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THE INTERNATIONAL EXPLORATION
OF CINEMATIC EXPRESSIVITY

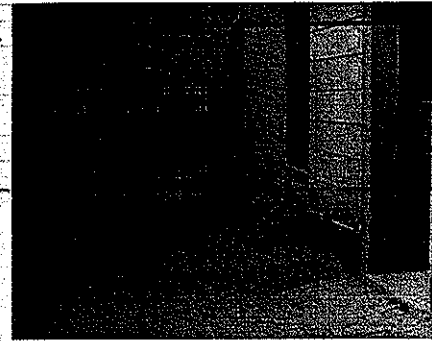
IT HAS COMMONLY BEEN ASSUMED that during the 1910s, cinematic techniques developed in the directions of clarity and expressivity. This change occurred mainly in the USA, Italy, and Scandinavia. In most histories, the notions of clarity and expressivity are combined. Here I would like to distinguish between these two concepts and try to suggest how and when expressivity rose to be a common goal of filmmakers.

I am assuming that many techniques of early cinema were introduced in order to assure narrative clarity. A cut-in could reveal a vital detail of a scene that would not be visible in the more distant establishing view. Cutting back and forth between two or more spaces implied strongly that the separate actions were occurring simultaneously. Eyeline matches showed that nearby spaces were visible to the characters. Shot/reverse shots established that people were face to face. As we are now well aware, by 1917, these techniques were firmly in place in the Hollywood filmmaking establishment. Indeed, the influence of these techniques quickly spread around much of the globe.

I suspect that by around 1912, enough of these techniques were in place that many filmmakers were able to tell stories clearly. At about this time, some directors went further, exploring the expressive possibilities of the medium.

I am using the term 'expressivity' broadly and simply here, to mean those functions of cinematic devices that go beyond presenting basic narrative information and add some quality to the scene that would not be strictly necessary to our comprehension of it. In many cases such expressive devices were included in order to deepen the spectator's emotional involvement in the action. Increased suspense during a chase, deeper sympathy for a character in distress, awe over the sudden revelation of a spectacular setting – such tactics could push the spectator beyond comprehension to fascination.

Traditional historians have typically assumed that the growing sophistication of the cinema in this period lay in its move from a theatre-based art form to a more independent, 'cinematic' art. For years, this led to an emphasis on those techniques which most seemed to separate cinema from the stage – primarily editing and camera movement. Those films which employed distant framings, a static camera, painted sets, and/or long takes were considered to be backward. Thus, D. W. Griffith became the hero of the tale of editing's evolution, *Cabiria* was the landmark film for popularizing camera movement, and the Swedes were valued for taking the camera out into nature.



Figures 15.1–15.5 Ingeborg Holm

In fact, the exploration of expressivity encompassed a great many techniques, including long takes, distant framings, and the static camera. These devices may have superficially seemed the same as techniques used in earlier films, but they gained functions in the 1910s that made them part of the new expressive repertoire of filmmaking.

One example should clarify what I mean by expressivity. In many cases, the most celebrated stylistic innovations of the early cinema were designed to make objects, characters, gestures, and other aspects of the *mise-en-scène* more clearly visible. These included closer

framings and cut-ins. Yet by the early teens, some films actually contain devices designed to make the action *less* visible. Victor Sjöström's 1913 masterpiece *Ingeborg Holm* contains a deceptively simple shot that uses such a tactic. The heroine has been reduced to poverty and is living with her family in a poorhouse. Her son is leaving with his new foster mother, and Ingeborg goes into the yard before the door to see him off. The action is staged in depth in a single take, without a cut-in to any of the characters; Ingeborg's back remains turned to the camera during most of the shot; no camera movements or intertitles are employed. The boy repeatedly turns to embrace her, unable to tear himself away, while the guard at the rear opens the gate for the pair (Fig. 15.1). Finally, Ingeborg ducks inside the door of the poorhouse while the boy is not looking (Fig. 15.2). Turning back, he sees that she is gone (Fig. 15.3) and resignedly turns to go (Fig. 15.4). Once they have gone and the gate is closed, Ingeborg re-emerges; the guard moves to catch her as she begins to faint (Fig. 15.5).

It is easy to imagine how this scene would have been staged only a few years earlier. The poorhouse would probably have been a painted drop or flats, seen straight-on facing the door. It would have occupied most of the back wall, with the gate visible, also frontally, at the side and a painted cityscape or landscape glimpsed beyond it. The characters would have emerged from the door toward the front, and the action would have moved back and forth in a shallow space, with their faces visible.

Despite its lack of 'progressive' techniques, the shot in *Ingeborg Holm* uses deep staging and setting in a way which distinguishes it considerably from earlier usage. Logically, it would seem that hiding a central character's facial expressions would detract from narrative clarity. Yet by putting Ingeborg's back to us, Sjöström displays an awareness that a de-emphasis on her facial expression could actually enhance our sense of her anguish and the poignancy of the moment. Similarly, the facade of the poorhouse is less clearly visible than it would be if filmed straight-on. The perspective of the set as filmed, however, emphasizes the gateway as the backdrop of the action and also allows the pair to exit quickly to the left outside the gate, placing the emphasis in the final portion of the shot on Ingeborg's breakdown. The oblique, off-center view of the doorway also makes it a more startling moment when Ingeborg suddenly ducks inside. Clearly, Sjöström has felt confident enough of his story-telling abilities to exchange a certain amount of redundant clarity for enhanced expressivity.

Similar explorations of the expressive possibilities of the cinema were going on in many countries simultaneously during the 1910s. I think that relatively few of these explorations involved direct influence. Similar impulses to use depth or to move the camera or to shoot into mirrors seem to have surfaced independently within different national cinemas.

It is particularly significant that this process was occurring largely during the First World War. Although in the key early years, especially 1913 and 1914, films were still circulating freely, by the middle of the war some markets were largely cut off. In particular, Scandinavia, Germany, and Russia had far less access to French and Italian films, which had dominated world markets before the war. By 1916, Hollywood films were becoming dominant in many parts of the world, such as South America, Australasia, the United Kingdom, and some parts of Western Europe. As domestic industries developed, distinctive styles were able to flourish briefly. A vivid demonstration of one such distinctive national style can be seen in 1910s Russian films. The characteristic slowly paced melodramatic plots, the emphasis on virtuosic acting, and the tragic endings all indicate a cinema in which expressivity far outstrips simple narrative clarity. The war, coming just at a time when continuity guidelines were becoming well established, discouraged the sort of international uniformity that might otherwise have developed. Instead, the disruptions in the international circulation of films at this crucial time probably encouraged the astonishing variety that characterizes the 1910s cinema.

The international spread of continuity devices

Before examining the great variety of expressive techniques explored in 1910s cinema, I shall briefly show that basic guidelines for narrative clarity were indeed picked up widely by film-makers around the world. That familiarity with standard storytelling devices may well have been what allowed venturesome film-makers to manipulate techniques for expressive purposes.

Given how few films of the silent era survive from most of the period's small producing countries, it is difficult to make firm generalizations about stylistic influences. Still, enough examples do exist to suggest that many film-makers around the globe quickly absorbed the lessons of early continuity practice and used them to create clear narratives.

In 1913, the earliest Indian fiction feature film made by an Indian director was released. Only about half of D.G. Phalke's *Raja Harishandra* survives, but it displays a distinct knowledge of continuity. Indeed, it is comparable stylistically to films made contemporaneously in the USA by some independent firms. It uses consistent screen direction, as when the king walks rightward through the forest and, in a cut to a contiguous space, arrives at the hut of the villainous sage. In a scene where the king stands talking with his wife, the framing follows the convention of the nine-foot line or *plan américain*.

Shot/reverse shot seems also to have spread quickly, though not all film-makers grasped it completely at first. An Argentinian film of 1917, *Ul Ultimo Malon* ('The Last Indian Attack', directed by Alcides Greca) contains an editing pattern that I have not encountered in any other film. The scene, an argument between a father and daughter, begins with an establishing long shot of the pair and a dialogue intertitle returning to the long shot. A cut moves to a close three-quarter view of the father, looking left. We might expect a balancing view of the daughter, but instead the next shot returns to the establishing view. Yet the next shot provides us with the expected three-quarter frontal view of the daughter, facing right. Without the intervening long shot, the two close views would create a standard shot/reverse shot. After the close view of the daughter, there is another re-establishing long shot. It is perhaps relevant that American films began to be widely distributed in Argentina in 1916. This may be a rare case where we can see a filmmaker in an undeveloped country who has only partially adapted a convention of mainstream cinema. Possibly, the director of *Ul Ultimo Malon* had seen films with shot/reverse shot and wished to use this device without understanding that the close shots could be edited together without re-establishing shots in between.

Other somewhat unorthodox uses of shot/reverse shot are evident in the late 1910s. In a 1918 Hungarian film directed by Sándor (later Alexander) Korda, *Az Aranyember* ('Man of Gold'), there are a few attempts at shot/reverse shot. In one scene, three characters are visible in medium-long shot (Fig. 15.6). The woman at the left is only partially visible, but she appears prominently at the right in the next shot, which is essentially only a lateral cut to the left with a move closer to the figures (Fig. 15.7). In a later scene, however, *Az Aranyember* contains a shot/reverse shot cut with conventional framing.

Surprisingly, in at least one case shot/reverse shot had an impact in Russia very quickly. The Russian retrospective at the Pordenone festival of 1989 showed us a cinema that was largely untouched by Hollywood influences. Yet Lev Kuleshov was able to use contemporary continuity techniques with great skill in his 1918 film *Proekt Inzhenera Prita* ('Engineer Prite's Project'). One of the fragments that survive contains a scene that would do credit to a Hollywood director of the same date.¹ A woman drops an object from a first-floor window; an establishing shot on the sidewalk below shows two men, including Prite, noticing it; a cut-in shows Prite picking the object up; there is a match on action as he straightens up and looks toward the woman; a perfectly executed reverse shot shows her looking down at him. Some



Figures 15.6–15.7 *Az Aranyember*

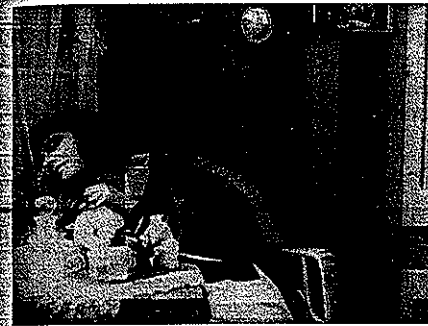
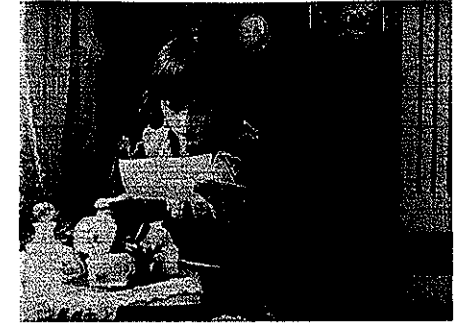
intertitles are missing at this point, but the scene continues in continuity style as she comes down to meet the two men.

Such continuity techniques spread through the dissemination of Hollywood films. Similarly, the fact that certain countries were cut off from the American supply during the war helps explain why distinctive stylistic practices arose.

Mise-en-scène

• *Acting* In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, I argued that the early pantomime style of film acting was quite efficient at telegraphing a good deal of narrative information in a short time. With the advent of feature films, film-makers quickly realized that it would be possible to linger over actors' reactions in closer framings. This lingering would not necessarily convey any new narrative information; instead, it added an emotional charge to the scene. By the mid-1910s, a key moment in the story would be allotted a virtuosic bit of acting, often with its own beginning, middle, and end. In *Weisse Rosen* ('White Roses', 1916, Urban Gad) the Asta Nielsen character receives a letter from her lover in which he wrongly accuses her of being a thief. She reads it (Fig. 15.8), reacts in disbelief (Fig. 15.9), reads it again, crumples it, then reads it a third time before slowly slumping down, despairing (Fig. 15.10). A similar three-part reaction occurs in *The Birth of a Nation* as the Little Sister, played by Mae Marsh, trims her dress with cotton in imitation of ermine. At first she is pleased, then loses her smile as she realizes what a poor imitation it is, and finally seems near tears.

As the example from *Ingeborg Holm* indicated, film-makers also realized that withholding such explicit depictions of emotion could also be effective. The homecoming scene in *The Birth of a Nation*, in which the Little Colonel leans into the doorway to embrace his off-screen mother, is only the most famous case where a highly emotional scene is partially blocked in order to heighten its impact. Numerous other films of the era use similar techniques. In Paul von Woringen's 1913 film, *Die Landstrasse* ('The Country Road'), an escaped convict has committed a murder, but a passing tramp has been arrested and falsely convicted. The trial scene ends as the court-room empties and we see the convict, his back to the camera. He moves to speak with a lawyer, but the lack of information about his reaction leads to greater suspense on the part of the audience. Also in 1915, Cecil B. DeMille's *The Warrens of Virginia* shows Blanche Sweet from behind as she strikes on the door of a room where, it is



Figures 15.8–15.10 *Weisse Rosen*

implied, her lover may be trying to shoot himself. The action begins in long shot as she pounds (Fig. 15.11). The film's first cut-in moves straight in, still showing her from behind (Fig. 15.12), and the camera tilts down as she slides to her knees in despair (Fig. 15.13). Here cut-in and tilt seem to offer us new narrative information, but in fact we can see little more than if the action had continued in long shot. Clearly the camera does not move around to show, say, a profile view that would reveal her expression because DeMille felt that the understatement would intensify the gesture's affect.

Film-makers also occasionally strove for the opposite effect, emphasizing facial expression by having actors move toward the camera while staring into the lens. The earliest case I know of occurs in *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912, D.W. Griffith), where the Snapper Kid moves into looming close-up. The effect goes far beyond the demands of narrative clarity; it functions to create a sense of menace. Most if not all of the other examples I have found use the technique for the same purpose. Early in Phillips Smalley's *Suspense* (1913), the heroine looks from an upper window and sees a tramp on her doorstep. Here his threatening glance into the lens is motivated as her point of view. Later, however, he moves up the stairs and toward the lens, while the wife hides in a nearby room. Now the menace seems directed at us without showing us anything she can see. The effect is perhaps comparable to the novelty medium shot of a cowboy firing a gun at the camera in *The Great Train Robbery* (1903, Edwin S. Porter), but by now the startling threat has been made part of the diegesis.



Figures 15.11–15.13 *The Warrens of Virginia*

Not surprisingly, then, we find characters staring into the lens in shot/reverse-shot situations during fights. In John Ford's *Straight Shooting* (1917), the hero's glance off camera right leads to a reverse close view of his opponent looking straight out. In Maurice Tourneur's *The Last of the Mohicans* (released in 1920), a knife duel between two Indians is handled with each of them staring into the lens.

• *Mirrors* Perhaps one of the most conspicuous ways in which film-makers sought to strengthen the impact of scenes was by shooting into mirrors. In A.W. Sandberg's 1917 Danish film, *Klovnen* ('Clowns'), the hero is onstage with a large mirror that reflects an unseen curtain. The curtain rises to reveal his lover embracing another man (Fig. 15.14), at which point he smashes the mirror. Here the space of the scene is perhaps a trifle convoluted, but the revelation is dramatized by the centered mirror.

An extraordinarily complex use of a mirror occurs in Gad's *Weisse Rosen*. In one shot we see the heroine Thilda standing by a mirror, then placing a bouquet of roses on the table beneath it as she joins some friends.² A cutaway shows two detectives searching Thilda's room for a diamond they think she has stolen. A return to the mirror shows the real thief, Kenley, slipping the jewel case into her bouquet; we glimpse Thilda in the mirror, her back turned so that she cannot see this gesture. Kenley leaves the shot, and people mill about; we then see Thilda and Kenley moving leftward in the mirror, and they soon enter the shot from the right.

Kenley hands Thilda the bouquet, and they exit in opposite directions. Almost immediately the two detectives enter, and they split up to follow Kenley and Thilda. One could hardly ask for a better example of a scene in which narrative clarity is sacrificed in order to engage the viewer's attention more forcefully.

Films of this era found a great variety of ways to use mirrors. In Erich von Stroheim's *Blind Husbands* (1919), the heroine's view of her sleeping husband in a mirror leads to a rack focus to her face and triggers a fantasy of a romantic lover. Yermoliev's *L'Anoissante Aventure* (1919) contains a disorienting shot which apparently begins as a straightforward image of the hero and heroine, then seems to slide vertiginously as the side of a mirror appears, revealing a group of filmmakers using a shiny reflector while on location.³ Mirrors, with their reversal of relations among objects, provided an obvious way of undercutting spectators' understanding of scenes.

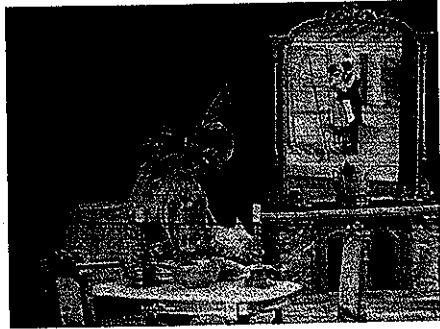
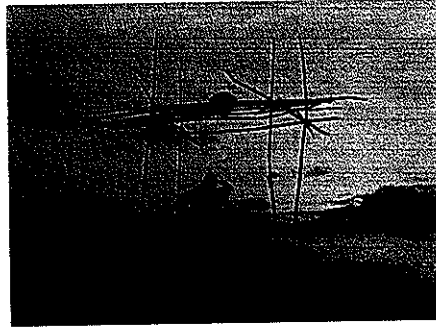
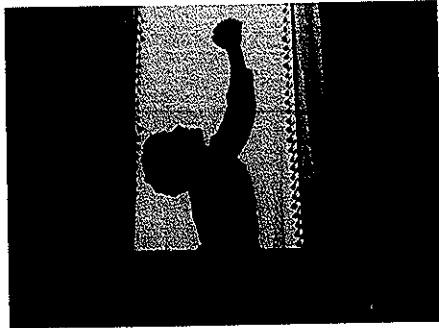
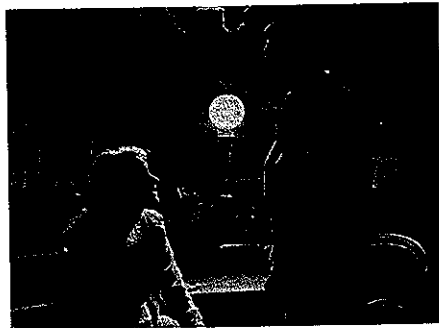
• *Lighting* Changes in lighting practice during the 1910s have been studied quite extensively. The focus has been on the shift from general, flat lighting – mainly dependent on sunlight – to highly selective 'effects' lighting based on artificial light. Intuitively, one might expect this to have been a gradual process. Filmmakers might have started with flat lighting, then gradually adopted more selective techniques. They might then have worked up to the stark low-key lighting characteristic of 'Lasky light' as exemplified by *The Cheat* (1915, Hector Turnbull).

Instead, many film-makers quickly hit upon an occasional alternative to flat frontal lighting: stark backlit silhouettes. Many of the most striking films of the 1910s create silhouettes using available light, whether indoors or in the open air. In most cases, such lighting seems to function generally to enhance the emotional impact of the scene.

Thomas H. Ince's *The Indian Massacre* (1912), ends with a dramatic view of an Indian mother mourning her baby (Fig. 15.15). Films of 1913 and 1914 are full of such shots. *Atlantis* (August Blom, 1913) places its hero against a bright seascape in the shipboard scene. Léonce Perret's early features *L'Enfant de Paris* (1913) and *Roman d'un Mouse* ('Tale of a Cabin Boy', 1914) contain several famous examples of silhouette lighting against doors and windows. In Benjamin Christensen's *Det Hemmelighedsfulde X* ('The Mysterious X', 1913), some scenes contain dramatic silhouette effects (Fig. 15.16). The same is true of his *Haevens Nat* ('Night of Revenge', 1916). In the USA, Maurice Tourneur increasingly used silhouette effects in his films, as in this shot from *The Last of the Mohicans* (Fig. 15.17).

By the middle of the decade, however, film-makers were creating somewhat comparable silhouette shots in the studio using artificial light. Forest Holger-Madsen's 1915 Danish film, *Evangeliedmandens* ('The Evangelist'), contains a complex set with a detailed miniature cityscape model outside the window.⁴ Careful backlighting creates several striking silhouette compositions. In the same year, DeMille's *The Cheat* used stark backlighting as a motif. In one scene, the heroine and villain listen through a Japanese paper screen as the lights go on in the next room, and the shadows of two figures appear on the screen. Later, the shooting of the villain is handled with a stark spotlight picking him out against a screen⁵; a cut to the other side of the screen reveals his shadow; the heroine's husband enters and reacts in shock as he realizes that the villain has been wounded. Such silhouette views using artificial light continued to be used in the next few years, as in this dramatic scene from John Collins' *The Girl without a Soul* (1917, Fig. 15.18).

During the same period, 'effects' lighting, where the light comes from a source within the scene, was also being introduced. The scene from *The Girl without a Soul* suggests that all the light comes from the single lamp visible at the rear. The main motivation for such lighting

Figure 15.14 *Klovnene*Figure 15.15 *The Indian Massacre*Figure 15.16 *Det Hemmelighedsfulde X*Figure 15.17 *The Last of the Mohicans*Figure 15.18 *The Girl without a Soul*Figure 15.19 *Homunculus*

seems to be realism. In many cases, however, the stark silhouette composition seems to have stood out as something more extreme than mere effects lighting. Silhouettes retained their expressive impact despite the development of other forms of selective illumination.

- *Sets and Staging* During the 1910s, set design was of course becoming more elaborate. The move toward features permitted higher budgets for individual films. Several sets from Nordisk's epic production *Atlantis* serve a straightforward narrative purpose of portraying the home of the protagonist, a sculptor; it also, however, shows evidence of a concern with pictorial beauty that is almost distracting in relation to the ongoing action.⁶ Some filmmakers of this era consistently used elaborate sets that contribute little to narrative clarity but add considerable compositional interest; these include Georg af Klercker in Sweden, Evgenii Bauer in Russia, and Maurice Tourneur in the USA.

With the advent of longer narratives, some film-makers also increasingly tried to create parallelisms that would link scenes that might be widely separated temporarily. Echoes within the settings provided a simple way of doing this. For example, von Woringen's *Die Landstrasse* consistently compared the escaped convict who commits a murder and the tramp who is accused of the crime. The two wander about the same village, but are almost never seen in the same space until the film's end. Yet motifs of setting and staging connect them. Shortly after his escape, the convict pauses in a forest to eat something; considerably later there is an extraordinary long take in which the tramp, having bought a loaf and stolen some meat, walks slowly from the background in a similar setting, then sits in the foreground and eats his meal. I should note that there is no particular reason in the plot why the film should visually compare the two men, who are actually quite different. The parallelisms, however, emphasize the irony of the mistaken accusation of the tramp.

- *Depth* There had been many cases of staging in depth before 1912.⁷ These were used mainly for moving characters from one space to another and for situations where the action demands it, as when a character in a foreground room eavesdrops on others in a room beyond. By 1912, however, depth shots seemed to be used occasionally for more expressive purposes, and in situations where it would have been possible to stage the scene in other ways.

A motif of deep staging could serve to create parallels across a film. Victor Sjöström's 1912 short feature, *Trädgårdmästaren* (released in the USA as "The Broken Spring Rose"), uses several striking stagings to stress the moments when the heroine is reunited with or must part from the young man she loves: the early scene of his return sets up this motif as the heroine stands with her back to the camera by the dock⁸; later, the couple bid each other goodbye as the young man's father stands by that same dock in the background; in the next shot she waves as the ferry departs; the motif culminates near the end, as the heroine herself returns to her home, and the camera again places her in the foreground, but this time on the ferry approaching the dock.

These examples all take place outdoors. One of the most common uses of deep staging, however, places a character in the foreground of a set, looking at someone in the background. A typical example would be a shot from *Doddspring til hest fra Circus-kuplen* (1912, Eduard Schnedler-Sørensen).⁹ Similarly, the looking character could be placed in the distant background, as in this shot from *Homunculus* (Fig. 15.19, 1916, Otto Rippert). Such depth shots look quite dramatic to us today, but they are so common in the early to mid-1910s that I suspect they originally functioned to convey the same information that the eyeline match was soon to fulfill more frequently. That is, filmmakers who needed to show clearly that one

character was watching another but who did not yet know about glance-object editing could employ this sort of depth staging.

During the 1910s, however, many filmmakers began to use this device of deep staging in a new way, placing a curtain in the foreground which the character or someone else pulls aside. Here I suspect the purpose is more to create a dramatic revelation of a new space than simply to show that a character is looking at something else. In *Fabiola*, a 1917 Italian film (Enrico Guazzoni), the villain moves into the foreground (Fig. 15.20) and furtively parts the curtains to spy on the heroine (Fig. 15.21). By this point in film history, the eyeline match technique was presumably becoming known among filmmakers internationally. Yet here the depth shot remains as a sort of flourish for the presentation of a new set.

This function is quite clearly present in *Madame Dubarry* (1919, Ernst Lubitsch). Early in the film, scenes take place in the millinery shop, in the streets, or in modest apartments. Here the heroine goes for the first time to dine with a wealthy man. She pauses expectantly by a curtain (Fig. 15.22), which is then drawn aside by an unseen hand, revealing the first of the film's many rich interiors (Fig. 15.23). The fact that the man she has come to visit is not yet present in the room reinforces the notion that here staging in depth functions primarily to create spectacle.

Depth staging could also be used for other purposes. To give one brief example, the most famous shot from *Terje Vigen* ('A Man There Was', 1916, Victor Sjöström) juxtaposes the protagonist with the sea seen through a window as a storm is brewing. Here depth serves a poetic purpose, as part of a metaphorical linking of the tempestuous sea with Vigen's desire for revenge.

Camera movement

I shall say relatively little about camera movement, since this subject has been quite extensively researched. There had been earlier uses of expressive camera movement, as when in 1909 Griffith began and ended his Biograph short *The Country Doctor* with panning movements across a landscape. But *Cabiria* popularized camera movement in 1914 by using slow tracking movements that ordinarily did not follow characters but instead served to show off the deep, impressive sets. We might note that at least one other director of the same era was employing such tracking movements. Evgenii Bauer's *Ditya Bol'Shogo Goroda* ('Child of the Big City', released in early 1914, at about the same time as *cabiria*) tracks the camera slowly forward through the relatively large cabaret set (Fig. 15.24), dividing its attention between the heroine, at the right, and the stage beyond (Fig. 15.25).

Griffith used camera movement for a narrational comment on the action when in *The Birth of a Nation* he tilts down, while introducing the Cameron patriarch, to the puppies sprawled at his feet. He then emphasizes Cameron's kindness by cutting in to a closer view of the animals. In *Intolerance*, he underlines the Dear One's shock after her husband's death sentence with a short track-in as she walks slowly toward the camera, until she is slightly out of focus and a slow fade-out begins.

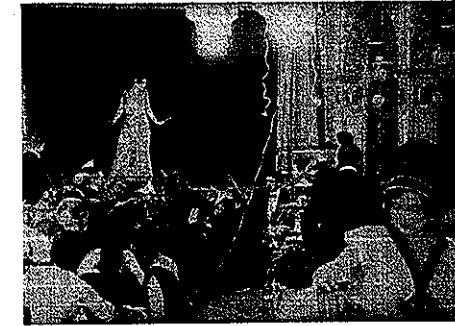
Christensen's *Haevens Nat* provides a rare example of camera movement being used for shock effect. He frames a young woman in a house at night, reacting in terror to something she sees off right front; as she struggles to open the door, the camera pulls back, seemingly directly through the closed French doors and continues to draw away from her; the intruder suddenly appears as a silhouette, breaking in and rushing forward to seize her.¹⁰ Such uses of expressive camera movement would be developed considerably by the French Impressionists and German film-makers in the 1920s.



Figures 15.20–15.21 *Fabiola*



Figures 15.22–15.23 *Madame Dubarry*



Figures 15.24–15.25 *Ditya Bol'Shogo Goroda*

Editing

Continuity editing emerged during the 1910s as a system for creating coherent narrative space and time. Surprisingly quickly, however, filmmakers discovered ways of using editing for authorial comment, for enhancing suspense, for creating parallelism, and even for disorienting the viewer for various purposes.

The ordinary cut-in had begun as a means for commenting on the action. In *Intolerance*, for example, the introduction of the French court includes a detail shot of a small attendant hiding a yawn, hinting at the court's stultifying pomp. *Intolerance* is famous as having emphasized the affecting detail, as when a general view of the Dear One collapsing after her child is taken away leads to a close view of the baby's bootie.

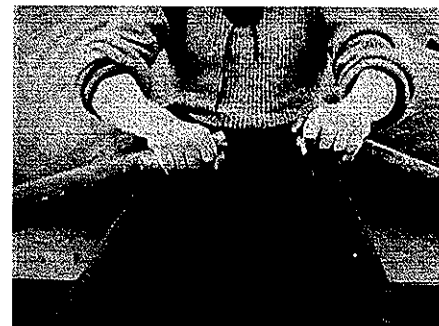
Another editing device that shows up occasionally in mid-1910s cinema is the expressive graphic match. In the scene of the gangster's death in *Intolerance*, Griffith cuts from the Boy, hunched on the floor, to the Dear One, in a similar posture. Presumably this cut functions partly to show why neither sees who fires the shot, but it also enhances the emotional tone of the scene by stressing their mutual helplessness. In *Terje Vigen*, Sjöström edits together a medium shot of several soldiers rowing (Fig. 15.26) and one of Vigen rowing as he tries to escape them (Fig. 15.27). The low framing and direction and rhythm of the gestures creates a graphic match that I think functions to add to the suspense.

The shot/reverse shot editing pattern became common practice during the 1910s. Quickly filmmakers found ways of enhancing the expressivity even of this staple device. For example, two scenes from very different sorts of films use shot/reverse shot to heighten the romantic overtones of their respective scenes. In *Oberg-Ejvind Och Hans Hustru* ('The Outlaw and His Wife', 1917), Sjöström presents the first meeting of Berg-Ejvind and Halla in an unusually extended series of shot/reverse shots. The fugitive Berg-Ejvind has just been hired as a servant on Halla's estate and carries a large trunk into a loft. Halla, seated at her desk, turns and sees him for the first time. These two will soon fall in love and flee together, and Sjöström dramatizes their meeting by lingering over it. A depth shot shows Berg-Ejvind in the loft, with Halla just visible below; a cut-in shows Halla turning and registering surprise at seeing the stranger; in reverse shot, he stares back at her. Despite the fact that there is neither dialogue nor significant movement, the next cut returns us to a shot of Halla continuing to stare; the next shot returns to the original depth framing but again simply shows the two staring at each other; finally, in a new reverse depth shot, Berg-Ejvind explains that he has been ordered to store the trunk in the loft.

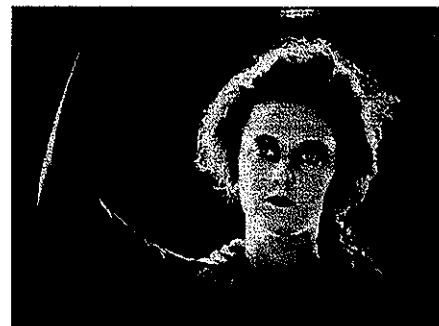
A different approach occurs in Tourneur's *The Last of the Mohicans*. In this film the romantic attraction between Cora and Uncas is conveyed largely through their intense gazes at each other in shot/reverse shot. Tourneur shoots a scene between the two in a cave with each staring almost directly into the lens; each also has one arm up touching the roof of the cave (Figs. 15.28 and 15.29). This off-balance echo subtly compares them and underscores the romance.

• *The Long Take* As I have suggested, traditional histories of the 1910s favor editing and camera movement. Long, static shots are seldom discussed as examples of 'progressive' style. Yet, as we saw with the example from *Ingeborg Holm*, the long take could be expressive. After all, there would have been no reason why film-makers of this era would feel compelled to use editing or camera movement to display their sophistication. They presumably felt free to explore all the possible techniques of the new art form.

Die Landstrasse provides a good example of a film which earlier historians might have dismissed as static and theatrical. We have seen how it uses nearly actionless shots to create



Figures 15.26–15.27 *Terje Vigen*



Figures 15.28–15.29 *The Last of the Mohicans*



Figures 15.30–15.31 *Die Landstrasse*

parallels between the convict and the tramp as they sit eating. The scene of the testimony concerning the murder and the questioning and arrest of the tramp takes place in a long take, as we watch the tramp react to the accusations (Figs. 15.30 and 15.31). Later, the climactic deathbed confession by the convict again occurs in a lengthy shot as the tramp again listens and responds.¹¹

The opening scene of the German film *Der Student von Prag* ('The Student of Prague', 1913, Stellan Rye) consists of a single long take, staged in depth with reframing camera movements and interrupted by several expository intertitles. Balduin enters and sits dejectedly in the foreground, waving his friends away. His depression is emphasized as Lyduschka appears in the background and dances, watched by all the students except Balduin. Soon Scapinelli's coach pulls up in the middle ground, and he sits with Balduin; the pair are spied upon by Lyduschka, in the far left rear. She comes forward and watches worriedly as Balduin and Scapinelli strike their bargain. The camera pans right as the pair leave, still watched by the apprehensive Lyduschka. Again this seems to me a case that could be dismissed as primitive. Yet it could also be described as a complexly staged scene that sets up the basic narrative situation and uses depth and unexpected appearances from off-screen to heighten the impact of the action.

Even *The Birth of a Nation*, ordinarily considered important primarily for its virtuosic editing and camera movements, creates some of its most affecting moments in intricately staged static long takes. For example, the Cameron family's reaction to news of a son's death begins with all four characters clustered in the foreground. The older sister stares left, then turns her back to the camera as the Little Sister moves forward; at the same time, the mother moves to the sofa and collapses on it. The others then move to cluster around her. Exactly the same framing is used later in this set for a similar shot: as her parents and sister watch, the Little Sister gives away her last good dress to help the Southern cause; Cameron chides her for doing so; the others turn and move away, the older sister to the sofa, the parents out left rear while we focus on the Little Sister's wistful expression; finally, she cheers up a bit and moves to display her dress to her sister before the two embrace on the sofa. I would argue that, far from being mundane, old-fashioned handlings of these scenes, such static takes effectively concentrate on the emotions of the whole family. Moreover, by making the scenes so similar, a nostalgic echo is created that enhances the emotional impact of the family's declining fortunes.

Conclusions

These examples are, I hope, enough to give some sense of the breadth and variety of techniques explored during the 1910s for their expressive possibilities. We tend to think of the 1920s as the period in which an 'art cinema' arose in the form of avant-garde stylistic movements like German Expressionism, French Impressionism, and Soviet Montage. Yet I would suggest that the period from approximately 1913 to 1919 saw the creation of the basis of what would later come to be seen as artistic cinema.

At the war's end, films began again to circulate more freely internationally. Some observers recognized that national approaches to cinema had emerged during the past few years. Louis Delluc was perhaps one of the earliest to comment on this phenomenon. When *The Outlaw and His Wife* appeared in France in 1919, he praised it highly and commented:

We know what the factory of American beauty has produced. Charlie Chaplin sums up six years of creative activity with his genius. But are the Americans alone? Soon you will get to see how carefully and attentively the Russians, Norwegians [sic], and

Germans have been working. Here is one instance of this worldwide effort, in which France still comes in last: *The Outlaw and His Wife*.¹²

The premiere of *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* in Paris in late 1921 revealed the new German movement. During the 1920s, histories of national cinemas appeared, including two book-length studies of Soviet film and special issues of journals which contained individual essays on Scandinavian, French, German, Soviet, American, and Italian cinema.

One thing that fascinates us in the films made in the era before 1913 is the struggle to create means of ensuring narrative clarity. For the period from 1913 to the end of the 1910s, the main fascination that films hold for us may well be the search for enhanced expressive means. The 1920s then become the decade in which modernism entered the cinema, expanding the new art form's possibilities in even bolder directions.

References

The original presentation of this paper involved a great many slides of frames from films of the 1910s. The editors of this volume have allowed me a generous sampling of those illustrations. In cutting, I deleted virtually all images from films that are available in the USA in either 16mm or video. I have also added references directing the reader to publications that reproduce frame enlargements from the examples used here. I am grateful to the following people and film sources: Gabrielle Claes and the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique, BFI Distribution, the National Film and Television Archive, Donald Crafton and the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Mark-Paul Meyer and the Nederlands Filmmuseum, and Jan-Christopher Horak, Paolo Cherchi Usai, and the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House.

Notes

- 1 For illustrations of this scene, see David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994, p. 130.
- 2 For an illustration of the opening shot of this scene, see *Film History*, p. 58.
- 3 For illustrations of three stages of this shot, see Kristin Thompson, 'The Ermolieff Group in Paris: Exile, Impressionism, Internationalism', *Griffithiana* 35/36, October 1989, p. 48, Figs. 4-6.
- 4 *Film History*, Fig. 3.15, p. 64.
- 5 *Ibid.*, Fig. 3.38, p. 73.
- 6 *Ibid.*, Fig. 3.14, p. 63.
- 7 Ben Brewster, 'Deep Staging in French Films 1900-1914', Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, London: BFI Publishing, 1990, pp. 45-55, and the early chapters of Barry Salt's *Film Style & Technology: History & Analysis*, London: Starword, 1983.
- 8 Three frame enlargements illustrate stages of this scene in John Fullerton, 'Spatial and articulation in pre-classical Swedish film', *Early Cinema*, p. 383.
- 9 See *Film History*, Fig. 2.8, p. 30.
- 10 For illustrations of two stages of this shot, see *Film History*, Figs. 3.17 and 3.18, p. 64.
- 11 *Film History*, Fig. 3.2, p. 57.
- 12 Louis Delluc, 'Cinema: *The Outlaw and His Wife*', Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism 1907-1939*, vol. 1, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 188.