Introduction

Griffith and Film Form

Griffith's work will always provide the ultimate challenge to the student of early cinema, if only because for so long, his was virtually the only historiographically examined manifestation of the period, often the sum total of what was known about early cinema.[1] In a corrective counter-move, the toppling of Griffith as the father of classical cinema and inventor of narrative film-making has become a ritual act of parricide among film scholars. However, such obligatory revisionism is itself giving way to a more historically and textually informed view of Griffith's work, with the result that we now have a body of knowledge establishing quite specifically the terms of Griffithian film practice.

In the essays on Griffith collected here, one can witness a shift from traditional assertions of his importance as the founder of the feature film, to a recognition of the relative autonomy of his work from both the early and classical modes. This shift has been facilitated by the acceptance of norms, in contrast to 'firsts' and 'inventions', as the touchstone in the history of film. Consequently, there has been a willingness to surrender the notion of Griffith as originator of the basic techniques of filmic narration,[2] in favour of trying to reconstruct the idea of film form and the practice of cinema underpinning his work. Attention has moved from Griffith's epics to his earlier work at Biograph where the fundamentals of a unique approach to filmic form, as well as the pressures emanating from the 'institution' can be studied in the process of coming into being.

As argued in previous introductions, the turn to narrative in the cinema cannot simply be seen as the consequence of the urge for storytelling. It involves the contradictory articulation of a logic of space and time, within the context of a new industrial commodity, the reel of film, itself standing for new experiences of spectatorship. Film narrative and classical continuity cinema emerge, in this model, as the 'solution' to the problem of how spatial representation can be inflected with a certain linearity (itself a compromise between a temporality and a causal chain), while serving as the optimal textual form of creating a commodity amenable to industrial production and capitalist exploitation. Griffith's films, as a consequence, seem even more extraordinary, complex and symptomatic, just as his influence becomes more puzzling, unexpected and multidimensional.

Before arguing this more fully, it may be helpful to recall in what ways

Griffith's work stands at the points of intersection and poses questions for students of early cinema and its transformations. To begin with, there is Griffith's relation to early film form, and the reasons why he must be regarded as belonging to a transitional rather than the primitive or the institutional mode. Although shot relations, formal linkages and a very sophisticated use of space make him a consummate example of continuity cinema and the IMR (in his use of alternation and repetition, for instance), there are enough features of the PMR even in Griffith's 'mature' work (frontal staging, rare close-ups, little scene dissection, relative absence of point-of-view structure) which make the retention of these features not so much a sign of retardedneeeess (as some of the iconoclasts had first argued), but evidence of a different conception of filmic form. In this respect similar to Porter during the first decade, Griffith is a Janus-faced figure among the directors of the second decade, looking both backwards and to the future. Hence, the possibility of treating, for instance, Griffith's Biograph films either *sui generis*, or as evidence of a transitional period where he is joined by other directors, such as Ralph Ince, Maurice Tourneur or George Loane Tucker (director of the remarkable *Traffic in Souls*), all of whom developed features of the different modes in idiosyncratic ways, helping to make especially the first half of the 1910s in the United States a much more diverse period stylistically than had been suspected as long as Griffith's remained the only body of films accessible or examined.

The retention of frontal staging, both in Griffith and Ralph Ince, for example, made possible a narrative space which in its complexity is almost incomprehensible to the modern eye. Open towards the audience (and thus 'primitive'), but nevertheless emphatically part of a cinema of narrative integration (where the space occupied by the camera is supposed to be 'invisible'), this 'frontal space' in films like *An Unseen Enemy* or *The Right Girl?* is fundamental to the progression and thus the logic of the narrative itself.[3] In particular, Griffith's use of frontality well into the 1920s does not spring from ignorance, but is more likely evidence that the PMR could be developed, and was developed, in sophisticated and still little understood ways, which were lost to the institutional mode when it abandoned frontal staging and the spectator-positioning it connoted. At the same time, it indicates that, from a certain point onwards, Griffith and so-called classical cinema parted company, obliging us to consider his influence elsewhere (in the European cinema, for instance). In fact, it is probably more useful to see Griffith as a representative of non-continuity cinema, elaborating the most extraordinary forms of continuity within that mode, rather than practicing a cinema of discontinuity, but retaining features of the non-continuous mode.

This is not to deny that Griffith remained an important source for instituting a 'cinema of discontinuity' in the sense used by Salt,[4] by developing techniques for transforming visually disparate locations (switching from place to place, or by juxtaposing scenes) into the impression of an overall unified narrative space. But instead of, say, the cut on action, which will become the most common form of shot transition, in Griffith it is character movement between spaces, frame cuts (shot transition as a character exits the frame) and a

manipulation of screen direction which serve as the key principles of Griffithian continuity. Jacques Aumont is therefore right to focus on the spatial articulations of Griffith's Biograph films, in order to emphasise their non-naturalistic qualities. Griffith's shallow frontal stagings create enclosed spaces, since in his conception of film drama, these spaces are crucial to the development of the narrative trajectory, almost as important as (and working in tandem with) parallel editing. One only has to remember in how many films the setting up of self-enclosed spaces within the frame and discrete action spaces are the starting points for narratives that drive towards an eventual bringing together of all the elements within one frame – the usual moment of closure in a Griffith film. It is in this context, and beyond the economic exigencies of film-making at Biograph, or the speed at which shooting took place, that one must see what Aumont calls the 'poverty of the referential store of locations'. However, Aumont insists, it is also indicative of 'figurative closure', another feature different from classical continuity cinema, which developed 'more fictional, thematic, indeed spatial' modes of closure, compared with the degree of figurative abstraction achieved by Griffith. Spatial closure thus becomes the symptom of a cinema allied to the theatre – the edges of the frame are used as wings (rather than continuing into off-screen space), *as well as* of a kind of abstract use of space quite unlike anything possible in the theatre.

Symmetry, Doubling and Alternation

Similarly multi-faceted is Griffith's most outstanding contribution to the development of narrative and continuity cinema, namely parallel editing which, although he did not invent it, he explored more fully than anyone else. Semiological models of filmic signification, such as Metz' 'grande syntagmatique' and its elaboration and application by Raymond Bellour to specific films have given us a much better understanding of parallel editing as only one instance of that more general principle – alternation – which, according to Bellour has a crucial function for both classical and non-classical modes of film-making.[5] What is only beginning to be appreciated is how deeply the principles of segmentation, division and alternation penetrate not only Griffith's formal procedures, but structure his very conception of the diegetic material, including his view of the family, of morality, sexual difference and history.[6]

Gunning recognised this feature when he distinguishes the formal principle of parallel editing and the diegetic principle of doubling the narrative interest (running two separate plot-lines together). Thus, in a film like *An Unseen Enemy*, the story of the two sisters alone in the house is joined to the story of the maid 'doubling herself' by calling on a crony to carry out the robbery. Put another way, Griffith's narratives are always based on an act of splitting the narrative core or cell, and obtaining several narrative threads which could then be woven together again. By this act of separation, and his ability to subdivide even the smallest of episodes, Griffith was able to insert further plot-lines and complications, opening up potentially infinite series, as in his epics, where the 'expansive' tendency of the narrative stands in a highly dramatic relation to its resolution and the bringing about of closure. Thus, analytical story-telling and

the breakdown of the linear narrative flow (parallel editing at the macro-level of the scene, juxtaposition and alternation at the micro-level of the shot) makes possible a certain 'formalisation' in Griffith's treatment of the referential material, quite different from the kind of scene-dissection of classical cinema, which Griffith uses so sparingly. Again, it would appear that the retention of a 'retarded' style gives the director a repertoire not available in the classical mode, such as the freedom to manipulate the pro-filmic, cutting it up and reassembling it according to formal procedures: in Griffith, the 'constructed' nature of cinematic realism is inescapable. This supports Aumont's point that 'Griffithian representation, just as coherent and systematic [as classical narrative] uses other means, thus obtaining very specific effects of reality, often very disconcerting.'

An equally non-naturalistic view of Griffith's *mise en scène* is taken by Bellour in his meticulous analysis of *The Lonedale Operator*. He is able to show that patterns of alternation structure both cinematic and non-cinematic codes, the narrative level (with its emphasis on sexual difference and the formation of the couple) and the formal level (different patterns of symmetry and asymmetry in the composition of the frame, in figure movement and visual rhymes), generating what Bellour calls 'textual volume'. Closure is brought to this proliferation of echoes and reduplications by 'that particular effect which superimposes repetition on resolution', identified by Bellour as one of the most typical traits of the classical Hollywood cinema. Bellour's analysis demonstrates a rigorous textual system at work even in this most simple of Griffith's race-to-the-rescue films. Yet perhaps he assimilates this system too categorically to the classical paradigm, given other possibilities inherent in alternation, also present in Griffith's work and explored by the avant garde.[7]

Within early cinema, alternation is itself a consequence of the kind of succession typical of the chase film, except that a succession of two shots had to be read not only as signifying temporal successiveness and relative spatial proximity, but as potentially signifying also an inverse relation: that of temporal simultaneity and spatial distance.[8] The example of the chase film best illustrates Griffith's different conception of spatio-temporal relations. In the early chase films, as already mentioned, pursuer and pursued were always in the same shot, due to the absolute priority of spatial coherence in the representation of causal relations or sequential action. By contrast, Griffith divided the pursuer and pursued, or more often, the attacker, victim, and rescuer into separate shots, and then intercut between them, creating emotional suspense and formal-dynamic patterning, but also a quite different conception of cinematic/diegetic space: one only has to look at Griffith's *The Curtain Pole* to realise its particular deviations from other chase films, which developed their own form, only remotely similar to Griffith's use. Parallel editing in the classical cinema (and to some extent this is true of *The Lonedale Operator*), increasingly came to connote temporal simultaneity/spatial distance. As film-makers began to favour the paradigm temporal succession/spatial proximity, the practice of analytical editing – i.e. classical cinema – generally came to mean articulating shots according to a form of alternation which privileged temporal successiveness (exemplified in shot-reverse shot) over spatial coherence, the former eventually absorbing the latter,

and subsuming both under the new narrational logic. But there are other formal systems (the European art cinema of the 1920s: so-called German Expressionism, notably the films of Murnau and Lang) where some of the other spatial possibilities of Griffith's editing are taken up or developed further,[9] and of course, Soviet montage cinema, where spatial coherence and temporality are played off against each other, without classical narration unifying either, and where instead, film-makers elaborate different principles of coherence.[10]

Aumont's article reminds us that Griffith has often been celebrated as the precursor of the classical cinema, because he led the cinema towards the novelistic. Yet this emphasis limits him to being an exponent of a Bazinian cinema of transparency, and must be balanced, as Aumont implies, against Eisenstein's acknowledgment of Griffith as the inventor of montage. The busy backgrounds in so many of his Biograph films (for example, the scenes in the tavern of *An Unseen Enemy*) with so many narratively insignificant figures moving deep in the frame are not only there to give a 'realist' effect. For Aumont, 'all these supplementary figures, these scraps of the imaginary appear by the very excess of their inscription as what they are: patchwork, collage, montage, . . . the famous "montage within the frame" so dear to Eisenstein'.

Griffith, the Storyteller

Finally, another feature of Griffith's system which is different from both early and classical cinema needs to be mentioned: the insert, the close-up and the point-of-view shot, as they make up a particular mode of narration. The exploitation of framing and depth, of the close-up and the look is, in Griffith as elsewhere, integral to, and indeed constitutive of narration itself, and thus requiring (the implied presence of) both a narrator and a narratee. Much of the discussion around narration and the diegetic effect in early cinema has thus focused on the status of the insert (cut-in): is it a monstrational or a narrational device? Burch, as we have seen, regards the history of the close-up as crucial for the 'linearisation of the iconic signifier',[11] a history in which Griffith (Burch's example is from *Musketeers of Pig Alley*) retains 'spatial coherence and topological complexity' as an alternative to the close-up. Parallel editing, cross-cutting, and the insert in Griffith thus can be read either (from the vantage point of the PMR) as elements of 'external' narration, or (from the vantage point of the IMR) as already part of a strictly narrational logic (overriding spatial coherence and temporal logic): only in the latter case will the close-up be read as an internally motivated, diegetically integrated element of a scene. This in turn shifts the emphasis from the active intervention of the film-maker to the capacity of the viewer to construct different kinds of difference as 'motivated'. Thus, Brewster in his article on *Gold is not all* ('A Scene at the Movies') points out that one of the crucial differences between the point-of-view shot as insert (and signifier of pure visual curiosity), and the technical point-of-view cut-in as narrational device depends on the kind of motivation the point-of-view shot has within hierarchies of knowledge organised according to the narrative's hermeneutic code.[12] In this respect too, then, Griffith stands both at the margins of the classical mode and exceeds it. As Aumont argues, the close-up in Griffith very often functions not as

internally motivated, but has a disruptive function. Instead of giving the illustrative detail or directing viewer attention, the Griffith close-up is often 'of the order of hyper-articulated writing, almost caricatural, in a sense the grimace of the film text'.

The question of 'externality' v. 'integration' with respect to narration is one of the key issues in Griffith, since his ambiguous place in this development sharply focuses attention on the extra-textual and institutional aspects of narrative cinema. When looking at Griffith the story-teller, traditional Griffith studies are in something of a dilemma: on the one hand, his consummate skill in putting across a story is the very basis of his reputation, but on the other hand, it has been difficult to locate this genius in anything more precise than his cross-cutting and parallel action. From the perspective of classical narrative, with its invisible story-teller and omniscient narration, Griffith's use of cross-cutting, together with the moralism of his intertitles would indicate a more 'primitive' instance of narration, with a didactic narrator making his presence felt, perhaps even pointing to the lecturer in a lantern slide show. From the perspective of 'primitive' monstration, however, as we have seen when discussing frontality, Griffith's films are, at least from 1911 onwards, the very epitome of 'narrative integration'. Aumont also addresses this issue, but perhaps too formalistically, from the perspective of Eisenstein and the avant garde.

In a sense, none of the available models had adequately described Griffith's mode of story-telling, his narrational procedures and strategies, until Brewster's 'A Scene at the Movies'. His contribution to the debate about narration in Griffith is first of all that he differentiates clearly between what he calls a 'technical' point of view (or optical point of view) and 'narrative' point of view (or 'focalisation', if one adopts Genette's literary terminology), linking technical point of view, as Salt had already done, with inserts, and thus with 'primitive' rather than classical use of cutting. As Gaudreault was also to argue, narration in primitive cinema functions perfectly well without the optical point of view. In Brewster's words, 'even when a narrative hinges on what a character sees, this will often be conveyed without pov structures'. Conversely, precisely because Griffith does not use the optical point of view, he can create situations where characters 'see' each other across an imaginary space. Aumont refers to this when he says that the economy of Griffith's locations, as in *Enoch Arden* (when Annie waits, then 'sees' Enoch, who eventually lands, on the 'same' beach where Annie had waited), greatly helps establish these forms of spatial continuity. In this example the different spaces are cut together on the basis of a 'homology of the two situations' which creates a space they both share and at the same time, reduces the imaginary distance between them. Gunning, when discussing point of view in early cinema calls such indirect point-of-view structures 'sight-links', and their presence in Griffith (he mentions *The Lonedale Operator*), alongside other features, makes him a representative of the 'cinema of narrative integration'.[13]

An example that comes to mind from *Drive for a Life* involves the use of close-up when a box of candy is injected with poison and then gift-wrapped. The scene proceeds by cross-cutting between the hero discovering the plot and driving towards the house of his fiancée, and the fiancée unwrapping the candy and passing it round to her women friends. In this alternating structure, the various interruptions delaying the eating of the candy are now motivated both from within the diegesis (the women joke and tease each other) and also via the narrational agency of cross-cutting, establishing the spatial alternation between the scene of the candy being passed round and the car approaching the house. *Drive for a Life* could serve as an example of two kinds of narration, internal and external, coexisting and naturalising each other, with intermittence and delay diegetically motivated (by resorting psychological and gender clichés of the protagonists) and extra-diegetically motivated (by cross cutting, as sign of an external narrator intervening).

Yet Gunning's concept of narrative integration and Bellour's notion of alternation and textual volume ignore to some extent what to Brewster is perhaps the most important feature of Griffith's narrational perspective 'without point-of-view shots', namely, that it has as its necessary third term the spectators' plane of vision, his/her presence within the (imaginary) field of the diegetic space. This particular way of situating the spectator could be said to form the bridge between showing and telling, monstrative and integrated narrational modes, and thereby shifts attention to the processes of intelligibility as well as specular seduction. Brewster makes the important distinction between two types of knowledge, both crucial to an understanding of Griffith and early film form: narrative knowledge and knowledge dependent on the visual field. The opposition would be between the information given in and through the visual field, and the 'narrative knowledge' accumulated by the filmic process and its temporality, which can be signalled, albeit ambiguously, by off-screen space,[14] of which one dimension or direction would be the frontal space already referred to.[15]

Multi-scene films were to give off-screen space a new significance, and it is not until his full-length features that Griffith thoroughly 'reinvents' frontality and combines it with an active use of off-screen space (as opposed to the off-screen space involved in the 'sight-links' or the narrative point of views), in order to create inferential structures of sight and knowledge far in excess of and unparalleled by the kind of hierarchisation of knowledge which we recognise as suspense and usually identify with classical cinema.[16] Brewster locates this inferential knowledge already in the Biograph films: 'the narrative (and the titles) provide a third perspective: the rich are ignorant of the poor; the poor see the rich and envy them; the spectator knows rich and poor *and knows the poor do not know how unhappy the rich really are*' (author's emphasis). This additional layer of contrast and dramatic irony is a powerful narrational device, because it relativises the positions of knowledge between characters and spectators. Differentiation in the hierarchies of knowledge thus becomes a sophisticated and specifically Griffithian mark of narration, without however contributing towards the dominance and narrative importance of the look as practiced in classical continuity editing. Since Griffith draws attention more often to off-frame space (the characters' movement from room to room, for instance) than to off-screen space, the separation of these spaces builds up a very particular 'spatialisation of

what was suggested earlier, namely the need to rearticulate not only the basic commodity of the industry as a different temporality (the long narrative), but also the position of the spectator *vis à vis* the representation, that is the severing of the quasi-existential bond with the reality of the viewing situation and the collectivity of the audience gathered there.

Griffith's 'discovery' of the infinite divisibility of the signifying material of cinema, when mapped onto narrative is in some sense the key to his filmic system, but it also indicates the constraints and limits facing the integration of his methods into the emerging film industry. Division becomes one of the preconditions for there to be a narrating instance, as well as for there to be an industrial mode of production. But Griffith's cinema is a kind of orgy of metaphor: everything can be combined with everything else, stand for everything else, rhyme with everything else. Within the filmic image, anything can become the basis for an analogy, the premise for a parallel, for structuring the narrative around similarity and juxtaposition. Divisibility and decontextualisation so important for the economic and technological organisation of filmmaking, but also for constituting context-free spectatorship, thus enters into textual articulation as the power of substitution and equivalence which in the classical system will emerge as the very order of cinematic narrative. Divisibility thus allows the filmic discourse to take on both a metaphoric and a metonymic function, to allow for 'linearisation' and 'topographical complexity'.

Griffith's feature films can be typified by their tendency to expand enormously in the topographical sense, while the classical cinema will put limits on these metaphoric orgies, in favour of a more strictly linear, overtly causal and to that extent metonymic logic, for economic (division of labour, calculation of budgets) and ideological reasons (standardise intelligibility and spectator orientation). In this sense, one can reconcile the fact that Griffith appears to be at once a 'modernist' in his approach to form (attracting the attention of German and Russian film-makers), and quintessentially 'Victorian' in his subject matter (putting the family or the couple at the centre of classical narrative). For the preference for family conflicts or for stories that deal with family separations is heavily overdetermined: however much it might have related to public concern about the decline of family values or the need of the cinema to woo a family audience, his choice was eminently sensible, insofar as a family separated, a house divided already imply the narrative's eventual goal and the terms of its formal closure. In most of Griffith's films we therefore find a preference for (1) dividing and doubling action spaces (almost all of the Biograph shorts), (2) dividing and doubling of families (e.g. *Way Down East*), (3) dividing and doubling characters (the Gish sisters in *Orphans of the Storm*), (4) dividing and hierarchising narrative knowledge (*Gold is not All*), (5) temporal division (across the movement of eventual recognition: (*Enoch Arden*) and (6) division of visual field, as in the typical Griffith frame, where frame left and frame right are crowded with action and detail, while the middle is usually left bare until the crucial moment, creating a tension between the narrative levels (and their divisions) and the visual levels (and their particular geometry).

By contrast, directors of a more 'classical' style, such as King (*Tol'able David*) or DeMille (*The Squaw Man*) develop the narrative divisions towards the effects of repetition/resolution described by Bellour, organising the material in ways that will 'use up' the narrative (or condense the functions of the characters). The reason why in Griffith, there is, by the end, so often a feeling of excess and asymmetry, comes from the fact that narrative divisions (male/female, aristocrat/commoner, departure/landing, Babylonian story/Huguenot story/Modern story/Judaic story) are never quite exhausted by the visual resolutions, which are dovetailed and superimposed in ways that give rise to all manner of *en-abyme* effects. It has been argued that this can be directly related to the text's unconscious, its articulation of femininity (threatening and desired) and the way the race-to-the-rescue scenario is called upon to enact but also to disguise relations of sexual exchange.[22] This of course, also foreshadows later both classical and non-classical developments, as they become typical of Lang, Hitchcock or Welles, all of whom were in love with the intricacies of their films' designs, which crucially depended on the exchange of women.[23]

Inscribing the Spectator: Griffith and Imaginary Space

Just as the issue of narrative and narration cannot be seen separately from that of the spectator in respect of film form, so the institutional issue cannot be divorced from questions of spectatorship. The effort to specify the modes of textual address of early cinema is a relatively new endeavour, which must be situated between two other more established fields of enquiry – the first focusing on the fundamental nature of the cinematic apparatus, the second on the textual characteristics of the films produced within the IMR. Both these discourses assert powerful claims towards all-inclusiveness: the first has tended to subsume all modes of cinematic spectatorship under Metz and Baudry's formulation of the Imaginary Signifier, while the second has tended to assimilate every operation of filmic signification to the paradigm of the IMR. The specifications of the modes of address of early cinema and Griffith in particular involves a complex process of engagement and disengagement with these two competing fields of inquiry and theorisation.

This in turn implies that our discussion of early cinema needs to confront the fact that at a certain point in its history, but perhaps implicit since its beginning, the cinema was instrumental in the development of what today is often referred to as 'a media reality', a regime of verisimilitude both hyper-real and non-referential. The very fact that continuity editing made possible the concatenation of images or views, and the construction of an imaginary space/time 'continuum', turned the cinema into a species of discourse, of which narrative became the privileged support. More concretely, the cinema's ability to establish an imaginary relation between the spectator and the represented relies not only on the semiotic process whereby space and time become effects of a discourse (the 'diegetic effect' or 'impression of reality'), but on objects and people being perceived as signs: meaningful or 'expressive' only in relation to other signs and as part of a specular geometry, binding camera, screen and spectator into a fixed set of articulations. That is to say, through the cinema, photographic representations of reality become involved in the constitution of

human subjectivity, while the real, and the significance that might be attached to it, is at the mercy of the filmic discourse. The camera, as a recording device of the visible, abstracts the visible from all contexts, all causality, all agency. Narrative and narration become the textual forms by which causality, agency and context are, as it were, reinserted into the representation, thus 'motivating' the filmic chain.

The consequences of this move were momentous, and yet the shifts are themselves embedded in the historical conditions of the filmic apparatus and the cinematic institution. Once again Griffith's work occupies a special place in these developments,[24] powerfully adding to the semiotisation of cinematic representation (in the sense of 'causing something to stand for something else, in such a way that both the relationship of "standing for", and that which is intended to be represented, can be recognised'),[25] while differing from the way this semiotisation was later elaborated: whether in the classical mode, or montage cinema or the German cinema of the 1920s.

We can now return to Aumont's and Brewster's case for saying that in Griffith the spectator needs to be thought of as part of the representation and separate at the same time. Aumont's reluctance to see Griffith as the master and precursor of the classical cinema of Bazinian realist transparency is closely connected to his perception that in Griffith's cinema the spectator plays a different role: 'One could say that the spectator's position is designated in an infinitely more explicit way'. Griffith's shots are rarely sutured classically, but mark the space of the absent field, leaving that space to be claimed by the spectator.[26]

Especially in the multi-reel feature films is this spectator required as the axis around which the system pivots. In contrast to the extra-diegetic audience, implied in a 'cinema of attractions', a dramatisation occurs of the spectator's space (now located not somewhere in the auditorium, and instead at the imaginary apex of a textual geometry). With it, Griffith builds on and radically transforms the PMR, to the extent that the spectator position is no longer a fixed place, but one that undergoes constant transformation in the course of the narrative trajectory.[27] In fact, one could say that in Griffith the characters only see and know each other, because the spectator sees and knows them, and thus, relaying that knowledge and linking the spaces that separate them, it is the spectator who introduces them to each other. Only hindsight or teleological reasoning would therefore want to subsume Griffith's mode under that of the IMR. The most one can say is that through Griffith we can thematise the difference and begin to understand historically the transformations between the two systems. This appears to be the direction of Brewster's work, which differentiates on the one hand, between the constitution of a physical audience (exhibition practice) through the film performance, and the constitution of an imaginary spectator (taken out of the auditorium 'into' the text) through the various hierarchies of knowledge and vision.

If in some sense, the spectator had to become 'mobile' and 'monadic' in the transition from PMR to IMR, it points to the institutional developments underlying these changes. For the film industry, once embarked on the need to 'commodify' and standardise the product, and under pressure from the exhibition situation to generate longer films, endeavoured not only to provide these films, but to counteract the various forms of editorial control which in the transitional phase had belonged to the exhibition sector or the exhibition site (and to that extent, to the collective audience). In this process, too, Griffith occupies an ambiguous position. On the one hand, his longer narratives were fundamentally beneficial to the institution, in that they bound a better paying public to the cinema. Textually, on the other hand, his films showed quite a number of features associated with non-continuous cinema, in which causality was often extremely opaque, complex and indirect, testimony of that 'spatial' or 'topographical' way of thinking about narrative, alongside the emergent psychological one. It was the latter which was most sought after by the institution in wresting editorial control from the exhibition site and exhibition circumstances. What the institution had to adapt to was a new commodity – not the reel of film, but the more immaterial and yet nonetheless standardised film experience, located in the coherence of the narrative, its interlocking mechanisms of resolution and closure, and the 'centering' of the spectator via equally interlocking levels of knowledge, via 'foreshadowing' (Brewster), ellipsis and the motivation of coincidence. That this was itself an intricate historical process is indicated by the trade press, where the practice of uninterrupted screenings of multi-reel films was for some time regarded as a health-hazard, because of eye-strain: another indication that 'respectability' may not have been the driving force in the change from nickelodeon multi-reeler to picture palace narrative feature film.

Continuity and the question of control can thus be seen to be linked, becoming crucial aspects of the story-telling process, since as Musser pointed out, the most effective way in which the production side of film-making can acquire control over the text as a fixed sequence of scenes is to develop forms of continuity and narrative complexity which make irreversibility of the scenes a function of the narrative's intelligibility. This suggests that non-continuous forms, as one finds them in Griffith and others even after 1915 are, once again, not a sign of backwardness or primitivity, but reflect a precise historical moment in the balance of power and economic rapport of forces within the emerging film industry. Conversely, continuity becomes not the attainment of an ideal of narrative efficiency as much as it is a 'weapon' in a struggle over control, in which textual authority is the expression of authorship as product control and the ability to impose standards and standardisation.

Yet by the same token, once the historical and economic reasons for imposing continuity have disappeared, with the stabilisation of the institution around the unified product (multi-reel film and narrative complexity), non-continuity can develop in quite different directions and assume different narrational functions, as it does in Griffith's later films, where the multi-reel non-continuous film generates an extraordinary narrative complexity far greater than the contemporaneous continuity film. Non-continuity as a structural principle culminated in Griffith with *Intolerance*, a film which falls right outside any linear development between non-continuous film and classical continuity

editing. Miriam Hansen has offered a very challenging reading of this fact, seeing *Intolerance* and its deviation from an increasingly streamlined, monocausal, psychological model of narrative continuity in terms of a twofold crisis. Griffith's 'cultural' ambitions to retain for the cinema the prestige of an essentially literary mode (emblematically represented by Whitman's democratic universalism) made him strive for an elaborate allegorical mode of hieroglyphics (perhaps also in the sense of the cinema as the 'script of life' alluded to earlier), rather than the visual transparency of the emergent classical style. The second crisis is the representation of femininity, in particular, the moral problem (which is also a structural one) of the unmarried woman: 'the fate – and the fatal power of unmarried female characters throughout the ages, especially the closer they get to modernity'.[28] Hansen sees an inverse symmetry between working woman and prostitute (which bears the traces of a whole history of feminism in the 1910s and the 'new woman' of the early 1920s), in relation to Griffith's own concerns about 'his personal investment in the cinema's bid for cultural respectability'.[29] Griffith saw his status as an artist threatened not only by the growing industrialisation of film-making, but also by the 'feminisation' of that consumer culture to which the cinema had become inextricably tied. Male narrative authority in *Intolerance* is only reasserted by playing out that most persistent of Victorian sexual fantasies, the rescue scenario, to which Griffith adheres in so many of his films. *Intolerance* could be said to represent a particularly complex response to the liberal, anti-racist protest against *Birth of a Nation* in which the former is a (sexist) middle-brow reply to sensationalist low-brow potboilers like *Traffic in Souls*, 'white slave trade' being itself a condensation of other social concerns, such as immigration and race, overcrowding and female factory work. While *Intolerance*, according to Hansen, tries to represent social tensions, racial and sexual difference in the allegorical mode of a literary culture, one could argue that *Traffic in Souls* was already simplifying the moral issues of social order, women's rights and prostitution, in favour of a very 'classically' narrative oedipal story of suspense, action and voyeurism, thus pointing the way to a much smoother operation of the cinematic institution in its treatment of social conflict and ideological contradiction.

Griffith, Non-Continuity and the European Cinema

One of the paradoxes of Griffith's place within and between early and classical cinema is the relative 'failure' of his films after *Birth of a Nation* in America, and his enormous influence – during the same period and with the same films, notably *Intolerance* – among European film-makers. The conventional answer is that his film-making system was retarded in relation to the imposition of the classical norms of continuity cinema. But an equally probably argument – and one that suggests itself if one follows the perspective taken above – is that his filmic system was too complex, sophisticated and eccentric for the emergent institution, and failed because of its inadaptability to the industrial norms, even more than because of its moral Victorianism and overtly patriarchal values.[30] If Griffith 'failed' in the late 1910s and 20s, it may be because his systems of divisibility – the elaboration of homologies, oppositions and symmetrical

relations – implied the coexistence of several distinct levels of textual work, which in the films are often played off against each other: the formal level (division of visual field and the frame), the fantasy level (sexuality and the use of the rescue scenario), the thematic level (the doubling of families and characters), the narrational level (hierarchising narrative knowledge and playing off external against integrated narration), the temporal level (the use of melodrama and the recognition scenario). This echoing and responding of levels with each other is of course the specifically Griffithian way of generating longer narratives out of basic conflicts and opposition usually rooted in the family. What the institution took from Griffith (though as we saw, by briefly looking at *Traffic in Souls*, not only from him) was the family melodrama and its oedipal emplotting of conflict and sexual difference. What it did not take was the formal complexity by which this emplotting is worked out, which in turn seems crucially related to the institutional need, with the establishment of the feature film as the basic commodity, to further push and develop the division of labour in the production process, the imposition of a production schedule and the agreement of release dates as its way of regulating production while maintaining a hold over the exhibition context. The multiple levels at which a Griffith film operates does not lend itself so readily to the breakdown which scripting in the industrial mode demanded. Thus, Griffith's model of alternation had to be greatly simplified in order to become the basis of the institutional mode, and in particular, impose a strictly unilinear cause and effect logic on events, which in turn would enable the shooting of scenes out of sequence, just as extensive scene dissection would enable editing to play the role it has had ever since: 'linearising' filmic narrative. Griffith's way of implicating the spectator – the other revolutionary aspect of his work in the early 1910s – relied on the perception of correspondences, of 'sight links', of empathetic, antithetic relations, of mental and moral parallels. This feature of his cinema which I characterised as 'metaphoric', the institutional mode abandoned in favour of plotting spatial contiguity, narrational cogency, the suppression (or motivation) of coincidence, in short a metonymic cinema, or a cinema of discontinuity, against Griffith's obstinate adherence to a cinema of non-continuity.

If we now look at Griffith's impact in Europe, we need to be careful to distinguish two moments, possibly even two quite distinct phases. The first would be the elaboration – parallel to Griffith, but quite possibly independent from his work – of a cinema of non-continuity. This we can see happen in France, but also in the Scandinavian countries and in German art cinema. The second phase would be the post-WWI period, when Griffith's films, and indeed the American cinema generally, became well-known to both film-makers and audiences, and directors needed to differentiate themselves from the American cinema (be it for competitive reasons, be it as part of an avant garde counter-cinema), by reinventing or further elaborating a cinema of non-continuity. Griffith's formal complexity and his non-industrial mode of production could thus be seen as the very condition of his success in Europe, where both mainstream and alternative film-making had to come to terms with the increasing dominance of the Hollywood mode of production, as well as its strategies of

occupying and colonizing foreign film-markets. Formally, once the cinema of discontinuity had established itself as the norm, non-continuity could become the hallmark of an 'alternative' to the classical cinema, as I believe it did in both the national art cinemas and the international avant garde cinemas of the 1920s, for directors as differently placed within their respective film industries as Fritz Lang and F.W. Murnau, Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Dziga Vertov, Marcel L'Herbier, Abel Gance, Jean Renoir and Luis Buñuel.

While the notion of a connection between early cinema and the contemporary avant garde is riddled with problems of historical periodisation, it is worth recalling that efforts such as Burch's to elucidate the peculiarity of early cinema have been marked by an acute awareness of what one might call a tradition of the cinematic avant garde. As Rod Stoneman has argued, studies of early cinema and the avant garde 'both function to relativise and counter the naturalisation of [the classical] mode of representation'.[31] The discovery of textual parallels between early and avant garde films (non-closure, non-perspectival space, material/spatial coherence over narrational coherence, the preference of non-continuous forms over analytical editing) depends, of course, on a particular reading of both types of films, a reading which Aumont already warns against as a-historical.[32] Stoneman's notion of autonomy for both early and avant garde cinema foregoes the fertile ambiguity of Burch's formulations about the 'fundamentally contradictory nature of primitive cinema … in which each gesture – in the direction of linearisation or closure, for example could contribute … to the creation of objects, whose other major attributes tended to impede the implicit project which underpinned those gestures'.[33]

From the work that has been done since on the European cinema of the 'teens, it is possible to go beyond Burch's formulation, and situate the question of an alternative practice more historically, both within the institutional framework and the textually specific forms of cinema that emerged in European countries. Informed by the historical perspective indicated by this Reader, namely the need to develop a framework which is capable of understanding the changes between the early and classical cinema in a non-reductive, non-linear way, it is possible, at least in outline, to grasp within the same terms that have been developed for early cinema and its multiple transformations into the classical cinema, the peculiarities of European cinema in the 1910s as well as in the 1920s. For reasons of space, this has to be sketchy, provisional and incomplete.

Some generalisations might nonetheless be in order. The American style could be said to have developed a spatio-temporal articulation in view of a certain type of (character-centred and psychological) causality, of a narration in view of a subject position/knowledge position, and a mode of representation in view of a single diegesis, and achieved via editing, scene dissection, cutting rate, point-of-view structure and changing shot-scales.[34]

The European cinema could be said to have developed the 'primitive' style of narrativity, mainly by preserving a greater flexibility of narrational stances, whether this is explained in terms of monstration rather than narrative integration, a multiplicity of narrators and narrative authorities (both intra-

textual and extra-textual), an emphasis on performative styles, a greater interplay of knowingness between spectator and character. Formally the European cinema seems to adhere to spatial coherence and spatial integrity, at the expense of unilinear causality determining spatio-temporal relations. Instead of scene dissection, fast cutting, and reverse field editing, the European cinema developed its systems of causality, its temporality and narration by a division of space into different playing areas, by deep staging, by action overlap, by 'editing within the frame' via door frames, apertures, by figure composition and frontality, and by a use of the look to generate off-screen space as an indeterminate space, rather than one folded back into the diegesis via point-of-view structure. By necessity, such a style implies longer takes and a greater degree of autonomy for the shot, and the consequences are a different way of reading the frame, different skills in 'following' the narrative, and a different mode of spectatorial address.

Non-Continuous Cinema in the 1910s

To substantiate these generalisations in detail would require a volume to itself. However, a start has been made, and the final remarks of this introduction are no more than pointers to this research.[35] During the 'primitive period', the developments in different countries were relatively non-specific to that country, and more part of the 'international' developments of film form. This might apply to France, Britain and the United States, all of them simultaneously even if on different fronts, exploring aspects of film form and heavily plagiarising each other's subject matter.[36] Only with the rise of the nickelodeons and their European equivalents – it is the increase in demand, as well as the feedback via audiences/reviewers which leads to competition – does differentiation in style or genre emerge along possibly 'national' lines.[37]

A striking case is the Scandinavian cinema, traditionally considered very 'advanced'[38] and also nationally specific in its genres,[39] its treatment of women,[40] its stylistic complexity.[41] John Fullerton, in 'Spatial and temporal articulation in pre-classical Swedish film' is challenging some of the assumptions underlying these models of stylistic differentiation, as they might apply to national cinemas, and also as they distinguish between 'spectacle attraction' and 'narrative integration'. Fullerton's main point is that, whereas Gunning and others have focused on spatial and temporal organisation as the key to understanding modes of continuity in early cinema, in the Swedish cinema there is a need to look to other factors as well. He juxtaposes filmic continuity (i.e. space/ time) to narrational continuity, which, he says, must involve, apart from the relation between images, the relation between image and intertitle. And not only image/intertitle, but the way intertitles cue the spectator in terms of tense, tone or mode (e.g. irony) to read the images both preceding and following them. Trädgårdmästaren, the 1912 Sjöström film he discusses, might at first glance appear to belong to a cinema of attraction, because of its elements of non-continuity. Yet if we redefine what we understand by 'narrative integration', then the film can be seen as highly integrated, narration hinging on the retrospective and prospective placing of the spectator, with tension and ellipsis

marking the gap between what the intertitles communicate and what the images present. Thus, despite the fact that the Swedish cinema, which according to Brewster, gives priority to spatial coherence and uses lighting cues for organising its deep spaces, belongs to the European paradigm, its emphasis on narrational coherence over spatio-temporal coherence makes it closer to American models, although visually, Swedish films up to 1917 look 'retarded' when judged by the fast cutting/shallow staging yardstick of Salt and Brewster. For Fullerton, Swedish films show signs of 'external' narration (the reliance on intertitles), but of a degree of sophistication in tone and mode that distinguishes them from the more didactic commentary of, say, Griffith. Unified narratively by assuming a good deal of implied (cultural) foreknowledge, Swedish films were clearly addressing themselves to a 'literate' and possibly even 'literary' public.

A similar assertion can be made about a certain group of German films, the self-consciously literary 'author's cinema' inaugurated around 1913 by directors like Max Mack, Max Reinhardt and Stellan Rye, actor-directors like Paul Wegener and writers like Hanns Heinz Ewers, Paul Lindau, Heinrich Lautensack. But in contrast to Fullerton's article on early Swedish films, Leon Hunt's analysis of *The Student of Prague* (1913) concentrates primarily on the codification of space, and discovers that within the non-continuous mode and the primacy of spatial coherence, Wegener's film is particularly remarkable for systematically transgressing the norm (thereby showing its importance) in ways which no subsequent film practice has taken up (except that we might compare it to Ince's treatment of space in *The Right Girl?*). With its left/right near/far oppositions *The Student of Prague* is both very Griffithian and yet very different from Griffith, in its use of trick shots and special effect, or indeed its evocation of the uncanny. On the other hand, formally it is quite different from subsequent German films of the same genre, including the remake of 1926, which relies on much more classical shot-reverse shot structures, on point of view and off-screen space, precisely the features which the 1913 original avoids in order to articulate power relations *within* the frame.

This raises the question of how one might account for such variations as Fullerton and Hunt identify. In the case of the French *film d'art* (the most thoroughly discussed example of deviation and differentiation for the period up to 1911),[42] we can already recognise the complex process of cultural legitimation and product differentiation which characterises European film-makers' response to competition and foreign imports. For instance, the preference for deep space staging can by analysed, as Brewster does, within the context of traditional 'art' forms (whose codicity is painting and theatre) but also of increased production values aiming at a competitive edge both domestically and internationally. Given the importance of staged theatre in France, Sweden, Denmark and Germany, it is possible to argue that during the crucial years of fixed site cinemas gentrifying themselves in the bid for better paying audiences, the media intertext (the legitimate theatre, but also operetta and music theatre[43]) and entertainment context (the pressures of censorship or social reform[44]) are more decisive than stylistic differences, bringing us back to the European variant of 'exhibition-led' film history.[45] Another possible cause for differentiation for the early period might have to do with the availability of certain items of film technology,[46] but this too, became a factor of diminishing importance by the late 1910s.

What the comparative stylistic analyses of Salt or Brewster and the detailed historical research of Kristin Thompson regarding film export[47] indicate is that the economic and stylistic interchange between European and US film-making is more important, more pervasive and begins earlier than had been assumed, which can be demonstrated when one studies the cases of plagiarism and copyright infringements, the output of a company like Vitagraph,[48] in addition to the well-known import of 'art films' into America.[49] The promotion of a 'national' film industry in this perspective becomes a retrospective, defensive, ideological move, so that by the early 1920s, the European response to Hollywood's policy of importing, poaching, loaning talent, in order to control the competition,[50] is to play up 'difference', national character, and the search for national subjects. In light of this, one can posit either that the notion of an autonomous film style/film form/national cinema derives from a different socio-cultural context or a different mode of representation[51] taking account of political and demographic factors, or different media intertexts, audience expectations and national markets (which includes the reception by critics, the intervention of reform movements or the role of the literary establishment). But this is a problematic argument, for what strikes one in this respect is the gradual Americanisation of all the European markets from 1919 onwards. Less contentious is the fact that this gives rise to counter-moves, either by launching self-consciously 'alternative' modes to Hollywood (in terms of an art cinema, of an avant garde, or as part of a product differentiation), or by marketing strategies that promote a 'national' film industry, to rival and compete with Hollywood.

Non-Continuous Cinema as Counter-Cinema

It is in these contexts that the earlier remark about the Janus-faced character of Griffith can be placed. Looking at his work during the late 1910s from the vantage point of the 1920s, he appears a director whose role was crucial because, for reasons we have tried to sketch, his work could be (and has been) inherited by very different traditions of film-making, from continuity cinema to art cinema, from the Russian montage school to the French avant garde, in each case for very different ideological reasons.

One of the reasons why German and Russian cinema in particular could learn from and refine the Griffithian model was that, effectively, both film industries – though for different reasons – were for some time protected from the world market. While in the classical Hollywood system we see a greater and greater convergence between narrative economy and industrial efficiency, in Germany, the kinds of narrative economy directors were interested in (or were driven towards in their battle for artistic legitimation and respectability) stood in an intriguing tension with the practical ways of producing it. This, if you like, more 'experimental' mode, was possible because, unlike the American system (which by the mid-1910s is market-driven, and thus for economic reasons as

well as for reasons of intelligibility and universality, works towards efficiency in narrative and narration), the German model, at least for some companies, is still film-maker driven, and does not have the same feedback as the American industry with its public. A similar case can be made for Eisenstein, Kuleshov and Pudovkin in the Soviet Union, though the ideological legitimation is as much political as it is artistic. If these ideological constraints of having to establish themselves domestically as 'artists' (or 'revolutionary artists') made them lean towards Griffithian models (himself an embattled director vis à vis his 'artistic pedigree'), in the German case, research into special effects and technological innovation (in prestige superproductions like The Nibelungen, Faust, The Last Laugh, Metropolis) was part of another strategy: penetrating European and overseas markets where they could compete with the Americans, with the ultimate goal being the US market itself. In this dual strategy of the German cinema we can study the prototype of a consumer oriented industry and its hazards. While the American film industry modelled itself directly around consumer demand, and the most economical way of satisfying and stimulating it, the German situation was distorted by this intermediary level of a taste elite, demanding cinema to be art, a demand which the film industry had to take seriously, since it was actively promoting a 'quality' market at an international level. At the same time, the industrial basis of the German film industry could not come to terms with what was effectively an avant garde ideology, where production schedules were uncertain, budgets open-ended and release dates volatile.[52]

Towards the 1920s: Avant Garde or Popular Cinema

In keeping with the focus of the Reader, we have concentrated in this section on a more pragmatic, but also tighter approach than is usually taken when discussing European cinema. By investigating the different deployment of the characteristics of early cinema generally a significantly more diverse, but also potentially more comprehensive picture emerges, in which the differences between American practice and European practice appear in the traditional histories to have been exaggerated, or at least not analysed within a historical, and instead a primarily ideological context. The handling of space and spatial coherence; the use of continuity, discontinuity, non-continuity; patterns of alternation, point-of-view structure, the look and off-screen space; narrational stances as they emerge out of the interplay of these parameters, but also the use of intertitles, commentary, sound and other marks of discursiveness (degree and modes of narrative integration, alternation/integration of diegetic and non-diegetic spaces) all bear features that can be usefully compared to American practice and historically differentiated. The Griffithian concept of several action spaces gradually coming together into a unified space is used by European directors of the 1920s for a more complex articulation of causal relations, and for developing narrational forms which put in crisis the relations between seeing and knowing, or for constructing quite different imaginary spaces. The uncanny of Murnau, the en-abyme constructions of Lang, their use of off-screen space vs. off-frame space and the importance of the frontal look without reverse-field

cutting; French Impressionist cinema's adoption of the continuity style, relying heavily on the point-of-view shot and camera movement, motivated diegetically by subjective states of mind rather than by spatio-temporal causality; Eisenstein's 'reinvention' of Griffithian non-continuity for a more oblique and multi-level causality; Gance's combination of non-continuity and the point-of-view shot; Renoir's use of off-screen space in Nana, and finally Buñuel's 'deconstruction' of classical continuity editing, heavily relying on point of view and the glance/glance, glance/object structure, but violating spatial continuity and contiguity, while parodying Impressionist subjectivity; all can be usefully analysed in terms of the formal problems and options raised in this section of the Reader around Griffith and his place within the emergent continuity cinema.[53] German Expressionist cinema, Soviet montage cinema, French Surrealist cinema thus reinvent certain aspects of a cinema of non-continuity and spatial coherence, but only in order to violate its norms, and playing them off against the narrational rule of classical American cinema (the dominance of the optical point of view) which in turn it renders discontinuous by frustrating the causal and narrational logic that classical cinema imposes on the material.

Although, for reasons of space, such assertions have to remain speculative, the idea has been to suggest that even the better known work of the late 1910s and 1920s (the first avant garde) can be fruitfully examined by the new film history, so that this most intense period of reflection on the cinema can be seen to emerge out of an often very careful study and familiarity with what went before, rather than constituting a radical break, and of being determined by institutional questions and choices, just like the commercial cinema. At the same time, a possibly even more urgent task will be the re-examination of European popular cinema during the 1910s, for it is there that our ignorance is directly proportional to the contempt and neglect which the old history has shown to productions deemed to lack 'artistic ambition'. Not only the preservationist and archival agenda of the new film history demands that we look at these films with fresh eyes: the temper of the times, with its love of the heterotopic, the parodic, the melodramatic, the carnivalesque and the multi-cultural, will find in the survivors of a hitherto largely despised cinema if not documents of history then documents of a sensibility with which rightly or wrongly, we today in our televisual culture feel a curious kinship.

Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker

Notes

1. 'The years from 1903 to 1907 are the most obscure part of film history, as far as nearly everyone is concerned occupied only by the films of Griffith … Griffith may have been the best director working in the years from 1908 to 1915, but that does not prove that he invented everything.' Barry Salt, 'The Early Development of Film Form', in John L. Fell (ed.), *Film Before Griffith*, p. 284.
2. See, for instance, William Johnson, 'Early Griffith: A Wider View', *Film Quarterly* vol. 29 no. 3, Spring 1976, pp. 2–13.