Between the Eye and the World

The Emergence of the Point-of-View Shot

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Introduction

This study originates from a conviction and a question. The conviction – today a shared belief, common to most film scholars – is that the set of filmic forms dominating Western institutional cinema is the product of a culture and its history, rather than the expression of what was once presumed to be "naturalness". The question concerns the emergence of one of the most fascinating filmic forms, commonly called the point-of-view shot, which represents on the screen the characters' gaze, showing what they see from their own optical vantage point.

The relationship between this conviction and this question may appear quite unrelated. Actually, it relies on the fact that, even today, ordinary spectators perceive the point-of-view shot as a "natural" device, which everyone understands without necessarily realising that it needs to be understood. And yet, to claim that the set of filmic forms dominating Western cinema is the product of a culture and its history means precisely to question the apparent naturalness of its devices. This study, then, investigates the emergence of what we call today a point-of-view shot. It examines the first period in cinema history – generally referred to as early cinema – in which some films include images representing what a character sees, usually looking through an optical instrument or a keyhole, and thus showing some views mediated through the evidence of a gaze. It tries, therefore, to provide an answer to the question: "Where does the point-of-view shot come from?", analysing early films in which the representation of the gaze makes its first appearances, so as to trace the driving forces which brought it about. That is, the forces which were conducive to the emergence of this form, rather than another.

In doing so, this study formulates three hypotheses.

The first is that the form assumed by the representation of the gaze in these films does not spring from nowhere. On the contrary, it derives from scientific, iconographic and performance practices which existed well before the advent of the cinema, and which converge in the cinema in the form of a trick, of an optical artifice, displayed as an exciting attraction. When examined in the light of their historical context, these early occurrences do not appear to be dominated by the urge to build a solid and linear set of film editing rules, nor a film narrative "grammar". Rather, they seem to respond to the idea of showing spectacular views, autonomous and in movement, often magnified, mechanically reproduced and otherwise inaccessible to the human eye. Indeed, the main addressee

of these views is not so much the viewing character in the film as it is the spectator in the audience, for whom they were actually conceived.

The second hypothesis is that this same form flows somewhere. More precisely, it feeds into the perfection of an editing practice capable of linking shots through a character's gaze – among other things – in order to tell stories. It enables, then, the emergence of a pattern apt to establish a link between the subject and the object of a look, which, over time, is codified into a match-cut practice that will be called an eyeline match or a point-of-view shot, depending on its specific form. This editing practice, quite as much as those especially related to the articulation of space and time, will be of crucial importance in the process of elaborating that set of filmic forms mentioned above, which are indeed also key features in the development of cinema as a narrative system.

Lastly, a third hypothesis concerns the fact that, in spite of the name that the point-of-view shot will acquire over time, these early occurrences of the representation of the gaze are, at first, unrelated to either narrative purposes or to the expression of the characters' "point of view" or subjectivity, for which specific forms are developed from the very beginning. In early cinema, in fact, the expression of a character's subjectivity is a prerogative of those mental images – oneiric, visionary or fantastic – which constitute the representation of a kind of inner gaze, i.e., visions originating inside that character's mind. In other words, since its very beginning cinema has elaborated specific forms for the representation of the gaze on the one hand, and for the representation of subjectivity on the other.

This study, however, also originated long ago. It started out as my 1982 graduation thesis for the University of Bologna, dedicated to the classical point-of-view shot from a formal and narratological perspective. It comes as well from my subsequent 1989 PhD dissertation, presented at the University of Bologna and devoted to the emergence of the point-of-view shot in early European cinema. Both studies generated several publications, which are partly merged in this book, updated and expanded with new data, and enriched with further in-depth examinations. This has given me the opportunity to "rethink cinema" – as this book series called "Rethinking Cinema" requires – in the light of the conviction and the question mentioned above.

The last three decades, in fact, have been of crucial importance for both cinema and film studies. The 1978 Congress of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) held in Brighton, often considered as a turning point in early cinema studies, was responsible for more than renewing the interest in the first period of cinema history. Greatly to its credit, it brought together for the first time archivists

and academics from different backgrounds, demonstrating the value of combining their knowledge and investigative perspectives. In this way, it showed academics that the results achieved by the theoretical and methodological surveys of previous decades could be fruitfully integrated with a philological and historical perspective, in order to contribute to a renewal of cinema history. And it showed archivists that theoretical and methodological knowledge could contribute to a profitable reconsideration of the historical and philological perspective. In short, it demonstrated to scholars that cinema history should no longer be undertaken without the contribution of theoretical research and, vice versa, that theoretical research should not be undertaken without an understanding of the historical context.

In a way, this study has converged with these dynamics. On the one hand, it encountered the wave of past theoretical film studies, in investigating a specific filmic form and in differentiating the filmic technique from subjectivity as a stylistic pattern, challenging commonplace ideas about equating the point-of-view shot with the "character's point of view". On the other hand, it encountered the forward-looking wave set up by the Brighton Symposium, in investigating the emergence of this filmic form as the product of a culture and its history, questioning its apparent naturalness and contrasting, on historical bases, the tendency to mistake the point-of-view shot for subjectivity (specifically, the viewing character's subjectivity).

Of course, in the last three decades cinema and film studies have also shifted their main area of interest from textual to contextual issues, at times privileging the exploration of historically and geographically situated cinema cultures over the formal aspects of films. Thus, some of the topics investigated here could seem to be less urgent than before. However, the question at the heart of this study is still crucial, and addresses a topic that is very much alive in the field of textual analysis as historically conceived. Consequently, rethinking cinema in the light of this question – and of the hypotheses formulated to answer it – can provide new knowledge, as well as a stimulus to further research.

Notably, it can inspire further research on modern (and postmodern) vision as a mediated vision: an important topic in contemporary debates in the digital media landscape. In these debates, the point-of-view shot is often considered to be fundamental, especially for its innovative ways of overcoming the classical pattern and its diegetic anchoring, through recourse to a mediating machine that underscores its technological nature. The contemporary discussion, however, cannot make any real progress if it ignores the early period of cinema history; that is, it cannot really be pursued without a deep knowledge of the origins of the point-of-view

shot and the peculiar features of its first appearances. As a matter of fact – and in spite of their reciprocal specificities – the on-going changes in point-of-view structure cannot be fully understood without considering the significant similarities between early representations of the gaze and contemporary digital media point-of-view-shot devices, themselves strongly affected by technological innovations at the turn of the last century.

This study can provide the proper instruments for such understanding. Tracing the emergence of the point-of-view shot at the turn of the previous century, which was marked by a true perceptual revolution thanks to immensely important optical innovations and scientific advances, it enables us to understand to what extent the above-mentioned similarities are probably not accidental. It shows, in fact, that what will become the point of-view shot has developed from the interposition of a prosthesis *between the eye and the world* – a not-yet-diegetic eye – capable of modifying the conditions needed to access the visible, and thus to expand the human potentialities of looking.

Likewise, this study can contribute to current debates on early film spectatorship as a situated experience, which needs to be historicised from a transnational perspective as well. That is, it suggests ways in which rethinking issues around transnationality can be a productive concept for early cinema history, while also legitimising the idea that some features of early cinema spectators exist outside national diversifications. Many recent studies on this topic have demonstrated the richness of studying spectatorship in its various concrete manifestations – along the lines of gender and ethnicity, or by focusing on instances of local, regional or national reception. However, this study considers early cinema spectatorship on a more general level, and in a broader cultural context, analysing the specific forms of early occurrences of the representation of the gaze in order to outline what makes them representative of a common, culturally and historically situated experience. That is, what makes them symptomatic of the above-mentioned experience of the perceptual revolution, modelled into a specific filmic form.

Last but not least, this study leaves me deeply indebted to several people that I would like to thank here. First of all, I want to thank all the professionals from the BFI National Archive and the BFI National Library in London, the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin, the Centre National de la Cinématographie in Bois D'Arcy (Paris), the Cinémathèque Française in Paris, the Institut Jean Vigo in Perpignan, the M.o.M.A. Archive in New York, the Cineteca del Friuli in Gemona, the Cineteca Nazionale in Rome, the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Turin and the Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna, all of whom helped me

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Chapter 1

The Archaeology of a Filmic Form

1.1. Early Cinema, Early Spectator

Among the flickering views that inhabit early cinema screens, one image recurs so often that it becomes interesting in its own right. This is the matte or mask, usually circular or keyhole-shaped, through which astronomers and scientists, barbers and porters, maids and pageboys, students and urchins are to be found peering. They may be ordinary people or fantasy characters, adults or children, proletarians or bourgeois, yet all of them are inevitably voyeurs (or voyeuses) intent on exercising their "faculty of sight".[1]

On a strictly iconographic level, this matte is identical to the one representing the telescope through which James Bond observes his enemy's moves while playing cards in *Goldfinger* (Guy Hamilton, 1964), or to the snooperscope through which the killer in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) secretly observes the agent who is trying to hunt him down. – Or – to quote another, more recent example – it is identical to the peephole through which, in *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006), a nextdoor neighbour sees the Stasi Captain Wiesler breaking into Georg Dreyman's apartment. In other words, it is identical to the matte still used today in contemporary cinema to signify the presence of a character looking through the lens of a telescope (or binoculars, or any other optical viewer), in order to create what is commonly called the point-of-view shot. An ambiguous name[2] for

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1 Or "faculty of vision": see Dagrada (1990b).

2 The expression "point-of-view shot", like the Italian "soggettiva", suggests the overlapping of an expressive and psychological function with a more properly perceptive function. This ambiguity can be found in other languages too. In French, for example, the evocation of a supposed subjectivity of a character, whose gaze is represented, is suggested both by the expression "caméra subjective" (introduced by Jean Mitry and full of psychological implications) and by the expression "plan subjectif" (used by Christian Metz), which not only evokes the expression of the viewing character's subjectivity, but is also problematic in that it calls to mind a single shot, instead of a structure that may comprise more than one shot (see Mitry, 1965; and Metz, 1971). Neither does the French term "ocularisation" – introduced by Jost (1987) as a narratological notion – escape this risk of equivocation; for, although it distances itself from the sphere of knowledge (reserved for the concept of "focalisation" as elaborated by Genette, 1972), it is not completely free from the suggestion of a

a fascinating filmic form, showing on the screen what a character sees, and thus making that character the subject of a gaze.

Film scholars have often played particular attention to this filmic form, because of its multiple implications which can be applied to the spheres of film style, enunciation, cinematic language, narrative perspective, subjectivity and distribution of knowledge; because of its numerous variations, such as eyeline match, shot/reverse-shot, mental image and "memory image";[3] finally, because of its wide popularity, which turned it into a much used and abused technique,[4] appearing today not only in fiction films, but also in non-fiction films, docudramas, documentaries, mockumentaries, advertising, cartoons, comics, and across the whole range of television genres, as well as video game genres. Once in a while, someone even decides to rechristen it,[5] although spectators understand it without needing to know it has a name, or what this name might be.

Nowadays, the matte as employed in early cinema is rarely used,[6] since the point-of-view pattern is indicated in an increasingly essential and elliptical form. Today's spectator needs very few clues to "recognise" it: a simple country road filmed with a hand-held camera moving forward, accompanied by the noise of hurried footsteps, the sound of heavy breathing or of a heart beating, is enough for the action to be interpreted

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subjective experience. The same issue is raised by the English expression "point-of-view shot", which suggests both a single shot and a "point of view", a notion owing its success to its inherent ambiguity. More properly, Brewster (1982) uses the expressions "point-of-view structure" or "point-of view pattern"; and Branigan (1984), in his study on the matter, makes use of both expressions "point-of-view shot" and "point-of-view structure".

3 This category was proposed by Metz (1972), in his review of Mitry (1965); Branigan (1984) translates it as flashback, but flashback doesn't necessarily imply that it's the character's memory that produces the image, as is the case during a "memory image" ("image-souvenir").

4 The well-known case of *Lady in the Lake* (Robert Montgomery, 1947), a free adaptation of Raymond Chandler's novel, is neither the first nor the only one. In it, very long sequences (alternating with shots of the main character addressing the spectator directly) are entirely made using the point-of-view shot, stemming from the idea that this filmic form is tantamount to a narrative first person singular.

5 During the 1970s and 1980s, the point-of-view shot has been at the centre of entire volumes – or vast sections of them – in the subject area of narratology and film analysis. See especially Browne (1975-6), who called it "depicted glance"; Branigan (1984); Casetti (1986); Jost (1987), who introduced the notion of "ocularisation"; Vernet (1988), who proposed the term "champ personnalisé"; Aumont (1989), who put forward the definition "plan-regard". See also Wardrip-Fruin, Harrigan (ed., 2004) for the use of the expression "First Person Shot" (FPS) in the study of video games. On the issue in early cinema, see in particular the studies collected in Gaudreault (ed., 1988).

6 Yet, see another recent good example in *Letters from Iwo Jima* (Clint Eastwood, 2006); or in *Tamara Drewe* (Stephen Frears, 2010).

as the point-of-view shot of a person fleeing from someone or something, even if the spectator has no idea who it is and has never seen the person's face. It often happens in Dario Argento's or Brian De Palma's films, for example, where an abrupt movement, accompanied by the amplified sound of breathing, is enough to reveal the presence of someone looking: usually a character whom the spectator has not seen up to that point. And a circular matte, such as the one described above, may still be sufficient to suggest the presence of a diegetic look[7] from behind an optical viewer. To create suspense. Tension. Expectation. Anticipation. Apprehension.

Consequently, wondering how and where today's spectator acquires the skills necessary to interpret certain clues and signals – such as the forward of a hand-held camera or a steadicam, or heavy breathing, or a circular matte – as signifying the presence of an unseen character looking (and thus what this character sees) might appear to be a rather idle occupation. Asking where the point-of-view shot comes from could seem a rhetorical question with a self-evident answer: it proceeds from previous occurrences of the matte, described above, from behind which James Bond scrutinises his antagonist's moves. That is, it proceeds from those numerous early films which, for the very first time, show what a character sees by surrounding the image with a matte, identical in form to that used so much later in *Goldfinger*. It is precisely what happens in the best-known of these early films, *Grandma's Reading Glass* (G.A. Smith, 1900), where a child seizes a magnifying glass to observe some objects (a newspaper page, a canary in its cage, a watch…), which appear magnified on screen and framed by a circular matte.

Of course, there are many differences between early films such as *Grandma's Reading Glass* and subsequent point-of-view structure. In films of the following decades the matte itself may be absent. Early films, on the other hand, lack sound and much else. On a substantive level, moreover, the gap is even wider, because James Bond's point-of-view shot informs spectators and influences their participation in the event the British secret agent is involved in. In early films, though, there is often no event at all in which the spectator is invited to participate; there is merely someone looking at something.

Nevertheless, these early films – where a variety of different characters observe a variety of different objects *through something* – still present views which are mediated through the evidence of a gaze.

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[7] In fact, only during a point-of-view shot does the implied optical vantage point belong "to a fictional character whose look mediates the images unfolding on the screen. And it is with that diegetic look that the spectator's reading activity will have to come to terms" (Dagrada, 1986: 116).

Yet, to think that these films really provide *the* answer to the question formulated above would be naïve. *Grandma's Reading Glass*, which is still the earliest-known film to represent a character's gaze, is surely not some miraculous epiphany, the very first appearance of the point-of-view structure. Not only because of the important differences previously mentioned, but also because, even if it were indeed the first film in cinema history to feature the point-of-view structure, referring to it as the "first case", as an epiphany, even as an invention, would not provide a real answer. Determining a filmic form's first occurrences is not enough to define its origins; it is also important to trace the driving forces which brought it about. It is crucial to grasp its cultural dimension, in order to define its role in that transformation process of the visible without which it might not have materialised. Nothing comes from nothing: if we wish to trace the genesis of the point-of-view structure we must also search for the reasons that made possible its emergence in the first place – that is to say, the reasons which favoured the emergence of *this* form, rather than some other.

From this perspective, it is still essential to try to identify these "first cases", for not only do they enable a careful examination of its earliest manifestations; they also exhibit – in their iconographic composition as well as in the themes dealt with – the elements necessary to bring to light the answer we are seeking.

Grandma's Reading Glass, like any other early film where we find this mode of representation of the gaze, belongs to the era of early cinema, which is far distant from what cinema became afterwards. If dealt with on the basis of our present expectations, it would inevitably seem impenetrable, like a foreign language which we do not understand. In fact, the era of early cinema is not defined solely by the films produced in the first fifteen or twenty years of cinema history, but is also inextricably bound up with the spheres of science, spectacle and iconography, within which these films circulated.[8] Parallel to the incubation, gestation and subsequent stabilisation of film entertainment, the age of early cinema was subject to countless scientific, technological and cultural developments, which modified the way in which the whole world was being experienced, and which thus influenced the mechanisms of artistic and imaginative creation.[9] Furthermore, the era of early cinema is the one in which cinema itself emerges as a product halfway between an optical, scientific

[8] This could be said, of course, of any other cinematic era, but seems especially true for early cinema because of its extraordinary conjuncture.

[9] Regarding the importance attributed to the evolution of technologies in the mechanisms of artistic and imaginary creation, see the studies – in other respects distant from one another – conducted by Schivelbusch (1977), Baxandall (1979), Milner (1982) and Crary (1990). On the "History of Vision debate", see in particular Kessler (2009).

phenomenon and a sideshow attraction, where old and new forms of popular entertainment meet. In a way, early cinema itself represents a sort of intersection between past and future forms of spectacle, intertwined with the development of optical techniques and scientific advances.

While this film practice does indeed appear for the first time at this intersection, it does so bearing meanings that are different to the ones understood subsequently, and assumes different modes and roles from those it will have in the years to follow.

For all these reasons, we must approach the origins of the point-of-view structure in an archaeological fashion – in the sense suggested by Michel Foucault.[10] We must map out the scientific and entertainment devices that paved the way for the advent of cinema and merged into it, and excavate its gaps and empty spaces with the meticulousness of an "archaeologist of knowledge", bringing together the history of culture and the history of filmic forms.

Early cinema, in fact, is also a lost cinema; a cinema which has been destroyed and altered, which has been made unknown and inaccessible. In order to fill in its gaps and empty spaces, we must therefore try to reconstruct the discussions which would have taken place at the time that the form we are dealing with makes its earliest appearances. As archaeologists – and philologists – of knowledge, we must strive to trace the history of this form, connecting it with what can be reconstructed of the context in which it was born. That is, we must broaden the notion of source to that network of varied material that Gérard Genette[11] named "paratext" – sales catalogues, advertisements, paper and iconographical documents – and interweave its analysis with the examination of what remains of the films themselves. Sometimes, indeed, this network of paratextual materials constitutes the only proof that a certain film existed. Catalogue descriptions may provide the only clues, if not how these films were viewed, at least how they should have been viewed and might have been received; they can provide suggestions about the possible reception that was expected from the audience, or about the way a lecturer – whenever present – would accompany the screening by commenting on it, and thus directing the audience's understanding in the desired direction.

In other words, in order to learn how to understand correctly those early films where the representation of the gaze makes its first appearances, to grasp their complexity in depth, to fully comprehend their mechanisms and multiple cultural references, we must make the effort to set aside our contemporary competences, adopting instead those possessed by

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[10] See the concept of archaeology of knowledge in Foucault (1969).

[11] See Genette (1987). See also the specific suggestions offered in Cherchi Usai (1994).

early film spectators. We must reject our expectations in order to embrace those of the spectators to whom early cinema is addressed. We must try to "become" those early spectators who would have recognised, in early cinema, their own skills at decoding iconography and spectacle, their own psychological and cultural understanding, as well as the symbolic references to their own horizon of expectations.[12]

But if this is the case, in order to find an adequate answer to our enquiry, we must first change the question from "Where does the point-of-view shot come from?" to "Where does the spectator addressed by this form of representation of the gaze come from?" We must first conduct an enquiry into the early film spectator's perceptual experiences. That is, we must first ask from which images these images are derived, and how the early film spectator would have seen them.

1.1.1. The World As Spectacle

One film suggests, more explicitly than others, an initial answer: *Toto aéronaute* (Pathé, 1906). It features a young boy, Toto, who is first seen leafing through a magazine. Inspired by the illustrations he sees, Toto decides to build a rudimentary, domestic hot-air balloon to be able to head skywards, telescope in hand. The following is an account of the beginning of the film from the November and December 1906 supplement to the Pathé catalogue:

> Toto feuillette une revue illustrée où sont relatés de lointains voyages. Soudain, il lève la tête: une grande idée germe dans son cerveau! Il se frappe le front d'un air important et cherche les matériaux dont il a besoin: un vaste panier d'osier, le filet qui sert à la cuisinière pour faire son marché et l'oreiller de sa maman gonflé à un bec de gaz et soigneusement ficelé, voilà un ballon sérieux! Toto s'embarque, muni de provisions de route: biscuits, confitures… prononce le traditionnel: "Lachez tout" et s'élève dans les airs.[13]

The account goes on, detailing Toto's aerial adventure until its disastrous conclusion, but a brief comparison between the film's contents and this description is enough to clarify that the latter is most explicit in highlighting the part played by the illustrated magazine in Toto's decision.

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[12] About the notion of "horizon of expectations" (*Erwartungshorizont*), see Jauss (1967). Among the wealth of contributions on early film audience and this topic see at least the essais included in Ligensa, Kreimeier (eds., 2009), Schenk, Tröhler, Zimmermann (eds., 2010) and Braun, Keil, King, Moore, Pelletier (2012).

[13] Toto is leafing through an illustrated magazine where faraway journeys are related. Suddenly, he raises his head: a big idea is germinating in his brain! He hits his forehead proudly and looks for the equipment he needs: a large wicker basket, the net bag the cook uses for shopping and his mother's pillow inflated with gas and meticulously tied, here it is a real balloon! Toto goes on board with a load of supplies: biscuits, jam… he utters the traditional words: "Drop everything" and rises up into the air.

This is chiefly because the film does not include everything described in the catalogue; nor could it. *Toto aéronaute* is a more elaborate film than *Grandma's Reading Glass*, as the date of production suggests. Still, it does not have sound, nor does it go through a complex editing process, complete with matches between full shots, medium shots and detail shots, which would enable the audience to see from up close Toto's magazine with its illustrations evocative of adventure in faraway lands.

In fact, the catalogue entry takes care to describe the illustrated magazine (which, in the film, is not easily recognisable as a magazine by an audience today, nor would it have been at the time, were it not for Toto's eloquent gestures). It emphasises the fact that it is precisely by leafing through the magazine that Toto develops the idea of building a balloon out of pieces of household furniture. It likewise specifies that, before setting off into the sky, Toto utters the traditional words "Drop everything". Of course, we may suppose that the lecturer, if present, would have compensated for what the film lacked, by filling in the gaps and declaiming this phrase during the screening. But we may also reasonably suppose that spectators to whom this film was addressed had the knowledge which would enable them to understand it, and to fill in the gaps for themselves by recognising a situation belonging to their own sphere of experiences, whether direct or indirect.

Like the young boy in this Pathé film, early cinema spectators – of whom Toto himself is a sort of cinematic extension – stimulate their imagination by leafing through illustrated magazines. Like any good "icononaut",[14] they have been used to travelling through the gaze for a long time and are familiar with the images Toto observes from above – Paris rooftops, the open sea – because they have already seen those rooftops and that sea many times before. They have seen them during the first film projections, of course, where films presenting city views and landscapes shot from above are abundant since the end of the 19th century. Especially, prior to the cinema,[15] they have seen them in popular prints, in dioramas, in panoramas, in the optical views of the Mondo Nuovo.[16] Early cinema spectators have also seen hot-air balloons many times before, if not in person, at least in print reproductions, in adventure books, as well as through the illustrated accounts of the many aeroplane trips organised at the time, or in the immensely popular magic lantern shows, which were still all the rage during the first years of cinema. Indeed, a French survey

14 See Brunetta (1992) and (1997).

15 Or after the emergence of cinema, in the architectural reconstructions at the Universal Exhibitions, like the *vieux Paris* reconstruction by Albert Robida in the 1900 Universal Exhibition in Paris.

16 On this topic, see Zotti Minici (ed., 1988a), (ed., 1988b) and (2003).

of the time points out that beginning in 1904 – two years before the Pathé film and a good eight years after the public inauguration of the Lumière *Cinématographe* – one of the magic lantern's "new entry" subjects was precisely the "navigation aérienne par les ballons dirigeables",[17] that is, dirigible flights.

The magic lantern, which was almost three centuries old and popular enough, since the second half of the 19th century, to feature in daily shows in many Western cities, contributed greatly to the development of the visual imagination of an audience which was to become, between the 19th and the 20th century, the same audience that would watch early films. This eclectic box *par excellence* – preceded by the *camera obscura* and the *lanterna viva*[18] which thrived during the entire Middle Ages – was able, from the very beginning, to move freely in every field of knowledge and pleasure. It turned the eye into the privileged organ which could access the latest areas of science and entertainment, progress and wonder, transforming into spectacle both the world itself and the process of acquiring knowledge about it.

Leafing through the principal magic lantern catalogues may be sufficient to make us realise how the immense repertoire of this device assembles all the frontiers of the visible in a synthesis, establishing its position as a means of both education and entertainment. It combines astronomical, panoramic, scientific, exotic, licentious and fantastic views, as well as images of natural disasters and artificial paradises. It offers, moreover, a wide variety of subjects intertwined in different ways with the themes of the scientific and technological progress that revolutionised 19th century life, and which the 19th century rewarded by turning science into spectacle. Jacques Perriault gives an account of the magic lantern projections at a conference at the Sorbonne in 1880, quoting

> une partie de la surface solaire, le globe lunaire, une éclipse de soleil (par tableau animé), les principales formes de l'aérostat, la machine à perforer les montagnes, la roue en dessous, une presse hydraulique […], la coupe en long du téléphone de Graham Bell, le microphone…[19]

Perriault also quotes technological topics such as railways, telegraph cables, natural history, blood cells, microscopic photography… All these topics will reappear as spectacle in many early films, like the numerous astronomical subjects, which are also to be found, for instance, in the

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17 Perriault (1981: 113).

18 Literally, "bright lantern" or living lantern: on this topic see Mannoni (1994: 37 ff.).

19 A part of the solar surface, the lunar globe, a solar eclipse (by animated tableau), the main lines of the aerostat, the machine for tunnelling into mountains, the wheel below, the hydraulic press […], the cross-section of Graham Bell's telephone, the microphone… Perriault (1981: 109 ff.).

1884 catalogue of magic lantern *plaques* by Molteni.[20] Here, out of a total of over 8,000 titles, 115 are views of astronomical subjects, and 275 are views of popular astronomy. But there are also images related to the voyage theme (once again, the Molteni catalogue includes numerous illustrations of "géographie et voyages": 886 numbered views and 3,500 uncatalogued views, to be added to the remaining 8,000). These travel images, astronomical views, plates of scientific or technological subjects, together with the imagination they stimulate, are precisely what emerge on early cinema screens. The same can be said of the cityscapes, reproduced in the views of panoramas and dioramas; of *trompe l'œil* images reproduced in the optical views of the Mondo Nuovo; of the kaleidoscopic images reproduced in optical effects and more.

We could go on adding elements to this list, but the essential point for now is already clear: on a strictly thematic level, the cinema becomes part of the spectacle and the iconography of the last years of the 19th century without making a particularly original contribution. Instead, it might be said to exploit – in more advanced technological ways – themes and subjects that had already enjoyed great popularity elsewhere. In other words, the images occupying those early cinema screens had already occupied screens for other entertainments: the magic lantern, the Mondo Nuovo, the panorama, the diorama, phantasmagoria, shadow play, even the screen at the Musée Grévin where Emile Reynaud showed his *Pantomimes Lumineuses*. Moreover, all these images continue to light up the same screens, as well as new ones (for example, *Cinérama*, Hale's Tours, the giant screen installed by the Lumière brothers at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1900), long after the advent of the *Cinématographe*.

Many early films are inspired by or taken from images pertaining to other forms of entertainment, previous or coeval, as the three following examples illustrate. *Fire!* (Williamson, 1901) draws on the popular magic lantern story, *Bob the Fireman*, a British series dating back to at least 1880.[21] *Histoire d'un crime* (Pathé, 1901) derives from the homonymous

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[20] Alfred Molteni, heir to a long line of optical system manufacturers of Italian descent, was a lecturer and the author of important works on the magic lantern (*Instructions pratiques sur l'emploi des appareils de projection*, 1st ed., Paris, 1878; *Emploi des projections lumineuses dans l'enseignement primaire*, Paris, A. Molteni, n.d.; *Catalogue des tableaux sur verre en noir et en couleur pour l'enseignement par les projections*, Paris, 1884). He was a committed supporter of the didactic use of the lantern, and from 1872 onwards he ran the family business, producing specialised optical material. About his collection, see especially Perriault (1981: 110-111) and Mannoni (1994: 269-271).

[21] Reproduced in Gaudreault (ed., 1979) and – partially – in Musser (1991).

waxwork series presented at the Musée Grévin in 1882.[22] *Le jardinier et le petit espiègle* (as well as its "remake", *Arroseur et arrosé*)[23] may have been suggested to Louis Lumière by his younger brother, Edouard, who had certainly seen – if not the plates themselves – at least some illustrations taken from Herman Vogel's plates for *L'arroseur*, published in Paris in 1887 by the *Librairie Quantin* along the model of Epinal pictures for children (in fact, the Vogel plates tell the same story as the Lumière film, although set in the street and with different characters).[24]

In addition, the images which are framed by the matte we are concerned with are directly imported from the magic lantern, or from other optical and popular entertainment forms fashionable at the time. As with other images that had already reappeared on early screens, once again they are cityscapes, solar eclipses, astronomical views, scientific curiosities, images of insects magnified through the microscope (the 1884 Molteni catalogue includes thirty views of "applications du microscope" as well),[25] or even vaguely licentious images that contemporary taste considered saucy. These are all subjects which derive from the 19th century visual imaginary.

To watch these images, however, in *Toto aéronaute* a resourceful Toto grabs a telescope. In other words, to gain access to those images, to admire a sea view or the Paris rooftops, a hot-air balloon is not enough for Toto: he requires the mediation of an optical device. For although, thematically speaking, cinema enters the visual universe of the time without producing substantial changes, it nevertheless sanctions new and more advantageous conditions of visibility for this thematic repertoire. It stresses the fact that the conditions required to access the visible in the world have changed forever; and that this change, which started well before the emergence of cinema, is brought to its completion by cinema itself. It therefore makes visible, among other things, the image of a matte by means of which some characters can exercise – with excitement and determination – a new visual capacity.

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22 See Schwartz (1998) for the reproduction of the seven tableaux: the crime from start to finish, as in a serial novel.

23 Both erroneously known as *L'arroseur arrosé*, 1895's *Le jardinier et le petit espiègle* is not to be confused with *Arroseur et arrosé* (No. 99), telling the same story, seemingly with the same interpreters, but shot by Louis Lumière one or two years later; cf. Pinel (1994).

24 Although Louis Lumière always denied the connection, on this topic see Sadoul (1946) and Pinel (1994). This popular subject was not only presented more than once by the Lumières themselves, but was also copied by others, for example by the Bamforth Company with *The Biter Bit* (1900), and by Edwin S. Porter for Edison with *Scarecrow Pump* (1904). Indeed, it was also a popular magic lantern subject.

25 On the interesting story of the projected microscopic world, see Godbey (2004).

The chance to benefit from something more than just the organ of sight to gain access to what is outside the self, that is, an optical and mechanical prosthesis which can extend the eye's natural limits, is what these voyeuristic characters and their contemporary spectators share. The complacent act of exercising a new "faculty of sight", aided by the mediation of a machine, is the common denominator linking early cinema spectators to their many filmic extensions who, like Toto, inhabit the films where this form of the representation of the gaze appears. Seeing and experiencing the world – the whole world, including that world which, until then, was considered to be "unseeable" – has become an act which is now really *possible*. Thus, an act *that can be seen*. It has become a shared, commonly experienced act, established after a long period of incubation and finally reaching a turning point: one relating to a *fin de siècle* which draws on the remnants of an authentic, bloodless, perceptual revolution.

1.1.2. Transformations of the Visible

In discussions on the "birth" of the cinema, some claim that German primacy, that of the Skladanowsky brothers, should be recognised over the universally acknowledged French primacy of the Lumière brothers. On the contrary, others deny – as a matter of principle – that such a primacy should belong to anyone, tracing cinema's origins to well before the invention of animated photography and its economical exploitation on a large screen, before Athanasius Kircher's *Ars magna lucis et umbrae* (1646), before Christiaan Huygens's animated glass for projections, even beyond Plato's Myth of the cave (*The Republic*, 514a-515d).

One thing is certain, though: in the history of western culture, the studies which lead to the invention of cinema belong to that trend in philosophical thought which, from Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 980a, 23) onwards, gives sight pre-eminence among the human faculties of perception. Even when it assigns sight an illusory value, as opposed to cognitive value. Even when it reproaches sight for surrendering to fascinations and deception instead of applying the methods of verification and observation. And even within the quarrel between iconoclasm and iconophilia, which is still not settled today – and which is, in a way, reawakened in the opposition between Charles Baudelaire and Doctor Frankenstein proposed by Noël Burch.[26] This debate does not actually question the eye's supremacy: if anything, it serves to discuss what its means and especially what its goals should be. Moreover, it in no way reduces the importance of the eye in accessing the sphere of the visible (whether the sensible or the supersensual reality; a reproduction of the real or a means towards knowledge of a different or superior degree), but rather elaborates, in any

[26] See Burch (1990).

case, the eye's process of perfection, in the direction of an excess.[27] That is, the direction of exceeding the eye's physiological limits, going beyond the barriers imposed by the practice of ordinary vision.

In this perspective, the primordial act from which the "birth" of the cinema derives does not matter. More important are the transformations of the visible rising above the natural limits that the gaze is subject to, on which the advent of a new type of spectator depends. In other words, what matters are those changes in perception that are produced by the mediation of a *machine*, a device able to expand the human eye's potentialities whilst modifying the conditions needed to access the visible.

Vision machines[28] can of course be found in ancient times. Descriptions of the workings of the *camera obscura* are found in Aristotle. In the Middle Ages opticians and astronomers manufactured and improved upon it, creating a version known as the *lanterna viva*, mentioned above, while the magic lantern appeared as early as the second half of the 17th century. Generally known by this name from 1688 onwards,[29] the magic lantern was to enjoy enduring and widespread success, interwoven, in the 18th century, with the vogue for optical views and the Mondo Nuovo then sweeping Europe, as well as with the trend of the panorama, patented in 1787 by Englishman Robert Barker. But it was mainly during the 19th century that the slow process of transformation of the act of viewing reached a decisive turning point.

On the one hand, this is the period when these viewing devices proliferated and were perfected. Parallel to the advancement of the magic lantern in reproducing movement, there is the "invention" of photography, of the diorama, of countless optical toys such as the thaumatrope, the stroboscope, the phenakistoscope, the zoëtrope, the stereoscope, the kaleidoscope, and the praxinoscope…

On the other hand, the destiny of these viewing devices overlaps with the cultural changes produced by industrial progress. In particular, the advent of the railway, and the consequent alteration in people's perception of time and space, plays a fundamental role in what has been called the *Panoramatisierung* (panoramatisation)[30] of the look.

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27 Regarding this issue, see the suggestions offered in Starobinski (1961).

28 On this topic, notably in early film theories, see Paci (2006).

29 See Mannoni (1994).

30 The expression is Dolf Sternberger's (1938): he speaks of a "panoramatisation of the world" and of "panoramatic" perception, in order to describe the modifications in perception which occurred in Europe during the 19th century, following which man would seem to be drawn to seeing indistinctly what is originally distinct. These expressions are employed by Schivelbusch (1977) in his study on the advent of the train and on the modifications in time-space perceptions induced by the diffusion of railway

This process, which transformed the way in which the world was seen, starts with the railway at the dawn of the 19th century; at the close of that century the cinema brings it to completion. It does so by paying homage to the train from the very beginning, with *Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* (Louis Lumière, 1895?),[31] of course, but also with a large number of similar films: it is impossible to count the views shot from a speeding train, and the arrivals or departures filmed from the remotest stations, which enrich catalogues of film productions before 1900. But it also does so by celebrating the advent of a new spectator, justly defined as an *immobile traveller*.[32]

The entire 19th century was involved in this great cultural change, for it was particularly rich in inventions which contributed, each in its own field, to the radical change in the traditional perception of the limits circumscribing natural human experience. The list has been drawn up too many times to be worth repeating. Yet, it should at least be mentioned that these are the years that witnessed the appearance of not only the railway, but also the telegraph and radio-telegraphy, the telephone, the automobile, the dirigible[33] and the bicycle, together with many other innovations – inconceivable only a short while earlier – having laid the foundations of a deep change that was to radically modify an individual's relation to his or her surroundings and the ways in which the world was experienced. In particular, the last years of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century – which saw the rise of the cinema – were ones of great scientific and technological advances. In addition to the Lumière *Cinématographe*, the year 1895 also witnessed the discovery of Wilhelm Roentgen's X-rays. These were soon followed by the discovery of radium in 1898, the invention of wireless telegraphy in 1899, by Sigmund Freud's

travel. Here I decided to use the term "panoramatisation", in order to underline the active mode of the process suggested by the original German term *Panoramatisierung*, even if this has been translated in English by the term "panoramisation", which on the contrary suggests a passive mode. Concerning panoramas, in addition to Walter Benjamin's unforgettable pages – see especially Benjamin (1955) – cf. among others Barnes (1967), Buddemeier (1970), Ötterman (1980), Bordini (1984), Dubois (1993), Comment (1993), von Plessen (ed., 1993), Frizot (1994), Pesenti Campagnoni (1995) and (2007), Friedemann (2013).

31 Recorded as No. 653, this Lumière's title is not to be confused with *Arrivée d'un train en gare* (No. 8), nor with *Arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat* (not included in Lumière catalogue and shot later). According to Pinel (1994), if No. 635 was shot during summer 1896, then the one projected at the Grand Cafè in January 1896 was No. 8.

32 See Burch (1990).

33 The dirigible was preceded by the hot air balloon, perfected by the Montgolfier brothers around the year 1783. But it is especially during the second half of the 19th century that travelling by air balloon and dirigible is improved upon and increases, until it leads to the invention of the rigid dirigible, designed by Ferdinand von Zeppelin in 1895.

The Interpretation of Dreams (1899)[34] and by Max Planck's quantum theory (1900).

Each of these events contributed to a modification of the customary way of perceiving space and time, thus overcoming the natural barriers restricting the human gaze. The telephone and the wireless telegraph revolutionised long-distance communication, while playing a role in modifying the perception of distances and the experience of spatial and temporal relations. Roentgen rays revealed a new view inside the human body, overcoming a barrier of vision until then thought to be insurmountable. Likewise, a new science called psychoanalysis gave us access to an unknown, and apparently unapproachable, dimension of human beings, by travelling inside the mind and by wiping out the memory's temporal distances. As for the conquest of the air, the dirigible and the airship stand in the continuity of that veritable cultural cataclysm inaugurated by the hot air balloon, which – well before the railway – upset not only the traditional perception of space, but also the usual vision *of* space and *from* space, enlarging its own accessibility.

It is in this climate of a true perceptual revolution, of a frenzied positivistic ecstasy determined by absolute faith in scientific and technological advancement, that cinema makes its appearance, managing to extend the gaze beyond every possible barrier and every *natural* limit, whether spatial or temporal, physical or metaphysical. The old mirage of Western culture, which gave sight the pre-eminent position among the senses,[35] is finally achieved thanks to the intervention of a machine. The desire to escape the narrow limits of what is ordinarily visible is finally achieved thanks to the intervention of a machine. The canonical hierarchies according to which man is at the centre of the universe fall apart, and the actual body as a unit of measurement is replaced by a

[34] Although published in 1899, Sigmund Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* was dated 1900 in order to emphasise its epochal importance.

[35] Even treatises were elaborated which predicted the amplification of the eye's viewing potential as one of the consequences of the bliss of eternal life. For example, Bartholomeus Rimbertinus (*De deliciis sensibilibus paradisis*, Venice, 1498) distinguishes between three types of perfection brought by Heaven to the sight of humble mortals, among which are the enhancement of acuteness, and an infinite variety of things offering themselves to the sight; enhanced acuteness is based upon a greater ability to distinguish shapes and colours, but also on the power to penetrate distances and solids which are interposed between the eye and the object one is looking at. Regarding this, see also Celsus Maffeus, *De sensibilibus deliciis paradisi*, Verona, 1504; and Petrus Lecepiera, *Libro de locchio morale et spirituale*, Venice, 1496. An insightful study of this aspect is in Baxandall (1972). See also Ferino-Pagden (ed., 1996), on ways in which figurative arts represented the hierarchy between the five senses elaborated by Western culture.

machine.[36] In addition to the viewing devices which thrived in the 17th and 18th centuries there is yet another machine – the train – that has delivered a *coup de grâce* to the traditional modalities of accessing the visible, thus forming a new kind of look: a look in movement.

Wolfgang Schivelbusch[37] has paid particular attention to the role played by the railway in the transformation of the gaze – a transformation that happens through the mediation of a machine and through a novel perception of space and time. He suggests that the railway refashions the traditional models of spatial and temporal perception (among other things, by requiring time to be standardised),[38] dissolving their continuity as organically linked to nature in order to replace it with new values, such as speed and the machine itself. Above all, the railway also becomes the place where a new "panoramatic" gaze develops, for the view that the railway makes it possible to access – from the window of a train moving at high speed – assumes the characteristics of a panorama. Movement and speed prevent the possibility of observing details; but this impediment is compensated for by an *otherwise inaccessible* overall view. The vision is necessarily indistinct;[39] but it is also, finally, global and all-encompassing.

A gaze on the move. An omnivorous gaze. A distracted gaze – like that of the "distracted examiner" Walter Benjamin will speak of to define the film spectator.[40] If it is true that analogies between the journey and the spectacle have been partly traced by Schivelbusch[41] and are widely corroborated by the abundance of entertainment devices reproducing travelling conditions, it is also true that other analogies may be established between railway and cinema, and are in their turn validated by the popularity enjoyed by an early genre, the "travelogue", whose main attraction was views of journeys.[42] They are likewise validated by the

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36 In this respect, see the suggestions contained in Kern (1983) and Zumthor (1993). See also Meyrowitz (1985) for an in-depth study on this topic applied to the electronic media landscape.

37 See Schivelbusch (1977).

38 It is not by chance that the chronicles from this period speak, at first, of perception as less rich, less natural, less free (see Schivelbusch, 1977: 27 ff.).

39 See Sternberger (1938: 80), from whom Schivelbusch (1977: 64 ff.) derives and develops the idea of indistinct perception as specific to the 19th century.

40 See Benjamin (1936).

41 See Schivelbusch (1977).

42 Regarding this issue, see Musser (1984). See also Fielding (1983), Kirby (1997) and Rabinowitz (1998), concerning Hale's Tours, an entertainment device which came after the cinema, based upon the simulation of a journey by train. See also Mannoni (1996) about the journey theme in the magic lantern tradition.

comparison between cinema and railway journeys, outlined by chronicles of the time which deal with the issue.[43]

The most significant analogy is the one brought into focus by Jacques Aumont, who sees the train as "le lieu prototypique où s'élabore, en plein 19e siècle, le spectateur de masse, le spectateur immobile".[44] Immobile travellers see unfolding before them a landscape similar to a spectacle, enclosed in the rectangle of a train window similar to a screen. Passive travellers who are sitting down. Anonymous and collective travellers who are condemned to be still, yet are endowed with ubiquity – a paradoxical kind of ubiquity, in that it is inactive – thanks to the newly acquired mobility of their gaze. Indeed, the changes in the look induced by railway travel entail not only its panoramatisation, but also its mobility. Aumont has rightly shown how, during the 19th century, the actual mobility of the eye is at stake: the gradual mobilisation of the spectator's gaze produces a *variable* eye, through the changes in perception of space and time caused by the railway, as well as by the pictorial studies of the end of the 18th century and by the Panorama shows.[45]

To this decisive fact, some other elements should be added, which are no less important. Like the train journey itself, which mechanises perception by emphasising an unnatural view and by diminishing the senses of hearing and of smell – both widely active in the pre-railway

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43 See the notes written by Heinrich Heine in *Lutezia* (second part, No. LVII, May 5th 1843), according to which, by eliminating space, the railway connects the most far-away places: "Just imagine what will happen when the lines to Belgium and Germany are completed and connected up with their railways! I feel as if the mountains and forests of all countries were advancing on Paris. Even now, I can smell the German linden trees; the North Sea's breakers are rolling against my door" (Eng. trans. quoted by Schivelbusch, 1977: 44, from Elster ed., Vol. 6, p. 360). Similarly, a few years later, the critic and novelist Rémy de Gourmont would speak of the cinema in the same terms; technologically more advanced, better yet than Panoramas and lanterns, according to de Gourmont the cinema allows us to "travel around the world", to experience the contrast between the desert and the ocean in a flash, as well as bold mixtures of places far from one another, to visit remote locations all over the earth, much more conveniently than any other previously known way. And René Doumic would even speak of leaving for exciting "filmic excursions" (see de Gourmont, 1907: 124-127; and Doumic, 1913: 919-922). In reference to the elimination of distances, see also – even though it is a consideration dating afterwards, about fields of mechanical reproduction very different from the cinematographic – Paul Valéry's interesting analysis, which even hypothesises the distribution of "Réalité Sensible à domicile" (Sensible Reality at home): see Valéry (1928: 1285).

44 The prototypical space in which, in the 19th century, the mass spectator, the immobile traveller is elaborated (Aumont, 1989: 44).

45 Aumont (1989) sees the railway as a crucial stage in the creation of a "variable eye", peculiar to the future film spectator. The train, in Aumont's view, replaces the "ecological" spectator of the art of painting with a spectator endowed with ubiquity and all-embracing vision.

travelling experience – the film spectacle has neither odour nor sound; the only sounds silent cinema has, as a matter of fact, are those that may have ben added during the screening. Again, like the train journey, which eliminates the perception of in-between spaces – the space of the journey – in order to amplify the spaces of departure and arrival,[46] film editing eliminates all that is in between one shot and the next; thus the shots, similarly to arrivals and departures, become the only portions of space and time experienced by the spectator.

But, above all, there is still another crucial fact to be mentioned: like the train journey, the cinema offers the spectator a view of the landscape that is modified by the transit of a machine. Between the traveller and the landscape, the railway as "an ensemble" is interposed, comprising the locomotive, the carriages, the rails, as well as the electrical telegraph, with its poles and its wires, all necessary for the system to function properly.[47] In this way, it produces a traveller who accesses a modified landscape, in its outer aspect, by the passage of the machine itself. Travellers do not only see the landscape they are travelling through; they also see some part of the machine (*visible* in the landscape) that enables them to cross it. In particular, beyond the window frame, they also see the telegraph poles and wires which have become as much as a part of the landscape and the railway as the engine and the rails.

The spectators elaborated by the railway, then, are not only immobile travellers endowed with a mobile gaze; they are also people who perceive a view appearing *beyond* the machine, in that it is seen through it. They are spectators provided with a prosthesis (the machine) which leaves its traces in the image it renders accessible.

As a matter of fact, the form of representation of the gaze elaborated by early cinema finally makes visible the trace of this prosthesis. The image of a matte representing itself as the sign of its own transit. A sign of the interposition, between the eye and the world, of a vision machine that the figurative arts have already depicted, though never going beyond its external portrayal. Over time, in fact, the figurative arts had variously shown in engravings, pictures, illustrations and even decorated furnishings, one or more people looking through the viewer of some kind of optical box or device. This happened both in the sphere of popular iconography, which, between the 18th and the 19th century, recorded the new vision

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[46] For an analysis of this aspect, see Schivelbusch (1977: 66 ff.), according to whom the train transports the spectator towards reading as well – thus towards fiction, in Aumont's opinion (1989). Regarding this topic, see chapter 3.

[47] Schivelbusch (1977: 19 ff.) speaks of a "machine ensemble", a whole comprised precisely of the railway and the telegraph, in the absence of which travelling is difficult and hazardous.

machines and illustrated in detail the *gesture* necessary to access them as well; and in the sphere of painting, with pictures representing the sense of sight and its use through lenses, mirrors or pantoscopes. Think, for example, of Jusepe de Ribera's painting concerning the sense of *Sight* (circa 1616), portraying the telescope built by Galileo in 1609. Think also of the *Five Senses* series, painted by Jan Bruegel starting in 1617, featuring the ground-based telescopes perfected by the Dutch[48] (see *The Allegory of Sight and Smell*). Or, among others, think of the paintings by Pietro Longhi and his school; or of the series painted by Jan van Bijlert, Philipp Jacob Nickhl, Pier Francesco Mola, Pietro della Vecchia and many others…[49] All these appeared though without ever recording, alongside the "external" image of such a gesture and of such an optical prosthesis, the mark left by this gesture, and by this prosthesis, on the visible in the world.

Cinema, on the contrary, fills in the picture by showing the prosthesis and its trace. By virtue of the editing process – that is, by virtue of the elimination of the in-between space – cinema elaborates a form of representation of the gaze which is, above all, the representation of *the mark left by the machine on the visible in the world*. More precisely, with the suppression of in-between space and time – eliminated by editing – cinema shows, in sequence, a character looking beyond a machine and the image observed by that character through the machine, *as seen* through the machine. Furthermore, by eliminating the last distance – the social one – cinema produces a mass spectator who finally becomes, in this form of representation of the gaze, a voyeur observing views through a device whose trace is materialised in the matte, visible in the shot.

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[48] Ribera's painting (oil on canvas, 114 x 89 cm) is in the Franz Mayer Museum in Mexico City; *The Allegory of Sight and Smell* (oil on canvas, 175 x 263 cm), by Jan Bruegel the Elder, is in the Museo del Prado, Madrid.

[49] Numerous reproductions of paintings, engravings and decorated furnishings depicting the act of looking through an optical device can be found in Zotti Minici (ed., 1988a), most specifically Pietro Longhi's paintings; and in Bertetto, Pesenti Campagnoni (eds., 1996), featuring a number of objects and paintings owned by the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Turin (Italy). In particular, see Giuseppe Gamberini's painting of a pantascope spectacle, oil on canvas, 84 x 38 cm, of the first half of the 18th century; a painting by Giovanni Michele Graneri depicting three "spectators" intent on looking through the viewer of a pantoscope, oil on canvas, 20 x 29 cm, 18th century; as well as numerous engravings, lithographs, statuettes and even a French piece of embroidery dating to the 18th century, which shows two pantoscope "spectators" looking through the viewer of this optical device. Traces of this obsession with a prosthesis which inserts itself between the eye and the world, thus expanding the potentialities of looking, can be found in the literature of the age as well. For a fascinating analysis of the importance that optics and visual perception assume in literature during the years preceding the emergence of the cinema, with specific regard to fantasy, see Milner (1982).

It is this new spectator that cinema celebrates through the point-of-view shot, before it becomes a point-of-view shot. A new spectator such as the young boy Toto, in *Toto aéronaute*, provided with a prosthesis and a moving gaze, with a variable eye which has overcome its natural limits once and for all. A new spectator who is also a mass spectator. Indeed, the cinema needs a mass of spectators from the very beginning, and immediately pays homage to them by representing people exercising their newly enhanced faculty of sight. At times, this is done precisely in travel films, where the most valuable item of luggage is often an indispensable telescope, again as in *Toto aéronaute*. And where immobile travellers, when not peering at the world through their precious optical device, are looking at us. In today's terms, at the camera.

1.2. The Place of the Look

In early cinema, it often happens that people are filmed looking directly at the camera; so often that the nature of this look calls for some consideration. Later on, of course, any such look at the camera was to be rigidly circumscribed, if not banned outright; but in early cinema it appears to be profoundly congenital to the mode of representation then taking place.[50] As a matter of fact, when observed closely, this look at the camera reveals a complexity and a variety that cannot be attributed to one register only. It is even possible to outline a typology, for there are at least three kinds of looks at the camera in early cinema.[51]

First of all there is the furtive glance of the absent-minded or curious passer-by; the look, for instance, of the traveller who steps off the train in *Arrivée d'un train à la Ciotat*. Casual and fortuitous, this look is nothing more than an act of curiosity aimed towards the camera. If it seems

[50] According to Tom Gunning (1979 and 1986), the direct address to the audience is part of early cinema's approach to filmmaking; notably, it is part of what he calls the "cinema of attractions" (see chapter 4), which is essentially an exhibitionist cinema, constructing a direct relationship with its spectator.

[51] Burch (1990) detects only two kinds: the look towards the camera and the look at the camera. For yet another typology of the look at the camera, based on the distinction between documentary and fiction film, see Châteauvert (1996). I have not included in my list (already outlined in Dagrada 1990b) the look that one character may aim at the camera while identifying it with another character, because this would constitute a particular kind of point-of-view shot, alien to early cinema. As a matter of fact, even when it may seem to us today that a character is addressing a look into the camera as if it were another character, he or she is actually addressing the spectator in the cinema, as the catalogues of the period confirm. It happens, for example, in *The Big Swallow* (Williamson, 1901): in the first part of the film Sam Dalton addresses the photographer (to the left of the camera), while in the second part, after having eaten up the photographer, he turns towards the spectator (the real recipient of the whole "joke").

somehow transgressive to us today, it is because it violates – but only today, for us, after about a century of this prohibition – the rule which prescribes that the spectator should not be looked at straight in the eyes.

Then there is the more or less overtly bold look of the character who, in the middle of a scene, openly asks (the director, the operator, a fellow actor…) for instructions as to what is to be done. A clear example can be found in *Sister Mary Jane's Top Note* (Hepworth, 1907) where the makeshift staging forces the performers to glance about, looking for the necessary information in order to proceed. Yet another instance is found in *The House that Jack Built* (Warwick, 1900), where a young girl playing the main character sneaks a few glances towards the camera, in search of final instructions as to how to behave. In these cases, which are more frequent than one would imagine, an actor's questioning glance is aimed towards the camera and its immediate human appendages (the operator, the producer, a fellow actor…). It is a glance which interrupts the rhythm of the representation, yet without drawing the spectator into this disruption of the action. It is also a glance that surprises us today, especially because of the degree of improvisation that it involuntarily exposes at times, a degree of amateurism.

Finally, there is the look of the actor who, in the scene, steps up to the camera in order to expressly address spectators in the cinema: to greet them, to welcome them and to be welcomed, as well as to thank them for having paid for a ticket to the show, and also to address them, to exchange comments on the events with them, to communicate intentions or sensations to them. In this case, the look at the camera is not the result of ingenuity or professional awkwardness; on the contrary, it derives from the adherence to an acting technique as old as the *commedia dell'arte*, called the "aside", widespread over the centuries in popular theatre. It is the aside – that is, a prevalent stage convention consisting of a temporary suspension of the action, during which the actor directly addresses the audience – which accounts for most of the looks at the camera in early cinema.

There are countless early films in which this type of look *into* the camera, usually associated with explicit gestures calling for the spectator's participation, is so common that it becomes a ritual. This is particularly so in the case of filmed versions of variety and music-hall numbers: see, for instance, *Die Springer* (Skladanowsky, 1895); *Kitty Mahone* (Walter Gibbons's Phono-Bio-Tableaux, 1901); *Les cartes vivantes* (Star-Film, by Georges Méliès, 1905); *Cochon danseur* (Pathé, 1907); *Tilly Bebe, die berühmte Löwenbändigerin* (Deutsche Bioskop, 1908). Against a backdrop similar to that of a stage – and which, indeed, is often the backdrop of a real stage – the actor (acrobat, painter, singer, juggler,

magician, dancer…) enters the scene with a greeting directed towards the camera, that is to say, at the spectators, performs a number, greets the audience once more, usually bows repeatedly, and then leaves the scene. This practice is so well-established that it can still be found at the end of the first decade of the 20th century, in films which display a complete variety or music-hall act (see *Animated Cotton*, Urban, 1909). But several examples can also be found in the popular facial expressions genre, known in the catalogues simply as "facials". These, which we will explore further on, originated from variety and music-hall numbers and showed, in close shot, an actor performing bizarre facial expressions. They were addressed directly at the spectators sitting in the theatre, for whom the camera, as it were, functioned as a stand-in. In all these films, the actor looks at the camera as if it were ideally located in place of a spectator sitting at a standard distance in front of the theatrical stage, facing it constantly.

Although this look may seem disorienting to us today, it should not surprise us at all. In the fiction cinema following the early era, in fact, looking towards the camera is universally known to be forbidden. This prohibition is supposed to protect the film spectator's privileged condition as a voyeur, who can observe without being observed in turn.

In early cinema, however, there was no reason for things to be this way. The prohibition was actually imposed by producers around 1910 to preserve the spectator's "hypnotic illusion",[52] forcing the actors to *ignore* the spectators (that is, to ignore the camera) during their performance, and was designed so that space and time represented on screen might definitively become an "other" space and time, with respect to those of the movie theatre in which the spectator is seated. Thus, the screen has been transformed into a place where *filmic* space and time, circular and closed, may be represented. In this filmic space and time, a look aimed at the camera – that is at a spectator in the movie theatre – should be a look aimed at a non-place, i.e., at a place off screen inaccessible to the action. Communicating with this space and time would not only result in unveiling the spectator's voyeurism, but it would also violate the inviolable impermeability of the circular and closed filmic space, and expose its artificial nature (see chapter 4).

[52] The expression is used by Frank Woods (whose pseudonym was *The Spectator*) in *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, May 14, 1910; reprinted in Kauffman (ed., 1972: 40), which includes other critical reviews from the time that bear witness to the introduction of the prohibition and to the motivations then produced. The initiator of this prohibition seems to have been the American Selig Polyscope Company – perhaps as early as 1909 – whereas in Europe the process was slower. On this subject, see Burch (1990).

On the contrary, in early cinema such a circular and closed filmic space does not yet exist. Consequently, this look which we today describe as being "at the camera" unveils nothing, nor does it evoke any hypothetical off-screen space with respect to the action. It invokes instead the look of the spectator, whose supposed physical presence and participation was, at that time, an integral part of the shooting technique. The early spectator was in fact perfectly used to this look,[53] because it was widely used in popular theatre, vaudeville, variety shows, music-halls… In a word, it was shared by all the forms of popular entertainment which merged into early cinema, and which presupposed spatial and temporal proximity of the actor to the audience.

Things are more complicated and circumscribed in subsequent fiction cinema – not to mention in particular a certain kind of modern cinema, which makes use of this look into the camera in an explicitly provocative and transgressive way. The prohibition, i.e., the taboo, as Francesco Casetti clarified, "is thus not absolute but, on the contrary, relative to the frame of reference. It concerns not the look into the camera itself but rather this look's capacity for insertion into a larger frame."[54] As a matter of fact, there are genres (such as the musical or burlesque, for instance), or particular narrative situations (such as the point-of-view structure itself), in which this prohibition is not active, and the off-screen space evoked by the look at the camera is perfectly integrated with the diegesis.

Early cinema, however, is not exactly one of those "frames of reference" in which this prohibition is not activated. In early cinema, in fact, the actor's looking towards the audience is a regular event, because it is common to the many forms of spectacle converging in it. Thus, its prohibition does not exist in the absolute, and it cannot be activated or disregarded in any context. As a matter of fact, the conditions which eventually brought about this interdiction did not exist. The setting of a filmic space and time – circular and closed, completely different from the

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53 Note that the tradition of the aside in spectacle belongs to painting as well, having reached it in the 15th century through the figure of the *festaiuolo*, recommended by Leon Battista Alberti in his treatise *De Pictura* (1436). On this subject, see Baxandall (1972).

54 "The look into the camera is forbidden whenever the unfolding of the plot and genre to which the film belongs must maintain a 'narrative' form (as in the case of an 'adventure film' in which the regime of absolute fiction and the transparency of the diegesis require masking all marks of enunciation). On the other hand, the look into the camera is recommended in the case of pure commentary (as in filmed declarations, where the self-construction of the film is quite evident). It would likewise be authorised in narratives which are open to commentary (as in the musical comedy, whose fictional regime includes an overtly metatextual component). Lastly, it is optional in films that refer to themselves by speaking of something else (as in documentaries, where what is represented is the visible conquest of representation)" (Casetti, 1986: 28-29).

physical and "real" space and time inhabited by the audience – did not exist. There is no setting of a diegetic space and time which is distinct from the space and time of the theatre in which the spectator is seated.

Certainly in early cinema there can be narrative, although in different proportions (an open question we will deal with in chapter 4). Often there is even fiction, in the sense of invention. Some of the films encountered in this study display both storytelling and fiction.

However, even in those films that, in addition to staging fiction, are also particularly complex and organised with regard to their narrative, it often happens that, before or after having carried out actions significant to the comprehension of the events shown, the character addresses the spectator identified with the camera (that is, looks into the camera), so as to comment, mime, or highlight what has happened, as occurs in popular theatre representations. In films where the actor embodies a character, i.e., a role, a *dramatis persona*, it often happens that this character performs an actual *aside*, exactly as one would in the theatre. See for example *The Anarchist and His Dog* (Walturdaw, 1907), where an "anarchist", rejected by a lady, plans revenge and makes a bomb, all the while addressing the spectator; or *Hanging Out the Clothes* (G.A. Smith, 1897), where a man, before kissing and cuddling his maidservant behind a blanket hanging on a washing line, winks at the camera as if asking for the spectator's complicity.

This look at the camera is of vital importance in early cinema. Not only because it openly establishes its own physical boundaries, which ideally include the movie theatre; but also because it is a look through which early cinema assigns a *place*[55] to the spectator: a place which is external[56] to the action, yet immediately adjacent to it, and which is already identified with the camera.

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[55] This place is not yet a role, as it will become later. About the issue of the spectator's role in fictional cinema, see in particular Odin (2000). Note also that here the spectator's actual place is not to be confused with the symbolic one assigned to him or her by psychoanalytically oriented studies.

[56] According to Burch (1990), the Primitive Mode of Representation is characterised by, among other things, a predilection for full and frontal shots; by the self-sufficiency of such views; by the necessity to have a speaker in the theatre explain the meaning of shots that follow one another with a strong autonomous quality; by the uniform lighting; by the absence of depth. All these traits, together with other features, concur to characterise what seems to be the most interesting aspect of the ones identified by Burch: the externality of the spectator (that is, the external position mentally occupied by the primitive spectator) and the non-closure of the Primitive Mode of Representation (as opposed to the closure provided by later cinema). See also El Nouty (1978), for some insightful suggestions of a similar nature.

This is a fact of no small importance. Firstly, assigning spectators a place means providing them with a sightline which in early cinema is always the best possible one: that of the wealthy patron seated in the front row. It is a view which, since cinema has eliminated social distance, is now democratically accessible to everybody, equally enjoyable *from any seat in the house*. It is thus an essentially exhaustive, all-embracing view, because it offers the spectator a complete and satisfactory picture of what is being represented. For this reason, it is usually a frontal view – though it may also be lateral or diagonal, in the interests of comprehensive representation, as in the celebrated and, in a way, paradigmatic film, *Arrivée d'un train à la Ciotat*.[57] This view always includes everything that is of interest in the scene, so that each spectator may observe the represented objects or events from the best possible angle, better than from any other viewpoint. As we shall see in chapter 3, it is this all-encompassing view that invariably characterises the scenes observed by spectators and voyeurs in the first occurrences of the representation of the gaze. These scenes are organised for the cinema spectator – of whom the character is merely an ideal extension – with the best possible view.

Secondly, assigning the spectator a place, identified with the camera but external to the scene, though immediately adjacent to it, deeply influences early cinema's ideas of staging, as well as acting.

It affects early cinema staging because, although the gentleman seated in the front row is provided with a moving gaze, he occupies a place that is itself immobile. It is a place that, precisely because it is immediately adjacent to the scene, is located at a distance which is as exact as it is fixed, and which may not move closer to the scene itself. Spectators located at this viewpoint, just like the "fourth wall" they represent to some extent, do not move, nor do they approach the characters; they do not change position, they *do not change place*. If need be, it is the action that moves towards them, as in *Le jardinier et le petit espiègle* (and later in *Arroseur et arrosé*), where when the gardener wants to punish the young prankster who has moved out of the frame, he must bring him back into it, in front of the camera. Or as in *How It Feels to Be Run Over* (Hepworth, 1900), where the action is brought towards the spectator – strikingly and literally – in order to let the audience experience what it feels like to be run over, as the title states, filming a car approaching the camera at full speed until it "runs over" the spectator seated in the front rows: it thus "pierces"

[57] It is incorrect to suppose that in early cinema each shot was filmed frontally: the single element common to each image in this cinema, in fact, is its being exhaustive, that is, all-encompassing relative to the represented event or scene, which is not always achievable through frontal filming. On Lumière's film and on the complexity of this topic see, among others, Belloï (1995) and (2001). On its title, see footnote 31 in this chapter.

the screen and will theoretically continue to speed through the movie theatre.[58] Or, again, as it happens in the emblematic case of *Ladies' Skirts Nailed to a Fence* (G. A. Smith, [1900]), where two gossiping women (played by men) are chatting animatedly beside a fence in the middle of a patch of grass, while two boys creep up behind them. Here, instead of moving the camera to the other side and thus actually changing the view, this second view is represented by moving the actors around the fence, so that the audience can now see the two boys trying to nail the women's skirts to it. In other words, the camera stays still while the action is moved in front of it – as it happens in the views observed through the matte in the films where the first occurrences of representation of the gaze take place, as we shall see later.

On the other hand, the fact that spectators are assigned a place also influences acting, because in early cinema actors think that, by addressing the spot occupied by the camera, they are addressing the spectators in the movie theatre as if no separation existed between them. And of course they take this into account, as well as the spectators, who also believe that they are being looked at. This kind of look at the camera, which is so typical of early cinema, is based on the mutual recognition of one another's reciprocal presence: the spectator for the actor, and, vice versa, the actor for the spectator. Each knows that in front of them, on the other side of the camera lens, there is someone looking, who knows that they in turn are being looked at.[59]

The most immediate consequence for the early cinema spectator is that the previously mentioned "hypnotic illusion" cannot take place. That is, it is impossible for the spectator to gain complete voyeuristic pleasure: the pleasure of *seeing without being seen*. Yet, the lack of this illusion – essential to following cinema – is here compensated for by the fact that spectators and characters are on an equal footing. For early cinema actors, in fact, the camera is an ever-present and very real spectator. Often, spectators are evoked, imitated and presupposed, in their gaze and their body, by the gaze and the body of the actors facing the place from which the spectators are looking at them.

It is for these spectators that the actors observe the world from up close, in the films we are about to examine.

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[58] The Hepworth Manufacturing Company catalogue, in order "to show large audiences what it feels like to be run over", thus describes the desired effect: "…the car dashes full into the spectator, who sees 'stars' as the picture comes to an end" (in Low and Manvell, 1948: 83). And, once again, the spectator sees these stars literally and frontally, painted on a black background, exactly as he literally and frontally sees, exploding towards him (towards the camera), the shots fired by the outlaw in *The Great Train Robbery* (Edison, by Edwin S. Porter, 1903).

[59] See Gaudreault (1988a).

1. Figures with pantoscopes. Left: Venetian porcelain, 18th century. Right: French porcelain, 18th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

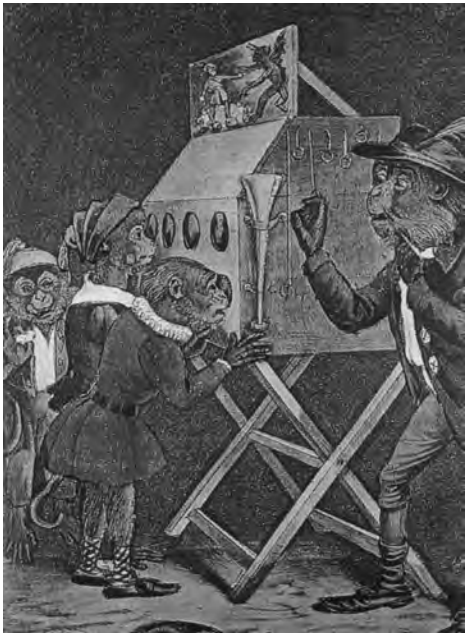
2. G. Gamberini, oil on canvas, first half 18th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

3. Neapolitan school, oil on canvas, 18th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

4. G.M. Graneri, oil on canvas, 18th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

5. P. Longhi school, oil on glass, 18th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

6. Piedmontese school, oil on canvas, 18th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.



7. Clothed monkeys around a pantoscope, coloured lithograph printed in England, first half 19th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

8. Engraving by Chr. Weigel, text by Abraham a Sancta Clara, Fürwitziger Curiositet-Narr, Frankfurt or Wien, first half 18th century. Coll. Seitz, Augsburg.

9. A. Orio (drawing by P.A. Lugd), watercoloured etching, first quarter 19th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

10. W.H. Payne, acquatint, London, first quarter 19th century. Coll. Seitz, Augsburg.

11. L.P. Boitard, etching, 18th century. Coll. Associazione Culturale Compagnia Mondo Niovo, Padua.

12. Lithograph by Schültz, from F. Marohon, *Ce qu'on voit et ce qu'on ne voit pas!…* Lemercier, ca. 1850. Coll. Cinémathèque française, Paris.

13. G. Zocchi, commedia dell'arte with Mondo Nuovo show. Uffizi, Florence.

14. A. Suntach, from F. Watley, *Les enfants empressés pour voir la chambre obscure*, etching and bulino, Bassano, Remondini, 1791. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

15. Popular print of Mondo Nuovo show.

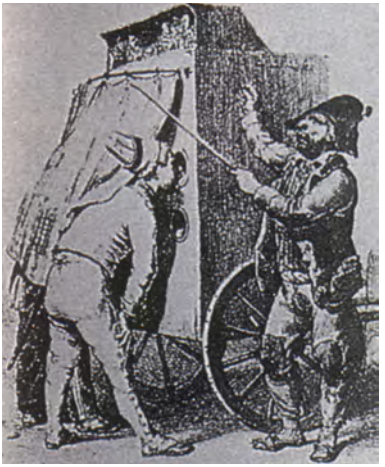
16. B. Pinelli, etching and tempera on paper, Rome, 1815. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

17. Collage perspective for Mondo Nuovo with scene in Venetian palace interior, 18th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

18. G. Zompini, *Le arti che vanno per via nella città di Venezia*, plate 55, 18th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

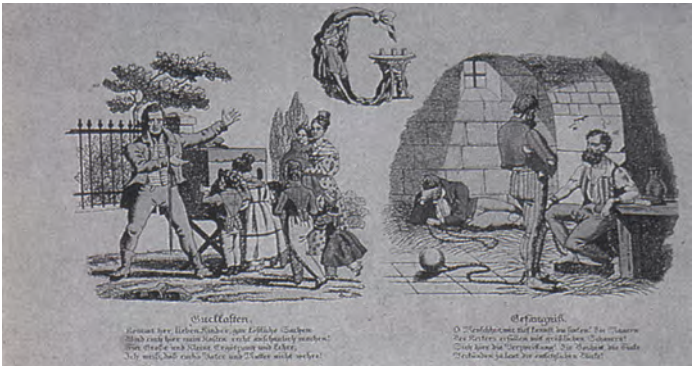
19. G.D. Tiepolo, *Il Mondo Nuovo*, late 18th century. Ca' Rezzonico, Venice.

20. Popular print of a pantoscope show. Institut Lumière, Lyon.



21. Popular print of a pantoscope show. Institut Lumière, Lyon.

22. French petit point embroidery, 18th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

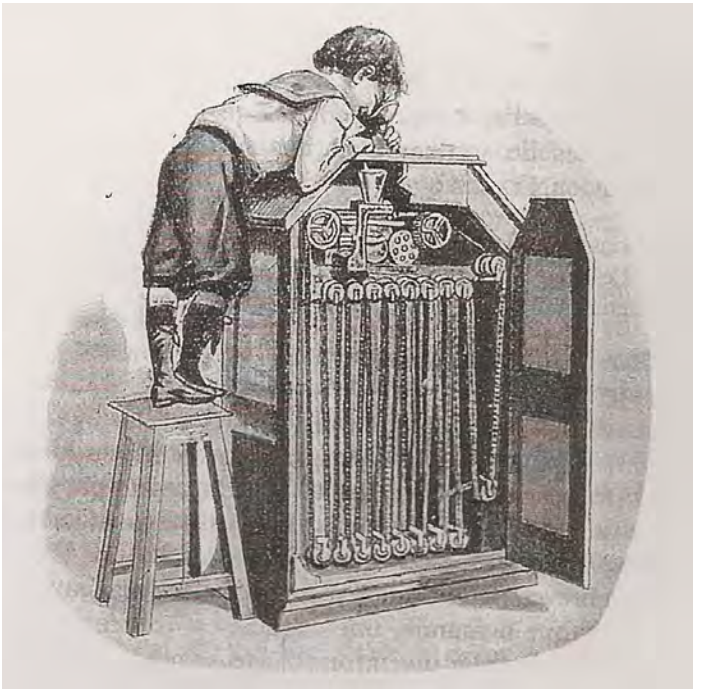


23. Illustrated alphabet, “Gluckkasten” (optical box show), coloured lithograph, Germany, second quarter 19th century. Coll. Seitz, Augsburg.

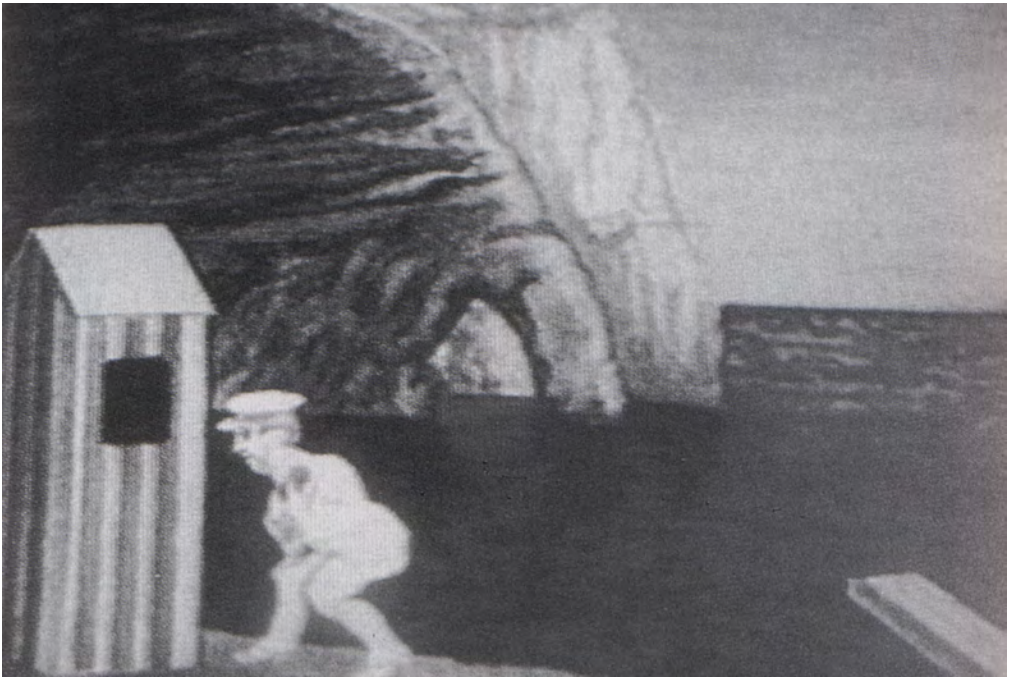
24. *Foire de Campagne*, by Charkes Nicholas II Cochin the Younger, etching, London, second half 18th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

25. *La curiosidad de los Chinos*, etching and bulino, coloured tempera. Bassano, Remondini, second half 18th century. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

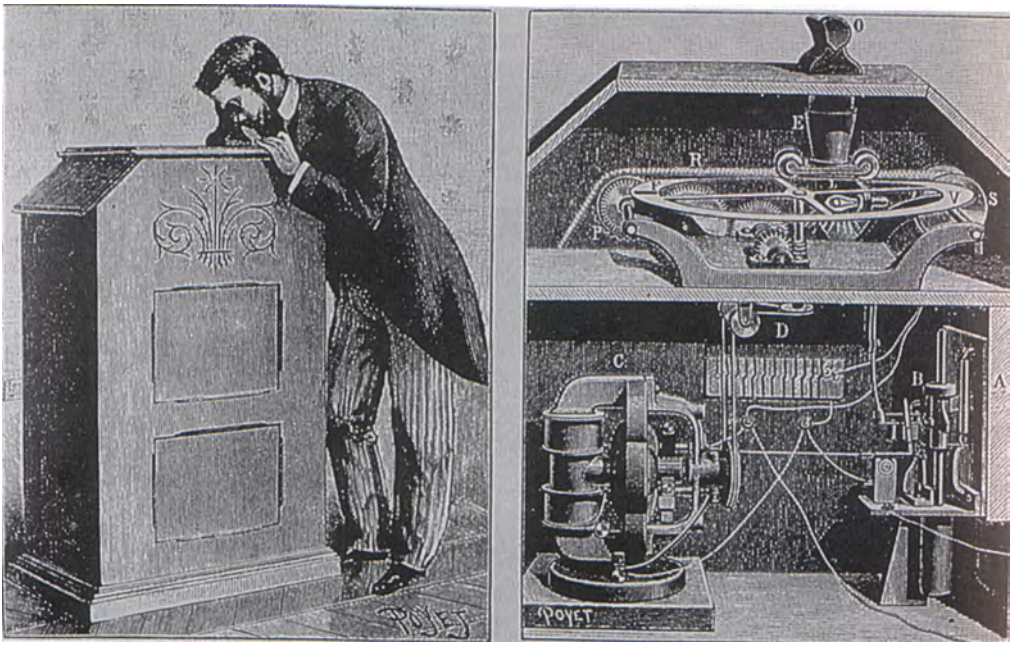
26. G.D. Tiepolo, *Il Mondo Nuovo*, half 18th century. Villa Valmarana ai Nani, Vicenza.



27. A kinetoscope.



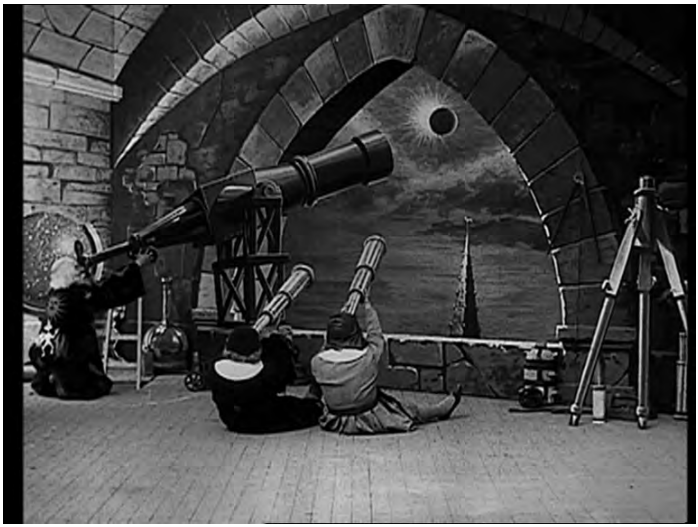
28. *Autour d'une cabine* (Emile Reynaud, 1893-4).



29. A kinetoscope and a kinetoscope mechanism.

30. German postcard, chromolithography, ca. 1905.

31. Postcard, chromolithography, G & L. Bollag, Colmar, ca. 1895.



32. *Eclipse de soleil en pleine lune* (Star-Film, 1907).

33. British postcard, *St.Valentine* series, 1905.

34. British postcard, 1911.

35. French postcard from a series of six entitled *Le galant photographe*, 1906.

36. German postcard, chromolithography, Prägendruck, ca. 1905.

37. Etienne Jules Marey's chronophotographic gun.

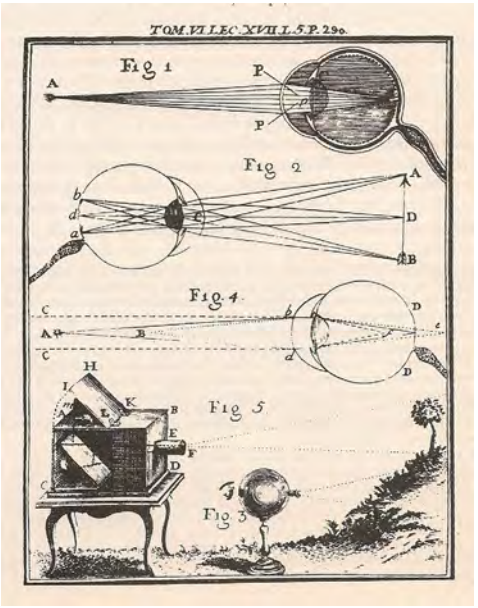
38. *As Seen Through a Telescope* (G.A. Smith, 1900).

39. *Silhouettes*, Théâtre Séraphin.

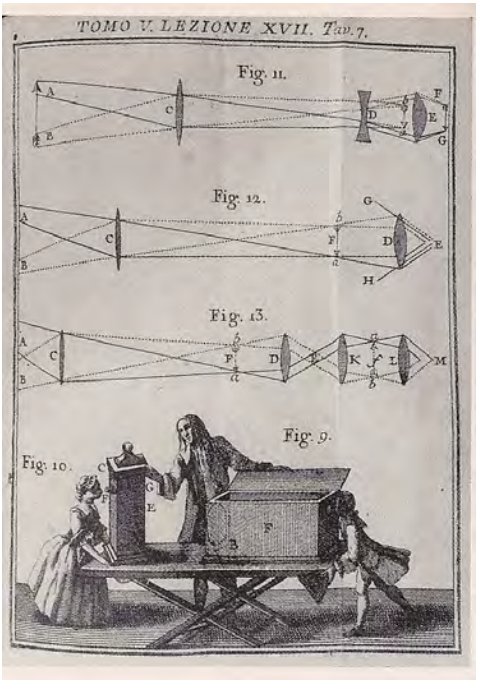
40. *Une excursion incohérente* (Pathé, 1909)

41. A shadow play.

42. A shadow play.



43. Comparison of the eye and the camera obscura, print, 18th century.

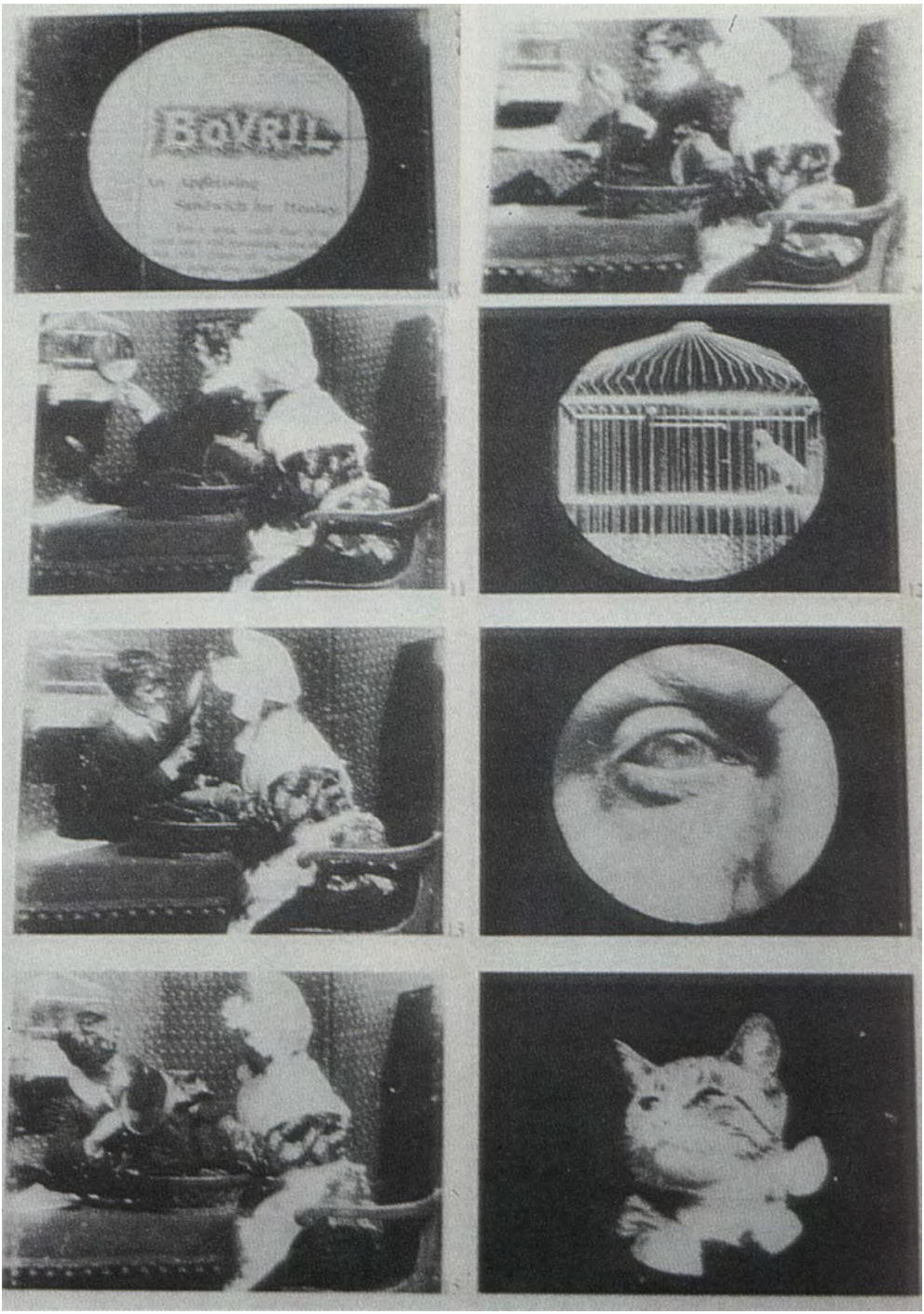


44. Abbot Nollet, plate from *Lezioni di fisica sperimentale*, Venice: 1756. Coll. Associazione Culturale Compagnia Mondo Niovo, Padua.

45. A. Robida *Le vingtième siècle* (1883).

46. *L'affaire Dreyfus* (Pathé, 1908).

47. *Are You There?* (Williamson Kinematograph Company, 1901).



48. *Grandma's Reading Glass* (G.A. Smith, 1900).

CHAPTER 2

Frontiers of the Visible

2.1. The Eye and the World, or the Faculty of Sight

Grandma's Reading Glass, shot in 1900 by the English pioneer George Albert Smith,[1] is still considered one of the first films – if not *the* first – in which the point-of-view structure appears.[2] Yet, it has long been cited by most cinema historians as one of the oldest examples of the close-up shot. Indeed, as we have seen, it shows a little boy observing a number of objects, which appear on screen enlarged and framed by a circular matte, through a magnifying glass.

It is important to underline that those cinema historians consider the apparent close-ups in *Grandma's Reading Glass* to be inferior to other coeval ones, precisely because they interpret the magnifying glass as a device, a mechanism that somehow diminishes the importance of the "invention" of the close-up shot. They consider it as a pretext, instead of as an optical prosthesis which allows the limitations of the eye to be overcome, transforming the gaze into a wonderful source of spectacular artifice. In other words, the role of the representation of the look in these so-called close-ups – which, as we shall see, are not really close-ups in the strict sense – is not acknowledged.

Naturally, even if we were to consider *Grandma's Reading Glass* as one of the oldest examples of the point-of-view structure, rather than the close-up, this would not necessarily be more accurate, and would make no difference when it comes to understanding it. While it is true that the concept

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1 *Grandma's Reading Glass*, along with other G.A. Smith productions, is attributed by De Vries (ed., 1993) and (1994) to Arthur Melbourne-Cooper. For a complete overview of this controversy – irrelevant for my purpose, but interesting indeed – see the debate that took place in the film journals *KINtop* and *Film History* (cf. Bottomore, 2002).

2 While *Grandma's Reading Glass* is still considered the oldest film to exhibit the structure of the point-of-view shot, among earlier productions should be mentioned *What Demoralized the Barbershop*, of which a first 1898 [1897] version exists, as well as a second, made in 1901. According to the description reproduced in Niver (1985), these two Edison productions, each composed of a single shot, might be similar to *A Photograph Taken From Our Area Window* (G.A. Smith, 1901). In fact, they are set in a barbershop located in a basement, with windows that give onto the sidewalk; here, customers amuse themselves by looking at the feet and legs of the passers by, especially those of women.

of the point-of-view shot belongs to the vocabulary of a filmic "grammar" elaborated later on, it is also true that the concept of the close-up belongs to the same vocabulary. This vocabulary designates the representation of the human face according to a relational scale that does not exist in early cinema. Consequently, it is not helpful to search in early films for the "first" cases of the representation of the human face. It seems more useful to shift considerations about the genesis of the close-up to another field: that of its integration into a complex articulation such as the one entailed by the slow process of linearisation. As Noël Burch pointed out,

> the main difficulty facing those film-makers whose historic task was to adapt to the cinema the essential gestures of classical theatrical, novelistic and painterly representation was not that of filming their actors from close to; this was something they had always done. It was that of integrating these close-ups and medium close-ups into the film, of presenting one after another long-shot tableaux and closer views, of achieving analytically the linearisation of the primitive tableau into a succession of pictures that would cut it up and organise it, making it *legible*.[3]

Similarly, the emergence of the point-of-view structure should be sought not so much in its "first" occurrences, as in the gradual realisation of the conditions that determined its urgency and codification.

It is also for this reason that *Grandma's Reading Glass* is better considered not as one of the first and oldest examples of the close-up or of the point-of-view shot, but of that early film genre[4] which represents a gaze, in order to spectacularise it while showing the new frontiers of the visible. This early film genre represents a gaze in order to display these new frontiers of the visible as in a trick, or in an optical artifice, flaunting them as the human eye's new conquest. It incorporates numerous films that show inquisitive characters looking through something, alternating with the observed objects encircled by a matte, which reproduces the shape of whatever the character is looking through.

In most cases, this is the circular rim of some sort of optical viewer, as in *Grandma's Reading Glass*, in which a young boy observes a number of objects through a magnifying glass. Otherwise it is a keyhole, as emphasised by the definition chosen by John Hagan,[5] who gave the name

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[3] Burch (1990: 155).

[4] I use the term "genre" as an analytical category, constructed *a posteriori* as an operational tool to better focus the object of this study; on this topic see Kessler (2000). On film genre see especially Altman (1999).

[5] Unlike Hagan ([1979] 1982: 234), who makes no distinction between keyholes and optical instruments (that is, iconographically, between the circle and the keyhole), and Gunning (1988: 36), who uses the expression *peeping tom series* and speaks, in his turn, of a genre, I shall here differentiate between "optical instrument films" and "keyhole films" (see 3.1.4.). The original version of Hagan's text is the English

of keyhole films to such productions. In keyhole films, it is often the case that a character observes a number of views through the keyhole of one or more doors, and what the character sees appears on screen surrounded by a keyhole-shaped matte.

To ponder on a film such as *Grandma's Reading Glass* today may be of some use precisely because it is – perhaps – the "first" example of a film that exhibits the above-mentioned characteristics; and because it is a film from which others have continued, imitated, circulated or reinvented those same characteristics.

2.2. Bigger, Not Closer: *Grandma's Reading Glass*

The close-up shot is certainly one of the filmic forms the "first time" myth enthusiasts have referred to most extensively, but naturally the close-up did not originate with the cinema.[6] If we understand it as a representation of the human face segmented from the rest of the body (excepting the shoulders and part of the chest), as well as detached from its background, not only did the photographic portrait exist roughly fifty years before the cinema, but the photographic portrait itself had long been preceded by the painted portrait. Over time the magic lantern would make use of the close-up to a certain extent, and as early as the end of the 19th century Demenÿ's phonoscope – to mention only one of the best-known cases[7] – projected enlarged faces, engaged in articulating simple sentences for didactic purposes.

The pictorial-photographic legacy was taken up in films such as the renowned *Repas de bébé* (1895) by Louis Lumière, who was first and foremost a photographer. In fact, although this view does not correspond to what we consider a close-up today (partly also because of the garden, which visibly surrounds Auguste Lumière's family, intent on consuming an abundant breakfast), it shows the busts and faces of the featured people, while deliberately excluding the rest of their bodies.

Moreover, in the earliest years of cinema another type of view, defined as "facial expression" or "facial",[8] appears as well. It consists

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one published in Holman (ed., 1982), three years after the publication of the French translation in Gaudreault (ed., 1979).

6 Regarding the close-up shot and its genealogy, see in particular number 10 (1984-85) of the *Revue Belge du cinéma*, and Philippe Dubois' article (Dubois, 1984-85), where *Grandma's Reading Glass* is analysed as a case of *gros plan-perception* (close-up perception). Among subsequent studies see at least Aumont (1998), Carluccio (1999) and Belloï (2001).

7 Other well-known cases are of course the "animated portraits" realised in Great Britain by William Friese Greene and in the U.S.A. by Dickson for Edison, notably *Fred Ott's Sneeze* (1894).

8 See especially Low and Manvell (1948) and Kember (2001).

in framing only the actors' faces and upper bodies, so as to highlight facial expressions, in order to produce a comical effect. Facials "had appeared as early as 1894, with Kinetoscope films such as *Layman, the Man of 1000 Faces*, in which a performer in close-up rehearsed a series of emotional expressions".[9] Important precedents can be found in the work of the chronophotographers, for example that of Georges Demenÿ, Etienne-Jules Marey and Ottomar Anschütz.[10] But, over time, the facial became a genre in its own right, usually made up of single shot films, often featuring variety performers, and frequently shown during vaudeville shows and in music-hall numbers. In Great Britain these films became so successful that the 1902 Warwick catalogue listed 33 entries in a separate "Facial Expression" section, and across the Channel they were promptly imitated, especially in France, where the production company Pathé counts numerous *grimaces* among its *scènes comiques* (see for example *Une bonne histoire*, 1900; *Masques et grimaces*, 1902; *La purge*, 1904; *Ah! La barbe!*, 1905).

The earliest facial expression recorded by Denis Gifford[11] in his chronology of British cinema is *Comic Faces* (1897). It was made by George Albert Smith, a former portrait photographer and magic lantern show manager – many pioneers of British cinematography came from similar professional backgrounds.[12] After having made *Comic Faces*, he became one of the most prolific directors of this genre. During 1900 he completed fourteen facials,[13] and of these fourteen films, as well as of the

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9 Kember (2001: 29); on this subject see also Pillips (1997).

10 See Kember (2001), and also Gunning (1997).

11 See Gifford (1973) and subsequent.

12 In particular, besides Smith, Cecil Hepworth and James Williamson were also photographers and magic lantern show managers, R. W. Paul sold photographic and projection material in Brighton, Frank Mottershaw did the same in Sheffield, while the Bamforth company had for many years been one of the most important manufacturers of magic lantern plates.

13 *A Jolly Old Couple* (No. 00276: "Facial – man smokes pipe and drinks beer; woman plays with cat and sews"); *The Two Old Sports* (No. 00277: "Facial – Two men chuckle over picture of actress"); *Two Grinning Yokels* (No. 00278: "Facial – Two country yokels grin through horsecollars for beers"); *A Quick Shave and Brush-Up* (No. 00320: "Facial – Man attempts to shave with blunt razor"); *The Dull Razor* (No. 00327: "Facial – man shaves, back to camera, face reflected in mirror"); *Grandma Threading Her Needle* (No. 00329: "Facial – grandmother eventually succeeds in threading needle"); *Scandal over the Teacups/Two Ladies Taking Tea* (No. 00330: "Facial – two spinsters gossip while drinking tea"); *The Old Maid's Valentine* (No. 00331: "Facial – spinster receives an insulting valentine card"); *The Two Old Sports' Political Discussion* (No. 00332: "Facial – two men argue over their newspapers"); *The Two Old Sports' Game of Nap* (No. 00333: "Facial (two parts) – two men argue over card game"); *A Bad Cigar* (No. 00334: "Facial – man tries to smoke bad cigar"); *Two Jolly Old Fellows* (No. 00362: "Facial – two men hold whispered conversion"); *The Village*

rest of his fertile production up to the end of the year 1900, two titles are especially interesting – on a par with *Grandma's Reading Glass* – from the perspective of the exhibition of a look. Although they are different from one another, they are both facials: *The Two Old Sports* and *Grandma Threading Her Needle*.

The Two Old Sports consists of a single shot in which two friends, shown from the waist up, leaf through an illustrated magazine, *Footlight Favourites*, spreading it out in front of them, in such a way that the spectator may clearly see, on the two magazine pages facing the camera, a photograph of a beautiful, scantily clad woman, languidly reclining on a sofa. So far, the two men have been expressionless. As soon as they turn the page, so that *they* now see the photograph (while the spectator is left with the two uninteresting pages previously perused by the men), they start exchanging suggestive nudges, and winking slyly at each other.

Classified as a facial, undoubtedly by virtue of the eloquent faces exhibited by the two men at the end, *The Two Old Sports* deserves our attention because of the role played by the gaze in brilliantly solving the problem of showing two perceptions of an event simultaneously. That is, the problem of showing, in a single stationary shot, two characters looking at something *and* the object of their look, by distributing the action (and the knowledge which directly results from this action) in two separate moments, in an intelligent way, even with a little suspense.[14] The gaze of the two "old sports" is central to this little tale. But, most importantly, the spectator is already aware of what the characters will see, and may thus correctly interpret their sudden change in mood and their knowing glances. Yet it does not occur to Smith, having separated the action into two parts, to separate the shot into two parts as well, showing the magazine through the two characters' gaze. Why should he have? The film does wonderfully as it is, and it shows, in its own way, that in early cinema it was not necessary to "invent" special devices to be able

Choir (No. 00383: "Facial – several singers in discordant song"); *Where Did You Get It?* (No. 00384: "Facial – four men pass naughty photograph around"). The numbers and brief description are from Gifford's catalogue (1973).

[14] I use the term "suspense" in the Hitchcockian sense, based upon a gap in knowledge between the spectator and the characters. Note that, in the future, one of the distinctive characteristics of the point-of-view pattern will be precisely that of letting the spectator know what a character sees exactly, and that through this information a film can establish a gap in knowledge between the spectator and the characters (see 4.3.1.). On the difference between "seeing" and "knowing" disregarded by Genette (1972), who merges both in his concept "focalisation" – unsuitable as such for film studies –, see Dagrada (1982) and Jost (1987).

to exhibit the character's look,[15] and use it to develop a fully narrative situation (see 4.1.1.).

When Smith does separate such shots, in *Grandma's Reading Glass*, it is not in order to show a character looking and the object of his look in two different moments, thus establishing a structure of subject and object in succession. His purpose is rather to exhibit – starting from a very different (and significantly non-narrative) situation – not so much a look, but a trick: a wonderful and exciting optical artifice. In fact, as we have already seen, in *Grandma's Reading Glass* a young boy observes – with no reason but curiosity, and with no logical correlation between the objects he sees – a number of objects through a magnifying glass that belongs to his grandmother, who is placidly sitting next to him at a table, sewing. Both the grandmother and the grandchild are visible only from their hips and thighs up, and the boy displays great enthusiasm for all he sees. But *Grandma's Reading Glass* is not classified as a facial, because its interest lies elsewhere, i.e., in the objects observed by the young boy, and especially in the way they are exhibited. In fact, each of the objects appears on the screen framed in the centre of a circular matte against a black background: a newspaper page scanned (through the glass) from left to right, the works of a watch, a canary in a cage, one of the grandmother's eyes, the head of a kitten. Most importantly, each of the objects appears magnified.

Following today's terminology of the previously evoked filmic "grammar", none of the views seen through the glass by the little boy could be defined as a close-up. Rather, according to present-day terminology, they would be considered detail shots or inserts,[16] which the boy triumphantly shows us even before he appears on screen himself. In fact, the surviving prints begin with the image of part of a newspaper encircled by the magnifying glass, and only later, in the next shot, do we see the boy laying down the glass and the paper, and then taking a watch out of his pocket in order to repeat the trick. For a trick it is, in the boy's

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15 In this respect, of course, *The Two Old Sports* is not an isolated example; indeed, it is preceded by many other films that display a character looking at something, including the object of his or her look within the represented space – therefore, within the space of the shot. We may think, for example, of the numerous versions of *Le coucher de la mariée* or *The Bride's First Night*, which we will come back to in 3.1.4. The inclusion within the shot of every element that is important to the action is peculiar to early cinema, based upon the autarchy of the shot, and on its being completely self-contained. This is also evident in those films that represent, within the same – and often the only – shot, a character who is dreaming or having visions, together with the object of his mental images, sometimes surrounded by a circular balloon (see chapter 5).

16 The term "insert" emphasises the editing of this type of shot, usually "inserted" within the continuity of other shots. See *infra* footnote 24.

view (therefore, in the spectator's view), i.e., an optical artifice made possible by the use of a magnifying glass.

During the same year, Smith made also *Grandma Threading Her Needle*, where another grandmother is seen only down to her waist. As in *The Two Old Sports*, however, here we are to concentrate on her facial expression. In fact, she is seated at a table with a sewing basket on her left side, and she is about to start sewing, attempting to thread a needle. But this time she has no magnifying glass, and the film lets the actor's repetitive gestures explain the situation (the character is played by Tom Green). After a few unsuccessful attempts, accompanied by frowns and grimaces, the grandmother accomplishes her purpose and puts on a satisfied air. And all this happens in a single, self-contained shot.

Thus, there is no magnifying glass, and there is no trick. That is, the needle and thread are not magically enlarged. Nor are they a full two years later, in *Old Lady Tries to Thread a Needle* (1902), also produced by Smith, in which, once more, an old lady must thread a needle, fails twice, and puts on an air of great satisfaction when she finally completes her task. Yet again, this happens in a single shot, without showing the efforts of threading the needle *through* the woman's look (in this film, the woman is played by Eva Bayley). Even though these efforts – and this look – are still the film's main attraction. Once again, the woman has no magnifying glass, and the needle and thread she observes would be "spectacular" only if magically enlarged through an optical instrument.

This is what happens to the objects observed by the boy in *Grandma's Reading Glass*. What appears here as different, in relation to the other modes of representation of the gaze we have just examined, is precisely the character's recourse to the mediation of an optical instrument. That is, the fact that the boy has resorted to the mediation of a viewing machine which helps to achieve a surprising enlargement – surprising to the boy, but also to the audience. It is this mediation, depicted and spectacularised, that is the basis of the "enlargements" or "magnified views" (thus defined in the catalogues of the period) that are to be found in *Grandma's Reading Glass*. And this mediation justifies them, as well as exhibiting them for what they really are in this film: a *perceptual artifice*, obtained through an *optical instrument*, and presented as a *spectacle*.

2.3. A History of Filmic Forms and the Historiography of the Cinema

George Albert Smith and his film production are generally considered not only on the basis of his previous experience as a portrait photographer and magic lantern operator, but also within the context of a more general evaluation of the group Smith and his work supposedly

belong to: the so-called "Brighton School". This happens even when the actual existence of such a School is not recognised, or when one distances oneself from it.

The "Brighton School" label, as it is generally known, was first named as such by Georges Sadoul[17] and has been criticised or reconsidered by other historians, notably by Jacques Deslandes.[18] In his polemic against Sadoul, claiming a lack of historical-philological rigour in the latter's research, Deslandes insinuated that the idea of a "Brighton School" might be more important to the historiography of cinema than to the history of cinema.

Whether Sadoul was right in arguing that the pioneers who were active at the same time as Smith in Brighton between 1896 and 1910 constituted a "School", or whether Deslandes was right in arguing the opposite, is to this day the object of a dispute flawed not only by a debate which is now outdated, but also by a basic prejudice. We might define it as "the precursor prejudice", that is to say the approach which tends to judge a film-maker's work according to criteria that do not belong to the film-maker's own time, but rather to *our* time. Such an approach proposes that the value of the film-maker's work directly depends on whether he has or has not anticipated our present values and understanding.[19] Thus, as we dispense with the "Brighton School or non-Brighton School" issue, I wish to suggest a hypothesis aimed at highlighting the importance of a small film such as *Grandma's Reading Glass*, not for the history of the cinema, or its historiography, but for the history of film forms. In this respect, the film would retain its importance even if the "Brighton School" were of no consequence to the history of the cinema.

As previously mentioned, *Grandma's Reading Glass* has been referred to by most history books and handbooks on cinema as one of the oldest examples of the close-up shot. According to Sadoul, for instance, Smith, after using editing as a "moyen d'expression" (a means of expression) in films like *The Little Doctors* and *The Mouse in the Art School* "il le transforme en truc […]. Il légitime ainsi le gros plan par l'emploi de la loupe"; that is, he transforms it into a trick, so he justifies the close-up by use of a lens, notably in filming *At Last! That Awful Tooth*. After this film, "la nouveauté est comprise par tous, et Smith développe son truc dans trois films qui auront un succès mondial et qui seront plagiés par Zecca".[20] The three films were, according to Sadoul: *Grandma's Reading*

17 Cf. Sadoul (1947) and (1948).

18 Cf. Deslandes, Richard (1966).

19 On this topic see also Gaudreault (2008).

20 The novelty was understood by everyone and Smith developed the trick in three other films that enjoyed world success and were plagiarised by Zecca. See Sadoul (1947: 172).

Glass, As Seen Through a Telescope and *After Dark; or, The Policeman and His Lantern*.[21]

However, these brief quotations from Sadoul require correction of some historical inaccuracies, which are undoubtedly responsible for his main interpretative inaccuracies. In fact, *The Little Doctors* (1901, where a kitten's head appears full screen) and *The Mouse in the Art School* (1902, where a mouse's head – so it seems – appears) are both preceded by *Grandma's Reading Glass*, as is *At Last! That Awful Tooth* (1902), in which a tooth appears enlarged through a circular lens. *Grandma's Reading Glass* was also followed, much later, by *After Dark; or, The Policeman and His Lantern* (1902).

Grandma's Reading Glass, then, was not a "machine arrière"[22] (a step backward) made in order to justify the close-up through a trick. Nor was it a film made of close-ups or close views; not even in the way, for example, that the previous facials were, with their clear pictorial-photographic origin, and for which Smith, a former portrait photographer, never used the lens device.[23]

Moreover, *Grandma's Reading Glass* was not a film including close-ups (nor of facial expressions); it was, to be precise, a film containing *magnified views*, that is to say enlargements.

Such a clarification is not pedantic at all, nor does it concern a merely academic disquisition. On the contrary, it pertains to a terminological difference corresponding to a significant conceptual one, generally disregarded in Anglo-Saxon film dictionaries, but which should be more

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21 Sadoul (1947: 172) quotes this title in French: *Pendant la nuit ou le Policeman et sa lanterne*. The existence of a film by the title of *After Dark; or, The Policeman and His Lantern* is documented in Gifford's catalogue (1973), where both the title and the description (No. 00615: "PC's lantern illuminates scenes of waif, drunkard, burglar, cook, beggar, pie, etc.") match the film discussed by Sadoul. The identification of *The Mouse in the Art School* is less certain; Gifford mentions a film with a double title, *Tommy and the Mouse in the Art School / Little Willie and the Mouse* (No. 00521), but which does not exactly match the description given by Sadoul ("Boy releases mouse and frightens models"), according to which the boy kills the mouse and is regarded by the girls attending the art school "comme un héros" (as a hero).

22 Sadoul (1947: 172).

23 Nor in the way in which *The Little Doctors* would be put together, a few years later. This film was derived from the widespread magic lantern technique which consisted in inserting, among the overall views, images depicting the characters in a closer view, that is, in a close-up or a close "shot", just as in a portrait (see footnote 32 in this chapter). Though in this film it is the portrait of a kitten, nevertheless, its structure is the same as numerous magic lantern stories. An example can be found in *Bob the Fireman*, a British lantern production dated not later than 1880 (see chapter 1, footnote 21), in which no optical instrument is used.

widely recognised and considered by scholars. It belongs, in other words, to two separate conceptual fields that should not be confused.

The close-up issue involves at least two separate parameters: *segmentation* (of the face from the rest of the body) and *size* (which presupposes the codification of a shot-scale). In Italian or French descriptive filmic terminology, for example, where there is an essential difference between a close-up and a detail shot, the notion of the close-up involves the human figure only,[24] and basically entails a process of both segmentation and extrapolation (of the face from the rest of the body, as well as from the surrounding space) that does not necessarily involve the "largeness" of the face. Its size – *any* size – in the close-up, as well as in facial expressions, derives from the portrait tradition which is deeply rooted in Western figurative culture.[25] On the other hand, the detail shot

[24] In Italian and French, one of the established points of the range of shot scales relates to its being founded on the representation of the human body (for which the terms "piano" or "plan" are used, instead of "campo" or "champ", designating various portions of space larger than a whole human body). This makes it possible to reserve the definition of close-up for the representation of the human face, generally including the neck and the shoulders – if closer, we would have an extreme close-up. If one sticks to this criterion, it is inaccurate to define as close-ups those shots representing objects *that have no face*, which are usually designated by the useful term "detail shot" ("détail" in French, "dettaglio" in Italian), conceived as *enlargement*, sometimes coupled with the term "insert" ("insert" in French, "inserto" in Italian), which emphasises the editing of this type of shot, usually inserted within the continuity of other shots. Certainly, the definition of a range of shot scales is one of the most problematic issues for film scholars from different countries. Indeed, if one compares different manuals, one rarely finds perfect equivalence between the definitions of various types of shots, and some terms (therefore, some concepts) exists only in some countries. The French expression "plan américain" ("piano americano" in Italian), for example, has no linguistic equivalent in English, although it designates the most typical shot in North American cinema, i.e., a character filmed more or less down to the knees or calves. Similarly, another French expression, "plan-séquence" ("piano-sequenza" in Italian), conceived to designate a whole sequence – understood as a narrative unit – entirely filmed in a single shot, has no equivalent in English, since it does not express the same concept as that designated by the English expression "long take" – nor by the English expression "sequence shot", understood as a long take constituting an entire scene, instead of an entire sequence. In the same way, it could be said that the French expression "gros plan" (emphasising size) does not entirely evoke the same conceptual fields as the English expression "close-up" (emphasising distance).

[25] Note that size, also in the figurative arts, does not necessarily imply the idea of *largeness* in the reproduction of the face alone, as is demonstrated by the popularity of the miniature portrait before the advent of photography. Moreover, it is significant that both facials and portraits represent the actors' faces and, to different degrees, upper bodies, following a figurative law pertaining precisely to the pictorial portrait, which usually includes, in various degrees, part of the upper body. Note how this figurative tradition passes on to the range of shot scales, in which the close-up represents not only the face but also the neck, the shoulders and (here manuals differ) a part of the upper body which may be more or less large (in order to speak of a "close shot" it is

does not involve the human figure exclusively; and when it does so, it concerns those parts of the body which are not the face or which are smaller than the face: the eyes or the mouth for example. Furthermore, it always specifically entails an enlargement, as such always perceived as *abnormal*.

In a close-up, the size of the face is perceived as a significant element (not necessarily as a disturbing one, however) only when an explicit comparison[26] between other images on a different scale is established through editing. Broadly speaking, it must be codified into what is called today the range of shot scales. Without this comparison of relationships, the size of a face depicted in a close-up or in a "close view", as with the case of facial expressions, is not necessarily perceived as peculiar (in facial expressions, in fact, what is peculiar is precisely the expression). Not even in early cinema: the catalogues of the period, in fact, when dealing with one-shot films representing a face in a close-up shot or in a close shot, speak of "the full size of the screen", or of "facial expressions", but never of "magnified views".[27]

The detail shot, on the other hand, has to do not necessarily with segmentation but with *size*. And it does not need a comparison to be

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usually necessary for the torso to be framed from the waist up, but there are of course various definitions of this shot). The expression "extreme close-up" ("très gros plan" in French, "primissimo piano" in Italian) is usually reserved for the face alone.

[26] As early as in 1894, according to *The Optical Magic Lantern Journal*, comparisons allow to evaluate the size of the depicted objects (and, above all, to evaluate the ensuing "realistic" or "unrealistic" impact of the objects): "Size, independent of anything else, has the power to affect an audience – or the more educated and intelligent portion of it – pleasantly or unpleasantly, as it may be suited to the subject shown. Pictures exhibited much above their normal size have a more or less grotesque appearance, especially if containing figures. Landscapes pure and simple only on rare occasions give rise to criticism in this respect; but take flowers, figures, or anything of such dimensions that they can be easily compared or exaggerated. The screen proclaims their unreality, which is at once strikingly apparent" (March 1, p. 56). This thesis is reported and discussed by Burch (1990: 89 ff.), who finds in it the reasons for the slowness with which cinema assimilated and somehow "normalised" the use of the close-up, not as an autonomous view (for instance, in what he calls single-shot "portrait-films", that is to say facials) but as a shot to be inserted among other, different shots, which are, above all, related to a range of shot scales.

[27] See the 1906 Hepworth Manufacturing Company catalogue (about the film *The Comic Grimacer*, between January 1901 and March 1902), where one can read that "a human face shown *the full size of the screen* is always a comic and interesting sight, and when the face is of the 'indiarubber' variety, and the owner can pull it about and distort it into frightful and hideous knots, the pictured result is bound to be interesting and laughable" (my emphasis). On the difference between mime in facial expressions and subsequent close-ups of institutional cinema see Brewster and Jacobs (1997). See also Brewster (1982: 6), who distinguishes between a "magnified view" and "what would now be called a close-up".

perceived as an enlargement, for it is, in itself, "abnormal".[28] As an enlargement, it is as such unusual, unnatural, surprising even, and always fascinating in itself. Naturally, a comparison in relation to other images will accentuate its visual impact. Even in early cinema, which, moreover, in these cases always exhibits the optical instrument that "magically" produces the enlargement (as in *Grandma's Reading Glass*), thus amplifying its unnatural dimension.

In point of fact, the *magnified views* are actually the main visual attraction[29] in *Grandma's Reading Glass*. They are enlargements made possible by the use of an optical instrument, which expands the human eye's potential (it is significant that the grandchild observes his grandmother's *eye* through the glass!) and endows the views with a magical aura, while transforming them into a wonderful artifice for the spectator. Furthermore, they are enlargements made possible by the "invention" of the optical machine *par excellence*, the *Cinématographe*, which is able to project *large* photographic images (larger than the ones that may be seen in the small wooden box built by Edison; like the Skladanowsky brothers' bioskop, Demenÿ's phonoscope…). Their visual impact, in fact, is maximised by the size of the screen. The catalogue is explicit on this point:

> This, the first of a series of most unique pictures, was conceived and invented by us. Grandma is seen at work at her sewing-table, while her little grandson is playfully handling her reading-glass, focussing same on various objects, viz., a newspaper, his watch, the canary, grandma's eye, and the kitten, which objects are shown *in abnormal size on the screen when projected.* The conception is to produce on the screen the various objects as they appeared to Willy while through the glass *in their enormously enlarged form.* The big print of the newspaper, the visible working of the mechanism of the watch, the fluttering of the canary in the cage, the blinking of grandma's eye, and the inquisitive look of the kitten, is most amusing to behold. The novelty of the subject is sure to please every audience. (My emphasis).[30]

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28 See Low and Manvell (1948: 76).

29 On the concept of attraction in early cinema see *infra* 3.1.1.

30 The quotation is taken from the Warwick Trading Company catalogue (April 1901), reproduced in Low and Manvell (1948: 76). The entire passage relating to *Grandma's Reading Glass* is the following: "This, the first of a series of most unique pictures, was conceived and invented by us. Grandma is seen at work at her sewing-table, while her little grandson is playfully handling her reading-glass, focussing same on various objects, viz., a newspaper, his watch, the canary, grandma's eye, and the kitten, which objects are shown in abnormal size on the screen when projected. The conception is to produce on the screen the various objects as they appeared to Willy while looking through the glass in their enormously enlarged form. The big print of the newspaper, the visible working of the mechanism of the watch, the fluttering of the canary in the

Thus, the element that Sadoul underestimates in this film, that is to say the magnifying glass device, is actually its real centre of interest. By reproducing the sense of wonder the spectator experiences when observing the circular views obtained through optical instruments, or through viewing machines such as the magic lantern itself – *large* views, like those projected on the cinematographic screen –, the magnifier in *Grandma's Reading Glass* achieves the same effect of visual artifice by showing objects, through the enlargement, "in abnormal size on the screen when projected".

Remarkably, when dealing with *Grandma's Reading Glass*, albeit with the appropriate re-evaluation and historical corrections, even scholars who later took Smith into consideration have again shown a tendency to focus on its limitations, rather than on its points of interest.[31] That is, the magnifying glass is still reductively interpreted as an expedient that reduces the importance of the "linguistic invention", no matter if that is of the close-up shot, the point-of-view shot, or the editing process.

But approaching *Grandma's Reading Glass* with this sort of expectation means to insist on evaluating its importance on the basis of criteria that do not belong to its time. Such an approach amounts to judging the film under the influence of the "precursor prejudice". In a sense, it would be like insisting on judging primitive art in the light of Renaissance perspective theory. Just as the perspective used in primitive art is not a limitation, but is rather evidence of a different way of conceiving and organising the space being represented, similarly, the magnifying glass in this film is not a limitation, but is rather evidence of a different way of conceiving and representing the gaze – and what had become *visible* at the time through that gaze.

For this reason, the importance of a film such as *Grandma's Reading Glass* is not to be determined by establishing whether or not it consciously anticipated certain filmic practices that appeared later. Such an approach would surely be artificial, since – in terms of the linearisation process – Smith's film does not represent a step towards the conscious codification of that form of representation of the gaze, which we now

cage, the blinking of grandma's eye, and the inquisitive look of the kitten, is most amusing to behold. The novelty of the subject is sure to please every audience".

31 For instance, Chanan (1980), while emphasising the importance of *Grandma's Reading Glass* in the development of film language, defines its use of the lens as a "pretext", and believes the film to be less important than *The Little Doctors* (1901) and *The Sick Kitten* (1903), in which Smith does not resort to the lens to create a close-up (i.e., a detail shot). Frazer (1979: 96) speaks of "Smith's rationalized iris close-ups in *Grandmother's Looking Glass*" [sic], as well as Costa (2011). Even Burch (1990), with reference to *Grandma's Reading Glass*, speaks in his turn of close-ups and diminishes their importance, defining them as "simple" tricks.

call the point-of-view shot – or, more properly, point-of-view structure or point-of-view pattern. After *Grandma's Reading Glass*, Smith repeats this technique only when an optical instrument is present (as in *As Seen Through a Telescope*, or in *At Last! That Awful Tooth*, according to the catalogue descriptions), or when there are similar instruments also created to expand the limited potential of the human eye, such as the artificial light of a lantern in *After Dark; or, The Policeman and His Lantern*. On the other hand, in films such as *The Sick Kitten* (1903), Smith uses close views with no matte, and – significantly – with no implication of the characters' gaze, thus continuing the tradition of the magic lantern.[32]

The importance of *Grandma's Reading Glass*, then, lies in the fact that it gave a specifically filmic form to the optical roots of the representation of the gaze in the cinema. It lies therefore in the fact that it is very much a product of its own time, which succeeded in capturing the era's transformations of the visible.

[32] There are close views in early films which do not employ optical instruments or the keyhole and do not imply a character's look. In *The Sick Kitten*, Smith uses a close view quite confidently, even in alternation with other shots and without exhibiting the look of the two main characters, i.e. the two children. The film shows an image, full screen, of a kitten drinking its "medicine" from a spoon held for it by a little girl (whose body is only partly visible), and the image is edited into the continuity of a full shot which shows the kitten in the girl's arms. Notice that the close view here is also used as an informative element for the spectator. Also the shot of the kitten's head in *The Little Doctors* is interrelated to other shots, and is significantly defined as "magnified" by the catalogue of the period, namely "a magnified view of the kitten's head is shown, the manner in which the little animal receives its dose (of milk) from a spoon, being most amusing" (quoted in Low and Manvell, 1948: 76-77).

Chapter 3

The Circle and the Keyhole

3.1. Clues to a Paradigm

Grandma's Reading Glass was soon imitated. In 1901, *La loupe de grand-maman* appeared in France, significantly classified in the Pathé catalogue as a *scène à trucs*, that is to say, a "trick" film.[1] The following year, *Grandpa's Reading Glass* was made in the United States. In the latter, an old man, sitting at a table with his daughter and his grandchildren around him, is reading with the aid of a magnifying glass; intrigued, the grandchildren seize their grandfather's reading glass and observe through it a number of objects and animals – as well as themselves – appearing on screen enlarged and surrounded by a circular matte, as in *Grandma's Reading Glass*.[2]

However, the voyeuristic vogue of the end of the century, which finds a consubstantial outlet in the cinema, is not catalysed by optics alone. Parallel to optical devices, there is another modality of vision that materialises in many films which show characters spying on other, unaware characters: the voyeuristic modality *par excellence*, looking secretly through a keyhole. Though the appearance of optics, in early cinema iconography, seems to have preceded the appearance of the keyhole – at least with regard to European cinema (see 3.1.4.) – Pathé distributed as early as 1901 the first version of the successful *Par le trou de la serrure*, which was immediately followed by other similar films in which the circular matte gives way to the keyhole-shaped matte.

These two aspects of the same genre – for which it is helpful to use the expressions "optical instrument film" and "keyhole film", so as to underline the important difference characterising these iconographic

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1 The Pathé catalogue reconstructed by Bousquet (1996: 861) attributes *La loupe de grand-maman* to Ferdinand Zecca and indicates the production number 362 (25 m).

2 This film, 34 metres long, was registered at the Copyright Office of the Library of Congress in Washington on October 3, 1902 by the American Mutoscope & Biograph Company. A number of frames are reproduced in Niver (1968), among which the enlargement of an eye and a grandchild's face in extreme close-up. Among other subjects observed there are a monkey, a parrot and a cat embraced by a little girl. Niver also points out that that "no earlier sample [of this structure] exists in the paper print collection" (p. 29).

figures[3] – enjoyed a period of great development, especially between 1900 and 1906. At first, they were organised around a structure that consists of showing exclusively characters engaged in looking through something, alternating images of the person looking with images of the object of the person's gaze, exactly as in *Grandma's Reading Glass*. They are subsequently combined with different and parallel structures (such as the travelogue or the chase), until they blended, around the end of the decade, with more narrativised films.

Naturally, this was not a chronological and evolutionary process. It is certainly possible to find films made after 1906 which are entirely articulated around a structure of alternation between the characters looking and the object of their gaze (see, for example, *Transfigurations* and *Les joyeux microbes*, both by Emile Cohl for Gaumont, 1909). However, the popularity of these films seems to be independent of their irregular transformation, to such an extent that a standardisation of actual topoi is stimulated, first and foremost the topos of the character looking through something: an optical viewer, a keyhole, a hole in a wall, or something framed by the throw of a lamplight. Some of these topics already existed in 18th and 19th century popular iconography, and were eventually utilised in a number of films in order to produce comic effects and amusing parodies. Such is the case of *Les locataires d'à côté* (by Emile Cohl for Gaumont, 1908), in which two young lovers manage to dupe an elderly couple of voyeurs.

Apart from these topics, the representation of the gaze depicted in keyhole and optical instrument films always alternates images of characters looking through something with images of the object of their gaze. That is, it structures the subject and the object in a succession of two or more shots. And since the action is distributed through more than one shot (thus showing separately the prosthesis and the mark it leaves), nowadays we might think that early spectators would not automatically have understood these films. Up to 1902 or 1903, in fact, most films were still composed of a single view and *Grandma's Reading Glass* was, in a way, an anomalous film in 1900.

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[3] The circular matte seems predominant in British cinema (which is greatly indebted to a strong magic lantern tradition), while the keyhole appears mostly in American cinema (which could be influenced by Edison's kinetoscope) and, above all, in French cinema – although the latter actually appears to employ both structures to an equal extent. In other words, there seems to be a slight geographical discrepancy in the parallel development of the two different structures at the core of the genre (see 3.1.4.). Furthermore, the matte reappears in a narrativised form only when it has exhausted its magical and spectacular potential, whereas the keyhole, consubstantial from the very beginning to narration and fiction, is narrativised quite early (see chapter 4). On issues relating to early cinema and the "national", see Abel, Bertellini, King (eds., 2008).

Of course, films composed of more than one view can be found before 1900 as well.[4] Such films, however, usually assembled tableaux that can be regarded as autonomous and which were often sold separately (it happened, for example, with the numerous *Passion Plays*).

There are also many single-shot films which explicitly presuppose a gaze, through the use of a matte or because of an unusual structuring of the shot, thus encouraging the spectator to read the image "as seen by someone" – although they do not show this "someone". In *A Photograph Taken From Our Area Window* (G.A. Smith, 1901), for example, a markedly voyeuristic representation transforms the view of everyday comings and goings, seen through a basement window looking out onto the pavement above, in an exciting spectacle shown "as seen by someone" from that basement window. Similarly, among the many films shot from the front of a moving train (such as the numerous *Kiss in the Tunnel*), a Pathé film from 1899, *Voyage dans un train*, is described as follows in the Pathé catalogue of the period:

> Vue panoramique donnant l'illusion au spectateur de quelqu'un regardant par la portière d'un wagon et voyant se dérouler le paysage si accidenté compris entre Nogent et Joinville.[5]

There are also many single-shot films that exhibit a gaze in order to exploit its dramatic potential, although to different extents. Such is the case of *Explosion of a Motorcar* (Hepworth, 1900) in which a policeman uses a telescope to observe the bodies of travellers who have been catapulted into the air by a car accident, but the spectator is not allowed to share the policeman's view through the optical instrument. It is also

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[4] The tendency to make single-shot films was still predominant, but this does not imply that there are no examples of multi-shot films. Burch (1990) mentions the existence of boxing matches filmed for the kinetoscope by the Latham brothers, and later by Raff and Gammon; these films lasted one minute (the duration of a round), and could be viewed one after the other by inserting more coins. Also, as early as the end of the 19th century, four versions of the *Passion* appear (1897 and 1898): two French versions (one by Léar, and one by Georges Hatot for the Société Lumière), a third in Bohemia by William Freeman, and a fourth in New York by William Paley (see Cosandey, Gaudreault and Gunning, eds., 1992, and Gunning, 1992). For other early titles, composed of more than one shot, see for example *L'affaire Dreyfus* (Star-Film, by Georges Méliès, 1899), composed of eleven tableaux which could be sold separately; *Fire!* (Williamson, 1901), *The Waif and the Wizard* (Walter R. Booth for R.W. Paul, 1901), *Firemen to the Rescue* (Hepworth, 1903). Likewise, it was probably during 1899 that the Italian Leopoldo Fregoli shot a remake of his own *Retroscena* (1898), entitled *Segreto per vestirsi (con aiuto)*, in which three fragments of different shots are inserted into the scenes (see Bernardini, 1980).

[5] Panoramic view which gives the spectator the illusion that someone is looking through the door of a railway wagon and sees unfolding the undulating landscape from Nogent to Joinville (1899 Pathé catalogue, production number 204).

the case of *Métamorphoses d'un fiancé* (Pathé, 1906) in which the plot revolves around how the various characters see themselves and others, thus displaying amusing discrepancies. Likewise, *Why Mrs. Jones Got a Divorce* (Edison, 1900) and the many examples of *Coucher de la mariée* inevitably include, inside the space represented on screen, a character who spies on the bride as she undresses for the night.[6] Or again, as we have seen, in *The Two Old Sports* the two friends who are leafing through an illustrated magazine are visible, to the spectator, along with the object of their look, in a single, self-contained shot.

The pictures in which this form of representation of the gaze appears, on the contrary, necessarily include more than one shot. Most importantly, they establish an original correlation between images, showing separately both the characters who look and the object of their look.

If early spectators, judging from the many imitations, understand these films without difficult and welcome them favourably, it is because they recognise something familiar. Above all, they recognise a range of views that covers the entire spectrum of their visual imagination, putting on screen the spectacle of the world. A range that includes views of cities, astronomic sightings, scientific marvels, erotic scenes, spectacular enlargements, moving shadows.

In these films, early spectators also recognise the representation of the act required to access "the spectacle of the world". In fact, these films all exhibit an experience spectators are familiar with. They show, more or less explicitly, the perceptive experience of pre-cinema and early cinema spectators, who have grown accustomed to looking *through something*. At popular fairs as well as in their own home, early cinema spectators have grown accustomed to looking through the optical viewer of the Mondo Nuovo, as well as through the zoetrope slots; through the lens of a telescope, as well as through the lens of a microscope; through the viewer of a mutoscope, as well as that of a kinetoscope.

In other words, these spectators have grown accustomed to looking through any type of viewing machine that is capable of expanding the human eye's perceptive power, so that the eye can access wonderful views that it would not be able to observe otherwise.

As we have seen, early cinema represents both the point of synthesis, and the ultimate frontier of these viewing machines. Looking through something has become an activity that is accessible to all, therefore an activity that is *visible* to all. These films, in their own way, officially record this event.

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6 Regarding this film, see footnote 42 in this chapter.

Not only do these films represent characters who are looking through something, followed by the object of their look; but, in doing this, they also adopt a number of criteria that might appear as bizarre incongruities today, if analysed superficially. Nowadays, these peculiar characteristics are at times disturbing, yet they represent symptoms through which it is possible to trace a paradigm of clues from which the form of representation of the gaze subsequently codified originates. It is a paradigm of revealing elements, although they are sometimes caught in the folds of differences related to what will, over time, become the point-of-view structure. Some of these elements are imperceptible, and may go unnoticed. Some others, on the other hand, are perfectly consistent with the future transformation of this filmic form, but may be too obvious and therefore appear elusive, or seem to be mere eccentricities.

When examined closely, however, each of these elements perfectly responds to the expectations of the spectators for whom they are intended. Actually, these spectators share the same perceptual experience shown in these films, and still perceive this experience and the cinema itself as an optical artifice, as a scientific marvel, as a wonderful, motionless journey that has the power to convey them towards mobile, exciting and spectacular views. Just like the ones we are about to discuss here.

3.1.1. Autonomy

It has been noted that these films exhibit a structure similar to parataxis, the syntactic organisation that connects the different clauses of a sentence by means of coordination, as opposed to subordination.[7]

Indeed, *Grandma's Reading Glass*, *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième* (Pathé, 1901), *Les cartes lumineuses* (Pathé, 1905), *La fille de bain indiscrète* (Pathé, 1902), *Par le trou de la serrure*, *The Inquisitive Boots* (Hepworth, 1905), *Les joyeux microbes*, *Transfigurations*, *The Unclean World* (Hepworth, 1903), *Curiosité d'une concierge* (Pathé, 1905), *L'amour à tous les étages* (Pathé, 1904) and also *La loupe de grand-maman* and *Ce que l'on voit de la Bastille* (Pathé, 1905) are all composed of a succession of shots with no other link between them than the protagonist, who acts as the bonding element between the different views he or she sees.

In *Grandma's Reading Glass*, for example, there is no actual subordination between the shots of the young boy observing various objects through the magnifying glass and the shots representing the objects themselves, enlarged by the glass. Nor is there a consequential

[7] In accord with popular arts and entertainment forms from which early cinema derives its repertoire: see Gunning (1979) and Gaudreault (1980). For a seminal study on this topic in literature, see Auerbach (1946).

logic dictating a chronological order of the views. Putting it more clearly, a link between the shots does exist, and it is represented by the character of the little boy who is looking through the magnifying glass. But it is merely a coordinating link, similar – relatively speaking – to the one introduced between two clauses by the conjunction "and", as opposed to a subordinating conjunction such as "in order to". The shots are and remain relatively autonomous, and the essentially independent quality of the enlargements is confirmed by the fact that they were sometimes commercialised separately.[8]

Of course, one might think that the autonomy of these views depends on the extreme simplicity of the narrative situation depicted by the film, in which nothing actually happens, apart from the act of looking. Most importantly, nothing happens as a consequence of the act of looking; that is why there is no hypotaxis. Indeed, if we consider the action in *Grandma's Reading Glass* in the light of the minimal requirements set by Vladimir Propp[9] in order for a story to exist, it is clear that Smith's film does not meet them. According to Propp's requirements, it is necessary that an initially balanced situation be upset, and subsequently restored. But in *Grandma's Reading Glass* there is no upsetting of the initial balance, which is actually sustained for the entire duration of this brief film.

However, this autonomy of views is also characteristic of films whose narrative framework is more developed, such as *Un coup d'œil par étage* (Pathé, 1904), *Un drame dans les airs* (made by Gaston Velle for Pathé,

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8 A number of views from *Un coup d'œil par étage* come from earlier Pathé films and were sold separately, notably *Bataille d'oreillers* (1902) and *Ma tante* (1903), played by Dranem. Other examples are given in Gunning (1988).

9 See Propp (1928). The issue of how to define a story is one of the most thorny questions posed by narratology, and it becomes even more complicated when considered within the filmic context. If one accepts a "broad" definition, which may be summarised in Claude Bremond (1973)'s idea that for a message to be considered a story it is sufficient that it be inscribed in time, thus entailing a process of transformation from an initial state to a final state, then *Grandma's Reading Glass* is also inscribed within a duration, and is therefore necessarily open to transformation (provided that we consider as "transformation" a simple shift in position within the shot: the boy is on the left at the beginning, and on the right at the end…). However, this definition forces us to see narration everywhere, particularly in the field of cinema, since any film is necessarily placed within time, and is therefore exposed to transformation (Andy Warhol's 1964 *Empire* is a striking case, from this perspective). But if everything is narration, then nothing is narration! So if, setting aside Bremond's definition, we turn to the stricter one, elaborated by Todorov (1971: 111), according to which a story, being an "intrigue minimale complète" (a "minimal complete plot"), consists of the passage from one state of equilibrium to another (a definition which is based on Propp's view of the story as a sequence of shifts from an initial balanced situation to an unbalanced one, then on to a new equilibrium), *Grandma's Reading Glass* does not satisfy this condition. For further consideration of the problem, with respect to the notion of storytelling in early cinema, see Gaudreault (1988b).

1904), as well as *Toto aéronaute*, discussed in chapter 1. These films place a series of shots of the character looking at something (through a keyhole in *Un coup d'œil par étage*, through an optical instrument in *Un drame dans les airs* and *Toto aéronaute*) within a narrative frame that satisfies Propp's conditions: a fire which is later put out by firemen in *Un coup d'œil par étage*, the flying adventure and its disastrous conclusion in *Toto aéronaute*, a storm followed by a fall into the sea and an ensuing rescue operation by boat in *Un drame dans les airs*. Again, however, though placed within a sufficiently structured narrative frame, the shots representing the characters' gaze entail the same layout and, more importantly, the same autonomy, in their relation to one another and to the rest of the film. Nor, by the way – in partial exception to what happens in *Un coup d'œil par étage*, which we will examine in 4.2.1. – is it possible to trace the upsetting of the initial stability, or its recovery, back to the content of the views.

Similarly, other films exhibiting a much more structured narrative framework, and again showing a group of shots representing a character's gaze, sustain a relationship of complete independence with regard to these views. In other words, the images representing the characters' gaze have little or nothing to do with the rest of the story. This happens, for instance, in *La peine du talion* (made by Gaston Velle for Pathé, 1906), *Eclipse de soleil en pleine lune* (by Georges Méliès, 1907), *Le tour du monde d'un policier* (Pathé, 1906) and *Voyage sur Jupiter* (also known as *Une excursion sur Jupiter*, by Segundo de Chomón for Pathé, 1909), in which the views that represent the characters' gaze exist as autonomous and compact segments, placed in the middle of the film, as if they had been actually inserted into it. And this isolation from the story further enhances independence and autonomy of those views.

This is particularly evident when these shots are presented as a true "film within a film". Take as an example the aforementioned *Le tour du monde d'un policier* (made by Charles Lucien Lépine and photographed by Segundo de Chomón, for Pathé, in 1906). Not only does it fully satisfy the conditions necessary to have a story: the initially stable situation is upset by a theft, committed by one of the two protagonists, and is subsequently restored by a policeman who overcomes a number of obstacles, chasing the thief in a sort of tour around the world. But also, in addition to the telling of an actual story, with a structured beginning and end, the protagonists of this film fully assume the role of main characters with sufficiently delineated psychological traits (the thief is an impoverished gentleman; the policeman himself has the chance to realise this and, in a way, acknowledges the gentleman's merit by not arresting him…). Yet, *Le tour du monde d'un policier* includes an insertion of panoramic views, observed through a pair of binoculars by one of these characters, which

are absolutely independent in relation to the context into which they are inserted. Of course, these views illustrate the stages of the trip around the world made by the policeman in pursuit of the thief: the Suez Canal, the African desert, Yokohama, Native American territory. But they are views that are presented in a way that is completely autonomous from the unfolding of the story. They are grouped together, one after the other, in the manner of a travelogue and their interest is in no way linked to the framework into which they are inserted, just as their autonomy is confirmed by the modality of their insertion.

When compared to the cinema we know today, this type of structure appears unusual, essentially for two reasons. Firstly because, in the cinema following the early period, shots representing a character's gaze are generally subordinated to those representing the character who is looking, as well as to the entire context into which they are inserted. Secondly because they hardly ever possess such autonomy and independence from their own framework, since this would necessarily entail an interruption of the continuity that linearisation generally aspires to. In other words, point-of-view shots tend to display a hypotactic structure, and even if they were inserted within a given context according to a paratactic construction, they would nevertheless mitigate the absence of subordination by exhibiting a certain degree of congruence.[10]

Probably, however, what seems incongruous to us, today, was in perfect harmony with the expectations of the spectator of *Le tour du monde d'un policier*. That is, what appears unbalanced and uninteresting to us, today, corresponded to the cultural and interpretative codes of the spectator for whom *Le tour du monde d'un policier*, *Grandma's Reading Glass* and all the other above-mentioned films were intended. This spectator did not expect a narrative implication from the succession of these images, and could not distinguish between narrative, fiction, documentaries and so on, on the basis of criteria which are familiar to us today, but which did not exist in the age of early cinema. Most importantly, this spectator was not necessarily interested in a potential relationship between the characters who look and the objects of their look, but was engrossed in the spectacular quality of each view, i.e., in its spectacular attraction.[11]

For this reason, then, the autonomous shots that appear in these films, far from being plain (*more* plain than what we see today) and poorly

[10] See, for example, an interesting case in Roman Polanski's *Knife in the Water* (*Noz W Wodzie*, 1962), in which a character looks at the coast from a boat, first with one eye and then with the other. The camera portrays this vision by showing the image of the coast from the perspective of the left eye and then from the perspective of the right one, in order to simulate human perception.

[11] On this seminal and much discussed concept, see here chapter 4.

dramatised (*less* dramatised than they would be today), are exactly the type of shots early spectators expected to see, and which they were able to appreciate. In other words, this autonomy and the lack of dramatisation itself corresponded exactly to their horizon of expectations. That is, nothing more than the simple showing of different kinds of *views*, interesting in themselves, obtained through the mediation of an optical instrument or some other means capable of making them accessible to human sight.

Wonderful views, because they are enlarged. A simple newspaper page, or the mechanism of a watch ticking (see *Grandma's Reading Glass*), enlarged by a magnifying glass and further enlarged by the big screen, acquire the same spectacular potential as the viewing of the personification of Jupiter, Mars or Saturn (see *Eclipse de soleil en pleine lune*, or *Voyage sur Jupiter*).

Exciting views, because they are usually inaccessible. The many scenes of everyday life, observed through a keyhole, become all fascinating to an equal extent, because they are all equally intimate and secret, whether they portray the seductive ritual of a beautiful woman combing her hair before going to bed (*Par le trou de la serrure*), innocent children playing with pillow feathers (*Un coup d'œil par étage*), or an eccentric lady lovingly cuddling her dog (*The Inquisitive Boots*).

Inspiring views, because they are permeated by the popular visual imagination of the age. Panoramas of cities seen from above (*Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*, *Ce que l'on voit de la Bastille*), possibly from a flying balloon (*Un drame dans les airs*, *Toto aéronaute*), or scenes of far-away lands, more or less exotic, evoke an idea of the journey which continues the popular panorama tradition (*Le tour du monde d'un policier*) and excite the spectators' imagination.

Interesting views, because they are scientific, or presumed to be scientific. The image of a butterfly moving its colourful wings (*La peine du talion*) or of worms and bacteria moving frenetically (*Le déjeuner du savant*, Pathé, 1905) or even the enlargement of a hair (*L'eau merveilleuse*), are in their own way didactic and continue the practice of educational magic lantern projections, of which these views sometimes offer an amusing parody (*Les joyeux microbes*, *The Unclean World*, *The Love Microbe*).[12]

[12] *The Love Microbe* (Biograph, 1907) is an interesting case, as well as an amusing parody of the scientific world. It tells the story of Professor Cupido, persuaded that people can "catch" love if infected with a specific germ; he then starts off the quest for the "love microbe", tests it on various characters, thus giving rise to several comic situations. Despite this narrative frame, though, the views observed by Professor

Finally, *entertaining* views, because they are derived from the most popular variety shows – as in the revealing of the *fausse femme* (*The Inquisitive Boots*, *Par le trou de la serrure*).[13]

Or, more simply, views in movement, observed from the best possible line of sight.

3.1.2. The Line of Vision

There is another element that stands out because of its anomaly, when comparing these films and their autonomous views with the subsequent point-of-view structure. Nowadays, while it represents a character's look, a point-of-view shot also complies with his or her perceptive conditions. That is, it reproduces the distance between the characters and the object of their look as well as the direction from which they are looking. If it did not, it would no longer be a point-of-view shot. In other words, distance and direction are two essential conditions without which it is impossible to speak of a point-of-view shot. In fact, the point-of-view shot represents not only *what* a character is looking at (this could as clearly be done by eyeline match), but also *how* a character sees it (from afar, from above, sideways, etc.).[14]

Conversely, in the views represented in these films, distance and direction are clearly never respected. Although the matte (to be further discussed in 3.1.4.) is often represented, in order to simulate the optical instrument or keyhole through which the character looks, the represented view is never shot from the same distance that separates the character from the view itself, and the direction of the gaze is never reproduced. In other words, the size of the objects viewed is never realistic, and neither is the angle from which these objects are shot.

This happens in *Grandma's Reading Glass*, where there is no proportion between the enlargement of the clockwork of the watch and the enlargement of the kitten's head, for instance; or between the grandmother's eye, magnified full screen, and the canary, framed within its own cage. Yet the young boy holds the same magnifying glass, and

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Cupido through his microscope – showing the love microbes encircled by a matte on a black background – are pure amusing spectacle.

13 The *fausse femme* theme is as old as it is widespread, and recurs in many popular songs.

14 Whether implicitly or explicitly, distance and direction are considered, by all scholars who have dealt with this issue, the basic conditions for a point-of-view shot to exist. On this topic see Branigan (1984), who very properly points out that camera angle and especially distance can also be critical variables in the "institutional" point-of-view structure**;** this can bear a degree of deviation from the strict framing of the character's vantage point and still work as such, i.e., as a convention.

does so from the same distance, in order to observe both the eye and the canary in its cage, as well as any other object that captures his interest.

Similarly, in *Un drame dans les airs* there is no proportion between the size of the Paris rooftops, shot from above, and that of the boats sailing the sea which appear immediately afterwards; nor is there any proportion between the size of the boats and that of the rocks in the sea, enlarged in the view that follows. Another example: in *Aux bains de mer* (Pathé, 1906) an old voyeur directs his telescope to the four points of the horizon (as the catalogue of the period notes), but the size of the boats among the rocks that the man is able to see in his first views is disproportionate to the view of the lovely ladies he finally observes on the beach.

This alteration in size of people and objects observed by a character does not occur only in the views reproduced in optical instrument films, although the enlargement effect is almost always suggested by the use of an appropriate lens, and thus appears to justify the reproduction of "abnormal" sizes with respect to "current" parameters. The same alteration is also to be found in keyhole films. Moreover, while in optical instrument films it occurs only in the form of an enlargement – which may appear out of proportion compared to the other views observed in the same film –, in keyhole films practically anything can happen. As a matter of fact, in keyhole films the represented views may be magnified or reduced in size, moved or even turned upside down or overturned, with regard to the position of the character who observes them. In other words, the scenes that appear through a keyhole are always observed from a line of vision that never belongs to the character who is looking. And this systematically alters the most rudimentary parameters of direction and distance, which would become so important later.

It happens, for example, in *Un coup d'œil par étage*, where a concierge at first spies on an excited businessman who is shouting into the phone at his desk, and who appears on screen framed from his elbows up (as if the desk were placed right in front of the door from which the concierge is observing him, facing the keyhole). On the second floor, the concierge observes three children having a pillowfight in their bedroom, framed in a long shot (unlikely though it is, in such an elegant bourgeois apartment, that the front door would open immediately into a bedroom, and equally unlikely that the keyhole would be positioned at the exact distance required to observe all three children simultaneously). The concierge then peeps into the keyhole on the third floor, observing in close shot an old lady sitting at a table, playing with her cat (as if the woman were positioned directly facing the keyhole through which she is seen). When the man finally gets to the attic, he sees the last tenant fighting a fire (again, centrally framed and facing the keyhole).

Another example of this occurs in *The Inquisitive Boots*, where the bootblack spies on the guests in the hotel where he works. These guests appear on screen in a series of views, at times medium long shots, close shots, or long shots, always as if they were facing the keyhole, and always at the optimum distance to be best observed. In the last view, the inside of the same door through which the bootblack is supposed to be looking can actually be seen in frame, on the right-hand wall. This time, the character who is being spied on hears noise coming from the other side of that door, bends down in turn to peek through the keyhole and squirts water through it. In the next shot, the bootblack is shown falling to the ground, dripping wet.

Similarly, in the Edison production *A Search for Evidence* – shot in 1903, two years before *The Inquisitive Boots* –, after having spied on various hotel guests, a private detective and a woman, seeking her unfaithful husband, at last find the room where the man is hiding with his lover. Here, in the final view observed through a keyhole by the woman and the detective, the room is seen from the same line of vision used later, in the very last shot, where the same woman and the same detective enter the room from the right-hand side.

An even more striking case is represented by the delightful *Curiosité d'une concierge*. In this film, the concierge in question looks through the front door keyholes of five apartments and sees five views at various distances. On the first floor, peeping through the keyhole of the front door apartment, she sees a young woman in love saying goodnight to her loved one's photograph before going to bed (in a close shot, as if the bed were located directly in front of the keyhole). On the second floor, she observes two little sisters in bed, as one of them says her prayers before falling asleep (in a close shot framed frontally). On the third floor, she spies a couple of old misers bolting the door with every possible means before stashing their savings under the bedcovers (in another close shot, but wider this time). On the fourth floor, she peers a married couple bickering because of a fit of jealousy (in a medium shot). Finally, on the fifth floor she sees a wife who greets her drunken husband by beating him with a stick (again in a medium shot). In at least two cases, though, the concierge observes views that appear on screen shot from the direction of an inverted line of vision with respect to her own. That is to say, she sees views in which the front door, from which the woman observes, is placed right in the middle of the frame and at the back, at the side opposite to the one where the camera is placed and from which the scene is observed. This happens in the third and fifth views. In the third view, the front door the two misers are bolting is seen from the back. In the fifth view, preceded by the image of the drunken husband crossing the landing under the observant eye of the amused concierge, the same drunken husband comes towards us

through the front door, near which the woman is preparing to spy on him. In this shot, however, the door is seen straight ahead, in the middle of the back wall, behind which, of course, we know the concierge is concealed, but from which the action is *not* observed.

In *L'amour à tous les étages* something similar happens. When the student arrives at the second floor landing, he sees a young woman arriving. She crosses the threshold of the door towards which the student immediately moves in order to spy on her. In the next shot, though, we see the woman entering the frame from the left, continuing the movement previously seen, but from a line of vision that logically cannot be the student's, for he himself is (out of frame) on the left, on the other side of the door, peeking in.

However, in this case as well, it would be a mistake to insist upon interpreting this "anomaly" as an error, as a naive outlook determined by an inability to correctly approach the current parameters of matching the look, the movement or the direction. On the contrary, this "anomaly" – which only today we interpret as an incongruity – is not a mistake, but illustrates a different way of perceiving the modalities of representation, in accordance with early spectators' expectations.

If one observes each of these views carefully, in fact, one notices that the alterations in the size, or in the direction from which the characters and objects are represented, never occur by chance. And although by today's logic they clearly violate the distance and the direction from which the character observes, they are actually consistent with another kind of logic: that of constantly and systematically exhibiting the *best* view of the scene. Therefore these views are consistent with a conscious will to offer the audience the *best possible sight line* of what is being shown. And this best possible sight line is not necessarily a realistic sight line, when compared to the one the observing character ought to have, because of where and how they are placed. As a matter of fact, these views are ultimately addressed not to the character, but to the spectator in the audience.[15] And, for this spectator, their interest lies precisely in their

[15] Note that *The Gay Shoe Clerk* (Porter, 1903) also works this way, even if it displays no circular matte and the protagonist makes no use of an optical instrument. In it, the shoe-shop clerk of the title observes a pretty customer's ankle, appearing on the screen enlarged and shot from the side, not from the clerk's vantage point. About this title, Gunning (2006: 38, footnote 5, quoting a suggestion by Wanda Strauven) speaks of "POV of the spectator outside the film", in opposition to "POV of the male character in the film". I would not use the expression "POV" to designate what a spectator sees, but the suggestion is in itself appropriate, even if it could be said about every early film representing a character's gaze, the aim of which is to provide the audience with the best possible view of what is shown, not to display a "realistic" sight line of how the observing character sees it. Indeed, the views observed are always ultimately addressed not to the character, but to the spectator in the audience. The peculiarity of

intrinsically exciting, fascinating, spectacular – and also all-embracing – quality (see 1.2.).

What is represented in these views is not what the observing characters see, *in the way* that they really look at it (from up close or from afar, at a three-quarter angle…), because this is not what matters to the spectator at the time these films were made. Instead, what the characters look at is represented *in the way* that the spectator of that time expects to see it. That is to say, from a line of vision that is as all-encompassing as possible. It may be in close shot, if it is important to be able to see the scene from up close (as in the case of the facials, or of actions based on spicy particulars or exciting details such as some of the views in *The Inquisitive Boots*, *Curiosité d'une concierge*, *Un coup d'œil par étage*…). It may also be in medium long, or even long, shot, if the representation of the action requires more space in order to include multiple characters (this happens, for example, in *A Search for Evidence* or in the fourth view of *Curiosité d'une concierge*). In any event, it is usually a frontal view (such is the case with nearly all the views observed in the films we have analysed, regardless of the position from which the character observes them).

The most possible all-encompassing view is given even if it entails disproportions, within the same film, or if the size of the objects changes although the characters have not modified the distance that separates them from those objects. Such is the case with *Grandma's Reading Glass*, in which the canary "enlarged" by the magnifying glass is much smaller than the grandmother's eye seen at the same distance and through the same lens, because in the case of the eye it is particularly interesting to have it magnified full screen, whereas the interest in the canary is the entire view of it in its cage.

In short, the line of vision characterising the views exhibited in optical instrument or keyhole films always enables the spectator to see the represented view at its best. It is the line of vision that best allows the spectator to be caught up in the spectacular attractions of the view – one of these attractions being movement.

The Gay Shoe Clerk seems to lie elsewhere: in its combining the display of *voyeuristic pleasure*, underlined by the *enlargement*, in spite of the *lack of a circular matte* (and of an exhibited character's gaze, looking through an optical instrument) – unlike in *As Seen Through a Telescope* (see in this respect Brewster, 1982), where the character has recourse to a telescope. On *The Gay Shoe Clerk*, see also footnote 60 in this chapter, and Musser (1991), who speaks in turn of the "male viewer" and stresses that the "close view of the young lady's ankle is shown against a plain background to further focus the viewer's attention, suggesting the subjective nature of the shot and abstracting from the scene" (p. 246). In fact, the recourse to a different, neutral background, does abstract the ankle from the scene, as will later be the case of the classical Hollywood close-up of a (female) star.

3.1.3. Movement

While the size of the observed objects may not be realistically represented, the objects themselves are rarely immobile. Indeed, among the films analysed here, with the exception of the Pathé production *L'eau merveilleuse* – in which a barber gazes fixedly at a hair through a magnifying glass – the observed objects are never motionless.

Butterflies' wings flutter in *La peine du talion*. Worms and bacteria move in *Le déjeuner du savant*, and so do the insects in *The Unclean World*, the microbes in *The Love Microbe*, and the (animated!) cartoons in *Transfigurations* and *Les joyeux microbes*. The characters being spied on in *L'amour à tous les étages*, *Curiosité d'une concierge*, *The Inquisitive Boots*, *Un coup d'œil par étage*, *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*, *A Search for Evidence*, *Par le trou de la serrure*, *Aux bains de mer*, *La fille de bain indiscrète*, and *Ce que l'on voit de la Bastille* are all moving. In *As Seen Through a Telescope*, a cyclist's hand moves slyly as he laces up a shoe for his lady companion. And the stars seen in *Voyage sur Jupiter*, or in *Eclipse de soleil en pleine lune* are also in movement.

A few more examples: the flag seen by the captain in *The Battle of Chemulpo Bay* (1904) moves, the revolutionaries and soldiers in *La révolution en Russie* (1905) are in movement, and so are the beautiful women in *Les cartes lumineuses*. In *Grandma's Reading Glass*, the grandmother's eye moves, as does the canary in its cage; the kitten moves, and so does the watch (that is, its clockwork is seen to run smoothly); even the newspaper page moves, in order to simulate a slight camera pan to the right, thus replicating a supposed movement of the boy's eye when looking through the magnifying glass.

In *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième* – like the newspaper page in *Grandma's Reading Glass* – the image of the Parisian rooftops also moves, thanks to a pan the camera performs in order to simulate the movement of the voyeur's eye, at our end of the telescope. And the panoramas observed in *Aux bains de mer*, *Un drame dans les airs*, *Toto aéronaute* or *Le tour du monde d'un policier* all "move" in the same way.

While the autonomous quality of the shots strikes us today as a disturbing anomaly, when compared to the subsequent development of the point-of-view structure, and while the alteration in size of the represented objects is soon detected through careful observation, movement is less noticeable (or perhaps too much so). At any rate, it is not evidently perceptible as a clue.

The representation of movement is an element that the cinema has used so much by now that, today, it usually goes unnoticed. Today, movement is the most obvious thing the cinema can display, so that it is also the

least spectacular, the least eye-catching, the least significant and attractive element that may be shown. But this would not have been the case for the spectator to whom these films were addressed. In that spectator's view, the greatest pleasure offered is the simple representation of movement. One should not forget that the big "novelty" of the cinema consisted precisely in the mechanical reproduction of photographic images *in movement*. Decades of experiments in the mechanical disassembly and reassembly of movement finally led to the invention of cinema, and it was cinema that made the representation of movement definitively *visible*.

In effect, apart from specific peculiarities and purposes, two groups of research relating to the reproduction of movement constituted the foundation of the invention of the cinema. These two groups remained autonomous for a long time, but were only apparently divergent. The first involved elaborating a mechanism that would pin down and *analyse* human and animal movement, by resolving it into its various stages. The second related to the elaboration of a mechanism that would be able to reassemble the different stages of a particular movement (drawn or photographed) into a *synthesis*, thus reproducing the perception of its continuity. Whatever the intention, though, whether it involved Muybridge or Marey, Plateau or Robertson, science or spectacle, magic lanterns, photography or stereoscopy, all these types of research were fuelled by a common, converging spirit: seeking to reproduce mechanically a natural perceptive phenomenon, in order to overcome its limitations. Again, in order to go beyond the narrow confines of viewing with the "naked eye". We may mention, in passing, that the aspiration underlying Muybridge's most best-known experiments is that of being able to see what is unseen in nature: i.e., whether horses simultaneously lift all four legs off the ground as they gallop.[16]

Once more, then, these views record what had become visible to the spectator thanks to the cinema, and to the perceptive practices that preceded the cinema. Better yet, they exhibit new modalities, made visible by the cinema, of viewing and experiencing the iconographic repertoire that had preceded the cinema. First of all, simply through the representation of movement in itself (in *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*, *Un drame dans les airs*, *Ce que l'on voit de la Bastille*, *The Inquisitive Boots*, *Un coup d'œil par étage*, *A Search for Evidence*, *Par le trou de la serrure*, *La fille de bain indiscrète*, *Curiosité d'une concierge*, *L'amour à tous les étages*…). Then also through the representation of movement which is perceived from up close, because it is enlarged, in *Grandma's Reading Glass*, *La peine du talion*, *Le déjeuner du savant*, *As Seen Through a Telescope*, *The Unclean World*, *The Love Microbe*, *Voyage sur Jupiter*…

[16] See at least Doane (2002), as well as Braun (1992) and (2010).

And finally through the representation of movement as an artifice, as a trick device, as pure simulation of the mobility that the human eye had acquired.

The latter is a kind of cinematic simulation which, as is well known, was achieved quite early on, thanks to ingenious makeshift expedients such as placing the camera on a boat in order to film the surrounding space *in* movement. The first to do this, according to recent research, seems to have been Constant Girel, who filmed for the Lumière brothers, from a boat in Cologne, a moving panorama of the Rhine riverside, not later than September 1896.[17] The most famous, however – and probably the most conscious of what he was doing –, remains Alexandre Promio, who, in November 1896 filmed a *Panorama du Grand Canal vu d'un bateau* in Venice, also for the Lumière brothers.[18] This technique was soon used by many others, for example to film panoramas from a speeding train, often called "Panorama en chemin de fer" in France, or "Phantom Ride" in Great Britain. This was a very popular genre in many other countries as well, as is demonstrated by the numerous imitations of *Voyage dans un train* (Pathé, 1897/99), *Panorama à l'arrière d'un train* (Pathé, 1897/99), *View From an Engine Front* (Hepworth, 1899), *Phantom Ride: Chamonix* (R.W. Paul, 1900) and so on.

There are even "eroticised" variants of this genre, for example the famous *The Kiss in the Tunnel*, which includes, in the version made by Smith in 1899, a shot of a couple kissing in the seclusion of a train compartment, inserted between two other shots which show, from the front of the train, the views as the train approaches and leaves a tunnel. The catalogues indicate that it was a film to be joined into the tunnel portion of a Phantom Ride,[19] during cinematographic exhibitions in fairgrounds. The visual effect, therefore, was an end in itself, and was intended to strike the visitors' imagination in the same way as walking on a conveyor belt observing the surrounding views in movement would have done for the visitors to the Parisian *Exposition Universelle* in 1900.

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17 See Seguin (1999), who refers to a letter by Girel dated September 22 (1896), in which the latter affirms that he filmed a moving panoramic view in Cologne. Today we know that this view was projected in Lyons on October 25 of that year.

18 See Seguin (1999), according to whom Promio (unlike Girel) was conscious of the novelty, as seems to be proved by its reiteration in the numerous moving panoramas he subsequently filmed, as well as by Promio's own memories set down in his *Carnets de route*, partially reproduced also in Pinel (1994).

19 See Gifford (1973). See also Kreimeier (2009). The *Vues panoramiques circulaires* (cf. Bousquet, 1996), where "le spectateur voit défiler… comme si… il regardait autour de lui" (the spectator sees flowing… as if… he was looking around him) are other examples of movement perceived as exciting in itself.

As Alexandre Promio himself observed in his invaluable *Carnet de route*,[20] if an immobile camera can reproduce things and people in movement, a moving camera is able to confer movement on objects and things which are usually still. Thus spaces – alpine mountain tops, the rooftops of a great city, the countryside – become a spectacular attraction in itself.[21] It happens in *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*, of course, and in *Aux bains de mer*, *Un drame dans les airs*, *Toto aéronaute*, *Le tour du monde d'un policier*, *Ce que l'on voit de la Bastille* and others.

Yet there is another aspect that must be considered. Indeed, what we have seen about paratactic construction, and about the exhaustiveness of the line of vision, is also relevant to the representation of movement. In all likelihood, the spectators of the day do not expect movement in these films to play a role, narrative or otherwise, nor do they expect it to be functional to the represented action; rather, they appreciate the exhibition as an end in itself. The spectators watching *Grandma's Reading Glass* – its protagonist as well as what he sees – do not make use of the movement to read what is written on the newspaper page. And even if they did, they would not be able to draw from it any significant conclusion relating to what they will see later on, in contrast to what happens, for example, in the many subsequent "epistolary films" (analysed in 4.2.3), where the view of the pages read by the characters remains still for as long as it takes the audience to read the information necessary to the comprehension of the story. In *Grandma's Reading Glass*, on the contrary, the view of the newspaper page functions as an attraction in itself, and its movement simply enhances the shot's spectacular impact.

The early spectator would not have expected movement to play a role even in those cases that, today, we would tend to read as subjective. Jacques Deslandes[22] has in fact shown that what we might interpret as a "moon landing" effect, achieved by Georges Méliès in *Le voyage dans la lune* (1902), was a particularly complex passage, taken from a succession of tableaux from the show mounted by the same Méliès at the Robert Houdin theatre in 1891, *Les farces de la lune à un metre ou les mésaventures de Nostradamus*. However this did not involve a journey by rocket into outer space, and that effect actually had the function of exhibiting an optical artifice.

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20 Partially reproduced in Pinel (1994: 80).

21 On movement as a spectacular attraction see Dagrada (1988a) and (1998a), and Gunning (2009a).

22 See Deslandes (1963). On this topic, see also Costa (1989) and (2011) and especially Lefebvre (2002) for a philologic reconstruction of the different elements from many sources combined into this film.

If we observe Méliès's film carefully, we will notice that the movement represented in *Le voyage dans la lune* does not simulate the approach of someone looking at it from inside the spaceship. Rather, it simulates the *movement of the moon* advancing towards someone looking at it (from the spaceship, but also, most importantly, from the audience).[23] In fact, the frame of clouds surrounding the image stays still, whereas the moon, inside this circular frame, similar to a matte, gradually grows bigger and bigger. This does not happen by mistake, or because of technical limitations – as we might think today. Very likely, it happens because for Méliès, and for the spectator of the time, it was not important to have that movement simulate an approach towards the moon. What was important was the wonderful effect of movement in itself, the impact of a trick device that could boost the visual effect of a view presented as the amazing exhibition of a visionary fantasy (similar, by the way, to the views representing the astronomer's gaze in *Eclipse de soleil en pleine lune*). This fantasy was taken up again a few years later, in identical fashion, in *Voyage à travers l'impossible* (1904), where Méliès repeated the trick, this time with a bright yellow sun, surrounded by a frame of immobile clouds: here, the sun "advances", growing bigger and bigger, encircled by the motionless outline of clouds, thus allowing a special solar train, arriving from Earth, to enter its great anthropophagous mouth.

It is significant, moreover, that the same movement from *Le voyage dans la lune* was "copied" at least twice, by de Chomón and Zecca in *Excursion dans la lune* (Pathé, 1908) and by Velle and Zecca in *Rêve à la lune* (Pathé, 1905), and that in both cases the dynamics of this movement remained unaltered. In *Rêve à la lune*, in particular, there is the same frame of clouds as in *Le voyage dans la lune*, surrounding the moon and remaining immobile as the satellite grows progressively bigger.[24] Velle and Zecca do not "correct" the trick, though in this case, rather than a spaceship, it is a man looking at the moon – or, to be more precise, dreaming of the moon – who then slips into its gaping mouth, kicking his legs. The film description in the May 1905 supplement to the Pathé catalogue is quite clear on this point, explaining that: "La lune elle-même attendrie de ses efforts s'approche de lui et lui accorde l'hospitalité".[25]

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[23] In fact, after the spaceship "enters" the moon's eye, the satellite movement towards us continues, until it fills the screen. Also the film description by Méliès explains that: "La lune approche!" / the moon approaches! Cf. "Texte explicatif de Méliès" in Malthête, Mannoni (eds., 2008: 129).

[24] This Pathé film is also known as *L'amant de la lune* and exists in at least two versions, both displaying the same frame of clouds and the same movement; on the two versions see Le Forestier (1996) and (2006).

[25] The moon itself, touched by his efforts, approaches him and offers him hospitality. See the *Supplément de Mai* 1905 to the Pathé catalogue, p. 8. This text is also quoted in Mitry (1985: 25). See Guibbert (ed., 1985).

This quotation, explicitly describing the approaching movement *of the moon*, then, reveals to what extent its representation here alludes to a way of perceiving the satellite, seeing it as magical, and, partly for this reason, quite clearly anthropomorphic. In addition, the moon is "humanised", if we take note of the catalogue describing it as compassionate, touched by the man's efforts. The movement connecting the moon to the man bears no similarity to the scientific representation of a man entering an equally scientific space, in which the moon is seen as a celestial body; nor does it correspond to a movement on the man's part, which would be able to modify the conditions of visibility of the satellite in a scientific direction. On the contrary, it is a movement *the moon* makes, drawing close to the man, entering the terrestrial space of his imagination, revealing that the way in which the moon itself was conceived was playful and spectacular. It is as playful and spectacular as the circular matte that was used to represent an image as seen through an optical viewer, or that same matte that surrounds the dreaming king in *Voyage sur Jupiter*, in order to suggest his movement away from Saturn as he moves toward Jupiter. It is as playful and spectacular as the frame of clouds surrounding the moon in *Le voyage dans la lune* and in *Rêve à la lune*, or the sun in *Voyage à travers l'impossible*.

However, in these cases as well as in others described here, it would be wrong to believe it necessary to interpret the movement performed by the moon (or by the sun, or even by the king in *Voyage sur Jupiter*) as a "mistake", as an inaccurate representation of the character's viewpoint. For, once more, we are witnessing the exhibition of a spectacular and fascinating element. We are witnessing an extraordinary event being put on display, in the form of a trick device.

Such a trick is splendidly exposed in *The Unclean World*. Here a man, while eating, discovers a foreign body in his food, and immediately looks at it though a microscope lens in order to find out what it is. The next shot shows two wriggling insects surrounded by a circular matte against a black background, which are turned over by a pair of hands, thus revealing that they are not actual animals, but two little mechanical toys; the hands now wind them up, using a small key.[26]

[26] This Hepworth film is, incidentally, a genuine parody, and it is classified by Gifford (1973) as a "Burlesque of 'The Unseen World': The Urban-Duncan Microbioscope". It pokes fun at a series of scientific films produced by Urban in 1903, entitled *The Unseen World*, which consisted of reproductions of subjects such as *Cheese Mites* and *Typhoid Bacteria*, seen through a microscope. See, on this point, Low and Manvell (1948: 60), and Gunning (1988: 38), according to whom this film exposes the matte device as an arbitrary convention (the film being a parody of scientific films). However, it seems to me that this film reveals, first and foremost, the "contents" of the matte: the hand does not remove the cardboard from which the matte is cut, but overturns the object instead,

3.1.4. The Matte

The wriggling insects that are revealed as a trick in *The Unclean World* are surrounded, as just mentioned, by a circular matte against a black background.

The circle constitutes the most frequent iconographic frame in optical instrument films, and in this case it clearly simulates the microscope lens through which the man observes the unidentified intruders who have ruined his lunch. However, it would be naive, as well as reductive, to interpret this frame as the result of "realistic" concerns. Indeed, the same circle also appears in films such as *Les trois phases de la lune* (Pathé, 1905), *When the Devil Drives* (Urban, by Walter R. Booth, 1907),[27] *La revanche du chat* (Lux, 1908), or even as late as in *Pauli* (Ambrosio, 1910), when there is no observer, and no trace of a microscope or any other optical instrument.[28] In *Bertie Buys a Bulldog* (Cricks and Martin, 1909) there are even two observers: a married couple, who read a newspaper advertisement (announcing a bulldog for sale) which appears on screen enlarged and surrounded by a matte against a dark background; nevertheless, they do not make use of an optical instrument of any kind. In *Faust*, Marguerite looks at a crucifix – again, without any optical instrument – that appears on screen surrounded by a matte.

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revealing that it is a toy. The amusing Pathé film *Le déjeuner du savant* works in the same way, evolving in an equally playful and parodic direction. Also *Una cura contro i microbi* (Cines, 1909) seems to work in the same way, according to the description quoted in Bernardini (1996).

27 In order to interpret the circular matte occurring during the final shot of this film – a close-up of the devil, which materialises after a dissolve preceded by the circular, whirling image of the train driven by the devil himself – Belloï (2001: 295 ff.) suggests the existence of a link between the first occurrences of the circular matte in early films representing a character's gaze (considered "subjective" in themselves) and the emblematic shot. According to Belloï, the close-up of the devil encircled by a matte in *When the Devil Drives* is an emblematic shot; and an emblematic shot, when encircled by a matte, would be a sort of emancipation of the point-of-view shot, freed from the Subject character (replaced by the Subject spectator), in a sort of "return to the lantern" – i.e., to "origins" – from which the first occurrences of the point-of-view shot tended to deviate. However, the first occurrences of the point-of-view shot are, if anything, a continuation of the lantern practice, not an emancipation from it, and are especially not "subjective" in themselves (see also chapter 5). Note also that Belloï distinguishes between emblematic shots with and without mattes, and focuses only on emblematic shots with mattes, since emblematic shots are not necessarily (and not primarily) surrounded by a circular matte. We may mention the most famous one, appearing in *The Great Train Robbery* (Edison, 1903), where Barnes, the leader of the outlaws, appears on screen in a close shot displaying no matte at all. On the emblematic shot see notably Gunning (1979) and Burch (1990).

28 See other examples in Bernardini (2002).

On the other hand, sometimes the circular matte may not appear where it should, as for example in *Eclipse de soleil en pleine lune*. Similarly, the keyhole shaped matte as well may not appear where it should, as it happens in *L'amour à tous les étages.*

The circular matte is an iconographic element which must certainly be connected to the mechanical and optical aspect of the visible that is recorded by these images. Indeed, this is an aspect which alludes to the instrumentation – to the actual idea of the *machine* – that can make these kinds of views possible: telescopes and microscopes, of course, but also lenses and viewers. In chapter 1 we considered at length how the scientific research preceding the invention of the cinema led to the development of optical and mechanical devices that, in most cases, offer a circular-shaped view, even when the view itself is not actually observable through circular apertures. The list of these devices is well-known, and potentially endless. One might begin by mentioning that the human eye itself is of a "circular" shape, and that even Leonardo da Vinci stresses this fact in a passage of his *Codes* (*Code D*, f. 8, *recto*), in which he draws a comparison between the human eye and the camera obscura, speaking of a *spiraculo rotondo*.[29] We should also bear in mind that the telescope lens developed by Galileo Galilei at the beginning of the 17th century is circular as well, and that a circle surrounds the drawings which Huygens made, fifty years or so later (in 1659, to be precise), when designing the glass panes for the animated projections which were to become the magic lantern. And we can also mention that, later on, the views produced by optical toys and devices such as the kaleidoscope, the thaumatrope, the stroboscope, the phenakistiscope, the zoëtrope, the stereoscope, the *stéréofantascope*, etc., were all circular.[30] Moreover, not only were most

[29] Belloï (2001: 290) quotes an unspecified "classical hypothesis", according to which the circular-shaped projected image depends on a sort of mimicry with the circular-shaped lens or viewer. This mimicry, however – as well as the mimicry of the circular lens itself, which was the easiest to construct technically – seems in turn to be based upon some kind of "primordial" mimicry of the shape of the human eye. These vision machines – i.e., all these optical and mechanical prosthesis – exist only to extend beyond the human eye's natural limitations.

[30] The kaleidoscope was probably invented in 1816, by the Englishman David Brewster. The thaumatrope is a toy – probably designed in 1825 by the London doctor John Ayrton Paris – which enjoyed an extraordinary success, especially with children; it consists of a round disk, with a different picture on each side, for instance a bird and a cage: when the disk is twirled rapidly, by means of a string inserted in the diameter, a third image is obtained, from the superimposition of the first two (in our example, the image of a bird in a cage). The stroboscope was invented by Simon Ritter von Stampfer, a professor of geometry at the Vienna Polytechnic Institute, in 1833, while the phenakistiscope was designed during the last months of 1832 by Joseph-Antoine Ferdinand Plateau (who announced its creation on January 20, 1833, in a letter published in the review *Correspondance mathématique et physique*). In both cases, the

magic lantern plates circular, but so were Marey's chronophotographs, the lenses of his chronophotographic gun, the glowing screens against which hands cast shadows for children, and shadow plays themselves.[31]

But we shall stop here. For, apart from the easily documented link between the circle and the majority of views mechanically reproduced between the 17th and 19th centuries, what matters most from our perspective is the magical impact characterising this link. What matters particularly is the fantastical aura it acquires in the eyes of the contemporary spectator, likening the views surrounded by a circular matte to something vaguely approaching the realm of sorcery; that is, to something similar to the result of a process rooted in the unstable boundary which, at the beginning of the 20th century, separated magic from science.

Up to this time, in fact, even technological progress – both optical and scientific – was still experienced as a sort of "scientific magic". Let us consider, for example, what a film such as *Put a Penny in the Slot* (1909) tells us about the technological imagination of the period. In this film produced by the Clarendon Film Company, by inserting just a penny in

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device consists of a slotted disk which depicts painted objects; when the disk is placed before a mirror and spun, the reflected image observed through the slots appears as if it were moving. In order to do away with the mirror, Plateau added a second disk in 1850; the first one had the pictures on it, the second was the slotted disk. Charles Baudelaire gave an evocative description of the device in 1835, in his *La morale du joujou*. The zoëtrope was invented in 1834 by the English mathematician William George Horner (though it did not appear on the market until 1867); it consists of a cardboard or metallic slotted cylinder, that moves on a revolving hinge which is fixed to a heavy base, displaying pictures drawn on paper strips, placed inside. An interesting, and significant contemporary, advertisement calls it *Wheel of Life* (1870). The stereoscope was designed in 1838 by Charles Wheatstone; it consists of two drawings of the same object, one in a slightly different position from the other: through a circular viewer, each eye sees the respective drawing, but perceives a single image, which appears in relief. In 1848, David Brewster designed a "refraction" stereoscope and had it built by the French optician Jules Dubosq, then living in London. In 1850, Dubosq substituted the drawings with photographs obtained by means of two contiguous lenses; the invention was launched the following year, at the first Universal Exposition in London. The *stéréofantascope*, or bioscope, consists of a cylinder, similar to that of the zoëtrope; however, in this case the pictures are not observed directly, but through a stereoscopic viewer, thus obtaining the effect of motion and depth at the same time.

31 Cf., among others, Perriault (1981: 65), Zotti Minici (ed., 1988b), Dagognet (1987), Mannoni (1994 and 1996), Mannoni, Pesenti Campagnoni, Robinson (1995), and, notably on shadow plays, Bordat and Boucrot (1956). With respect to shadow games, on the other hand, note that the passion for Chinese shadows which prevailed in Europe in the 19th century is reflected in the widespread success of shadow plays for children, as well as of manuals on shadow casting. Let us not forget, moreover, that the optical instruments through which enthusiastic adventurers of the sky examine the space around them, in the numerous illustrations created for *Le vingtième siècle* by Albert Robida, are all systematically circular, as are – at times – the pictures on theatre curtains; a beautiful reproduction can be found in Zotti Minici (ed., 1988b).

a number of machines it is possible to obtain virtually anything: from an automatic baptism to mechanical shaving.

Significantly, in some other films, "artificial" light itself – whether powered by electricity or gas – can substitute for the optical instrument in order to render magically a series of views that would be inaccessible through "natural" light. In *Les cartes lumineuses*, for instance, licentious images materialise thanks to the luminous emanations of a lamp. In *After Dark; or, The Policeman and His Lantern*, a street at night is made visible by a lantern. Similarly, in *La poule aux œufs d'or* (Pathé, 1905) the devil's sneering face becomes visible through the light of a lamp in a transparent egg.[32] It is also because of this "scientific magic", or "magical science", then, that a dimension of fantastical and spectacular artifice prevails in these films.

This dimension, marked by the circular shape, fully explains the significance of the trick device, optical and mechanical, which is thus transmitted by the circular matte to the images it encircles, both for the viewer in the film, as well as the spectator in the audience. Let us return to *Grandma's Reading Glass*. This opens with a circular matte against a black background, inside which appears a magnified newspaper page (one could, if one wanted to, read an article in it about a new type of sandwich), afterwards followed by the image of the boy putting down the magnifying glass and the paper. *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième* begins in the same way, that is, with an image surrounded by a circular matte against a black background, inside which two lovers can be seen at an attic window; again, the next image is that of a man, holding a telescope, who is shown directing his instrument elsewhere. Another example: *Aux bains de mer* begins with a binocular matte against a black background, inside which one can observe the sea; the following image shows a bather lowering his binoculars, then raising them and pointing them elsewhere.

These beginnings could seem quite perplexing, today. They could, in fact, be regarded as an illogical anomaly in an early film. We might suppose that a first, didactic shot is missing that would show in *Grandma's Reading Glass* the boy as he takes up the magnifying glass and the paper;[33] or, in *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*, the man as he seizes the telescope; or, again, in *Aux bains de mer*, the holidaymaker holding his binoculars. Or we might also suppose that the order of shots was tampered with at

[32] On the theme of electric light as an element which "reveals" images, see *Electric Transformations* (Clarendon, 1909).

[33] In a paper presented at the 1978 Brighton symposium, reproduced in Holman (ed., 1982: 31), Barry Salt suggested that the first shot in *Grandma's Reading Glass* may be missing.

some point, and be strongly tempted to correct it.[34] Yet, this opening matte could be not a "mistake" or an anomaly, but rather the exhibition of an artifice; and the matte is its technological marker, immediately revealed as such by the exhibition of the optical instrument in the second image presented to the spectator, for whom the artifice is intended. The hands that turn the little key in *The Unclean World*, revealing that the insects are toys, are exactly the same.

Once again, we are dealing with a process that is in perfect accord with the horizon of expectations belonging to a spectator predisposed to accept these kinds of views as corresponding to spectacular attractions, in the form of fanciful optical and mechanical artifices. And, as we have seen, in this horizon of expectation is included the gesture of bending down so as to look through, in order to observe quite secretly, from this side of a "hole", one or more luminous and moving images.

This gesture of bending down in order to look through is always explicitly represented in keyhole films. That is, it is always represented in films displaying a keyhole-shaped matte, which mostly recurs, alternating with the circle, in early films where this form of representation of the gaze appears. In fact, in the presence of a keyhole, the voyeur character bends down so as to look, exactly as the 18th and 19th century spectators did, in order to look through the Mondo Nuovo and optical device peepholes, or exactly as spectators would do later on to look through Edison's kinetoscope.[35] In this perspective, it is probably not by chance that the keyhole matte is absent from early British cinema – here the circle prevails instead, mirroring the very strong optical tradition of the magic lantern – while it appears primarily in early French and American cinema, in which the *vues d'optique*, the Mondo Nuovo and the Edison's kinetoscope, prepare the ground for the Lumière *Cinématographe*.[36]

While the "syntactical" structure involving these two types of matte is more or less similar (parataxis, exhaustive line of vision, movement and – as we shall see soon in 3.1.5., 3.1.6. and 3.1.7. – alternation, repetitive gestures and punitive endings, all recur in each case), their semantic is extremely different. The science of optics, like the cinema before the cinema, has its roots in the mechanical experimentation that preceded the cinematograph, and offers the marvels of the visible to the view.

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[34] Again, this was done with *Grandma's Reading Glass*. See Costa (ed., 1983), where the publisher – in order to correct what was perceived as an anomaly – "corrected" the editing by putting the photographic image of the boy holding the magnifier before the photographic image which represents the newspaper page magnified.

[35] The latter consisted of a wooden box with a peephole on top, in the centre, over which the spectator leaned.

[36] See footnote 3 in this chapter.

The keyhole, on the other hand, as with the cinema later on, is projected towards the fiction – and the narrative – that the voyeur observes *without being seen*, thus breaking down the last, most secret barrier of the visible.

In other words, the circle always promises a spectacle, while the keyhole already promises a story too.

A quick consideration of the views observed through a keyhole in the films analysed here will validate this point. There are story ideas, potential micro-tales, always articulated and interpreted by highly stereotyped characters, such as the naive countryman, the eccentric city dweller, the sick old lady, the joyful hedonist, the elderly spinster, the young prankster, the *fausse femme*, the frantic businessman… These are always self-sufficient characters, perfectly capable of sustaining the development of a plot, who even pretend not to know that they are being observed. Indeed, they rarely look in the direction of the keyhole – that is, at the camera – and when this does happen, in no case do they address their diegetic spectator (when they do "discover" this spectator's presence, for example in *The Inquisitive Boots* or in *Par le trou de la serrure*, they punish him; see 3.1.7.).

In *The Inquisitive Boots*, moreover, each view's narrative potential finds a way to unfold in the few seconds at its disposal, following, one by one, each of the story's "stages" according to Propp's definition,[37] displaying the upsetting and re-establishing of the initial balance. To such an extent that, in the last brief scene observed by the bootblack, there are two actions developed and embedded one into the other: the successful treatment of a character's deafness, and the character's revenge on the prying valet, discovered thanks to the restored sense of hearing.

In *L'amour à tous les étages*, on the other hand, each of the views observed by a curious student belong to a different genre: the erotic genre, the comedy, the thriller (the latter being structured with a beginning, a development, and an ending which is so effective as to frighten the spying student himself).

While in *Curiosité d'une concierge*, each scene regarded by a nosy concierge lasts the time needed to develop an actual story, and the concierge herself, just like a reader of serialised novels, promptly recognises in each new "episode" a piece of her own life, soon commenting on it while looking in the direction of the audience. Here, in particular, in the fourth scene a dissatisfied and jealous wife discovers a love letter in her husband's jacket pocket, wakes him up and violently attacks him, thus stimulating the concierge's active participation. After having observed this scene, in

[37] See 3.1.1. and footnote 9 in this chapter.

fact, the concierge produces a letter from her bodice, indicating to the spectator that it is just similar to the one found by the deceived wife.

Yet, there is more. On a strictly iconographic level, while the circle primarily refers to the optical factor which makes these views possible, that is to the roundness of the prosthesis-*machine*, placed between the human eye and the world, the keyhole-shaped matte actually refers to the erotic factor which is characteristic of pure voyeurism, in which the promise of a story is chiefly a promise of pleasure: the pleasure of seeing without being seen.

It is not by chance that, from *Autour d'une cabine* (which will be discussed in 3.1.7.) onwards, there are countless somewhat licentious plots revolving around the exhibition of a keyhole, and of a look that symbolically penetrates it.[38] Many of the first keyhole films are more or less explicitly erotic: in addition to *L'amour à tous les étages*, we may mention another Pathé film, dated 1908, *Collection de cartes postales*; a 1906 Italian production, called *Il pompiere di servizio*, directed by Gaston Velle for Cines; and at least two American films, produced by Biograph, *Through the Keyhole in the Door* (1903) and *The Boarding House Bathroom* (1905).[39] In addition, there are many decidedly pornographic series in which the keyhole-shaped matte is again on the scene.[40]

It is important to keep in mind that erotic voyeurism was widely staged in the iconographic and spectacular practices which immediately preceded the birth of the cinema (there are entire "scripts" for shadow-play erotic shows, for example a *Pierrot pornographe*).[41] These practices, in turn, were to welcome the cinema within their world, precisely by projecting erotic films. More often than not, the films were modelled on those same spectacles, so that the most well-known erotic film of

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38 Speaking of eroticism and the keyhole, it is impossible not to mention the beautiful cover of Lo Duca's book (1959) and (1960), a classic on cinema eroticism, which portrays, precisely, a keyhole-shaped matte.

39 According to the description in the *Bollettino Cines*, No. 11 (Oct. 1906), *Il pompiere di servizio* shows a fireman who, between one act and the other, "amuses himself by indiscreetly peeping through the doors of the artists' dressing rooms, and sees exciting scenes, strange scenes, hilarious scenes". The description goes on to relate the fireman's, and the artists', misadventures, caused by a stagehand who opens the tap of the pump held by the fireman (*sic*!), but although it is impossible to know whether a keyhole matte recurs in the first part of this film, it is clear from the description that the exhibition of the act of *looking through* certainly does. Regarding *Collection de cartes postales*, on the other hand, cf. Bousquet (1996: 962), who indicates it with the No. 1955.

40 On this topic see, for instance, Apter (1991) and Abel (1994), but also Kimball (1970), who demonstrates, in passing, that many of these pornographic series were shown in brothels.

41 See Bordat and Boucrot (1956: 35 and 163 ff.).

the time, *Le coucher de la mariée* (1896-99), is nothing but a faithful reconstruction of a pantomime show interpreted by Mlle Willy, "créatrice du *Coucher de la mariée* à l'Olympia",[42] which also existed as in the form of a mass-produced illustrated postcard.

According to Burch,[43] this film, of which many versions exist, is the prototype of the typical "voyeurism" film: it shows a woman undressing in front of the intrigued eyes of a man – nominally her husband – who promises not to look, but, of course, secretly looks anyway. In the dynamics of these looks, Burch sees a number of exemplary points for the future emergence of what he calls Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR). First of all, the look of the man which "projects" the woman (see Fischer, 1979). But also, second, the woman's look at the camera, as she addresses the spectator in the audience as a cabaret dancer might in a striptease number. Third, the man's look at the camera, as he in turn addresses the male audience, making it a witness to his look. In the light of our previous discussion, at least two considerations may be added.

Primarily, by looking at the woman secretly as she undresses, not only does the man become a voyeur, but he also duplicates the spectator's

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42 There were many films with this title. Deslandes (1963) cites a version attributed to Eugène Pirou, as early as 1896, and reported by Burch (1990) to have been produced by Pirou, photographed by Joly and directed by Kirchner, better known as Léar; the postcards Pirou is thought to have been inspired by (reproduced in Toulet, 1988), however, are different. Another *Coucher de la mariée* is the third tableau of five, whose complete title was *Mariage de raison* (*scène vécue en 5 tableaux*), which the Pathé catalogue reconstructed by Bousquet (1996) dates to 1899 (though it could actually be earlier), indicating the production numbers 397 and 350, describing it as the faithful reconstruction of a scene interpreted by Mlle Willy, "créatrice du *Coucher de la mariée* à l'Olympia" (who created the *Coucher de la mariée* at the Olympia). Bousquet (1996: 861) also mentions a *Le coucher de la mariée* (1901) with the production number 361 (25 m). The 1904 catalogue (cf. Bousquet, 1996: 890) reports the same title with the number 1059 (40 m), followed by a *Le coucher de la parisienne* (No. 1060, 35 m). Another *Coucher de la mariée* is reported in 1907 with the number 1639 (80 m) by Bousquet (1993). We must also mention Méliès's *Coucher de la mariée ou Triste nuit de noces* (1899), and the numerous British examples, among which is *The Bride's First Night* (Haydon & Urry, 1898).

43 Burch (1990) attributes great importance to the series of films entitled *Coucher de la mariée*, to such an extent that he regards it as the origin of the entire keyhole films genre, to which he assigns a secondary role in the process of linearisation. This view of the matter, however, underestimates at least three fundamental issues. Firstly, it ignores the other half of the genre – the optical half – which played a predominant role at the beginning, as we have seen. Secondly, it underrates the role played by this genre in the codification of one of the most important types of match cuts, the eyeline match, codified around 1905, that is, when this genre reaches its peak. Finally, it undermines the importance of the emergence of this filmic form in the process of the spectator's establishment as a subject – a subject made visible in the representation of the character who is looking.

look, turning the latter into a voyeur as well. Thus, by winking at the spectators in the audience, the man tells them something very important (something that characters looking through optical instruments cannot always say, while characters looking through keyholes always can). The man tells the spectators that they are doing the same thing, that is, looking without being seen looking. In brief, he calls the spectators' attention to the extraordinary, privileged condition which is peculiar to the cinema, a condition the spectators are not yet aware of – while, here, their substitute on the scene becomes conscious of it – and which consists precisely in the possibility of looking without being seen looking.[44]

Secondly, here the man observes a spectacle that already exhibits the features that characterise both narrative and fiction, just as, a little later on, will the views observed through a keyhole. It exhibits the features of narrative because the woman's striptease is usually followed by the man's punishment (see 3.1.7.) – a symbolic punishment which literally upsets the representation's initial equilibrium, often with the collapse of a screen behind which the man has been hiding, or with the nuptial bed itself collapsing on the newlyweds. And it also exhibits fictional features, because – unlike the images of cities observed from above, or the pseudoscientific enlargements exhibited as spectacles in optical instrument films – here the voyeur always observes another character (as it happens in keyhole films) who is aware of this fact but pretends not to know. Significantly, the woman's beckoning glances are addressed to the audience in the movie theatre, and not to the "diegetic" audience represented by the man who is watching her.[45]

Of course, there are also combinations of the two types of matte. From *As Seen Through a Telescope* to *Aux bains de mer*, one comes across a few optical instrument mattes that display fiction as well as narrative – usually when one character secretly watches another. Yet in most cases the optical instrument is directed elsewhere, and the scenes observed through a viewer almost always have what we would call today, with all due precautions, a "documentary" quality, be it scientific or geographical. They are offered to the spectator precisely as enlargements, or as documentation of voyages, whose consubstantial subject is the spectacle of the world. On the other hand, the keyhole allows the unfolding of a plot, "such stuff as dreams are made on".

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[44] It is worth noting that these erotic films, which turn the activity of viewing into spectacle by representating predominantly male viewers, make explicit the voyeuristic nature of the cinema without excluding feminine pleasure (and feminine voyeurism). On this important topic see at least Mulvey (1975).

[45] Exactly like the occasional glances cast in direction of the keyhole by the characters being observed, who never address their diegetic voyeur, but exhibit instead a look intended solely for the spectator in the audience.

The people who look through optical instruments are generally adventurers in a flying balloon (*Un drame dans les airs*, *Toto aéronaute*), more or less credible scientists (*Le déjeuner du savant*, *Ce que l'on voit de la Bastille*, *La peine du talion*, *Les joyeux microbes*, *The Unclean World*, *The Love Microbe*, *Un matrimonio interplanetario*, 1910, by Yambo, real name Enrico Novelli, for Latium Film), pompous astronomers (*Voyage sur Jupiter*, *Eclipse de soleil en pleine lune*, *Voyage autour d'une étoile*, 1906, by Gaston Velle for Pathé), and aspiring *bricoleurs* (*Grandma's Reading Glass*, *Grandpa's Reading Glass*, *La loupe de grand-maman*, *L'eau merveilleuse* and *At Last! That Awful Tooth*).

The "ordinary" voyeur, on the other hand, chooses the keyhole and its most "profitable" variants: holes in walls (*L'indiscret mystifié*, *Les locataires d'à côté*), slits in doors and windows (*La fille de bain indiscrète*, *A Photograph Taken From Our Area Window*), and any other means which will let him or her look without being seen. For this reason the main voyeuristic characters are servants, valets, waiters, doorkeepers, concierges, who typically represent a proletarian and inquisitive population, that, in the rigidly hierarchised European society of the early 20th century, possesses the necessary ubiquity to be able to spy, from door to door, on the entire bourgeois community (*Par le trou de la serrure*, *The Inquisitive Boots*, *Un coup d'œil par étage*). However, young and wealthy students are also on the scene (*L'amour à tous les étages*, *Eine lustige Geschichte*), as well as female *voyeuses* (*Curiosité d'une concierge*, *A Search for Evidence*, *La fille de bain indiscrète*),[46] who have been avid readers of popular serialised literature for more than a century. In other

[46] The long-held notion that early cinema lacks women voyeurs is not true. Incidentally, let us note that *La fille de bain indiscrète* takes place where public conveniences designated the *mise en scène* of the first erotic films (*A Poor Place for Love Making*, *On the Beach at Brighton*, *He Went into the Wrong Bath House*); *La fille de bain indiscrète* is certainly a subtler example of this, although its subject was in fact quite scabrous for its time, yet it is interesting, because it displays a woman in the role of a vaguely licentious *voyeuse* observing men. A case of a woman looking through an optical instrument (that is, attaining a view through science) is that of the voyeur's wife in *Aux bains de mer.* She becomes a "voyeuse" in the second part of the film, using a pair of binoculars which belong to her husband (who has imprudently left them near his wife), in order to find out where he is. See also *Un matrimonio interplanetario*, in which the Martian princess looks through a telescope, in the same way as does her beloved terrestrial astronomer, though, in this case, we do not see what she sees. Moreover, a section of an unidentified film, dating from around 1910-11 and showing a woman looking through binoculars (followed by shots of various panoramas), is held in the BFI National Archive under the title *Devon/Fishing Net Industry*. The Archive catalogue describes it as follows: "Sections from two different films: Cottages by stream (18). A woman looking through binoculars, with Ilfracombe in background (36). Masked view of wooded valley with tourists on river bank and bridge (122) and pan shot, also masked, of Ilfracombe harbour with paddle steamer putting to sea (237). Coastal cliff (272). Waterfall, wooded valley (353)". I thank Elaine Burrows for this information.

words, a standardised and serialised immobile traveller is on the scene; as standardised and serialised as the doors – repetitive and identical to one another – that here go by, one after the other.

In a similar way, another point of convergence between the two types of matte can be found; a point with which we may conclude, adding a last, important consideration. What has been said at the beginning about the circle is applicable to the keyhole as well. In fact, its iconographic presence cannot be reduced merely to a "realistic" preoccupation, chiefly because the keyhole-shaped matte itself does not appear with unfailing regularity in all the films whose framework should require it.

In this respect, the most important thing to notice is not the actual regularity or realism in the different forms that are represented (circular, keyhole-shaped, but also binocular if the instrument used is a pair of binoculars, as in *Aux bains de mer*, *Le tour du monde d'un policier*, *The Airship Destroyer*, *The Comet*); nor is it the regularity of its recurrence. If anything, it is actually its irregularity. Indeed, the matte may not appear although the situation requires it. For instance, it happens in the already mentioned *Eclipse de soleil en pleine lune*, as well as in *L'amour à tous les étages*, *Curiosité d'une concierge*, *Un coup d'œil par étage*, in which the student and the concierges look through the keyhole of each door, but the following shot, representing their look, displays no matte. On the other hand, there are films in which, although no-one is looking explicitly at anything, or none of the characters looking uses instruments of any kind, a number of shots are nevertheless surrounded by a matte; this happens, for example, in the above-mentioned *Les trois phases de la lune*, *When the Devil Drives*, *Pauli, Bertie Buys a Bulldog*, *Faust* and many others. It also occurs in *Le ore di una mondana* (Cines, 1906), in which the various phases of an attractive, elegant lady's day go by in succession, "as in a kaleidoscope",[47] that is to say, inside a circular matte. And it happens in *The Inquisitive Boots*, in which the bootblack looks through six keyholes, though the keyhole matte appears only in the first three instances.

This irregularity reveals that the matte is here employed as a *sign*. A sign that, in the case of *The Inquisitive Boots*, is no longer needed after three appearances, and thus "forfeits" its function of making the look explicit. In other words, in these films the matte is codified as the sign of a mediating presence – the presence of the cinema – between the eye and the world. A sign which must be considered in its completeness, that is,

[47] The description of this film (No. 32 in the 1907 Cines catalogue, and No. 33 in the 1911 Cines catalogue), in which "si succedono *come in un caleidoscopio* le diverse fasi della giornata di un'avvenente, elegante signora" / the different phases of an attractive, elegant lady's day go by in succession *as in a kaleidoscope* (my emphasis), is taken from the Bollettino Cines, No. 10, Sept. 1906 (cf. Bernardini, 1996a: 44-45).

to an equal extent, as an icon, a symbol and an index, following Peirce's definition of the sign.[48]

It is an icon because it "resembles" the circular shape of the optical viewer, the keyhole shape of the keyhole, the binocular shape of a pair of binoculars or of a double viewer. It is a symbol because it is "conventional" with respect to what the human eye actually sees when placed in front of an optical viewer, a keyhole or a pair of binoculars (in fact, a matte with a relatively clear-cut outline, on a background which tends to be black or dark, can only conventionally represent the viewer, the keyhole and the binoculars, as well as what a character may see of these objects when facing them from nearby). Finally, it is an index in that it constitutes a "trace". Not so much a trace of the look which penetrates it, but rather of the *machine* that is placed between the eye and the world: a meaningful indicator of its "passage", of its indispensable mediation in order to access the new frontiers of the visible.

This is a sign that will gradually become anthropomorphised in its forms, setting aside the machine, and representing the look through its most immediate and human extensions. Besides, in early films as well, sometimes the matte is coupled with hands, fingers, mirror frames or similar shapes. In *Grandma's Reading Glass* the boy's fingers appear, holding the watch. In *The Unclean World*, a pair of hands appears, overturning the toy animals. In *Les cartes lumineuses* the boy's drawn hands may be seen holding the cards. And in *La poule aux œufs d'or*, once more, the character's fingers are drawn; just as the mirror, in which the protagonist of *La purge* (Pathé, 1904) observes the state of his tongue, is cut out of cardboard…

From a strictly formal perspective, there are two categories that allow us to define and localise a point-of-view shot. One concerns editing (thus the alternation between the subject and the object of a look). The other concerns the internal markers of the image, which are supposed to represent a character's look. Speaking of these markers (which will soon include the trace of the perspective coordinates from which the look originates: i.e. distance and direction), suffice it to add that when, later on, the point-of-view structure will disregard the repeated alternation between subject and object – that is to say, the shots which represent the character who is looking and the object of his or her look – this will be possible only because the shot which represents the character's look includes sufficient clues as to his or her presence (a pair of glasses, the body's shadow, a face reflected in a mirror, movement, the noise of steps, a voice, loud heartbeats…). Over time, these clues will be added to the

[48] We are here referring to the tripartition of the sign as icon, symbol and index, elaborated by the American philosopher Charles S. Peirce.

matte, until they are finally substituted for it, in order to simulate, in a particular shot, the mediation of a machine placed between the eye and the world.

3.1.5. Alternation

Alongside the matte, another evident feature of these films is the structure of alternation. In effect, save for rare exceptions, up to 1905 practically all the films in which this form of representation of the gaze appears are organised around a structure which consists of showing one or more characters intent on looking through something, alternating the image of the character who is looking with the image of the objects observed. This happens in *Grandma's Reading Glass*, as well as in *Grandpa's Reading Glass*, *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*, *La fille de bain indiscrète*, *The Unclean World*, *L'amour à tous les étages*, *Les cartes lumineuses*, *The Inquisitive Boots*, *Le déjeuner du savant*, *A Search for Evidence*… and in many other titles mentioned before.

It is useful to consider the nature of this alternation as well. At first glance, it would appear to contradict the autonomy of the shot, as analysed in 3.1.1. The structure entailing repeated alternation between a shot representing the character looking, and another shot representing the object of this look, is a form of editing that underlies the process of linearisation.[49] Significantly, Christian Metz[50] placed it among the editing structures which compose his "grand syntagmatics". In turn, Raymond Bellour[51] re-elaborated an equally syntagmatic reading of it, in order to highlight its narrative and unifying potential, which is opposed to the isolating and disjunctive potential characterising the paratactic construction of early films where this form of representation of the gaze at first appears.

The distinctive characteristic of alternation is to connect, unify or encompass in one unit what is spatially and temporally disconnected. Alternation, in fact, is a pivotal structure in film language, differing as such from the simple juxtaposition of more or less autonomous shots. Thus, it works towards the unification of the alternating patterns in a single shot – for example, through cross cutting in the last-minute rescue typical of the "Griffith ending", or through an ideal or symbolic merging obtained through parallel editing, also typical of David Wark Griffith.[52]

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[49] For an in-depth study on this topic, see Dulac, Perron (eds., 2007).

[50] Cf. Metz (1966).

[51] Cf. Bellour (1980).

[52] Cross cutting alternates different spaces (that is, two or more actions occurring in different spaces), taking place at the same time, i.e., simultaneously. Parallel editing alternates different spaces and (sometimes) actions taking place at a different time,

However, in early films where this form of the representation of the gaze appears, there is no final unification of alternating patterns, at least not always, and, most importantly, not right away. From a spatial point of view, actually, most optical instrument films do not even place disconnected spaces in opposition. The objects contemplated in *Grandma's Reading Glass* are located in the same room, i.e., the same space and time as the boy who observes them, exactly like the worms and bacteria observed by the scientist in *Le déjeuner du savant*, or of the toy insects in *The Unclean World*. And even where the subject and the object occupy disconnected spaces, as in keyhole films which alternate a hall with several hotel rooms, or landings with different apartments (but this may also happen in optical instrument films, for example in *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*, where the voyeur spies into the neighbouring rooms from a roof), unification of the parts rarely occurs. Indeed, when such a unification does occur, it is because hypotaxis has occurred. See, for instance, what happens at the end of *A Search for Evidence* or *Aux bains de mer*, a topic which will be fully discussed in chapter 4.

This alternation, therefore, is not a guarantee of linkage, or of diegetic unification, at least until such time as a unification of the parts actually occurs.[53] As already mentioned with respect to the line of vision, here, between the image of the voyeur and the view of the objects seen, there is no spatially structured match (be it on the axis, eyeline match or reverse shot). Not even when the direction the character is looking in seems to be confirmed by the perspectival coordinates of the view observed, or at least does not appear to be obviously contradicted. In these cases as well, careful analysis reveals that what we can mistake today for a cut-in does not correspond to the exact direction towards which the voyeur's telescope is pointed (it happens, for instance, in *As Seen Through a Telescope*, in which the old voyeur occupies the front of the field and peeps at a beautiful lady's ankle in the background). Similarly, very often, what might be likened to a "reverse angle shot" is not to be interpreted as such with respect to the direction of the look exhibited by the looking character (think of those cases such as *The Inquisitive Boots* and *Curiosité d'une concierge*, in which the space of the action observed appears opposite to

sometimes an abstract one, in order to suggest symbolic meanings. On patterns of alternation and cross cutting before Griffith, see the studies collected in Dulac and Perron (eds., 2007); and notably, on cross cutting and the last-minute rescue in Pathé films before Griffith, see Gauthier (2008).

53 This alternation does not even guarantee centring, in the sense intended by Burch (1990). Here, the articulation of the alternating parts does not give rise to an ideal circular space in the middle of which the spectator's look may be placed. In no case, in fact, could we speak of shot/reverse-shot.

the position occupied by the voyeur). Rather, it is simply another way of providing the audience with the best possible line of sight.

It would seem to be more accurate, then, to speak of "juxtaposition" or of an arrangement: expressions that convey the idea of a separation, of the autonomy of the single view from the ensemble in which it is inserted. But, once more, to do so would result in ignoring the essential point. Here the intention is to show views shot from the best possible line of sight for the benefit of the audience, regardless of the direction of the voyeur's look. Furthermore, the meaning of this separation is even more profound, because it allows the recording of what the cinema achieves – parallel to the reproduction of movement, to the spectacle of the world, to the marvels made accessible by viewing machines – and finally makes visible: a subject looking, *and* the separate object of his or her look. Besides, this is achieved through editing, that is through the segmentation of the action in different spaces or in different portions of the same space.

This editing process also makes it possible to record what the cinema has radically changed with respect to the preceding and coeval entertainment forms most similar to it, which were based upon the simultaneous presence of an actor and a spectator. Indeed, we should not forget that films have been the first entertainment form to show "real" actors who are apparently *present*, yet at the same time are actually *absent* from the space in which the spectator is sitting. During a film projection, actors are disconnected from the space towards which they address their performance. The forms of entertainment which preceded the cinema and eventually converged with it presuppose physical proximity between the actor and the spectator. The cinema, however, no longer offers such a physical proximity, although it inherits the codes of a performance based on physical contiguity. Of course, early cinema simulates physical contiguity, and presupposes it, to the extent that actors constantly address the spectator (as seen in 1.2.). Nonetheless it does not achieve it, because the editing itself provides an alternation, which is the product of a spatial separation between the spectators and the scene – that is, here, between a subject and the object of their look.

This editing that separates, then, rather than connects, is in perfect harmony with the expectations of its audience, which did not watch these films expecting hypotaxis, linking, linear editing or reconnections of any kind. In fact, this alternation that juxtaposes elements while highlighting their autonomy, divorcing characters from the object of their look, is in perfect harmony with the significance of the cinema in the spectacular panorama of the day.

It is also for this reason that the function performed by this kind of editing is more than a simple juxtaposition. It equally originates from

a connection between the different parts shown in succession, that is a connection between the subject and the object of the same look, guaranteed, exhibited and repeated, as well as emphasised by the recurrence of a "machine" (of a prosthesis and its trace).

In this sense, it is already an alternation. Nevertheless, it is an alternation that is not yet linear, syntagmatic or hypotactic, but actually paratactic, where the recourse to the mediation of an instrument functions as a conjunctive element, as a coordination (and not subordination) link between the different parts. The recognition of this link depends on the identification, induced in the spectators, with characters who are separate from the object they are looking at – as the spectators are separate from the screen – and who duplicates what the spectators are doing in the cinema. In other words, it is a link between spectators and characters whose gesture the spectators recognise. In effect, it is a gesture that is similar to the spectators' own: watching moving shadows, which spectators learn to perceive as separate from themselves.

One of the practices that highlight this bond between the spectator and the character – between a subject looking and the views exhibited in these films – is the reiteration of an alternation between the shots displaying the observing character on the one hand, and the shots displaying the objects of the gaze on the other hand. Indeed, the peculiar characteristic of these films lies precisely in the type of very eloquent situation performed, around which the structure of this paratactic alternation is built. The connecting element between the shots, as we have seen, is provided by the "machine" – an optical instrument, artificial light, a keyhole etc. – which becomes the point in space from which the look originates and operates as a bond between the two spaces. With this "machine", the characters exhibit all the actions necessary in order to prepare to look (and to stop looking), before and after every view. It often happens, in fact, that the subject-object alternation is repeated several times (as in *Grandma's Reading Glass*, *Grandpa's Reading Glass*, *La loupe de grand-maman*, *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*, *Par le trou de la serrure*, *Le déjeuner du savant*, *La fille de bain indiscrète*, *Transfigurations*, *Les joyeux microbes*, *The Love Microbe*, *Les cartes lumineuses*, *The Inquisitive Boots*, *Par le trou de la serrure*, *L'amour à tous les étages*, *Curiosité d'une concierge…*).

In *Grandma's Reading Glass*, for instance, the magnifying glass is the point of connection between shots which alternate the images of the boy who is looking with the images of the objects of his look. Yet there is more: the boy meticulously prepares each view. He extracts the watch from his pocket and opens it, and after having looked at it he lays down the magnifying glass and puts the watch back into his pocket. He then points to the canary, drawing his grandmother's attention to it, takes up

the glass again, and after looking at the canary, he lays it down again, and points his forefinger at his grandmother, who takes off her eyeglasses. He then takes up the glass again and points it towards his grandmother's eye, and so on until the end of the film.

In *Un coup d'œil par étage, The Inquisitive Boots*, *Par le trou de la serrure*, *Curiosité d'une concierge*, the connecting point between the different views (and the different spaces) is provided by the keyhole; concierge and waiters bend down and then straighten up in front of each door, before and after the exhibition of the view representing the object of their look. In *Le déjeuner du savant*, as in *Les joyeux microbes*, the point of connection is the microscope, and in both cases the scientist and the doctor bend down to look through its viewer, then stand up straight again. In *Un drame dans les airs* the connecting point is represented by the telescope; the two adventurers change the direction of their look, indicating with outstretched arms the different landscapes observed (Paris from above to the left, the sea on the right), before and after each view, and they lean over the basket before looking more closely at the sea. The same happens in *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*, *Aux bains de mer* and *Toto aéronaute*. Similarly, the butterfly collector is several times seen admiring his victims through a lens in *La peine du talion*, and the same goes for the boy looking at his *Cartes lumineuses*, the public toilet attendant observing his unsuspecting customers in *La fille de bain indiscrète*, and the student spying upon his neighbours in *L'amour à tous les étages*.

After all, this paratactic alternation between subject and object, i.e., between the observing characters and the object of their gaze, is the same that underlies the point-of-view structure. It is one of the above-mentioned two formal categories – editing and internal markers (cf. 3.1.4.) – which make it possible to define and recognise this form of representation of the gaze. It is by codifying it, and integrating it through the practice of the "good" match cut, that the point-of-view structure has reached us, also with the codification of an editing technique that consists of inserting a shot (the one representing the object of the look) into the continuity of another shot (the one showing the character looking).

Over time, parallel to the autonomy of the shot, the spectacularisation of movement, and the exhibition of the matte, this alternation will also change in a direction which is functional to the process of linearisation, thus becoming a true connecting element (hypotactic, diegetic, symbolic). In particular, it will incorporate the linking dynamics, so as to allow the spectator to be included in the filmic chain as a subject, by means of the look. However, although this process – even if irregular – begins early on,

for some considerable time the spectator is instructed in this chiefly by the gestures of the actors.

3.1.6. Gesture

As we have already seen, one of the popular stage conventions of the period prescribed that the actors – well aware of the existence of the spectators in the theatre – should regard the audience as a constant and involved interlocutor of the performance, thus inviting the spectators to participate and comment upon the performed events (see 1.2.). We have also seen how, as a consequence of this solid tradition, in early cinema characters tend to look at the camera in order to address the audience, thus taking the spectator's presence into account. However, in these films where a voyeur often addresses the spectators, something else also occurs. Actually, something occurs that is more specifically linked to the representation of the gaze and its being made explicit. Indeed, the characters looking through optical instruments, keyholes, holes and so on, exhibit, before and after each view, all the gestures necessary to access the views themselves, as has been described in the previous section. What is more, in addition to performing this ritual, after having looked (through a viewer, or through a keyhole), the same characters punctually repeat everything they have just seen, miming it while addressing the spectator.

In *Un coup d'œil par étage*, for instance, the concierge sees, through the keyhole of the front door apartment on the first floor, a businessman sitting at his desk, shouting into the telephone, and eventually smashing the appliance; after having seen this, the concierge addresses the spectator (the camera) and imitates the agitated man, miming his struggle with the telephone. Through the keyhole of the door on the second floor, the same concierge observes three children having a pillowfight, feathers fluttering in the air; again, after having seen this, the concierge turns to the spectator and mimes both the children's game and the fluttering feathers (incidentally, before going on to the next floor, he blows a kiss towards the door behind which the children are playing, like the concierge in *Curiosité d'une concierge*). Then, through the keyhole on the third floor, the concierge sees an old lady stroking her cat; once more, after having observed this, he turns towards the spectator and pets an imaginary cat, mimicking the old lady's action to the spectator.

The same thing happens in *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*, where the excited voyeur mimes the shape of the beautiful young woman he has, with the aid of his telescope, just watched undressing. In *La fille de bain indiscrète* the girl mimes the actions carried out by the customers of the public toilet she is in charge of. In *Le déjeuner du savant* the scientist makes disgusted faces, looking at the worms and bacteria

through his microscope, and mimics their frenetic wriggling. In *Par le trou de la serrure* the waiter, before bending down to look through the first keyhole, faces the camera, points at his own eyes, then looks, and, after having looked, promptly repeats everything he has seen. In *L'amour à tous les étages* the student performs everything he sees through the different keyholes. In *Curiosité d'une concierge* the concierge mimes and comments upon each view, sometimes duplicating it by exhibiting elements of her own life. In *Grandma's Reading Glass*, at the end, the boy – who never actually looks towards the camera – opens his arms wide to show "how big" (as can be read from his lips) the cat seems when observed through his grandmother's magnifying glass. In *The Inquisitive Boots*, the bootblack even performs eloquent gestures to anticipate the views for the spectator's benefit: by choosing, among the heap of shoes, a pair which makes it possible to guess whether the person behind the selected door is a man or a woman; and by bending down to spy for a moment before demonstrating through his gestures what he has just seen and the spectator is about to see. So, the bootblack touches one of his own feet before allowing us to see the image of a man with a bandaged foot; he mimes a curly hairstyle before bending down again to peep at a bizarre individual wearing a wig; he rocks an imaginary cradle before looking through a keyhole to see a woman holding a dog; and he spreads his arms wide in disbelief, after having realised that the woman is actually cradling an animal – and so on.

Today, this kind of display seems to us definitely redundant. In fact, it repeats what we, as spectators, have just seen in the previous shot. Nevertheless, it is once more important to bear in mind the kind of expectations that the audience addressed by these films had. This audience probably did not perceive these gestures as redundant at all, recognising, on the contrary, the same reflected gestures and reactions that this audience itself had just experienced in the cinema. Indeed, the actor's actions not only repeat or sometimes anticipate what has just appeared – or what is about to appear – on screen, but, above all, they display, *for the spectator's benefit*, the spectator's own reaction to what is seen. It can be a predictable reaction showing amazement (caused by the size of the kitten's head as seen through the magnifier in *Grandma's Reading Glass*); affection (for instance, the kiss the concierge blows towards the door behind which the children are playing in *Un coup d'œil par étage*, just as the concierge does in *Curiosité d'une concierge*); excitement (at the young woman's curves in *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*); wonder (at the beautiful aerial panorama of Paris in *Toto aéronaute*); fear (caused by the theft the student unintentionally witnesses in *L'amour à tous les étages*); disgust (at the worms and bacteria in the food in *Le déjeuner du savant*); disbelief (at the woman cradling a dog in *The Inquisitive Boots*).

In brief, these apparently superfluous gestures provide reassuring confirmation, for the spectators of the time, of the "correctness" of their own reactions, as it is clearly exemplified by the British film produced and made by Robert W. Paul in 1901, *The Countryman and the Cinematograph*. In it, a country bumpkin, standing in front of a big screen, dances with the projected image of a ballerina, flees from an apparently advancing train, and winks slyly when he sees a man canoodling with his young maid… Similarly, it is clearly exemplified by the subsequent American film produced by Edison in 1902, *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (by Edwin S. Porter), where the protagonist Uncle Josh, like his British predecessor, standing in front of another screen dances with an onscreen ballerina, runs away from the projected image of another advancing train, and then, seeing on the screen a farmer cuddling a country girl, removes his coat to chastise him.[54] It is, then, a convention of early cinema, which also operates as an invitation, to induce identification.

This invitation issues not only from an exuberant way of acting[55] that today we perceive as old-fashioned – especially when comparing it to the way film acting has changed over time. It also allows the character to become a voyeur by duplicating the look and, above all, the spectator's reaction to this look.

This identification is encouraged further by making explicit the act of looking without being seen looking. It is not by chance, in fact, that the voyeur characters emphasise this act and often explain it, whenever they can, to their accomplice: the spectator. In *Par le trou de la serrure*, for example, the servant points at his own eyes before bending down to spy, like the Mondo Nuovo spectators depicted in the same act in a number of 19th century paintings.

Finally, identification is encouraged by explicitly displaying the mediation of a machine that makes it possible to look "secretly", and which the actor exhibits with open satisfaction. For to be able to look without being seen looking, as has already been pointed out, is a privilege

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54 According to the Edison catalogue description, Uncle Josh "evidently thinks he recognises his own daughter, and jumping again upon the stage he removes his coat and prepares to chastise the lover, and grabbing the moving picture screen he hauls it down, and to his great surprise finds a kinetoscope operator in the rear. The operator is made furious by Uncle Josh interrupting his show, and grappling with him they roll over and over upon the stage in an exciting encounter" (Edison catalogue No. 135, September 1902, p. 81-82). On this topic see Musser (1991). See also Mayne (1990), and Hansen (1991) for an analysis of gesture and spectator identification in this Edison film. See Borden (2012) for its links with shadow pictures.

55 On acting in early cinema, see among others Brewster and Jacobs (1997); for a synthesis of the debate on this interesting topic see Dagrada (2010). See also, for early cinema actors' gestures as an attraction, Kessler, Lenk (1995a) and (1995b).

specific to the cinema. These films make this privilege explicit, inviting the spectator to identify with the character whose look is duplicated.

At the same time, such gestural redundancy again emphasise, as with the above-mentioned alternation, the existence of a link between the character and these views. The gestures are confirmation (for the spectator) that the characters have correctly seen (*with* the spectator) everything that has just appeared in the previous shot. That is, they reveal the existence of a connection between the views and the character, between the subject and the object of a look. They reveal the existence of a character who is "seeing"; or, if we prefer, of a subject who is looking, who is an extension of the spectator in the scene.

Today we consider these gestures to be redundant, not only in themselves, but also chiefly because they are inserted within a context in which the reiterated alternation between subject and object coexists with the open exhibition of a matte and its "machine". It is the whole context that seems redundant to us. When each of the processes here described is definitively codified, when each becomes one of the many rules of the point-of-view shot, they will no longer be used in a redundant way.

In early cinema, this gestural redundancy belongs also to films in which the representation of a look is achieved in a single shot (see *Le coucher de la mariée*, *The Two Old Sports*, or *Explosion of a Motorcar*). But it is perhaps the only characteristic, among those discussed so far, which does not survive, in any form, beyond the end of the early period. Later on, such a display of redundant gestures will totally disappear.

3.1.7. The Punitive Ending

The May 1902 supplement to the Pathé catalogue describes the film *Chez le photographe* as follows, in order to announce its release:

> Un bonhomme vient pour se faire photographier. Mais c'est en vain que l'opérateur cherche à le faire tenir en place, la curiosité le pousse à vouloir voir ce qui se passe dans l'objectif. Aussi ne tarde-t-il pas à en être *puni*, car il reçoit d'abord du blanc et du noir puis ensuite un jet d'eau en pleine figure. (My emphasis).[56]

This is not an extreme case, nor is it exceptional. On the contrary, it is a rule which could seem anomalous to us today, but which is again

[56] A man comes to have his photograph taken, but though the photographer tries to make him keep still, curiosity compels him to try to see what's going on inside the lens. He is soon punished as he gets first white and then black stuff, and then a jet of water in his face. Cf. the *Supplément de Mai 1902*, production number 622. This film was made and interpreted by Ferdinand Zecca, and is not to be confused with *Chez le photographe* shot in 1900 by Alice Guy for Gaumont. On the latter, telling a similar story of *curiositas*, see McMahan (2006).

consistent with the expectations of the time. It is the rule of the "punitive ending", which here involves the photographer's customer, guilty of such curiosity as to wish to look (inside a machine!), in order to exercise his faculty of sight.

The rule of the punitive ending is a distinctive characteristic of early cinema as a whole; as a matter of fact, it is an actual topos, an authentic convention of the period. It does not affect merely the voyeur, brilliantly typified by the customer in this Pathé film, but recurs in countless other cases and genres. According to Burch,[57] it derives from the circus, and from the music-hall numbers originating in the circus. But its true origins are surely even older, and its motivations more profound.

This final retribution appears in the cinema as early as 1895 in *Le jardinier et le petit espiègle* (reappearing, in identical form, in *Arroseur et arrosé*)[58] which, as already observed, shows a striking resemblance to a publication for children that was printed in 1887 by the Librairie Quantin.[59] Later on, this kind of ending moves to the *burlesque* genre in film, but in the earliest days of the cinema there are already countless films in which the burglar or tramp, exactly like the voyeur or the prankster, is inevitably punished, possibly at the end of an exciting chase (see, among others, *Stop Thief!*).

The voyeur's punishment, however, well illustrated in *Chez le photographe*, deserves careful consideration. In fact, it does not appear only in films, such as this one, composed of a single shot (see also *Les locataires d'à côté*, by Emile Cohl for Gaumont, 1908); or, of course, in the numerous *Coucher de la mariée*. It also appears, very often, as a corollary in optical instrument films, in which the voyeur is punished every time he pushes his indiscretion too far. This happens, for example, in *As Seen Through a Telescope*, in which the old voyeur peeps through a telescope at a young lady's slender ankle,[60] is hit on the head by the

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[57] Cf. Burch (1990: 191 ff.), who mentions "the clown's closing kick in the behind" (p. 193), without explaining further.

[58] Cf. footnote 23 in chapter 1.

[59] See footnote 24 in chapter 1. See also four magic lantern plates owned by the Museu del Cinema in Girona (Col·lecció Tomàs Mallol), telling a similar story.

[60] *The Gay Shoe Clerk* (by Edwin S. Porter for Edison, 1903) also ends with a punishment. Here a shoe-shop assistant is not only guilty of having persistently observed a lady customer's ankle, *but also* of having kissed her: he is subsequently repeatedly hit with an umbrella by her chaperone. As we have already seen (cf. footnote 15 in this chapter), the image representing the customer's ankle cannot be explicitly attributed to the shop assistant's look; rather, it is an insert edited into the film in the same manner as the view of the kitten's head in *The Sick Kitten* (see footnote 32 in chapter 2; and Brewster, 1982). However, this detail shot both informs the spectator of what the assistant is observing, and acts as a spectacular attraction, displaying the onset of the young man's desire. Because of this, when in the following shot the shop assistant and the customer embrace, the girl's companion has reason enough to punish the man, even if he is not actually depicted as

person accompanying her, and falls to the ground. It also happens in *Ce que l'on voit de la Bastille*, in which the scientist who has climbed on the top of the Bastille to observe Paris from above gives in to the temptation to look at the much more exciting sights to be enjoyed through his fellow Parisians' open windows, and falls off the building, together with the column which supports him.[61] And, of course, punishment systematically takes place at the end of keyhole films: let us mention only *The Inquisitive Boots*, in which the spying boot boy is caught in the act and sprayed with water by one of the hotel's clients.

Well before the cinema, the punitive ending involving a voyeur is in some way anticipated in the delightful *Pantomime à trois personnages* entitled *Autour d'une cabine* (1893-4), one of the few surviving *pantomimes lumineuses* by Emile Reynaud's Théâtre Optique. The pantomime displays an indiscreet bourgeois, dressed up to the nines, who bends down to peep into the keyhole of a cabin in which a young lady is changing into her swimming costume. Let us note, in passing, that as he spies upon the girl, the man casts a few satisfied glances towards the audience, slapping his thigh (like the voyeur in *Le coucher de la mariée*); but he is discovered upon the arrival of the third character in the pantomime, another bather, the lady's official escort, who vigorously kicks the voyeur in the pants, making him run away.

Furthermore, in the films where this form of the representation of the gaze appears, this type of ending is not only very common, but also one of the most violent (the astronomer in *Eclipse de soleil en pleine lune* dies; the two voyeurs in *Les locataires d'à côté* are forced to leave their home).[62] It is, above all, one of the most unsettling endings.

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a voyeur in the strict sense. On this retribution, see also Musser (1991). On attraction and voyeuristic pleasure (of the spectator as well as of the shop assistant) in this film see Gunning (2006). On its combining attraction and storytelling – also in comparison with *Hooligan in Jail* (American Mutoscope and Biograph, 1903) – see Gunning (2009b).

61 This is what the Pathé catalogue states about *Ce que l'on voit de la Bastille*, by Ferdinand Zecca (*Catalogue Pathé, Supplément de décembre* 1905, No. 1323, 75 m): "Un vieux savant a entrepris l'ascension de la colonne de la Bastille dans le but d'étudier l'espace. Après avoir promené sa lorgnette sur quelques panoramas de Paris, il fouille d'un œil indiscret le logis des habitants qui ont l'habitude de laisser leurs fenêtres ouvertes. Il se réjouit des secrets intimes qu'il a surpris lorsque, par un inexplicable manque d'équilibre, la colonne s'effondre, entraînant dans sa chute notre malheureux savant." (An old scientist has climbed the column of the Bastille, in order to study space. After having passed his glass over many Paris panoramas, he pokes around with an indiscreet eye into the homes of his fellow Parisians, who habitually leave their windows open. He is enjoying the intimate secrets he catches when, due to an inexplicable loss of balance, the column falls dragging him down).

62 Burch (1990: 191 ff.) describes an equally cruel ending for a voyeur in the film *L'envers du théâtre* (Pathé, 1905). However, the description to be found in Bousquet (1996) for this title (No. 1231) makes no reference to it.

It lacks justification, at least apparently, the only possible one being an implicit and inscrutable prohibition to look, affecting Western culture from Oedipus onwards. What is more, the offence here is not just the act of looking, but of looking by means of a *machine*! Punishment for such audacity, then, is not only the price to be paid for exercising an indiscreet viewing faculty, that according to public moral code should be chastised. It is also the plainly popular manifestation of a prohibition that surely has its roots in the past – before the circus, before the music-hall – which is not alien to the vague sense of transgression that the voyeur here embodies, celebrating his renewed faculty of sight.

The origins of such a prohibition certainly deserve to be investigated. The curiosity that is fateful to the protagonist of *Chez le photographe* seems in fact rooted in a distant past, in that "pleasure of looking" which, in his *Confessions*, at the beginning of the 5th century, Saint Augustine called *curiositas*. The demonisation of the machine as the work of Evil has distant origins as well: when it first appeared, the cinematograph was defined as "the devil's invention" in many religious milieus in Western culture.[63] For western religious culture, perfection of the viewing faculty was believed to be not of this world, but reserved for Heaven (see, for example, Bartholomeus Rimbertinus's treatise, *De deliciis sensibilibus paradisi*, and Celsus Maffeus's *De sensibilibus deliciis paradisi*).[64] To seek its perfection in this world, daring to long for access to the marvels of the visible that are reserved for eternal bliss, is an unforgivable act of pride, an act of *hubris*. And doing this by means of a machine, acquiring a prosthesis, a mechanical device designed to enhance the human body's sensorial "natural" possibilities, is equated with attempting to take the place of God.

It is no coincidence, then, that in these films punishment often literally hits the voyeur from above. For instance, it happens in those licentious films in which the voyeur is overwhelmed by the bed collapsing onto his head (*Le coucher de la mariée*). It happens in *La poule aux œufs d'or*, where a sneering demon, by means of an explosion, punishes the two thieves who are guilty not of trying to steal, but of having *looked* at the egg against the light of a lamp. Or yet, it happens in *Un drame dans les airs*, in which the two adventurers, who observe the world from a balloon with the aid of a telescope, are struck by lightning and fall into the sea.

But the final punishment inscrutably strikes the voyeur, guilty of having dared to look, even when it is the manifestation of a more earthly situation. It is sometimes an exemplary punishment, as in *The Big*

63 On this point, cf. the studies collected in Cosandey, Gaudreault, Gunning (1992).

64 Regarding this point, cf. footnote 35 in chapter 1.

Swallow, in which Sam Dalton actually punishes the photographer who would like to take his picture by eating him up;[65] or in *Rêve à la lune* (and in *Excursion dans la lune*), where an anthropophagous moon swallows up anyone who dares to look at it as it approaches.

The final punishment also strikes the servant or the "professional" meddler who peeps at every door, as in *The Inquisitive Boots*, at the end of which the boot boy is sprayed with water, through the last keyhole, by the person he is spying upon. Let us consider, for example, *Par le trou de la serrure*, where the final door is slammed in the waiter's face; *Un coup d'œil par étage*, in which the concierge who has peeped through the door on each floor of the building is caught up in the fire which breaks out in the attic; or *A Search for Evidence*, in which a betrayed wife is punished by effectively catching her husband *in flagrante* with his lover.

It also happens to the voyeur in *Aux bains de mer*, who has at first spied upon and then joined some girls in the water: he is repeatedly hit with an umbrella by his wife, who has spied upon her husband herself, and therefore falls into the water as well. It happens in *L'indiscret mystifié*, where the voyeur, intent on spying upon a young couple, is deceived by them, exposed, and then punished by the police. And it happens in a film as late as *Don Juan heiratet* (Duskes, 1909), where three women spy through a keyhole on a seducer whom they have imprisoned, and are misled by the vision the man acts out for them (a true lesson in iconoclasm): as they open the door, they are immediately trapped in turn.

It happens to the amateur adventurer as well as the scholar in search of knowledge, for example in *Toto aéronaute*, where the young boy who has turned himself into an explorer of the skies crashes to the ground in his rudimentary home-made balloon. Or again in *Eclipse de soleil en pleine lune*, where the astronomer leans from the window to observe the moon more closely, by means of his telescope, but falls out. And it happens in *Le déjeuner du savant*, where the scientist checks his food with a microscope before eating it, and, finding it full of bacteria, must go without. Or in *Les joyeux microbes*, in which a patient devil breaks a picture over the head of a doctor who has forced him to observe his microbes through the microscope. In *La peine du talion*, where the butterfly collector receives his punishment on the basis of the law of retaliation: the same butterflies he has observed through a magnifying glass turn into young girls and pierce

[65] In Burch's opinion (1990), this punishment is inflicted because the photographer wishes to reproduce the man's image. For parodic versions of the misadventures of a photographer, see for instance *Une chute de cinq étages* (1906), *Les mésaventures d'un photographe* (1908) and the interesting *La photographie électrique à distance* (1908), all by Georges Méliès. See also *Photographie d'une étoile* (Pathé, 1906) and *Fotografo burlato* (Ambrosio, 1906), the latter quoted in Bernardini (1996: 39).

him with an enormous pin. And in *L'eau merveilleuse*, where a barber who has covered his bald customer's head with hair, thanks to a lotion he applies after having meticulously studied it through a magnifying glass, finds that his own arms and hands are thickly covered in hair.[66]

We could go on. But even this convention, this punitive ending will disappear. That is to say, it will assume subtler, less flagrant, at times even concealed forms; to such an extent that the first signs of this increased subtleness already appear in films still "old" in other respects (like *Eine Fliegenjagd*, [1905] or *Le concierge bat son tapis*, 1906). Films in which the voyeur is no longer the victim of a punishment, but rather becomes, significantly, its artificer.[67]

3.2. This Side of the Circle, the Other Side of the Keyhole

The paradigm just delineated marks out a map made up of clues, of particular features that are sometimes clearly visible, sometimes difficult to detect, but all equally enlightening with respect to a modality of representation of the gaze so different from the one we call the point-of-view shot today.

Over time, of course, these clues were to absorb the most important transformations brought about by the linearisation process, which was especially to amplify its narrative possibilities. Eventually, parataxis would subside in favour of hypotaxis. Movement would lose its function as a spectacular attraction in itself. Redundant gestures would disappear and give way to different acting techniques. The voyeur's punishment would be integrated and newly placed into the dynamics of the fictional narrative, and the prohibition to look through a machine (imposed upon the spectator embodied by the voyeur character) would turn into a prohibition to look at the camera, imposed solely upon the character. Alternation, instead of separating the subject from the object, would reunite them in a linear, connecting structure. And the matte was to become so anthropomorphised that the fact that it had been primarily the trace of

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[66] In addition to *L'eau merveilleuse* (Pathé, 1901) the theme of the barber dealing with a bald customer appears in *Lotion miraculeuse* (Pathé, 1904), and in *The Marvellous Hair Restorer* (Williamson, 1901 – cf. Gifford, 1973, No. 00459: "Trick – Bald man grows hair and so does table he splashes"). On the barber theme see also, among others: *The Rival Barbers* (Williamson, 1905), *The Lady Barber* (G.A. Smith, 1898), *Comic Shaving* (or *Comic Barber*, No. 00044, G.A. Smith 1897), *A Quick Shave and Brush-Up* (G.A. Smith, 1900) and the original *Fregoli barbiere* (by Leopoldo Fregoli, 1899), which overturns the stereotype, magically making hair grow back on a customer's head, which the barber himself has shaved completely.

[67] On *Eine Fliegenjagd* see 4.3.4.; on *Le concierge bat son tapis* see 4.3.1. The voyeur character is no longer the (only) victim also in *Les joyeux microbes* and *Transfigurations*, by Emil Cohl, both significantly from 1909.

a machine would be forgotten; instead, it would become transformed into the definitive sign of a diegetic look that penetrates it.

However, in these early optical instrument or keyhole films it is precisely through these clues that the gap between the representation of the look in early cinema and what will become the point-of-view structure is revealed. And this gap involves the early spectator and today's spectator as well.

In this respect, this paradigm of clues displays the same coordinates among which the transformations of the visible move – together with the transformation of the gaze in the representation of the visible – between the 19th and the 20th centuries. And if we investigate this paradigm in the right way, it tells us not only where the point-of-view shot came from, but also where it is going. Of course, it tells *us*, today, who already know. Yet, the philological approach has its privileges: it allows us to know the "future of the past",[68] so as to benefit from this knowledge at the appropriate time. It is because we know what the point-of-view shot has become that we can ask what it once was. And it is because we know its present rules that we are able to investigate the past in which those rules were first laid down. In other words, it is because we understand what the form of representation of the gaze appearing in these films has become over time, that we are able to understand its most significant changes too.

The characteristics which constitute the paradigm analysed in the previous pages fully illustrate the profound relationship the appearance of this filmic form has with its own time, bringing to life a form of representation of the gaze which is intimately connected to the representation of the visible of the period, through autonomous views corresponding to optical artifices or perceptive marvels. After all, the perceptive experience of the spectators of the time is precisely what is inscribed in the films. Ordinary spectators, who enter into this experience – of which the cinema is part – with excitement and amazement, and who feel the same enthusiasm for these views, finding them fascinating in themselves, as do the characters who stands in for them. This is what the first representations of the gaze in early cinema display, and turn into a spectacle: they display the early spectator's perceptive experience, made possible by the intervention of a machine placed between the eye and the world.

However, there is also something here of the filmic form which over time will become the point-of-view structure. Most importantly, what

[68] When I first wrote this phrase (which in Italian sounds "il futuro del passato"), in Dagrada (1989a) and (1998a), Janet Staiger had not yet titled thus an article that I quote here willingly – see Staiger (2004) – even if its topic differs from mine. See also Dagna (2011).

is different here – and original, when compared to the preceding visual experiences of the contemporaneous spectator – is that, in addition to the look of the spectator, there is also, *simultaneously*, someone else looking through, beyond the keyhole or the optical instrument. There is the look of someone who, unlike the spectator, belongs to the scene shown. In these films, then, what becomes visible is also a character looking, who develops into a vicarious "viewing" subject, a substitute on the screen for the spectator in the cinema.

A crucial match is played here, which goes well beyond the constitution of this form of representation of the gaze into a filmic pattern. In fact, its role in the process of linearisation also contributes to the establishment of the spectator as a ubiquitous subject, creating the conditions for his or her visibility, as well as for his or her inclusion in a circular, continuous filmic space.[69]

The insistence, then, the redundancy we have observed in the clues which comprise this paradigm, the "excess" of information – which tend to highlight the link between the spectator and the character on the one hand, and the link between the character and what is looked at on the other – signify this as well. They signify, through every possible means, that there is someone seeing, besides the spectator; that there is another body, in front of the image, together with the spectator, looking through the matte, the keyhole, the lens or the telescope; that the objects seen by the spectator through the lens are objects seen through the eye *of* the character, *by* the character. A character who is included in the representation through the projection of the spectator's gaze as well.

Thus, the place of the look – at first external, fixed and immobile (see 1.2.) – becomes, in turn, mobile. And the mobility of the look integrates, within itself, the ubiquity that is peculiar to the mobility of the point of view.

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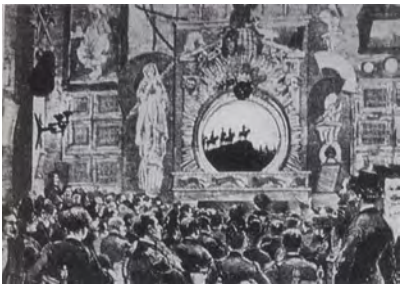
[69] On this point, I disagree with Noël Burch who thinks that "the 'invention' of the 'point-of-view shot' or 'subjective camera' […] never came to occupy a key position in the edifice of the IMR" (Burch, 1990: 240). Firstly, point of view and subjective camera pertain to different conceptual fields and should never be conflated (see chapter 5). Secondly, if the Metzian double process of primary identification (of the spectator with the camera) and secondary identification (of the spectator with the character) plays a role in the edifice of what Burch calls the IMR, the emergence of the point-of-view shot as it surfaces here does too, and shows – among other things – that the character established as a "viewing" subject, during a point-of-view shot, is absent from the image he sees, exactly as the spectator sitting in the movie theatre is absent from the scene represented. On the Metzian double process of primary and secondary identification, see Metz (1977). On the assumption of point of view for the spectator as a key feature in the evolution of cinema as a narrative form see Mayne (1988).

49. *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième* (Pathé, 1901).

50. Mechanised plate for magic lantern.

51. Poster for a shadow play show.

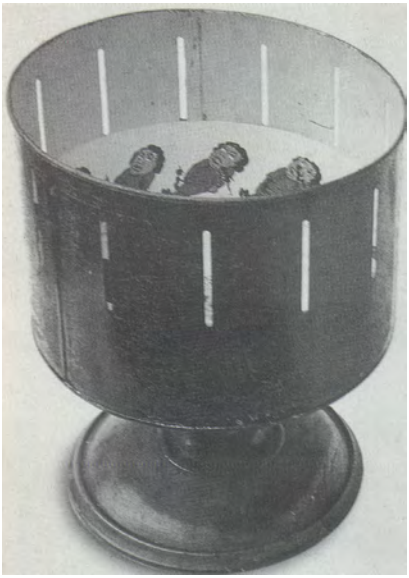
52. Jules Chéret (attr.), sketch for unrealised poster for the Cinématographe Lumière, 1896.



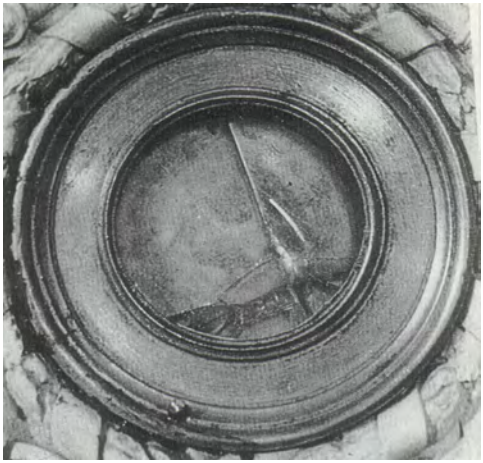
53. Caran d'Ache show, Chat-Noir (1885).

54. British chiaroscuro plate.

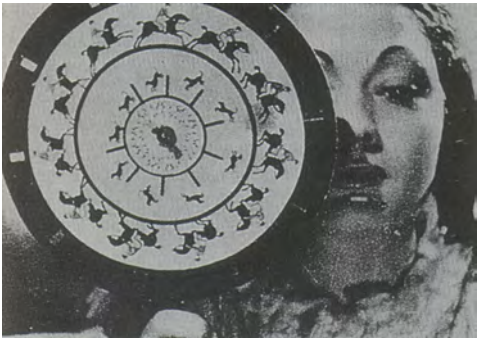
55. A Trewey show seen from behind the stage.



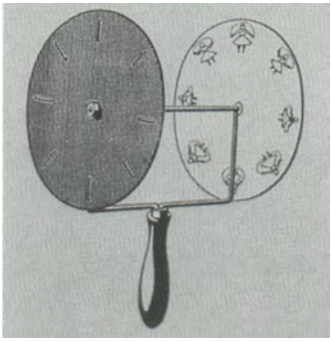
56. A zoëtrope.



57. Galileo Galilei's lens.



58. A phenakistoscope.



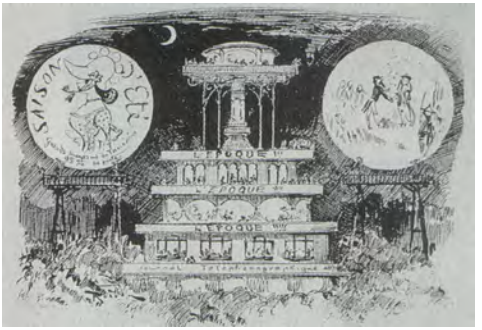
59. A two-plate phenakistoscope.

60. Grandma's eye from *Grandma's Reading Glass* (G.A. Smith, 1900).

61. Miniature, watercolour on ivory (painting of an eye: 21x14 mm).

62. A. Robida, *Le vingtième siècle* (1883).

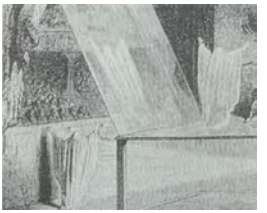
63. W.R. Hill (attr.), *The Soldier's Dream*, plate for magic lantern, Royal Polytechnic Institution, London, ca. 1860. Coll. Cinémathèque française, Paris.



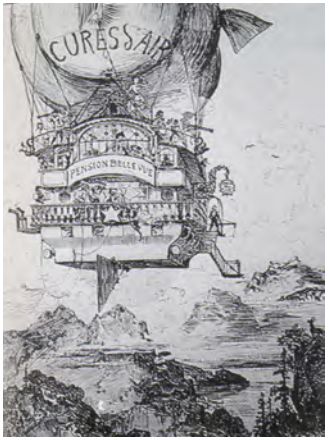
64. A. Robida, *Le vingtième siècle* (1883).

65. A. Robida, *Le vingtième siècle* (1883).

66. A phantasmagoria by Robertson in the Capuchin convent in Paris.



67. Apparition during a theatre show.



68. A. Robida, *Le vingtième siècle* (1883).

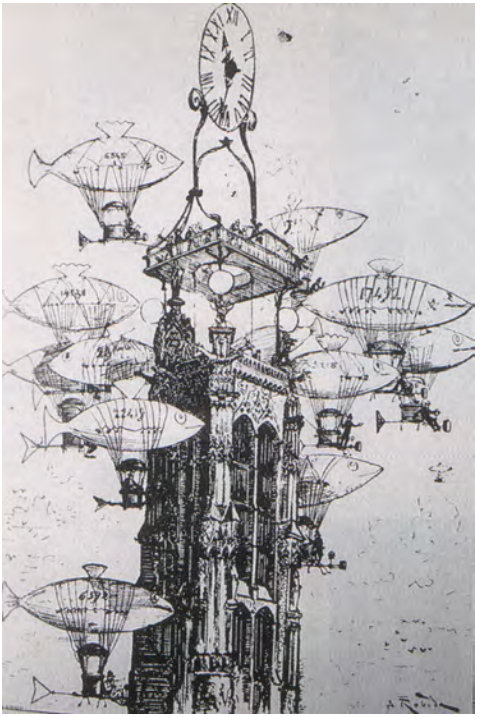
69. Daumier, *Nadar élévant la photographie à la hauteur de l'art* (1862).

70. *Vers les étoiles* (Star-Film, 1908).

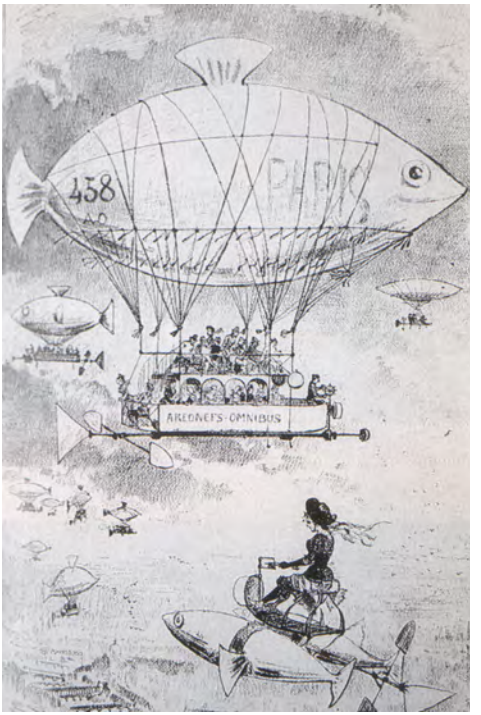
71. *Un drame dans les airs* (Pathé, 1904).

72. Grimoin-Sanson's Cinéorama at the 1900 Exposition Universelle, Paris.

73. *The Airship Destroyer* (Urban, 1909).



74. A. Robida, *Le vingtième siècle* (1883).



75. A. Robida, *Le vingtième siècle* (1883).

76. A. Robida, *Le vingtième siècle* (1883).

77. A la conquète de l'air (Pathé, 1901).

78. G. Demenÿ in *Vive la France!* (1882).

79. A. Robida, *Le vingtième siècle* (1883).

80. Photographic portraits.

81. Veronese magic lantern plates. Coll. Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Turin.

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82. *Par le trou de la serrure* (Pathé, 1905).

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83. Le déjeuner du savant (Pathé, 1905).

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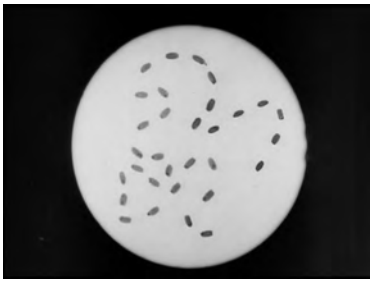

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84. *Les joyeux microbes* (Gaumont, 1909).

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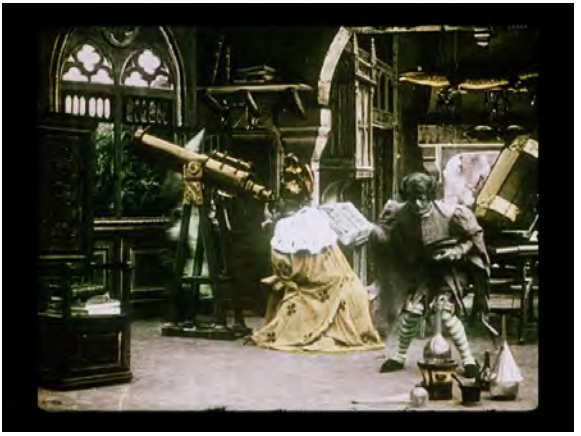
85. *Transfigurations* (Gaumont, 1909).

86. *The Unclean World* (Hepworth, 1903).

87. *As Seen through a Telescope* (G.A. Smith, 1900).



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88. *Voyage sur Jupiter* (Pathé, 1909).

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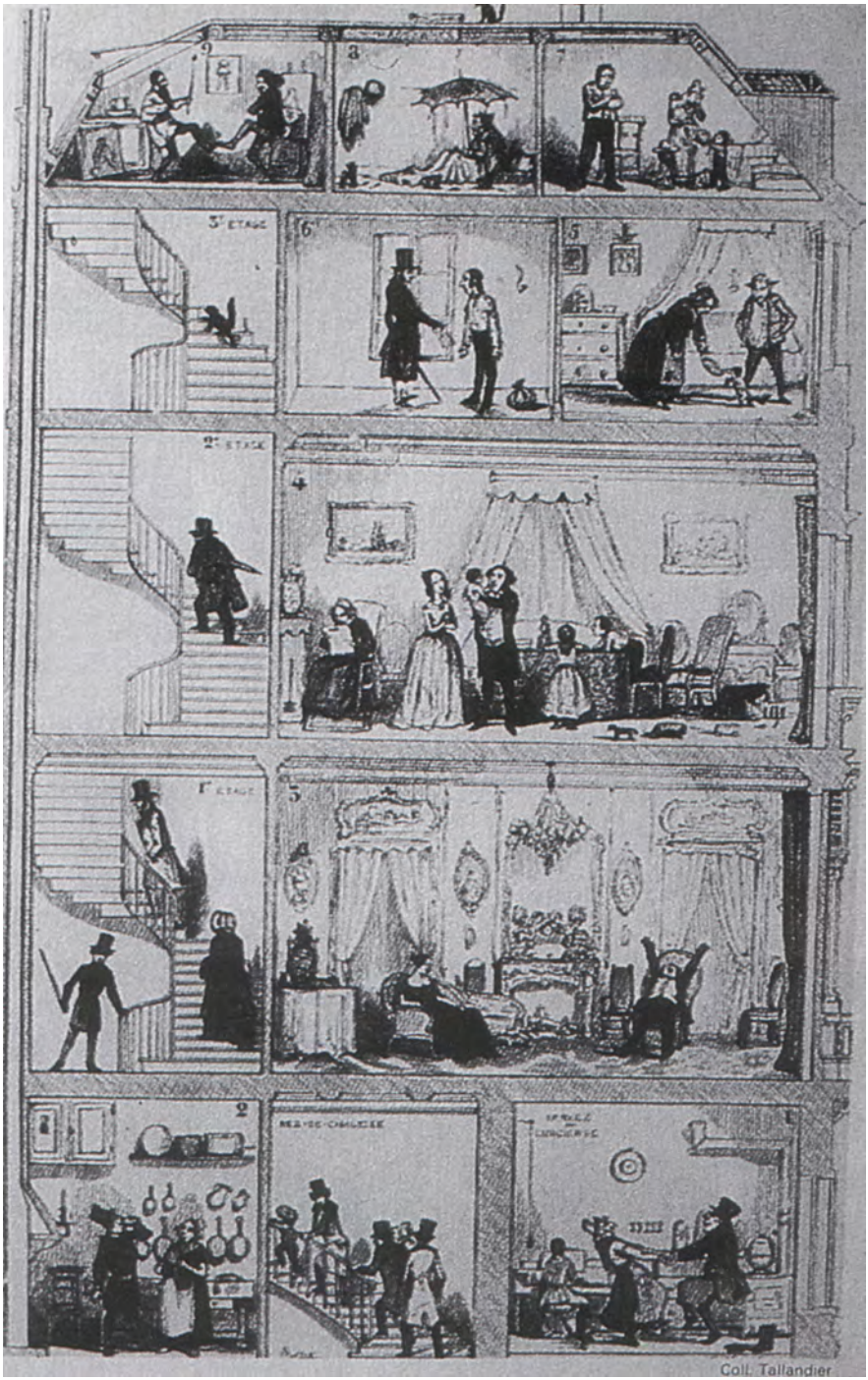
89. *La poule aux œufs d'or* (Pathé, 1905).

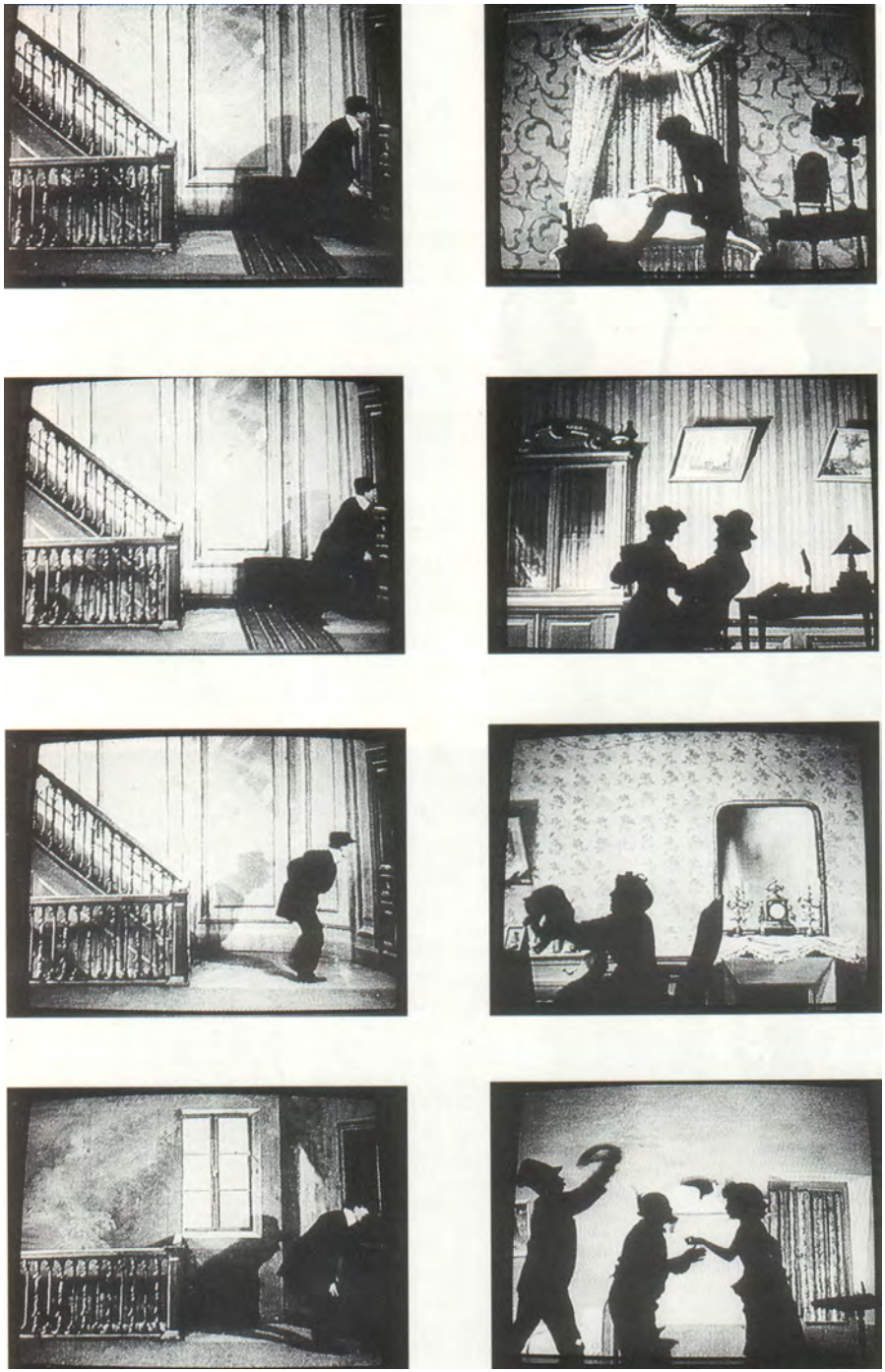
90. *Histoire d'un crime* (Pathé, 1901).

91. *The Life of an American Fireman* (Edison, 1903)

92. *Aladin ou la lampe merveilleuse* (Pathé, 1906).



93. *Paris Comique*, 1845.



94. *L'amour à tous les étages* (Pathé, 1904).

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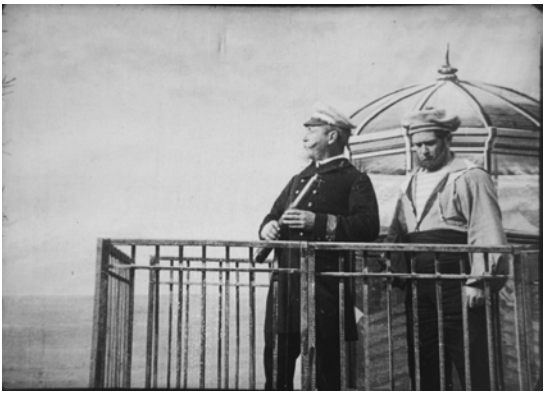
95 Curiosité d'une concierge (Pathé 1905).



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96 Images from an unidentified Pathé film on the Russo-Japanese War (ca. 1904-5).

CHAPTER 4

Towards Linearisation

4.1. The Look and the Story

Among the issues dealt with in the previous chapter, one in particular now demands more attention. It is the issue of narrative – or, better, of the story – and its relationship with early cinema, especially with the status of the single view.

From a strictly narratological perspective, what characterises early cinema is not so much the presence or the absence of a story; rather, it is the different modality of performing it. In previous chapters we have seen that early cinema can tell a story, and that it is able to do so from the very beginning, even in a single view. On the other hand, it may happen that several views assembled in a single film do not tell stories of any kind.

A story is told in very early films, each composed of a single view, such as *Le jardinier et le petit espiègle*, *Explosion of a Motorcar*, *Why Mrs. Jones Got a Divorce*, to mention only a few among the many possible examples analysed so far. On the other hand, there are films comprising several shots which do not add up to a story; we may think of the travelogues, but, in fact, also *Grandma's Reading Glass* – as illustrated in 3.1.1. – does not satisfy Propp's conditions for a story to exist. According to these conditions, it is necessary that an initial equilibrium be upset, and then re-established. Likewise, in most of the optical instrument or keyhole films analysed before, the look is not used in the first instance for narrative purposes, whereas it is possible to encounter such a use in brief single-shot films, like *The Two Old Sports* or *Métamorphoses d'un fiancé*, where the characters' look is used to tell a story that develops within a single image.

Early cinema, then, is not a cinema that lacks stories. Rather, it is a cinema that, when telling a story, tells it in a different way than would be done later on. This is not only because it is a cinema dominated by the *autonomy*[1] of the single view (as seen in 3.1.1.), thus by the lack of integration among parts – in the cases in which they exist (as seen in 3.1.5.), but also because it is a cinema dominated by the spectacular

[1] Regarding this point, note that Burch (1990) speaks of autarchy. Note also that this conception of the shot as an autonomous entity has emerged as one of the most important achievements of post-Brighton theoretical studies about early cinema.

attraction[2] of the single view, perceived by the audience as a spectacle in itself. That is to say, it is a cinema which favours the spectacular impact of the single shot, which usually tends to prevail even in those films which involve a narrative.

Of course, this peculiar status of the single view in early cinema is strictly part of the mode of film practice[3] of the period, which is strongly linked to contemporary cultural models, especially in popular arts and entertainment forms. But, during the years between the beginning of 1900 and the establishment of the so-called classical paradigm, around the late 1910s, this mode of film practice goes through enormous transformations. These transformations involve, among other things, the way stories are told. It is a process of profound change chiefly stimulated by exposure to a more cultivated and heterogeneous public, used to the naturalistic illusion of the bourgeois theatre and novel, and by the resulting reassessment of the cultural models that cinema had previously referred to.[4] The acquisition of these new models can actually be indicated as one of the most important factors which lead to a different way of developing stories.[5] And when the way stories unfold changes, a change in the mode of representation of the gaze occurs too.

We have seen that the point-of-view shot does not make its appearance in the iconographic and spectacular panorama of the time in order to relate stories, but rather to shape – in a specifically filmic way – a perceptive experience common to the spectators of the day. It represents an act (that of looking *through* a machine), together with the marvels of the visible which are made accessible by that act. In doing so, however, we have also seen that it enables the emergence of an editing pattern capable of establishing a link between different views. It can establish a link, even though not yet hypotactic, between the subject and the object of a look.

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2 On this seminal concept see footnote 7 in this chapter. On the debate about attraction and narration see, among others, Kessler (2000) and Strauven (ed., 2006).

3 The expression is Bordwell's (1981-2).

4 Burch (1990) identifies the radical change from what he calls the Primitive Mode of Representation to the Institutional Mode of Representation in the process of "centring" the subject-spectator, which became necessary when the audience was broadened to include more cultivated social classes, used to the naturalistic illusion of the bourgeois theatre and novel, and which, according to Burch, suffered from the "Frankenstein syndrome", that is, analogical representation.

5 The lack of enduring success of the French Film d'Art production strategy, which, starting in 1908, tried to attract richer and more middle class patrons by filming versions of well-know theatrical plays with Comédie Française actors and directors, seems to me symbolically eloquent when compared with the fact that, starting only one year later, in the USA, David W. Griffith succeeded in attracting middle class audience by *filming stories differently*. It proves further – if need be – that it has not been a matter of *what*, but a matter of *how*.

When the representation of the gaze is used in order to tell stories *differently* from the way they have been told before, this link changes to the point of becoming hypotactic. In many of the optical instrument and keyhole films considered so far there is no true interdependence between shots, nor is there a true narrative use of the characters' gaze. Yet, within a number of optical instrument and keyhole films, we may observe the emergence of the conditions which make such an interdependence and such a narrative use possible. It is here that the use of the "faculty of sight" gives way to the use of the look for narrative and expressive purposes, thus making the structure of alternating editing, between the subject and the object of a look, no longer a way to gain access merely to the discovery of wonderful or forbidden shows, but also to events or objects – virtually *any* events and objects – transformed by the look into the turning point of a story.

4.2. Parataxis and Hypotaxis

By emphasising the paratactic nature of early cinema, Tom Gunning has drawn attention to an essential characteristic of what he has called the "non-continuous style"[6] of early cinema, that is to say, a style which keeps separate the different parts which make up a film, instead of blending them into the illusion of a homogeneous narrative continuity. This is, then, a paratactic style, which dominates the structure of optical instrument and keyhole films, and which, among other features, characterises what Gunning and André Gaudreault have called, since the mid-1980s, the *cinema of attractions*.[7] That is to say, a cinema that favours the spectacular impact of the single shot, detouring the spectator's attention from storytelling to display, in opposition to a mode of narrative integration which favours, instead, the dilution of each image into the continuity of a diegetic logic.

According to Gaudreault,[8] the conception of the shot developed in three periods. First, that of the single-shot film, which only involves the shooting phase. Then, the period in which the film is composed of several non-continuous shots, involving two phases, shooting and editing, but

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6 "Non-continuous style" is the first definition used by Tom Gunning for what will be named later "cinema of attractions" (see *infra* footnote 7). Gunning (1979) identifies the origin of this style in the numerous exchanges and contacts between early cinema and the various popular arts of the age (i.e. cartoon, vaudeville, popular songs, caricature…).

7 Cf. at least Gunning (1986) and Gaudreault and Gunning (1989). On the genealogy and the seminal influence of this concept in early cinema theory and historiography, see Strauven (ed., 2006).

8 See Gaudreault (1988b and subsequent editions).

in which the shooting phase is not carried out with the editing process in mind (i.e., it is not determined by the editing). And, finally, the era in which the film is composed of several continuous shots, which involves shooting in a way that is functional to the editing process.

Gaudreault himself clarifies that these are not definite periods, but rather different modes of film practice which co-existed for quite a long time.[9] There is no linear evolution, no chronological succession involved. Moreover, although it is possible to venture a cautious hypothesis according to which the years 1902 and 1903 would represent the boundary between the first and second periods, no such boundary can be established between the second and third, which co-existed for many years.

However, from our perspective, there is another important fact which must be further clarified. If we understand *editing* as *assembling*, the transformation of the conception of the shot does not end when shooting with the intention of editing. For the shift from a succession of non-continuous shots to a succession of continuous shots to occur, shooting with the idea of producing a specific arrangement of shots is not enough. There are many early films which are composed of several shots in some way conceived and filmed with a certain "assembling" process in mind, but which do not, however, establish a connection between the shots that is more than the simple arrangement already mentioned. Consider again the optical instrument and keyhole films: the shots which represent a character looking through something, together with the shots which supposedly represent the character's gaze, are often filmed with the idea of a certain arrangement (as the recourse to the matte shows). Nonetheless, the autonomy of the single moving image generally prevails, through the inclusive and self-contained composition of the image itself,

[9] Many films composed of several shots were registered at the Copyright Office of the Library of Congress in Washington as a series of separate films, each with its own title. Such is the case with *The Downward Path* (Biograph), composed of five shots, each registered as an autonomous film under its own title (1 – *The Fresh Book Agent*; 2 – *The Elopement*; 3 – *The New Soubrette*; 4 – *The Girl Who Went Astray*; 5 – *The Suicide*), and of *The Pioneers* (Biograph, 1903), divided into: 1 – *Rescue of a Child from Indians*; 2 – *Firing the Cabin*; 3 – *Discovery of Bodies*; 4 – *Indians Leaving Bald Mountain*; 5 – *Trappers Crossing Bald Mountain*. In Gunning's opinion (1979), this was also due to commercial reasons. Biograph films at the time were destined both to be projected in theatres and to be viewed in peep-show Mutoscopes; in the latter case, dividing the film into several autonomous parts forced the spectator who wished to know the rest of the story to go from one Mutoscope to the other, inserting more money each time. Regarding this point, however, Burch (1990) remarks that often such divisions were merely fictitious, and draws attention to the case of the various *Passions*, whose tableaux are indicated as separate in producers' catalogues, but with their numbers always in succession. It even seems that the tableaux which composed Horitz's *Passion* (which appear for the first time in the 1903 Biograph catalogue), though listed separately, could not be purchased as such.

its high potential as an attraction, and therefore its spectacular impact on the audience.

The true turning point lies in the advent of a particular link between the different parts of the filmic chain. It is a link which implicates a reciprocal necessity and interdependence, in contrast to the autonomous and self-contained nature of autarchic and non-continuous shots, whether they are filmed for a particular edited arrangement or not.

In other words, for the shift from a succession of non-continuous shots to a succession of continuous shots to take place, a link presupposing a shift from autonomy to subordination – that is, from parataxis to hypotaxis – must be established. Likewise, from the editing perspective, a practice which links shots in such a way as to ideally reunite what it spatio-temporally separates must gain ground, thanks also to the elaboration of a specific film form which, later on, would be given the name "match cut" according to the terminology of classical film grammar.

With respect to the shift from autonomy to subordination between shots, i.e. from parataxis to hypotaxis (but also regarding the match cut practice, which will be discussed in 4.3.), the transformation of optical instrument and keyhole films is exemplary, also because it is exemplarily irregular. First of all, its absence of chronological succession mirrors the same absence of chronological succession that characterises the transformations of the cinema in those years. Moreover, the many changes in optical instrument and keyhole films are strongly interwoven with the transformations of all the other main parallel early "genres", which are also at the peak of their popularity at this time. This is true to such an extent that, after 1903, it is quite uncommon to find a "pure" optical instrument or keyhole film, that is to say, an optical instrument or keyhole film which is not combined with some other genre (the chase, the travelogue, facials, scientific explanations, the catastrophe spectacle…). In particular, the most frequent amalgamation occurs with the chase film, which reaches its peak of popularity between 1903 and 1907, and which plays a pivotal role in the process of linearisation.[10]

Furthermore, the transformation of optical instrument and keyhole films clearly shows – perhaps to a greater extent than in any other early genre – how this age of the cinema is *also* an age of transition, in that

[10] The chase film has been especially studied by Gaudreault (1980), with regard to the development of film narrative, and by Burch in a series of essays published subsequently in Burch (1990). Although the autonomy of the different shots relating to the chase dominates for quite a long time, it is primarily here that one finds the conditions necessary for the "reunion of alternating patterns" discussed in chapter 3. Here, this editing pattern turns out to be a structure possessing a unifying and linking narrative potential**,** as well as a structure playing a pivotal role in the centring process, because it favours the emergence of directions match cut; see *infra*, 4.3.

it is strongly connected to its past, and yet projected into a very near future.[11] In fact, the structure entailing repeated alternation between a shot representing the character looking, and another shot representing the object of this look, is used in optical instrument and keyhole films in a predominantly paratactic way for a long time. But, although these films assemble views which are, more often than not, autonomous with respect to the general framework into which they are inserted, likewise they establish a link between the subject and the object (the nature of which has been discussed in 3.1.5., and will be considered further later on). Moreover, from around 1903, there are films that come half-way between the paratactic and the hypotactic structures, even though the two are so different. These films can establish a link between shots which is at times paratactic and at other times hypotactic. Or they can establish a link between shots belonging simultaneously to both structures. That is to say, while they may validate a clearly paratactic interpretation of the shots, nevertheless one can also find a subordinating link with respect to the general framework.

Such films are the most intriguing and the most indicative of the richness of early cinema.

4.2.1. Isomorphic Combinations

The films analysed here are extremely interesting, not only because they exhibit each of the two variants we have just mentioned, but also because they do so within a formally homogeneous structure. At first sight, they are ordinary optical instrument or keyhole films: they are structured according to the mode of alternation, as well as having recourse to the mediation of an optical instrument, or of a keyhole, in order to represent a character's gaze. Moreover, they exhibit a series of all-encompassing views, shot from the best line of vision. However, the first example alternates a paratactic structure with a few hypotactic passages, while the others establish a link between shots in which parataxis and hypotaxis co-exist.

The earliest case encountered so far is *A Search for Evidence*,[12] the Edison production from 1903 analysed in chapter 3. In this film, a woman,

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[11] Actually, as Noël Burch pointed out, early cinema is both "a 'primitive mode of representation' […], a stable system with its own inherent logic and durability" and "a transitional period whose peculiarities can be attributed to the contradictory forces pulling in various directions – the influence of popular spectacle and popular audiences on the one hand, bourgeois economic and symbolic aspirations on the other" (Burch, 1990: 186).

[12] Instead of skipping to the crucial part (crucial from our present-day perspective), *A Search for Evidence* proceeds as any keyhole film would, showing five scenes of everyday life, secretly observed from behind five doors. The scenes have nothing to

accompanied by a private detective, first bends down to look through five keyholes, observing a man cradling a baby in his arms, another foolishly trying to light an electric lamp with a match, a sick woman being visited by her doctor, a group of card players sitting around a table,[13] and an old lady getting up from her bed to look at herself in the mirror. Then, the sixth keyhole finally reveals the woman's unfaithful husband. In this way, *A Search for Evidence* proceeds as a normal keyhole film almost up to the end, displaying five autonomous scenes of everyday life which have nothing to do with each other or with what happens when the woman discovers her disloyal husband through the sixth keyhole. At this point, however, the woman bursts into the room to confront him. Thus, the structure of alternation is now followed by a shot filmed from inside the room itself, where the tragedy of jealousy explodes and the paratactic exhibition of everyday views yields to the clearly hypotactic depiction of the betrayed wife's investigation and desperation. Furthermore, the keyhole matte disappears, while it had surrounded the preceding views.

The French film *Aux bains de mer*, a 1906 Pathé production, is structured in a way similar to *A Search for Evidence*, and, being even longer and more elaborate, it stands out as an exemplary case of the combination of two genres. In fact, the film is structured in two parts. In the first half the protagonist, a man on a seaside holiday with his wife, points his binoculars to the four points of the compass[14] in order to view his surroundings. Four views appear in succession on the screen, framed by a binocular matte against a black background: the sea and a number of sailing boats, the sea with mountains in the distance, the pier, and finally a panoramic view of the beach, crowded with bathers and umbrellas. In

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do with one another or with what happens afterwards, when the woman, seeing her husband in the company of another woman through the keyhole of the sixth door, urges the detective to verify, as a witness, that the sight (no longer a *view*) she has seen is correct, and then bursts into the room. Only at this point, the man and woman who have been spied upon are transformed from common people into *characters* (the husband, the lover). A similar subject is dealt with in another American production, titled *The Divorce: The Evidence Secured* (Biograph, 1903); from the description reported in Niver (1985: 79), however, it is difficult to establish its structure. The film tells the story of a waiter bringing drinks to a hotel room in which, when the door is opened, he discerns a scantily dressed woman sitting at the table; the waiter leaves, and a detective arrives, who looks through the keyhole, calls a second woman, and makes her look as well; after seeing what is going on, the woman faints. The detective then forces the door open, and obliges the husband and his wife to confront at each other (Niver adds: "The final section of a three-part picture").

13 It is interesting that this shot resembles the Lumière film *Partie d'écarté*, which in turn resembles Cézanne's painting *Les joueurs de cartes* (1892 ca.). Regarding the latter aspect, see Pinel (1994).

14 This specification appears in the plot as described by the Pathé catalogue, in which the documentary intent of this first group of marine views is underlined.

the second half of the film, however, the same view of the beach becomes much more interesting when, through his binoculars, the man spots a group of attractive girls and decides to join them. When his wife, who has been taking a nap, wakes up, she looks through the binoculars to locate her husband. The shots which follow (surrounded by a binocular matte) are long pans from left to right over the crowded beach, finally alighting on her husband in the water with the girls – that is, they are shots showing the viewpoint of a jealous woman, who wants to find out what her husband is up to.

The first group of shots seen through the man's binoculars stands out as a set of autonomous views, like the travel images seen in *Le tour du monde d'un policier*. The second group, on the other hand, initiates a subordinating mechanism that triggers the consequences of the event shown (the man surreptitiously leaves his sleeping wife's side because he catches sight of the beautiful bathers, and the wife runs after her husband because she discovers that he is surrounded by other women). While the first group sustains a paratactic relationship with the structure within which it is placed, the second group sustains a hypotactic relationship with the same structure, because the story that unfolds actually *depends on* that group of shots.

This happens regardless of the fact that *Aux bains de mer*, like *A Search for Evidence*, is a "primitive" film.[15] It is enough to observe, first of all, that it starts in the same way as *Grandma's Reading Glass*, that is to say with a first shot showing the image of the sea surrounded by the matte on a black background, thus at first exhibiting the "trick", then revealing it as such. Furthermore, it also combines documentary-like images with decidedly narrative shots, permeated by fiction, in a manner typical of early film.[16] The acting style and gestures exhibited are emphatic and redundant (the man, for example, mimes the sensual curves of the lovely bathers, the woman looks at the camera, addressing the spectator). And finally, it ends with a classic finale depicting retribution, inflicted on both voyeurs: the husband is hit with an umbrella by his wife, but she falls into the water and is splashed by the amused bathers. By many standards, then, it is an "ancient" film, but precisely because of this, its interest lies in the fact that it blends, within a homogeneous alternating structure which remains so for the duration of the film, a collection of "old" features with a "new" use of shot succession. And it does so by creating a paratactic and documentary-like first part – even didactic, in

[15] In the sense clarified by Burch (1990).

[16] This combination of documentary and fiction is one of the characteristics of the non-continuous style analysed by Gunning (1979). On the "*combinatoire* of prior genres" see also Abel (1994: 105 ff.) who speaks of a "*Bricolage* Model".

the indication of the four points of the compass – followed by a second part which is narratively integrated, and in which the protagonists become genuine fictional characters. This is done within a structure of alternation whose form is kept intact, whereas the substance is profoundly modified: in the end, we witness a real "reunion of alternating patterns" (cf. 3.1.5.), for both the voyeurs join the space previously observed, and interact with its inhabitants.

There is no reunion of alternating elements in *L'amour à tous les étages*, another Pathé film, from 1904, but only because the student runs away so fast as to prevent it (and perhaps this is precisely why he runs away…). While in the previous example, towards the end of the film, the paratactic structure yields to a number of hypotactic passages (similar to those in *A Search for Evidence*), here, on the contrary, parataxis dominates until the end, establishing a sort of coexistence with a passage which is *also* hypotactic, though only at the very end. Once more, it is a common keyhole film, organised according to the reiterated modality of alternation though the combination, in this case, is with the shadow play. An inquisitive student goes from floor to floor to peep through the keyholes of his neighbours' doors, and the neighbours appear on screen as black silhouettes engaged in everyday activities (a beautiful woman at her toilette, two lovers meeting secretly, an old woman petting her cat). Through the last keyhole, however, the student witnesses an old man being robbed, and this produces such a state of terror in the boy that the situation takes a turn for the worse. It is interesting that even the view of the theft functions as a spectacular and autonomous attraction, just as the previous ones do (the theft is shown in silhouette, it is played by characters who do not personally interact with the boy, and it does not interfere at all with what happens outside the door…). And yet, it is *also* a view which establishes a hypotactic relation with the rest of the film, because it generates the next scene: as a consequence of secretly observing the robbery, the boy is overcome by fear and rushes down the stairs.

This is exactly what the concierge in *Un coup d'œil par étage* does the following year (the film is another Pathé production, from 1905), for he too, after having observed the inhabitants of his building in a series of autonomous views, goes up to the attic, "smelling" the fire coming from it as he climbs the stairs, and his suspicion is confirmed when he peeps into the last keyhole: frightened, he rushes off to call the fire brigade. The representation of the fire is a spectacle in itself, with which this keyhole film is combined. Yet it further functions as an event which triggers the subsequent actions, for, in addition to retaining its paratactic nature, it also establishes a hypotactic relation with what follows, producing the concierge's reaction, the flight of the other occupants, and the arrival of

the fire brigade. The firemen then undertake a complex rescue operation: they heroically save the attic tenant and the three children on the second floor, while the concierge takes care of the woman who lives on the third floor, thus determining a true reunion of alternating patterns here, unlike the ending of *L'amour à tous les étages*.

Another example is *Un drame dans les airs*, again a Pathé film, from 1904. Here the combination occurs between the travelogue, the catastrophe spectacle and the contemporary predilection for journeys by hot air balloon. The two protagonists set out on balloon trip and observe a series of aerial views: Paris, the open sea, then cliffs. Suddenly the telescope matte encircles a series of flashes of lightning, which set the balloon on fire and cause it to fall into the sea. The views of the lightning – drawings, followed by drawings of heavy rain – are an exciting spectacular attraction in themselves, identical to many analogous views created for the magic lantern.[17] Yet, these shots equally represent the sudden onset of a thunderstorm, which literally precipitates the situation into a crisis. As a consequence, the travellers react to the views with fear: they do not mime the shape of the flash of lightning, but point at it in the sky, terrified, before their balloon is set on fire. The succession of autonomous views representing Paris and the sea, in perfect travelogue style, is then followed by a series of views which function as independent spectacular attractions, but also, *simultaneously*, as shots which provide the necessary visual information to interpret what comes next. This film, in the same way as the previous ones, is primitive in more than one respect (i.e., the blend of several primitive genres, the actors' gestures, the combination of the documentary-like style and narrative fiction, the use of drawings…). The last series of shots, however, while retaining the usual paratactic structure, also justify a hypotactic interpretation.

A more striking case is the remarkable *La purge*, made by Zecca for Pathé in 1904, and interpreted by the popular actor Dranem (Armand Ménard's stage name). It is composed of only three shots. In the first one a man, seen from the hips up, is suffering the pangs of indigestion and makes a woeful expression; he then takes an oval mirror from his table, puts out his tongue, and looks at it in the mirror. The next shot represents his gaze: the oval shape of the mirror is actually a cardboard cut-out; the man inserts his face into the shape, sticks out his tongue, and makes faces. In the third shot, the man lays the mirror on the table and decides to drink a purgative, but this is so disgusting that he makes even more horrible faces, always looking at the camera, addressing the spectator.

[17] Among other films to employ this technique is Gaston Velle's *Les effets de la foudre* (Pathé, 1906).

The film possesses all the characteristics of a facial **(**incidentally, Zecca was prolific in this genre). It is, then, a primitive film. It exhibits a succession of independent shots, amusing in themselves, in which the mirror is clearly represented by a cardboard cut-out,[18] exactly like a matte, circular or keyhole-shaped, also usually made out of cardboard. Moreover, Dranem looks at the camera several times, and addresses the audience, not only to show them his comical faces, but also to ask them, through his gestures, whether *they* would like to drink the horrible medicine. However, this succession of shots can be seen as both paratactic and hypotactic. Despite the power of the facial to offer a spectacle, despite the cardboard, a link is established here which is also of a hypotactic nature: it is *because* Dranem, in the second shot, sees his horrible tongue, that he *then* decides to drink the awful liquid, in the third shot. Thus, this succession of shots also builds in the view of a representation – or simulation – of a gaze, in order to signify the state of health of a character and the reasons for his behaviour. Not only is the face in the mirror exhibited as a facial, it is also inserted within a syntagmatic succession of shots with which it establishes a hypotactic relation.

Even *Le déjeuner du savant* (encountered in chapter 3) is structured in this way. It justifies, and even demands, a double reading, paratactic and hypotactic. The pseudoscientific views of worms and bacteria, surrounded by the matte, have an independent life exactly because they are so spectacular, enlarged, and in movement. Yet it is as a consequence of those views that the scientist skips his meal; and it is only through his unwilling fasting that the true sense of this amusing parody is revealed.

4.2.2. Polymorphic Combinations

The coexistence of parataxis and hypotaxis within the same film may also be distributed in different forms of representation of the gaze. This happens when different modalities of representation of the characters' gaze are included in the same film; that is, not only the typical structure of the optical instrument or keyhole films, characterised by repeated alternation and the exhibition of the matte, but also other forms, where each modality has a different function.

Let us again consider the case of *Toto aéronaute*. It tells the story of a boy who builds a makeshift hot-air balloon and sets out for an adventure in the skies over Paris, observing the city from on high through binoculars. Yet, it equally tells the story of what happens on the ground when the boy

[18] Note that in *La purge* the shape of the mirror, cut from cardboard, and the (real) tongue that is "reflected" in it, correspond to a specific early cinema mode of representability of an event in which the artificial and the real can coexist. On this interesting topic, see footnote 16 in this chapter.

starts tumbling down. In fact, the alternation between the shots showing Toto and the sights seen from above is followed by a less systematic one – which is, however, as sustained as the previous kind – between shots which show Toto falling from the sky[19] and shots displaying the many inquisitive passers-by watching his misadventure from below. Here the combination occurs between the optical instrument genre and the chase film, since the second part of the picture exhibits all the typical features of this latter, very popular genre. The mother initially follows Toto, on her own, by car; she is gradually joined by inquisitive passers-by and by people who are more directly involved (the couple hit by objects flung from the balloon, the children who see other objects dropped down their chimney…), until a positive conclusion is reached, with the "reunion of alternating patterns" between the shots of the pursuers and of the pursued boy. The pursuers finally catch up with Toto and rescue him.

The driving force behind the two types of alternation is, once again, the look. However, while in the first part of the film Toto's gaze, turned towards the view of Paris, is neutralised by the optical machine that enables him to access the views from above, and these views are autonomous and spectacular (although without a matte), in the second part things are more complicated. Here, in fact, not only the matte but also the optical instrument is missing (the characters chasing Toto from below do not use binoculars or any other such instrument). Moreover, the alternation is less systematic than in the first part of the film (a shot of Toto may be followed by two or three shots of the street and his pursuers). And while the panoramas observed from above by Toto are, in effect, shot at a slight angle (a rare fact, and a very significant one in this case, which we will come back to), Toto is never seen from below. Invariably, though, the pursuers are always shot as they look towards the sky, that is to say in Toto's direction: the following shots, consequently, show the object of their look – a collective look, unaided by prosthesis, and undoubtedly diegetic. We are in the presence, then, of a form of representation of the gaze that is different from the one encountered so far, obtained through optical instruments or keyholes – an example of which appears here as well, in the first part of the film, when Toto observes the Parisian rooftops and the countryside from above. It is a form which establishes

[19] Note that in *Toto aéronaute* the boy's landing on a church steeple is very similar to the landing on a steeple of the main character in *Rescued in Mid-Air* (Clarendon, 1906), made in the same year. Note also that both these landings are in turn similar to the one drawn by Winsor McCay (in 1905), and employed by Edwin S. Porter (in 1906) in *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend.*

a hypotactic relation between shots, unifying the action and prompting the frantic chase from below, which produces the boy's rescue.[20]

Another interesting case is *The Airship Destroyer* (made by Walter R. Booth for Urban, 1909), combining a science fiction and a love story. At the beginning, two characters observe, through a pair of binoculars, a huge fleet of airships in which enemies are attacking Great Britain. Towards the end, the same inventor, his assistant and his sweetheart observe with the naked eye an airship about to be hit by a flying torpedo developed by the inventor, who controls it from the ground via a wireless apparatus. The airships observed initially through a binocular matte constitute a view that is a strong attraction, spectacular in itself, although it can be assigned a narrative function.[21] On the other hand, the airship observed at the end, without any optical instrument, appears with no surrounding matte in a narrative shot which enables the story to conclude happily. Thus, here again, not only do parataxis and hypotaxis coexist within the same film, but they are also distributed between different forms of representation of the gaze.

An even more interesting case is *The Comet* (Edison, 1910), which tells of the havoc caused by Halley's comet as it approaches Earth. The film starts with a number of shots representing the protagonist's gaze as he explains the comet's trajectory on a blackboard. A view of the comet appears near the middle of the film, observed through an astronomer's telescope. At the end a series of panoramic views show a landscape destroyed by the comet's devastating passage, again observed through a telescope.

Once more, as in *Toto aéronaute* (and unlike *A Search for Evidence* or *Aux bains de mer*), the shots which represent the characters' look do

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[20] *Rescued in Mid-Air* proceeds in the same way as the second part of *Toto aéronaute*. Here, shots of the aircraft by means of which an inventor saves a girl fallen onto a steeple, and shots of a small group of onlookers (following the rescue from below), are interconnected through the exhibition of the protagonists' look – even if not "properly", since they do not respect its distance and direction – and are reunited at the end, when the rescue has been completed.

[21] In a way, the same could be said of *Richesse d'un jour* (Pathé, 1906), in which a tramp finds a wallet full of money and spends it frivolously, including by betting at the races. First of all, we see horses racing around a course; then the tramp looking through binoculars, matching the direction of the horses' movement across the frame. The second shot thus injects a narrative function into the first – the tramp is anxious to know if his horse will win – which itself displays a horse race as an attraction. On this film see Abel (1994). Another interesting case is *Un matrimonio interplanetario* (Latium Film, 1910), which, like *The Airship Destroyer*, combines science fiction with a love story. In it, the astronomical views observed through a telescope by the terrestrial astronomer constitute a spectacular attraction, while the views of the Martian princess play a narrative function and are significantly shown encircled by a keyhole shaped window.

not all possess the same form. And again, as in *Toto aéronaute*, the formal difference is coupled with a difference of substance. Those in the first group are completely functional as point-of-view shots, in form and in relation to the context: the shots representing the character's gaze coincide with his perceptual viewpoint, and they establish a clearly subordinate relationship to the general structure. The view of the comet observed through the telescope, on the other hand, is a spectacular topos of many astronomical films of the day. Here, though, this theme is developed in both a narrative and a didactic way, and this endows the shot with an ambiguous nature, similar to that of *La purge*, or *Le déjeuner du savant*. Finally, the last group exhibits the typical structure of optical instrument films, complying with the usual paratactic relationship to the whole: it is a series of views of an attractive and documentary-like nature, interesting as an illustration of the destructive effects of the comet's passage, regardless of their possible importance to the story.

This last example is particularly interesting, not only because of the rich mixture of different modes of representation of the gaze and the coexistence of parataxis and hypotaxis, but also because it is a film made no earlier than 1910.[22] It is, therefore, a later film than others already analysed. Yet, though it displays a form of representation of the gaze closer to what we are used to today, much older forms also appear in it – forms which are nearer to the optical instrument or keyhole films discussed in the previous chapter. This is further confirmation that there is no chronological development in the emergence of this filmic form towards the use that will be made of it in later cinema. And it is also further confirmation of the tenacity of the paratactic structure, which dominates optical instrument and keyhole films, and survives well after the introduction, around 1903, of other forms of representation of the gaze which have a decidedly hypotactic function, coexisting with them.[23]

4.3. Linearisation, Centring and the Match Cut

In the examples just discussed, the shift from a paratactic to a hypotactic structure – that is, from autonomy to subordination among shots – occurs around the representation of a gaze distributed over several, more or less continuous shots. However, all of the examples belong in some way to the optical instrument or keyhole film genre, in which the reiteration

[22] The film was probably shot at the time of the appearance of Halley's comet, that is to say around April-May 1910, and was certainly not made before that year.

[23] See, for example, the interesting *Frankenstein* (Edison, 1910), a ten-minute narrative picture in which the characters' gaze plays a pivotal role, but where two entire minutes correspond to a sort of keyhole parenthesis, in pure attraction style, showing the birth of the monster through his creator's eyes.

of alternation and the recourse to a device (an optical instrument or a keyhole), to which the act of viewing is submitted, are widely present. In most cases, it is the use of an optical instrument that "certifies" that the character is seeing whatever appears in the shot encircled by a matte. In all cases, the shot in question always exhibits the characteristics of an all-encompassing view, conceived to satisfy the spectator in the audience.

Moreover, in each of the examples discussed above, a shift from parataxis to hypotaxis is established on a strictly narrative level, which depends solely on *what* the character looks at, and not on *how* the object of this look is represented. The narrative use of the look just discussed, in fact, always satisfies Propp's conditions for a story to exist, and revolves around a representation in which the look itself interacts with an initially balanced situation, its interruption, and the re-establishment of a new equilibrium. This pattern may be spread over several shots, but the link connecting the parts (the shots) depends on what is represented – through the mediation of a machine – and not on how the objects of the look are shown.

Parallel to these examples, others can be found where the representation of the gaze becomes independent of the structure of the genre from which it stems. In this case, the look is freed from the necessity of employing a machine to produce it, and the machine itself is replaced by applying perspective co-ordinates referencing not the spectator sitting in the movie theatre, but the place occupied by the character in the action. In other words, these other occurrences are devoid of the typical redundancy of keyhole and optical instrument films. In fact, they discard exhaustiveness as well as the matte, the repeated alternations, the reiterated gestures, in order to substitute all this with the representation of the spacial and temporal co-ordinates of a diegetic look.

Their emergence does not take place according to any linear and gradual chronological pattern, nor does it occur as an isolated phenomenon. On the contrary, it runs parallel to the changes in the conception of filmic space and time during the years between the beginning of 1900 and the establishment of the so-called "classical paradigm", around the late 1910s, coming as a consequence of the reassessment of the cultural models that early cinema had referred to, as mentioned earlier in 4.1. For this transformation to fully succeed, what must also[24] happen is that the practice of arranging shots converts to a significant editing system, based upon a specific filmic form, later on called "match cut", which assembles shots in such a way as to ideally reunite what it spatio-temporally separates. Notably, concerning the representation of the gaze, what must first happen is that the practice of arranging shots alternating

[24] Another very important element is lighting: see Burch (1990) and *infra* 4.3.2.

the subject and the object of a look discards the usual parameters of all-encompassing views, substituting new ones which must be adapted to the character's uniqueness and limited position in the represented space and time. That is to say, what must gain ground is a specific filmic device using the character's look in order to establish a link between shots at a deeper level, thus contributing to the creation of the temporal and spacial co-ordinates of the action taking place.

When, over time, this link is codified into an editing practice, it will be called – according to its specific form – an eyeline match or a point-of-view shot.[25] When, to various degrees, the conditions of distance and direction (discussed in 3.1.2.) are satisfied, there will no longer be a link between subject and object denoting only the same type of continuity existing between the representation of a prosthesis and its traces, possibly in order to tell stories to which the spectator is denied access. On the contrary, the link will be one that makes use of the characters' look, possibly in order to tell stories[26] in which the spectator's participation is assumed by the setting of a circular, continuous filmic space.

The transformations in the representation of the characters' gaze, therefore, will support what Noël Burch has called the *centring of the spectator*, which is the most crucial feature of the above-mentioned classical paradigm. Indeed, it allows the spectator to be included in the filmic chain as a ubiquitous subject, "by making him or her the reference point 'around which' [is] constituted the oneness and continuity of a spectacle destined to become more and more fragmented".[27] In fact, if early cinema assigns to the spectator a place which is external to the action, even if immediately adjacent to it and already identified with the camera (as we have seen in 1.2.), the classical paradigm needs a centred spectator, caught in the illusion of a logical, circular and closed diegetic world. And if the linearisation process, in order to develop, needs above all an interdependence among the views (which thus become proper shots), centring, as the word suggests, depends strictly on the setting of a circular filmic space, which through the above-mentioned "match cut" practice contributes to neutralise the "primitive externality" of the audience, as well as to inject the perception of verisimilitude of filmic space itself.

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[25] See Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson (1985), who speak of "point-of-view cutting", in addition to eyeline match cutting.

[26] Even if not necessarily so: see footnote 10 in chapter 3. Actually, among the set of filmic forms which emerged during the early years of film history, the point of view structure (as well as mental images and oneiric representations) will retain a high potential of attraction, as is proven – among others – by its use in avant-gard films (or in Alfred Hitchcock's films).

[27] See Burch (1990: 209).

In this respect, the emergence of editing as we know it today also occurs because of the transformations in the representation of the gaze. The editing practices tending to conceal the spectators' perception that a film results from discontinuity, as well as the perception of their own physical externality, are the outcome of the emergence of those devices nowadays called match cuts,[28] including cuts that match the direction of the eyeline. Together with all the filmic forms organising space and time for a ubiquitous spectator – such as action, direction, position, axial match cuts – the structure elaborated over time to match a shot representing a character who is intent on looking, with a shot representing the object of this look, helps to conceal the "non-closure"[29] of early cinema and to undermine its parameters of exhaustiveness and frontality, linking shots in such a way as to ideally reunite what it spatio-temporally separates.

The examples considered in the following sections may not yet be the full equivalent of what we would call eyeline match or point-of-view shot, though they tend towards that. Nonetheless, they bear witness to the shift from the contemplation of exhaustive, all-encompassing views exhibited as ends in themselves – thanks to the intervention of a machine – to the insertion of a series of shots into the continuity of a signifying succession, in which a new use of a character's look is added to a new way of representing the look itself.

In contrast to what we have seen in the previous chapter – that is, the relation between the optical instrument and keyhole films and *their* present time – these features shed light on the possible relations with *our* time. They reveal the emergence, from the second half of the first decade of the 20th century onwards, of modalities which will become the rules and codes that appear to us today as the "natural" rules and codes of the point-of-view shot, but which are, in fact, the result of cultural conventions, developed over the years in order to signify *how* a character sees. And if the point-of-view shot nowadays appears as a more complex film form, with several diversified narrative features, it is nevertheless here that the development of such features becomes possible.

Therefore, after having considered where the point-of-view shot comes from, we can ask now, not so much in what direction it is moving (for we know it already), but rather how it is moving in that direction.

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28 According to Burch (1990), the full mastery of these matches and process culminates in the emergence of the shot/reverse-shot practice. See also Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson (1985: 55 ff.) and Elsaesser, Barker (eds., 1990).

29 The expression is Burch's (1990).

4.3.1. The Match Cut and the Look

Le concierge bat son tapis, a 1906 Pathé film, tells the following story. Armed with a carpet beater, a concierge beats a carpet so vigorously that he raises a great quantity of dust, which flies out of an open window. In the street, two passers-by, seeing this grey cloud emerging from the window, assume there is a fire in the house and rush off to call the fire brigade. When the firemen arrive, they discover the truth and take revenge on the poor concierge by hitting him with the carpet beater.

In this film, composed of only ten shots, there are still many primitive elements. The characters are popular icons in the cinema of their day: a concierge engaged in domestic work, the firemen, the inquisitive passers-by. The structure is typical of the chase film: in this case the chase starts when the two passers-by looking for the firemen are joined by some policemen, and then by a group of onlookers. The representation of the gaze follows the structure of alternation developed in optical instrument and keyhole films, here organised in three shots: first, the two passers-by come to a corner, look upwards (towards a space off-screen), and raise their arms, pointing in the direction of their look; second, a shot of the window from which a thick grey cloud is emerging (a frontal shot, though showing the object of the look just exhibited); finally, a shot of the two passers-by still looking upwards, indicating the window with their arms, and then running inside to call for help.

Nonetheless, though the film could generally be described as a standard "primitive" of its day, the shot representing the look of the two passers-by is quite unusual, and proves to be extremely interesting. First of all, the two passers-by suspect that there is a fire because they *see* a grey cloud coming out of the window, and they mistake it for smoke.[30] In

[30] Regarding this aspect, Jost (1992) formulates a hypothesis according to which, here, "la logique de l'histoire se base sur la seule représentation cinématographique des choses, selon laquelle il n'y a pas de différence entre l'icône de la poussière et celle de la fumée. La diégèse est donc réduite à l'iconique." (p. 270) (the logic of the story is based on the only cinematographic representation of things, according to which there is no difference between the icon of dust and that of smoke. The diegesis is then reduced to the iconic). However, this does not take into account two essential elements. In the first place, the equivalence of dust and smoke by no means pertains solely to the filmic representation: indeed, this filmic representation originated from a strong, analogous convention of the theatrical stage, which is, in this sense, no less iconic than the cinema. Second, according to the requirements of the plot – again, exactly as in the theatre – in early cinema the character (and with him or her, the spectator) may be led to activate only some of his or her senses (only sight, or sight and hearing, or even smell: see *infra* footnote 31) in order to support the progress of the action. In *Un coup d'œil par étage*, for example, the concierge *smells* the fire before he even sees it. In *Le concierge bat son tapis*, the two passers-by *see* smoke coming out of the window. There are many instances in which characters hear noises, which produce a certain

an optical instrument or keyhole film, the shot of the window would be an autonomous view, self-contained and used for its own visual impact. This shot of the window, instead, *because it is seen* by the two passers-by, is the motivating factor for the next shot. In fact, it is not a shot whose function is exhausted in syntagmatic succession with other shots, as a simple informative detail shot (see 4.3.2.). *Le concierge bat son tapis* is a film that uses the characters' look entirely for narrative purposes, distributing its consequences, so to speak, over the whole course of the action. Everything that happens, the chase included, depends on the relationship established between shots which represent the characters' gaze, between the characters themselves, and with the spectator. And from the perspective of the transformation in the representation of the gaze, four crucial events occur.

In the first place, as we have seen, the relationship established between the shots of the passers-by and the shot of the window is hypotactic, not paratactic; that is, it is a relationship that subordinates and implicates. It is because they see the smoke that the two passers-by rush to seek help, draw the policemen into the action, are joined by a group of inquisitive onlookers, find the firemen, and, having returned to the place in question, discover there is no fire.

Second, this shot of the window functions as an eyeline match, for it points out *to* the spectators the object of the look *of* the two passers-by, the direction of which has already been clearly revealed in the preceding shot. If this did not occur, the spectators would not be able to understand the rest of the film. In fact, they know perfectly well that the grey cloud is not actually smoke but only harmless dust: they know it because they have seen it, earlier in the film. They also know that the two passers-by do not know this (for the two passers-by have not seen the concierge beating the carpet), and it is for this reason that they become engrossed in the misunderstanding, laughing at the film's comical ending.

Third, by means of the distribution of the looks, a process of distribution of knowledge[31] occurs as well, creating a gap between the spectator and

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type of behaviour on their part, aiding the progression of the plot (see, for example, *La poule aux œufs d'or*). On the other hand, of course, there are instances in which the characters do not hear what, in the interest of the plot, they must not hear (see, for example, *The Lonely Villa* by David W. Griffith, 1909). On the modalities of the evocation of sound in silent films see, among others, Raynauld (1999), Altman (2004), Auerbach (2007) and the essays included in Abel, Altman (eds., 2001).

[31] It is important to notice, however, that the distribution of knowledge in the cinema is not always a consequence of the distribution of "seeing"; knowledge, in fact, may depend on information carried by sound, or other means. Similarly, it would be a mistake to believe that in silent cinema every form of knowledge derived through the senses must be reduced to a visual image (cf. footnote 30 in this chapter). In *Un coup d'œil par*

the characters similar to the one occurring in *The Two Old Sports*. This time, however, instead of concentrating the action in a single shot which simultaneously represents the characters and the object of their look – as was generally the custom at the time – there is a linear succession of several shots, matched through an editing articulation designed to represent the characters' gaze.

Lastly, *Le concierge bat son tapis* represents, in more than one respect, a significant emancipation from the structure of the optical instrument film. First of all, the instrument and its matte are lacking; that is, the "logical" bond unifying the views in optical instrument and keyhole films has disappeared, and has been substituted here by the explicit description of a look (to a point off-screen) whose object is represented in the next shot, although framed frontally. The alternation is not repeated, but is condensed into only three shots, which in turn constitute an important change when compared to the single and self-contained shot in *The Two Old Sports*. Instead of addressing the spectator and *repeating* what they have seen, the characters *take action* accordingly. The autonomy of the single view subsides in favour of the view's concatenation into a narrative continuity; in fact, in the shot of the window from which the cloud of smoke emerges, there is no trace of the pleasure of contemplation, enjoyed as an end in itself (as provided by those exciting views observed through a matte): this shot, in the syntagmatic succession, exists only in order to represent the object towards which the passers-by aim their look, misconstruing its meaning.

Additionally, something important happens at the end, on a symbolic plane. Though a character is punished (the English title, *The Danger of Carpet Beating*, makes this explicit), it is the voyeur – indeed, the voyeurs – who inflict it rather than endure it. Regardless of the fact that they are guilty of misinterpretation (and, by extension, already guilty of looking),

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étage, well before seeing that there is a fire, the concierge understands that something is wrong by "smelling" the air on the stairway, and informing the spectator in the audience through this "olfactory" gesture. A narratively relevant piece of information is thus delegated to the exhibition of a sense – that of smell – which Schivelbusch (1977) would define as "pre-railway" (that is, preceding the modifications in sensorial perception which were produced by the advent of the railway journey). It thus confirms the possibility of representing senses other than sight in the cinema of the period (as already happened in the theatre), when this is useful to the plot. In the case of *Le concierge bat son tapis*, on the other hand, it is precisely the use of the look that allows the passage of an item of information – an erroneous one – upon which the development of the entire plot is based (it is useful to the plot that the characters' ability to see is better than their potential ability to hear or smell, something which could also happen at the theatre). On the necessity to distinguish between "seeing" and "knowing" see Dagrada (1982), (1986) and (1998a). On the "five senses" of cinema, see Auteliano, Innocenti, Re (eds., 2005).

the two passers-by walk away unharmed by the adventure, while the innocent concierge must suffer its consequences.

There are analogous match cuts in various other films from the same period, although their narrative implications are not always as complex. A window is also both the object of a look and the turning point of the story in *Two Little Waifs* (1905). The film narrates the story of two children, who are held captive by Gypsies, but eventually manage to escape. While the little boy makes his way home, though, the little girl is recaptured; so the boy, together with his father, goes looking for his little friend, finds her, and rescues her with his father's help. The passage which contains the representation of the look is quite brief – only two shots. The boy discovers the Gypsies' home and looks upwards (to a point off-screen, as in *Le concierge bat son tapis*), indicating the direction of his look to his father. We then see inside the top floor of a house, where the girl at the window signals to the boy; the Gypsy sees her, looks down in his turn (once again, towards somewhere off-screen), realises that he is trapped, strikes the girl and bolts the door. In the commotion he causes a fire, which brings the situation to its crisis. As in *Le concierge bat son tapis*, there is a passage which shows the spectator what a character (in this case, the boy) is looking at, albeit not from the same direction, nor from the same distance. Nevertheless, it is a passage in which the boy's look is indicated visually, and is essential from a narrative perspective. In fact, it produces the girl's look in response, and this in turn brings about the Gypsy's look, and his ensuing actions, thus precipitating the denouement of the entire action. In addition to the absence of both the instrument and the matte, not only is the structure of alternation not repeated, but it is not even completed (unlike the way it occurs in *Le concierge bat son tapis*), for there is no return to the shot of the boy looking. The children's look has the function of linking together the two different spaces, the interior and the exterior of the building.

Another example occurs in *Rescued in Mid-Air*, a 1906 British production. After an explosion, caused by an accident with a motorcyclist, a girl flies up into the air and lands on top of a church steeple.[32] Some passers-by see her and rush to seek the help of an inventor, who uncovers a bizarre spacecraft of his own making and succeeds in carrying out an extraordinary mid-air rescue. The onlookers follow each step of this rescue from below: their look (once again, off-screen), exhibits its own clear direction and trajectory, and it is answered by the woman's gaze.

[32] The image of the girl flying through the air with her parasol open, in the fashion of a parachute, calls to mind a drawing by Albert Robida, *Le vingtième siècle* (1883), which depicts a girl flying with her ample, pleated skirt (reminiscent of an umbrella) puffed out with air. See also footnote 20 in this chapter.

She – apparently amused – even waves at her audience below. As in *Toto aéronaute*, the editing here alternates two spaces (the sky and the street), linked by the characters' look, although it lacks a first part employing an optical instrument (in the travelogue style) and showing panoramic views from above. The only look exhibited in this film, in fact, is a diegetic look, either individual or collective. Appropriately, there is no matte here, because there is no prosthesis. It is a look which unifies the action and creates great anticipation – in the audience of inquisitive people below, as well as in the cinema spectator – because of the spacecraft's acrobatics, as well as the fate of the young woman. And in the ending, once more as in *Toto aéronaute* (and in the two cases just discussed), a reunion of alternating patterns takes place.[33]

Other examples of continuity between shots, underlined through the look, can be found in the delightful *Brown's Half Holiday* and in *Notre Dame de Paris.*

In the first one, a James Williamson film from 1905, Mrs. Brown urges her husband to help with the housework, but he causes chaos and is accidentally blown up by an exploding gas meter which sends him flying out of the window; his wife and the maid rush over, the maid points upwards off-screen, Mrs. Brown looks in that direction and faints. Cut. Brown, still flying through the air, lands in a tennis court (where he had intended to go before his wife forced him to help with the housework); he takes off his jacket, and picks up a racquet!

Notre Dame de Paris is a Pathé film from 1911. Once more, though the represented look is directed off-screen, it enables the linking of several consecutive shots that constitute the different phases of a single event. In particular, an intertitle introduces the action, explaining to the spectator that Frollo is interested in the noise coming from the square in front of the church. Cut. Esmeralda (framed frontally, and not from Frollo's vantage point), is dancing in the square in front of Notre Dame. Right after that, another intertitle announces that Frollo wants to show Esmeralda to Quasimodo. The next shot shows Frollo and Quasimodo, emerging from a nook in the church, and heading outside. Cut. Esmeralda has stopped dancing and is collecting offerings from the people gathered in a circle around her. This shot of Esmeralda, like the previous one, does not match the distance and direction from which Frollo and Quasimodo are observing her; yet it complements the one by which Frollo and Quasimodo were looking at her, for it represents what Frollo and

[33] The two actions are actually unified by the exhibition of the look, aimed at mid-air, and the large group of people, instead of acting, limit themselves to *looking*, from below, at the action taking place in the the sky above. The alternation of the look establishes, in effect, a connection between the two spaces thus unifying the action.

Quasimodo have been looking at, and is part of the unfolding plot. Not only is it not an autonomous view, but it is also a shot inserted into a linear filmic continuity, in which the look becomes the object of a description and a representation, because of an editing practice which is capable of drawing the off-screen space into the one visible to the audience.

Le concierge bat son tapis, *Two Little Waifs*, *Rescued in Mid-Air*, *Brown's Half Holiday* and *Notre Dame de Paris* are all films which can only be considered as primitive, in the sense evoked several times before. However, their interest lies in the fact that – being primitive – they include tensions and forces pulling towards linearisation and centring through recourse to the characters' look. This has the effect of relating a story that articulates space and time, creating or resolving a specifically narrative problem, also through the characters' look.

4.3.2. From the Enlargement to the Insert

In contrast to the cases already discussed, those analysed in this section all exhibit a characteristic feature: that of representing enlargements. These, however, are enlargements very different from those exhibited in the views seen through the boy's lens in *Grandma's Reading Glass*. In the first place, the characters use no optical instruments, but look with the naked eye, and the objects seen are not surrounded by a matte. In addition, the characters look at the objects *from up close*, and the reduction in distance is to the enlargement what the circle is to the lens in optical instrument films. Moreover, these enlarged objects all perform some kind of narrative function; the shots which represent them, then, actually correspond to what we call inserts today. Christian Metz[34] called them "subjective inserts". They are "inserts", in that they are usually interpolated within the continuity of a shot which shows a character looking before and after the insert, as if the detail shot were extracted from the surrounding space. And they are "subjective", in that they are observed by a subject-character, although they are different from a point-of-view shot, which always requires the observance of direction, as well as distance.[35]

Normally, these inserts perform the function of showing the spectator an important detail, or of informing the spectator of a particular aspect of the narrated event. The interesting fact is that, in most cases, the medium which enables these inserts to be placed within the continuity of a full

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[34] See Metz (1966).

[35] Of course, it is possible to find closer shots cut in to full views even in films which do not employ optical instruments or the keyhole, nor imply a character's look. See, for example, *The Gay Shoe Clerk* or *The Sick Kitten*, both from 1903. See also footnotes 23 and 32 in chapter 2.

shot is the representation of a *close* look. It is a "naked" look, in that it lacks the prosthesis. However, it is nevertheless qualified, through the recourse to alternation and the observance of distance, to access enlarged images, which are no longer exhibited for their spectacular quality, but because they are pertinent from a narrative perspective.

An interesting example is *Une excursion incohérente* (by Segundo de Chomón for Pathé, 1909). In this Pathé film – which, as the title suggests, tells the story of a bizarre outing – the main characters are about to picnic on sausages, boiled eggs and cheese, but find them full of sand, mice and worms. Here, the regular alternation between medium shots (of the hungry protagonists) and inserts (of the sand, the worms, and the mice) helps to indicate what the characters are looking at; and although the shooting angle does not enable us to attribute the shot to a particular character's look, the slight angle at which the inserts are filmed points to the traveller's position, which is not only close up but also oblique. Above all, although these inserts perform no particular narrative function, and, indeed actually constitute an attraction of sorts (they are enlargements, in movement, and quite spectacular in themselves), as they are inserted within this regular succession, they explain to the spectator the reasons for the subsequent enforced fasting demonstrated by the protagonists.

Juggins' Motor Skates (a Clarendon production from 1909) tells the story of an eccentric inventor who buys the parts necessary to motorise a pair of skates and thus transform himself into a machine-man. While working on the motor, the inventor stares fixedly at a piece of machinery for a long time, and then, after a cut, an insert shows this machinery, enlarged and framed frontally, before returning to the inventor at work on his motor. The enlargement of the machinery – which does not perform a specifically narrative function and even acquires a sort of spectacular value (it is an enlarged image in movement, and quite unusual for the period) – is informative with regard to the event that is taking place, rather than about the object itself. As it is inserted between two shots of the character observing the motor, it also means (to the spectator): "here is the piece of machinery the man is working on". Moreover, this enlargement works not only as an insert, but also as an eyeline match which, like all forms of representation of the gaze derived from the optical instrument film, operates according to the structure of alternation. However, since it is a departure from the structure of the optical instrument film, it is not obtained through the mediation of a prosthesis, but through the mediation of a look exhibited as *close* to the motor in question, and thus sufficient to justify the insertion of an enlargement within a linear succession of full shots, then to narrativise the object by temporarily putting it at the core of the event shown.

A similar passage can be found in *Don Juan heiratet*, a German 1909 film produced by Duskes. Here, after a series of extraordinary circumstances, a philanderer is arrested and escorted to a police station. The shot in which the police chief arrests the seducer is interrupted by an insert of the man's hands and wrists, as they are put into handcuffs (framed frontally, i.e. from the vantage point of the police chief), and is inserted into the otherwise continuous full shot. Once again, the insert explains what is happening – instead of being included for its own sake – and it does so by making explicit the direction of the character's gaze.

In *Boy Scouts to the Rescue*, also from 1909, a Boy Scout finds a shoe belonging to a little girl who has been kidnapped by gypsies. The succession of shots is as follows. A group of Boy Scouts enters the frame from a path, and one of them picks up something. Cut. Against a dark background, the boy's hand is seen to be holding a shoe. Cut. The Scouts appear again, and others join them. Here the inserts of the shoe, placed between two full shots, is represented on a black background and lit in such a way as to be placed in the middle of a beam of light, as if it were encircled by a dark matte. This "impression of a matte", however, does not suggest the mediation of some kind of optical instrument or viewing machine, but serves to give depth to the image and to better "centre" the object shown, thus highlighting it.[36] It is a focusing process, which involves a look from up close, and which therefore accesses a detail important to the story.

The insert which appears in *Henri IV et le bûcheron* (a Pathé production from 1911), on the other hand, is not "centred" through lighting, but it approaches all the point-of-view features. During a hunting expedition, King Henry IV loses his way in the woods and is generously welcomed by a family of kind-hearted peasants. In return for their generosity, the king offers the peasant some money. The succession of shots is: the king takes a coin from his purse. Cut. The coin held by the king's fingers, which are clearly recognisable. Cut. The king hands the coin to the peasant. Note that, in this case, it is particularly evident that the insert functions as additional information for the spectator in the audience; the king, of course, knows perfectly well which coin he is giving to the peasant, and the peasant sees it just as well as the king does.

One last example: in *A Bad Day for Levinsky* (a Precision Film Company production from 1909, probably made by T. J. Gobbett, also known as *The Wrong Coin*) a miser unwittingly inserts the wrong coin into a slot machine and, in order to retrieve it, takes the machine home to open it with a hammer. The miser gets his coin back, but is caught by a guard, who takes the coin from him and shows him that he has broken

[36] On lighting as an important element in the centring process, see Burch (1990).

both the coin and the slot machine. First the spectator sees the guard take the coin from the miser's hands. Cut. The guard's hands, watched by the miser, separate the broken coin into two parts. Cut. The guard and the miser appear again, the latter fainting into the arms of two other guards. Here, once more, the insert of the broken coin represents the miser's look, and accounts for his dismay and subsequent fainting. In this case, however, an additional aspect requires our attention. Before fainting, the miser (together with the guard) looks incredulously at the camera; that is, he communicates his dismay and consternation to the spectator in the audience. Thus, *A Bad Day for Levinsky* reminds us of the fact that, in spite of the linear succession of shots, we are watching a primitive film.[37] Here, in other words, the constitution of a circular and closed filmic space appears to be a process by no means obvious, but it co-exists with a divergent mode of representation too: in the earlier shot, the place of the look is ideally occupied by the miser's body, located in front of the broken coin; in the following shot it is occupied, instead, by the spectator, seated in the theatre.

A Bad Day for Levinsky, then, like each of the films mentioned earlier (including *Boy Scouts to the Rescue*, regardless of the centring effect obtained through lighting) still exhibits many features of the primitive film. Furthermore, in each of these cases it is not particularly important for the spectator to know who sees, and who does not see – unlike the case of *Le concierge bat son tapis*. It does not matter if it is the king or the peasant, a traveller or his companion, the seducer or the police officer, the drunken man or simply the spectator. What does matter is that since someone observes an object from up close, the film utilises the alternation developed in optical instrument or keyhole films. More specifically, it matters that through this alternation, the "big" and the "small" are put together without having to resort to an optical instrument, but exclusively through the observance of the distance (a close distance) that separates the characters from what they are observing. In other words, the succession between shots representing things and people as larger or smaller, closer or more distant, is also codified through the elaboration of the informative detail shot and the emergence of eyeline match.

4.3.3. Alternation and Linkage

The examples just analysed constitute a sort of outline of what we call today the eyeline match. In fact, they consist of a succession of two or more shots, in which the first shot exhibits a look with an explicit trajectory, whereas the second shows the object being observed, though

[37] Which, by the way, exhibits a typical case of repeated action editing; see Gunning (1979) and Gaudreault (1980).

not exactly from the optical vantage point previously exhibited. From around the same date, it is not impossible to find cases closer to actual point-of-view shots. These are cases of representation of the gaze that observe the distance or the direction (or both distance and direction) from which the character is looking.

The consequences can be significant. In early cinema, which favours exhaustiveness and frontality, relegating the spectator to an external position, an eyeline match realised in the way described above does not necessarily entail a departure from the usual parameters. Of course, an eyeline match can "justify" those parameters differently, i.e., through proximity, instead of the mediation of a prosthesis. But it still depicts a look whose object is framed in a way that is functional to exhaustiveness and frontality. It also continues primarily to promote the spectator's understanding, in that the spectator is the true addressee of these views.

Constructing a point-of-view shot, on the other hand, almost always involves challenging the parameter of frontality (and of exhaustiveness, as will be discussed in the next section). Observance of distance and direction, in fact, entails a reconsideration of the way in which early cinema represents the filmed space. What is more, an alternation between subject and object which takes such a reconsideration into account depicts a look whose explicit co-ordinates requires a change in the angle which is equivalent to a kind of reverse angle shot.

In this respect, *Their First Snowball* (Urban, 1907) is a case of great interest. It shows two children playing in the snow and moving readily from the exterior to the interior of their house, as well as from their garden to the neighbouring one, where a woman is caught up in their pranks and tricks. In the end, the two children run after their father, who takes refuge by entering the house through a glass door. The following image is that of the two children as seen from inside the house, through the glass door (therefore, from the angle opposite to the previous one), against which the two mischievous children hurl snowballs. It is a frontal image, but its frontality is also a consequence of the father's position, this side of the glass door. Moreover, it is not an exhaustive image, not least because the snow hurled at the glass progressively blocks the view. Most importantly, it is an image linked through a change of angle analogous to a reverse angle shot, which closes the filmic space placing a character in the camera's position. Of course, in this 1907 British film[38] the representation of space is greatly elaborated, by means of a succession of full shots, medium shots and close shots. However, its real interest is in this final shot, which functions both as a fascinating attraction (the glass door hit

[38] The "precocity" of British pioneers has been widely recognised and variously interpreted. See here chapter 2.

by the snow reminds us of the glass of the camera lens) as well as the equivalent of a suturing point-of-view shot – equally fascinating – since the place of that camera is occupied by a character.

There are other examples. One can be found in a 1906 Pathé film, *Pauvre mère*. It tells the story of a woman who loses her little daughter in a household accident, takes to drink, becomes ill and dies. The little girl's death is developed throughout the first three shots of the film: the first is a full shot of the room in which the mother is sewing, while the girl plays with her doll and moves towards the window on the left. Cut. A military band is seen from above (from the window), advancing along the street below. Cut. In the room again, the mother seizes the little girl, pulls her away from the window, and returns to her sewing; the girl goes back to the window, leans out too far, and topples over the edge. Here the primitive structure is emancipated from redundancy (alternation is not repeated, the instrument and the matte are absent). Above all, the band is shown not for its own sake, but so it can be seen by the girl, as well as for *how* it can be seen: from above, from the window. Therefore, the result is not a frontal and full view that would allow the spectator to see the band in the best possible way; this image from above is also far away, at a distance. Furthermore, as Richard Abel has observed, here the image of the military band does not function "as a spectacle in its own right but rather as an explanation of what draws the girl to the window and leads her to lean out and fall".[39] That is, a hypotactic cause-and-effect relationship is established between the shots,[40] because the spectator is not supposed to be excited by the splendour of the band, but to be worried about the girl's fate. In other words, the view of the band is not attractive and exciting *to the spectator*, but rather to the little girl, who leans out of the window in order to see it better, and consequently dies.[41]

The same happens in *Faust*, another Pathé production (by Henri Andréani), this time from 1910. The film starts showing an old and weary Faust walking towards the window of his small study; he draws open the curtain, and looks downwards. Cut. A number of young people are seen from above, running in the street. Cut. Faust turns away from the window, and, shortly afterwards, Mephisto appears. This image of the young people is not an autonomous view, an attraction for the spectator;

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39 Abel (1988: 75).

40 As in *Le concierge bat son tapis*, the representation of the gaze sets off the succession of events which make up the rest of the film: the illness and death of the mother.

41 Despite the girl's desire to see better, this death has less to do with the primitive tradition of the punishment of the voyeur than with a melodramatic convention that *Pauvre mère* exploits from the outset, thus integrating it into the narrative. On *Pauvre mère* and domestic melodrama, addressing a specifically female spectator, see Abel (1994); also on this topic see Kaplan (1987).

rather, it is what causes Faust to accept Mephisto's offer. It is also shown to the spectator *as seen* by Faust: from above, and from far away. It is an image that enlarges the fictional space to the point of including the street below in a diegetic, fictional world that is here linked through the reverse angle shot.

In some way, an early trace of linkage equally pertains to those rare optical instrument films that not only neutralise the observation of distance through the device of the optical machine, but also simulate the direction of the look through movement or an unusual angle. In *Toto aéronaute*, for example, the panoramas Toto observes from above are shot at a slight angle (although there is no co-ordination between Toto's movements and those of the panoramas). And in *Un drame dans les airs* there is correspondence between the trajectory exhibited by the telescope and the movements of the camera.[42]

However, the peculiar nature of *Their First Snowball*, as well as the interesting features of *Pauvre mère* and *Faust*, lie in their contribution to the setting of a filmic space through the exhibition of a *naked* look; i.e., by providing, within the image, part – or all – of the perspectival co-ordinates of the look represented. This happens despite the fact that *Their First Snowball*, *Faust* and *Pauvre mère* are primitive films, in the sense already evoked. In addition, their protagonists look directly into the camera several times, addressing the spectator. This way, they remind us that linearisation and centring proceed with reciprocal discrepancies, with regard to a mode of film practice in which the place of the look is occupied by the spectator in the audience.

4.3.4. The Partial Line of Vision

When the conditions enumerated so far – hypotaxis, observance of distance and direction, emancipation from the optical instrument and keyhole structure – are complied with, the most decisive consequence lies in the necessary restriction of the visual field the spectator has access to. In fact, this visual field is no longer exhaustive, but, on the contrary, it conforms to diegetic necessity. It goes from being "total" – in so as far as this relates to "best possible line of vision" – to partial instead.

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[42] Note, however, that these two titles are also combined with the chase and the catastrophe spectacle, and their endings celebrate the reunion of alternating motifs (in *Toto aéronaute* the mother is reunited with her reckless son, and in *Un drame dans les airs* a fisherman rescues the two adventurers from the dangers of the sea they had been observing). Moreover, in *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*, at the beginning there is a correspondence between the movement of voyeur's looks and the telescope's "movements", but this correspondence is subsequently contradicted. Thus, the case is still to be studied and it probably would show a long-lasting coexistence of different modes of film practice.

As we have seen, in optical instrument or keyhole films there is no restriction of the spectator's visual field. In these films the representation of the characters' look functions to allow the spectator in the audience to see *everything* and *to its best advantage*. A point-of-view shot, on the contrary, replaces exhaustiveness with fragmentation. The enlargement of the visual field, offering the marvels of the visible to the spectator, is exchanged for the circumscribed limits of a diegetic look, integrated within a logical, fictional world.

Two particular examples best illustrate this metamorphosis, not only because they occur in films in which the narrative implications related to the look are striking, but also because they are examples in which the look in question is still through a keyhole-shaped matte. Despite this, they embody a quite drastic transformation of the genre they derive from, whose most typical characteristics are replaced by other features. Both are taken from German films, relatively late. The first, *Eine Fliegenjagd, oder die Rache der Frau Schultze*, by Max and Eugen Skladanowsky, actually poses a dating problem and exists in at least two different versions.[43] The year 1913, however, can be considered the *terminus post quem* for its production (in this year the German board of censors declared the film to be unsuitable for children), but the film may well have been produced before that date – perhaps even a few years earlier.[44]

In *Eine Fliegenjagd* an old lady, in order to take revenge on her neighbour – a noisy and disturbing composer – decides to insert a fly (which had settled on her nose during the night) through the keyhole of a door which communicates with the composer's room. Before pushing the insect into the keyhole, the woman bends down to look through it. Cut. Through a keyhole-shaped matte on a black background, the composer is seen writing his music with an inspired air. Cut. Frau Schulze sniggers, turning towards the camera, then inserts the fly into the keyhole.

The image of the composer beyond the matte is in no way similar to the many views of keyhole films such as *Par le trou de la serrure*, *The Inquisitive Boots*, or *Un coup d'œil par étage*. It does not possess their autonomy with regard to the context, nor does it represent a spectacular attraction. It does not even possess their paratactic collocation, since a hypotactic relation is established here, between the composer's image beyond the keyhole and the image of Frau Schultze spying at him. In fact,

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[43] In the version preserved at the Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde, the name of the protagonist is written "Schultze"; in the one preserved at the BFI National Archive, the name is written "Schulze". In order to simplify the exposition, here I have always written Schultze.

[44] See Dagrada (1990a) and (1995); assertions made by Skladanowsky who dates the film to the year 1905, however, seem to be untrustworthy.

it is the image of a character, seen by a second character who is scheming against him.

But there are other great differences. First of all, the structure of alternation does not persist throughout the film, nor is it repeated several times, but is shown only once, within a film that is structured differently. Secondly, there is a difference in substance. As already recalled, the views exhibited in keyhole films are always offered *to the spectator* as exhaustive, in that they are shot from the best possible line of vision. They do not observe the distance and direction of the voyeur's look, because they aim to guarantee the best possible view of what is shown. They never restrict access to the field of vision; if anything, they expand it, even in the case of an enlargement, thanks to the mediation of a prosthesis.[45] In *Eine Fliegenjagd*, on the contrary, the shot of the composer beyond the keyhole matte does not represent the best possible line of vision to show the spectator the composer at work. Rather, it is an image that is partial and distorted. In the version preserved at the BFI National Archive, the man is not even shot frontally, but turned sideways, exactly in the position he occupies with respect to the axis of Frau Schultze's look. In addition, part of his body is actually hidden by the same matte that in keyhole films would reveal, rather than hide it.[46] Besides, the spectator here is not the primary addressee of the view. In point of fact, the spectator already knows the composer's face and room, from other, more complete, viewpoints. In the BFI's version, in particular, the camera had shown, a few shots before, an exhaustive full shot of the composer's room, making a slight panning movement to the left (beyond the wall which separates the two rooms). And the version preserved at the Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde includes a first shot, divided in two by the cross-section of the wall, giving a full view of the composer and his room.

In short, this shot of the composer at work on the other side of the matte is not the best possible line of vision for the spectator in the audience. On the contrary, it is the best possible line of vision for the story. It is the *only possible* line of vision at this stage of the story: a stage that involves the use of a character's look, and more specifically the use of the character's optical vantage point (with the observance of distance and direction). This line of vision is incomplete, limited and distorted, when compared to the exhaustive one that a keyhole film would reserve for its spectator.

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45 Note that this happens not only in the case of the keyhole-shaped matte, but also in the case of the circular or binocular matte, for the scenes that appear through it are always best organised for the spectator in the audience (see 3.1.2.).

46 This shot reveals also a narrative logic which prevails over the attractional one. It does not relate to the early cinema taste for exhibited fragmented bodies, typical of the fabulous and the *féerie*.

But it is the only image of the composer that Frau Schultze is able to see through her keyhole.

The same occurs in *Don Juan heiratet*, produced by Duskes in 1909. In it, an analogous restriction of the visual field derives from the limits set by the representation of a diegetic look: that of a character who belongs to the scene shown, charging the image with narrative tension.

The film tells the story of a repentant Casanova, who is abducted by three women he had previously abandoned. The women have the firm intention of preventing him from getting married, so they decide to kidnap him at the church door, and to lock him up in a room. Afterwards, they bend down to peep through the keyhole to see what their prisoner is up to. Cut. Beyond a keyhole-shaped matte the man is seen hanging from the chandelier. Cut. Alarmed, the women rush into the room, and the man (who was only pretending to have committed suicide) seizes the opportunity to flee, after having locked up the three women.

All that has been said about *Eine Fliegenjagd* applies to this film as well. The image of the philanderer beyond the matte is not offered to the spectator as an exceptional attraction, autonomous and self-contained. The structure of alternation is not repeated, but completed only once. The gestures are relatively limited. And a hypotactic, cause-and-effect relation is established between the shots. Moreover, exactly as happens in *Eine Fliegenjagd*, the shot of the hanged man through the matte, which represents the three women's look, does not offer the best possible line of vision for the audience's perception of the scene. The spectator has, in fact, already observed it a couple of shots earlier, from a much better viewpoint, in a full shot. Spectators also know that the scene is false, for they have been shown quite clearly that the man has only staged his suicide in order to mislead his captors.[47] It is, instead, the best possible line of vision for the organisation of this stage of the story. More precisely, it is the *only* possible line of vision: the partial one – partially concealed by the matte – belonging to the three women who thus fall into their seducer's trap, in such a way as to aid the progress of the action.

We may note, in passing, that this "best possible" line of vision for the story's progress (that of the three women) operates on several fronts, generating a significant discrepancy in the distribution of knowledge (exactly as in *Le concierge bat son tapis*). Spectators know what the three women do not know, and they know that the three women do not know because of this point-of-view shot. It is for this reason that they will take

[47] Note that this point-of-view shot has not lied: rather, it has forseen – and played with – the difference between the spectator's knowledge and that of the characters. Therefore, it has worked as "a potential textual node which regulates the spectator's interpretive activity" (Dagrada, 1986: 116).

either the women's side, hoping that they will not open the door, or that of the seducer, urging them to do so.

In many respects, both *Eine Fliegenjagd* and *Don Juan heiratet* are still primitive films. Excepting these point-of-view shots, the framing is mainly full and frontal, the sets are artificial, the lighting is flat and uniform, the characters constantly look at the camera, wink at the spectator in the audience and display repetitive gestural expressions. Frau Schultze even exhibits some amusing facial expressions. But the awareness of eyeline directions appears here perfectely mastered.

4.3.5. Reading and Writing

Towards the end of the first decade of the 20th century, a new mode of representation of the diegetic look proved to be extremely useful to storytelling: the representation of the act of reading and writing.

Written communication (mainly epistolary), in the same way as the reading of a newspaper, is an authentic topos of narrative cinema, even on the silent screen. Indeed, it was in silent cinema – especially before the First World War – that it assumed the specific characteristics that were to gradually become codified with the advent of sound. Actually, it is a device that had already been used in the theatre, in "low budget" productions which could not afford to employ a sufficient number of actors, and would substitute one or two characters by having a letter read aloud, which condensed the action, the role, and the deeds necessary to the continuation of the performance.[48] Afterwards, in silent films, the device is mostly used to concentrate the necessary information for the development of the story in a single shot.[49]

Our interest in the reading or writing device, however, lies in the fact that it almost always involves an implication of the characters' look. A letter, as well as a newspaper page, must be read by its addressee in order to complete its communicative task. And in a film, the addressee of a letter or of a newspaper page is usually a character – that is, a diegetic addressee – in addition to the spectator. In fact, the narrative information is always addressed to both the character and the spectator; and usually it is the character who must read the information.

This technique implies that the act of reading these pages must occur in a point-of-view shot, or through an eyeline match, which, in the second

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48 See at least Ahrens (1913) and Kessler (1988).

49 See Sargent (1913: 51), who in a chapter devoted to titles wrote: "Letters and telegrams are largely used, the telegram being used where possible because of the brevity due to the cost per word. Common sense must tell the author when to use a letter and when a telegram may be substituted. If a letter is to be used, it is often better to use a paragraph from a letter than the entire letter".

half of the first decade of the 20th century, was already a convention, the normalisation of which was greatly aided by this practice. In particular, the letter-reading device, whose diffusion occurred chiefly between 1908 and 1914, played a part in the normalisation of the alternation pattern between the subject and the object of a look – the object here being the written word, whether a letter, a note, or a telegram. And, in a way, it could be argued that this written word is a fitting continuation of the views which characterised the keyhole film; for this kind of written word, like the keyhole views, allows the spectator to access what is secret – often a secret *story*. Reading this story equates to sharing the privileges of the real diegetic addressee, penetrating the inviolable intimacy which characterises any private missive, thus satisfying the *curiositas* already elicited by the views observed through a keyhole.

Among with other factors, the increase in this practice can be explained by the consolidation of the pattern of alternation, together with the progression of the linearisation process then under way. At that time, moreover, the cinema underwent profound changes in the themes represented. Notably, in France, 1908 is the year of birth of the Film d'Art, which tried to "elevate" the cinema from its lower class origins by elevating the social standing of the protagonists involved in the plots staged. Once predominantely lower and working class figures, the protagonists often became noble or higher-class bourgeois characters, usually educated and generally used not only to reading and writing, but also to communicating by letter. In this context, the film which inaugurated the new French trade name, *L'assassinat du Duc de Guise* (Film d'Art, 1908), is in a way paradigmatic.[50] But similar plots, peopled by similar characters, can be easily found in the rest of Film d'Art French production,[51] as well as in those of the affiliated Film d'Arte Italiana, founded the following year and specialising in productions which drew from "quality" subjects, inspired by theatrical or literary texts, bourgeois melodramas or historical costume dramas.

Written communication is so common a feature of these productions that we can speak of actual "epistolary films",[52] on the model of epistolary novels. These are not only films in which letters are used to clarify very quickly, in a single shot, a complex passage of information between the characters and the spectator. Here written communication may occur to such an extent that it transforms the entire plot into a film where the main characters communicate almost exclusively by letter, writing to each

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50 In this film, the Duc de Guise communicates in writing with his lover, the Marquise of Noirmoutiers, despite the fact that they are standing next to one another.

51 On Film d'Art French productions, see Carou, de Pastre (eds., 2008).

52 See Dagrada (1998a) and (1998b).

other what they could just as well say aloud. In fact, in the epistolary film, the letter *takes the place of the voice* – that is to say, of direct speech, and in some way it anticipates dialogue captions.

The constant recourse to this kind of device can prove versatile and economical, since it allows the elimination of an intertitle, and enables the characters to be involved, thus giving an enhanced impression of smoothness as the story progresses. Yet, it can also prove cumbersome, thereby slowing down the narrative flow instead of speeding it up. Clear examples of the latter occur in films directed by Camille de Morlhon, at first for Pathé (Série d'Art Pathé Frères), and, after 1912, for his own studio, Films Valetta. These include *Une aventure secrète de Marie Antionette* (1910); *La mémoire du cœur* (1911); *Une intrigue à la cour d'Henri VIII d'Angleterre* (1911); *La broyeuse de cœurs* (1913); *La fleuriste de Toneso* (1913)… Most of these films, however, are successful melodramas,[53] particularly interesting in that they often do away with intertitles by using written messages. They also deserve mention for the care with which they show, in a shot showing a letter, the hands of the character who, with elegant penmanship, is writing or signing it.[54]

There are, of course, films in which only one letter occurs, on a single occasion, in order to motivate the action or give the plot a boost, livening up the action. It happens, for example, in the Italian comedy *La corsa all'eredità*, made in 1909, whose subject is modelled after that of *Un testamento originale* (Ambrosio, by Giovanni Vitrotti, 1907). Here, the reading of a will is cleverly shown in two parts, separated from each other by a large portion of the plot, so that the assignment of an inheritance is transformed into a posthumous joke played on two profiteering nephews. But – as mentioned above – the same liveliness and functionality in the development of the plot are found in many other films in which epistolary communication is widely present, and clearly takes the place of dialogue intertitles by having characters write what they could simply say to each other. This occurs in Italian melodramas such as *Resto Umano* (FAI, 1913), *Una congiura contro Murat* (FAI, 1912), *I carbonari* (FAI, 1912). It also occurs in French thrillers, for instance, *Nick Winter et l'affaire du "Célébric Hotel"* (Pathé, 1911), in which not only does the detective Nick Winter communicate by letter with the hotel director who has hired him to catch a thief, but the thief himself communicates with his own accomplice through unlikely notes, even when he might simply address

53 Masson (1996) defines them as "society melodramas".

54 This detail is evident when it is possible to have access to original versions of such epistolary films, in which the captions and the letters have not been translated or, otherwise, substituted for some reason, and are thus unmodified in their graphical, as well as their lexical form.

him verbally. This even puts the man into the position of having to eat one of the notes, so as not to leave any evidence!

Incidentally, the practice of having the sender of a letter deliver it in person to the addressee, and wait in the addressee's presence for the latter's reactions, is more common than one might think (see, for example, *The Plumber and the Lunatics*, Tyler, 1908). It reminds us that the written message, be it of an epistolary nature or not, is never merely a means of communication between characters, but is always a transfer of information addressed to the spectator as well.

A striking demonstration is given in those instances in which newspapers or letters are displayed in an isolated fashion. In these cases, the structure of alternation is necessarily omitted, and frontal representation predominates. One example is in *Pauli*, an Italian film produced by Ambrosio in 1910. The first shot of the film shows a page of the *Gazzetta di Bologna*, the image centred firstly through the lighting. It is also surrounded by a matte with a blurred outline: this way, it does not simulate an optical instrument but, instead, it simulates – and thus stimulates – the "focalisation" of the spectator's gaze on the centre of the image. Moreover, the initial view of the newspaper contains information necessary to preface the main character's story. A couple of shots later, when this prologue is complete, another page of the *Gazzetta* explains the event a month later, and introduces the central part of the whole story in the form of a flashback.

In the same way, in *The Boy and the Convict* (Williamson, 1909) the letter that an escaped convict writes to the boy who had helped him to flee many years before is shown right after the man has written it, not from his viewpoint, though (at the end of the previous shot the man is already doing something else), but frontally, for the spectator's benefit. After the shot of the letter, the film does not return to the image of the man writing, but carries on with the story instead.

However, these are exceptions to the rule. In general, letters, written messages, composed by hand or printed, are shown in alternation with the image of the character who (together with the spectator) is reading them. It happens in *Bertie Buys a Bulldog* (also made in 1909), in which, as in *Pauli*, the shot which displays Bertie's look as he reads the paper is surrounded by a circular matte on a black background. And yet, although this matte is the equivalent of the one surrounding the newspaper page at the beginning of *Grandma's Reading Glass*, here it does not perform the same function. In *Grandma's Reading Glass*, that black circle simulated the trace of the optical instrument that allowed the boy (and the spectator) to enjoy an exceptionally enlarged view; here, on the other hand, it has become a sort of catachresis of the same instrument (which the character

no longer holds in his hand). It is an iconographic figure which acts as an alternative to the soft lighting, in order to stimulate the spectator's look and direct attention to the centre of the image. Moreover, while in *Grandma's Reading Glass* the news reported in the paper is irrelevant, because the interest lies in the enlargement and in the movement of the image, here the image remains still in order to let the spectator (and Bertie) read the item in question: an advertisement announcing a bulldog for sale. This advertisement encourages Bertie to buy the dog, and thus sets off the action to follow.[55]

In a similar way, the alternation between a shot representing a news item in the paper and a shot of the character reading it can be found in several other films. In *La momie* (Pathé, 1908) a man reads that a mummy is up for sale. In *Don Juan heiratet* a woman – one of the seducer's victims – reads the announcement of his wedding in the paper. In *How Percy Won the Beauty Competition* (Gaumont Film Company, 1909) a man called Percy reads of a beauty contest and decides to take part in it.[56] Sometimes these are real point-of-view shots, which not only comply with the alternation between subject and object, including a number of parts of the body of the character who is reading (and occasionally writing), but also exhibit the perspectival coordinates necessary to certify the distance and direction of the look. This happens in *The Plumber and the Lunatics*, in which the plumber reads a message which summons him to a job in the local mental hospital. In *Boy Scouts to the Rescue*, where the Scouts read an invitation to a lavish afternoon tea party. In *The Invaders* (Clarendon, 1909), in which an enemy soldier intercepts a spy's message. In *Mutterliebe* (Duskes, 1909), where a man reads a letter in which his adopted son asks to be allowed to go back to his real, poor parents. In *Mendiant d'amour* (a Pathé production by Camille de Morlhon, 1911), in which a poor employee, mocked by his colleagues, reads a false love letter. In *Le clown et le pacha neurasthénique* (SCAGL, 1910), where the beautiful Mistinguett reads the note she writes for her

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[55] Of course, it was possible to distinctly read the contents of the news item reported in the paper in *Grandma's Reading Glass* as well – but only in order to excite the spectator with the enlarged size of the typographical characters. Once the shot was over, so was the interest in the news item, and the film went on to other subjects (the watch, the canary, etc.). The news item read by Bertie advertises the sale of the bulldog which he will buy, and which is to be at the centre of the whole film. Thus, unlike *Grandma's Reading Glass*, here a hypotactic relation is established between the shots.

[56] Here we can already observe the spuriousness which was to characterise the use of newspaper front pages in the subsequent Hollywood newspaper movies. Note, for example, the difference between *Bertie Buys a Bulldog* and *How Percy Won the Beauty Competition*, in which a plausible advertisement triggers the plot, and the case of *Don Juan heiratet*, in which the reading of an article, which is actually quite implausible, is inserted into the film for the sole purpose of aiding the action.

impresario (thus taking the place of her diegetic addressee). In *Il piccolo garibaldino* (Cines, 1909), in which a boy writes to his mother to explain why he has run away from home.

A final example of interest from a longer list is *£100 Reward*, a Williamson production from 1908. In this film, a notice on a wall is read as follows. A man enters the frame from the left and goes up to a notice to read it. Cut. The man occupies the left part of the frame, filmed from behind and partially off-screen; the notice, in full view in front of him, is on the right. Cut. The man continues to read the notice, then walks away, off-screen, followed by his dog. By today's terminology, the second of the shots just described would be defined as "semi-subjective":[57] part of the looking character is clearly visible, together with the object of his look, and he exhibits the act of looking. Actually, the spectator is looking over the character's shoulder. But this shot is interesting to us because it condenses the autarchic tendency which characterises early cinema with the tendency towards linearisation analysed in this chapter. And this group of three shots represents, in a way, a summation of the conception of the early cinema single view, concentrating the action to be represented within a self-contained shot (as is also the case of *The Two Old Sports*), and the dilution of the action within the structure of a linear alternation between the subject and the object of a look. All this is performed with the aim of conveying information to the spectator, while codifying a filmic form and a narrative function.

It is also for this reason that this use of the diegetic look for informative purposes should not be underestimated. Quantitatively relevant, this practice has certainly aided the stabilisation of a representation of the gaze that here appears to have become a convention. The alternation between the image of a character writing (or reading), and the image of what has been written (or read) by that character, is included within a linear whole in an extremely fluid way. None of the spectators in the audience doubts that the character, whose hands can often be seen holding the paper, is reading with them.

4.3.6. The Diegetic Spectator

There is one last group of films to be considered, before closing this section. It consists of these films that record some sort of live performance, so that they could apparently represent the "natural evolution" of the filmed entertainment (be it theatrical, variety, prestidigitation or a dancing number). These films, however, are anything but natural, and they seem

[57] The term can be found in Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985: 57) and it corresponds to a "semi-point-of-view shot". The definition is Metz's (1972), though often erroneously attributed to Mitry (1965).

to derive their basic structure from the optical instrument or keyhole film. Even if they represent staging a spectacle, they also stage something more, namely the act of observing the spectacle in question. In other words, these are films that represent not only the staging ritual, but also the one performed by the audience that looks: an audience represented as being part of the diegesis.

The debt these films owe to the optical instrument or keyhole film lies in their recourse to alternation (which sometimes becomes an actual shot/reverse-shot), and in the predominance of parataxis (which, however, does not exclude hypotaxis). Furthermore, the shows recorded apparently derive their repertoire from popular entertainmenet forms coeval to early cinema, as in optical instrument and keyhole film views. And, although the matte is lacking here, an analogous role of mediation is played by the frame of the stage, which is seen surrounding the action in exactly the same way as the matte that surrounded the spectacle-views.

A striking example is the evocative *Le théâtre du petit Bob*, a Pathé film from 1906 (which also exists in a second version from 1909),[58] by Segundo de Chomón. In it, a shopkeeper sells little Bob's father a toy theatre, explaining to the boy how the puppets work. Little Bob organises a show in his sitting room, the performance takes place, and the spectacle is alternated with the one offered by the audience of Bob's young friends, all watching the show.

This film is interesting for many reasons. First of all, its significance lies in the recourse to the mode of alternation between the performance and its audience (even if it is not repeated), obtained through a sort of axial match cut. The puppet performance – shown frontally, encircled by the frame of the stage – is preceded (and followed) by the back view of the young audience; thus, by the backs of the little spectators' characters (not so very different from what happens in some coeval keyhole films).[59] Secondly, there is the paratactic link established between the shots representing the miniature stage, and those representing its large and attentive diegetic audience. The shots of the puppets are related to the shots of the young spectators in exactly the same way as the views exhibited in *Grandma's Reading Glass* are related to the shots of the boy who observes them through his grandmother's magnifier. They are attractions – pure spectacle

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58 The version I refer to is the first one, from 1906. With respect to this film, see Montanaro (1988).

59 See also *La lanterne magique* (1903) by Georges Méliès, where Pulcinella and Pierrot build a gigantic magic lantern, make projections on a wall, then from the magic lantern itself are seen emerging a group of ballerinas, Harlequin, Colombine, a second group of ballerinas in tutus… all of which are characters belonging to the popular theatre and the pre-cinematographic variety show, which are still coeval to the cinema.

– independent of what happens in the sitting room of little Bob's house. Moreover, their "contents" seem to be borrowed from the spectacular repertoire of early cinema, which had in turn been borrowed from a similar repertoire of preceding forms of entertainment. Among the feats exhibited, one is accomplished by a barber who applies a lotion to a bald customer (as happens in *L'eau merveilleuse*, *Fregoli barbiere*, *Lotion miraculeuse…*); another looks like a "view" of a balloon flying over the rooftops of a great city (as in *Toto aéronaute*, *Panorama pris d'un ballon captif*, *Un drame dans les airs…*); then there is the view of a space ship (similar to the one in *Rescued in Mid-Air*); a motorist who "squashes" a passer-by (as happens to the unfortunate reader in *An Interesting Story*, from 1905). Furthermore, while the relation between the shots of the show and the shots of its audience remains paratactic, as the performance goes on a link that is *also* hypotactic is progressively established between the various scenes. And this link follows the stages of a possible tale. In fact, after the accident, the same motorist smashes into the premises of the barber who rubbed lotion on the bald customer, ventures up to the highest peaks of the mountains and falls onto the roof of a house, crashing into the sitting room (where a puppet pianist accompanies a singer, as in *Sister Mary Jane's Top Note*), and is finally led to the police station to answer for all the damage caused (as happens in *Les invisibles*, Pathé, 1906). Within a larger paratactic frame, then, a central body of paratactic and hypotactic views is inserted (as in an isomorphic combinations), and watched by Bob's little friends without a prosthesis.

Something similar can still be found in the later *Le bazar mystérieux* (also known as *Le bazar magique*), a quite peculiar Pathé Comica production from 1913, which recasts in an original way the relation between parataxis and hypotaxis necessarily implied by the films that stage a diegetic audience. The plot is about a little girl, whose much-loved doll is broken by a group of young thugs. The girl falls asleep on a bench and dreams[60] of entering a shop with an inviting name: *Bazar Electrique*. In the shop, waiting for her, there is a magic chair which goes up to her, a large audience surrounding a circus ring, and a projectionist operating a crank (one can distinctly see the film rolling). Then, entering through a curtain, animals, clowns, magicians, trapeze artists and acrobats take the scene. At the end of an extraordinary performance, the little girl leaves the shop and goes back to her bench, and when she wakes up her most intimate dream comes true: an old gentleman, who had defended her from the bad boys, presents her with a wonderful new doll.

Here the mode of alternation between the show and its diegetic audience is repeated throughout the performance, in a succession of

[60] See chapter 5 for the main forms of oneiric representation in early cinema.

actual shot/reverse-shot. The performance delineates a real synthesis of all the entertainment forms that not only merged into the views exhibited in optical instrument and keyhole films, but also – by bringing together the circus, the theatre and the cinema itself[61] – offers a review of the entire spectacular repertoire of the age, which the magic of the cinema has transformed into a mechanical show. It does this through a succession of shots establishing a paratactic relation, among them and in relation to the general frame, which otherwise is perfectly narrative. The plot, in fact, goes from an initial balanced situation to an unbalanced one, then on to a new equilibrium, thanks to the doll presented to the little girl by the old gentleman. Moreover, the film displays an audience watching the performance, which is anonymous, collective, crouched in the darkness as if witnessing the projection of a dream; most importantly, it is an audience that no longer requires a prosthesis – as in *Le théâtre du petit Bob* – because it has become, in the meantime, plural and collective.

A plural audience can also be found in fully narrative pictures, across several genres, creating interaction between the spectators watching and the show performed.

A well-known example is David W. Griffith's *The Drunkard's Reformation; or, Saved by a Play* (1909), a melodrama in which a repeated shot/reverse-shot alternates between a theatrical performance, depicting the damages of alcoholism (a hugely popular subject at the time), and an audience including the drunkard of the title who recognises his own story in the one being staged. Also this film starts with an important prologue, presenting the characters and their psychological dynamics, displaying a perfect mastery of cross cutting and directional match cutting. But from our perspective, its interest lies in the mode of alternation between the theatrical performance and its diegetic audience.

A first consideration concerns the double link, both paratactic and hypotactic, which is established between the stage and the stall. Despite the self-sufficiency of the theatrical performance, it is impossible to perceive it as separate from the rest of the film. A cause and effect link is established, too, and this transforms the performance into a part integrated with the whole, inserted within a continuous and logical scheme. It is because the drunkard recognises his own dramatic story in the one staged before him that he repents and in the end decides to give up drinking.

A second consideration concerns the fact that, despite the theatrical setting, here the spectacle lies not only in the represented scene, but also in the representation of its diegetic audience – and quite literally so, for the main protagonists of the plot are the drunkard and his child, not

[61] Note that many cinemas started off with hand-cranked projectors, and only later became all-electric cinemas.

performing on stage, but performing in front of it, displaying identification, emotional involvement and motivated reactions. Their eyes are especially expressive, their significance emphasised through the eyeline match and shot/reverse-shot. It is also thanks to the exhibition of the drunkard's look (as well as that of his daughter, sitting beside him) that this forceful melodrama achieves its aims.

Similar considerations apply to a quite different picture, the comedy *Rosalie et Léontine vont au théâtre* (Pathé Comica, 1911), also alternating between a theatrical performance and its audience. Here a relationship is established between the two main characters, Rosalie and Léontine, and a theatrical piece performed on stage by actors in costume (as was the vogue on the cinema screen at the time). Furthermore, this film too has a prologue, preceded by an introductory shot in which Rosalie and Léontine's faces are presented in close-up, in the middle of a double matte.[62] Then, we are party to the ritual of leaving the house and to their arrival at the entrance to *Les Capucines* theatre. Finally, when the girls enter the theatre and take their seats, the performance begins and from this moment a repeated shot/reverse-shot also begins, between the girls as they watch the performance, and the scenes staged. These scenes at first make the girls laugh convulsively, then cry inconsolably, to such a degree that they become a nuisance and are escorted away by a gendarme.

As in *The Drunkard's Reformation*, in *Rosalie et Léontine vont au théâtre* too a hypotactic link is established between the frame and its contents. Though theatrical scenes represent views potentially independent from the space of the theatre in which Rosalie and Léontine are sitting, the girls' reactions (unrestrained laughing and crying), while having the main and "attractive" task of amusing the audience for whom this film is intended, also establish a hypotactic relation with the shots that represent the girls' look. These reactions are quite different from the ones usually displayed by the voyeurs in optical instrument or keyhole films, who *repeat* the scene previously seen, duplicating it. Here the girls do not mimic what they see. They *react* to what they see. They do not even repeat the presumed reactions of the spectator in the audience (who, in this case, is supposed to laugh throughout, amused by the two intemperate girls). On the contrary, they exhibit their own reactions, which, this time, are shared by the audience sitting with them in the theatre. In addition, despite the theatrical setting, here, too, the spectacle lies not so much in

[62] Presenting the characters through the exhibition of their faces surrounded by a matte (which "justifies" the enlargement whilst "centring" the spectator's look) was a very common practice in early cinema; see also *Little Moritz aime Rosalie* (Pathé Comica, 1911), which opens with a close-up of of Little Moritz and Rosalie framed in a heart-shaped matte (reminiscent of a binocular matte) on a black background. On this topic see Gunning, 1979.

the represented scene on the stage, as in the representation of its diegetic audience. And again, this is literally so, for the "stars" of the film are embodied in the characters of Rosalie and Léontine, who are not on stage, but perform in front of it, in the gallery, in the midst of the diegetic audience.

In a way, all the films discussed in this section are still quite primitive, despite the common presence of the theatrical frame within which a performance is presented. They all combine hypotaxis and parataxis. *Le théâtre du petit Bob* ends with an emblematic shot showing Bob looking at the camera, bowing and thanking both his diegetic audience as the spectators in the "real" theatre. *Le bazar mystérieux* exhibits a narrative frame, but stages a primitive spectacular form as an attraction (even more than *Le théâtre du petit Bob*). In *The Drunkard's Reformation* frontality dominates. *Rosalie et Léontine vont au théâtre* is also dominated by frontality, as well as by a flat and uniform lighting, and is introduced by a presentation of Rosalie and Léontine's faces encircled by a double matte, looking at the camera and winking at the spectator in the audience (i.e., the real audience, sitting in the movie theatre).

For these reasons, too, it is interesting to consider such films in relation to the optical instrument or keyhole genre. In fact, the representation of a diegetic audience is their real common denominator. If the optical instrument or keyhole film represented – and turned into spectacle – the perceptive experience of the spectator of the day, these films spectacularise the experience of a spectator who has become a diegetic spectator.

4.4. With the Naked Eye

Among the examples representing a narrative look discussed in the previous pages, only a few exhibit the mediation of a keyhole, and virtually none displays the mediation of an optical instrument, which occurs only in those films where there are combinations of parataxis and hypotaxis, of an isomorphic or polymorphic nature.

Actually, even if it is possible to find late films in which the keyhole matte witnesses the coexistence of parataxis and hypotaxis, combining attraction and storytelling, the keyhole shape appears from the very beginning as symbolically connate with the pleasure of storytelling. It is also narrativised relatively soon, as in, example, *Don Juan heiratet*, where the recourse to a keyhole matte helps make the most of the plot's potential.

The case of the circular matte, on the other hand, seems more complex. So far, all examples of optical instruments used for purely narrative purposes seem to be relatively late. A partial exception is *La révolution*

en Russie (a Pathé production by Lucien Nonguet, 1905),[63] where a view of a burning house and a view of people attacked by Cossacks, both seen through a telescope by an officer, constitute a case of narrative information, as well as spectacular attraction. Similarly, a re-enactment of events in the Russian-Japanese war [*Guerre Russo-Japonaise/Guerra-russo giapponese*], Pathé [1904-5], also displays views seen through a telescope by an officer.[64] It is only in films involving both parataxis and hypotaxis, such as those discussed in 4.2.1., that a narrative emerges and stands out as such. In general, for a long time every other appearance of this matte remains firmly linked to the exhibition of a strong magical and spectacular quality. This occurs even in narrative pictures such as *The Love Microbe* (Biograph, 1907), which displays a solid plot, but in which the optical instrument views are pure attraction. Moreover, there are late cases of optical instrument films, such as *Transfigurations* and *Les joyeux microbes* (both 1909), still completely structured through the modality of alternation and the exhibition of autonomous circular views obtained by means of a microscope, which are really nothing but amusing animation games, spectacular in themselves. This is also the case of a late Ambrosio production titled *Le bolle di sapone* (1911, by Giovanni Vitrotti), where the naughty Pierino is seen playing with a soap bubble, which gets bigger and bigger until it fills the screen like a circular matte. The boy sees an image appear magically inside it, showing his mother living a life of sacrifice; he then perceives, inside a second bubble, the woman lying sick in bed; finally, inside a third bubble, his mother appears again, dead. Full of remorse, Pierino goes home to his mother and promises to mend his ways.[65]

The present state of research suggests that a purely narrative use of the circular matte did not exist for very long, and this is probably for two reasons.

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63 Note that this film generates no special narrative between the shots, and is actually more similar to a case of isomorphic combinations between paratactic and hypotactic construction.

64 On this film, see Bousquet (1997) and Pesenti Campagnoni (2013).

65 On this film, see *The Moving Picture World* no. 21, May 27, 1911. See also *Caccia allo stambecco* (by Carlo Rossi for Rossi & C. of Turin, 1907), in which, according to the description published in *The Moving Picture World* (December 28, 1907), the story is told of a group of hunters who go off to hunt mountain goats, leaving their old mother at home; the hunters use a pair of binoculars to locate the game, capture their prey after a series of adventures, and offer the animal to their mother upon their return. Bernardini (1996: 70) reproduces a frame of this film, representing the spectacle of a mountain goat surrounded by a circular matte against a black background. A later interesting case is the Comerio production from 1912, *Sulle Alpi Graje*, where a group of men go hunting on Mont Blanc and point to some mountain goats, shown on the screen surrounded by a circular matte; on this title see Pimpinelli (2012).

First, in order to become a possible narrative device, the circular matte must lose its magical qualities. Thus, it must cease to represent the *trace* of the *machine* which allows access to the marvels of the visible in the world. As we have seen, early cinema displays the circular matte as the trace of a machine – an optical synthesis of all the vision machines that preceded the cinema and merged in it. It displays it as the mark of a mechanical device placed between the eye and the world, enabling the spectator to enjoy wonders inaccessible to the naked eye. This constitutes its greatest point of interest, not its limitation. This interest, though, is in contrast to the emergence of a mode of film practice aimed at making every perceptible trace of that machine disappear. This is why, in order to be used for narrative purposes, the circular matte must first free itself of the spectacular legacy left by the many vision machines which merged into the cinema as tricks and optical artifices. It must be released from the priority of showing the spectator views that are enlarged, in movement, and mechanically reproduced. It must, in a word, neutralise its optical and mechanical nature. For this reason, unlike the keyhole, which is immediately consubstantial with fiction and narration, in the first cases of the narrative gaze the circle steps aside, and reappears in a narrativised form only when it has exhausted its potential as a magical and spectacular icon.

Second, in order to cease to be first and foremost the trace of a machine, the circle must somehow become anthropomorphised. That is, it must become the trace of a viewing character, looking with a (circular) naked eye. For this reason, over time, the pattern that had been developed in optical instrument and keyhole films discards first of all its redundant features, by suppressing the matte and the instrument. For this reason, the earliest cases of the narrative use of a character's gaze maintain the modality of alternation – as a linearisation pattern – but tend to remove the circular matte, because it is the trace of a machine.[66] Always for this reason, over time, the representation of the gaze disguises its optical and mechanical origin: it stops simulating the trace of a machine, and becomes, instead, a simulation of the human gaze that penetrats it. It makes itself seem to be anthropomorphic to such a degree that it actually conceals its own mechanical roots, in order to enter smoothly the flow of a mode of film practice that is linear, continuous, and, in its own way, anthropocentric.

[66] They also tend to suppress redundant gestures, which are replaced by a mime in which the characters no longer repeats what they see for the benefit of the spectator (thanks to the intercession of a machine), but act because of what they see for themselves (as in *Le concierge bat son tapis*, *Pauvre mère*, *A Bad Day for Levinsky*, *Henri IV et le bûcheron*, *Two Little Waifs*…).

Therefore, this process of anthropomorphisation takes place by eliminating the matte insofar as it evokes the trace of a machine, so as to restore it later on as one of the many possible signs of the diegetic look that penetrates it. This is the case even when it becomes merely a catachresis, such as when a blurred matte is used as an aid to lighting (as in *Bertie Buys a Bulldog*, *Faust*, *Boy Scouts to the Rescue*…), tracing the trajectory of a diegetic look conceived to overlap that of the spectator. This is also the case when it becomes the sign of a body absent from the image, and yet visible through the co-ordinates of a look (the hands or the fingers of the characters writing in epistolary films, and, later on, the shape of a pair of glasses, the body's shadow, a face reflected in a mirror, the noise of steps, loud heartbeats…).

From this perspective, then, the emergence of the "classic" structure of the point-of-view shot as the linear succession of two or more shots (one showing the character looking, followed by one representing the object of the character's look, and then sometimes by a return to the character looking), in which the role of alternation has more importance than other possible features, can be seen as the achievement of a process aimed at eliminating the perception of the machine. And the debate on the lack of psychological identification in a film such as *Lady in the Lake* (Robert Montgomery, 1946), in which there are plenty of traces, but too few examples of alternation, may be explained also as a symptom of residual irritation at the perception of the machine.[67]

Thus, the emergence of the point-of-view shot as a filmic form representing a character's gaze finally transforms the spectacularisation of the spectator's look into the representation of a diegetic look, playing a peculiar role in the centring process as in the rise of a logical, circular and closed filmic space. And here lies its greatest paradox: at first the trace of a machine, the point-of-view shot must become, over time, one of the best ways of eliminating the perception of that machine. By putting a character *in the place of the machine*, every trace of that machine's existence is erased. What better guarantee could there be of a suitable link for closing filmic space than the one produced by the presence of a character standing in for the machine? What better seal can there be, for the inviolability of filmic space, than the one embodied by a diegetic look which substitutes that of the camera? What better medium can be offered

[67] On this film and on psychological identification as a supposed function of the point-of-view shot, discussion was basically concentrated, in the 1950's and 1960's in France, on the New Psychology trend. See in particular Merleau-Ponty (1945), Laffay (1950), Mitry (1965) and Metz (1972). See also here footnote 4 in chapter 1 and Dagrada (1988b) for an overview of the whole debate. Among subsequent contributions see at least Kawin (1978), Simon (1983), Sobchack (1992), and the essays included in Esquenazi, Gardies (eds., 2006) and Chateau (ed., 2011).

for the mobility of the look, than that produced by one that originates *in* the fiction?[68]

Initially a filmic form which favours the best possible line of vision for the view to be shown to the spectator (a view that is exhaustive, exciting, in tune with the perceptual experience of the spectator of the period), the point-of-view shot develops in a different direction, favouring the best possible line of vision for the story, taking on the widest range of narrative roles, putting a character in the camera's place, and restricting the character's look to its limited perceptual abilities. It does so by using the look of the character as a character, no longer as an extension of the spectator's own faculty of sight, by contributing to the closure of filmic space, by neutralising the perception of the machine, by segmenting the point of view; and, most importantly, by preserving the pleasure of vision.

[68] Burch (1990) wonders whether there is any correspondence between the moment in which itinerant cinema disappeared (until that moment the spectator had supposedly been topographically immobile, as in the theatre, and the images were supposed to "come to him"), and the moment in which the "ubiquitous subject" was born (that is, the multiplication of viewpoints, and the simulation of the idea that it is the spectator who "goes towards the images"). There is certainly a correspondence between the moment in which the first cinemas appeared (the disappearance of itinerant cinema is a relatively long and complex phenomenon), and the one in which films were made with the first instances of diegetic look without the appearance of the matte (traces of linearisation are to be found well before the appearance of the first purpose-built cinema). If it is true that the camera with which the spectator identified in early cinema occupied a more or less fixed place, the identification with the camera which occurred subsequently would confer on the spectator – in addition to the already acquired mobility of the look – the ubiquity which is peculiar to the mobility of the point of view.

Chapter 5

The Inner Gaze

5.1. Forms of Vision

There is another important issue which now demands our attention: the issue of subjectivity. The form of representation of the gaze perfected in optical instrument or keyhole films was initially developed to reproduce a series of autonomous and spectacular views, which in principle served neither a narrative purpose, nor that of constructing a fictional "subjectivity". That is, it did not represent views ascribable to the subjective states of the characters looking through an optical instrument or through a keyhole. The characters themselves are rarely developed enough to possess any kind of subjectivity. Even when they embody a highly stereotyped role (the indiscreet valet, the inquisitive concierge, the prankster student), they never display any psychological depth, and often do not even perform specific functions, or embody roles to which they might lend their own personality. On the contrary, these characters are essentially an extension of the spectator's faculty of sight. The only subjectivity which may appear through the gaze represented in keyhole or optical instrument films is – if anything – that of the spectators themselves. Furthermore, the redundant gestures made by the characters are exhibited as duplications of the reactions (of wonder, amazement, admiration, excitement) stimulated in the true addressee of the views: the spectator in the audience.

It is important to highlight this fact, because film theory has shown a long-standing tendency to conflate, and even confuse, the point-of-view shot with subjectivity. Instead of interpreting the form which emerged to represent the gaze as, *first of all*, a filmic form, that may operate according to different modalities, vary in different contexts or historical periods, and thus disregard or abstract from the expression of subjectivity, cinema theory long thought it necessary to attribute to the point-of-view structure functions and purposes which are primarily and ineluctably "subjective". Moreover, for most cinema theory, the same subjective functions and purposes aim at guaranteeing the spectator's

"psychological identification" with the character, just because the point-of-view shot represents the character's gaze.[1]

However, if early cinema studies can aspire to contribute to insights that go beyond the simple accumulation of data in relation to a specific period of cinema history, it is also because it forces scholars to adopt an approach which is diachronic, as well as synchronic, with respect to the filmic forms developed over time. In particular, the study of early cinema forces scholars to discern the transformations involving these forms, as well as to take into consideration the hypothesis that similar forms may, over time, perform different functions. As we have seen in the previous chapters, this is exactly what happens to the form of representation of the gaze developed in optical instrument or keyhole films, which initially does not perform the functions we usually attribute to the point-of-view shot nowadays. Similarly, it does not embody "subjective" requirements, for which specific forms are developed from the start.

Since its very beginning, in short, cinema elaborates specific forms for the representation of the gaze on the one hand, and for the representation of subjectivity on the other.

If the first cases of the representation of the gaze do not correspond to the representation of the characters' subjectivity, this does not mean that early cinema lacks specific forms to represent a kind of inner look – i.e., visions originating in various forms and for various reasons inside a character's mind. On the contrary, modes of representation of this kind of look have existed since the earliest days. Of course, these modalities are difficult for us to catalogue, especially from the perspective of the classical "film grammar", which distinguishes between mental or oneiric images, flashbacks or memory-images, and even imaginary sequences.[2] In the same way as with the point-of-view shot, these forms of inner

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1 On the importance of not confusing the point-of-view shot with subjectivity (and the necessity to avoid identifying the point-of-view shot with a form devoted to "procuring the psychological identification" of the spectator with the character), see Dagrada (1986).

2 This terminology comes from the Metzian classification inspired by Mitry. In an extensive and insightful reading of the second volume of *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma*, published by Mitry in 1965, the young Metz (now in Metz, 1972) devotes a section to the many scattered notes dedicated by Mitry to the point-of-view shot, proposing a more organic classification of these, which includes: 1) the subjective or analytical image; 2) the semi-subjective or associated image; 3) the memory-image; 4) the mental image (which includes the oneiric image as well); 5) the imaginary sequence. This Metzian classification is – erroneously – still known today as Mitry's classification, when Mitry had in fact proposed a different classification, not regarding subjective images, but rather the different types of filmic image. Regarding this point, see Dagrada (1982) and (1989b).

vision in early cinema precede the elaboration of such categories, thus escaping a literal application of the categories themselves.

The most interesting aspect of the early cinematic representation of the inner gaze lies in its uniformity. Without exception, even with respect to the representation of dreams, it is quite difficult to distinguish between the various modalities showing visionary subjectivity that is in some way ascribable to a character. Dreams, hallucinations, memories, fancies, visions, are often represented through practices that are as similar as they are interchangeable: substitution splice, superimposition, double staging, dissolve, double exposure and dream balloon… Moreover, these practices are systematically entrusted to the magic of devices or optical artifices, plundering the iconographic and spectacular repertoire of the period, which in turn is greatly indebted to the numerous devices developed by the theatre and the various forms of optical shows preceding cinema itself.

The above-mentioned practices are used for the representation of supernatural visions (*Scrooge*; *or, Marley's Ghost*, 1901; *The Old Chorister*, 1904; *Il piccolo garibaldino*, 1909; *L'aiguilleur*, 1910), as well as for the representation of a recollection (*Scrooge*; *or, Marley's Ghost*; *The Old Chorister*; *Napoleon and the English Sailor*, 1908), or a dream (*Le rêve du maître de ballet*, 1903; *Aladin ou la lampe merveilleuse*, 1906; *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend*, 1906; *Conte de la grand-mère et rêve de l'enfant*, 1908; *And Then He Woke Up*, 1909; and again *L'aiguilleur* and *Il piccolo garibaldino*). Often, indeed, the technique is the same as the one used to show apparitions and disappearances in the numerous trick films of the period (*The Haunted Curiosity Shop*, 1901; *The Puzzled Bather and His Animated Clothes*, 1901; *Baignade impossible*, 1904; *Métamorphoses d'un fiancé*, 1906; *Un cocher halluciné*, 1908; *Animated Cotton*, 1909…). The latter employ substitution splice to transform, for example, illegally acquired booty into a frightening skull (*Skulls Take Over* [1901]).[3] In other cases, the technique used is the circular balloon – visually similar to a matte – which, exactly like a matte, encircles the contents of the inner gaze, and may be used to display a dream, as well as a visionary fantasy or a fantastical apparition.

Although the cinema was born at almost the same time as psychoanalysis, in this respect it appears decidedly closer to Homer than to Freud.[4] More precisely, it seems closer to the representation of the pre-Freudian theory of the brain developed by 19th century psychology, rather than the one developed by psychoanalysis. In most cases, the dream is still conceived under the double aspect of a vision and an omen, as a magical

[3] Preserved at the BFI National Archive, this film has not been identified yet and the title by which it is currently known has been supplied by a cataloguer.

[4] With respect to this point, see Ripa (1988), Jost (1992) and Dagrada (1998a).

and premonitory phenomenon, pervaded by superstitious elements. In the same ways as hallucinations, apparitions, obsessions or visual fantasies, the oneiric representation may take on the fantastic quality of a supernatural apparition, or of a divinatory and predictive vision.

Therefore, it seems useless to try to distinguish between the different forms of inner gaze, or to attempt an organic classification of the different oneiric or visionary forms of interior representations as they emerge in early cinema. We may of course trace a typology, and distinguish between dreams or oneiric apparitions (which materialise during the character's sleep), apparitions of a more fantastical kind (which materialise when the character is awake), visions of mental images (which also materialise when the character is awake), and apparitions which correspond to a story or a recollection. And yet, each of these categories – certainly more useful to us, today, than they would have been to an early spectator – may indistinctly take on all of the above-mentioned forms (obtained by substitution splice, superimposition, double exposure, etc.). They may co-exist with other devices (visualisations of dreams which are *also* the representation of a fantastical apparition are not rare). They may display a pure attraction, spectacularising the trick (instead of the character's subjectivity, which is at times weak or completely spurious). And, more importantly, they may assume the same "physical" quality as its objective materialisation.

Like iconographic uniformity, then, an identical substantial homologation characterises the actual nature of these visions. Fused into a material continuity, in which only visible variations count, all of the early images representing an inner gaze flow naturally from the scenography, and are integrated with it, with the same ease and physical quality as that with which they are presented to the character. To the character, they are as "real" as reality itself, and are perfectly inserted into the material continuity of the representation.

In other words, the physical aspect of the apparition always co-exists with the mental aspect, whichever form is taken on by the different visions represented. And the subjectivity that it is supposed to spectacularise is always part of an objective materialisation. For this reason, the common denominator of each technique enumerated above is always the characters' gaze, exhibited even when – in the case of a dream, for instance – characters "see" with closed eyes: upon awakening, as soon as their eyes are open, they look for what they have seen "inside" exactly where it has appeared "outside". Then, if a decisive difference exists between the collection of these techniques and the parallel one that emerged in early cinema to represent the gaze in optical instrument or keyhole films, there

is no such difference between the various forms of representation of an inner gaze, which, on the contrary, seem to be interchangeable.[5]

The paradigm of the representation of the gaze has been discussed in the previous chapters, as has its transformation from an attractive artifice into a linear link which may perform various narrative roles. We will now turn to the forms assumed by the different modalities of representation of the inner gaze, and to their transformation from a spectacular attraction into a linear structure, able to be integrated into the dynamics of a narrative.

5.1.1. The Magic of the Eye Before the Cinema

Just like the matte in optical instrument or keyhole film, the various forms of representation of the inner gaze did not appear out of nowhere. The aspiration to visualise what dwells in the human mind, to represent thought, to exteriorise what is internal, is also typical of the many spectacular forms which preceded and were coeval to the birth of the cinema – from the magic lantern to phantasmagorias, from vision machines to Pepper's Ghost, from theatrical shows to optical toys, from popular illustrations to shadow plays.[6] The urge to represent the inner gaze, in short, was not born with the cinema, and is by no means an exclusive claim of early cinema. Even a brief consideration of the techniques employed to this end in other fields reveals complex relationships of derivation between the different spectacular forms, of which cinema itself is only one of the latest manifestation.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the tendency towards the visualisation of mental images was not uncommon, and it usually appeared combined with the supernatural dimension already mentioned. Oneiric representations were very frequent at the theatre, for example, where the dream was conceived both as an inner vision and as an omen, a premonitory event, exactly as would happen later, in early cinema. Many theatrical melodramas had also recourse to an atmospheric device called a "vision scene", in order to display a second scene on the background. Here, a shutter was opened to disclose prearranged scenes, usually

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5 Note that the same cannot be said about the circle and the keyhole matte, as seen in chapter 3 (notably, in 3.1.4.).

6 The shadow play is often cited by Gustave Flaubert (in his *Carnets de travail*) as the ideal means for the representation of the characters' thoughts. The issue of the visualisation of mental images was a true obsession for this French writer, and it is interesting to observe that the solution he proposed later became a common practice in early cinema, in which the shadow play technique was sometimes employed to visualise the characters' thoughts and dreams.

showing a "pictorial representation of action proceeding within the mind of one of the characters on stage".[7]

Apparitions of skulls, skeletons, spirits, phantoms and demons constituted an authentic topos, and the modes of representation chosen to depict them, in most cases, were the same ones which would be found in early cinema.[8] In passing, it may be mentioned that Christiaan Huygens himself, in the 1659 study already cited, drew a series of skeletons (surrounding them with a circle and drawing inspiration from Hans Holbein's *Dance of Death*) in order to illustrate the first "animated glass panes" still known today, conceived "for representations using convex glass panes with a lantern".[9] Over time, Jesuit priests made a so-called "edifying" use of the same spectral projections and apparitions (of which there are illustrations reproduced in *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* by the Jesuit, Athanasius Kircher).[10]

Spectres, spirits, phantoms, skeletons and demons are also the most recurrent images among the apparitions obtained through phantasmagorias, or "mobile retro-projections", which were developed at the end of the 18th century, by a man known by the pseudonym of Paul Philidor,[11] who ostensibly pretended to combat the audience's credulity. They were subsequently popularised by Robertson,[12] who took up and exploited the visual spectacle of the phantasmagoria, obtaining an enormous success with projections whose atmospheric quality was greatly enhanced by being performed in the abandoned chapel of a Capuchin convent, near the Place Vendôme, in Paris. The procedure is well-known: with the aid of a mobile magic lantern, Robertson projected terrifying spectral images on double or triple muslin curtains, producing the impression of movement by enlarging or decreasing the size of the images, by moving the lantern forward and backward. The lantern itself was hidden behind the curtains so that the audience could not see the source of the images, in the same

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7 Vardac (1949: 17). Vision scenes could also represent supernatural apparitions, as well as parallel actions occurring in a different location.

8 Incidentally, let us note that these same apparitions continued to populate theatrical stages well after the advent of the cinema. According to Deslandes (1963: 48), Georges Méliès staged *Les Phénomènes du Spiritisme* at his Théâtre Robert Houdin from September 1907 to September 1910.

9 See the reproduction of these drawings in Mannoni (1994).

10 In recent years, studies on this topic have flourished. See, among others, Mannoni (1994) and Mannoni, Pesenti Campagnoni, Robinson (1995).

11 See Mannoni (1994), according to whom Philidor also developed a rack lens which makes it possible, by manoeuvring behind the screen, to project images that are enlarged as they draw closer, and grow smaller as they draw away, thus increasing the impact on the audience.

12 Belgian born, Robertson's real name was Etienne-Gaspard Robert.

way as later spectators would not be able to see the cinema projector, located behind them.[13] The image that was thus projected acquired the impact of an authentic supernatural apparition, with such atmospheric powers that a similar technique soon began to be used in the theatre. Here, with the aid of a magic lantern and of great glass plates placed under the proscenium, phantoms and skeletons were evoked on the stage and could appear right in the middle of a scene, in order to terrorise the characters – as well as the spectator.

Around 1820, the candles used for illumination in the theatre were replaced by gas lighting, and then by electricity; soon, the use of special lenses and ever more sophisticated machinery was accompanied by an increase in oneiric and fantastical representations of every kind.[14] Melodrama increasingly featured visual effects in which shadows of characters and spectres appeared and disappeared thanks to elaborate combinations of glass plates, mirrors, lights and shades. From the second half of the century onwards, the possibility of darkening the stage was complemented by magic lantern projections, which were particularly effective in depicting scenes of inner vision. And, as would happen later on with cinema, these scenes depicted dreams, premonitions or hallucinations, which were sometimes represented in the background, through a muslin curtain, or directly behind the actors; at times they were projected above them, like a superscript.

In this way, the evocation of a supernatural event could be staged through its simultaneous representation in the background. Such is the case of *The Frozen Deep* (1857), from a collaboration between Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens (who used to accompany his public readings of *The Haunted Man* with apparitions): here, a traveller, exhausted after having reached the North Pole, has a vision of the girl he has left behind. In *The Bells*, by Leopold Lewis (1871), a murderer, hiding in an inn in an Alsatian village, sleeps and has a dream: a curtain (behind a muslin veil) rises to reveal a courtroom, and there follows a scene in which a hypnotist induces the criminal to confess his crime; the muslin is then lowered, and the man wakes up.[15]

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13 Numerous engravings from this period illustrate Robertson's shows. With regard to the phantasmagoria shows, see Mannoni (1994), and Mannoni, Pesenti Campagnoni, Robinson (1995).

14 See Fell (1974).

15 See Fell (1974); *The Bells* became a film in 1926, with Lionel Barrymore in the role of the murderous innkeeper and Boris Karloff as the hypnotist. Here the dream scene does not appear simultaneously with the image of the sleeping man; it is introduced by a dissolve and developed over several shots. However, the innkeeper's obsession with the bells, as well as with visions of the assassinated man, appears through repeated superimpositions.

The use of gas or electric lighting during theatrical productions entailed not only an improvement in the quality of spectral apparitions, but also the possibility of making a dramatic use of lighting itself, as well as achieving spectacular effects. Among these, one technique – which made its appearance very early on – enabled the passage from one scene to another to be achieved through a sort of dissolve (for example, in *Arrah-na-Pogue*, 1864, in DeWitt version),[16] a technique which, later on, was to enjoy such great success in the cinema. An early trace of it can also be found in numerous optical toys depicting images within which the visualisation of a thought, a dream, or a supernatural apparition materialises as if by magic.

In addition to phantasmagorias, Pepper's Ghost and theatrical shows, optical toys also elaborated their own forms of representating the inner gaze. Here, once again, the figurative repertoire abounds in phantoms and skeletons (for example, a series of drawings for the choreutoscope,[17] showing a "macabre dance" in which a dancing skeleton plays with its own skull; or of a series of magic lantern glass plates, titled *Squelette sortant de son tombeau*, mentioned by Perriault).[18] However – and this is also true of the theatre, of course – phantoms and skulls are not the only apparitions inhabiting the imaginative repertoire of the period, placed halfway between the mind's images and the supernatural. Historical characters, chivalric figures, damsels in the bloom of youth, or heavenly apparitions, also enrich the iconographic repertoire of optical toys and spectacles exhibiting a taste for visionary representation. For example, a beautiful series of lithographs produced around 1830 depicts a number of characters as they dream or think about someone else; when lit in the right way, in each lithograph there appears, as if superimposed, the image of the person who is thought of, dreamt about or magically evoked – for instance, a soldier dreams that he is being decorated by his superior officer.[19] Other greatly atmospheric examples are the glass plates for double magic lanterns, entitled *The Soldier's Dream* (Royal Polytechnic

16 See Vardac (1949).

17 The choreutoscope was invented in 1866 by the English engineer Lionel S. Beale, and perfected in 1884 by Hughes. It consists of a glass pane with a macabre dance depicted on it, in six separate images, inserted into a metal frame with a rack and Maltese cross mechanism, which prevents one from seeing the successive phases of the drawing before the right moment. A round disc, to which a crank is fastened, causes intermittent movement, opening the diaphragm. Through a notch on the disc, the image advances one section while the diaphragm opens simultaneously. The choreutoscope was one of the first magic lantern mechanisms to use the Maltese cross, which constituted the basis of the mechanism later employed in film projectors.

18 See Perriault (1981: 65).

19 The series is reproduced in Mannoni (1995).

Institution, 1860 ca.),[20] which depict a sleeping soldier dreaming of his family welcoming him upon his homecoming from the war; or the plates depicting *Jacob's Dream* (England, 1880 ca.),[21] in which Jacob dreams of a flight of angels.

In each case – and in each different technique, as in each of the different kinds of spectacle – it is clear that these visualisations place the oneiric state, as well as the more strictly visionary or fantastical visions, in a supernatural dimension where magic, psychology and religion merge into the representation of aspirations and obsessions, desires and fears, beliefs and superstitions, which, more often than not, embody the meaning of an omen.

5.1.2. The Circle and the Focus

The visualisation of an inner gaze (dreams, thoughts, obsessions, memories, desires or hallucinations), as represented in optical shows or on the popular stage throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, reappeared in early cinema using similar procedures for its material execution. Quite rightly, John Fell[22] asserts that early films are a sort of visual museum of the scenic gestures, the sets and the conventions that disappeared from the theatre very early on, leaving almost no trace. The technique that shows a character's mental image in the background of a scene, for example, soon became a topos in film melodrama. Apparition and disappearance effects, superimpositions, or even circular projections placed beside the character who is dreaming or "imagining", were recurrent forms used by popular entertainment before the invention of cinema, which re-emerged in early cinema in an identical manner, with similar functions and operating modalities.

Among the various techniques, the most salient one is the previously mentioned dissolve.[23] The migration of this technique from theatre (and from optical toys) to cinema, and its subsequent uses, are well-known today; its application lasts well beyond the early period, reaching its apogee in classical Hollywood. It is worth noting that, when it was first used in cinema, this technique was mostly employed to introduce oneiric images, in order to separate the realm of the dream from the waking life.

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20 Also reproduced in Mannoni (1995).

21 Reproduced in Zotti Minici (ed., 1988b).

22 See Fell (1987: 43).

23 I use the term dissolve as established by Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson (1985: 46), who distinguish between dissolve and fade, the first one being "a variant of the fade – a fade-out overlapped with a fade-in".

It was by altering camera focus that George Albert Smith achieved one of the first "dissolve effects"[24] known today, in *Let Me Dream Again* – which Ferdinand Zecca later remade as *Rêve et réalité*, though obtaining the same effect through a real optical dissolve. The alteration of focus in *Let Me Dream Again* also allows for an early appearance of a structure codified over time as the "match on action cut", consisting of emphasising the continuity of an action from one shot to the next. Here, through the manipulation of focus, the action passes from the oneiric scene to the "reality scene", by means of the continuity of the gesture that the character performs in both scenes, that is to say in the dream and during the awakening. The dreamer and his waking counterpart occupy the same position in each shot, and the actor performs – or, rather, completes – the same gesture from one scene to another, albeit in a different environment and with different secondary characters.

In this regard, we must emphasise that what allows this kind of match cut is the editing of two shots, and this, in turn, implies a process of linearisation. The editing pattern of *Let Me Dream Again* was used subsequently; as already mentioned, *Let Me Dream Again* was promptly imitated by Zecca the following year, with *Rêve et réalité*, using an identical match cut to emphasise the shift from sleeping to awakening. It also occurs in *Le cauchemar du Caïd* (Pathé, 1905) and in the previously mentioned *Voyage sur Jupiter, The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend*, as well as in many others films.

However, another less obvious but no less important aspect must also be underlined. This representation of continuity in movements or gestures performed by the characters, in their sleep and when they wake up, does not necessarily occur as a *result* of a linearisation process (although linearisation is certainly favoured here). Rather, it occurs in order to emphasise the materiality of the represented oneiric dimension, showing its potential interchangeability with the "real". Thus, what could seem "modern" to us, today, is above all consistent with the expectations of the time. In perfect harmony with its horizon of expectations, it entails a way of conceiving the oneiric representation for the contemporary spectators, for whom the physical dimension of the dream co-exists with its mental one, a characteristic which also belongs to the other forms we are discussing here.

Finally, this process was almost certainly first developed in film, then successfully transferred to the strip cartoon, which also "edits" a series of pictures. So far, the first known instance occurs in 1905 in the popular *Little Nemo* by Winsor McCay, while it can be found in films

[24] By "dissolve effect" I designate these filmic effects obtained by altering camera focus, where the gradual fade in does not overlap a preceding gradual fade out.

from as early as 1900, the year of Smith's *Let Me Dream Again*. There is good evidence, then, that this form constitutes a contribution to the representation of the inner gaze made by the cinema to other popular arts.

Along with the dissolve, an even more interesting modality is the recourse to the figure of the circle, enclosing an interior vision, oneiric or fantastical, which originates in the character's mind or from the supernatural. Like the theatre, the magic lantern or vision machines, the cinema too – as in popular illustrations, or even cartoons subsequent to 1900 – often resorts to oneiric or fantastical representations as a pretext to portray fantasies of every kind; and it does so through a device called a "dream balloon". This balloon, usually circular in shape, surrounds the vision which most often appears in the top corner of the frame, typically situated above the characters who see or dream the image in question (thus seeing it "inside" themselves), like a superscript.

We may recall here that the white space on a lantern slide reserved for oneiric or supernatural representations was also circular, as were the images of dreams projected with a second lantern in the case of double glass slides. The equivalent of a dream balloon is already delineated in a 1847 drawing by Rodolphe Töpffer,[25] where a sleeping man dreams of performing heroic feats which are shown at the top of the drawing, above the bed. This idea also appears in many popular illustrations, and in a number of magic lantern plates, such as the beautiful series of glass slides depicting the dream of a girl who has been given a bicycle.[26] In one of the images of this dream, part of the action appears in a circle at the top right corner, that is to say in the same position occupied, in early cinema, by the usually circular visions placed within a different image to represent the dream, the thought, the visionary omen or other mental image pertaining to a particular character.

The dream balloon is an image of great iconographic interest, chiefly because it is similar to the circular matte surrounding the views represented through a viewer in optical instrument films. It also possesses the same optical connotation as the circular matte, as well as the same spectacular force. Common to both these circular forms is the fact that they impress a magical aura onto the image. They certainly share common optical origins (which are also on the boundary between magic and science), as well as a vaguely fantastical and supernatural perception among the early audiences.

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[25] Töpffer's drawing exhibits a striking resemblance to the technique used in 1906 by Edwin S. Porter for his *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend.*

[26] See the plates reproduced in Costa (ed., 1983).

Usually – but not always – obtained by means of the double exposure technique,[27] the dream balloon gives rise to a specific structure, different from the form of representation of the "referential" gaze, spectacularising the supposed subjectivity of the characters and showing their inner gaze.

The practice of enclosing part of the action within a circle soon becomes an early screen convention. It is, in fact, a very frequent device, preceding the increase in editing by a few years, as well as the emergence of the optical instrument or keyhole film, compared to which it was even more widespread. The dream balloon is optimally and easily integrated with the aesthetics of the autonomous tableau of early cinema, which tends to enclose the totality of the action in a single, autonomous and self-contained view. What is more, in early cinema the dream balloon is not used exclusively to depict oneiric visions, thus marking a separation between the waking and the realm of the dream; it is also used to depict apparitions and disappearances of supernatural figures, the sudden materialisation of obsessive or reassuring visions, of premonitory apparitions, and even of a second scene within the same picture.

This circle also exhibits the same type of tangible, objective, physical corporeality we have observed with regard to the practices generated by the dissolve, as well as favouring the development of an analogous match cut.

One of the first examples is *Santa Claus* (George Albert Smith, 1898), which exhibits a significant ambiguity. The balloon featured in this film represents both the dream of the two children who are the main characters, and the simultaneous staging of a second action which happens at the same time but in a separate, albeit contiguous space. On Christmas Eve, two children go to bed with their stockings hanging from the bedstead, the maid turns off the lights (as in the theatrical technique of darkening the stage), the right part of the room grows black and immediately there appears, thanks to a double exposure, a circular balloon showing Santa Claus on the rooftops, about to climb down the chimney. As soon as Santa Claus disappears from the circular image, he appears in the room (the circular image also disappears, soon after a match on action), fills the stockings with gifts, and is made to disappear by means of substitution splice. The children then wake up and hasten gleefully to go through the stockings brimming over with gifts.

This ambiguity – furthermore presented in a single, autonomous shot – clearly shows the effect of a strong corporeal quality which always

[27] Technically, a double exposure is obtained through the use of a matte (utilised to conceal), exposing the same portion of film twice, in two different areas. The first time, all of the film is exposed with the exception of the part obscured by the matte. The second time, the film is exposed in the area that had been previously obscured.

characterises the images depicted by means of the balloon device, even when they are unmistakably dreams. And this corporeal, physical quality is always materialised as if by optical magic, emphasised by the shape of the circle, which contains the potential attraction not only of the image depicted, but also of its mode of representation.

5.1.3. Forms of the Dream

The ambiguity in the representation of oneiric images, as the one just described in *Santa Claus*, is not an isolated phenomenon. In early cinema, films representing dreams are often catalogued among the *scènes à transformations*, with overtly magical connotations, evoking conjuring tricks. There are many examples: *Le rêve d'un avare* (Pathé, 1900), *Rêve d'artiste* (Pathé, 1900) *Le rêve d'un buveur* (Pathé, 1900) – the latter being classified as a "*scène à transformations en cinq tableaux*"[28] – are only a few of those films, in France alone, whose titles announce the spectacle of oneiric images, conceived precisely as fantastical transformations. It is reasonable to suppose that many of the films containing oneiric representations, whose existence is proven by the network of paratextual materials (reviews, sales catalogues, advertisements, paper and iconographical documents), were equally inclined to place the dream halfway between the trick and the visionary fantasy. Examples in Italian cinema include *Nel paese dei sogni (Il piccolo Verne)*, directed by Gaston Velle in 1907 for Cines (Velle would later remake the film in France, for Pathé); *Il sogno di due gaudenti* (Cines 1908); *Un viaggio nell'Olimpo* (Cines 1908); *Le viole* (Cines, 1908); *Le tentazioni di un fraticello* (Cines 1908).[29]

In early cinema, the dream is a form of vision just like any other. Thus, it can be similar to supernatural apparitions, as well as to the stage tricks which render those visions physically observable. *La fée des roches noires* (Pathé, 1901), for example, shows a man falling asleep after having mistreated an old woman. The man dreams of a witch who tortures him with horrific apparitions and disappearances, causes him to be hanged from a scaffold, transports him to a graveyard in which skeletons and phantoms appear, until finally, in his sleep, the man tumbles from the stone "bed" on which he had fallen asleep, finds himself next to a beautiful fairy,

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[28] Scene of transformations in five tableaux.

[29] In Bernardini (1996) see the information regarding *Nel paese dei sogni* (by Gaston Velle, 1907), no. 57 of the 1911 Cines catalogue, which describes the film as being of the "fantastical" genre; *Il sogno di due gaudenti* (1908), no. 123 of the 1911 Cines catalogue, in the "comedy" genre; *Un viaggio nell'Olimpo* (1908), no. 98 of the Cines catalogue, in the "fantasy" genre; *Le viole* (1908), no. 131 of the Cines catalogue, which presents the film as a "comedy"; *Le tentazioni di un fraticello* (1908), no. 107 of the Cines catalogue, also as a "comedy".

and hastens to beg forgiveness. It is difficult to affirm whether all this constitutes a dream, or the exhibition of a macabre punishment fantasy inflicted by a superior force upon the man, guilty of having mistreated a witch, initially disguised as the old lady and then as the fairy. It may be both those things, since a similar triumphant use of the trick is found as late as 1906 in *The Cook's Dream*, where the whole dream consists of nothing but a series of tricks.

Among the many techniques used for the representation of oneiric images in early cinema, one must remember that of the shadow play, in which black *silhouettes* stand out against white backdrops, performing entire pantomimes supposed to represent the dreams – more often than not, the nightmares – of a character who is asleep below, or next to, the representation itself (see, for example, *Une excursion incohérente*, from 1909, already encountered in 4.3.2.).

In *Histoire d'un crime* (1901), on the other hand, Zecca resorts to a more complex technique of the vision scene, in order to represent a dream which equally functions as a flashback, showing earlier episodes in the life of the main character.[30] This techinque is derived from the theatre and consists of a double staging, requiring an enclosed stage built into the backdrop of the main set. Today, *Histoire d'un crime* is mostly remembered precisely for the evident theatrical quality of the staging of a dream which is also a recollection. A condemned man is asleep in his cell. The wall above him opens up like a theatre curtain, and an entire stage appears, equipped as in a theatre, where a number of scenes are acted out, one after the other, illustrating the crucial moments of the man's life: first as an honest worker in a carpentry shop, lastly as a gambler driven to crime after having lost all his money. In order to render the representation more effective, a shadow marks the passage from one scene to the other, thus concealing the internal gap between scenes and evoking the curtain of a theatre.

Beginning in 1900, with the emergence of editing, a new technique of oneiric representation emerged too, consisting of a change of shot introduced by a dissolve or by a dissolve effect – a technique referred to in the previous section. Méliès, for example, in *Rêve de Noël* (1900) shows two children asleep, dreaming. After a dissolve, we see the kingdom of toys and we witness a sort of puppet's parade. After another dissolve, we

[30] Speaking of *Histoire d'un crime*, Salt (1983) criticises the theatrical technique used by Zecca in place of the double exposure, and concludes that this "is further confirmation that the Pathé film-makers had a lot to learn at the beginning of the century" (Salt, 1983: 67). Mitry (1985), on the other hand, emphasises the importance and coherence, from the perspective of authorial aesthetics, of such a choice being made by Zecca – a choice that is, in any case, philologically interesting. See also Abel (1994).

see two angels distributing toys into the chimneys. And after a series of oneiric shots, each introduced by a dissolve, a final dissolve brings us back again to the children's room where they wake up to find their enormous fireplace full of gifts.[31] Here, the action represented in a single view in Smith's film *Santa Claus* is enhanced and spread over several shots. The central ones of the dream, however, loses none of the ambiguity contained in the use of the balloon in *Santa Claus*, and this new form, which was to enjoy great success in classic cinema (where the insertion of oneiric shots within a sequence is often obtained through a dissolve), favoured the development of the match on action.

Also in 1900,[32] Smith made *Let Me Dream Again*, in which the first shot shows a man dreaming that he is passionately embracing a beautiful woman, while the second shot (introduced by a dissolve effect) shows the same man's disappointed awakening, as he finds himself embracing his old wife. An identical thing happens in *Rêve et réalité*, made the following year, where Zecca evidently draws inspiration from Smith's film, preserving the same order, the same succession between shots (though by means of a real dissolve), and the same type of match cut on the continuity of gesture. The only, piquant difference is that in this case the embrace is completed by a passionate kiss which the oblivious wife, happily surprised at being woken up with such fervour, wants to continue. In both cases, however, the dream retains the powerful physical dimension of an impudent desire, of a "daydream".

Over time, this form of oneiric representation tends more and more to develop the depiction of the dream over several shots. Yet the realm of the dream would still tend to be introduced by a dissolve, but to end with a cut, though one softened by the match on action. Very often, indeed, the editing of the oneiric representation ends with the last shot representing the dream – where the character occupies a certain position in the frame, performs a certain gesture or movement – followed by a shot which illustrates the awakening, where the character occupies the same position in the frame and completes the gesture or movement in question.

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[31] Méliès repeated this pattern in several other films, in which the dreams are composed of more and more shots; see, for instance, *Le rêve du maître de ballet* (1903) and *Conte de la grand-mère et rêve de l'enfant* (1908). Note that *Rêve de Noël*, being a *féerie*, ends with a playful ballet around a Christmas tree.

[32] It is important to consider that *Let Me Dream Again* (as Méliès' *Rêve de Noël*) is contemporaneous to *Grandma's Reading Glass*. The fact that these two films are so close in time but so different in style confirms that the two forms they develop should be considered as two separate phenomena. It is clear that the representation of the gaze (a referential gaze in *Grandma's Reading Glass*) emerges independently of the modalities of representation of a supposed subjectivity (in *Let Me Dream Again*). Clearly, the two phenomena are distinct, and originated and developed individually as autonomous practices.

This is a very interesting procedure. The beginning of the dream occurs in a dissolve in order to signify the exit from the waking space, as well as to introduce, through a change of shot, a new setting, i.e., the dream space. For the character, the end of the dream coincides with the moment of the awakening, which usually follows the match on action previously described. For the spectator, however, the dream ends with the cut, that is to say, with the return to the first setting. This became established practice to such extent that the representation of this shifting modality from the dream to the awakening moment became a topos.

It can be found, for example, in *Le cauchemar du Caïd*, where the Caïd, smoking opium while lying on a soft, cushioned bed, falls asleep and starts to dream. In the following shot (introduced by a dissolve), he finds himself lying, not on his bed but on an uncomfortable prison bunk; only when he wakes, after a series of distressing adventures, is he once more on his divan, doing to his pillows what he had been doing to his violent attackers in the dream.

It can also be found in *Rêve à la lune*, where, at the end of the dream which has transported him to the moon, a drunkard falls out from the satellite's mouth, and, after a cut, we see him falling out of bed, in a similar downwards direction, and then waking up. Here, once more, the dream is introduced by a dissolve, though, rather than a second one occurring to mark the end of the oneiric experience, this is instead delimited by a match on action.

The same dynamics equally occurs in *Voyage sur Jupiter* (also known as *Une excursion sur Jupiter*, by Segundo de Chomón for Pathé, 1909), where at the end of a dream (introduced by a dissolve) an astronomer is awakened by falling from his bed, because he had been falling from the sky in his dream. In *Un roman passionnant* (Pathé, 1910), a man reads a gripping novel, falls asleep, and dreams of being the book's protagonist, having terrible adventures until he wakes up with a start (still gesticulating as he had done in the dream, but after a cut), and tears up the novel. In *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (Edison, 1906), the voracious eater of cheese *soufflés* wakes up tumbling from his bed, continuing the action of falling down from a steeple, which abruptly ends his nightmare.[33] A partial exception occurs in the previously mentioned *The Cook's Dream*

[33] Porter's film *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend*, inspired by the homonymous comic strip by Winsor McCay, does not exactly exhibit a match on action, but rather a movement direction match cut. The dream ends in the last shot, which is set in the main character's bedroom, after the character himself has fallen from the sky through the ceiling. Stop motion makes the man disappear from the floor, and also resolves any other remaining confusion caused by the dream. Note that this film exists in at least two different versions (see Dagrada, 1998a), and that this solution is identical in both**,** even if the conclusion of the last shot is unequivocally different.

(R.W. Paul, 1906), where a drunken cook falls asleep in the kitchen, a dissolve introduces his dream, and a second dissolve brings the spectator (but not the dreaming character!) back to the kitchen, where another cook and two maids wake the sleeping man up by playing tricks on him.

In brief, the objective physical quality forcefully inscribed into the continuity between subjective oneiric space and waking space characterises all of the forms of representation of dreams developed by early cinema. It is not surprising, then, that in this context made up of reality and magic, of waking and sleeping, mixing the objective and the subjective, oneiric representation simultaneously assumes both the material characteristics of a physical apparition and the supernatural characteristics of clairvoyance, as if it constituted a magical way of communicating with "somewhere else", a place that is just as real, but also supernatural. Neither is it surprising that oneiric representation may assume the form of a wish that comes true, or, conversely, fades away, as in *Let Me Dream Again* and in *Natale*, a 1906 Ambrosio production, where a sick child dies after dreaming of a wooden horse which his poor father cannot afford to buy him for Christmas.[34]

The same physical quality also characterises another form of oneiric representation, discussed briefly earlier, in which dreams appear enclosed in a balloon (which over time becomes rectangular, like the cinema screen). A striking instance of a dream represented through a balloon is the Edison production *The Life of an American Fireman* (by Porter, copyrighted 1903, but very probably completed before the end of 1902).[35] The eponymous fireman dreams of a mother putting her child to bed. When he wakes up, he "paces the floor in a nervous state of mind, doubtless thinking of the various people who may be in danger from fire at the moment".[36] The vision appearing in the top right hand part of the screen, enclosed in a circular dream balloon, spectacularises an inner gaze that functions as a premonition, as an extrasensory foreboding of something that is actually occurring – as people are really endangered by a fire at that very moment.

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[34] Cf. Bernardini (1996: 41-42) who reports the description of this film (no. 61 of the Vitrotti list) which appeared in the no. 45 issue of the *Photo-Ciné Gazette*, Feb. 1st, 1907.

[35] In 1903, Porter created a similar vision scene in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but his most famous dream balloon remains the one appearing in *The Life of an American Fireman*. For an insightful study of *The Life of an American Fireman* see Musser (1991). See also at least Vardac (1949), Burch (1978) and (1990), and Auerbach (2007).

[36] *Edison Films*, February, 1903, quoted in Musser (1991: 216). The same Edison text also explains that "the inference is that he [the fireman] dreams of his own wife and child"; thus, Musser (1991: 224) argues that the mother and child appearing in the dream balloon are possibly the fireman's own family.

Also, at the beginning of *Aladin ou la lampe merveilleuse* (Pathé, 1906), Aladdin dreams that he is in the company of a beautiful princess (whom he will really meet later in the film). The image of the dream appears on the right, enclosed in a dream balloon. When Aladdin wakes up, he hurries over to the point where the balloon has appeared, searching for the princess "seen" in the dream, with outstretched arms.

In *Le tour du monde d'un policier* (1906), already discussed in chapter 3, a bankrupt man visits an opium den. After smoking a great deal, he falls asleep and dreams of three women with a pitcher and two goblets, who appear in a dream balloon in the left half of the frame. A few shots later, the policeman searching for the bankrupt man visits the same opium den, falls asleep after smoking opium himself, and dreams about the arrest of the bankrupt man, which he has long yearned for. This time, the man himself appears as a dream on the half left side of the frame (exactly where his own dream had been shown). The policeman, however, wakes up and excitedly rushes over to the spot where his dream had appeared, waving his arms while looking in vain for his quarry.

Again, in *L'aiguilleur* (Pathé, 1910) a switchman, who is responsible for the death of his much loved young daughter, sees the scene of the accident all over again in a nightmare which appears above him, in a rectangular projection;[37] the man tosses about in his sleep, waving his arms as if trying to undo the action which caused the tragedy. In the Cines production *Il piccolo garibaldino* (1909) a boy, determined to join his father who is fighting with Giuseppe Garibaldi, dreams of the heroic feats achieved during the Italian Risorgimento by the legendary Mille, whom the boy really joins in subsequent scenes. In *Grandfather's Birthday* (1908), the image depicting an elderly officer's dream has the physical power to elate him at the moment of his death. The film tells how, on his birthday, an old soldier thinks about his past before going to bed and falling asleep. Above him, on the wall beside which the bed is placed, an image of his last battle appears in a rectangular projection; the dream wakes up the old man, and he flings himself into the imaginary battle, excitedly acting it out; he then falls onto the bed, exhausted, and dies.

In all these cases, the materiality of what the characters have seen in a dream is explicitly suggested by the gesture made by the characters as soon as they awake, looking for the object of their dream *where the image of it had appeared*. As if the characters themselves had seen that image exactly where the spectators have just seen it.

[37] This rectangular shape may recall the cinema screen (it may in fact be a projection), but it must be noted that rectangular sheets existed for the magic lantern projection as well.

5.1.4. Attractions and Apparitions

Among the new ways of representing the inner gaze permeated by the supernatural, made possible by advances in film technique, was the previously mentioned substitution splice, which enables a character or object – which were not in the picture at first – to suddenly appear, or to replace a character by a different one (or by an object). Substitution splice tricks were very popular from the beginning, and are used constantly by Méliès. Others employed them too, however: a British example where a demon appears, in the tradition of the magician of Montreuil, is *The Devil in the Studio* (1901, by Walter R. Booth).[38] Substitution splice and stop motion splice[39] also favoured a flourishing of films of a fantastical nature, producing many hallucinations and supernatural apparitions, subjects halfway between the subjective and the objective, between a visionary intimacy and the spectacular representation, and of a wide range of scenographic elements such as dreams and daydreams.

The substitution splice technique, alternated with more specifically scenic tricks (traps, double and triple curtains, etc.), is prevalent in films such as the already seen *La fée des roches noires*, or *Skulls Take Over* and *Le remords*, to mention only a few. These are films in which the apparitions of skeletons and phantoms are, after all, very similar to the ones represented at the theatre, or by means of magic lantern projections.

In *Skulls Take Over* [1901], the main character kills a miser and is haunted by remorse, with visions of skeletons and phantoms. A few years later, Pathé produced a near remake of this film, entitled *Le remords* (1905), where a servant kills his stingy master in order to seize his riches. In this case, though, the "remorse" suggested by the title does not assume psychological depth, but is, rather, of a fantastical and supernatural kind: the miser's treasure suddenly turns into a skull, tombs appear in the garden of the house, spectres and skeletons spring out everywhere, until the murderer falls to the ground, overcome by this vision of death. According to a description found in the 1911 Cines catalogue, we may suppose that the Italian production titled *Lo spettro* (Cines, 1907), made by Gaston Velle, was similar to this film, not only in the choice of subject, but also in the execution of the apparitions and disappearances of phantoms or skulls, which haunt the main character (a mean shoemaker who kills his employer in order to rob him). In addition to *Lo spettro*, we can cite the film *Il tintinnio dell'oro* (Giovanni Vitrotti for Ambrosio, 1908), where a man, who has killed his neighbour for money, is overcome

[38] Cf. McKernan (1995), who comments upon the work of this trick film director, who worked with Robert William Paul. The film was found in the Will Day collection.

[39] On these two different techniques see Kessler (2005).

by a vision of the victim and dies in turn.[40] Furthermore, we may also suppose that the flourishing of films of this fantastical nature, telling similar stories with supernatural apparitions of phantoms, became so popular as to generate a topos that existed in parodic variations too. An interesting case is *La revanche du chat* (Lux, 1908), where a servant girl cooks a kitten by mistake (instead of a rabbit), is haunted by apparitions of the poor puss, implores it in vain to pardon her and faints. These apparitions are interesting because they are developed in both a narrative and a spectacular way, and this endows the apparitions themselves with an ambiguous nature, similar to that already underlined in films such *Le déjeuner du savant*.

The drunkard's hallucinations in *Rêve à la lune* are filled with similar apparitions: a bottle on a table turns into an enormous man-bottle, other bottles pop up here and there, a human wine cask appears and dances with the drunken man, the face of a grandfather clock turns into the moon…[41] Substitution splice is the means by which these hallucinations are represented, as are the apparitions which subsequently inhabit the man's dream. It is also used to materialise a hallucination in *Les victimes de l'alcoolisme* (Pathé, 1902, made by Zecca), where a drunkard sees a maid turning into a skeleton as she serves him drinks. And in the first version of *La poule aux œufs d'or* (Pathé, 1905), it is again substitution splice which produces the miserly farmer's vision of two pairs of menacing, rolling eyes looking at him, and of two pairs of greedy arms gesticulating animatedly towards him.

However, apparitions and disappearances are not only achieved by substitution splice. Many were produced with the balloon device or with its more common variations (superimposition, rear-screen projection, etc.), which enclose the image of an inner gaze within a more or less circular setting[42] and, above all, embody the same physical and material

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40 Cf. Bernardini (1996: 202), who, with respect to this film, provides the text published by the programme of the Politeama Ariosto in Reggio Emilia (Nov. 18, 1909).

41 During the dream in *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend*, similar "magic tricks" occur as well. The most striking apparition, which partly resembles the above-mentioned drawing by Töpffer, is the one appearing on a black background in the top half of the screen, above the dreamer: three little demons pop out of a saucepan, carrying a hammer, a pitchfork and a shovel, and start beating the poor man's head.

42 In *La revanche du chat* an apparition of the cat is shown surrounded by a sort of circular matte on a black background, as in *Grandma's Reading Glass*. Belloï (2001: 289) argues that there is a difference between the two images, as only in *Grandma's Reading Glass* the matte conveys a subjective status to the shot, since in *La revanche du chat* no relationship "observing character-observed view" is implied, nor is there any optical instrument "justifying" the presence of the circle; but this reading is based on the overlapping of point-of-view shot and subjectivity. Conversely, in chapter 3. we have seen that in *Grandma's Reading Glass* no subjective status is conferred on the

quality as already encountered. In this respect, the most interesting group of visions appears in *The Old Chorister* (1904), *The Mistletoe Bough* (1904), *Drink and Repentance* (1905), and again, *Il piccolo garibaldino* (1909) and *L'aiguilleur* (1910). These visions – as was the case of Aladdin's dream, or the policeman's dream in *Le tour du monde d'un policier* – assume such corporeality that the characters feel compelled to try to touch them, searching for the objects of these visions in the places where they have seen them.

In *The Old Chorister*, an old man remembers his childhood, when he used to sing in a church choir. He reaches a nearby church, goes in and takes his place with the choir. Suddenly a white angel appears: the old man stretches out his arms to the angel, walks towards the apparition at the centre of the frame, and falls to the ground. The angel disappears, the old man regains consciousness (and the angel reappears for an instant), stretches his arms out to the angel once more and then falls down again, dead.

The Mistletoe Bough (1904), on the other hand, tells a macabre story based on an old English legend: during her wedding reception, a bride plays hide-and-seek with the guests, hides in a chest which locks automatically, and cannot be found. Thirty years later, her widower has a vision of his wife coming out of the chest and stretching her arms out to him; he stretches his own arms out to the vision, closes them in an embrace, and the vision disappears. The man then rushes to see for himself, and discovers the woman's skeleton in the chest.

In *Drink and Repentance* (1905) a drunken man sets his own house on fire with his wife and little child inside it. Later, lying on the bunk in his cell, the man has a vision which appears in a rectangular double exposure, above him and to his left, showing his dying wife, who stretches her arms out to him. The husband then stretches his own arms towards the vision of his wife (which disappears after a few moments), escapes from prison to rush to her deathbed, and in the final scene finds her in the same bed, and in the same position, as the vision in the cell.

In *Il piccolo garibaldino* (1909), the young hero's mother is desperate because of her son's disappearance, but, through a dissolve, the wall in the background turns into a sky full of white clouds; at its centre is a woman draped in the Italian tricolour (representing Italy),[43] together with the little *garibaldino* wearing his red jacket. The boy then descends a ladder, enters

newspaper, the watch, the canary, the grandmother's eye or the cat, even though they are encircled by the matte. On the contrary, in *La revanche du chat* the narrative frame ascribes to the apparitions of the kitten the double status of spectacular attraction and subjective mental image.

[43] As in another important Italian film on the same subject: *La presa di Roma* (1905)

the living room, shows his mother the wound on his heart, his mother kisses it, and the boy takes his place again next to Italy; after another dissolve the vision disappears; the mother looks for her son waving her hand towards the wall at the back, where he had appeared.

In *L'aiguilleur* (already discussed in the previous section), the railway switchman, mad with grief after having lost his daughter, nearly causes a tragedy. But, in the top part of the picture, a blurred balloon appears, in which, among greenery and clouds, his dead child urges him to stop, and, joining her hands, invites him to pray instead.

Once more, in each of these cases, the visions depicted possess the physical quality of a material apparition and the supernatural tone of an omen. This is a religious omen in both *The Old Chorister*, where the angel is an omen of death (and of the resurrection of the soul in heaven), and *L'aiguilleur*, where the vision of the child in heaven initiates a process of reconciliation between her father and life itself, with the assurance of a future eternal life. The omen is macabre in *The Mistletoe Bough*, in which the apparition of the woman who appears from the chest gives the man a clue as to where to find her body. It is a moral omen, both in *Drink and Repentance*, in which the vision "brings repentance" (as the caption states) to the guilty prisoner and brings about his redemption; and in *Il piccolo garibaldino*, in which the sacrifice the boy makes for his native land gives a higher meaning to his poor mother's loss.

Again, in each case, the character tries to touch the vision, whose materiality here is really "such stuff as dreams are made on".

5.1.5. The Memory Eye

If apparitions and disappearances, dreams and hallucinations, mental images and supernatural depictions appear as standardised and usually exhibited as pure spectacle, the same cannot be said for that peculiar case of flashback which is the memory image, i.e., a recollection which is clearly indicated as the visual representation of a character's memory.[44]

Of course, memory images and flashbacks soon appear in turn as standardised and are at first obtained through recourse to interchangeable techniques such as superimposition, double exposure, double staging, inset sets, dissolve… For this reason, they are also exhibited as attractions, often blended with magical elements, to such extent that these visions, too, can seldom be ascribabed solely to the visualisation of a recollection through pure images, with no supernatural factor – whether oneiric or fantastical – to endow the vision with some additional spectacular quality.

[44] It must be underlined that every memory image is also a flashback, but not every flashback is also a memory image. See footnote 3 in chapter I.

It must be stressed, though, that images supposed to represent a recollection through a character's gaze are quite rare prior to 1910.[45] Moreover, these are images which sometimes materialise not only a gaze (i.e., the inner gaze of someone who is remembering something), but also a voice (an inner voice, or the voice of someone who tells somebody what he recollects). Therefore, they often appear blended with some kind of storytelling, and integrated into the dynamics of a narrative.

Among the earliest cases known, in addition to *Histoire d'un crime* discussed above (which is also a dream, however), an interesting one is the coeval *Scrooge*; *or, Marley's Ghost* (by Walter R. Booth for R.W. Paul, 1901), also known as the oldest film adaptation of Charles Dickens' 1843 novel *A Christmas Carol*. Actually, the film was based as much on John C. Buckstone's popular stage adaptation *Scrooge* as on Dickens' original story; like the play,[46] the film eliminates the different ghosts visiting Scrooge, relying instead on the figure of Jacob Marley, draped in a white sheet, to point out the error of the old miser's way. Thus, Ebenezer Scrooge is only confronted by Marley's ghost and sees visions of Christmas past, present and future, in addition to recollections from his own childwood and youth appearing superimposed over a black curtain.

Another interesting case is *The Old Chorister*, made by James Williamson in 1904. As we have seen, it tells the story of an elderly chorister who recalls his childwood memories, when he used to sing in a church choir. The image which corresponds to his recollection is shown in a superimposition: the old man puts his hand to his ear (to him, this apparition is above all a recollection of "sound") and, in the top right hand corner, some singing children appear. Moved by this recollection, the old man then turns to the point where the image has appeared (the source of

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45 The titles that Salt (1983) identifies as flashback instances are all quite late (*After One Hundred Years*, 1911; *A Wasted Sacrifice*, 1912). Again in Salt (1987), with the exception of *The Old Chorister* (1904), the cited films are quite late: *Napoleon, Man of Destiny* (1909); *Nozze d'oro* (1912, by Luigi Maggi – though the film was made in 1911); and *The Man that Might Have Been* (1914). However, a few earlier cases may be added: the previously discussed *Histoire d'un crime* (1901); *Scrooge*; *or, Marley's Ghost* (by Walter R. Booth for R.W. Paul, 1901); *What the Curate Really Did* (by Lewin Fitzhamon for Hepworth, 1905); *Fireside's Reminiscences* (by Edwin S. Porter for Edison, 1908); *Amleto* (by Mario Caserini for Cines, 1910), *Il racconto del nonno* (Milano Films, 1910). We can also add *La lampada della nonna* (Ambrosio, 1913); *Il campanile della vittoria* (Vera Film, 1913), also know as *Racconto di Natale*; and the two versions of *Inferno*, one by Helios (1911), and the other by Milano Films (also 1911), containing three flashbacks: the recollection-narration of Paolo and Francesca, that of Count Ugolino, and that of Pier Della Vigna; these flashbacks are evoked by the voices of the characters, not by their gaze.

46 Cf. Ewan Davidson, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/698299/index.html (last contact December 2013).

the sound, and simultaneously the image of his childhood), and leaves to find a church in which to sing.

A quite different case is represented by *What the Curate Really Did*, a 1905 Hepworth production by Lewin Fitzhamon, which exhibits the peculiar feature of involving the characters' actual gaze only at the beginning, since it subsequently visualises their narration – and therefore, a "narrative voice" – while the spectator is supposed to see its iconic equivalent. In this film, a curate meets a little girl and buys her a posy of flowers. Mrs. Jones, who has just witnessed this, tells Mrs. Brown, who tells Mrs. Robinson, who tells the Bishop; step by step the story is altered by the malicious subjectivity of three gossiping women. As the film progresses, images appear in a rectangular space occupying the top half of the picture, above the characters that are narrating or listening. These images depict what each of the three women is saying – the almost true story by Mrs. Jones, and then the distortions of Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Robinson which eventually make the story quite salacious. The upper images visualise the gossips' subjective inventions, which transform an innocent occurrence (a priest buying some flowers for a little girl) into a scabrous, close, and premeditated encounter between the priest and a woman of easy virtue.[47]

On the other hand, the case of *Napoleon and the English Sailor* (1908) is interesting because it displays both features in equal terms: the character's inner gaze and his voice. An English soldier, who has been taken captive by Napoleon, tries to escape in a boat made from a barrel to reach his old mother on the other side of the Channel. Napoleon discovers him, and, moved by such great filial love, has him escorted to England, even presenting him with some money. As soon as he arrives, the soldier tells his mother what has happened, and, in the top of the left hand corner of the picture, Napoleon's face appears in superimposition, synthesising at the same time both the man's recollection and his narration to his old mother (then, the inner gaze and the voice together).

Napoleon recurs quite frequently in the instances of flashback during these years: *Napoleon, Man of Destiny* (1909), and *Life Drama of Napoleon* (1909), are two examples produced by Vitagraph.[48] It is interesting to notice that the first title constitutes a sort of flash-forward as well, for Napoleon not only recollects Waterloo, but sees himself in the future on St Helena. This suggests that, in early cinema, the same

[47] Salt (1983) believes that only sleeping or dozing characters recollect the past. This film, however, at least in the case of the first woman who narrates, contradicts such a hypothesis, as do both *Amleto* and *The Old Chorister*.

[48] On Vitagraph films, see Uricchio, Pearson (1993).

supernatural and premonitory nature of the dream also belongs to the recollection, which often borders on clairvoyance and omen.[49]

An equal tone of clairvoyance and omen is found in *Fireside's Reminiscences* (by Edwin S. Porter, 1908), where (as in *The Old Chorister*) the character's voice is not implied. Here, the protagonist is shown meditating near a fireplace, inside which his memories appear in a series of blurred rectangular dream balloons. The spectator is thus privy to the happy days of the man's marriage, his wife and child, the moment he threw his wife out of the house (after having seen her embracing another man, and not realising that this is her brother),[50] then his wife alone in the street, at night. This last image actually corresponds to what is happening outside the man's house, at the very moment that he sees it in his fireplace. Thus, it works as a premonition for the man, who finds his wife outside the house, brings her inside and is reunited with her.

In *Amleto*, a 1910 Cines production directed by Mario Caserini, the physical quality of the superimposition, through which the character's recollection is materialised, recurs in a flashback which is definitely combined with a supernatural dimension. Here the ghost of the Danish king appears to his son to "tell him" that he has been killed by his own brother, Claudius; the story, which the ghost wishes to conclude in the rocky cavern to which he leads Hamlet, appears projected and enclosed in an arch-shaped balloon, on a black background. At the end of the projection, Hamlet walks towards the same black background, looking for the image he has just seen.

Other examples can be found in the film *Nozze d'oro* (Ambrosio, 1911), the structure of which, revolving around the visualisation of a narrated recollection, is taken up two years later in *La lampada della nonna* (Ambrosio, 1913). Again, in *Pauli* (1910), already discussed in the previous chapter, the visualisation of a newspaper article relates the events depicted in a flashback.

The list could go on: but the peculiar interest of these memory images is already clear and lies once more in their ambiguity. They are the illustration of a recollection, but they are also part of a narration; nonetheless, they also function as an attraction, as a magical apparition, since the representation of the recollection itself occurs in the same way as do the magical and supernatural apparitions: by means of projections, superimpositions, dissolves, or through recourse to a dream balloon.

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[49] Another case of vision into the future, produced by Vitagraph, is *A Mother's Devotion* (1907).

[50] The film was inspired by a well-known song, *After the Ball*, whose story line is altered by Porter in order to add family-centred elements. On this Porter adaptation see Musser (1991).

This seems to happen, first and foremost, because in early cinema the character's recollection is always materialised as the representation of an inner *gaze* (that of someone who is remembering something), even when it materialises also as the enunciation of *words*. That is, it represents a gaze even when it also materialises some kind of narrative voice: that of the character telling a story, regardless of the absence of sound. It is a gaze which is shown and exhibited in the presence of the character supposed to be recollecting, and therefore seeing. And the spectator in the audience must see it in turn, because he is the real final addressee of these images.

5.2. From Magic to Introspection

The spectacular aspect of the representations of the inner gaze, discussed in the previous sections, often lends these images the quality of an attraction. At first, that is, all of the forms of representation of an inner gaze are exhibited as spectacular attractions, like the views shown in optical instrument or keyhole films.

Over time, however, the same transformation begun by the representation of the gaze affects the representation of the inner gaze too. This transformation replaces the purely spectacular use of the character's subjectivity with its narrative use; it is a transformation which progressively narrativises apparitions and visions, making them no longer merely an occasion for a spectacle, but also a device for the advancement of a story. Thus, the representation is no longer exhibited, or no longer primarily so, in order to amaze and surprise, but also to suggest – and to exploit – a character's emotional state. It is no longer a pretext for the exhibition of exceptional images, but a way to evoke a psychologically defined personality, and even to present the plot with an element of some importance.

Of course, in this area as well, transformation is by no means chronological and free from discrepancies. The spectacular use of visions, apparitions and disappearances was persistent and co-existed, over time, with the narrative use of the same techniques. For instance, *Métamorphoses d'un fiancé* (1906) or *La maison hantée* (made by Segundo de Chomón for Pathé in 1906) are cases of films that use the apparition and disappearance tricks with a spectacular aim, even when these shots constitute part of the story. On the other hand, even the above-mentioned *Let Me Dream Again*, *What the Curate Really Did*, *The Mistletoe Bough*, *Il piccolo garibaldino*, *L'aiguilleur*, and *The Old Chorister*, may be defined as cases in which the taste for spectacular exhibition and the logics of narration co-exist. As early as 1901, in the above mentioned *Scrooge*; *or, Marley's Ghost*, the miser Scrooge sees (as described by Dickens, though) a vision of Marley's

face over the door knocker, which functions both as an attraction and as a narrative device.

In a way, almost all the titles dealt with in the previous sections are cases of isomorphic combinations of parataxis and hypotaxis. Many of these films exhibit oneiric or fantastical images which present, with respect to the whole into which they are inserted, the same autonomy as views in optical instrument or keyhole films, as well as the same spectacularity which frees them from the ties of the context and makes them attractive in themselves. They are films in which these images may also offer a pretext for the plot to progress, or even a reason for it to begin.

The oneiric, mental or fantastical image is potentially involved in a narrative process right from the start, for the simple reason that the image itself is presented as a breaking point, a discrepancy, which intervenes to disturb or alter an initial situation – identified with the character's being awake, in the case of the dream – which the rest of the film tries to re-establish. The children's dream in *Santa Claus* is, in this respect, the driving force of a story, as understood in Propp's terms. On the other hand, in *Skulls Take Over* and later on in *Le remords*, a true "action" is shown (the miser being murdered for money), which entrusts the task of representing the shattered equilibrium to apparitions and disappearances. In each of these cases the action depicted is there to assist the spectacular exhibition of a series of tricks, and only to a lesser extent the exhibition of the psychological element of the assumed remorse. Namely, the initial narrative situation is used as a pretext for the exhibition of a trick.[51] Such is still the case with a relatively late film as *Le bazar mystérieux* (1913), discussed in 4.3.6., where the narrative frame set during a waking period does not diminish the spectacular impact of the long dream which is the central part of the film.

However, even when a narrative frame is lacking, this relationship may be slowly overturned with spectacular tricks being transformed into a plot device. Indeed, in the case of oneiric representation (which nevertheless retains a very high attraction factor throughout film history – consider Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, 1958, for example),[52] the entire dream may take shape and develop as a full story in itself. It thus becomes the place where the real plot is set, and reduces the waking space to a simple framing device which introduces the characters and the context.

We will discuss only a few examples. *A Diabolo Nightmare* (made by Walter R. Booth for Urban in 1907) constitutes a case of oneirism

[51] For this reason, Merritt (1987) notes that the dream visions in early cinema display little introspection, and a great deal of magic.

[52] h. See footnote 26 in chapter 4.

that is still ambiguous, placed halfway between the exhibition of bizarre adventures (with traces of chase scenes) and their narrativisation. The film shows a man so passionately engaged with an addictive toy, that he is fired from his office job; at home, at night, he falls asleep and dreams about performing the most incredible feats with the toy – and these feats constitute the central nucleus of the film. *The Pageboy's Joke* (a British film from 1908), on the other hand, represents an actual narrative dream. A pageboy is reading a magazine and falls asleep just as his mistress rings the bell to call him; the maid shakes him to send him off to answer the call. During the time that elapses between the sound of the bell and his rude awakening by the maid – a time which is spread over nearly the entire duration of the film – the pageboy dreams about playing a joke on his masters, which is extended in a series of amusing episodes. Here, there is no dissolve to mark the shift from the dream to reality: the dream is presented as an actual story in itself, the story that gives the film its title. The same thing happens in *And Then He Woke Up* (made by David Aylott for Williamson in 1909, in which a tramp slips into the garden of an elegant home, lies down in a hammock and falls asleep. A dissolve introduces a long dream which is composed of a series of remarkable adventures, culminating in the tramp marrying a rich heiress. It also happens, in an equally striking fashion, in *Un roman passionnant*, where a man reads a gripping novel, falls asleep, and dreams about being the book's hero, saving the heroine from the hands of her captors, and then becoming involved in a series of mishaps which turn the dream into a nightmare – so that when the man awakes, he angrily tears up the book with his hands and teeth.

Likewise, while it can happen that the dream becomes a story in itself, visions and apparitions tend to be integrated into the plot which contains them, until they become its turning point, or an Aristotelian *dénouement*. At first merely tricks, they turn into devices for the benefit of the story, in which the psychological and subjective dimensions prevail over the purely spectacular dimension.[53]

[53] Judging from the descriptions found in surviving paratexts, this happens in *Nozze tragiche* (made by Gaston Velle for Cines, 1906), where a poor woman, who has been seduced and abandoned, sees a vision of the faithless man who has reduced her to such a state, and decides to take revenge; in *Visione accusatrice* (by Oreste Mentasti for Rossi & Co. of Turin, 1907), where a murderer, on the verge of death and haunted by a vision of the murder he has committed, confesses his crime and thus clears an innocent man; in *I due fratelli* (Itala, 1908), where a dead father appears to two brothers, preventing a fratricide; in *I minatori* (Comerio & C., 1908), where a young girl has a premonitory vision of the danger threatening her betrothed, and manages to save him (See Bernardini, 1996: 42-43; 110; 139; 167). Another interesting title is *Il delitto del magistrato* (by Gaston Velle for Cines, 1907), in which a murderer "succumbs to the martyrdom of remorse" (*La lanterna*, Napoli, no. 10, Nov. 23-24,

In *La fille de l'armateur* (1908), for example, there are a number of supernatural apparitions similar to the ones found in *Skulls Take Over*. Instead of being exhibited as spectacular elements in themselves, however, they are there to support the plot and its *dénouement*. The film tells the story of a rich ship-owner, who refuses to give the hand of his only daughter to a humble sailor. The man organises a night-time fishing trip, and tampers with the boat with the intention of causing the undesirable suitor to drown. But this plan fails because the sailor manages to save himself, and, together with his companions in misfortune, appears, by means of a superimposition, first to the ship owner, causing him to repent (with his remorse being more important than the trick effect which occasions it), and then to a little girl, asking her to send for help. Of course, here the apparition is presented as a supernatural event – how else could the little girl see the shipwrecked sailors, who are on a far off island? Yet it is also perfectly integrated into a narrative development, which it helps to resolve: in fact, without this apparition there would be no rescue, nor would there be the much desired happy ending in which the ship-owner's daughter and her sailor are blissfully reunited.

1907) and the picture "closes with the vision he sees of his daughter and her lover folder in embrace in Elysiom" (*The Moving Picture World*, New York, January 18, 1908; both texts are quoted in Bernardini, 1996: 78). In *Le fiabe della nonna* (Cines, 1908) – survives in the BFI National Archive – another young girl sees a premonitory vision of her lover in danger, and rushes to his aid. The Archive's synopsis reads: "Drama. Fairy story of a prince and shepherd girl. In a cottage, an old woman begins to tell her grandchildren a story as their mother goes out (13). Dissolve to story: a King, Queen and young Prince in their castle. The Prince says goodbye to his parents (26). He rides out from the castle and meets a young shepherd girl, embraces her, then leaves (77). 'A proposal of marriage and declaration of war' - the King, surrounded by his courtiers, argues with the Prince (115). The Prince meets the shepherdess briefly, then leaves her (124). The castle gate: the Prince leaves for war, accompanied by foot soldiers (153). The shepherdess is mourning her fate; she looks in a magic mirror and sees a picture of a woman and soldiers searching among the wounded and taking the Prince away (227). A fairy appears (239). The shepherdess, dressed in armour, appears on a horse with a groom in attendance. They ride off to search for the Prince (245). The shepherdess rides towards the battle scene, and asks a dying soldier about the whereabouts of the Prince (294). A prison cell: the Prince and another man are talking when the shepherdess enters. The man leaves in fright and the girl takes off her armour. She and the Prince are about to leave by the door when smoke pours in; the window is barred. The shepherdess prays, and the fairy appears (327). The fairy makes the bars disappears; they thank her and climb out of the window (362). They climb a rope ladder down the castle wall and reach their horse (391). The castle (a model) engulfed in smoke and flames (414). Back at their own castle, the Prince is received by the King and Queen. He tells them about the shepherdess, and the King blesses them both (449). A tableau depicting the fairy presiding over the couple, with the King, Queen and courtiers in attendance, and a large number of other fairies, against a background of clouds (458). Dissolve to the grandmother finishing her story and the mother returning (466ft)".

Sometimes, the supernatural element may even disappear altogether, giving way to a purely psychological dimension. This happens, for instance, in the 1911 *Mendiant d'amour* (mentioned earlier – see 4.2.3.), which tells the story of a modest employee who is in love with a colleague, a beautiful and unapproachable secretary. After he has been stood up, the employee falls seriously ill, and, shortly before dying, he has a vision of the scene of the appointment, where, this time, the secretary does join him and goes for a walk with him. This vision has none of the features of the magical and supernatural illusion, but, instead, emphasises the emotional aspect of the story. This is not a fantastical apparition aimed at producing a spectacular effect; on the contrary, it is the visualisation of a consolatory fantasy, thanks to which the poor employee dies more contentedly.

This also happens in *Pauvre mère* (1906), discussed in the previous chapter.[54] After her daughter's death, a mother is so haunted by her memory that she eventually dies of grief. The image of the little girl appears to the woman three times, each by means of a superimposition, always employed not as a pretext for spectacle, but to evoke the subjectivity of the mother. In one of these visions, for example, the child appears to the woman in the place of a little girl playing in the park. This heartrending apparition, instead of using the superimposition as an occasion for the exhibition of exceptional images, uses it as a device to emphasise the emotional intensity of the mother's state of mind. Thus, it suggests – and exploits – not a spectacle, but the character's psychology.[55]

In other cases, the narration of a supernatural event may exhibit modalities of representation that are integrated into a logic in which the apparition obeys specific canons. In this respect, the Pathé film *Jeanne d'Arc* is extremely interesting. Here Joan's hearing of voices is presented as a supernatural event. These voices, though, are represented by the apparition of Saint Michael, who talks to Joan while appearing behind her, therefore out of the range of her look. In this way, the spectator sees what Joan can only hear: the apparition of Saint Michael, represented in iconic form for the benefit of the audience, is uniquely visible to that audience. The appearance of the Saint thus personifies the visual source of the voices which are only *heard* by Joan. And the apparition of a voice

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[54] Regarding the distinction made at the beginning of this chapter, between the representation of the gaze and the expression of subjectivity, a film such as *Pauvre mère* is of great interest, because it exhibits, both point-of-view shots such as the one of the little girl looking down from the window, as well as visualisations of mental images, such as the ones the mother has because she cannot accept the idea of having lost her daughter and "sees" her everywhere.

[55] See Abel (1994: 135-6), also for what in *Pauvre mère* involves domestic and family melodrama, addressing a specifically female spectator. See also footnote 41 in chapter 4.

is emancipated from the involvement of the character's gaze (to a greater extent than had already occurred in *The Old Chorister*), playing solely to that of the spectator.[56] This is also the case with *La caduta di Troia* (Itala, 1911), in which Paris seduces Helen with the help of Aphrodite, but the goddess, appearing in a superimposition, stands aside to show that she is seen only by the spectator, not by Helen and Paris. At the end, however, her transparent figure stretches out a veil and enfolds the pair; they immediately disappear and then reappear, in the following shot, inside a large and beautiful seashell.

This is how recollections and mental images, as well as visions and apparitions, dreams and hallucinations can integrate the logic of verisimilitude with the logic of spectacularity. While retaining their function as attractions – a function that is more or less highlighted in accordance with the different requirements of the plot – they give up their autonomy. They aid the development of a plot. They adapt their own manifestations to the requirements of the representation. And they are naturalised, becoming linearised and narrativised.

In addition, the inner gaze, like the gaze exhibited in optical instrument or keyhole films, changes in a direction which shapes its characteristics in such a way as to aid narration. Among other things, it encourages the development of a number of editing techniques which contribute to the linearisation process. It modifies the forms of vision featured during the first years of early cinema, in order to exhibit spectacular tricks aimed at the representation of a visionary subjectivity, until they become forms showing above all the introspective dimension of the gaze.

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[56] With respect to this film, Jost (1992: 271) and (1998: 70) speaks of the "curieuse position qu'occupent parfois les apparitions ou les rêves par rapport au sujet qui les subit" (curious position occupied sometimes by apparitions or dreams in relation to the characters undergoing them). Here, though, the position of St. Michael is in no way odd or accidental with respect to Joan's look; on the contrary, this is the only way that the film can clarify that Joan *is hearing* voices, though she *does not see* the angel who has appeared behind her. The direction of the characters' gaze, in the case of early cinema apparitions, is never accidental or irrelevant, and, on the contrary, operates in such a way as to signify what a character sees, as well as to signify to the spectator that the character is seeing. When, on the other hand, the character does not see – or does not look – it may be because he or she only hears (as in *Jeanne d'Arc*, and partly in *The Old Chorister*), or because the character is sleeping (in the later case the character will show, upon awakening, that he or she has seen something, in exactly the same place where the dream had appeared for the spectator). Or, it may be that the apparition relative to the character is exclusively inner, though this is a later use of the technique as well as being the rarest.

Over the years, the classical paradigm we are familiar with – several times evoked in this study – would codify these forms and techniques, bringing them to a figurative and diegetical dimension, developing various forms of mental images, flashback, flashforward and much more.

But that is a subject for further research.

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