip to the Moon* as a prototypical example of a linked series of cinematic attractions much more than an early narrative. Thus, Gunning contends that it is a “plotted trick film” in which the “story simply provides a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of cinema.”<sup>61</sup>

Charles Musser has vigorously disputed this reading, arguing that in *A Trip to the Moon*, “Méliès’s cinematic dexterity performs a narrative function,” and stressing the “intimate interrelationship between attraction and narrative action” in the film.<sup>62</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s, the respective positions in scholarly debates around the “cinema of attractions” were often mapped onto *A Trip to the Moon*. In the final analysis, Gunning points out, the question of “whether audiences were mainly amazed by the sets, costumes and camera tricks . . . or primarily drawn into its narrative of exploration and discovery can never be absolutely adjudicated.”<sup>63</sup> But, Musser’s claim—first published in 1994, and nearly just as true when it was republished in 2006—remains: “an extensive analysis of *A Trip to the Moon* still needs to be done.”<sup>64</sup> This volume and its contributors respond to Musser’s implicit challenge in a variety of ways.

The first two chapters place *A Trip to the Moon* in the context of Méliès’s film practice. In chapter 1, “A Trip to the Movies: Georges Méliès, Filmmaker and Magician (1861–1938),” Paolo Cherchi Usai provides a concise introduction to Méliès’s filmmaking career, with attention to the technical virtuosity of his productions, his fluid onscreen identity, and his penchant for displaying the female body as a “special effect.” Cherchi Usai emphasizes the range of Méliès’s oeuvre, which includes not only trick films that derived from his work as a conjuror and designer of stage illusions, but also “‘realist’ and political films . . . characterized by a straightforward, polemical attitude.” Chapter 2 is a newly revised version of André Gaudreault’s crucial revisionist essay, “Theatricality, Narrativity, and Trickality: Reevaluating the Cinema of Georges Méliès,” which has been published in French, Italian, and German, but never reprinted in English. Gaudreault argues that Méliès must be understood on his own terms as an early filmmaker rather than as a precursor of—or, alternatively, in opposition to—“the later classical narrative style of filmmaking.” Film historian Jean Mitry, for example, associates Méliès’s films with “theatricality,” claiming that they lack the emphasis on editing found in truly cinematic examples of “narrativity.”<sup>65</sup> Gaudreault, how-

ever, introduces a third term, “trickality,” to describe the strategy that Méliès employed to create illusions that were explicitly acknowledged by actors in the films and presumably appreciated as such by spectators. For Gaudreault, Méliès was neither primarily concerned with storytelling nor—contra Georges Sadoul—confined to a strictly theatrical approach.

In chapter 3, “*A Trip to the Moon: A Composite Film*,” Thierry Lefebvre shows that *A Trip to the Moon* was not simply based on the work of Jules Verne (as Méliès himself claimed later in life)—nor is it an amalgamation of Verne and H. G. Wells’s novel *The First Men in the Moon*, as Sadoul states<sup>66</sup>—but it is in fact a much more complex and “composite” film that combines elements from many sources. Trips to the moon were taken frequently in the popular culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (not only in books, but also in scientific lectures, magic lantern shows, fairground amusements, and theatrical performances). Lefebvre focuses in particular on the film’s connections to *A Trip to the Moon*, a popular attraction at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, and to the Jacques Offenbach operetta *Le Voyage dans la lune*. Although this operetta was glossed over as an intertext for the film prior to Lefebvre’s essay (originally published in French in 2002), it emerges here as a crucial inspiration for Méliès, who appears to have drawn several of the tableaux of *A Trip to the Moon* and selected details of the film’s mise-en-scène (including the umbrellas the travelers take to the moon) from it.<sup>67</sup>

In chapter 4, “First-Footing on the Moon: Méliès’s Debt to Verne and Wells and His Influence in Great Britain,” Ian Christie explores the connections between *A Trip to the Moon* and the works of Verne and Wells. He points out that by the late nineteenth century, “Verne” constituted a veritable multimedia brand that could be consumed not only by reading his stories in newspapers and illustrated books, but also by going to the theater, where both authorized and unauthorized versions of Verne’s tales were staged. Much like another “unauthorized” version of Verne, Offenbach’s *Le Voyage dans la lune*, Méliès traded on the recognition and appeal of the established “Verne” brand with *A Trip to the Moon*. He may also have been inspired by the recent publication of Wells’s *The First Men in the Moon*, although, as Christie notes, Méliès’s treatment of the themes of imperialism and colonization in the film is far less ambivalent than either Verne or Wells. In chapter 5, “‘Distance Does Not Exist’: Méliès, le Cinéma, and the Moon,” Murray Pomerance ruminates on a line of dialogue from Verne’s *From the Earth to the Moon* that also resonates with the film: “distance does not exist.” Pomerance proposes that *A Trip to the Moon* collapses distance in many ways: through juxtapositions of scenes; through the famous sequence of the moon as one

seems to approach its surface; through an emphasis on transformation and (dis)appearance, and ultimately through what he terms the “transitional image, . . . [which] merges two contradictory, two ‘distant’ states into a single moving—and thus emotional—experience.”

In chapter 6, “Shooting into Outer Space: Reframing Modern Vision,” Tom Gunning considers the ways that *A Trip to the Moon* engages with “modern vision”—that is with the extended capacities that technological mediation made available to human sight. With its ability to transcend space, time, and even gravity, cinema epitomizes “modern vision” and early cinema in particular often seems to revel in these possibilities. For Gunning, the linchpin sequence of the approach toward the moon is an archetypal moment of “rocket vision” that exemplifies “modern vision” not only because it seems to adopt the point-of-view of the rocket itself at a crucial moment, but also because it was created—like many others in *A Trip to the Moon*—through a skillful combination of theatrical stagecraft and cinematic technique. This combination owes much to Méliès’s work designing illusions for his magic theater, yet it also results in a “hybrid” or “collagelike” sense of space “in which different modes of representation contend.” As a whole, the film’s spatiality is neither entirely “theatrical” nor fully “cinematic” (in the sense of creating a synthetic space across a series of cuts). Rather, *A Trip to the Moon* is a film in which moving flats painted in trompe l’oeil perspective jostle against superimpositions and substitution splices—a film in which the temporal overlap of the shell landing on the moon twice is entirely consistent with its spatial inconsistencies.

The next two chapters are specific case studies. In chapter 7, “*A Trip to the Moon* as *Féerie*,” Frank Kessler considers *A Trip to the Moon* in generic terms as a *féerie*. Part of what Marian Hannah Winter later broadly categorized as the “theatre of marvels,”<sup>68</sup> the *féerie* was a genre defined by its emphasis on spectacle in the form of sumptuous scenery and costumes, stage effects, and dance performances—all of which typically came together in the apotheosis scenes with which *féeries* conventionally concluded. The *féerie* flourished in nineteenth-century popular theater and was immediately taken up by film producers such as Méliès, Pathé, and others. By positioning *A Trip to the Moon* within a genre history that stretches back to the end of the eighteenth century—rather than as part of the film genres that coalesced later during the twentieth century—Kessler is able to read the film on its own terms as well as to demonstrate, more generally, how early cinema inherited and transformed spectacular theatrical traditions that were inherently skewed toward what Gaudreault and Gunning characterize as “attractions.” In chapter 8, “*A Trip to the Moon* as an American Phenomenon,” Richard Abel examines



the reception of *A Trip to the Moon* in the United States, where many Americans had already taken fictive trips to the moon (or were at least familiar with such imaginary journeys) through novels, theaters, amusement parks, and/or traveling carnival shows. The film was thus received in the United States within a context that activated the public's prior knowledge and experience of these other media. By combing local newspapers from small towns and cities around the country, Abel finds that although *A Trip to the Moon* was widely seen in the US up until the end of 1906, it was almost always identified as an Edison, Biograph, Vitagraph, or Lubin subject. Thus shorn of Méliès's name and its French origins, *A Trip to the Moon* was received in many places—quite surprisingly—as an American production.

In chapter 9, "A Trip to the Fair; or, Moon-Walking in Space," I examine *A Trip to the Moon* as part of the culture of turn-of-the-century World's Fairs, amusement parks, and fairground shows. Fairground exhibitors were one of the primary markets for Méliès's films and, given his close relationship to the realm of fairground exhibition, *A Trip to the Moon* resonates in various ways with the experience of the fairgrounds. In the film, the astronomers do a whole lot of walking and comparatively little actual space travel; as they perambulate through the deep spaces of the film's various scenes, they effectively make stops at a series of "attractions" that are analogous to what one could have seen at a World's Fair. Lefebvre, Gunning, and Abel each note the film's echoes of the *A Trip to the Moon* ride at the 1901 Buffalo Pan-American Exposition (of which Méliès may or may not have had specific knowledge), but I argue that it also bears the traces of a more generalized fairground conception that can be linked to the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris (which Méliès certainly knew because he shot a number of nonfiction films there).

In chapter 10, "The Stars Might Be Smiling: A Feminist Forage into a Famous Film," Victoria Duckett uses questions about the place of women in *A Trip to the Moon* as a point-of-departure for a wide-ranging interrogation of its treatment of gender. Women do not travel to the moon in the film, Duckett notes, but they are highly visible agents within the film nevertheless. For Duckett, the lines of women pushing the shell into the breach and waving to the camera, the personified female constellations who look down on the astronomers on the moon, and the women taking part in the revels that follow their return are not just objects of the gaze who (as Laura Mulvey famously describes women in later narrative cinema) "connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*."<sup>69</sup> Instead, she argues that the film's depiction of women creates "a comedic reflection upon . . . gendered difference." By emphasizing Méliès's humor—an aspect of his films that has been underdiscussed<sup>70</sup>—Duckett mounts a

compelling feminist analysis that touches on a rich array of intertextual references ranging across the realms of art history, mythology, literature, comic strips, and theater.

In chapter 11, “Impossible Voyages and Extraordinary Adventures in Early Science Fiction Cinema: From Robida to Méliès and Marcel Fabre,” Antonio Costa links *A Trip to the Moon* and several of Méliès’s other “impossible voyages” to the “science fictions” of French author and illustrator Albert Robida. Costa suggests that Robida’s futuristic adventure stories perhaps have more in common with the Mélièsien style than either Verne or Wells, pointing out that Robida’s profusely illustrated 1889–1890 novel *Voyages très extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandoul*—like Méliès’s *The Conquest of the Pole* (1912)—is more of a parody than an imitation of Verne. He concludes by examining the early Italian film based on this novel, Marcel Fabre’s *Le avventure straordinarissime di Saturnino Farandola* (1913).

In chapter 12, “No One-Way Ticket to the Moon,” Viva Paci traces the afterlife of Méliès’s imagery in *A Trip to the Moon* through the present day, citing examples from Hollywood musicals, experimental film, television, and music videos. Just as *A Trip to the Moon* was a highly intermedial film that borrowed from theater, literature, and the amusement park, so too the film lends itself to such borrowings.<sup>71</sup> Paci argues that the film is a quintessential example of the “cinema of attractions” in which individual “images, elements, and motifs operate and circulate independently, as fully autonomous attractions.” She traces this circulation through many unexpected subsequent films that range from Robert Z. Leonard and Busby Berkeley’s *Ziegfeld Girl* (1941) and Kenneth Anger’s *Rabbit’s Moon* (1950) to Al Razutis’s *Melies [sic] Catalogue* (1973) and Baz Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge!* (2001).

The appendix contains several relevant documents, including a list of the film’s thirty tableaux and a detailed synopsis published in English in the September 1902 supplement to the catalog of the Warwick Trading Company. This is followed by Méliès’s answers (written in English) to nine questions about the film that were sent to him by LeRoy around 1930. The appendix also contains two important articles Méliès wrote for French cinema periodicals that have been translated by Paul Hammond: “The Marvelous in the Cinema” from 1912 and “The Importance of the Script” from 1932. In the former, Méliès discusses his approach to filmmaking and, in particular, his penchant for “impossible films.” The latter contains Méliès’s remark that the scenario had limited importance for his own films since the script served merely as a pretext for a series of tricks—a statement that is often quoted vis-à-vis the “cinema of attractions.”<sup>72</sup> A full translation of the entire article provides essential

background for Méliès's claims and their possible bearing on our understanding of *A Trip to the Moon*.

To avoid confusion, *A Trip to the Moon* is referred to throughout the book by its English-language title—although it was occasionally called *Trip to the Moon* instead—whereas its French title, *Le Voyage dans la lune*, is reserved for the Offenbach operetta and other productions that went by this name. Likewise, Méliès's other films are referred to here by the English titles under which they circulated, except in cases where this would alter the orthography of an original document or where an exact English release title is unknown.<sup>73</sup> Other film titles are given in the language of the country where they were produced. French works that are frequently cited in this volume—namely, the novels of Verne and Cyrano de Bergerac—are referred to by the titles of their recognized English translations.

## Notes

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1. William Johnson, "Journey into Science Fiction," in *Focus on the Science Fiction Film*, ed. William Johnson (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 3–4; Alec Worley, *Empires of the Imagination: A Critical Survey of Fantasy Cinema from Georges Méliès to The Lord of the Rings* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2005), 21–22; Devin Orgeron, *Road Movies: From Muybridge and Méliès to Lynch and Kiarostami* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 32–35. Elizabeth Ezra has claimed that *A Trip to the Moon* "was not only the first science fiction film, but the first cinematic spoof of the genre." *Georges Méliès: The Birth of the Auteur* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2000), 120.

2. *L'Orchestre*, Sept. 28–Dec. 18, 1902.

3. Letter from Merritt Crawford to George[s] Méliès, Mar. 17, 1931; statement by Arthur White, Nov. 10, 1939, reproduced in *The Merritt Crawford Papers*, ed. Eileen Bowser (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1986), microfilm, reels 3, 4. See also Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 209.

4. Charles Musser, *A Guide to Motion Picture Catalogs by American Producers and Distributors, 1894–1908: A Microfilm Edition* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1985), 11.

5. Percy Williams, "The Orpheum, Week commencing October 27, 1902," unpublished *Managers' Report Books*, vol. 0, p. 33, Keith/Albee Collection, University of Iowa, Iowa City.

6. Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 7–8.

7. Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 299.

8. Quoted in Charles Musser, “Rethinking Early Cinema: Cinema of Attractions and Narrativity,” in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 394.

9. “Pictures at the Windsor,” *Montreal Daily Star*, June 19, 1903, 8; “Meetings and Amusements,” *Montreal Daily Star*, June 20, 1903, 12, GRAFICS collection, Université de Montréal. References courtesy of Louis Pelletier.

10. Herbert Birett, *Das Filmangebot in Deutschland, 1895–1911* (Munich, Germany: Filmbuchverlag Winterberg, 1991), 541.

11. Mauro Conciatori, “‘Le fantasie luminose’ di Georges Méliès nei cinematografi italiani,” in “*Verso il centenario: Méliès*,” ed. Riccardo Redi (Rome: Di Giacomo, 1987), 52; Aldo Bernardini, *Gli ambulanti: Cinema italiano delle origine* (Gemona, Italy: Cineteca del Friuli, 2001), 92.

12. Jean-Jacques Meusy, *Paris-Palaces, ou les temps des cinémas (1894–1918)*, rev. ed. (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2002), 121.

13. *L’Ami du peuple du soir*, Dec. 20, 1929, quoted in Georges Sadoul, *Lumière et Méliès*, ed. Bernard Eisenschitz (Paris: Lherminier, 1985), 272.

14. Paul Hammond, *L’Âge d’or* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 58–60. Méliès himself regarded these “Vanguard films” as “purely disgusting.” Letter from Méliès to Crawford, July 3, 1931, *Merritt Crawford Papers*, reel 3.

15. Letter from Méliès to Crawford, Dec. 9, 1930, *Merritt Crawford Papers*, reel 3.

16. Letter from Méliès to Will Day, June 4, 1935, reproduced in *The Will Day Historical Collection of Cinematograph and Moving Picture Equipment*, special issue of 1895 (Oct. 1997): 64.

17. Letter from Méliès to Crawford, Mar. 17, 1931, *Merritt Crawford Papers*, reel 3.

18. On the Gala Méliès, see especially Roland Cosandey, “Georges Méliès as *L’Inescamotable Escamoteur*: A Study in Recognition,” in *Lo schermo incantato: Georges Méliès (1861–1938) / A Trip to the Movies: Georges Méliès, Filmmaker and Magician (1861–1938)*, ed. Paolo Cherchi Usai (Rochester: International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House; Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell’Immagine, Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 1991), 57–111. See also Maurice Noverre, “Le Gala Méliès,” *Nouvel Art cinématographique*, no. 5 (1930): 71–90.

19. Letter from E[ugène] Lauste to Méliès, Feb. 4, 1927; letter from LeRoy to Méliès, February 7, 1927; letter from LeRoy to Méliès, November 14, 1928, files 2/1, 2/2, 2/6, Georges and Gaston Méliès Collection, Special Collections, British Film Institute, London.

20. Letter from LeRoy to Méliès, February 7, 1927, file 2/2, Georges and Gaston Méliès Collection, British Film Institute.

21. Although none ever wrote a book, LeRoy, Crawford, and Noverre published items, respectively, in *Moving Picture World*, *Cinema*, and *Le Nouvel Art cinématographique*. See also Léo Sauvage, *L’Affaire Lumière: Enquête sur les*