4

Time in the classical film

Our examination of exposition has shown that the narrational aspect of plot manipulates story time in specific ways. More generally, classical narration employs characteristic strategies for manipulating story *order* and story *duration*. These strategies activate the spectator in ways congruent with the overall aims of the classical cinema. We shall also have to pay some attention to how narration uses one device that is commonly associated with the Hollywood style's handling of time: crosscutting.

Temporal order: the search for meaning

> After dramas supposedly without endings, here is a drama which would be without exposition or opening, and which would end clearly. Events would not follow one another and especially would not correspond exactly. The fragments of many pasts come to bury themselves in a single now. The future mixed among memories. This chronology is that of the human mind.[1]

Jean Epstein, writing in 1927, thus describes his film *La Glace à trois faces*. Hollywood cinema, however, refuses the radical play with chronology that Epstein proposes; the classical film normally shows story events in a 1-2-3 order. Unlike Epstein, the classical filmmaker needs an opening, a threshold – that concentrated, preliminary exposition that plunges us *in medias res*. Events unfold successively from that. Advance notice of the future is especially forbidden, since a flash*forward* would make the narration's omniscience and suppressiveness overt (see Chapter 30 on alternative cinemas' use of the flashforward). The only permissible manipulation of story order is the flashback.

Flashbacks are rarer in the classical Hollywood film than we normally think. Throughout the period 1917-60, screenwriters' manuals usually recommended not using them; as one manual put it, 'Protracted or frequent flashbacks tend to slow the dramatic progression' – a remark that reflects Hollywood's general reluctance to exploit curiosity about past story events.[2] Of the one hundred UnS films, only twenty use any flashbacks at all, and fifteen of those occur in silent films. Most of these are brief, expository flashbacks filling in information about a character's background; this device was obviously replaced by expository dialogue in the sound cinema. In the early years of sound, when plays about trials were common film sources, flashbacks offered a way to 'open up' stagy trial scenes (e.g., *The Bellamy Trial*, *Through Different Eyes*, *The Trial of Mary Dugan*, *Madame X*, all 1929). Another vogue for flashbacks ran from the late 1930s into the 1950s. Between 1939 and 1953, four UnS films begin with a frame story and flash back to recount the bulk of the main action before returning to the frame. Yet those four flashback films still comprise less than 10 per cent of the UnS films of the period. What probably makes the period seem dominated by flashbacks is not the numerical frequency of the device but the intricate ways it was used: contradictory flashbacks in *Crossfire* (1947), parallel flashbacks in *Letter to Three Wives* (1948), open-ended flashbacks in *How Green Was My Valley* (1941) and *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943), flashbacks within flashbacks within flashbacks in *Passage to Marseille* (1944) and *The Locket* (1946), and a flashback narrated by a dead man in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950).

It is possible, of course, to present a shift in story order simply as such, with the film's narration overtly intervening to reveal the past.

In *The Ghost of Rosie Taylor* (1918), an expository inter-title announces that it will explain how the situation became what it is; the title motivates the flashback. *The Killing* (1956) uses voice-over, documentary-style narration to motivate 'realistically' its jumps back in time. The rarity of these overt intrusions shows that classical narration almost always motivates flashbacks by means of character memory. Several cues cooperate here: images of the character thinking, the character's voice heard 'over' the images, optical effects (dissolve, blurring focus), music, and specific references to the time period we are about to enter. If we see flashbacks as motivated by subjectivity, then the extraordinary fashion for temporal manipulations in the 1940s can be explained by the changing conception of psychological causality in the period. Flashbacks, especially convoluted or contradictory ones, can be justified by that increasing interest in vulgarized Freudian psychology which Chapter 2 has already discussed.

Classical flashbacks are motivated by character memory, but they do not function primarily to reveal character traits. Nor were Hollywood practitioners particularly interested in using the flashback to restrict point-of-view; one screenwriters' manual suggests that 'unmotivated jumping of time is likely to rattle the audience, thereby breaking their illusion that they participate in the lives of the characters.'[3] Even the contradictory flashbacks in *Through Different Eyes* or *Crossfire* serve not to reveal the teller's personality so much as they operate, within the conventions of the mystery film, as visual representations of lies. Jean Epstein's aim in *La Glace à trois faces* – to reflect the mixed temporality of consciousness, fragments of the past in a single now – is far removed from Hollywood's use of flashbacks as rhetorical 'dispositions' of the narrative for the sake of suspense or surprise. Nor need the classical flashback respect the literary conventions of first-person narration. Extended flashback sequences usually include material that the remembering character could not have witnessed or known. Character memory is simply a convenient immediate motivation for a shift in chronology; once the shift is accomplished, there are no constant cues to remind us that we are supposedly in someone's mind. In flashbacks, then, the narrating character executes the same fading movement that the narrator of the entire film does: overt and self-conscious at first, then covert and intermittently apparent. Beginning with one narrator and ending with another (e.g., *I Walked With a Zombie*), or compelling a character to 'remember' things she never knew or will know (e.g., *Ten North Frederick* [1958]), or creating a deceased narrator (e.g., *Sunset Boulevard*) – all these tactics show that subjectivity is an arbitrary pretext for flashbacks.

Classical manipulations of story order imply specific activities for the spectator. These involve what psychologists call 'temporal integration,' the process of fusing the perception of the present, the memory of the past, and expectations about the future. E.H. Gombrich points out that temporal integration depends upon the search for meaning, the drive to make coherent sense of the material represented.[4] The film which challenges this coherence, a film like *Not Reconciled* (1964), *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), or *India Song* (1975), must make temporal integration difficult to achieve. In the classical film, however, character causality provides the basis for temporal coherence. The manipulations of story order in *Not Reconciled* or *Marienbad* are puzzling partly because we cannot determine any relevant character identities, traits, or actions which could motivate the breaks in chronology. On the other hand, one reason that classical flashbacks do not adhere to a character's viewpoint is that they must never distract from the ongoing causal chain. The causes and effects may be presented out of story order, but our search for their connections must be rewarded.

Psychological causality thus permits the classical viewer to integrate the present with the past and to form clear-cut hypotheses about future story events. To participate in the process of casting ever more narrow and exclusive hypotheses, we must have solid ground under our feet. Therefore, through repetition within the story action and a covertly narrated, 'objective' diegetic world, the film gives us clear memories of causal material; on this basis we can form expectations. At the same time, the search for meaning of which Gombrich speaks guides us toward the motifs and actions already marked as potentially meaningful. For example, motifs revealed in the credits sequence or in the early scenes accumulate

significance as our memory is amplified by the ongoing story. Kuntzel suggests that these reinscribed motifs create a vague *déjà-vu* that becomes gradually more meaningful: 'The entire itinerary of *The Most Dangerous Game* is to make its initial figure *readable*, to progressively reassure the subject plunged *ex abrupto* into the uncertainty of the figure.'[5] The classical aesthetic of 'planting' and foreshadowing, of tagging traits and objects for future use, can be seen as laying out elements to be recalled later in the cause-effect logic of the film. If temporality and causality did not cooperate in this way, the spectator could not construct a coherent story out of the narration.

Our survey of narration has shown that the viewer's successive hypotheses can be thought of as a series of questions. Hollywood cinema's reliance upon chronology triggers the fundamental query: What will happen next in the story? Each shot, wrote Loos and Emerson, 'is planned to lead the audience on to the next. At any point, the spectator is wondering how things will come out in the next scene.'[6] The forward flow of these hypotheses may be related to the irreversibility of the film-viewing experience; Thomas Elsaesser has speculated that the channeling of chronology into causality helps the viewer 'manage' the potentially disturbing nature of the film-viewing situation.[7] The relatively close correspondence between story order and narrational order in the classical film helps the spectator create an organized succession of hypotheses and a secure rhythm of question and answer.

Duration, deadlines, and dissolves

Like order, classical Hollywood duration respects very old conventions. The narration shows the important events and skips the intervals between them. The omitted intervals become codified as a set of punctuation marks: expository inter-titles ('The Next Day') and optical effects. From 1917 to 1921, fade-ins and -outs and iris-ins and -outs were the most common optical transitions between scenes. Between 1921 and 1928, the iris fell into disuse, replaced by the fade as the most common transition. In the sound era, fades and dissolves were the most common signs of temporal ellipsis. Wipes enjoyed a vogue between 1932 and 1941 and appeared occasionally thereafter. Such optical punctuation marks were often compared with theatrical or literary conventions (curtain, end of chapter). Within a scene, of course, some of the same ellipses could be used. After the late 1920s and until the early 1950s, scenes often began with a shot of a building or a sign and then dissolved to the action proper. In the same period, a wipe, either hard- or soft-edged, might follow a character moving from one sub-scene to another. (Not until the late 1950s did a few films begin to eliminate such internal punctuation and simply use the straight cut to link scenes and sub-scenes.[8]) Such a clear set of cues creates an orderly flow of action; compare the disruptive effect, in the films of Eisenstein and Godard, of beginning a scene's action and then, part of the way through, interrupting the action with a title that tells us when the action is occurring.

Punctuation marks enable the narration to skip unimportant intervals by simple omission. The montage sequence lets the narration represent, however briefly, those intervals. The montage sequence does not omit time but compresses it. A war, a prison sentence, or a career can be summed up in a few shots. Films which cover a great length of time may make heavy weather of montage sequences, as does **High Time* (1960), which employs montages of seasons and semesters to cover four years on a college campus. The montage sequence was especially important in literary adaptations, since the plots of novels tended to cover extensive periods.[9] So critical were montages to temporal construction that they were also called 'time-lapse' sequences.

The classical film creates a patterned duration not only by what it leaves out but by a specific, powerful device. The story action sets a limit to how long it must last. Sometimes this means simply a strictly confined duration, as in the familiar convention of one-night-in-a-mysterious-house films (*The Cat and the Canary* [1927], *Seven Footprints to Satan* [1929], **One Frightened Night* [1935], **Sh! The Octopus* [1937]). More commonly, the story action sets stipulated *deadlines* for the characters.

The mildest and most frequent form of the deadline is the appointment. This is most evident in the romance line of action, wherein a suitor will invite a woman out for dinner, to a dance, etc. If the film makes romance primary, the acceptance, rejection, or deferral of such invitations forms a significant part of the drama (e.g., **Interlude* [1957], **The King and the Chorus Girl* [1937]). The very title of **Appointment for Love* (1941) conveys the same idea. Even if the film does not rely completely upon the romance line of action, many scenes include the making of appointments for later encounters. Just as motifs anticipate future actions, so appointments gear our expectations toward later scenes.

The deadline proper is the strongest way in which story duration cooperates with narrative causality. In effect, the characters set a limit to the time span necessary to the chain of cause and effect. Over three-quarters of the UnS films contained one or more clearly articulated deadlines. The deadline may be stipulated in a line of dialogue, a shot (e.g., a clock), or cross-cutting; whatever device is used, it must specify the durational limit within which cause and effect can operate. Most frequently, the deadline is localized, binding together a few scenes or patterning only a single one. Scenes in **Miss Lulu Bett* (1921) are structured around the repeated deadline of the family's dinner hour. A series of short episodes in **High Time* (1960) are governed by the fact that the freshmen must build a bonfire by seven o'clock. The localized deadline is of course most common at the film's climax. In **Fire Down Below* (1957), one of the protagonists is trapped in the hold of a ship; it is on fire and sinking, and the suspense is predicated upon the slow drainage of time until the situation becomes hopeless. **The Canterville Ghost* (1944) presents the climactic scene of the ghost and young William proving their courage by towing a ticking bomb across the landscape. When William says, 'If it'll hold for twenty seconds more!' the Ghost starts to count the seconds off. The conventional last-minute rescue is the most evident instance of how the classical film's climax often turns upon a deadline.

A deadline may also determine the entire structure of a classical film. The protagonist's goal can be straightforwardly dependent upon a deadline, as when in **Roaring Timber* (1937), Jim agrees to deliver eighty million feet of lumber in sixty days. **The Shock Punch* (1925) gives the protagonist the task of finishing construction of a building by a certain date; the film's last scene

occurs on the deadline day. In 1940s films, the use of the flashback can also limit the duration of the story action. For example, **No Leave, No Love* (1946) begins with the protagonist rushing to a maternity ward; while he waits for news of his child's birth, he tells another husband the story of how he met his wife. By halting the action at a point of crisis and flashing back to early events, the film makes those events seem to operate under the pressure of a deadline. (See also *The Big Clock* [1948] and *Raw Deal* [1948].)

**Uncertain Glory* (1944) offers a clear example of how appointments mix with deadlines to unify the duration of the classical Hollywood film. The film's action takes place in France under the Nazi Occupation. The first six scenes present the escape of the convict Jean and his capture by the police detective Bonet; in these portions, alternating point-of-view creates suspense. When Bonet has captured Jean, we learn that the Gestapo will shoot one hundred hostages if a partisan saboteur does not surrender in five days. This long-term deadline structures the bulk of the film, as Bonet tries to convince Jean to pose as the saboteur, help the Resistance, and save the hostages. While the deadline hovers over the action, the two men quarrel, villagers conspire against them, Jean falls in love with a village woman (entailing small-scale appointments), and Jean tries several times to escape from Bonet. Finally, in the penultimate scene, at five o'clock Jean decides to surrender himself: 'Deadline's six o'clock, isn't it?' He turns himself in.

It should be evident that deadlines function narrationally. Issuing from the diegetic world, they motivate the film's durational limits: the story action, not the narrator, seems to decide how long the action will take. Planning appointments makes it 'natural' for the narration to show the meeting itself; setting up deadlines makes it 'natural' for the narration to devote screen time to showing whether or not the deadline is met. Moreover, appointments and deadlines stress the forward flow of story action: the arrows of the spectator's expectations are turned toward the encounter to come, the race to the goal. When, in **Applause* (1929), the sailor from Wisconsin asks April for a date, we expect to see the date; when he says he has only four days of leave, we are not surprised that he should ask her to marry him before his leave is up. Deadlines and appoint-

ments thus perfectly suit classical narration's emphasis upon eliciting hypotheses about the future.

As a formal principle, the deadline is one of the most characteristic marks of Hollywood dramaturgy. Alternative styles of filmmaking can often be recognized by their refusal to set such explicit limits on the duration of story action. The alternatives vary. Ozu structures his films by repeated routines and cycles of family behavior. Jacques Tati uses a fixed duration (a week, a day or two) simply as a block of time without a deadline. Eisenstein often composes a film of separate, durationally distinct episodes (e.g., *Ivan the Terrible* [1945]). The 'art cinema' of Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman, or Michelangelo Antonioni is characterized partly by its refusal of deadlines, its replacement of appointments by chance encounters, and its 'open' endings that do not allow the audience to anticipate when the chain of cause and effect will be completed. A Hollywood version of *L'avventura* (1960) would be sure to include a scene in which someone says: 'If we don't find Sandra in three days, her supply of food will run out.'

Within the classical scene, the viewer assumes durational continuity unless signals say otherwise. The individual shot is assumed to convey a continuous time span which only editing can disrupt. Yet the classical cinema is a cinema of cutting; the single-shot sequence is very rare. Thus classical editing strategies have to signal temporal continuity. *Match-on-action* cutting is the most explicit cue for moment-to-moment continuity. If a character starts to stand up in one shot and continues the movement in the next shot, the classical presumption is that no time has been omitted (see figs 4.1 and 4.2). Editors are warned that if they mismatch action, audiences will be confused about temporal progression.[10] But the match-on-action cut, expensive and time-consuming, is relatively rare; of all the shot-changes in a classical film, no more than 12 per cent are likely to be matches on action. In the absence of information to the contrary, spatial editing cues, such as eyeline-match cutting, imply durational continuity.

The adoption of synchronized sound-on-film had a very powerful effect on how the classical cinema represented story time, as Chapter 23 will show in detail. Diegetic sound created a concrete perceptual duration that could aid editing in creating a seamless temporal continuity. If two characters are talking, the sound editor could make the continuous sound conceal the cut. A British editor summarized American practice:[11]

> This flowing of sound over a cut is one of the most important features of the editing of sound films – in particular, of dialogue films. The completely parallel cut of sound and action should be the exception rather than the rule. . . . Most editors today make a practice of lapping the last one or two frames of modulation on the soundtrack of the shot they are leaving over onto the oncoming shot.

That is, the shot change precedes the dialogue change by a syllable or a word. This 'dialogue cutting point' (Barry Salt's term) became standard by 1930.[12] On other occasions, of course, the sound can lead the image; very commonly a classical film will motivate a cut by an offscreen sound. The noise of a door opening, a character starting to speak, the music of a radio from another room – these can all help sound flow over a cut.

Another way of using sound to secure durational continuity is to employ diegetic music. Of course non-diegetic music, as accompaniment, had been present in the silent cinema, but there its quality as narration made it temporally abstract. In the sound film, diegetic music could cover certain gaps at the level of the image while still projecting a sense of continuous time. For example, in *Flying Fortress* (1942), a couple sit down to dinner in a restaurant while a band is playing. The meal is abbreviated by means of dissolves, creating ellipses on the visual track; but the band's music continues uninterrupted. The bleeding of music over large ellipses suggests how easily the temporal vagueness of music can make sound fulfill narrative functions.

The dissolve, the most common indication of duration, affords us an instructive example of how classical narration does its temporal work. Visually, the dissolve is simply a variant of the fade – a fade-out overlapped with a fade-in – but it is a fade during which the screen is never blank. 'To the layman or the average theatregoer, a lap dissolve passes unobtrusively by on the screen without his being aware that it had happened. A lap dissolve serves the purpose of smoothly advancing the story.'[13] The dissolve was quickly restricted to indicating a short, often indefinite interval, if only a few seconds (e.g., a dissolve from a detail to a full shot). This makes the dissolve a superb way to soften spatial, graphic, and even temporal discontinuities. The dissolve could blend newsreel footage with studio shots, cover mismatched figure positions or screen direction, or blend an extreme-long shot with a close-up (see figs 4.3 through 4.5). Filmmakers of the 1920s in Europe and Russia showed that the dissolve opens up a realm of sheerly graphic possibilities, but Hollywood severely curtailed these: apart from a few exceptions (such as Josef Von Sternberg's work), the Hollywood dissolve became, as Tamar Lane puts it, 'a link. . . . It bridges over from one situation to another without a jarring break of action and without need for explanatory matter.'[14]

After 1928, the dissolve on the image track was accompanied by a sound transition as well. At first, the procedures of sound editing and the uncertainties of sound perspective made technicians puzzled. 'Imagine switching abruptly from the blast of a jazz orchestra to a flash of a whispered conversation, then to the rush of a train and back to the silken vampire sleeping peacefully in her boudoir. Such a rush of conflicting sound ought to leave an audience as nervous as a doe at a waterhole.'[15] Sound dissolves were declared distracting; while a close-up of a face could dissolve to a long shot of a crowd, to mix even briefly the character's speech with the crowd's babble would result in cacophony. Instead, the character would complete the dialogue and pause; the crowd noise would then be sneaked in over the dissolve. Like the offscreen sound that motivates the cut to a new space, the sound bridge here may sometimes very slightly anticipate the next image. Both image and sound dissolving procedures show how, once a transition became codified, it could provide a continuous and unself-conscious narration.

Like our experience of story order, the viewer's experience of story duration depends upon a search for meaning. Gombrich writes: 'We cannot judge the distance of an object in space before we have identified it and estimated its size. We cannot estimate the passage of time in a picture without interpreting the event represented.'[16] In the classical cinema, the narration's emphasis upon the future gears our expectations toward the resolution of suspense. It is this that determines what periods the narration will eliminate or compress. When this does not happen, the narration dwells upon 'dramatically meaningless intervals,' duration comes forward as a system in the film and vies with causality for prominence. (See the various critiques[17] of Hitchcock's use of the long take in *Rope* [1948].) Time in the classical film is a vehicle for causality, not a process to be investigated on its own. Hence the stricture that a walk without dialogue is 'dead' or wasted time. (Compare the durational importance of the silent walk in Dreyer, in Antonioni, and, from a different culture, in the Navajo films described by Sol Worth and John Adair.[18])

More generally, classical narration's insistence upon closure rewards the search for meaning and makes the time span we experience seem a complete unit. Even from shot to shot, our expectation of causally significant completion controls how we respond. 'We hardly realize that we look at two different shots if the first one shows the beginning of an action and the next one its continuation.'[19] The match-on-action cut, the bleeding of sound over a cut, the use of dissolves and diegetic music all confirm our expectation of completion. The viewer's ability to test hypotheses against a film's unfolding cause and effect means that duration again becomes secondary to a search for narrative meaning.

Hollywood has also exploited our search for temporal meaning by shaping the felt duration of our experience. Narrative 'rhythm' can be thought of as a way in which narration focuses and controls successive hypotheses. Camera movement, especially if it is independent of the figures and closely timed to music, can create a moment-by-moment arc of expectation.[20] Editing was the earliest rhythmic realm which the classical cinema systematically exploited; by 1920, scenarists were recommending using short shots to increase excitement.[21] Rhythmic editing is still far from clearly understood theoretically, but certainly the time needed to grasp a new shot depends partly upon expectation. It appears that if the viewer is prepared and if the shot is graphically comprehensible, the viewer requires between half a second and three seconds to adjust to the cut.[22] Slowly paced editing leaves a

comfortable margin, so that the new shot is on the screen quite long enough for the viewer to assimilate it. But in Hollywood's use of accelerated editing, the viewer is primed to expect a very narrow range of alternative outcomes and the shots then flash on the screen so quickly that the viewer can 'read' them only in gross terms: do they confirm or disconfirm the immediate hypothesis? This process is evident in the last-minute rescue, when all the viewer wants to know is whether the rescuers will arrive in time, so the accelerating editing builds excitement by confining each shot to posing, retarding, and eventually answering this question. The ability of rapid editing to funnel the spectator's hypotheses into very narrow channels is confirmed by Robert Parrish's claim that fast pace can cover story problems. Asserting that *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) works like 'one big ninety-minute montage,' Parrish notes: 'The audience never gets a chance to relax and think about the story holes. They're into the next scene before they have time to think about the last one.'[23]

Crosscutting

Strictly speaking, crosscutting can be considered a category of alternating editing, the intercalation of two or more different series of images. If temporal simultaneity is not pertinent to the series, the cutting may be called *parallel* editing; if the series are to be taken as temporally simultaneous, then we have *crosscutting*. For example, if the film alternates images of wealth and poverty with no temporal relation to one another, we have parallel editing; but if the rich man is sitting down to dinner while the beggar stands outside, we have crosscutting. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) uses both types: parallel editing makes abstract analogies among the four epochs, while crosscutting within each epoch depicts simultaneous actions. In the classical Hollywood cinema, parallel editing is a distinctly unlikely alternative, since it emphasizes logical relations rather than causality and chronology.

Crosscutting is a narrational process: two or more lines of action in different locales are woven together. Our hero gets up in the morning; cut to the boss looking at the clock; cut to our hero eating breakfast; cut to the boss pacing. Christian Metz has pointed out that such a sequence manipulates both order and duration.[24] Within each line of action, the events are consecutive; but between the lines of action taken as wholes, the temporal relations are simultaneous. The hero gets up somewhat *before* the boss looks at the clock, but across the whole sequence, we understand that *while* the hero gets up and comes to work the boss waits for him. There is yet another factor involved, which Metz does not mention: usually, crosscutting creates ellipses. If we cut from hero waking up to boss to hero leaving, the shot of the boss covers all the time it takes our hero to dress, wash, etc. Crosscutting almost always skips over intervals in exactly this way. Crosscutting, then, creates a unique set of temporal relations – order, ellipsis, simultaneity – which function for specific narrational ends.

Alternation of narrational point-of-view has a long history in literature and other arts, but crosscutting is often linked to specifically nineteenth-century theatrical and literary sources. Nicholas Vardac found 'cross-cut' scenes in nineteenth-century drama, which used dual box sets and area lighting to switch between lines of action.[25] Eisenstein traced Griffith's parallel montage through theatrical melodrama back to Dickens's novels.[26] The analogies with other arts emphasize the brevity of the scenes alternated and the simultaneity of the actions represented. Chapter 16 will show that both these aspects of crosscutting were common in American film-making long before 1917. But such analogies with other arts do not specify all the features of classical crosscutting.

Classical crosscutting traces out personal cause and effect, creates deadlines, and frees narration from restricting itself to a single character's point-of-view. We most commonly think of crosscutting as supporting a deadline – supremely, the last-minute rescue situation. But a silent film might employ crosscutting in a great many scenes – as exposition, as a reminder of characters' whereabouts, and especially as a way in which narration could control the viewer's hypothesis-framing. Crosscutting thus reveals narration to be omniscient (the narration knows that something important is happening in another line of action), but this omniscience, true to classical precept, is rendered as omnipresence.

In 1920, Loos and Emerson advised the screen-

writer that two crosscut lines of action would help keep the audience interested.[27] Of the UnS silent films, 84 per cent use extensive passages of crosscutting. With the coming of sound, however, crosscutting became far less frequent. Of the UnS sound films, only 49 per cent use any crosscutting at all, and only 16 per cent use it as extensively as did silent films. The reasons are evident. Dialogue would not be cut as quickly as silent action, and crosscutting lines of dialogue (done in Europe by René Clair and Fritz Lang) probably seemed too narrationally intrusive for Hollywood film-making.[28] The abandonment of crosscutting thus became consonant with a greater reticence on the part of sound-film narration.

None the less, the principle behind crosscutting remained important for the sound film. As Chapter 23 will show, the rhythm of silent film editing found a functional equivalent in the sound film's rapid shifts from scene to scene. In **The Whole Town's Talking* (1935), our hero's boss notices that he is late and begins to interrogate other employees. The scene switches to Jones at home, asleep; he wakes up, notices the time, and rushes off. We then see Jones arrive at work. Such shifts in locale could be motivated by sound links as well (music, radio or television broadcasts, phone conversations, etc.). In such ways, a rapid alternation of distinct scenes could stimulate crosscutting's characteristic play with time – consecutive order, ellipsis, and an overall sense of simultaneity. A discreet narration oversees time, making it subordinate to causality, while the spectator follows the causal thread.

5

Space in the classical film

The motion picture industry for many years has been trying to remove the one dimension of the screen. By lighting, with lenses of inexplicable complexity, through movement, camera angles, and a variety of other techniques, the flatness of the screen has largely been overcome.[1]

Ranald MacDougall, 1945

In making narrative causality the dominant system in the film's total form, the classical Hollywood cinema chooses to subordinate space. Most obviously, the classical style makes the sheerly graphic space of the film image a vehicle for narrative. We can see this principle at work negatively in the prohibitions against 'bad' cuts. 'The important subjects should be in the same general area of the frame for each of the two shots which are to be cut together,' but 'as long as the important subject is not shifted from one side of the screen to the other, no real harm is done.'[2] In describing the classical cinema's use of space we are most inclined to use the term 'transparent,' so much does that cinema strive to efface the picture plane. 'The screen might be likened to a plate-glass window through which the observer looks with one eye at the actual scene.'[3] We need, however, a fuller account of how classical narration uses image composition and editing to create a powerful representation of three-dimensional space.

The image: composition

While recognizing that Hollywood cinema subordinates space to narrative causality, we ought also to acknowledge that the classical spatial system is, in a strictly logical sense, arbitrary. We could imagine other systems that privileged different devices (e.g., decentered framings, discontinuity editing) but which were equally coherent and equally supportive of causality. Historically, however, the classical construction of space appears far from arbitrary, since it synthesizes many traditions which have dominated various Western arts.

Post-Renaissance painting provided one powerful model. Cinematographers and directors constantly invoked famous paintings as sources. Cecil B. De Mille claimed to have borrowed from Doré, Van Dyck, Corot and one 'Reubens.'[4] Robert Surtees cited the Impressionists, Leon Shamroy imitated Van Gogh. Discussions of lighting invariably invoke Rembrandt.[5] To a point, such assertions are simply hyperbole. Allan Dwan remarked: 'Once in a while we would undertake the imitation or reproduction of something artistic – a famous painting, let's say.'[6] (Staged replicas of famous pictures were also a convention of theatrical melodrama.) But in a more significant sense, Hollywood did perpetuate many precepts of post-Renaissance painting. The very name 'film studio' derives from the term for the workroom of the painter or sculptor. While no major cinematographers were professional painters, many (Charles Rosher, Karl Struss, Stanley Cortez, James Wong Howe) had been portrait photographers, a field in which academic rules of composition and lighting prevailed. And occasionally a cinematographer would articulate principles of filmmaking that directly echo those of academic painting.[7] We ought not to be surprised, then, that Hollywood's practices of composition continue some very old traditions in the visual arts.

An outstanding example is the Hollywood cinema's interest in centered compositions. In post-Renaissance painting, the erect human body provides one major standard of framing, with the face usually occupying the upper portion of the

picture format. The same impulse can be seen in the principle of horizon-line isocephaly, which guarantees that figures' heads run along a more or less horizontal line.[8] Classical cinema employs these precepts. While extreme long shots tend to weight the lower half of the image (this derives from landscape painting traditions), most shots work with a privileged zone of screen space resembling a T: the upper one-third and the central vertical third of the screen constitute the 'center' of the shot. This center determines the composition of long shots, medium shots, and close-ups, as well as the grouping of figures (see figs 5.1 through 5.8). In widescreen films, the center area is proportionately stretched, so even slightly off-center compositions are not transgressive (especially in a balanced shot/reverse-shot cutting pattern). Classical filmmaking thus considers edge-framing taboo; frontally positioned figures or objects, however unimportant, are seldom sliced off by either vertical edge. And, as the illustrations indicate, horizon-line isocephaly is common in classical filmmaking. Thus the human body is made the center of narrative and graphic interest: the closer the shot, the greater the demand for centering.

But how to center moving figures? The classical style quickly discovered the virtues of panning and tilting the camera. The subtlest refinement of this practice was the custom of *reframing*. A reframing is a slight pan or tilt to accommodate figure movement. Every film in the UnS contained some reframings; after 1929, one out of every six shots used at least one reframing. The chief alternative to reframing is what Edward Branigan has called the *frame cut*.[9] Within a defined locale, a figure leaves the shot, and, *as the body crosses the frame line*, the cut reveals the figure entering a new shot, with the body still crossing the (opposite) frame line (see figs 5.9 through 5.14). Frame-cutting is extraordinarily common in classical cinema, partly because it is the least troublesome match-on-action cut to make but also because it confirms the importance of the center zone of the screen. In a frame cut, the image's edge becomes only a bridge over which figures or objects pass on their way to center stage.

With centering comes balance, but the complex and dynamic equilibrium of great Western painting is usually lacking in Hollywood compositions. Overall balance and an avoidance of distractingly perfect symmetry generally suffice. Once centered, the human body provides enough slight asymmetries to yield a generally stable image, and camera viewfinders, engraved with cross-hatchings, enabled cameramen to balance the shot. When balance is lost, the results leap to the eye. In figures 5.15 and 5.16, from *The Bedroom Window* (1924), William C. deMille's practice of multiple-camera shooting has pushed the shots off-center and off-balance. Of course, such imbalance can be causally motivated, as in *Harvey* (1950), for which cinematographer William Daniels had to frame the shots asymmetrically to include the invisible rabbit.[10] The value of balance in the classical cinema can be seen in the way that a vacancy in the frame space will be reserved for the entry of a character; that figure will complete the balanced composition (see figs 5.17 through 5.19).

Both centering and balancing function as narration in that these film techniques shape the story action for the spectator. The narrational qualities of shot composition are also evident in the classical use of frontality. Renaissance painting derived many principles of scenography from Greek and Roman theater, so that the idea of a narrative action address to the spectator became explicit in Western painting. The classical film image relies upon such a conception of frontality. The face is positioned in full, three-quarter, or profile view; the body typically in full or three-quarter view. The result is an odd rubbernecking characteristic of Hollywood character position; people's heads may face one another in profile but their bodies do not (see figs 5.20 and 5.21). Standing groups are arranged along horizontal or diagonal lines or in half-circles; people seldom close ranks as they would in real life (see figs 5.22 and 5.23). The dyspeptic Welford Beaton was one of the few critics who noticed this practice:[11]

> In most of our pictures the directors make their characters face the camera by the simple expedient of turning them around until they face it, no matter how unnatural the scene is made thereby. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* [1928], there is an exhibition of flagrant disregard of common sense in grouping characters. Ruth Taylor, Alice White, and Ford Sterling are shown seated at a round table in a

restaurant. Instead of forming a triangle, they are squeezed together so closely that Sterling, in the center, scarcely can move.

Yet complete frontality – e.g., direct address to the camera – is rare; a modified frontality requires that a wedge be driven into the space, opening up the best sightlines.

Frontality constitutes a very important cue for the viewer. When characters have their backs to us, it is usually an index of their relative unimportance at the moment. George Cukor points out a scene from *Adam's Rib* (1949) in which Katharine Hepburn was turned from the camera: 'That had a meaning: she indicated to the audience that they should look at Judy Holliday.'[12] Groupings around tables often sacrifice a good view of the least significant character in the scene. One UnS film, **Saratoga* (1937) vividly illustrates how troubled the film's space becomes when frontality is disrupted. Jean Harlow died in the course of the film's production, before several scenes were shot. In those scenes, Harlow was replaced by a double who never faces the camera, resulting in the odd phenomenon of having no portrayal of the heroine's expressions during climactic moments of the action.

Most important, frontality can be lost if it is then regained. Over-the-shoulder shot/reverse-shot cutting decenters a figure and puts his or her back to us, but the reverse shot reinstates that character front and center. Once the figures are arranged for us in the image, editing can introduce new angles, but then closer shots will typically be centered, balanced, and frontal in their turn. Even if one minimizes editing, as Orson Welles and William Wyler are often thought to do, the deep-focus composition cannot forfeit frontality – indeed, in films like *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) and *The Little Foxes* (1941), classical frontality is in fact exaggerated (see figs 5.24 and 5.25).

The most obvious way that the classical cinema works to treat the screen as a plate-glass window is in the representation of depth. Probably the most important depth cue in cinema is movement. When a figure moves and creates a continuous stream of overlapping planes and receding shapes, when the camera glides through or across a space – under these circumstances it becomes very difficult to see the screen as a flat surface. This is perhaps one of the reasons that modernist and avant-garde films have often suppressed the kinetic depth effect by such devices as flicker, still images, and graininess.

Classical Hollywood space is created in planes through various depth cues. To the usual cues of visual overlap (the object that overlaps must be closer) and familiar size, the classical image adds pattern, color, texture, lighting, and focus to specify depth. Geometrical patterns and colors, especially of costumes, stand out from plainer backgrounds (see figs 5.26 and 5.27). Even in black-and-white filming, set designers painted sets in different colors to create planes in depth.[13] More dense and concentrated textures were reserved for the figures in the foreground, and cinematographers would diffuse the light on backgrounds to make them more granular. Lighting is particularly important in establishing depth. Cinematographers were careful to alternate planes in contrasting keys and half-tones (a silhouetted foreground, a bright middle ground, a darker background).[14] Hollywood's standardized three-point lighting system (key, fill, and backlighting), supplemented by background lighting, eye lights, and other techniques, had as its effect the careful articulation of each narratively relevant plane. The importance of backlighting cannot be overestimated here. Commonly thought of as a Griffith cliché or a sudden lyrical effect, back-lighting is in fact one of the most common ways the Hollywood filmmaker distinguishes figure from background: A pencil-line of light around the body's contour pulls the figure forward (see figs 5.28 and 5.29).[15] Edge lighting of figures remained common even after fast film stocks and color films enhanced figure separation (see fig 5.30). Low-key lighting could be very effective in picking out planes if edge-lighting supplemented it (see fig 5.31). Finally, the planes of the classical image also usually get defined by selective focus, an equivalent of aerial perspective in painting. In framings closer than medium shot, the characters are in focus while other planes are not.[16] Variations are possible – in deep-space compositions, a figure in the foreground might be out of focus while another in the background is in focus – but the principle generally holds good. No classical films throw figures out of focus to favor insignificant objects (kegs, stoves) in the manner of Ozu's films or of certain avant-garde works.[17]

Stacked planes are not enough; the classical style stresses volumes as well. Cinematographers valued 'roundness' as much as depth, using highlights to accentuate curves of face and body or to pick out folds in drapery.[18] As early as 1926, the cinematographer was compared to the sculptor:[19]

> It is chiefly by the use of such lighting equipment that the sculptor-director seeks his worshipped 'plasticity.' Failing a true stereoscopic effect in film, he models his figures to a roundness with lights behind and above and on either side, softening here and sharpening up for accent elsewhere with a patience and skill inevitably lost on the layman.

Make-up was designed to enhance the roundness of faces. Likewise, a set had to be represented as a volume, a container for action, not a row of sliced planes. Designers often built three-dimensional models of sets in order to try out various camera positions. Even the ceiling, which usually could not be shown, had to be implied through shadow.[20] Camera movement could endow the set with a sculptural quality too, as Dwan observed: 'In dollying as a rule we find it's a good idea to *pass* things in order to get the effect of movement. We always noticed that if we dollied past a tree, it became solid and round, instead of flat.'[21]

The importance of planes and volumes in defining classical scenographic depth makes academic perspective rather rare. Developed during the Renaissance as a revision of ancient Greek perspective, central linear perspective organizes planes around the presumed vantage point of a stationary monocular observer. The impression of depth results from the assumption that parallel lines receding from the picture surface seem to meet at a single point on the horizon, the vanishing point.[22] Now it is indisputable that certain aspects of Hollywood film production, such as set design and special-effects work, frequently draw upon principles of linear perspective.[23] But images in the Hollywood cinema seldom exhibit the central vanishing point, raked and checkered floorplans, and regular recession of planes characteristic of what Pierre Francastel calls the 'Quattrocento cube.'[24] (Such conventions are far more common in pre-classical

films; see fig 5.32.) The classical shot is more usually built out of a few planes placed against a distant background plane – in a long shot, the horizon; in a closer view, the rear wall of a room (see figs 5.33 and 5.34). A limited linear perspective view can be supplied by the corner of a room or ceiling or the view out of a window. Sometimes, especially in 1940s films, a more explicit sense of perspective emerges; an occasional establishing shot exhibits a deep recessional interior (see fig 5.35), or a skewed vanishing point (see fig 5.36). But in medium-long and medium shots (the majority of the shots in a film), linear perspective remains of little importance, and pronounced depth is achieved by interposing figures and objects on various planes.

Such art-historical traditions would not seem easily applicable to the scenographic space constructed by the soundtrack. But the classical cinema modeled its use of sound upon its use of images. (Chapter 23 examines how this occurred historically.) As one technician wrote:[25]

> With the two-dimensional camera, which bears the same psychological relation to the eye as monaural sound does to the ear, the illusion of depth can be achieved by the proper use of lighting and contrast, just as by the manipulations of loudness and reverberation with the microphone. And just as the eye can be drawn to particular persons or objects by the adjustment of focal length, so can the ear be arrested by the intensification of important sounds and the rejection of unimportant ones.

What Hollywood technicians called 'sound perspective' was the belief that the acoustic qualities of dialogue and noise had to match the scale of the image. Engineers debated how to convey 'natural' sound while granting that strictly realistic sound recording was unsuitable. Microphones had to be rotated in the course of conversations; musical numbers had to be prerecorded; some dialogue had to be post-synchronized; and, most importantly, sounds had to be segregated onto separate tracks for later mixing. In the theater, the speakers were placed behind the screen, as centered as were the figures in the frame. The same conceptions of balance, centrality, and spatial definition were applied to stereophonic sound in the early 1950s.[26]

Thus in the Hollywood cinema the space constructed by the soundtrack is no less artificial than that of the image. Alan Williams points out that like visual perspective, sonic perspective is narrational, yielding not 'the full, material context of everyday vision or hearing, but *the signs of* such a physical situation.'[27] He shows how selective the sonic space of a Hollywood locale is in comparison with that of the racket-filled café in Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1966). Similar effects occur in the dense, layered montage of offscreen sound in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Third Generation* (1980) and *In a Year of Thirteen Moons* (1980), during which radios, television sets, and several conversations compete for our attention. In this sense, classical sound technique articulates foreground (principal voice) and background (silence, 'background' noise, music 'under' the action) with the same precision that camera and staging distinguish visual planes.

Centering, balancing, frontality, and depth – all these narrational strategies – encourage us to read filmic space as story space. Since the classical narrative depends upon psychological causality, we can think of these strategies as aiming to *personalize* space. Surroundings become significant partly for their ability to dramatize individuality. Hence the importance of doors: the doorway becomes a privileged zone of human action, promising movement, encounters, confrontations, and conclusions. The classical film also charges objects with personal meanings. Props (guns, rings, etc.), and especially representational props (photographs, dolls, portrait paintings) all bear an ineluctable psychological import. (How many classical films convey a lover's disgust by violence against the picture of the beloved.) Shot scale is also geared to expressivity, with the *plan américain* (the knees-up shot) and the medium shot the most common ones because they 'retain facial expressions and physical gestures – partially lost in the long shot – and relate these, dramatically, to the action involved.'[28] A close-up, which can theoretically show anything, becomes virtually synonymous with the facial close-up, the portrait that reveals character. It is significant, however, that *extreme* facial close-ups – framings closer than full facial shots – are almost absent from the classical cinema, as if cutting the face completely free of the background made the close-up too fragmentary. (Compare the frequency of enlarged portions of faces in the Soviet cinema of the 1920s.) Lighting brings out the personality of the character, while diffusion distinguishes women by spiritualizing them.[29] In the sound cinema, the voice parallels the face as a vehicle of personalization. In all these ways, the classical cinema declares its anthropocentric commitment: Space will signify chiefly in relation to psychological causality.

Classical narration of space thus aims at orientation: The scenography is addressed to the viewer. Can we then say that a larger principle of 'perspective' operates here – not the adherence to a particular spatial composition but a general 'placing' of the spectator in an ideal position of intelligibility?[30] Certainly Hollywood's own description of its work emphasizes the camera as an invisible witness, just as the soundtrack constitutes an ideal hearing of the scene. This aesthetic of effaced present is anthropocentric (camera and sound as eye and ear) and idealist (the witness is immaterial, an omniscient subject), hence also ideological. Yet the viewer is not wholly a passive subject tyrannized by a rigid address. Analogies with perspective, being spatial, tend to neglect the spectator's activities. Just as the viewer must meet causal and temporal systems halfway, the viewer must contribute something in order to make classical space work. That contribution includes the sort of hypothesis-forming and -testing that I have emphasized in earlier chapters. That we tend to anticipate data, that we frame our hunches as more or less likely alternatives (or paradigmatic choices), that we retroactively check our hypotheses – all these activities operate in our construction of classical space.

So, for instance, centering procedures quickly lead the viewer to perform certain operations. Confining significant narrative action to any constant zone of screen space effectively insures that attention paid to other areas will not be rewarded. Moreover, psychologists have long known that it is hard to read a configuration as three-dimensional if we are markedly aware of the edges of the image: our eye tests for consistency, and the depth of the represented space conflicts with the boundary of the picture.[31] Centered film compositions, either static or moving, draw our attention away from the frame edge. Even the viewing situation encourages this, since black masking on the theater screen conceals the aperture line. Cinematographers often darkened the edges of the image to avoid a glaring contrast between the picture and the theater masking.[32] Distracting our attention from the edge thus discourages us from testing the image as a flat space. Compare, however, the flattening effect of edge-framed compositions in non-Hollywood traditions (see fig 5.37).

Similarly, frontality functions as a strong cue for the spectator. Since the classical Hollywood cinema is predominantly anthropocentric, the representation of the expressive body arouses in us an interest nourished not only by art but by everyday life. Our principal information about people's mental states is derived in large part from posture, gesture, facial expression, and eye movement (as well as voice), so that if classical cinema is to represent psychological causation in its characters, narrational space must privilege these behavioral cues. Moreover, as Gombrich points out, some objects give a more exact feeling of frontality than do others. We are remarkably sensitive to anglings of body, face, and especially eyes, and we tend to orient ourselves to postures and gazes with a precision that we do not apply to walls or trees.[33] In addition, of course, 'normal' camera height, standardized at between 5 and 6 feet, corresponds to a gaze from an erect human body, a position canonized not only in art but also in culture generally.[34] Imagine a classical film with only one difference: it is entirely shot from straight above the characters. The consistent bird's-eye view would destroy the expressive basis of the narrative because the classical filmmaker lacks schemata for rendering such an orientation and the film viewer has no appropriate repertoire of expectations.

And what of the spectator's construction of depth? The various depth cues, most prominently movement, require an act of spatial integration on the viewer's part. If classical space does not pose the visual paradoxes of images in some German Expressionistic cinema or in abstract film, that is partly because we scale our expectations to a limited set of possibilities. But consider the baffling space of figure 5.38, from Griffith's *Trying to Get Arrested* (1909). A tiny man runs in at the lower right corner. The cue of familiar size dictates that he looks small because he is far away, but the receding planes of the shot seem to deny this. Is the man then a leprechaun? No, he is indeed in the distance, as a later frame (fig 5.39) makes clear. The peculiarity of this primitive shot arises from the way the image foils those expectations about planes and volumes that the classical cinema would have confirmed by composition and framing. Certainly seeing an image as deep is 'easier' in cinema than in other arts, but even film depth must be *achieved* to some degree, relying upon what Gombrich has called 'the beholder's share.'[35]

Continuity editing

Theorists are still a long way from fully understanding how the viewer contributes to the creation of classical space, but some consideration of the process of editing may help. Certainly editing can work against the orientation achieved within the image, as it does in the films of Eisenstein, Ozu, Nagisa Oshima, Godard, and other filmmakers.[36] Classical continuity editing, however, reinforces spatial orientation. Continuity of graphic qualities can invite us to look through the 'plate-glass window' of the screen. From shot to shot, tonality, movement, and the center of compositional interest shift enough to be distinguishable but not enough to be disturbing. Editors seldom discussed graphic continuity, but the procedure was explained as early as 1928 by two visitors to the Hollywood studios, who claimed that either the point of interest in shot B should be on the screen 'almost' where the point of interest of shot A ended, or B should continue A's movement:[37]

> This has no reference to the story itself, but merely to the making of the pictures considered only as spots of colour and centres of pictorial interest. The eye should be led a gentle dance, swaying easily and comfortably from side to side of the picture, now fast, now slow, as the emotional needs of the story demand.

Compare the graphically gentle cut of the typical shot/reverse-shot series, which only slightly shifts the center of interest (see figs 5.40 through 5.43) with the graphically jarring cut which alters that

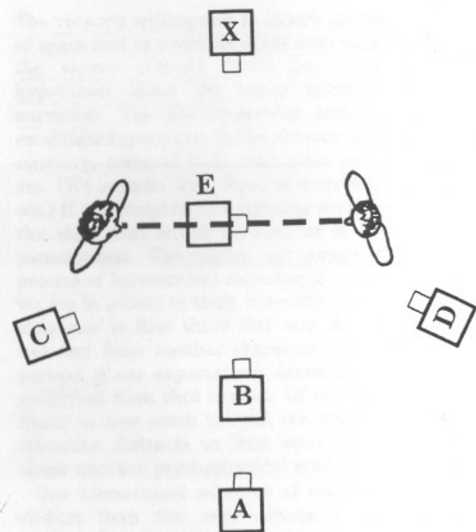
center of interest quite drastically (see figs 5.44 and 5.45).

Once graphic continuity is achieved, the editing can concentrate upon orienting us to scenographic space. Crosscutting creates a fictive space built out of several locales. As Chapter 4 points out, classical crosscutting presupposes that shifts in the locale are motivated by the story action. More often, editing fulfills the narrational function of orienting us to a single locale (a room, a stretch of sidewalk, the cab of a truck) or to physically adjacent locales (a room and a hallway, the rear of the truck). Thus the principles and devices of continuity editing function to represent space for the sake of the story.

André Bazin has summarized the basic premises of classical continuity editing:[38]

> 1 The verisimilitude of the space in which the position of the actor is always determined, even when a close-up eliminates the decor.
> 2 The purpose and the effects of the cut are exclusively dramatic or psychological.
>
> In other words, if the scene were played on a stage and seen from a seat in the orchestra, it would have the same meaning, the episode would continue to exist objectively. The changes of point of view provided by the camera would add nothing. They would present the reality a little more forcefully, first by allowing a better view and then by putting the emphasis where it belongs.

Besides spelling out the classical assumptions about consistent spatial relations and the determining role of character psychology, Bazin reveals the extent to which classical editing continues and elaborates the scenography of nineteenth-century bourgeois theater. Bazin's mobile-yet-stationary spectator in the orchestra personifies the viewpoint created by the classical '180°' or 'axis-of-action' system of spatial editing. The assumption is that shots will be filmed and cut together so as to position the spectator always on the same side of the story action. Bazin suggests that the 'objective' reality of the action independent of the act of filming is analogous to that stable space of proscenium theatrical representation, in which the spectator is always positioned beyond the fourth wall. The axis of action (or center line) becomes the imaginary vector of movements, character positions, and glances in the scene, and ideally the camera should not stray over the axis. In any scene, explains Robert Aldrich, 'You have to draw the center line. . . . You must never cross the line.'[39] If we assume that two conversing characters are angled somewhat frontally (as is usual), the classic 180° system will be as laid out in diagram 5.1. Camera positions A, B, C, and D (and indeed any position within the lower half-circle) will cut together so as to orient the viewer, while camera position X (or any position on the other side of the center line) is thought to disorient the spectator.



The 180° principle governs all the more specific devices of continuity editing. *Analytical* editing moves the spectator into or back from a part of a total space. A cut from position A to position B (or vice versa) would be an analytical cut, respecting the axis of action. *Shot/reverse-shot* cutting assumes that the series of shots alternates a view of one end-point of the line with a view of the other. Thus cutting from camera position C to that of D would be a shot/reverse-shot pattern. Typically, shot/reverse-shot editing joins shots of characters facing one another, but it need not.

The same principle applies to vehicles, buildings, or any entities posited as being at opposite ends of the axis of action. *Eyeline-match* cutting uses character glance as a cue to link shots. The assumption is that the eyeline runs parallel to the axis, so the camera positions will remain on one side of the line. Shots C and D when cut together will yield correct eyeline matches in a way that, say, shots X and D would not. A comparatively uncommon case of eyeline-match cutting, *point-of-view* cutting, reveals the limits of permissibility in the 180° system. The first shot shows the character looking at something offscreen; the second shot shows what the character is seeing, but more or less from the character's optical vantage point. Remarkably, critics continue to reduce shot/reverse-shot cutting to point-of-view cutting. A recent monograph defines shot/reverse shot in a conversation scene as taking the second shot 'from the first character's point-of-view.'[40] Hollywood shot/reverse-shot cutting is more properly what Jean Mitry calls *semi*-subjective: we are often literally looking over a character's shoulder.[41] (Edward Branigan has shown that camera angle is the critical variable here: camera distance is often inexact in classical point-of-view cutting.[42]) But even the point-of-view shot remains within the 180° convention because it represents a camera position *on the axis itself* (e.g., position E on the diagram). The power of the 180° system may also be seen in what we may call the *'earline-match'* cut, in which a character listens from outside the space of the scene. The assumption is that the sound travels in a straight line, which constitutes the axis of action. If a listener at a door cocks his ear to screen left, a cut to someone inside the room walking to that door must show the character moving screen right.

Obviously, across a series of shots all these editing devices work smoothly to reinforce each other, so that an establishing shot will be linked by an analytical cut to a closer view, and then a series of shot/reverse shots will follow. But the system, being part of a stylistic paradigm, has a certain latitude as well, so that one can use the shot/reverse-shot schema if one character has turned his back to the other, if there are five or six characters present, and so on.

One more device of the 180° system deserves mention, not least because it dramatizes the extent to which the system defines a coherent but limited field for the spectator. Editing for *directional* continuity translates the imaginary line into a vector of movement. If a character or vehicle is moving left to right in shot 1, it should continue to do so in shot 2. Directional continuity cutting is like eyeline cutting: just as two shots of figures looking in opposite directions imply that the figures are looking at each other, so two shots of figures moving in opposite directions lead us to expect the figures to meet. Directional continuity also resembles point-of-view cutting in that one can show the movement from a position *on* the axis of action – i.e., either a heads-on or a tails-on shot of the action. (A shot from this position can function as a transition if one wants to cross the line.) Directional continuity is often used within a circumscribed space, as when a character goes from the window (exit frame left) and comes to the desk (enter frame right). In these cases, Hollywood directional continuity depends upon the frame cut. What is more revealing, though, is that directional continuity can be maintained across separate spaces, for in that case the 180° system presupposes that the ideal spectator is situated on one side of an axis perhaps miles long! The closed chamber-space of the theater has been left behind, but Bazin's spectator-in-the-orchestra and his or her relation to proscenium space remain intact.

The devices of continuity editing are best seen as traditional schemata which the classical filmmaker can impose upon any subject. As King Vidor wrote: 'The filmmaker should be consciously aware of this 180° rule throughout the whole field of film action. It is not only beneficial in sports, but in chase sequences, with cowboys, Indians and cavalry, animal pursuits, moon landings, dinner-table conversations, and a thousand other movie subjects.'[43] Most film critics are aware of these schemata but consider them simply a neutral vehicle for the filmmaker's idiosyncratic themes or 'personal vision.' What makes the continuity devices so powerful is exactly their apparent neutrality; compositional motivation has codified them to a degree of rigidity that is still hard to realize. In each UnS film, less than 2 per cent of the shot-changes violated spatial continuity, and one-fifth of the films contained not a single violation. No wonder that, of all Hollywood stylistic practices, continuity editing has been considered a set of firm rules.

with other classical techniques, continuity ıg cues form a redundant paradigm. entional 180° editing assumes that the lishing shot *and* the eyeline match cut *and* tional continuity of movement *and* the reverse-shot schema will all be present to determine' the scenographic space. The ıdancy of the paradigm becomes evident ı we watch a non-classical filmmaker simply ve one or two cues. In Dreyer's *Day of Wrath*), the characters' eyelines in medium shot violate the 180° axis, but there are frequent lishing shots to orient us. Conversely, in son's *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (1961), the nes respect the axis of action, but scenes ently lack establishing shots.[44] In neither do we lose our bearings (although, since each naker exploits his devices systematically, the t is significantly different from the space of lassical scene).

hat are the narrational consequences of al continuity editing? One answer might be d on a broad conception of perspective. In etuating the playing space of post-ıissance bourgeois theater, classical editing es the spectator an ideally placed onlooker. araphrase Bazin, the action and the viewer eparate ('the episode would continue to exist tively'), yet the narration acknowledges the oker by implicitly addressing her or him ('by ring a better view'). In sum, the intelligible ıtation created within the single shot is kept stent across shots by positing a spectator can be moved only within the limits of a trical space of vision.

ıis account is certainly correct as far as it . Its drawbacks are the passivity it imputes to spectator and its neglect of certain significant ılarities in the continuity system. For one , the space constructed by continuity editing rely a total one, even on the favored side of axis of action. Not only do we seldom see the h wall of the typical interior, but areas ediately in front of the camera remain ively undefined. Films of the late teens and 1920s sometimes have holes in their ographic space; the establishing shot may not all adjacent areas from which characters emerge. And Hollywood practitioners have employed the aptly named 'cheat cut,' in h the shift of camera distance and angle during a cut covers a distinct change in character position (see figs 5.46 through 5.49). The cheat cut works to enhance balance, centering, or frontality:[45]

> 'Cheating' is the great game between the camera operator and the Continuity girl. To compose a foreground or a background the operator will sometimes move or substitute objects, or have the artiste raised or lowered in relation to his surroundings. Actually, after a long while in pictures, I realised that such 'cheating' is seldom noticeable to an audience, but in the studio it often seems fantastic.

The viewer's willingness to ignore unshown areas of space and to overlook cheat cuts suggests that the viewer actively forms and tests specific hypotheses about the space revealed by the narration. The always-present pockets of non-established space are, in the absence of cues to the contrary, assumed to be consistent with what we see. (We assume that there is more wall, a door, etc.) If a technician or a lighting unit peeped into the shot, that would provoke us to revise such assumptions. The cheat cut suggests that a process of hierarchical selection is at work. Since we are to attend to story causality, the fact that a character is first three feet and then suddenly two feet from another character becomes unimportant if our expectations about the action are confirmed from shot to shot. Of course, there are limits to how much the cut can cheat before the operation distracts us from story causality, and these warrant psychophysical study.[46]

Our hierarchical selection of what to watch is evident from the very schemata of classical cutting. For example, the repetition of camera position becomes very important. Typically, any classical series of shots will include several identical camera set-ups. The reestablishing shot will usually be from the same angle and distance as the establishing shot; shot and reverse-shot framings may be repeated several times. Such repetitions encourage us to ignore the cutting itself and notice only those narrative factors that change from shot to shot. In a similar way, the first occurrence of a set-up often 'primes' us for a later action. In **The Caddy* (1953), Harvey hides from dogs in a locker room. A *plan américain* reveals him leaning on the door; on the right of the frame are clothes lying on a coat rack. Cut: the dogs outside the door wander off. The next shot repeats the *plan américain* of Harvey, but now Harvey notices the clothes. The first set-up unobtrusively asked us to hypothesize that Harvey would disguise himself, and the guess is confirmed by keeping set-ups constant. A similar process occurs in figures 5.50 through 5.53. This priming of later actions does not occur in films by Eisenstein and Godard, for instance, who seldom exactly repeat set-ups and who thus demand that we reorient ourselves after every cut.

The phenomenon of priming illustrates Gombrich's point that schemata set the horizon of the viewer's expectations. Classical editing is organized paradigmatically, since any shot leads the viewer to infer a limited set of more or less probable successors. For example, an establishing shot can cut away to another space or cut in to a closer shot; the latter alternative is more likely. An angled medium shot of a character or object is usually followed by a corresponding reverse shot. Cutting around within a locale is most likely to be based upon eyeline matches and upon shot/reverse-shot patterns, less likely to be based upon figure movement, and least likely to be based upon optical point-of-view. (In this respect, Hitchcock relies upon point-of-view cutting to an almost unique degree.) The classical construction of space thus participates in the process of hypothesis-forming that we saw at work in narration generally. Julian Hochberg compares the viewer's construction of edited space to 'cognitive mapping': 'The task of the filmmaker therefore is to make the viewer pose a visual question, and then answer it for him.'[47]

The process of viewer expectation is particularly apparent in the flow of onscreen and offscreen space. Consider again the shot/reverse-shot schema. The first image, say a medium shot of Marilyn, implies an offscreen field, foreshadowing (by its angle, scale, and character glance) what could most probably succeed it. The next shot in the series, a reverse-angled view of Douglas, reveals the narratively significant material which occupies that offscreen zone. Shot two makes sense as an answer to its predecessor. This backing-and-filling movement, opening a spatial gap and then plugging it, accords well with the aims of classical narration. Furthermore, shot/reverse-shot editing helps make narration covert by creating the sense that no important scenographic space remains unaccounted for. If shot two shows the important material outside shot one, there is no spatial point we can assign to the narration; the narration is always elsewhere, outside this shot but never visible in the next. This process, which evidently is at work in camera movement and analytical cutting as well, is consistent with that unself-conscious but omnipresent narration described in Chapter 3.[48]*

Classical offscreen space thus functions as what Gombrich calls a 'screen,' a blank area which invites the spectator to project hypothetical elements on to it.[49] Given classical viewing priorities, we are more concerned with the distinct persons and things visible within space than with the spaces between and around them. If a shot shows a person or object that was implicit in the previous shot, we check the new material against our projection rather than measuring the amount of space left out. Since Hollywood scenography seldom represents a locale in its entirety, we must construct a spatial whole out of bits. And if those bits not only overlap in what they show but agree with the fields we have inferred to be lying offscreen, we will not notice the fuzzy areas that have never been strictly accounted for. Classical editing supports orientation according to Gombrich's negative principle of perspective: A convincing image need not show everything in the space as long as nothing we see actually contradicts what we expect.[50] If classical cinema makes the screen a plate-glass window, it is partly because it turns a remarkably coherent spatial system into the vehicle of narrative causality; but it is also because the viewer, having learned distinct perceptual and cognitive activities, meets the film halfway and completes the illusion of seeing an integral fictional space.