

their character or allegiance. Subject transformation is a fundamental characteristic of dualistic narrative, from Griffith and early Eisenstein to Ford, Capra, and Hollywood genre film. As such it is a necessary element of classical narrative, but it cannot be perceived by a methodology entirely dependent on linearity, completed change, syntagmatic relationships, and predicate transformations.

Furthermore, structuralist analysis has in general followed Greimas (*Sémantique structurale: recherche de méthode*, Paris: Larousse, 1966) in treating character as a dependent aspect of narrative. Through the influence of Barthes, this approach, whereby the character is reduced to *actant*, has filtered into the study of film narrative. According to this theory, the narrative is supported by its linear flow of actions, related by a necessary cause-and-effect link; characters, therefore, are second-rate citizens. They exist only insofar as they act and therefore have no existence independent of the function they play in the text's action. This rather existentialist approach, by denying any essential quality to the narrative personage, flatly contradicts the implications of our paradigmatic analysis. We can handle the film as capture and escape without challenging the concept of *actant*, but the minute we try to understand the internal contradictions in de Boeldieu's character, we must treat the notion of character as preceding action. In fact, our paradigmatic analysis does suggest just such a concept. We defined the three main characters from the very beginning through a series of oppositions; each of the characters appeared not so much as an independent psychologically-based individual but as what we might term a "parameter bundle," a set of parameters derived from a series of oppositions to other characters. According to this alternative view, a concept of character as essence must coexist with--if not replace--the traditional psychological conception of the classical narrative character.

The key to this widened understanding of classical narrative lies by no means in a denial of already acquired positions concerning classical narrative. Barthes and Todorov, the *Cahiers* group and Burch are not wrong in their evaluations, they are simply too close to the surface. According to their method, each segment of the narrative is to be used in only one way, according to its position in a syntagmatic sequence. Yet what is needed is a clear sense of the double articulation of each individual segment--double because it must play its role as paradigm as well as syntagma. We cannot understand the functioning of classical narrative until we have the proper tools for analysis of both paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes, of metaphoric as well as metonymic matching, of subject as well as predicate transformation.

Imploded Space: Film Style in The Passion of Jeanne d'Arc

David Bordwell

If that abused term "modernism" means much, it surely means that an art work's style deviates from some classical norms and organizes those deviations in fresh, perhaps even unique ways. I want here to examine a film usually recognized as a "classic," The Passion of Jeanne d'Arc, and suggest that in its construction of cinematic space the film provides a powerful challenge and alternative to the dominant "realist" style. The challenge consists not in an "explosion" of realistic space--i.e., bursting the scene apart and projecting the fragments onto disparate spatial, temporal, and conceptual levels (as in, say, the silent films of Eisenstein)--but rather in an "implosion," a rigorous flattening and reduction of classical cinematic space. In The Passion of Jeanne d'Arc, "realistic" space is abolished by the way in which spatial contradictions fold the scene in on itself, creating a space as "impossible" as that of Eisenstein's October but violently compressive rather than expansive. This implosion could be measured at the level of narrative construction or at the level of the film's editing, but I shall concentrate upon another pressure toward implosion: the construction of space within the shot. Through mise en scène and camera movement, The Passion of Jeanne d'Arc deviates markedly from the conception of cinematic space that constitutes the Classical norm.

What is that conventionally "realistic" film space? In Western filmmaking, the predominant example remains that efficient system perfected by the classical Hollywood cinema. According to this system, the action is situated within a generally homogeneous space. The consistency of the depth cues is reaffirmed by cast shadows, muted lighting for background elements, the correct perspective diminution of distant planes, and even camera movement. The scale of the figures is kept constant with respect both to other figures and to the background. Camera distance and angle work to this end, framing figures and setting so that the two are congruent and so that scale does not alter drastically from shot to shot. The camera is anchored or maneuvered in such a way as to present a stable and firm "ground" for the scene. Camera movement will support the coherence of the dramatic action--by following a moving character, surveying a setting, moving into or out from a significant object or character. Even what we might call graphic space cooperates with the construction of a stable story space. The screen presents itself not as a surface but rather a window opening onto the spectacle. To efface the surface of the screen, not only does the mise en scène teem with depth cues (overlap, lighting and texture gradients, consistent perspective, movement, relative size, etc.) but also the composition of the shot follows some basic rules of thumb. The upper half of the screen, and especially the central area of this half, constitutes a privileged zone of dramatic activity. The shot will be symmetrical, usually along a vertical

center axis. And, of course, the principal action will not occur on the very edge of the screen. In sum, graphic configurations are designed to melt imperceptibly into the scenographic space of the narrative.

In all, then, the continuity style (developing since around 1905 and becoming refined throughout the next twenty years) seeks to put space at the service of the chain of narrative cause and effect. Space must not "come forward," since it functions to guarantee the homogeneity of the spectacle. Rupture this space, dissolve the mutual dependencies amongst the various devices, and you bring space forward as an element in its own right, capable of being put into new and disorienting patterns. Such a rupture of the classical norm is the stylistic goal of The Passion of Jeanne d'Arc.

Consider, as a point of entry, the way in which The Passion of Jeanne d'Arc sets up a play between depth and flatness. Not that the scenic space of the film has no depth: occasionally, planes are distinguished by focus and lighting. Usually, though, the film lacks depth cues. The film refuses to define multiple planes by distinct background features, by cast shadows, or by linear perspective. The blank settings--either as pure white walls or as empty sky--push all figures to the same plane, making everything foreground against neutral background. Since the decor has been scraped clean of reference points, objects and figures often float suspended in a luminous vacuum. Similarly, though the lighting upon facial contours and textures produces attached shadows, there are seldom any cast shadows to confirm depth. A sense of depth is further sabotaged by the distortion of linear perspective. Shots suggest no systematic diminution of planes around a vanishing point, and the decor often goes so far as to utilize false perspective. For example, in the first scene the windows "behind" the judges constitute skewed, ambiguous shapes that catch us in contradictory cues: according to the optical recession of planes, the right window should seem further back, but according to perspective diminution, the left one (being smaller) should seem the more distant. Later, the peephole through which Cauchon views Jeanne illustrates the same distortions, though now from foreground to background. Similarly, the recessed area of Jeanne's cell contains no fewer than three inconsistent cues: the crooked crosspiece of the window, the perspectively perfect window frame, and the exaggerated leftward slant of the diminishing arch. Even reckoning Jeanne's body into the calculation, we cannot ascertain the depth of the recess, the height of the arch, or the size of the window. As a result, overlap of edges becomes the primary depth cue in the film, though it too can sometimes make the space slip into ambiguity. In the absence of firm certainties about planes, even the characters' movements become ambivalent, for often we can rely only upon change of figure size to determine whether a character is moving leftward, downward, rearward, or all three.

The sense of figures hovering in a gravity-less space is exacerbated by manipulations of camera angle which cut figures free of the ground. When the angle is not straight-on, it is almost always low, looking up at the figure. Set against neutral wall or sky, the figures fill the shots with their distended volumes. Moreover, the low angle usually shears off the characters at the waist or above, so that in the absence of traces of leg or foot movement and swathed in ecclesiastical drapery, the judges

seem not to walk but to glide or drift. More spectacularly, the tilted or canted camera angle makes space implode, heaving figures and setting to the right or the left. Lacking the sense of a firm ground, the characters sometimes struggle through these tilted frames: entering a doorway comes to equal climbing uphill. Later I shall suggest how Dreyer even inverts the camera in order to deform the classical norm's assumption that the gravitational field of narrative space must pull the camera's behavior into an orderly orbit.

In The Passion of Jeanne d'Arc, the framings are as unstable as the camera positions. The center of interest will not necessarily coincide with the center of the frame. Compositions swing radically, almost madly, out of balance. Jeanne's face may be found tucked into the lower right corner, poised at the right edge, wedged into the lower left or split by the left edge. Significant gestures are secreted in crannies of the frame. We find a procession of judges not in the center but in the upper left; the soldiers' attack on a bystander occurs almost offscreen, at the bottom edge of the frame. The judges leave Jeanne's cell at the lower left, the same area in which the young Ladvenu submits and raises his hand. Indeed, one of the reasons we remember the film as one composed wholly of close-ups is that even in long-shot, faces are often isolated by such unbalanced framings.

Graphic patterns come forward to fill the vacuum left by the eviction of conventional scenography. Many shots of The Passion of Jeanne d'Arc revive the then-anachronistic silent-film convention of vignette framing, so that a purely decorative overlay serrates and stylizes the screen surface. Equally noticeable are the numerous graphic motifs which, though in the scenographic space, are raised to extranarrative prominence. One such motif is that of the arch. Jeanne's cell, with the curved ceilings and door-tops, is built from echoes of the arch pattern. Elsewhere, the first interrogation, the courtyard walls, and the draw-bridge repeat the arch. A specific variant is, peculiarly, the top of the human head! Since most heads are semi-circular above the ears, this claim might seem over-ingenious, but the mise en scene in the first scene forces the motif on our attention by close-ups of the priests pointing to their tonsures or skullcaps, and by a series of shots associated with de Houpeville's abasement before Jeanne. Thereafter, skull and arch echo each other. Another graphic motif also pervades the decor: that of two lines intersecting each other at a sharp angle. The emblem of Rouen castle--a verticle line with a "v" at each end--schematizes the motif. Indeed arch and angle engage in an interplay close to pure abstraction. Rafters and ceiling corners angle out from characters' heads; corners of canopies jut out like shapes in a Malevich composition; a vector slashed in a wall drives downward into the shot; and the human head is squeezed between the pincers of dynamic diagonals. In another film, such configurations might be ignored, but the sparse mise en scene of The Passion of Jeanne d'Arc foregrounds the abstract configurations traversing the screen surface and refuses to subordinate graphics to the role of "invisibly" supporting the narrative action.

Effacement of depth, camera angles which balloon the figures upward and cut their ties to the ground, decentered framings which make the characters perch anywhere in the frame, and graphic motifs which play across

the screen surface--all these devices yield a cubistic, "uniplanar" space which juxtaposes elements in a tug-of-war of contradictory cues. A shot becomes less a slice of a homogeneous spatial whole than the intersection of a number of elements--geometrical shapes, oddly tilted heads and shoulders--set against a blank surface. It is easy to read this shot as simply the pasting together of a contorted rectangle, an arc, and two faces; it is nearly impossible to read it as a bit of "realistic" space. Warwick sits on a level plane above the crowd, while his men, no more than a heap of helmets, slope out of kilter; has the castle been built leaning? While an upper wall cuts in at an impossible angle, two spears thrust diagonally against it, framing the skewed figure of Jeanne. A lectern and a canopy become massive rectangles dominating and unbalancing two tiny heads; human scale and size vanish. Three men engaged in prayer become spread weightlessly across the frame, like figures dangling from a mobile. Though striking, these shots aren't atypical; frames "quoted" earlier also illustrate how, throughout the film, the frame becomes a suspension system.

What such examples can hardly indicate is how even the moving camera warps the film's space. As I suggested earlier, by perceptual rights the moving camera should orient us more firmly to the dramatic space than static shots do. For one thing, camera movement strongly cues depth, through a variant of what psychologists call the "kinetic depth effect." As Julian Hochberg writes: "objects whose spatial forms are ambiguous when they are stationary usually spring into three dimensions when they are rotated."¹ Foreground and background planes get picked out by moving at different rates with respect to the camera lens. For another thing, camera movement supplements the sense of a ground, a balanced gravitational field within which the camera can confidently maneuver. Finally, the tracking shot can be used to stitch together the dramatic space so that the positions of elements mutually cohere. Through the kinetic depth effect, the reiteration of a stable ground, and the linking of dramatic elements into a coherent field, camera movement operates in the classical cinema as a contributor to spatial realism. But *Jeanne d'Arc* will show that such "realism" is not an inevitable consequence of the moving camera.

We can observe, for example, that the ambiguities of frame space are not dispelled but are rather augmented by *Jeanne d'Arc's* camera movements. When a shot presents only one plane against a neutral background, and when that plane is a face in close-up or medium-close-up, a strange thing happens: the viewer cannot be certain whether perceived movement is attributable to the figure or to the camera. Thus, in the first scene, gliding tracking shots down the judges create an ambiguous effect: the heads roll through the frame as if on a conveyor belt. In the torture chamber, sawtooth shapes lunge out at us, and funnels drive through the frame, but we cannot attribute the movements to either the torture machinery or the camera. At the extreme, in the final scene the camera is mounted upon the sights of a horizontally rotating cannon, so that the moving cannon muzzle appears perfectly static and the (presumably stable) street spins past us.

Even when perceived movement can be attributed to figure movement, camera mobility can still distort and "derealyze" frame space by careful synchronization of camera and subject action. For if subject movement is observed by a static camera, the frame space will become defined by

the relative displacement of the figures. What happens here, in contrast, is that the camera often displaces itself relative to any figure movement, thus keeping the ambiguous spatial relations constant. The most apparent results of this strategy occur in those shots with neutral white backgrounds and figure movement in close- or medium-shot. In the first scene, just as a skinny judge rises in indignation and two judges' heads spring into each side of the frame, the camera tracks abruptly back, reestablishing and fixing the shallow space presented at the start of the shot. Similarly, as the judges pass a whisper down their ranks, the camera movement coordinates itself with their leaning to and fro, in order to minimize the shot's depth cues. In longer shots, such rigid coordination of camera and subject movement can at times disorient us spatially, as in certain shots during the final immolation scene, such as the sudden track right following a boy's feet to a woman's corpse, or--especially--the rhythmic track in and out showing, from a low angle, maces dropped from a tower to a waiting soldier, an astonishing shot which makes the tower heave and buckle. In such shots, camera movement no longer takes as its aim the demarcation of planes; instead, the camera cheats the kinetic depth effect and times its movements to coincide with those of the subject, reasserting the ambiguities of shallow frame space.

If *Jeanne d'Arc's* camera movements forego the kinetic depth effect and often undermine the gravitational stability of a "ground," it is no wonder that those movements also often fail to stitch together the film's narrative space in a coherent manner. The movements are hardly subordinate to narrative; Drøyer calls our attention to them. First, the movement is frequently gratuitous by the standards of classical narrative. When Loysel enters Jeanne's cell, the camera pans upward, revealing less and less of his figure until the frame is quite unbalanced, or the camera will track right from a guard to reveal--nothing. Secondly, camera movement gains still more autonomy by the fact that a moving shot will unabashedly be interrupted by a static one.

Finally (and most radical of all) are those camera movements which split the dramatic space apart, confusing rather than concretizing relationships. Consider one stunning, space-warping pan shot. The judges are sitting in a row looking at the seated Jeanne. The camera pans left to right down them. What happens? At the beginning of the movement, other judges are looking off left at Jeanne; at the end of the movement, other judges are looking off right at her. This space is simply impossible. Since the camera swivels across the judges, they cannot all be looking at the same point, but the narrative context insists that they are. Jeanne cannot be in two places at once, but the pan shot (assisted by the eyelines of the priests) asserts just that. Camera movement here freely cleaves open the scene by the force of pure contradiction; the space caves in.

Gravity is cheated, too. *Jeanne d'Arc's* camera movements cooperate with the framings in eliminating the ground as a founder of stable spatial relations. Not only are bodies seldom shown below the waist and are often sprinkled variously across the frame, but sometimes camera movement frees itself from any reference point on ground or floor. At times, the conveyor belt effect of elements flowing through the frame becomes an "escalator" effect when the moving camera is tilted or canted. In the

first interrogation in Jeanne's cell and in the torture chamber scene, the judges' faces slide up and down through the frame. In the final communion scene, a close-up of choirboys puts them first at an upper-left-to-lower-right diagonal and then, tacking, shifts its slope so that the boys are now rolling from upper right to lower left. Instead of a camera with its tripod legs firmly on the ground of the scene, we have a camera whose movements at skewed angles conspire with the vagueness of the decor and the uneasy framings to break the gravitational pull of the narrative space.

That break is most successful, of course, in the final sequence of the film, when before and after Jeanne's immolation the camera executes its most disorienting movements. While a priest administers communion to Jeanne, the populace rushes into Rouen castle. One unsettling shot calls attention to a specific camera operation: mounted atop the castle gate, the camera is inverted to view the soldiers, pans with them to the gate, and then rights itself to view the crowd. Later another pan shot inverts the crowd as the earlier one had inverted the soldiers. At the end of the scene, two equally disorienting camera movements parallel the earlier pair. Now, as the people frantically flee through the gateway, the camera views them from directly below and pans up, against the grain of their movement. Unlike the somersaulting movements in Dupont's *Variety*, these shots make no attempt to simulate subjective viewpoints; unlike camera movements in the classical cinema, these shots deliberately avoid that "transparency" that demands that the camera e-face itself before the spectacle. The camera is no longer that "ideally placed possible spectator" considered by Ivor Montagu to be the center of the orthodox style.² Instead, such unmotivated inversions of the image mark the paroxysmic culmination of the film's search for camera movements which dissolve the classical scenographic space and the stability of the viewer's vantage point. The camera pivots weightlessly upon itself in ways that cannot be duplicated by the human body; the viewer cannot imagine his or her eye mimicking these movements. If further proof were needed of the essential "modernity" of *Jeanne d'Arc's* style, we need only recall that film made forty years later which seizes upon such inverted movements and impossible positions as its formal project: Michael Snow's *La Région Centrale*.

Trying to exhaust the film would exhaust only the reader's patience, but I should add that an examination of the film's editing supports the analysis I've proposed. The film is crammed with false eyeline-matches, false point-of-view shots, and inconsistent spatial juxtapositions. At every level, internal contradictions cleave open the homogeneous space of classical cinema and, instead of bursting the narrative action outward onto abstract conceptual levels, these contradictions collapse the scene into a multiple, rarefied, inconsistent space. The lesson, I think, is that when we examine a film from the standpoint of the norms of the classical style, we may even find the most "modern" disorientations staring out at us from a seemingly staid "classic."

Notes

¹ Julian Hochberg, *Perception* (Englewood Cliffs, 1964), p. 94.

² Ivor Montagu, *Film World* (Baltimore, 1964), p. 141.