

***Beyond the Movie Theater: Sites, Sponsors, Uses*, by Gregory A. Waller. University of California Press, 2023, 320 pp.**

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“What is cinema?”, is a recurrent question posed by film theorists. Scholars have long explored the “expansion” of cinema suggested by technologies like video, computers, and holography (Youngblood). Some have questioned the ontological impact of digital vs analogue (Rodowick), while others have returned to foundational questions of *What Cinema Is!* (Andrew). From a historiographical perspective, however, a great deal of scholarship on US cinema is produced from a position in which commercial cinema is the dominant form, and therefore, scholars work backwards to find its “origins”. Gregory A. Waller argues that in doing so, we are potentially missing an important aspect of US cinema history. *Beyond the Movie Theater* extends, enriches, and complicates our understanding of 1910s US cinema by viewing it from an often-overlooked perspective, namely “non-theatrical cinema”. The book’s focus is novel but draws upon Waller’s earlier work published in several edited collections from Christie; Hoyt and Acland; and Maltby, Biltereyst, and Meers. Throughout the work, Waller avoids offering a concrete definition for “non-theatrical cinema” in the 1910s, as he explains its comparison to contemporaneous “theatrical cinema” is “relational, variable, and historically grounded” (2). Indeed, he points out how the term did not enter common parlance until the mid-1930s when 16mm film became the default means by which US educators, government agencies, and businesses could produce and exhibit films for, typically, non-commercial purposes (2). Waller explains instead that “non-theatrical cinema” can best be understood as a sponsored, multi-purpose, and multi-sited form of cinema that is targeted at specific audiences (17–18). This typology provides the structure for the first four chapters, while making clear that any non-theatrical screening could serve as an example of one or more of these types. To better emphasise this, Waller closes with a final chapter that incorporates all four into a discussion of the use of cinema at large public events, like the Panama-Pacific International Exposition.

To better inform us about this “Other Cinema” (2), Waller draws upon contemporaneous postcards, pamphlets, and reports, as well as articles in newspapers, trade press, fan magazines, and periodicals to offer “an array of what might be termed micro-histories” (5). One might criticise this methodological approach since Waller states that “individual people only occasionally take center stage in this book” (5), and yet, microhistorical research is often focussed on the actions of individuals (Trivellato). It might have been useful to offer a more detailed explanation of how this methodology differs from case study research; Waller is taking steps down a relatively untrodden path, so it becomes all the more important to give explicit guidance to those that might wish to follow.

Chapter One begins by differentiating between commercial cinema productions like Keystone Studios' *The Property Man* (Charlie Chaplin, 1914), and the part-instructional, part-promotional film *How Marjorie Won a Career* (Unknown, 1914), which was created "under the auspices of a local merchant" (85), Gossard Corsets. Waller explains that in this cultural environment, sponsorship was commonplace and the phrase "under the auspices of" was widely understood as a sponsored non-profit screening that was not subject to tax, which provided a useful means by which non-profit organisations could raise funds. One such organisation was the National American Woman's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) who in 1914 financed and produced *Your Girl and Mine* (Giles R. Warren). The film tells the story of a wealthy woman whose new husband gets into debt but as, at the time, a wife's financial affairs were controlled by her husband, he attempts to use her money to pay. From 1914 to 1917, the film was distributed and exhibited throughout the US by Louis J. Selznick's World Film Corporation (WFC). Suffragists in each state would sell coupon booklets for screenings, which included two five-cent tickets and four ten-cent tickets, with twenty percent of the take going to their local state suffrage associations, five percent to NAWSA, and the rest to WFC (38). Waller details the many ways in which suffragists used the film to fundraise, and crucially, advocate for their cause. For example, they often had local members give "short and to-the-point suffrage speeches" as the projectionist was switching over the reels (40). Waller then applies Elsaesser's idea of the "utility film" to *Your Girl and Mine* to pose important questions about the role of the sponsor in the funding, producing, distributing, promoting, programming, and exhibiting of non-theatrical cinema.

Chapter Two likewise avoids a historiographical focus on commercial cinema by exploring the multi-purpose nature of non-theatrical cinema. We have already heard how Gossard Corsets and NAWSA used their films, but in this chapter, Waller employs a term borrowed from Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson, "useful cinema", to highlight its various functions. These include helping to sell real estate, attempting to engage newly arrived migrants, promoting dental hygiene, advocating for the creation of new municipal service providers, celebrating African American culture, promoting missionary work, documenting new local construction projects, sharing information about union working conditions, and instructing bank tellers on how to spot fraudulent checks (62). Waller also spends a large part of this chapter detailing how the varied "usefulness" of cinema was espoused by publications like *Scientific American*. In a 1914 issue, for example, they document the work of brothers J. E. and George Williamson who had developed a means of shooting footage underwater. Their footage of shark fishermen in the Bahamas, both above and below the waves, attracted many to screenings at the Smithsonian Institution and the Museum of Natural History (75). Waller explains how this footage later found "use" beyond non-theatrical cinema by being marketed theatrically as *Thirty Leagues Under the Sea* (Carl Gregory, 1914), which was "one of the most widely circulated non-fiction features of the 1910s" (75).

Given the portability of film stock and projection equipment in the 1910s, Chapter Three begins by reframing the historiographical question over what cinema is, to where cinema was. In other words, it seeks to uncover where, when, and by whom cinema was dispersed from theatrical to non-theatrical sites, as well as how these sites functioned as a social and cultural space for audiences. In doing so, Waller exemplifies how manufacturers like Pathé were incentivised to market their projectors to non-theatrical buyers to such an extent that it is impossible to know how many of their Pathéscopes were sold country-wide, how often they were used, or how long they remained in operation (102). Of the little data that is available, we know that in 1919, roughly three percent of US schools had a projector on site (102). However, Waller's work points to the huge variety of non-theatrical sites beyond education. These

include “churches, YMCAs, conventions, trade shows, hotels, penitentiaries, asylums, public halls, lodges, and even battleships” (102).

In Chapter Four, Waller again differentiates between commercial and non-theatrical cinema, this time in terms of their intended audiences. US commercial cinema in the 1910s was often aimed at an imagined “mass” audience, whereas non-theatrical cinema, especially given its relationship to sponsors, was often aimed at a specific audience. By this point in the book, Waller has offered numerous examples of such audiences. *How Marjorie Won a Career* served as an instructional film for a specific audience, namely women working in department stores that sold Gossard Corset Company products. The footage the Williamson brothers shot of shark fishermen in the Bahamas had a different but equally specific audience, patrons of the Smithsonian Institution and the Museum of Natural History. In this chapter, we learn of the efforts of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) to use cinema to promote their interests in “industrial capitalism”, a conservative anti-union and anti-regulation approach to manufacturing (139). By working with the Edison Company, NAM produced and distributed three, what might be deemed industrial safety films, titled *The Workman’s Lesson* (Unknown, 1912), *The Crime of Carelessness* (Harold M. Shaw, 1912), and *The Man He Might Have Been* (Ashley Miller, 1913). Screenings were often arranged by local businesses for their workers, like the Dupont Powder Company in Hannibal, Missouri, or the Inland Steel Company in Crosby, Minnesota (144). Waller uses the NAM films to make important theoretical and historiographical interventions about the increasing diversity of US cinema audiences in the 1910s, and the efforts of sponsors to utilise cinema to communicate with them.

The final chapter draws the four-part typology of sites, sponsors, uses, audiences together into a fascinating analysis of large public events, with particular emphasis on the “Land Shows” that were at promoted at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Within this almost nine-month event, thousands of feet of film were screened for free daily across almost seventy sites, thereby testifying “to the viability, visibility, and the status of cinema put to utilitarian rather than commercial entertainment purposes” (192).

In summary, *Beyond the Movie Theater* provides a unique perspective on an often-overlooked aspect of US cinema history. It would be of great interest to scholars of early cinema history, as well as anyone interested in expanding their understanding of what cinema was, and what it is today. Waller’s focus is US cinema of the 1910s, but in challenging our understanding of what constitutes a comprehensive history of the cinematic medium, this work poses important questions as to what constitutes the “boundaries” of cinema today, and how and why we should document it.

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