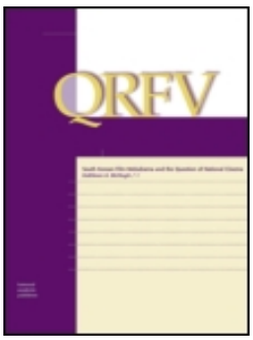

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Weaving a Narrative: Style and Economic Background in Griffith's Biograph Films

Tom Gunning

The spectre of D. W. Griffith, the mythical "father" of film as an art form, haunts film history. All too often Griffith has been an excuse for a lack of scholarship on early film. To relieve film scholars of the burden and anxiety of wading into the morass of anonymous or little-known films that mark the early years of the cinema, Griffith has been labeled as the "beginning" of film as an art form. A whole barrage of techniques have been identified as Griffith "discoveries." Or when this myth of actual invention could not be maintained, Griffith was seen as the man who first gave these techniques meaning, or used them in an artistic context. A radical inversion of this myth has also appeared. In this counter-myth, Griffith is seen as the betrayer of a purer idea of film found in the work of Méliès and Lumière, as the man who introduced the fatal element of bourgeois narrative, the Adam from whose fall film is yet to recover.

Likd any myth of a father's role, both these approaches carry something of the significance and paradox of Griffith's place in film history. Yet some attempt to demythologize Griffith's contribution is necessary, if only to help us understand the myth more fully. An examination of the economic factors at the time of Griffith's entrance into film shows the extent to which they determined the transformations of film form that appear in Griffith's first films. Griffith's early work must be seen as a paradigm of the development demanded by the new economic identity film was establishing, rather than as the magical creation of a semimythical culture

hero. At the same time, Griffith's work appears curiously overdetermined, fulfilling certain expectations and aspirations of the film industry of the time, and yet also running into conflict with them—exceeding them. I feel that this excess created a tension between his work and the film industry as an economic entity that was to pursue Griffith throughout his career. The way Griffith's early style resulted from certain demands within film economics will be shown by an examination of the film industry in 1908-1909 and the treatment of one aspect of his style—parallel editing—during these years. We may also find within the use of parallel editing something of the tension that would develop between Griffith and the very conditions which allowed his film style to appear.

Griffith Films in Economic Context: The Years 1908-1909

Any close examination of the early period of film reveals its nonmonolithic nature. The period from 1895 to 1915, that is, from Lumière to *The Birth of a Nation,* is not a uniform slice of film history that can be labeled simply "early" or "primitive" film. Our task must be to find the points of articulation within this period, the breaks and reroutings in film practice. Practically every year in this twenty-year period provides something of a milestone in the development of cinema. But the years 1908-1909 are of a peculiar nature worth defining. The changes that begin in these years mark the nature of film until 1913, when other factors begin to dominate.

1908 is a year not so much of innovation as of crystallization. It is not the year of the first story film, or of the first full reel (1000-foot) or the first film exchanges or nickelodeons. Rather, it is the year when the film industry tried to knit all these developments into a stable industry. Permanent film theaters, built for the showing of films, had begun appearing in 1905. A large number of steady theaters had allowed for the growth of film exchanges as a means of distribution. The film of one-reel length had become common by 1906. And by 1908 the heads of the film industry saw economic organization as a way to unite all these factors into an assured profit-making system.

The formation in December of 1908 of the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPCC) was to be the means of this stabilization. The combine was an agreement between the Edison Film Company and the other principal American producing companies to end the

decade of lawsuits over patent infringements, by acknowledging Edison's priority. The American Mutoscope and Biograph Company felt confident in the strength of its own patents (and the financial support of the powerful Empire Trust Company) and held back from joining the combine. However, at the end of 1908, Biograph was admitted on an equal basis with Edison, and the MPCC was officially formed.

The MPPC brought to the film industry the kind of organization that had been dominating American business since before the turn of the century. Industry had moved away from a system of competition between rival firms toward a variety of pooling agreements and "trusts" which would limit competition. This process had encountered opposition from the government, the strongest being the Sherman Anti-Trust Law of 1890. However, control of patents seemed a way to circumvent those restrictions, and it was on this basis that the MPPC was formed.

Control of patents was only a means to an and. The aim of the MPPC was total control of the film industry in all its aspects. All of the major American producing companies were included in the group (as well as the American representatives of several foreign companies: Pathé, Méliès, Gaumont, and Eclipse). A few inconsequential American firms and a large number of European manufacturers were excluded. To further sew up its control of the production end of the industry, MPPC worked out a contract with Eastman Kodak, the world's largest supplier of film stock, for exclusive use of their film stock. With the company pool of patents, the MPPC hoped to restrict the American use of any existent motion picture camera.

In 1909 the MPPC abolished its exclusive contract with the Film Service Association, an organization of independently owned exchanges. Setting up its own distribution company, General Film Company, it intended to exert control over this previously independent aspect of the business. With its control over patents for film projectors, it instituted a system of licenses and royalties that extended its power over exhibitors. The film industry would be organized horizontally and vertically under the control of the MPPC.

Ultimately, the "Film Trust" (as it was called by its rivals) failed, for a number of reasons. But what is important for our purposes is not the economic defeat of the combine, but rather the desire in 1908-1909 to create a centralized, permanent, and stable industry.

The MPPC claimed its economic control of the film industry would "uplift" the motion pictures, improving their content and the means of exhibition. In July of 1909 *The Moving Picture World* praised its success in this direction.[1] If we look carefully behind the Film Trust's rhetoric of reform, we discover a major purpose of the MPCC—the wooing of a middle-class audience. In most film histories, this phenomenon is assigned a later date. But it begins (as Russell Merritt has pointed out[2]) during Griffith's work at Biograph. It is difficult to understand Griffith's early work without being aware of this background.

The push to make film respectable (i.e. acceptable to the middle class) opened on two basic fronts: censorship of film content, and improvement of the theaters in which the films were shown. Both of these issues had been inflammatory in the hands of anti-film reformists. These groups had shown their ability to convince authorities that films were an undersirable anti-social force when, in December 1908, Mayor McClellan of New York City had ordered all nickelodeons shut down as a threat to the city's physical and moral well-being. To succeed in capturing a new audience, the MPPC had to defuse the criticisms of the reform groups. In 1909 The People's Institute, a liberal-minded reform organization, set up the National Board of Censorship in association with the MPPC. The MPPC submitted all films made by its ten-member companies to this board for review. This support of film censorship had two aims: to "improve" film content and therefore attract a "better class" of audience, and to keep censorship out of the hands of the police and clergy who might deal more harshly with the films than the producers wanted.

MPPC's drive to improve theaters centered on an issue now almost forgotten—fear of the dark. The darkness of the motion picture theater blackened film's image for the respectable classes. In that darkness, anything could (and perhaps *did*) happen. Crawling with real or imagined "mashers," the darkened theater was a place a middle-class patron hesitated to enter (unless, of course, he was a masher). The MPPC stressed the possibility of lighting setups whereby the theater could be light enough to read a newspaper while the film was projected.[3] In an official announcement, the MPPC declared "the light theater is one of the most desirable changes that can be made toward the elevation of the motion picture business."[4]

The MPPC did not single-handedly father this desire to elevate film to the level of middle-class entertainment. The film trade journals reflect this longing for middle-class respectability as well. We find this in their discussion of the film theaters. The trade journals encouraged exhibitors to cater to the creature comforts of their customers, providing such things as iced water,[5] comfortable chairs, and proper ventilation.[6] *The Moving Picture World* advised against using sidewalk barkers for film shows, saying "this sort of thing jars the nerves of refined people."[7]

The terms "educational," "instructive," or "a moral lesson" appear again and again in the trade journals as a justification of the film medium. The claim that entertainment was in fact educational has long been an important ploy in American culture to justify (or disguise) frivolous pastimes to a middle class still dominated by a puritan ethic. The need for films whose outlook would be acceptable to "refined people" became a constant theme in trade journals during this period. The National Board of Censorship addressed itself to this issue, but the journals emphasized its finer points. "Improve your pictures," said *Nickelodeon,* "and you will improve the class of patrons who come to your theater."[8] *Moving Picture World* noted that Biograph's *Confidence,* a film without a chase or murder, would appeal to the "higher class" audience.[9]

Along with the drive to eliminate gruesome melodrama or vulgar comedy, we find during this period a lobbying for the happy ending as requisite for all films. This enforced optimism seems in tune with the pursuit of a middle-class audience. An editorial in *Nickelodeon* states, "We are living in a happy, beautiful, virile age. . . . we do not want sighs or tears. . . . We are all seeking happiness—whether through money or position or imagination. It is our privilege to resent any attempt to force unhappy thoughts on us."[10] *The Moving Picture World* also sounded this theme, saying in one review, "We object to being made sad in motion picture houses."[11]

All of this defines the years 1908-1909 as the origin of a unified effort to attract the middle class to motion pictures, an effort that extends over the whole span of Griffith's work at Biograph (1908-1913). As Russell Merritt has pointed out, these are transition years, when film was still catering to the working class, while wooing the bourgeois.[12] This is the context within Griffith's Biograph work must be seen: a period of, on the one hand, the economic stabilization of a large industry reaching a mass audience, and on the other

hand the decision of that industry that its ultimate stability lay in its attaining social respectability.

Attracting a middle-class audience entailed more than lighting the theater and brightening the content of the films. The narrative structure of the films would have to be brought more in line with the traditions of bourgeois representation. One of the clearest signs of this is the films made in 1908-1909 based on famous plays, novels, and poems. Before 1908, the primary sources for films seem to have been vaudeville and burlesque sketches, fairy tales, comic strips, and popular songs. These forms stressed spectacular effects or physical action, rather than psychological motivation. Although still in an elementary form, film now looked toward more respectable narrative models and the problems they entailed.

Many of the adaptations that appeared were greeted with the same complaints by trade journals: the audience did not understand them.[13] Film had not yet developed a narrative style suited to the bourgeois traditions it wished to emulate. The emphasis of earlier films had been on the technical mastery of magical effects (as in the "trick" films of Méliès and Pathé) and the creation of a unified geography from shot to shot in the chase films. The need now appeared for a series of film techniques that could articulate the narrative elements and involve the audience in their unfolding.

Parallel editing, with its fracturing of the natural continuity of the actions, is one of the most important of these new techniques and the film technique with which the name of Griffith is most clearly tied. Through parallel editing we sense the hand of the story-teller as he moves us from place to place, weaving a new continuity of narrative logic. The development of parallel editing can be seen not simply as the product of Griffith's individual genius, but as a response to the demand for a more complex narrative style. More investigation is needed of the use of parallel editing by other filmmakers during this period. It may be that what I have to say about Griffith's style is that it is merely typical of film style of the period. However, my preliminary investigation of other filmmakers seems to indicate that Griffith's use of the technique exceeds that of other filmmakers and has a larger variety of meanings. This excess and variety of meanings may represent Griffith's movement beyond the style demanded by the times.

Parallel Editing at Biograph: Meanings and Implications

In a lecture at NYU, Noel Burch gave a handy schema for describing the editing of early film. He pointed out that there are three basic spatial relations possible between any two shots. The first, which he called *alterity,* is the movement from one location to an entirely different one (for instance, in Porter's *The Great Train Robbery,* the edit from the girl untying the telegraph operator in his office to the interior of the dance hall). The next possibility—*proximity*—is an edit from one space to a space very near yet different from it. This obviously shades into *alterity,* but a clear example of it would be an edit from a character opening a door in an interior to an exterior shot of the character emerging from the door. Most shot/counter-shot patterns would be examples of *proximity.* The third spatial relation would be for a shot to include part of the space of the preceding shot. The classical example of this would be a cut-in to a closeup of something previously seen in the preceding master shot (e.g., the closeup of the wrench near the end of *The Lonedale Operator*). The cut from such a closeup back to the master shot would also be included in this category. Although Burch does not use this term, I will call this spatial articulation *overlap.*

Parallel editing is a subclass of *alterity.* The traditional definition of the term would be *alterity* with the qualification of simultaneous time for the events within the shots. The classical examples of parallel editing are sequences of shots which alternate from one location, or group of characters, to another, with the indication that the actions are occurring at the same time. Closely related to this strict definition of parallel editing—and in Griffith's Biograph films at points difficult to separate from it—are alternating patterns of shots which do not necessarily happen simultaneously. (Christian Metz's term "alternating syntagm" in his essay "Some Points in the Semiotics of Cinema," which would include both patterns, might be useful here. However, Metz later separated the patterns more completely into "parallel syntagm" and "alternating syntagm."[14]) The basic structure underlying much of Griffith's editing at Biograph is this pattern of interweaving one location or action with another, of interrupting one line of narrative development by a separate one.

The history of parallel editing before 1908 still needs to be written. Although isolated examples of it appear before 1908 (particularly in European films), it is extremely rare in American films

before Griffith. Further research may reveal that the role of Griffith in making it a common element in film narrative will be his strongest claim as one of the fathers of the narrative film style. In any case, by 1909 Griffith structures parallel editing in such a way that the pattern overrides the unfolding of action within individual shots. In 1908 Griffith had already cut between two threads of actions (from rescuers speeding to save victims from some imminent disaster, such as a lynching about to take place, or a mechanically rigged pistol about to go off) to build suspense. With *The Drive for Life* (1909), Griffith begins to place his edits so that they interrupt the action at a crucial point, in the middle of a gesture. In this film a woman scorned has sent her ex-lover's fiancee a box of poisoned chocolates. The lover finds out and rushes off in a car to warn his fiancee. Griffith cuts from the speeding automobile to the innocent girl at home about to eat the chocolates. At the end of each shot of the fiancee, she is in the middle of an action: holding the chocolate to her lips or opening her mouth. Of course when we cut back to her, she hasn't eaten the chocolate (she is interrupted by her sisters, or drops it, or merely kisses it). Griffith builds suspense, then, not only by cutting away from the dangerous situation, but also by placing his edit at a point where the action is incomplete. The pattern of the editing overrides the natural unfolding of the action. The action's continuity is noticeably interrupted, its unity sliced and its development suspended, by the structure of the shots. One senses, then, the intervention of the storyteller, the manipulator of narrative signs, who directly invokes the audience's participation by withholding—for a moment—the desired information.

Griffith used a structure similar to parallel editing in non-suspense sequences as well. The most famous example of this is in *A Corner in Wheat* (1909). In this film Griffith cuts from the financial gain of the Wheat King to the suffering he causes farmers and the poor. In this case the primary thrust of Griffith's editing is not simultaneity (though that is not ruled out) but contrast (Metz's "parallel syntagm"). This contrast pattern of editing, alternating rich with poor, is found in a number of Griffith's Biograph films. First sketched in *The Song of the Shirt* (1908), it also appears in *The Usurer* (1910), *Gold Is Not All* (1910), and *One Is Business, the Other Is Crime* (1912). The interweaving in these films of rich and poor, exploiters and exploited, is articulated by pairs of shots that sharply contrast. The death of a poverty-stricken woman is cut with bosses eating heartily at a restaurant (*The Song of the Shirt*); The Wheat

King's lavish entertainment is contrasted with poor people unable to buy bread (*A Corner in Wheat*); a poor couple plays with their children while a rich woman's daughter dies (*Gold Is Not All*). The intervention here of the storyteller allows the creation of a moral voice, who not only involves the audience in reading the narrative signs—recognizing the contrast—but also instructs them by causing them to draw a moral conclusion.

It is interesting to note that, in *The Usurer,* a 1910 near remake of *A Corner in Wheat,* Griffith combines this contrast pattern with the practice of suspending the outcome of an action by an edit. In one shot we see Henry Walthall as a poor man ruined by the Usurer's greed. He stands alone in his apartment, points a gun to his breast, and shuts his eyes. We cut to the usurer at a lavish party raising his glass. We return to Walthall staggering and falling dead on the floor. The pattern here is very interesting. On the one hand we have the structure, already established in the film, of contrasting the evil joys of the rich with the miseries of the poor. In addition, we have the intensification given by interrupting actions (both the pistol shot and the Usurer's raised glass; in the shot following Walthall's death we return to the usurer as he drinks). The editing pattern (and particularly the ellipses of the actual firing of the gun, which presumably occurs while we see the usurer raise his glass) certainly seems to indicate simultaneity. The edit involves a degree of suspense, but since no rescue is attempted this is not the main effect of the edit. The ironic juxtaposition with its indication of cause and effect becomes the principal meaning. Later in the film, Griffith cuts from the usurer, accidentally locked in his own safe and beginning to suffocate, to Walthall's dead body, underscoring the irony.

In Griffith's later Biograph films, some form of alternating pattern increasingly underlies the narrative form, even in cases that don't involve suspense or contrast. In 1912 and 1913, the first two shots frequently introduce two characters (or two groups of characters) before they have actually met. The characters' stories will be intercut in the opening sections of the film until a scene where they are finally narratively linked. Such interweaving seems to be Griffith's basic narrative schema. Griffith also further articulates its use for dramatic effects. In *A Woman Scorned* (1911), Griffith uses interruption of an action and contrast to accent an act of violence. A doctor (Wilfred Lucas) has been lured to an apartment by a gang of thieves who knock him unconscious. As he falls, we cut on this

action to his wife and child at home sitting down to supper. In this shot, the father's empty place at the table is prominent in the left foreground. Although one might be dubious that this is intentional (similar structuring of space across edits in other Biograph films leads me to think that it is), it is worth pointing out that this empty place occupies the same area of the frame that Lucas collapsed into in the previous shot.

Later in the same film, Griffith enhances a contrast edit by presenting two radically opposed but visually similar actions. He cuts from the mother untying her daughter's shoes as she lies on her bed to the thieves tying a gag on Lucas, who is also lying in bed. By this kind of visual rhyming, Griffith develops a visual structure that overlays and articulates the narrative action taking place in the shots themselves. This elaboration of the formal elements of the shots beyond the necessary narrative information is one of the clearest examples of Griffith's tendency to make the storyteller evident to the audience. The act of arranging the narrative information becomes as important as simply conveying it.

During the Biograph period, Griffith's use of patterns of alternating shots takes on several meanings, usually distinguishable from each other, but at points shading into one another, as though not yet moulded into rigid formulas. The meanings of parallel editing patterns become particularly complex when they are used in relation to the psychological development of characters. Very early in his career appears a type of parallel editing based on the thoughts of his characters. Here we can see Griffith using parallel editing to provide one of the most basic *desiderata* of a bourgeois narrative—psychological motivation. By the intercutting of disparate locations and characters within certain narrative contexts, Griffith creates, as it were, a sort of psychological space. Significantly, its first use is in an adaptation of a respected literary source, his 1908 version of Tennyson's *Enoch Arden, After Many Years.*

The intercutting of the faithful wife at home with her distant shipwrecked husband provides one of Griffith's first cuts on action. As the husband on his desert island kisses his wife's locket, we cut back to her standing on her porch, arms outstretched, as if yearning for her absent husband; the splicing together of the gestures metaphorically unites the characters across vast space. Later in the Biograph period, Griffith's editing frequently joins characters separated in space. The vehicle of these connections is often a prayer (*The Fugitive, The Broken Locket, The Last Deal, A Pueblo Legend*).

Many shots of this sort include a token of the absent person, a locket or necklace, which the characters gaze at as they long for reunion (*Rose of Salem Town, The Broken Locket, After Many Years*). This pattern is often combined not only with an interrupted action (like the kiss in *After Many Years*), but also with a contrast. In *The Fugitive,* for instance, we cut from a mother praying, to her son's death on the battlefield. The defining quality of the parallel editing in these instances is its participation in the characters' desires; the motive for the editing springs from their desire to cross space and join their loved ones. Through the editing their emotional union is stressed along with their physical separation.

There are films in which the expression of an emotional sympathy between separated characters takes on a nearly supernatural overtone. This is especially true in those cuts where the simultaneity of events is stressed. In both *As It Is in Life* (1910) and *In Life's Cycle* (1910), Griffith cuts from a pair of lovers embracing to a male relative of the girl far removed from the scene. The relatives (who in both films disapprove of the girl's lover) suddenly look very disturbed or shiver involuntarily. When we return in the following shot to the couple of *In Life's Cycle,* the girl too suddenly looks upset, as if aware of her brother's distant disapproval.

In *Sunshine Sue* (1910), Griffith expresses this type of emotional connection over distances through composition as well as editing. A beloved daughter (Marion Sunshine) is first introduced playing the piano for her parents. Later in the film she is stranded, penniless, in a big city. Getting a job at a music store, she is preyed upon by the store's manager. Upset, she leans against a piano in the left foreground of the shot and weeps. Griffith cuts to her father in the family parlor looking at a piano (which is associated with the daughter from the first shot) and patting it fondly. Not only do both shots contain pianos, both pianos occupy the left foreground of the frame. Through this edit and the similar arrangement of space in each shot, Griffith transfers the father's caress from the piano to his distant daughter who occupies the same area of the frame in the preceding shot.

Less dramatic than these shots of emotional union, but perhaps more revealing of the psychological meanings Griffith derived from parallel editing, is what I will call the "motive shot." An early example of this kind of editing appears in *A Salvation Army Lass* (1908). A tough (Harry Salter) has scorned his girlfriend's (Florence Lawrence) attempt to dissuade him from joining a burglary with his

cronies, and has knocked her down. As he and his gang creep along the edge of a building, he suddenly stops and looks off screen. Griffith cuts to a brief shot of Lawrence still on the ground. In the next shot we return to Salter, who changes his mind about the burglary, hands his gun back to his companions, and leaves the frame. The editing pattern articulates and explains Salter's decision. It splits in two the moment when Salter changes his course of action, interrupting it with a shot of the factor that causes the change. The editing portrays a mental act and supplies a motive for the action ("He thinks of his true love. . . .").

However, it is the double nature of this shot which reveals the still fluid stage in the evolution of film syntax which characterizes Griffith's Biograph films. The shot of Lawrence is not univocally defined as a mental image, released from the objective space and time of the diegesis. The use of parallel editing remains an intervention of the storyteller who "points out" the character's motivation, rather than assigning the shot unambiguously to the subjectivity of the character. Salter's off-screen look could define the shot of Lawrence as an awkward sort of point-of-view shot. Or we could stress the simultaneity of the shot and see it as a strict parallel edit, conveying the information of what is happening to Lawrence as Salter sets off on the burglary. But since it neither offers new narrative information (at most it tells us that Lawrence is *still* lying there), nor develops a suspense situation, its articulation of Salter's decision remains its primary effect.

This three-shot pattern frequently recurs in Griffith's Biograph films to portray a decision by a character. Its appearance in *A Plain Song* (1910) is typical. A girl (Mary Pickford) is leaving her aged parents and running off with a carnival man. At the train station, she sees a group of old people being taken off to the poor house. Struck by the scene, Pickford stands motionless in the foreground. Griffith cuts to her parents at home. We then return to Pickford, still frozen in her previous position. The carnival man approaches with the train tickets, but she turns away from him and runs home. Again the interpolated shot of the parents articulates and motivates a decision. In this case there is no possibility of its being a point-of-view shot. Mary's frozen stance, as if she were in deep thought, also stresses the psychological nature of the shot. We can find the same pattern in *The Sands O' Dee* (1912). Mae Marsh has decided not to keep an arranged meeting with an artist on the beach. She stands motionless by her window. We cut to a shot of the artist wrapped in

a shawl, waiting at the beach. We cut back to Mae, who apparently has changed her mind and climbs out her window to keep the assignation.

In both these instances, we must hesitate before we describe the interpolated shot purely as a mental image. Pickford's parents *are* waiting at home for her, and the artist *is* waiting on the beach for Mae. The shot of the artist includes details that Mae could not "imagine," such as his paisley shawl. The shots therefore are also parallel edits to events occurring at the same time. This dual role of expressions of the characters' thoughts and parallel edits to autonomous events shows the still pliable nature of Griffith's film syntax at this point.

Interestingly, in 1913, we find Griffith modifying this pattern, probably in order to present the interpolated shot more unequivocally as a mental image. In the opening of *Death's Marathon* (1913), a clerk (Walter Miller) looks up from his work with a dreamy expression. The next shot begins extremely underexposed and then brightens in a camera-made "fade-in." We see a girl (Blanche Sweet) seated on a bench in a garden facing the camera in a rather static posture (this is her first appearance in the film). The shot fades and we return to Miller, who rouses himself as if to shake off his reverie and return to work. The use of fades and the actionless shot of Sweet seem to signal the shot as Miller's mental image, rather than a parallel edit which indicates that Sweet is sitting in a garden at this precise moment. It is in this way that Griffith presents memories in *The Birth of a Nation,* by a thoughtful look of a character and an interpolated shot bracketed by fades. The fades signal an entrance into another dimension, that of unequivocal mental images. However, even this example is not an unambiguous image of a single character's subjectivity. The three shots from *Death's Marathon* just described are themselves bracketed by two shots of Walthall, who plays a coworker of Miller. Walthall too is in love with Sweet, and this rivalry forms the basic dynamic of the plot. At the end of the first shot of Walthall he pauses. When we return to him after the shots of Miller and Sweet, he too seems to be emerging from a daydream. The shot of Sweet, then, could be interpreted as a shared mental image. Again the pattern seems to be a gesture of the storyteller unwilling to relinquish the authority of the image to the subjectivity of any one character.

Griffith's use of parallel editing in the films at Biograph created not only a narrative form, but a form of narration, a storyteller to tell

the story. Through parallel editing Griffith could create suspense by interrupting action and delaying information, make moral judgements, underscore characters' desires, and reveal motivation. All of these techniques fulfilled essential conditions for a new bourgeois narrative form, the rival of theater and the novel. However, the process of fulfilling these demands does not explain away all effects of the technique. The multiple meanings gained from this one technique in different situations show something of its enormous power and far-reaching implications. By breaking the continuity of actions, by composing similarly frames that are separated in space, by interpolating shots in the middle of decisions, Griffith both creates a fissure in the continuity of the narrative and forms a synthesis on a new level. Griffith's editing becomes a noticeable force which suspends, interrupts, and yet knits together actions within his narratives. What is sensed behind this narrative labor is the storyteller. This invisible but sensed hand will reach its apogee in Griffith's commercial disaster *Intolerance*. The "uniter of here and hereafter" will prove an obstacle to much of his audience, a frustration rather than a guide. Already towards the end of his tenure at Biograph the trade journals (which had praised some of his earlier films for their "high class" appeal) were finding his style too disjoined, too brutal, and were complaining about the large number of shots in Biograph films, the disorienting nature of their editing.[15] This kind of dissatisfaction may have had a role in the tension between company executives and Griffith that led to his leaving Biograph in 1913.

Increasingly in the feature era, the storyteller would blend indistinguishably into the unfolding of the action of the narrative, and Griffith's style would be found old-fashioned or clumsy. Writing the history of this process and the many factors that contribute to it—the rise of the studio style as pioneered by Ince, the imporance of film stars, and a new economic organization of the film industry—will require a great deal of new research. Griffith's place within that history is complex. But it is clear that Griffith's development of parallel editing during the Biograph years opens a tradition that not only moves toward the invisible editing of the classical Hollywood narrative, but also to (as he was the first to admit) the radical understanding of montage in the films of Sergei Eisenstein.

Tom Gunning writes on film from New York City.

Notes

1. *The Moving Picture World,* Vol. 5, pp. 82, 84.
2. Russell, Merritt, "The Films of D. W. Griffith and Their Social Impact (1908-1915)" unpublished PhD. dissertation, Harvard University, p. 196.
3. *The Edison Kinetogram,* October 15, 1909, p. 2.
4. *The Moving Picture World,* Vol. 4, p. 631.
5. *The Nickelodeon,* Vol. 2, p. 5.
6. Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 101.
7. *The Moving Picture World,* Vol. 5, p. 443.
8. *The Nickelodeon,* Vol. 2, p. 13.
9. *The Moving Picture World,* Vol. 4, p. 476.
10. *The Nickelodeon,* Vol. 2, p. 135.
11. *The Moving Picture World,* Vol. 5, p. 278.
12. Merritt, op. cit., pp. 196-198.
13. See. for example, the reviews of Edison's productions of Molnar's *The Devil* and Halm's *Ingomar* in *The New York Dramatic Mirror,* September 19, 1908, p. 9, and *The Moving Picture World,* Vol. 3, p. 231, respectively.
14. Christian Metz, *Film Language* (New York, 1974), p. 104.
15. Samples of such reviews can be found in George Pratt, *Spellbound in Darkness* (Greenwich, Connecticut, 1973), pp. 95-105.