

ALTERNATING EDITING IN VITAGRAPH FILMS, 1906-1909

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It is well-known that the feature that seems most peculiarly characteristic of the films directed by D.W. Griffith in the 1910s, the switchback or alternation, was not an invention of Griffith himself. George Pratt, basing himself solely on trade-press summaries of films, pointed out that the Pathé film *Le Médecin du château*, released in the United States as *A Narrow Escape* in March 1908 (426 feet), which climaxes in a race to the rescue of the hero's wife and children, threatened in their home by invading burglars, predated the beginning of Griffith's directorial career in June 1908, let alone his use of alternation in the similarly plotted *The Lonely Villa* (release date: June 10, 1909)¹. Barry Salt was able to confirm this claim when he identified a number of fragmentary prints in the National Film and Television Archive in London as *Le Médecin du château* and reconstructed the film as released, showing that it did, indeed, use an alternation between the doctor driving to the rescue and the retreat through various rooms of his family in their home². And Eileen Bowser noted the Vitagraph film *The Mill Girl*, copyrighted September 17, 1907, which contains a sequence in which the hero is attacked in an upstairs bedroom by agents of his jealous rival, with shots of him in the bedroom alternating four times with shots of the attackers outside attempting to break in³.

What is interesting here is not principally the issue of "who was first", however, but the fact that these filmmakers with unquestionable priority over Griffith in this respect did not, as it were, pursue their advantage. Griffith made alternating editing the fundamental device of almost all his one-reel films, and continued to use it extensively and spectacularly in his features. With the rise of the feature film in the USA in the mid 1910s, alternating editing became for most American filmmakers the basic method of organizing a long narrative. And even when, with the full establishment of the classical cinema around 1917, the scene (in Christian Metz's sense)⁴ joined alternating editing as one of the standard ways of organizing a sequence, alternation remained probably the second most common. Meanwhile, the pioneers did not make alternation so central; Vitagraph one-reel films from 1910 on make surprisingly little use of it⁵.

In what follows, I will examine the films made by the Vitagraph Company of America between the summer of 1906, when the first use of alternating editing can be detected in those films, and the end of 1909, by which time that use had decidedly ebbed, whereas the device had become central to the films produced by the American Biograph Company. A fairly comprehensive examination is possible because, not only are there quite a large number of extant prints of films produced in these years, but also the Vitagraph Company made copyright deposits of paper prints of fragments from nearly all the films they released between August 23, 1905 and October 9, 1909. However, comprehensive should not be taken to mean systematic, let alone statistical. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, the surviving materials make identification of alternation and of its extent in each film problematic. Surviving prints are incomplete, and may have suffered re-editing. The Paper Print fragments present even greater difficulties. In an article written for the 1987 *Giornate del Cinema Muto* in Pordenone⁶, I assessed the fragments as a whole, comparing them with extant prints and with descriptions in the American and English trade press of the films they were extracted from. Fragments consisting of a series of two-foot extracts from shots in the films are hard enough to interpret, but it is also clear that the order in which the fragments are arranged does not correspond to the release order in those deposited before October 1908. In almost every case, the fragments do not include intertitles, which are becoming increasingly important in surviving prints by the beginning of 1909. And even in the ones that are in eventual release order, whenever it is possible to compare the fragments with an extant print, there are shots in the extant print that are not represented in the fragments⁷.

But even if there were perfect surviving prints of all the films Vitagraph made in this period, it would still be difficult to make systematic claims about the extent to which they deploy alternating editing, because of uncertainties about the definition of alternating editing as such. Repetition might be said to be the fundamental means to aesthetic effect in all the arts – it is repetition that «projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination», as Roman Jakobson put it⁸, with the usual attendant disturbance in the relationship between signifier and signified, syntax and semantics. Any repetition, if insistent enough, will have such effects, and will thereby constitute an alternation. But alternating editing in the standard usage seems to require more. In a fiction film, or a diegetic film more generally, that is, one which represents an action, alternation seems to involve a split of the action into two (or more) strands and the representation successively of one of these strands and the other(s). For alternating *editing*, more still is required: the Martha's Garden scene in *Faust* involves an alternation, between the courtships of Faust and Marguerite on the one hand and Mephistopheles and Martha on the other, but, on stage, the alternation takes place within the scene, so a film of *Faust* that simply replaced scene changes with cuts or dissolves would have alternation here, but not alternating editing – obviously enough, alternating editing presupposes editing as such. Another awkward limit case is point-of-view editing. The split in the action here is minimal, but then so, arguably, is that between the chaser and the chased, and chase sequences in their classical (as opposed to primitive) form⁹ are the epitome of the alternating syntagm. However, I would tend to require repetitions of the shot of the viewer and what he or she views, with some development on both sides of the alternation – so *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième* (Pathé, 1900-01), where repeated shots of a man looking through a telescope alternate with shots of a woman progressively undressing, is a case of alternating editing, while *Un coup d'œil par étage* (Pathé, 1904), where a porter looks through the keyholes on successive landings and sees different scenes in the rooms opening off those landings, is not. But by now I am splitting hairs. The point is that it would be hard to produce a definition of alternating editing that would enable one to state unequivocally that any film did or did not have it, so a statistical approach to the issue is problematic. In what follows, I will consider both films that do, on the face of it, seem to alternate shots of a split action, and films which have split action, but eschew, or minimize cutting between the two sides of the split.

The first film by Vitagraph which we can be sure contains alternating editing in this sense is *The 100 to One Shot; or, A Run of Luck*¹⁰. This contains a repeated point-of-view sequence as the hero watches a horse race through binoculars and sees the horse he has bet on win (a possible example of alternating editing), but more significant is the very end of the film. The hero has placed his bet to raise the money to save his fiancée and her father from having their house seized

by a moneylender. After leaving the race course, he takes a taxi to her home. The final five shots of the film are as follows:

27. The entrance to the race-course. The hero boards a taxi and drives off in it.
28. Road. The taxi passes from rear to front.
29. The sitting room in the heroine's house (already seen in shot 3). The heroine enters followed by her father. The moneylender enters and demands payment; they can give him nothing; he claims the house. Bailiffs enter and start to lead the heroine's father off.
30. Country road rear to front. The taxi stops in front of a house; the hero descends and goes off into the house.
- 31 (as 29). The hero runs in. He grabs the deed from the moneylender and tears it up. He gives the moneylender money, then tosses a bunch of notes into the air and chases bailiffs and moneylender off. The heroine runs to embrace the hero, as her father dances in delight.

This is a last-minute-rescue alternation such as are found in *Le Médecin du château* or *The Lonely Villa*, but reduced to its minimum length. This kind of minimal alternation recurs in later films, and, indeed could be said to be the basic kind of alternation found in Vitagraph films from the summer of 1906 through to the end of 1909.

In my article on the Vitagraph fragments, I suggested that *The Bad Man – A Tale of the West*¹¹, represents a more complex example, but, given that the fragments are jumbled, and that I have been unable to find a contemporary plot summary that would enable one to reconstruct the proairesis, it is hard to establish a likely order for the film as issued, and the least unlikely ones do not necessarily involve alternation¹².

*The Hero*¹³ is less equivocal. Although for it, too, I have only seen the fragments and know of no published summary, there seems little doubt as to its original form, and, as it happens, the fragments are correctly ordered (here and in my other shot breakdowns of the Paper Print fragments, I put in square brackets the minimum amount of action that I deduce to be necessary for the story not represented in the fragments themselves – in most cases, action that occurs in footage in each scene before and after that in the fragment itself):

1. Dining room interior, with a little girl sitting at the table. Smoke begins to fill the room. [The girl tries to get out through the door but finds her way blocked. She opens the window and calls for help].
2. Slight high-angle view of the street, with the ground floor of a house. The street door opens, smoke emerges. Inhabitants of the house run on into the street. Men point up to the upper floor, off the top of screen.
3. Horizontal view of two upper-storey windows from the street side. One window is open, and the girl is sitting on the sill.
- 4 (as 2). [A man steps out of the crowd]. The man starts to climb a drainpipe. [He exits top of screen].
- 5 (as 3). [The man climbs on from bottom of screen up the drainpipe]. The man grabs the little girl from the window sill. [He climbs back off down the drainpipe carrying her].
- 6 (as 2). [The man enters down the drainpipe carrying the girl]. As he stands on the sidewalk he is cheered by all the spectators.

This is a clear alternation, though the spatial division of the action is so slight that shots 2 to 6 are a Metzian scene – it is only the difficulty of bridging the gap between the girl on the window

sill and the crowd watching from the street that constitutes a divided action and hence an alternation. Moreover, the scenes are linked by glances and movements from shot to shot.

*The Easterner – A Tale of the West*¹⁴ is another example of minimal closing alternation. An Easterner on his honeymoon out West drives his car to a remote saloon, where most of the locals have never seen an automobile. He is challenged by Bad Bill, a cowboy, to race his car against Bill's horse. The race is represented in primitive chase style, with both competitors passing through different shots of the landscape, the car steadily drawing ahead of the horse. Finally, the car arrives outside the saloon on its own. The Easterner gets down, is congratulated by the spectators, and exits into the saloon. In the next shot, inside the saloon, he enters followed by the spectators; he claims his winnings and stands drinks all round. Back outside, Bad Bill rides up on his horse, dismounts, curses the horse, kicks the car, then readies his revolvers before exiting into the saloon. In the next shot, inside the saloon as before, Bad Bill enters and challenges the Easterner to draw. Thus the alternation is confined to the last three shots.

*The Mill Girl – A Story of Factory Life*¹⁵, discussed by Eileen Bowser in the article cited above, contains the following sequence:

13. A bedroom, with a window in the left-hand wall. The hero enters and starts to get ready for bed.
14. The outside of a house, with a shuttered window on the ground floor. The hero's supervisor (the villain of the story) calls on two accomplices with bludgeons. The accomplices tiptoe off.
- 15 (as 13). The hero is in bed. He wakes, listens to something, gets out of bed and goes to the window.
- 16 (as 14). The accomplices carry on a ladder which they prop against the house wall.
- 17 (as 13). The hero turns from the window and arranges pillows and blankets on the bed to imitate a sleeping man. He crouches beside the bed holding a cudgel.
- 18 (as 14). The blackguards climb the ladder.
- 19 (as 13). The blackguards climb in the window and bludgeon the dummy in the bed. The hero leaps up and attacks them with his cudgel, knocking one of them out. The other escapes through the window. The hero picks up the unconscious one and throws him out of the window.
- 20 (as 14). The unconscious blackguard falls from top of frame onto the supervisor at the foot of the ladder. He and the conscious blackguard run off.

This is a classic alternating segment, but only a minor high point, in the middle of the story (which climaxes later with the rescue of the heroine from a fire).

Pratt cited *The Tale of a Shirt*¹⁶ as one of the precursors of Griffith's use of alternation, basing himself on the summary which does suggest an alternating structure. Father, packing to depart on a trip, finds he has no clean shirts, and sends his son Willie to the laundry to collect the shirts waiting there for pickup. Willie sets out, but is waylaid by playmates and delayed by the games he plays with them; when he has collected the clean shirts, he runs into the same problem on the return trip, but this time the shirts are soiled again by the effect on them of Willie's games. The *Moving Picture World* description of the trip to the laundry ends with a parenthesis reading: «For a moment we catch a glimpse of father impatiently awaiting the return of his son, pacing up and down the room, watching the clock, etc». The account of the return trip is similarly interrupted by a parenthesis reading: «Father is again observed opening the front door, looking up and down the street, tearing his hair, etc». The summary thus posits two returns to Father waiting while basically following Willie's trip to the laundry and back. The Paper Print fragments, which are not in

final order, could fit this structure. The first two show the same interior; in the first, Father is searching for a shirt; in the second he does not seem to be doing anything in particular. A later fragment shows the outside of a house with Father jumping up and down in the street by the front door. The rest of the fragments are street scenes with children's games and a tramp inspecting a very dirty shirt. Thus the first fragment could be the first shot, the second the first cutaway to Father, and the house door scene the second such cutaway.

The Tale of a Shirt is generically close to the next two titles I wish to consider. *Get Me a Step-Ladder*¹⁷ is very short:

1. Title: *Get me a Step-Ladder*.
2. Richly furnished sitting room. Mother is seated sewing, while Father is fixing a small picture to the wall rear centre. As Mother rises, Father piles furniture and climbs on it to hang a large picture on the rear wall. He jumps to reach the picture rail, accidentally kicking away the furniture, so he is left swinging helplessly from the rail. Mother rushes over to help. He says, "Get me a Step-Ladder!" She runs off.
3. Cluttered lobby. Mother runs through.
- 4 (as 2). Father hangs from the rail.
5. Richly furnished hall. Mother runs through.
- 6 (as 2). Father hanging from the rail. He drops the picture.
7. Kitchen, with the Cook on a ladder fetching crockery from a dresser. Mother runs on, shouts, and startles the Cook, who grabs onto the dresser to keep her balance, knocking it over and falling onto the stove. Mother grabs the ladder, knocks over the front table with the ladder; everyone falls in a heap. Mother gets up and exits with the ladder, demolishing the door in the process. Cook is left sitting in a daze.
- 8 (as 5). Mother runs through with the ladder, scattering furniture left and right.
- 9 (as 3). Mother runs through with the ladder, knocking down all the furniture.
- 10 (as 2). Father still hanging. Mother enters right dragging the ladder. As she arrives, Father falls from the rail to the floor. He is furious and beats her.

*How Jones Saw the Carnival*¹⁸, can be reconstructed as follows:

1. The streets of Nice in carnival time. Revellers in costume pass by, some exiting into a hotel. [Mr. Septimius Jones of Jonesville emerges from the crowd and exits into the hotel].
2. The hotel lobby. [Jones enters]. Jones checks in at the desk. [He exits to the interior of the hotel].
3. [Jones's room. He enters. He looks out of the window and chuckles in anticipation. He goes to the desk, and writes a letter].
4. [Insert letter: Mrs. Septimius Jones, Colonna Hotel, Rome. Dearest: – Arrived at Nice this morning. Horribly crowded with vulgar people on account of the carnival. Very uncomfortable. Don't join me for two days. Your loving husband, Septimius Jones].
- 5 (as 3). [He rings for service. Felice, a French maid, enters]. Jones flirts with the maid. [He asks her if she is going to the carnival. She leaves, and re-enters with a box containing her costume. He asks if she can get him a costume, tipping her handsomely. She says she will, and re-exits].
6. Another room in the hotel. [A bearded man is its occupant. Felice enters]. Felice borrows a clown costume from the bearded man. [She re-exits].
- 7 (as 3). Jones waiting. [Felice re-enters with the costume, and tells Jones what it will cost. He is staggered, but finally hands over the money].

- 8 (as 2). [Mrs. Jones enters from the street. She goes to the desk and checks the register, finding her husband's name]. Mrs. Jones checks into the room taken by Jones.
- 9 (as 3). Jones has changed into the clown costume. [He arranges to meet Felice in an hour at a certain point in town, and exits].
- 10 (as 2). Mrs. Jones finishes registering. [She starts for the room, perhaps passing Jones en route].
- 11 (as 3). [Mrs. Jones enters]. She unpacks her bags. [She rings for a maid. Felice enters. Mrs. Jones asks Felice where her husband is. Felice pretends ignorance, but Mrs. Jones offers her a large bribe. She points out of the window].
12. The street, filled with dancing revellers in costume, including Mr. Jones in his clown costume.
13. (as 3). Felice tells Mrs. Jones of her rendez-vous with Mr. Jones. Mrs. Jones asks Felice for a costume of her own. Felice exits. Felice re-enters with a second clown costume, gives it to Mrs. Jones, and re-exits. Mrs. Jones dons the costume. [Mrs. Jones exits].
- 14 (as 11). [Mrs. Jones enters]. Mrs. Jones looks for Mr. Jones. [She finds him. Mr. Jones starts to flirt with her. They exit together].
15. A private room in a restaurant. [Mr. and Mrs. Jones enter]. Mr. Jones makes love to Mrs. Jones. At the climax, she un.masks, and beats him. [He pleads with her, and she finally consents to forgive him – on her own terms].
16. Outside the railroad station in Jonesville, Vermont, two weeks later. [A train enters along the tracks across the rear and stops. Mr. and Mrs. Jones descend from the train; a porter deposits their luggage. The train leaves]. Mrs. Jones loads all the luggage onto Mr. Jones's back.

These three films are short comedies, less than half a reel in length. The first two are versions of the primitive “repertory of gags comedy”, where each new shot introduces a new variant on the basic gag – Willie's street games in the *The Tale of a Shirt*, the mayhem caused by Mother's ladder in *Get Me a Step-Ladder*. Alternation helps to protract the series of gags, and to remind us of the original cause. Suspense is not really at issue (although Father is literally suspended in *Get Me a Step-Ladder*). *How Jones Saw the Carnival*, too, though it does involve the suspense of waiting for Jones to find out his wife is on to his shenanigans, is more concerned with the irony of Jones's situation than with any drive to a resolution.

*The Inn of Death – An Adventure in the Pyrenees Mountains*¹⁹ can be tentatively reconstructed as follows:

1. Outside an inn in the Pyrenees known as “The Inn of Death”. [Antonio, a brigand, points out to Luigi, the innkeeper, and his wife Maria an approaching English traveller, and leaves. As the traveller arrives, Maria is persecuting Beppa, the slavey; the traveller intervenes to protect Beppa]. Luigi and Maria bow to the traveller, inviting him into the inn, as Beppa watches, anxiously. [They go into the inn].
2. The dining room inside the inn, with stairs leading to an upper storey. [The traveller eats his supper, and Maria shows him off upstairs to his bedroom. Beppa hides in a cupboard. Maria comes back, and Luigi and Antonio come in. They and Maria plan to murder and rob the traveller]. They shake their fists at him off upstairs. [They leave. Beppa comes out of her hiding place and exits up the stairs].
3. The traveller's bedroom. He is sleeping in the bed, when the bed canopy starts to descend to suffocate him. Beppa runs in. [She wakes him, and gets him off the bed before the canopy reaches it. Beppa and the traveller climb out of the bedroom window. The three plotters come in; they raise the canopy, but find the traveller gone. They start in pursuit].

4. A different view of the inn yard. [Beppa and the traveller enter, run through, and exit. The three conspirators run in]. The three conspirators run through. [They exit].
5. The interior of a barn, with a ladder leading up to the loft. [Beppa and the traveller run in]. Beppa leads the traveller up the ladder. [They exit into the loft].
6. The exterior of the barn. Beppa climbs out of the loft window and down the creeper.
- 7 (as 5). [The three conspirators enter]. They climb the ladder.
8. The interior of a police station. Beppa runs in. [Beppa tells the policeman on duty of the traveller's danger. She and a group of police run off back towards the inn].
9. The barn loft, a split set with the loft and its window left, the landing right. [The conspirators enter on the landing, and try the door to the loft – it is locked. Maria goes off and gets an axe. Antonio takes the axe and starts to beat down the door. The traveller draws a pistol]. The traveller fires, wounding Antonio. [The door is broken down. Luigi picks up the axe that Antonio has dropped and attacks the traveller].
- 10 (as 5). [Beppa runs in with the police]. The police climb the ladder, as Beppa stands at its foot. [The police exit into the loft].
- 11 (as 9). [The police run in right from the ladder, and enter the loft, left. They disarm Luigi]. The police seize Luigi, Antonio, and Maria.

Despite the splitting of the narrative into three strands – the conspirators, the English traveller in the loft, and Beppa running to the police station and back – alternating editing is kept to a minimum: the beginning of the chase is done the primitive way, with both the pursued, Beppa and the traveller, and the pursuers, the innkeeper, his wife and the brigand, running through the same shot. Only when Beppa and the traveller have entered the loft and Beppa has escaped to convey the warning to the police, is there a return to the scene at the foot of the ladder to the loft; and when the traveller is directly besieged in the loft, the film uses a split set to show both parties simultaneously. A single return to the scene at the foot of the ladder followed by another to the scene at the top of the ladder close the alternation.

*Sheridan's Ride*²⁰, looks at first to be a clear instance of an extended alternation:

1. October 19, 1864. Union General Philip Sheridan's lodgings at Winchester, Virginia, in the Shenandoah Valley. Sheridan and other Union officers are seated at a table, with a sentry on guard. [They hear the sounds of Confederate General Jubal Early's cannonade at Cedar Creek, twenty miles away].
2. Landscape near Cedar Creek, Virginia, with clouds of smoke from cannons.
- 3 (as 1). Sheridan exits.
4. Outside Sheridan's lodgings in Winchester. [Sheridan enters]. Sheridan mounts his horse. [Sheridan rides off].
5. Another view of Cedar Creek, with guns firing.
6. Landscape. Sheridan rides.
7. Cedar Creek, with guns firing.
8. Another landscape. Sheridan riding.
9. Cedar Creek. [Sheridan rides in]. Sheridan reaches the Union troops. [Sheridan rallies fleeing Union soldiers].

The film simply alternates shots of Sheridan, in all but one riding his horse, with battlefield shots, and might thus seem a clear suspenseful "ride-to-the-rescue" alternation. However, this appearance is deceptive. Although the shots of the battle are impressively graphic, they do not, in

the fragments at any rate, really show any proairetic logic – they are pictures of a battle, not the narration of a battle. And the alternating pattern derives directly from the famous poem *Sheridan's Ride*, written by Thomas Buchanan Read in 1864, with its end-of-stanza lines repeated with slight variations: «And Sheridan twenty miles away. [...] And Sheridan twenty miles away. [...] With Sheridan fifteen miles away. [...] With Sheridan only ten miles away. [...] With Sheridan only five miles away. [...] From Winchester down to save the day. [...] From Winchester, twenty miles away».

In my previous article, I argued that there were no unequivocal examples of alternating editing in the films made in 1909, at least as far as could be told from the Paper Print fragments. I would now qualify that claim a little, and note that the minimal alternation which was seen in the earliest examples, which persists into the 1907 and 1908 films, and could be said to be the Vitagraph norm in handling alternation, is also found in the 1909 titles. However, although many of the narratives do have more than one strand of action, sometimes involving the suspenseful anticipation of how the strands will join or rejoin, alternations between the strands of more than one or two shots from each are not found. In order to illustrate and explicate this, it seems necessary to give fairly long shot breakdowns of complete films. By 1909, not only are some titles approaching a full reel in length, but Vitagraph films tend to have a relatively large number of shots compared with those of all other American producers but Biograph.

In *The Fisherman; or, Men Must Work and Women Must Weep*²¹, Ben Bourne and his son take leave of Mrs. Bourne and the son's little sister and go out on a fishing trip. Their boat is capsized by a squall, and only the father is left clinging to the upturned boat. Mrs. Bourne rows out and rescues her husband, but there is no sign of the son. He is washed up on the beach, and when the Bournes reach him, he appears to be dead, but artificial respiration brings him round and the family are reunited. The film follows the family until the departure of the men; there is then an alternation of scenes: boat at sea/women returning to their home/boat capsizing/Mrs. Bourne coming out of their home to look out to sea. The film then follows Mrs. Bourne until she reaches her husband and starts back to shore with him. Another minimal alternation shows fishermen finding the son in the sea and bringing him ashore. In the next shot the fishermen are joined by Mr. and Mrs. Bourne, and the son is revived in the last shot.

1. A fisherman's shack by the beach. [Ben Bourne, a fisherman, his wife Nellie, and their adolescent son Little Ben and four-year-old daughter Lucy enter from the shack]. The family collect fishing gear. [They exit].
2. The shore, with a boat drawn up on it. [The family enter]. Big Ben and Little Ben ready the boat, helped by Nellie and Lucy. They push the boat out, Big Ben gets in, followed by Little Ben. [Nellie and Lucy watch as the boat is rowed out to sea].
3. The boat in the open sea. Big Ben and Little Ben catch fish. [A squall begins].
4. (as 1). But tilted up. Nellie and Lucy enter. [They go off into the shack].
5. (as 3). [Big Ben tries to ship the oars, but the boat capsizes]. Big Ben clings to the upturned boat, but Little Ben is nowhere to be seen. Big Ben waves for help.
6. Same shack as in 1 and 4, but more frontally filmed. [Nellie enters from the shack with a lantern]. Nellie looks off towards the sea. [She exits].
7. Shore (not the location of 2). [Nellie enters]. Nellie holds up the lantern and looks out to sea.
8. Shore with boat. [Nellie enters with lantern, pushes boat into the water]. Nellie gets into the boat. [Nellie rows out].
9. The open sea. The upturned boat with Big Ben astride the keel. [Nellie rows in]. Nellie helps Big Ben into her boat. [Nellie rows the boat off].

10. The open sea. [Nellie rows the boat on]. As Nellie rows, Big Ben sits helpless with exhaustion and grief near the stern of the boat. [Nellie rows the boat off].
11. Rocky shore. [Little Ben floats in. Two fishermen enter]. The fishermen haul Little Ben ashore. [The fishermen carry Little Ben off].
12. Shore. [Nellie rows the boat on and beaches it. She helps Big Ben onto the beach]. Nellie and Big Ben come up the beach. [The fishermen enter carrying the unconscious Little Ben. Nellie and Big Ben join them, grief-stricken, and the whole group exits].
- 13 (as 1). [The two fishermen carry Little Ben on and lay him down in front of the shack. Nellie and Big Ben follow them on]. Nellie and Big Ben weep over their apparently dead son. One of the fisherman applies artificial respiration. [Little Ben recovers consciousness. The Bournes offer up a prayer of thanks].

The following reconstruction of *An Alpine Echo; or, The Symphony of a Swiss Music Box*²² combines information from both surviving print and the Paper Print fragments (there were probably originally a main title and an opening subtitle before what I have numbered shot 1; the closer framing of shot 45 indicates that it is the last shot other than a “The End” title)²³.

1. (Not in NFTVA print). Carpenter’s shop in the Swiss Alps. An old carpenter and his grandson Antoine put the final touches to a music box.
2. The living room in Grandfather’s chalet. He and Antoine listen to the music box. [They hear something and run to the rear window to look out].
3. Model shot of a mountain valley. An avalanche rolls down into the valley.
- 4 (as 2). [Grandfather and Antoine exit].
5. Outside the chalet. [Antoine runs off as Grandfather enters from the chalet door]. Grandfather runs forward. [Grandfather runs off].
6. Rocks. Grandfather and Antoine descend a steep rock, using a rope. [Antoine jumps off bottom of screen].
7. A pile of rocks and timbers, the remains of a house crushed by the avalanche. [Antoine runs in and finds a little girl, Lena, buried in the debris]. Antoine picks Lena up. [He carries her off. Grandfather enters and drags a dead man, Lena’s father, from the debris].
8. The bridge over a stream. [Antoine enters, carrying Lena. He puts her down, gets water from the stream, and tries to revive her with it. He calls off and Grandfather enters]. Grandfather picks up the unconscious Lena. [Grandfather starts to carry her off].
- 9 (as 2). [Antoine enters and removes things from the bed under the windows. Grandfather enters carrying Lena, and seats her by the stove]. Antoine starts the music box. Lena stirs and wakes. She listens to the music box. [Lena falls back asleep].
10. [Title: ONE YEAR LATER: Childish Love].
11. Mountain road. Antoine and Lena leading a cow.
12. Road passing through open double gate in front of a duckpond. [Antoine and Lena enter with the cow and come forward through the gate. Antoine and the cow exit. Lena closes the right leaf of the gate. Antoine re-enters and closes the left leaf. As they meet in the middle, they kiss]. They skip together. [They exit].
- 13 (closer version of 5). [Grandfather descending steps from the chalet, carrying the music box. He sits at the bottom of the steps and calls. Antoine and Lena enter]. Grandfather, Antoine and Lena listen to the music box.
14. [Title: TEN YEARS LATER].
- 15 (as 2). [Lena at the stove, Antoine and Grandfather eating breakfast at the table. The children are now grown up (change of actors). Antoine is in *Lederhosen* and carrying a rope. The music

- box is on the bench by the stove. Antoine caresses it as he makes preparations to leave. He says goodbye to Grandfather, kisses Lena].
16. The porch of an inn, in chalet style, with a sign reading “Der grünen Kranz”. A party of tourists and guides is waiting outside. [Antoine comes forward to join them. As he does so, the American girl and her woman companion join the group. The chief guide introduces them to Antoine. The American girl confides to her companion, with giggles, that Antoine is very handsome]. Antoine is smitten by her, to the girls’ amusement. [The whole party exits].
 17. A mountain path, with the party walking towards camera, roped together. [Most of the party exit, but the American girl and her companion linger as Antoine, the rearmost guide, comes up to them. The American girl complains she has twisted her ankle (but grins conspiratorially to her companion). Antoine picks her up and carries her off].
 18. Different view of the steps of Grandfather’s chalet. [Lena is coming down the steps, carrying a basket]. Lena goes to the right, smiling happily.
 19. [Same angle as 12, longer framing. Lena enters between the gates and stops at a bridge over a stream. She looks off. She comes forward across the bridge and takes a field path away from the road and exits].
 20. A path in a rocky defile. [Antoine supports the American girl on from the rear. She sits down and he examines her ankle]. Lena appears at the rear of the defile. [The American girl gives Antoine her card. Lena sees, and registers shock. Antoine and the American girl exit front. Lena comes forward down the defile, expresses despair, and begins to exit].
 - 21 (as 2). Lena and Grandfather. [Antoine enters]. Antoine sits moodily at the table. [Grandfather offers him food, but he refuses. Lena opens the music box, but he angrily rejects the sound and goes to the window rear left. Lena tries to comfort him].
 22. (Not in NFTVA print). Rocky countryside. Antoine and the American girl courting.
 23. Hotel room. [The American girl and her companion enter in outdoor clothes]. The American girl and her companion laugh together about Antoine. [Two hotel servants enter. The American girl gives one of them a letter. The servants takes the girls’ trunks off. The American girl and her companion start to exit].
 - 24 (approximately the same as 13). [Grandfather and Lena are sitting on the bench, Antoine is coming from the rear, dressed as a guide. He sits on the bench, Grandfather and Lena rise. The hotel servant of 23 enters and gives Antoine a letter. The servant exits]. Antoine stands to read the letter.
 25. [Insert letter: I cannot accept your proposal. I am leaving unexpectedly for America. Call on me – if ever you come to New York. Beatrice Pastor].
 - 26 (as 24). Antoine expresses despair, refuses Lena’s comfort, and exits up the stairs. Grandfather and Lena try to comfort each other].
 - 27 (as 2). Antoine enters. He sits at the table, and makes a decision. [He gets up, gets writing things, and sits back down at the table and writes].
 28. [Insert letter: My dear Uncle and Marie: – I am following the American lady to the United States. When I have won her you shall hear from me. Antoine].
 - 29 (as 2). [Antoine puts the letter on the music box. He goes towards the door].
 30. (Not in NFTVA print). The exterior of the chalet in a new view. [Antoine enters from the chalet]. Antoine says goodbye to the chalet and the scenes of his youth. [Antoine exits].
 - 31 (Not in NFTVA print). (As 2). [Grandfather and Lena enter and find the letter. Grandfather reads it]. Grandfather and Lena are disconsolate.
 32. [Title: ONE MONTH LATER].

33. (Not in NFTVA print). Porch of a New York town house. [Antoine, still in his *Lederhosen*, enters]. Antoine points at the door – he has found the place. [He goes to the door, he knocks, a servant answers, and Antoine hands in a note. The servant exits into the house].
34. A fashionable salon, with the American girl sitting in the chair. [The servant enters and hands the American girl Antoine's letter on a salver. He awaits instructions, as the American girl rises and reads the letter]. The American girl paces furiously backwards and forwards. [She gives the servant orders, he exits].
35. A similar room. Antoine is sitting on a settle, hat in hand. [The servant enters, followed by the American girl]. The American girl tells the servant to throw Antoine out. [He protests, she tears up the letter. He starts to exit].
36. [Title: TWO YEARS LATER: ALONE IN THE WORLD. The Promise to search for the Wanderer].
- 37 (as 2). There is now a bed in front of the stove, the music box as usual on the bench by the stove. Grandfather is lying in the bed. Lena is kneeling, clutching Grandfather's hand. A priest is administering last rites. Grandfather points to the music box. [He makes Lena swear an oath to take the music box to Antoine, and expires].
38. [Title: MARIE ARRIVES IN AMERICA].
39. Real New York street, with iron railings and a gate, the building behind having "Ellis Island" written on it (the Ellis Island ferry terminal?). A crowd is coming through the gate onto the street, including Lena with the music box wrapped in a shawl.
40. [Title: ONE MONTH LATER: A Stranger in a Strange land. THE SEARCH FOR ANTOINE].
41. A poor room in a boarding house. The music box is on a table. [Lena enters followed by her landlady. Lena sits]. The landlady demands rent. [Lena decides she must sell the music box. She wraps it in her shawl].
42. The street exterior of a junk shop, with signs: "Swiss Carvings a Specialty"; "Antiques". [Lena enters, carrying the music box]. Lena points to the signs. [She exits into the shop].
43. Inside the junk shop, with the back room visible through a glazed door and windows. [Antoine in an apron is examining a carved chair. The shopkeeper enters rear, and sends Antoine off rear. His back can be seen through the glass panels in the rear door. Lena enters front, carrying the music box. Antoine disappears from view in the back room]. Lena tells the shopkeeper she has something to sell him. [Lena hands the music box to the shopkeeper. He opens the box and listens to the music, and then makes Lena an offer].
44. The back room of the junk shop. [Antoine is working at a bench. He turns as he hears the music box and drops his tools. He reaches out as superimpositions of Grandfather, then Lena and Antoine as children, are faded in and out]. A superimposition fades up of Lena reaching towards the real Antoine.
- 45 (Closer version of 43). [Lena is sitting disconsolately while the shopkeeper listens to the music box. Antoine is in the rear doorway. He asks the shopkeeper where he got the box, and the shopkeeper points to Lena. Antoine turns, Lena rises]. Lena and Antoine join hands. [The shopkeeper gives Lena back the box. Lena and Antoine exit].

For most of the film, the narrative has two strands. The opening follows Antoine and his grandfather as they rescue and adopt the orphaned Lena, and then Antoine and Lena's childish romance. When Antoine is seduced by the American girl, there is a four-shot alternation (shots 17 to 20) between Antoine and Lena, ending when Lena sees the couple kiss. There is a two-shot alternation between Antoine writing and leaving the letter announcing his departure and his grandfather and Lena finding and reading it. Then the two strands are shown in blocks: shots 32 to 35 relate

Antoine's adventures in New York until he leaves the American girl's house in despair; then shots 36 to 42 show the grandfather's death and Lena's trip to New York and search for Antoine. After Lena arrives outside the junk shop, three shots alternate between Antoine then Lena in the front room of the shop (which Antoine leaves before Lena enters), Antoine in the back room, and the reuniting of the couple in the front.

*The Little Father; or, The Dressmaker's Loyal Son*²⁴:

1. Interior, the house of the widowed Mrs. Northfield, a dressmaker. She is there with her adolescent son Robert, younger daughter, and baby. She finishes a blouse she is working on, and prepares to leave. [She leaves with the blouse. Robert leaves for his work].
2. The boudoir of Mrs. Aldcorn, a rich woman and patron of Mrs. Northfield's. [She takes off jewelry and hides it. The dressmaker comes in with the blouse]. Mrs. Aldcorn looks at the blouse and notes a problem with the work. [Mrs. Northfield agrees to deal with it there and then. She settles down to work, while Mrs. Aldcorn leaves. The work finished, Mrs. Northfield leaves (this might happen in shot 4)].
3. Street, with news stand. The news stand has a "for sale" notice posted on it. [Robert enters]. Robert greets the old proprietor. [The proprietor hands Robert newspapers to deliver. Robert exits with them].
- 4 (as 2). [Mrs. Aldcorn comes in and starts to dress for dinner. She looks for her jewelry, but it is not where she incorrectly remembers having left it. She calls her husband, who comes in]. She explains to her husband what happened, showing him the finished blouse. [They leave to get the police].
- 5 (as 1). The Northfields are gathered. [The Aldcorns arrive with the police and take Mrs. Northfield away].
6. Court room. Mrs. Northfield is on trial for stealing Mrs. Aldcorn's jewelry. Her children are among the audience at the trial. Mr. Aldcorn gives evidence. [Mrs. Northfield is found guilty and condemned to prison. Robert promises to look after the other children while she is in prison. Mrs. Northfield is taken away to prison].
7. The street. Robert is laying out newspapers on the news stand. [He proposes buying the news stand from the old proprietor. Possibly he makes arrangements with a second-hand dealer to sell items of the family's furniture to help pay for it].
- 8 (closer version of 1). Furniture is missing. [The scene may begin with the furniture being removed for sale to the second-hand dealer]. The three children make and eat dinner in the absence of their mother in prison.
- 9 (as 2). Mrs. Aldcorn finds the hidden jewelry. She calls her husband and tells him. [They rush out to exculpate Mrs. Northfield].
10. The office of the prison. [The Aldcorns arrive and explain to the governor that they have found the supposedly stolen jewelry. The governor calls for Mrs. Northfield's release, and she is brought from her cell]. The Aldcorns apologise to her.
11. Different view of the news stand, now enlarged. The "for sale" sign has gone. Robert is selling newspapers at the stand. A policeman is standing beside him. [The policeman may have entered to tell him that his mother has been exonerated. Mrs. Northfield and the Aldcorns enter. Aldcorn gives Robert money to expand his newspaper business].

The departures of Mrs. Northfield and Robert in the first scene introduce two of the other spaces, and hence narrative strands: the Aldcorns' house and the news stand. A minimal alternation follows as the Aldcorns discover the supposed loss of the jewelry and we return to the

Northfields' house for the arrest. The film continues to alternate scenes in the established locations, but without the immediate connection typical of last-minute-rescue alternations.

*The Power of the Press*²⁵ was the last film Vitagraph released in 1909:

1. Title: *The Power of the PRESS, or Politics VS. Journalism, Produced by the Vitagraph Co. of America*
2. Title: *The Mayor of Griggsville and the New Editor.*
3. Interior of a bar, with several men in cowboy costume drinking. Bill Mawson, the Mayor of Griggsville, enters. Another cowboy follows him on and shows him a newspaper.
4. Newspaper insert: *Since Mr. Mark Lamson, late Editor of the Press has found it necessary to leave town for the good of his health, we are glad to announce that his place as Editor of the Press will be filled by John Masden a young Journalist from Kansas, who will conduct the paper on the same free and outspoken lines as heretofore.*
- 5 (as 3). John Masden enters carrying a case. He puts down the case and orders a whiskey, while the Mayor and his cronies are laughing at the newspaper story. The Mayor calls John over and tells him that he, the Mayor, will decide what the newspaper will print. John says no, I will decide. He exits.
6. Title: *The Mayor's niece has an Adventure.*
7. House porch from the sidewalk. The Mayor's niece and three women friends come onto the porch. The niece comes down the steps, waves goodbye to her friends, and exits.
8. The house from the road. The niece comes through the garden gate and turns towards front. Two drunks enter and make advances to her. She expresses indignation. John enters and tells the drunks to leave the woman alone. They refuse, a fight follows, and he knocks them down. They exit. John escorts the niece off.
9. Title: *The Mayor Makes a Proposition.*
10. The Mayor's dining room, with the Mayor sitting facing front. His niece and John enter. She tells her uncle about the adventure. The Mayor expresses pleasure, and rises. The Mayor offers to shake John's hand in gratitude, then recognizes him, and John recognizes the Mayor. Though both bristle, they shake hands. The Mayor offers John a drink; he refuses, but sits at the table and accepts a cigar. The Mayor asks his niece to leave them alone, and she exits. The Mayor gestures to the newspaper on the table, and asks John to lay off, but John refuses. The Mayor takes money from his pocket and offers it to John, but he again refuses, stands up, lectures the Mayor, and exits. The Mayor rises, and thinks.
11. Title: *Trouble brewing.*
- 12 (as 3). The Mayor enters and gets a drink from the barman. A cowboy enters and shows the Mayor a copy of the newspaper. The Mayor reads, expresses fury, and exits. The cowboy relays the news to the barman.
14. Title: *Incriminating Evidence.*
15. The offices of the Press, with the printing press rear right. John is sitting behind the table, a compositor is at work by the press. The compositor takes a proof from the press and brings it to John, who rises and looks at it. It reads: *The Press, CORRUPTION EXPOSED, MAYOR AND COUNSEL [sic] GRAFTERS, THE PRESS FIGHTS FOR PUBLIC AND POLITICAL PURITY.* The compositor exits and John sits down again. The Mayor enters. He and John discuss the paper. John gets a document out of his pocket and reads it out. John and the Mayor sit back down. The Mayor tries to grab the document without success. He begs for it, offers money for it, then draws a gun, and knocks over the lamp. In the succeeding darkness, John crouches behind the desk, gets his own gun from a drawer, and holds the Mayor up with it.

The Mayor retreats, making threats, and exits.

16. Title: *The Conspiracy*.

17 (as 10). The niece is sitting at the table. The Mayor enters with two cowboys and tells his niece to leave. She does. The Mayor and the cowboys sit and plot.

18. Title: *A listener*.

19. Partly open door, with the niece, in chiaroscuro medium long shot, listening.

20. Title: *The Warning*.

21 (as 14). John is at his desk. The niece runs in and begs him to run away. He refuses, and makes light of the threat. Nevertheless, he carefully checks and loads his revolver. She exits without him noticing. He gets back to work.

22. A field. The niece, on horseback, rides through.

23. The sheriff's office, with the sheriff sitting at his desk and deputies standing. The niece runs in and calls to the sheriff, who rises. Everyone exits.

24 (as 14). John is at his desk, left. He hears something and turns to look out of the window. The Mayor, in cowboy costume and with a kerchief over his face, enters and holds John up at pistol point. John attacks the Mayor, pulling off his kerchief, but cowboys run in, overpower John, tie him up, and gag him. The Mayor blows out the light and all exit, manhandling John along with them.

25. Countryside with a settlement rear left and a road. The niece, the sheriff, and four deputies ride along the road.

26. A tree with a large overhanging branch in a wood. One of the cowboys is tying a noose to the branch. They Mayor and other cowboys drag John in and get the noose ready.

27. River and a line of trees. The sheriff, the niece, and the deputies ride in, dismount, and exit into the trees.

28. Title: *Right is Might*.

29 (as 25). The Mayor and cowboys are preparing to hang John. Suddenly they turn to look off, then flee, as the niece, the sheriff and the deputies enter. The sheriff holds up the masked and disguised Mayor as the niece unties John. John grabs a gun, says he will guard the prisoner. The sheriff exits after the rest of the gang, leaving the Mayor, John and the niece on the scene. John drops his gun and tells the Mayor to flee. The Mayor is amazed, lowers his mask, and expresses shame. John offers him his hand. The Mayor shakes it. The Mayor exits. John and the niece embrace.

The main two strands of the story involve John Lamsden on the one hand and the Mayor and his sidekicks on the other, but a secondary division appears at the end between Lamsden and the Mayor's niece. Most of the time, the first split is handled by having characters from one strand go to the locations principally associated with the other, creating a very minimal alternation. Only at the very end, when Lamsden refuses the Mayor's niece's advice to flee and she goes to get help for him from the sheriff, is there an eight-shot alternation (A-B-B-A-B-A-B-Title-A) between Lamsden and his captors on the one hand (A), and the niece and the sheriff on the other (B); even here, the first pair and the last are linked by the presence of the niece on both sides of each.

So, to summarize, the filmmakers at the Vitagraph Company of America²⁶ began using a form of alternating editing in 1906, and continued to use it until at least the end of 1909. However, for the most part they kept the number of alternations needed to tell the story to a minimum; only in 1907-8 are there any signs of their developing multiple sets of shots in different strands of the story in such a way as to orchestrate a climax (*The Mill Girl*). In 1908, alternation is primarily

used in comic films (*Get Me a Step-Ladder*), as a way of dilating the film in order to multiply repetitions of gags (*Sheridan's Ride* is an exception, its multiple alternations deriving from the literary source rather than from any filmmaking strategy). In 1909, the Company reverted to the minimal use they had pioneered three years earlier. In such film as *An Alpine Echo* and *The Power of the Press* we can see the beginnings of the typical Vitagraph method of constructing a film in the early 1910s: laying out scenes consisting of a single shot or a master shot with inserts and linking them with titles (note the way the middle part of *The Power of the Press* consists of a series of such one-shot scenes introduced by titles).

At the Biograph Company in the same period, D.W. Griffith (the only director at the company from his debut in June 1908 until the very end of 1909) adopted the device of alternation after about a year of directing, but from the start it assumed much more importance to his work than it ever did to the Vitagraph directors. In my first entry for the *Griffith Project*, I noted how Griffith's films are built around a climactic situation; to set up that situation requires backstory, so the films consist of an establishing part, using stereotype, pantomime, even a charades-like acting out of words, to lay out the characters and their motivations as briefly as possible, so that the climax can be milked, extending it to fill more than half of the film²⁷. A film like *An Awful Moment*²⁸ shows how this was done before Griffith started using alternation. The backstory consists of one shot in a courtroom, in which Judge Mowbray sentences an Italian gangster, and his wife Fiammetta vows vengeance (stereotype being the main resource here). Fiammetta follows the Judge home, climbs to a balcony and looks in through the window. Three rooms of the Mowbray apartment are shown; the bedroom of the wife and daughter, the husband's study, and a room between them, which contains the window to the balcony. The season of the release then motivates the separation of the husband from his wife and daughter: he goes to his study to prepare his present to her, while she unwraps and puts under the Christmas tree in the bedroom her present to him, which is a shotgun. While they are thus occupied, Fiammetta comes in through the window, sees the wife putting the shotgun under the tree through the keyhole, waits until she has settled to sleep, then goes in, chloroforms her, and ties her up with the gun set up pointing at her, with a string from the trigger to the doorknob so that when the Judge opens the door, he will shoot his own wife. The situation is resolved when, just as the Judge is reaching for the doorknob, the daughter removes the string from the doorknob. The climactic dilation here is provided not by true alternation, but by room-to-room cutting (and the rooms are already laid out side-by-side and shot so as to preserve screen direction in the way which remained standard for Griffith throughout his career), with cuts on characters going through doors, or looking through keyholes (a method already used in such Vitagraph films as *The Boy, the Bust and the Bath*)²⁹. Alternating editing has clear advantages over such cutting for the same purpose: action and direction matching are obviated, so that the climax can be dilated to whatever degree will fit in the reel, and timings can be fine-tuned in the editing phase. Not surprisingly, once he had hit on the device, Griffith took alternating editing much further than anyone did at Vitagraph. Even such an early Griffith-directed film with alternating editing as *The Drive for a Life*³⁰ has a twenty-shot sequence: A-A-A-B-A-B-insert-B-A-A-B-A-A-B-A-A-B-A-B switching between the hero racing in his automobile to prevent his fiancée from eating some poisoned candy on the one hand (A), and the candy arriving, being received, opened, and prepared for eating on the other (B). Later, when (probably because of the difficulty of coming up with new plot ideas) Griffith turned to combining different plots and resolving them together in the climax as his basic form of one-reel film construction, alternating editing became even more significant, since, as well as protracting and orchestrating the climax by an alternation, he built the exposition section of his films by alternating between the different plots.

Meanwhile the Vitagraph filmmakers had different ambitions than the very concentrated climactic action favoured by Griffith. The 1909 films and fragments show a tendency to simplify and linearize narratives, allowing for stories spread over long periods of time and distant spaces like *An Alpine Echo*. Stories of that kind had no place for alternations longer than two or three shots.

- 1 George C. Pratt, "In the Nick of Time: D.W. Griffith and the 'Last-Minute Rescue'", in *Image*, Vol. VI, no. 3, March 1957, reprinted in Marshall Deutelbaum (ed.), *"Image" on the Art and Evolution of the Film*, Dover Publications [for] the International Museum of Photography, New York 1979, pp. 74-78.
- 2 Barry Salt, "The Physician of the Castle", in *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 54, no. 4, Autumn 1985, pp. 284-285.
- 3 Eileen Bowser, *Toward Narrative, 1907: The Mill Girl*, in John L. Fell (ed.), *Film before Griffith*, University of California, Berkeley CA 1983, pp. 330-338.
- 4 Christian Metz, *Problèmes de dénotation dans le film de fiction*, in *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, Klincksieck, Paris 1968, Vol. I, pp. 130-131.
- 5 Cf. Barry Salt: «Even in 1910, when Griffith had already shown in scores of films what could be done with many cuts between parallel lines of action, one can only find limited use of a few such 'cut-backs' in a few Vitagraph films such as *The Telephone* and *Society and the Man* which happen to have plots that definitely call for the use of the device» (Barry Salt, *Vitagraph films: A Touch of Real Class*, in John Fullerton (ed.), *Screen Culture: History and Textuality*, John Libbey, Eastleigh 2004, pp. 57-58).
- 6 *Frammenti Vitagraph alla Library of Congress*, in Paolo Cherchi Usai (ed.), *Vitagraph Co. of America: il cinema prima di Hollywood*, Studio Tesi, Pordenone 1987, pp. 279-321 [english version: *The Vitagraph Fragments in the Library of Congress Paper Prints Collection*, in John Fullerton (ed.), *Screen Culture: History and Textuality*, cit., pp. 73-98].
- 7 There are also usually shots represented in the fragments that are not in the extant prints. Sometimes this is because of footage lost in the surviving prints, but other prints show no signs of the kind of wear or splices at the corresponding places that would indicate loss after release. It seems probable that the fragments were printed for the Copyright Office before the final editing of the film, and shots would then be cut for reasons of length or balance.
- 8 Roman Jakobson, *Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics*, in Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), *Style in Language*, MIT, Cambridge MA 1960, p. 358.
- 9 In "chase films" in the first years of the century, the pursued characters and their pursuers each run through a scene, usually both entering and exiting, before another scene is presented, and the pursued and pursuers both run through the new scene, and so on. In the classical-period form, the pursued run through a scene, then another scene shows the pursuers, a third scene the pursued further on, and a fourth the pursuers, perhaps in the same scene as the first scene showing the pursued. This is taken by Christian Metz, as exemplary of the alternating syntagm (see Christian Metz, *Problèmes de dénotation dans le film de fiction*, cit., p. 130).
- 10 Copyright: July 3, 1906; 640 feet; materials: Library of Congress Paper Print fragments and Museum of Modern Art print.
- 11 Copyright: January 17, 1907, but not advertised until March; materials: Paper Print fragments.
- 12 See *The Vitagraph Fragments in the Library of Congress Paper Prints Collection*, cit., pp. 80-82.
- 13 Copyright: April 16, 1907; 250 feet; materials: Paper Print fragments.
- 14 Copyright: July 31, 1907, first advertised September 7, 1907; 475 feet; materials: National Film and Television Archive, London, print and Paper Print fragments; summary: *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, Vol. 1, no. 19, September 19, 1907, p. 310.
- 15 Copyright: September 17, 1907; 700 feet; materials: NFTVA print and Paper Print fragments.
- 16 Copyright: March 7, 1908; 300 feet; materials: Paper Print fragments; summary: *Moving Picture World*, Vol. 2, no. 13, March 28, 1908, p. 270.
- 17 Copyright: July 9, 1908; 185 feet; materials: NFTVA print and Paper Print fragments.
- 18 Release date: December 5, 1908; 652 feet; materials: Paper Print fragments; summary: *Moving Picture World*, Vol. 3, no. 23, December 5, 1908, p. 463.

- 19 Release date: November 14, 1908; 435 feet; materials: Paper Print fragments; summary: *The Bioscope*, no. 117, January 7, 1909, p. 20.
- 20 Release date: December 15, 1908; 327 feet; materials: Paper Print fragments; summary: "Stories of the Films", *Moving Picture World*, Vol. 3, no. 25, December 19, 1908, p. 511.
- 21 Release date: September 7, 1909; 430 feet; materials: Paper Print fragments; summary: "Stories of the Films", *Moving Picture World*, Vol. 5, no. 12, September 18, 1909, pp. 389, 391.
- 22 Release date: September 11, 1909; 990 feet; materials: NFTVA print and Paper Print fragments; summary: "Stories of the Films", *Moving Picture World*, Vol. 5, no. 12, September 18, 1909, p. 389.
- 23 The name of the heroine and the relationship to Antoine of the old wood-carver in the titles in the NFTVA print differ from those in the *Moving Picture World* summary. In my description, I follow the summary, in order to bring this description closer to those of films for which I only know the Paper Print fragments, which all lack titles. Material in single square brackets here is not my hypothetical reconstruction but a description of elements in the NFTVA print that are not found in the Paper Print; material which is hypothetical reconstruction of elements missing from both sources is in double square brackets.
- 24 Release date: September 14, 1909; 610 feet; materials: Paper Print fragments; summary: "Stories of the Films", *Moving Picture World*, Vol. 5, no. 12, September 18, 1909, p. 391.
- 25 Release date: December 28, 1912; 977 feet; materials: George Eastman House print; summary: "Stories of the Films", *Moving Picture World*, Vol. 5, no. 27, December 31, 1909, p. 973.
- 26 At the beginning of the period covered by this essay, most Vitagraph fiction films were probably directed by James Stuart Blackton in person. By the end, although the Company did not yet publish directors' names, so many films were being issued that the director-unit system was almost certainly already in place, in which case it is likely that *An Alpine Echo* was directed by Charles Kent, and *The Power of the Press* by Van Dyke Brooke, since these actors who later became acknowledged leaders of such units feature in these films.
- 27 Paolo Cherchi Usai (ed.), *The Griffith Project. Vol. II: Films Produced in January-June 1909*, British Film Institute/Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, London-Pordenone 1999, pp. 75-76 (title 126, Twin Brothers).
- 28 Release date December 18, 1908, 737 feet; material: Paper Print; summary: *Biograph Bulletin*, no. 197, December 18, 1908.
- 29 Copyright: July 24, 1907; 425 feet; materials: NFTVA print and Paper Print fragments. It should be said that this interpretation depends on my assumption that, in 1908, Griffith would not have used the type of temporal overlap found in such films as *Life of an American Fireman* (Edison, 1903; see Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, British Film Institute, London 1990, pp. 204-207). The Paper Print consists of complete shots rather than the fragments of the Vitagraph deposits, but the shots are not in release order. The scene in which the gangster's wife sees the Judge leave Mrs. Mowbray in the bedroom and go into his study, then climbs into the room, looks into the bedroom through the keyhole, and finally exits into the bedroom, is one shot, but I am assuming that the shots showing the husband preparing his present in the study and the wife laying the shotgun under the tree would have been cutaways from the scene in a release print. Stephen Higgins provides a tentative reconstruction of the release order in his entry on the film in Paolo Cherchi Usai (ed.), *The Griffith Project. Vol. I: Films Produced in 1907-1908*, British Film Institute/Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, London-Pordenone 1997 (title 75). My reconstruction differs somewhat from his, I think because the print he viewed included the original shot labels whereas the one I did omitted them (or I failed to notice them), so he knows that sequences I considered a single shot were originally separate scenes.
- 30 Release date: April 22, 1909, 940 feet; materials: NFTVA print and Paper Print; summary: *Biograph Bulletin*, no. 233, April 22, 1909.