

The power of a research tradition: prospects for progress in the study of film style

David Bordwell

If we take progress to mean an enlarging fund of empirical knowledge, few will doubt that film historians have made progress. We know much more about the history of cinema than our predecessors did. But historiographic progress involves more than amassing data. It also involves an increasing skill in formulating and solving problems; and this activity goes beyond empirical matters to conceptual ones. While the ultimate pay-off is usually empirical – that is, a wider or richer understanding of historical events – historians' conceptual schemes have guided concrete inquiry in productive directions.

What follows is an attempt to sketch how a research tradition developed in the study of film style. Within this tradition, three research programmes developed distinct conceptions of stylistic history. These programmes shared a sense of the essential story to be told, but they organized that story in ways which addressed different problems. In the process, they increased our understanding of how particular questions could be more profitably posed¹.

I take it that the overarching question addressed by this tradition goes something like this: What are the principal patterns of change and stability in the international history of style, and how may these be explained? This question immediately rules out

'chronicle' histories which aim only to record the flux of phenomena². It also rules out at least some versions of auteur history, in that these do not attempt to plot large-scale patterns of change or stability.

My concern is with the French and Anglo-American tradition of tracing the 'development' or 'evolution' of film style. This focus is not, I hope, damagingly narrow. The writers under consideration have had crucial influence on how film history has been written, and their concern with technique, 'film grammar', or 'film language' has left deep marks on how we conduct research and teach our students. It is also evidence for the vitality of a research tradition and its capacity to display progress in solving both empirical and conceptual problems.

The standard version: construction, consolidation and refinement

The research tradition I am considering rests upon

David Bordwell is Jacques Ledoux Professor of Film Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His most recent books are *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Harvard, 1993) and, with Kristin Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction* (McGraw-Hill, 1994). Please address correspondence c/o Department of Communication Arts, 821 University Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin 53706, USA.

one fairly stable, broadly accepted account of the international history of film style. I shall call this the Basic Story. Taking this only as far as the early 1930s, we can say that the Basic Story presents film style as developing from the recording of a pro-filmic event (either an actual occurrence or a staged event) through stages of elaboration of particular film techniques – cutting, closer framings, camera movement, lighting effects, and nuanced acting. In the course of the 1910s and 1920s, according to the Basic Story, these effects were refined. The coming of sound tempted filmmakers to forego the visual beauties of the silent era, but some filmmakers not only maintained a pictorial tradition but found inventive ways of handling the new sound cinema.

The Basic Story identifies particular nations and individuals as significant causal agents. Certain Western countries make distinctive innovations in technique, often through what Jasset, borrowing from art history, called national 'schools'³. It seems likely that the effects of World War I in dividing markets and distinguishing films by nationality – reflected, for example, in the film criticism of Louis Delluc – intensified the influence of this concept. Whatever the cause, the narrative in the Standard Version depends upon distinctions among nations: Italian epics are followed by American and Swedish features, which are followed by German Expressionism and *Kammerspiel*. In many book-length studies, the chapter layout is based upon this national scheme⁴.

The Basic Story also focuses on the work of individuals. By the end of the silent era, film journalism had identified the major *dramatis personae* of the tale⁵. A 1932 survey is characteristic: Méliès is 'the father of cinematic spectacle'; France benefited from the work of Linder, Feuillade and Cohl; American film is the creation of Griffith, Ince, DeMille, Sennett and Chaplin; and so on⁶.

The Basic Story became widely accepted by the early 1930s. In rough outline, it provides a chronology and a canon. It traces a course of events to be examined, explained and expanded upon. Any stretch is open to further exploration. In developing and diffusing the Basic Story, however, historians also proposed conceptual schemes which gave it a particular significance. They thus created what I shall call a Standard Version of the story, a research programme with specific theoretical commitments.

One such commitment centres on the idea that changes in film style yield a gradual enrichment of technical resources. The complementary concepts of geographical school and individual master, commonplace in art history since Vasari, enabled film historians to ascribe the accumulating contributions to particular causal agents and circumstances. A second theoretical commitment revolved around an underlying pattern which historians ascribed to the Basic Story's course of events. They argued that changes in film style could best be understood as revealing film's inherent aesthetic potential. The pattern governing changes in film style was a progress toward disclosure of film's distinctive, if not unique, aesthetic resources. As one observer put it: 'The evolution from the jerky beginnings to this grand climax [the 1930s cartoons of Disney] offers the fascinating spectacle of a new artistic medium gradually becoming conscious of its legitimate, that is, exclusive, possibilities and limitations'.⁷

According to this view, the earliest films were insufficiently artistic: the *actualités* were mere records of reality, while fictional films reproduced the conventions of theatre. A series of technical discoveries – closer framings, camera movements, various sorts of editing, the expressive use of setting and lighting – gradually revealed the resources of 'film language'. By the end of the 1920s, the Standard Version continues, the silent cinema had achieved its full aesthetic possibilities. These were abruptly cut short by the arrival of sound, a break in style which triggered a reversion to film's 'theatrical' mode and a sudden loss of visual values. A few imaginative creators (Lang, Clair, Lubitsch, Mamoulian, Eisenstein, Disney, *et al.*) pointed the way toward a true audio-visual art. Henceforth the problem would be that of finding a style appropriate to the mature sound cinema.

While the overall causal dynamic is seldom explicit, it seems safe to say that according to the Standard Version stylistic change results from filmmakers' efforts to solve a particular problem. In the silent era, the creative filmmaker's task is to reveal the aesthetic resources of the medium, either by finding new ways of telling stories more clearly or engagingly, or by pure experimentation independent of narrative demands. The accumulated contributions of national schools and individual artists yield a 'cinematic language' which is visible

both in mainstream commercial products and in more avant-gardé works.

An adequate history of the emergence of the Standard Version remains to be written, but certainly its component ideas developed alongside the delineation of the Basic Story. For example, in Léon Moussinac's *Naissance du cinéma* (1925), a collection of his 1920–24 essays, he identifies the key works of film history, from *The Cheat* (1915) and *Broken Blossoms* (1919) to *Sylvester* (1923) and *L'Inhumaine* (1924), and singles out the major artists: Chaplin, Ince, Griffith, Gance, Stiller, Sjöström, Wiene, Pick, and others. Moussinac even provides a list of 'steps' in evolutionary progress, all of them canonized by journalism and ciné-clubs. He goes on to discuss major national schools (USA, Sweden, France, Germany) in more detail⁸. Guiding this re-telling of the Basic Story is Moussinac's insistence that

cinema must not be confounded with theatre. 'As an independent art, it has its own laws which remain to be discovered. Its meaning has been revealed little by little thanks to the slow efforts of a few good craftsmen'⁹.

The canon and chronology of the Basic Story were sketched in the silent era, so the Standard Version was developed to explain that course of events. The coming of sound thus posed some problems. What would now be the canonical works? What progress could be discerned after the coming of sound technology? How could sound be taken as



Fig. 1. Robert Brasillach, ca. 1939–40.

a further unfolding of the medium's distinctive artistic possibilities? Although I have already mentioned some common answers, it is instructive to examine one of the most influential synoptic histories to see how problems of stylistic continuity and change were worked out.

Published on the cinema's fortieth anniversary, Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach's *Histoire du cinéma* exploits the vantage point of 1935 in order to continue, even codify, central tendencies of the Standard Version. There is the division into national schools, the emphasis upon known creators,

and the proposition that the history of film is best understood as a search for the distinctive qualities of film as an art. Furthermore, Bardèche and Brasillach assert that it did not take long for filmmakers to discover the medium's 'language' (*langage*); what took time was the emergence of cinema as an independent mode of expression.

In particular, cinema had to overcome its theatrical tendencies. According to Bardèche and Brasillach, a lucky accident made the earliest cinema silent. Lacking spoken language, it was forced to become a visual spectacle, and this impelled artists to explore the resources of images and their juxtapositions. But the arrival of sound created a new dependence on the theatre, and this was a regression. In their 1935 edition, the authors leave open the prospect of a distinctive aesthetic for the sound cinema, but they suspect that intensified commercial pressures will make the creation of truly artistic work even more unlikely.

While encapsulating these long-standing ideas, Bardèche and Brasillach also use assumptions of the Standard Version in order to refine the Basic Story. Most significantly, they set out periods based upon the international development of film style. During the first period, until 1908 or so, the development of film technique was ruled by Méliès and his *féerie*. His 'technical audacity'¹⁰ revealed stop-motion, cutting, the dissolve, the double-exposure, and variable-speed filming. In the years 1908–18, as cinema became more respectable, filmmakers in several nations broke definitively with theatrical cinema and disclosed film's distinctive means. At the same time, intellectuals and artists became attracted to cinema.

Bardèche and Brasillach go on to assert that between 1919 and 1924, the cinema as an autonomous art was born. Several national schools (most prominently, the French avant-garde, the Scandinavians, the Germans, and the Hollywood directors) discovered how to use devices which belong to cinema alone. Editing, changes in camera angles, superimposition, and similar resources were systematically exploited so as to provoke emotion or suggest ideas. The masterpieces of the late 1910s and early 1920s furnish examples of 'a serious and complex art'¹¹.

The period 1924–29 is that of the 'classic' silent cinema, dominated by the masterworks of the

major producing countries and their accomplished directors. According to Bardèche and Brasillach, there was no significant progress during these years, but film style achieved stability. As a reaction against the self-conscious flourishes of the early 1920s, *Caligari's* sets and *La Roue's* rhythmic editing, filmmakers could make technique less noticeable. 'Henceforth, technical skill would be hidden, almost invisible'¹². By the time sound arrived, the silent film had virtually completed its stylistic development and had become confident enough of its means to flaunt them no longer.

Earlier formulations of the Basic Story cast it as a nation-by-nation survey, with periodization within countries based largely on external events such as the World War or the division of decades¹³. Bardèche and Brasillach instead propose a truly transnational stylistic history. In their invocation of the 'classic' period of the silent cinema, Bardèche and Brasillach also recall the common art-historical conception of classicism as a stable dynamic of creative forces, in which inventions are assimilated to an overall balance of form and function.

Sound disrupted this equilibrium. 'Five or six happy and triumphal years, brutally interrupted by the discovery which halted cinema on its royal road and instantly took back its fundamental laws and its aesthetic autonomy'¹⁴. The early auditory innovations were not taken up, and sound did not revolutionize film art. With few exceptions, the 'mature' talkie is merely a mundane silent film accompanied by spoken language, a species of filmed theatre.

It is significant that Bardèche and Brasillach's first edition appeared soon after Clair and others had revealed distinctive audio-visual possibilities in the sound cinema¹⁵. Moreover, the authors, each twenty-six years old upon publication of the *Histoire*, were too young to have seen most of the silent classics on initial release¹⁶. Children of the transitional years 1925–35, they were forced to address the question of how the history of film style was to be written after the coming of sound. Their answer in 1935 was to mark out a few distinctive creators (Vidor, Clair, Pabst) whose creative development had been assisted by sound. Generally, however, the authors deplore the money-hungry producers who had elevated profits over artistry. It is with some ambiguity that the two write: 'Even today, can one truly love this art without knowing it in the silent

days? We cannot separate those last years from the years of our youth ... We who witnessed the birth of an art may also have seen it die¹⁷.

Although the *Histoire* was seldom cited or translated¹⁸, that is probably because of the authors' political affiliations. When they wrote the book, they were already prominent right-wing intellectuals, and during the German occupation Brasillach became a notoriously enthusiastic collaborator¹⁹. Even so, for at least a decade the *Histoire* was the most prominent aesthetic history of the cinema in any language.

Once Bardèche and Brasillach had consolidated a Standard Version for the early sound era, it was possible for more painstaking historians to fill in details. The Standard Version had become a research programme guiding more local, fine-grained study. An outstanding example is the work of Georges Sadoul. A Surrealist and Communist, Sadoul stands as an ideological antithesis to Bardèche and Brasillach. Yet both his one-volume *Histoire mondiale du Cinéma* (1949) and his multi-volume *Histoire générale du Cinéma* (published 1948–54, with posthumous volumes in 1975) adhere rather closely to their period scheme²⁰. It is likely that his work popularized their periodization²¹. Naturally, many aspects of the Standard Version receive far more detailed treatment at Sadoul's hands. For instance, he refines the Bardèche/Brasillach conception of theatrical cinema by including not just Méliès but Capellani and Danish directors of melodramas. The Standard Version's search for the 'pioneers' development of 'film language' enables him to bring forward the Brighton school and Vitagraph. Sadoul also provides a sharply different explanatory perspective, relying on Marxist class analysis rather than his predecessors' emphasis on commercial pressures felt by artists. Both Sadoul and his rivals consider economic factors as important causes of stylistic stability or change, and both cast this in an art-versus-commerce framework. Bardèche and Brasillach, however, attribute economic pressures on film artists to a cadre of businessmen eager to make a fortune out of the new art. According to Sadoul, aesthetic factors are often tied to class interests. For example, he argues that cinema developed artistic ambitions in the 1910s because it addressed itself to the bourgeoisie²².

Still, Sadoul remains committed to the idea that film history is centrally about cinema's unfolding

aesthetic resources: 'The cinema, which is an industry, is also and first of all an art'²³. More generally, the 'problem-space' which he confronts is defined by the period boundaries and stylistic tendencies enunciated by Bardèche and Brasillach. These writers supplied a narrative schema which Sadoul refined in rich detail but did not fundamentally contest.

Building on twenty years of film journalism and chronicle histories, the young authors of *Histoire du cinéma* offered the Standard Version in a compact, compelling form. That would in turn become tested and refined in the work of Sadoul, Mitry and many later researchers²⁴.

Revisions and recastings: the dialectical programme

We can now see that a notion of progress based wholly on amassing more facts would miss the important role played by conceptual structures. There was the Basic Story itself, which needed to be tested, filled in, and updated. And there was the Standard Version, which made certain techniques salient, emphasized a progressive unfolding of the medium's potential, and saw change as a matter of accumulating resources. These ideas have fostered a robust research tradition, and many historians of film style have been content to follow Sadoul and Mitry in providing fine-grained local expansions and corrections of the Basic Story, often guided by one or another idea proposed by the Standard Version. But we can pick out at least two other significant research programmes within this tradition. They are not radical rethinkings of the Story; they often accept its canon and chronology. In many respects, they borrow from the Standard Version. Yet they also try to come to grips with difficulties bequeathed them by their predecessors. Consequently these programmes reorganize the patterns of change and stability identified in the Standard Version. They also offer some distinctly fresh causal accounts. Perhaps most notably, these research programmes seek to accommodate contemporary developments in film style, and this leads them to break with some key theoretical assumptions of the historians promoting the traditional account.

In 1943 the twenty-five-year-old André Bazin, writing for a student magazine, commented upon the waning of cinéphilie among young people. He

reminded his readers that the coming of sound had alienated intellectuals, and he traced this to the fact that they no longer had any influence over an increasingly commercial industry²⁵. Bazin does not mention Bardèche and Brasillach, but his indictment, coming several months after the publication of the 1943 revision of their *Histoire* (bearing the subtitle 'Édition définitive'), pointedly recalls their generation's despair at the talkie. And his charge that intellectuals of the last decade have displayed an 'absence of all effort at systematic thought in regard to the cinema'²⁶ does not exempt them.

It seems likely that the 1943 *Histoire* encapsulated the Standard Version for Bazin and his contemporaries. In particular, it bequeathes them a problem: What will be the proper style for the contemporary sound cinema? If film style ceased to develop around 1934, how can one write its history nearly a decade later?

In their 1943 update, Bardèche and Brasillach handle the problem through positing a period of stability within the first decade of talkies. They distinguish a 1929–33 phase, during which some filmmakers undertook auditory experiments. After 1933, avant-garde movements disappeared, and artists and intellectuals largely gave up the medium. The authors speculate that 1939, the threshold of the war, marked the end of this 'classicism of the "talkie"'²⁷.

Taking Hollywood as the paradigm case, Bardèche and Brasillach argue that the stylistic stability of the 1933–39 period was sustained by the routinized process of making a talking film. In commercial filmmaking, the division of labour and the power of the producer make it unlikely that a director will be able to impose a personal style upon the film. Thus the chief development of American sound cinema lies in its genres and cycles; repetition and variation of story have replaced stylistic innovation.

Bazin's 1943 essays accept the commonplace that sound cinema had brought about a new realism and a concomitant absence of stylistic innovation. 'The curve of [cinema's] stylistic evolution already shows a downward path'²⁸. But from 1945 he would begin to mount an alternative version of the Basic Story. This version, which we might call the Dialectical one, would counter certain aspects of the Standard Version and offer a far more optimistic account of cinema's stylistic 'evolution'.

Bazin of course wrote no history of film on the scale of Bardèche and Brasillach's synoptic treatise. His most wide-ranging essay on stylistic history, 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema', was published only at the end of his life. But this essay was built out of shorter articles published in 1951, 1952, and 1955²⁹. His late 1940s writings on Welles and Wyler constitute further pieces of an overall argument about the history of film style. The contours of that argument are by now familiar, but some aspects take on a fresh significance when set into the context of the dominance of the Standard Version.

Bazin's revision starts from the idea that the Basic Story includes not one evolutionary trend but rather two. One tendency, in accord with the aesthetic program of the Standard Version, traces the ways in which cinema has sought to break free of photographic realism. By manipulation of the image and by abstract montage, the national schools of the 1920s exemplified a 'faith in the image'³⁰. But there was another tendency, one which stretched back to the early *tableau* cinema and which emerged in the work of Flaherty, Murnau and other masters of the mature silent cinema. This tendency puts its faith in the camera's ability to record and reveal physical reality. The result was a realism of time and space which is no less artistic than the more obvious manipulations of expressionism and montage. The coming of sound destroyed the cinema of artifice but not all cinematic artistry.

In its first decade, sound cinema promoted a moderate realism of staging and cutting, continuing the tradition of analytical editing founded by Griffith and his contemporaries. The 'invisible découpage' seen in all countries' films of the mid-1930s respected real space and made the celebrated montage techniques of the silent era seem overwrought³¹. The 'theatricality' despised by the Standard Version was in fact a reasonable halfway house between the excesses of silent stylization and the more realistic cinema to come. The stabilization of Hollywood genres and the perfecting of a harmony between sound and image created a 'classical' equilibrium.

Realistic in its portrayal of spatial relations, classical découpage nonetheless was obliged to distort real time, creating a more 'intellectual and abstract' rhythm³². This drawback was overcome by



Fig. 2. *Citizen Kane* (RKO, 1941).

means of a 'dialectical step forward in the history of film language'³³. That step was taken by Renoir in such films as *La règle du jeu* (1939), by Welles in *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), by Wyler in *The Little Foxes* (1941) and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), and by Neorealist directors in *Paisà* (1946), *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), and *La Terra Trema* (1948). As is well-known, Bazin identifies this new phase with certain technical devices, particularly the long take and the shot in depth, which preserve both spatial and temporal continuity. The Standard Version had all but ignored these techniques.

Bazin goes beyond merely itemizing these devices and seeks to account for their contextual uses. To Sadoul's claim that these techniques were already known in cinema's silent days³⁴, Bazin replies that their current use involves new features and functions. The depth staging in early cinema predated the arrival of analytical editing. In the primitive period, cutting served to link spaces, not to break a scene into closer views. But with the arrival of analytical cutting, deep-focus camerawork gave way to selective focus, which was the most effective way to direct the viewer's attention within close shots. Whereas the depth of the primitive *tableau* could not reflect post-Griffith principles of guiding the specta-

tor's attention, the deep-focus of the 1940s assimilated the principles of classical cutting.

Bazin would soon broaden this account to allow for Renoir's sweeping camera movements and bustling frame entrances and exits, as well as some Italians' reliance on *plans-séquences*. These are all part of a 'vast geological displacement' in film language³⁵. Bazin's discussion of Welles provides the most detailed views of how this displacement worked, and a key example is the scene of Susan's suicide in *Citizen Kane*.

A 1930s *découpage*-based director would cut from Kane outside Susan's room, banging on the door, to Susan gasping in bed, and then to the glass and bottle to allow us to infer that she has taken an overdose. But Welles puts all the elements into a single frame (Fig. 2).

Far from being ... a return to the 'static shot' employed in the early days of cinema by Méliès, Zecca and Feuillade, or else some rediscovery of filmed theatre, Welles' sequence shot is a decisive stage in the evolution of film language, which after having passed through the montage of the silent period and the *découpage* of the talkies, is now tending to revert to the static shot, but by a dialectical progress

Fig. 3. *The Best Years of Our Lives* (Goldwyn-RKO, 1946).



which incorporates all the discoveries of *découpage* into the realism of the sequence shot³⁶.

Elaborating on Bazin's account, we can imagine that a one-shot scene in the 1910s cinema might have put the bed in the middle ground, the doorway near the foreground (but still fairly distant from us), and the glass and bottle in a middle-ground or background plane. The staging would not necessarily stress the three elements as distinct. By contrast, the three striated zones of action which Welles provides serve as functional equivalents of the separate shots which a more orthodox director would provide. 'The fixed shot of *Citizen Kane* could be conceived only after the era of montage; Griffith's analysis had to reveal clearly the anatomy of presentation before Welles or Wyler, with a cameraman of Gregg Toland's class, could remodel the unity of the image much as a sculptor might do'³⁷.

Accepting the chronology and canon of the Basic Story, Bazin reorganizes it by means of a quasi-Hegelian account of the development of film style. The opposing strains of the 1920s, expressionism/montage and realism, find a temporary synthesis in 1930s classical cutting. But this synthesis is unstable, and its opposing tendencies – the prin-

ciples of *découpage* versus the narrative-based urge to respect real time – yield a new synthesis in the deep-focus long take of Welles. Bazin goes even further, suggesting that within *Citizen Kane* itself Welles mixes long takes which offer 'crystallizations' of dramatic time with montage sequences which generate a more abstract duration. Welles thus creates a 'dialectic of the plot [*dialectique du récit*]'³⁸. Now the time-abstracting qualities of editing find contextually appropriate functions.

Bazin also insists that in certain directors this 'geological displacement' has far-reaching aesthetic consequences. The single shot can present varying centres of interest, which can increase tensions among areas of the frame and yield a greater 'density' of performance. Bazin's famous discussion of a climactic scene in the bar and grill in *The Best Years of Our Lives* shows that the scale of planes is in inverse ratio to the significance of the action taking place on them. Here Homer's piano-playing in the foreground furnishes a 'diversionary action' in tension with the scene's crux, the phone call which Fred makes in the distant booth (Fig. 3)³⁹. Similarly, Bazin shows that the same principle can obtain when the depth is exploited much less vigorously. Fanny's breakdown at the kitchen table in *The Magnificent Ambersons* also exploits a 'pretext action', George's prattle as he wolfs down her cooking,

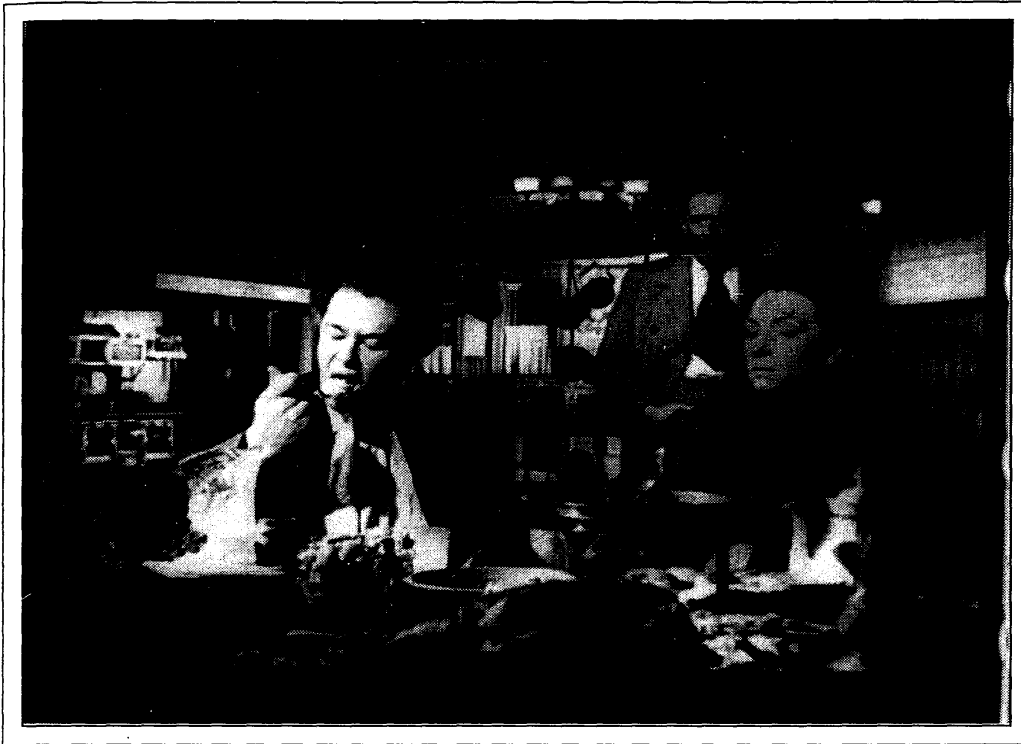


Fig. 4. *The Magnificent Ambersons* (RKO, 1942).

which distracts us from her spasm of distress. Now, however, the salient zones are not stacked in depth but spread across the frame (Fig. 4)⁴⁰. Renoir's panning camera in *La règle du jeu* creates a similar effect of 'lateral depth of field'⁴¹. In sum, the revolution in film language of the late 1930s and the 1940s demanded that the spectator cultivate viewing skills which go beyond those elicited by classical cutting. The viewer will have to scan the image, seek out salient points of interest, and integrate information into a total judgement about a scene.

In precision and attention to analytical context, Bazin's dialectical history of style marks a signal step beyond his predecessors. Furthermore, his synoptic scheme created a more discriminating and comprehensive version of the Basic Story. The international history of silent film now revolves around two problems. Either a filmmaker sought to overcome the realism of the medium by revealing aesthetic resources specific to it; or the filmmaker sought to use the medium's realism in order to create an art based on the recording and revealing of physical reality. For Bazin, the first turned out to be a false problem. With the coming of sound, the artifice of the 'high' silent era drew to its end, and the cinema's 'realistic vocation' was revealed even more fully, first in the triumph of classical *découpage* and then in the revolution wrought by Renoir and his successors.

Bazin thus extended the stylistic history of cinema beyond the dead end posited by the Standard Version.

In doing so, Bazin neatly suggests a solution to the problem that vexed the Standard Version as he knew it. What is the style suitable for post-1933 sound cinema? He replies that the mature sound cinema would progress through the 'revolution' of the long take, the shot in depth, and fluid camera movement (very different technical avenues from the 'creative use of sound' advocated in the early 1930s). Moreover, particular films may reveal a formal interaction among *découpage*, montage, and the new stylistic tendencies, with the very contrast becoming a source of fruitful aesthetic effects (as in *Kane*).

Bazin's research programme supplements the idea of stylistic progress as accumulated resources with a more dialectical dynamic of latent possibilities which come to delayed fulfilment. This move is made possible by extending the transnational generalizations already sketched in Bardèche and Brasillach's periodization. But whereas Bazin's predecessors emphasize national cultures as the wellsprings of film art⁴², he traces cinematic innovation to a deep-seated human impulse moving through the history of representation.

According to Bazin, an age-old 'dream of total

cinema', whereby a representation would be a perfect simulacrum of reality, is accompanied by a 'mummy complex', an ancient urge to freeze time. These transcultural psychological needs form the basis of the realistic impulse, as seen in all the arts, and supply the driving force behind stylistic change in film history. Bazin believes that while other arts present reality through symbols, cinema's photographic base permits it to provide a record of phenomenal events. Unlike still photography, cinema records time as well as space.

Bazin thus reverses the medium-specificity arguments of proponents of the Standard Version: what is central to cinema is its recording capacity, not its ability to create aesthetic transformations. Some filmmakers grasp cinema's essential vocation and assist the medium in developing toward its ultimate goal. The dialectical progress of the medium is asymptotic, moving ever closer to a perfect reproduction without ever having the prospect of achieving it. 'Total cinema' will never be achieved, but as a goal it guides those directors who understand that unlike other arts, cinema supplies an 'aesthetic of reality'.

The novelty of Bazin's account ought not to minimize the extent to which he drew upon concepts already circulating in his culture. Several of his points had already been made by Alexandre Astruc. Astruc's essays of 1945–48 posit 1939 as the apogee of the 'classical' period of cinema, distinguish between silent montage and sound *découpage*, declare that American cinema of the 1940s saw a renewal of film form, and stress that the sound cinema will be that which explores the theatrical and novelistic resources of the medium⁴³. Perhaps most strikingly, in a 1946 essay on *Citizen Kane* Alexandre Astruc described the American studio system as having achieved 'the most economical and transparent' technique possible, based on shot/reverse shot and unobtrusive camera movements. 'This technique may have lacked ambition, but it was faultless and sure. It would be still interesting today to analyse its finest details'⁴⁴.

Bazin's notions of realism in film style also owe something to Roger Leenhardt's *Esprit* essays of the 1930s⁴⁵. For example, consider Leenhardt's discussion of a camera movement following a man from a street into an office and tracking up to a close-up of a cheque as he signs it:

Here we have the joining of ten or twenty fixed shots within a single moving shot. The creation of depth and locale, usually accomplished through matching shots of different scales, is rendered here by camera movement. ... And the successive and selective quality of montage, the enlargement of various components of reality – the very essence of cinematic language – is obtained without break or elision⁴⁶.

From this it is only a short step to considering the depth shot as harbouring a tacit *découpage*. More overtly, Bazin's discovery of deep focus and the long take was almost certainly initiated through the self-conscious promotional efforts of Toland and Welles and the press coverage which *Citizen Kane* had received by the time the film premiered in Paris in 1946⁴⁷.

Bazin's recasting of the Basic Story, then, involved a reconfiguration of the canon and affinities among directors, as well as a proposal for new, long-range causes of stylistic change. He also rejected the aesthetic preferences of the Standard Version, elevating realism over the stylization prized by the silent-era aficionados. But his reorganization of affinities and problem-solving trends did not challenge other aspects of the Standard account. His protagonists – Murnau, Flaherty, Stroheim, Dreyer, Renoir – were already ensconced in the Pantheon.

There are also many congruences between the Bardèche/Brasillach account and Bazin's. His model of stylistic history fairly closely follows their period schedule. More significantly, the two authors had already posited an international 'classicism' at the end of the 1930s. As we have seen, they also traced the stylistic stability of American sound cinema to the emergence of genres and cycles. Both premises became points of departure for Bazin's arguments about depth of field. In addition, the 1943 edition of the *Histoire* highlighted Ford and Wyler as the outstanding American directors, particularly emphasizing *Stagecoach* (1939), *Dead End* (1937), *The Letter* (1940) and *The Little Foxes*. Even though Bardèche and Brasillach do not discuss the films' stylistic qualities, Bazin's generation was thus primed to see these works as salient.

Perhaps most strikingly, Bazin's basic antithesis between artifice and realism can be found in the epilogue to Bardèche and Brasillach's *Histoire*. They

posit two opposing tendencies traversing the history of the medium: 'to escape as far as possible from reality' and 'to accentuate the most realistic properties of the photographic image'⁴⁸. The former is exemplified by Méliès, Chaplin, *Caligari*, Clair and Disney; the latter by the Soviets, notably Eisenstein. It seems likely that this formulation, a commonplace today (recast in the textbooks' split between Méliès and Lumière, or formalism and realism), shaped subsequent thinking. Bazin probes the implications of this duality more subtly than did any of his predecessors, but it was put conspicuously on the horizon by the most notable French history of cinema.

Whereas the Standard Version has been taken up, amplified and revised extensively over sixty years, Bazin's Dialectical version has not been used in the same wholesale fashion. This is partly due to the rather fragmentary way in which it was assembled, in a series of essays over a decade and a half. But it goes without saying that pieces of this scheme have proven enormously influential, particularly on film criticism. Many of Bazin's insights have been assimilated into what we might call a Revised Standard Version. The innovations of Renoir, Welles, Wyler and the Neorealists have been absorbed as new contributions to the accumulated resources of film technique⁴⁹. Instead of taking up the Dialectical programme, either to refine it or extend it to new domains, historians have deployed Bazin's critical insights in order to extend the Basic Story into the 1940s and 1950s. Accordingly, the 'unfolding essence of the medium' component of the Standard account has been played down or completely dropped.

Revisions and recastings: the oppositional variant

If Bazin was right, then the Renoir-Welles-Neorealist line of influence ought to have continued into the 1950s and 1960s. Certainly in the work of many directors it did, and some Bazinians have argued that widescreen technology actively intensified the trend⁵⁰. But the Bazinian research programme was also confronted with the rise of postwar European 'modernist' cinema. Major films like *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), *A bout de souffle* (1960), *Nicht versöhnt* (1965), *Abschied von Gestern* (Yesterday Girl, Kluge, 1966), seemed to deviate both from classical *découpage* and from Bazinian realism,

displaying a new dependence on techniques suspiciously close to silent-era montage. How to write a history of style that would recognize that the 'realism' of the 1940s and early 1950s had been followed by a new stylization?

Bazin was dead by the time these films appeared, but the question he bequeathed his successors – how to accommodate and explain the postwar 'modernist' cinema – remained. Once more, a new model can be seen as an effort to tackle problems left unsolved by earlier historians, and to reconfigure the Basic Story accordingly.

The Basic Story distinguishes between a film-making practice which derives from popular culture and which appeals to a mass audience, and an avant-garde cinema tied to the fine arts and aiming at an educated elite. In what I shall call the Oppositional Version of the development of style, this duality becomes the primary organizing principle. On one hand we have the development of a normalized film style, epitomized in the Hollywood cinema. On the other hand we have alternative developments which oppose, challenge, or even subvert the standard style. Writing an international history of film style will then involve tracing each current's pattern of change and stability, as well as gauging reciprocal influences and conflicts between the traditions. Noël Burch's work offers the key exemplar of the Oppositional tendency. Although Burch has written no single synoptic history, his books on Japanese cinema and early cinema and his numerous articles on particular films and filmmakers cumulatively delineate a broad research programme. Throughout, his strategy has been to study the Western system from the vantage points of oppositional modes which 'denaturalize' the conventions of mainstream film style and which suggest other ways in which films might be made⁵¹. This comparative approach gives a fresh force to the effort to write an international history of style. It allows the historian not only to include the postwar efforts of Godard, Resnais and the like; it also allows the historian to reconfigure the Basic Story along new lines.

Burch takes the mainstream/avant-garde antithesis as an opposition between illusionism and modernism, a duality informing his theoretical book *Praxis du cinéma* (1969). Thanks to the insights of Brecht and Eisenstein, he writes in the introduction to the 1973 English-language edition, the historian is

now in a position to expose illusionist filmmaking and to examine the 'crest line' of work which contests that⁵². Although virtually all the crestline works are Basic-Story masterpieces, historians have not acknowledged their radical force. Instead of contributing to the development of mainstream 'film language', as the Standard Version has supposed, they have actually contested the illusionist cinema 'through a "deconstruction" and "subversion" of the dominant codes of representation and narrativity'⁵³. Study of this modernist tradition allows the historian to 'relativise and analyse [illusionism] for what it is: i.e. a *construction*'⁵⁴.

The illusionist cinema of Hollywood and most national film industries Burch calls the 'Institutional Mode of Representation' (IMR). Derived from nineteenth-century realism in literature and drama, the IMR works to create an intelligible narrative structure centering on character and promising self-sufficiency and closure. Stylistically, the IMR creates recognizable ('iconic') images and organizes them in a spatially and temporally linear fashion. From painting the films borrow techniques of creating an illusion of three dimensions (what Burch, echoing Riegl, calls a 'haptic' space). The IMR also uses the techniques of editing to create a sense of spatial ubiquity and of a physical space oriented around the spectator's left and right. Along with the conventions of Renaissance perspective, these editing 'codes' serve to 'centre' the viewer, creating the illusion of being an all-knowing witness to events.

According to Burch, the IMR began to become consolidated during the decade after 1904. The tableau cinema gave way to the linkage of scenes (as in chase films) and alternating editing started to signal simultaneity. In the early 1910s, eyeline-match editing and the breakdown of a scene into details became more common. Progress was not easy or even, but somewhere between 1915 (*The Italian*, *The Cheat* and *The Birth of a Nation*) and 1917 (*A Girl's Folly*), the 'classical' cinema's visual system fell into place. By 1922, in Lang's *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler*, the system was displayed with a new economy and finesse. The arrival of synchronized sound capped the development of the IMR as an illusionistic style.

This process, Burch claims, had some long-range causes. Recasting Bazin's conception of 'total cinema' along class lines, he suggests that the bour-

geoisie dreamed of 'the Recreation of Reality ... a perfect illusion of the perceptual world'⁵⁵. Instead of a 'mummy complex', he calls this the 'Frankenstein' ideal, a specifically nineteenth-century notion of vanquishing death through creating life mechanically. Even more broadly, he hints that the drive toward such illusionism is part of the Western psyche, and that its logic can only be elucidated by psychoanalysis⁵⁶.

He offers a more concrete and short-term explanation of the IMR's development as well. The expansion and refinement of the IMR is tied to the growing power of the middle class within the cinematic institution. In Britain, the bourgeoisie's control over working-class leisure made it likely that middle-class entrepreneurs, often involved in lantern-show amusements, would become directors. In the US, the desire to cater to a middle-class market, first through vaudeville and then through the nickelodeons, hastened the rapid rise of the IMR at Biograph and Vitagraph. In France, the middle and upper strata avoided the cinema until around World War I, and so it maintained a tableau style longer, although this was somewhat 'linearized' by such middle-class talents as Feuillade and Jasset. Appealing to the composition of audiences, the origins of producers and directors, and the representational traditions which were deployed, Burch goes beyond Sadoul's rather sketchy Marxist analysis and makes class a central causal factor.

Against the IMR Burch sets a range of alternatives. Japanese cinema instantiates a rather different representational system⁵⁷. Its traditional arts were not pledged to illusionism. Rather, poetry, theatre, and graphic art of the Heian era (794–1186) flaunted the materiality of the medium and the 'play of the signifier', addressing a spectator who would not be absorbed into an imaginary world. When cinema came to Japan, it was immediately taken as a presentational art: the *katsuben* (*benshi*), a permanent fixture of silent screenings, provided a 'reading' of the image which blocked total immersion in the spectacle. The films themselves assimilated the IMR's codes only partially. Thus the films of the 'Golden Age' of 1930–45 often ignore the rules of Western *découpage* or, as in the works of Ozu and Mizoguchi, absorb Western conventions only to sabotage them. For instance, Ozu is said to break down diegetic space 'by systematically violating the rules



Figs. 5 & 6.
Seishun no yume imaizuko
(Where Now Are the
Dreams of Youth?,
Shochiku/Kamata, 1932),
directed by Yasujiro Ozu.



of eyeline-matching (the keystone of shot-reverse-shot) and raising pictorial flatness to a principle of *mise en scène*⁵⁸ (see Figs. 5 & 6.) As Japan became colonized by the West after World War II, most filmmakers adopted the IMR; only Kurosawa and a younger avant-garde generation self-consciously contested it.

In the Soviet Union, during the 1920s and early 1930s, some directors sought to harness the IMR to Soviet genres. Through various systems of disjunctive editing, guided by a materialist conception of representation and history, Pudovkin, Eisenstein, and Vertov all attacked the conception of a unified story world and the rules of correct matching.

They thereby tacitly subverted the IMR. In the West, the IMR has been opposed by a series of alternative works: *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928), *L'Argent* (1929), and other classics of the silent cinema; certain early sound films (*M* [1931], *Vampyr* [1932]); the postwar modernist cinema (works by Dreyer, Tati, Godard, Straub/Huillet, Akerman, et al.); and the experimental cinema (Brakhage, Snow, et al.). Although Burch's writings do not trace this modernist tradition itself, he presumes that the anomalous works of the 1950s and 1960s which would be a problem for the Dialectical tradition could be assimilated in the long-range trend of 'deconstruction'.

One important alternative style preceded the constitution of the IMR. The Primitive Mode of Representation (PMR) reigned until 1914, from the works of Méliès and Zecca to *Afgrunden* (1910) and *Fantômas* (1913–14). As an international style, it never became as refined as the IMR, but it did achieve a certain stability.

The PMR rested upon an 'autarchy' of the shot. Space was comparatively flat, with backgrounds often consisting of theatrical backdrops. The scenes remained 'external' to the spectator, since characters' interior states were rarely available, except through behaviour. Often the distant framing and crowded activity of the tableau required an active scanning; without cutting to emphasize narrative action, the whole frame became a playing area, and key bits of business would not necessarily be centred. A lecturer might be present in the theatre to explain the action, but then his voice further distanced the spectacle, making it impossible for the viewer to become imaginatively absorbed. When editing was used, it might well be non-standard for the IMR, as when in the rediscovered version of *The Life of an American Fireman* (1903), Porter repeats the same scene in two shots taken from different angles.

While Burch resists calling the PMR a 'populist' or 'proletarian' mode, he does trace some of its presentational strategies to circus, music-hall, fairs, and other working-class entertainment. And although he insists that he does not intend to see the avant-garde of any period as a return of the Primitive repressed, he does point out that some modernist films revert to strategies characteristic of the PMR. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* ('the first great modernist

film'⁵⁹) mixes a Primitive flatness with more illusionist movement in depth. The 'dialectical' form comments on the IMR by juxtaposing it with the pictorial system it sought to replace.

Burch finds stylistic change and stability in the PMR, the IMR, the Japanese cinema, and the Soviet cinema to be ultimately caused by class- and culture-based factors. But he seldom suggests any such explanations for the 'deconstructive' works of modernism. He may be assuming that the avant-garde tradition itself, bent on the critique of orthodoxy and a search for incessant novelty, furnishes a broad impulse for change. According to Burch, once the IMR was established in the late 1910s, 'successive modernist movements set about extending ... their 'de-constructive' critiques of those representational norms to the realm of film'⁶⁰.

Although I have called Bazin's schema dialectical, Burch is also at pains to stress the contradictions and regressions, the partial and transitory syntheses, to which stylistic history is subject. For instance, the PMR shot is not always or simply flat, as the deep perspectives of early *actualités* demonstrate. So Burch recasts the Lumière/Méliès dichotomy as an opposition between surface and depth, as if the PMR contained within itself the future tension between the PMR and the IMR⁶¹. According to Burch, the *Film d'Art* failed because it undertook the task of rendering middle-class theatrical representation in the Primitive style. Griffith and his followers knew better: in developing the 'non-theatrical', specifically cinematic codes of the IMR, they actually achieved the involvement and identification characteristic of bourgeois theatre.

The search for tensions and contradictions also characterizes Burch's analyses of individual works. Again and again a particular film sets two techniques or representational systems into conflict. Porter's *Life of an American Fireman* is said to exploit new cutting methods while clinging to the Primitive tableau, even at the cost of the nonlinear editing of the rescue. Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926) exemplifies a different contradiction: in seeking to make a scene maximally 'readable', Pudovkin fragments it into many discrete close-ups; but this very fragmentation breaks down a sense of a consistent, encompassing story space. A passion for legibility leads to disorientation⁶². The tendency to find key films exhibiting a conflictual interaction of parameters carries forward

the 'organic dialectics' of film form which Burch set out in *Praxis du cinéma*.

Burch's work bears the traces of many contemporary forces, and not only the semiology and the *Tel quel* aesthetic which he acknowledges. Just as we can see Bazin's recasting of the Basic Story as derived from contemporary efforts to accommodate the breakthrough films of the 1940s, so we can treat Burch's Oppositional variant as seeking to introduce into cinema insights derived from postwar modernism in other arts. The growing influence of art criticism on thinking about avant-garde film made it more likely that film scholars would find the realism/modernism duality applicable to cinema. For instance, Burch's insistence that an interplay of flatness and depth constitutes a key feature of modernism probably owes something to the critical tradition arising from Clement Greenberg's influential essay 'Modernist Painting'⁶³.

Within film culture, the possibility of an Opposition-based history may have become apparent with the emergence of a self-conscious sense of the history of avant-garde film⁶⁴. Once scholars realized that cinema might well have been quite different, they were able to look at ordinary movies as strange and contingent things. From the standpoint of the experimental cinema, mainstream style could seem arbitrary, and some filmmakers of the 1960s suggested as much⁶⁵.

Despite his explicit desire to overturn traditional history, Burch does not repudiate the Basic Story's canonical works and auteurs. He accepts much of the Standard Version's periodization and many judgements about causality and influence⁶⁶. His Oppositional account also echoes Bazin, sometimes quite deliberately. Burch replies to Bazin's argument about 1940s deep-focus being significantly different from 'primitive' depth, maintaining that Feuillade, Gasnier, and others created an 'extreme primitive depth' which was rediscovered by Renoir, Welles and Wyler⁶⁷. More obliquely, some of Burch's key concerns were put on the agenda by Bazin. There is the 'myth of total cinema'; the depth/flatness issue; the comparative method treating classical *découpage* as a norm; the importance of the viewer's scanning the shot (for Bazin, in the work of deep-focus directors; for Burch, in the Primitive tableau); the tendency to see a film's style as a systematic mixture of alternative technical choices (compare

Bazin's interest in *Citizen Kane's* 'dialectic of the plot'); and even perhaps the idea of linearization⁶⁸. Burch's version of the Oppositional model has gained in breadth and nuance by incorporating earlier insights.

The Standard Version gained its authority in the 1920s and early 1930s, when intellectuals were trying to argue that cinema deserved aesthetic consideration⁶⁹. Bazin's Dialectical variant emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, when the French intelligentsia was strongly under the sway of Hegelian modes of thinking⁷⁰. The Oppositional programme came to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s, a period during which left-wing political theory inclined writers toward ideas of 'counter-cinema' and a tendency to propose taxonomies of films' ideological effects⁷¹. It is tempting to try to pull these schemes back to their origins and see each as necessarily limited by its moment. But to trace out an event's causes and context is not necessarily to reduce it to them. The successive refinements and recastings of the Basic Story have richly amplified and nuanced our understanding of the history of film style.

Prospects for progress

My survey of research programmes might seem to prove the old adage that while history may not repeat itself, historians repeat each other. But my aim has been more positive. The account I have sketched reminds us that no historian of style starts from scratch. In a process that resembles the activity of artistic change itself, each writer, no matter how sceptical or self-consciously revolutionary, builds upon inherited schemata⁷². The stories that each tells depend crucially on the stories that have been told before.

And these stories have affected our conception of film history in myriad ways. It seems apparent, for example, that Lewis Jacobs' *The Rise of the American Film* (1939), though devoted solely to US cinema, develops the Standard Version, particularly as mapped out in Bardèche and Brasillach⁷³. It is also likely that a key initiative in US film culture, the establishment of the Museum of Modern Art Circulating Film Program in the 1930s, is indebted to Bardèche and Brasillach's variant of the Standard Version⁷⁴. In turn, the 'MoMA canon' had a substantial effect on how film history was written in the US. Similarly, researchers such as Tom Gunning have

refined and amplified some of Burch's points concerning Primitive cinema⁷⁵.

The recastings offered by Bazin and Burch can be seen as testing the canon and chronology of the Basic Story. But the virtues of the three research programmes I have been outlining go beyond the accuracy of empirical claims. Our increasingly richer conceptions of film style itself owes a good deal to these competing research traditions. To read Moussinac or Bardèche and Brasillach today is to be reminded how gross were the stylistic categories available to them. Bazin, however, marks a new phase in our understanding of the resources of style. No previous historian had exposed the details of film technique with his patient care; his scrutiny of shots and editing is rivaled only by Eisenstein's writings on his own films. A general awareness of the conventions of orthodox *découpage* was growing in the mid-1940s⁷⁶, but Bazin's focus on the deviations from tradition enabled him to identify the 'classical' norms with great exactitude. Burch, a practicing filmmaker, was able to go still farther in this direction, nuancing our descriptions of editing, offscreen space, and other technical parameters. These historians have left us a rich vocabulary for noting and analysing the fine grain of film style.

Against any suspicion that these 'grand narratives' embody an impossible ideal, we can set the methodological principle that writing history can involve a progressive approximation to comparatively reliable knowledge. The ambitious sweep of the Standard Version, the Dialectical variant, and the Oppositional variant has provided points of departure for in-depth research. Such bold, often conjectural style-schemes prove very useful in unifying data and noticing patterns. All three research programmes have allowed historians of film style to achieve better approximations: asking sharper questions, posing more plausible answers. If this does not count as progress, it is hard to imagine what would.

I am not arguing that my four B's cannot be faulted; elsewhere I have criticized two of them⁷⁷. Nor would I insist that any one research project could not profitably learn from all three programmes. For instance, a minimal conception of accumulated technical resources seems indispensable for any stylistic history, even one of a dialectical or oppositional bent. It may well be that inquiry into a local question could benefit from combining insights of

two or more programmes. Or we might consider each of the three programmes as focusing exclusively on only one aspect of the historical process. Perhaps some stretches of stylistic history are most fruitfully handled from an Oppositional perspective, while others are better suited for the Dialectical account. Here we are close to Noël Carroll's suggestion that in any art, stylistic history can focus on processes of replication, amplification or repudiation⁷⁸.

Whatever their shortcomings, these programmes have allowed us to improve our knowledge. If the study of film style is undergoing something of a renaissance today, chiefly in the realm of early cinema studies, it may well be because it has a well-developed research tradition in which precise problems stand out clearly. Young scholars stand a chance of making a contribution when a tradition gives them something firm to improve on, or to supercede.

This tradition has shown, moreover, that the prospect of an international history of film style is no more utopian than those grand style-schemes which have guided research in the history of music and the visual arts; and in these domains such schemes have proven very fertile. In outline as well as in detail, studies of the international Baroque or Neoclassicism are probably as well-supported as any generalizations we have within contemporary humanistic inquiry.

And of course not every conjecture about the history of film style has been falsified. Through the play of assertion, contestation and revision, we have created a consensus about the most promising hypotheses for analysing and explaining how film style has developed around the world. This consensus, always open to confutation and correction, has benefited from those historians willing to think about change and stability on a grand scale.

I am grateful to Ben Brewster, Noël Carroll, Lea Jacobs, Vance Keypley and Kristin Thompson for suggestions and criticisms of earlier versions of this essay.

Notes

1. For purposes of this essay, I distinguish between a *research tradition*, which constitutes a broadly defined field of inquiry, an approximate agreement about the central problems of that field, and shared

methods of research. Thus the historical study of film style is defined by its object (change and stability in film technique over time), a core set of problems (about chronology, causality, influence, affinity and the like), and shared methods (of stylistic analysis). A research tradition can harbour many different, even conflicting, theories, or what I call *research programmes*. I borrow the term 'research tradition' from Larry Laudan, *Progress and Its Problems: Towards a Theory of Scientific Growth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), Chapter 3. I use the term 'research programme' rather than 'theory' to capture the sense that film historians, while certainly deploying conceptual structures, characteristically make empirical research central to their efforts.

Within research programmes, particular projects (or sub-programmes) can also be distinguished. For example, a scholar might focus on identifying at exactly what point crosscutting was introduced (as in Barry Salt's 'The Physician of the Castle' *Sight & Sound* 54, 4 (Autumn 1985): 284–284, an argument for the likelihood that the intercutting in this Pathé film influenced Griffith).

2. Early examples are Francesco Pasinetti, *Storia del cinema dalle origini a oggi* (Rome: Bianco e Nero, 1939) and Ove Brusendorff, *Filmen: Dens navne og historie* 3 vols. (Copenhagen: Universal-Forlaget, 1939–1940).
3. Victorin Jasset, 'Étude sur le mise-en-scène en cinématographie (1911)', reprinted in Marcel Lapiere, ed., *Anthologie du cinéma* (Paris: La Nouvelle Edition, 1946), 83–98. I am indebted to Ben Brewster for reminding me of this piece.
4. Some examples are Carl Vincent, *Histoire de l'art cinématographique* (Brussels: Trident, 1939); Pietro Bianchi and Franco Berutto, *Storia del cinema* (Milan: Garzanti, 1957); Lino Lionello Ghirardini, *Storia generale del cinema (1895–1959)* (Milan: Marzorati, 1959); Ulrich Gregor and Enno Patalas, *Geschichte des Films* (Gütersloh: Sigbert Mohn, 1962); and Octavio de Faria, *Pequena introdução a historia do cinema* (Sao Paulo: Martins, 1964).
5. An entertaining book-length example is *Film-Photos wie noch nie* (Cologne: König, 1929), in which texts and photographs identify not only major stars but major directors.
6. René Jeanne, 'Evolution artistique du cinématographique', in Jean-Georges Auriol et al., *Le Cinéma: Des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions du Cygne, 1932), 169–248.
7. Erwin Panofsky, 'Style and Medium in the Moving Pictures', in Daniel Talbot, ed., *Film: Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 24.
8. *Naissance du cinéma* (Paris: Povolosky, 1925),

called by Sadoul 'the first historical study of cinema for the 1914–1924 years', was soon followed by Moussinac's 1927 study of the Soviet cinema and his 1929 discussion of films which had appeared since the first volume. See *Le Cinéma soviétique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1928) and *Panoramique du cinéma* (Paris: Sans Pareil, 1929). These volumes, along with *Naissance du cinéma*, are collected in *L'Âge ingrat du cinéma* (Paris: Sagittaire, 1946). The citation from Sadoul comes from his introduction to the 1967 edition of this collection (Paris: Éditeurs français réunis), 12.

9. Moussinac, *Naissance du cinéma*, in *ibid.*, 32.
10. Maurice Bardèche Robert Brasillach, *Histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Denoël and Steele, 1935), 312.
11. *ibid.*, 235.
12. *ibid.*, 311.
13. Significant examples would be Georges Charensol, *Panorama du cinéma* (1930), and Paul Rotha, *The Film Till Now* (1930).
14. Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach, *Histoire du cinéma: Édition définitive illustrée de soixante et une photographies hors-texte* (Paris: Denoël, 1943), 174. Although this sentence does not appear in the 1935 edition, it is in keeping with the position articulated there. I cite it to suggest that the idea of aesthetic autonomy could still be central to the Standard Version in the early 1940s.
15. Clair wrote an introduction to the *Histoire* in Brasillach's collected works. He points out that the authors find the last years of the silent film and the first years of sound to be an era unparalleled in diversity and artistic invention. See 'Brasillach et le cinéma', in *Oeuvres complètes de Robert Brasillach*, annotated by Maurice Bardèche, Vol. X (Paris: Club de l'Honnête Homme, 1964), xi–xvi.
16. The authors claim in memoirs to have relied upon screenings in ciné-clubs and repertory theatres, interviews (notably with Méliès), special screenings arranged by Gaumont, and magazines such as *Ciné-Ciné pour tous*. For discussions of their research process, see Robert Brasillach, *Notre avant-guerre* (1941): in *Oeuvres complètes de Robert Brasillach*, annotated by Maurice Bardèche, Vol. VI (Paris: Club de l'honnête homme, 1955), 145–150; and Maurice Bardèche, preface to *Histoire du cinéma* in *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. X, 3–9; Bardèche claims that virtually all of the *Histoire* is Brasillach's work (7–8). In *Brasillach ... le maudit* (Paris: Denoël, 1989), Pierre Pellissier reports that Charensol's competing 1935 updating of *Panoramique du cinéma* bore a wrapper declaring: 'By a critic who has seen all the films he talks about' (p. 159).

17. *Histoire du cinéma*, 312.
18. So far as I know, the *Histoire* has been translated only into English, by Iris Barry under the title *The History of Motion Pictures* (New York: Norton, 1938). Barry excised a few portions of the French edition and wrote a postscript.
19. Brasillach, a novelist and literary critic, was a fascist sympathizer since the early 1930s. In 1941 he was nearly made Commissaire of the cinema, a post which would have given him control of the French film industry under the Occupation. He was executed for collaboration in 1945. A useful introduction to his career is William R. Tucker, *The Fascist Ego: A Political Biography of Robert Brasillach* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). Bardèche married Brasillach's sister and devoted a large portion of his energies after the war to sustaining a cult around his brother-in-law. He completed the 1948 edition of the *Histoire* and subsequently updated it. The 1943 edition of the *Histoire* contains several anti-Semitic remarks, as well as approving citations of Goebbels on national culture and an epilogue discussing fascism's role in rejuvenating an enervated bourgeois society (pp. 401–404). Most of this material is deleted from the 1948 edition, though some anti-Semitic asides remain. For a discussion of the fascist aspects of the first two editions of the *Histoire*, as well as an intriguing 1982 interview with Bardèche, see Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 142–188.
20. See Georges Sadoul, *Histoire d'un art: Le Cinéma des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 1949), 6. The periodization which Sadoul outlines here and elaborates in subsequent editions is somewhat at variance with the periods as delineated in the published volumes of the *Histoire générale du cinéma* (Paris: Denoël, 1946–75), but the congruences are clear enough. Bardèche and Brasillach identify 'Film's First Steps' as the period 1895–1908; Sadoul's *Histoire générale* finds the 'pioneering' period to lie in the years 1897–1909. Bardèche and Brasillach mark off a 'prewar' period of 1908–14, very close to Sadoul's (1909–14). Both sources agree that the war years 1914–18 constitute yet another period. Both also agree that 1919–29 constitutes the phase of the 'silent art' with Bardèche and Brasillach further breaking the decade into two phases.
21. Sadoul's one-volume history was translated into Spanish, Czech, Italian, Yugoslavian, German and Portuguese. Several writers follow Bardèche/Brasillach and Sadoul in breaking periods at about 1908 and 1918. The Spanish historian Carlos Fernandez Cuenca, for example, ends the first volume of his *Historia del cine* (Madrid: Afrodísio Aguado, 1948) with a consideration of 'The struggle for [Cinematic] Expression (1900–1908)'. The 1918 period division is also common, since the War is often believed to have marked American ascension in foreign markets and the beginning of distinctive national schools in France and Germany. See for example, René Jeanne and Charles Ford, *Histoire illustrée du cinéma* Vol. 1: *Le Cinéma muet* (Paris: Marabout, 1966).
22. Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma* Vol. III (*Le Cinéma devient un art: 1909–1920*), part 2 ('*La Première Guerre Mondiale*'), Paris: Denoël, 1952, 451–454.
23. Sadoul, *Histoire d'un art*, 111.
24. Jean Mitry's *Histoire du cinéma* Vols. 1–3 (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1968–73) varies scarcely at all from the periodization offered by his predecessors. He even follows Bardèche and Brasillach in marking the postwar period into two phases, 1919–23 and 1923–29.
25. André Bazin, 'Let's Rediscover Cinema!' in *French Cinema of the Occupation and Resistance: The Birth of a Critical Aesthetic*, trans. Stanley Hochman (New York: Ungar, 1981), 26.
26. André Bazin, 'For a Realistic Aesthetic', in *French Cinema of the Occupation and Resistance*, 36.
27. *Ibid.*, 369.
28. Bazin, 'Let's Rediscover Cinema!' 27.
29. The essays comprising 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema' (available in English in André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, ed. Hugh Gray [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967], pp. 23–40) are 'Pour en finir avec la profondeur de champ', *Cahiers du cinéma* No. 1 (April 1951): 17–23; 'Montage', in *Twenty Years of Cinema in Venice* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1952), pp. 359–377; and 'Le Découpage et son évolution', *L'Age nouveau* No. 93 (July 1955): 54–61. I shall make reference to these essays when they contain remarks not included in the later synthesis.
30. Bazin, 'Evolution of the Language of Cinema', 24.
31. Although some accounts of Bazin's theory counterpose 'editing' and *mise-en-scène* as exclusive alternatives, he actually follows his contemporaries in distinguishing two sorts of editing: the abstract 'montage' characteristic of the silent era and the *découpage* characteristic of the sound film. For writers of this period, *montage* often implied a constructive assembly of a meaningful totality out of discrete fragments, as in the 'montage of attractions' whereby Eisenstein generated an idea through the juxtaposition of spa-

- tially and intellectually disparate phenomena. By contrast, *découpage* implies 'scene dissection', a breakdown of a prior spatio-temporal whole into closer views. A sketchy but influential discussion along these lines is André Malraux's 1940 essay, *Esquisse d'une psychologie du cinéma* (rept. Cannes: XXXe Anniversaire du Festival International du Film, 1976). The French rendering of a Pudovkin essay, 'Le montage et le son', *Le Magasin du spectacle* No. 1 (April 1946): pp. 8–20) seems to make use of the distinction. Simultaneously, of course, *montage* remained a term for cinematic editing in general, as when Sadoul writes that in *Grandma's Reading Glass* 'the alteration of close-up and long shots in the same scene is the principle of *découpage*. Smith thereby created the first true editing [montage]' (*Histoire d'un art*, p. 40). Significantly, in his introduction to *Praxis du cinéma* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), Noël Burch pushes the idea of *découpage* somewhat closer to that of montage: 'From a formal point of view, a film is a succession of slices of time and slices of space ... Two partial *découpages* (in space and time) are joined in a single *découpage*' (pp. 12–13).
32. Bazin, 'Montage', 376.
 33. Bazin, 'Evolution of the Language of Cinema', 35.
 34. Sadoul's 1946 review called *Citizen Kane* 'an encyclopaedia of old techniques' and criticized Welles for excessive reliance on expressionistic silent-film devices ('Hypertrophie du cerveau', *Les lettres française* [5 July 1946]: 9). Throughout the late 1940s and the 1950s, in the face of Bazin's counter-arguments, Sadoul clung to his belief that Renoir's depth of field was a 'return to an old technique', while Welles' films 'revert for the most part to old fashions or devices' (*Historie d'un art*, 270, 327). Sadoul was fond of pointing out that Lumière's *Arrivée d'un Train* (1895) contains a great deal of depth of field (*Ibid.*, 20).
 35. Bazin, 'Le découpage et son évolution': 58.
 36. André Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical View*, trans. Jonathan Rosenbaum (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 81–82. This is a translation of the 1972 French edition (Paris: Cerf), which is a revised version of the original 1950 edition (Paris: Chavane).
 37. Bazin, 'Montage', 373.
 38. André Bazin, 'William Wyler ou le janséniste de la mise en scène', in Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, Vol. 1: *Ontologie et langage* (Paris: Cerf, 1969), 163.
 39. Bazin, 'William Wyler', 166–169.
 40. Bazin, *Orson Welles*, 72–73.
 41. André Bazin, *Jean Renoir*, trans. W.W. Halsey II and William H. Simon (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 89.
 42. Before Bardèche and Brasillach, writers had been quite willing to inject chauvinism into their accounts of film history; witness, for example, the eagerness of Jean-Georges Auriol to dot Jeanne's account of film history ('L'Évolution artistique') with reminders that breakthroughs credited to other nations were actually made earlier by French directors (e.g. p. 210). The customary division into national cinemas led many writers to postulate national culture and character as key sources for film art. Bardèche and Brasillach follow this line in their 1935 version and make it even more central in the Occupation revision. For a discussion of their conception of national culture, see Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*, 144–158.
 43. See Alexandre Astruc, *Du stylo à la caméra ... et de la caméra au stylo* (Paris: Archipel, 1992), 255–349.
 44. 'L'Évolution du cinéma américain'. *Combat* (19 July 1946); rpt. *ibid.*, 291.
 45. Dudley Andrew discusses Bazin's debt to Leenhardt in *André Bazin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 30–33.
 46. Roger Leenhardt, 'La prise de vues', in *Chroniques de cinéma* (Paris: L'Étoile, 1986), 55. The original essay is from 1936.
 47. *Kane*'s stylistic and narrative innovations were announced most prominently in Sartre's essay, 'Citizen Kane', *L'Écran français* No. 5 (3 August 1945): 2–3, 15. Sartre saw the film in the United States, and his essay was published nearly a year before the film was available in Paris. After *Kane*'s Paris release in July 1946, *La Revue du Cinéma* energetically promoted Welles, printing extensive reviews of *Kane* and *Ambersons*, along with script extracts and portions from Roy Fowler's book on Welles' career. (See *La Revue du Cinéma* No. 1 [October 1946] and No. 3 [December 1946].) An article by Toland, illustrated by deep-focus stills from *Kane* and *The Little Foxes*, was published as 'L'Opérateur de prise de vues' in *Revue du Cinéma* No. 4 (January 1947): 16–24, before Bazin's own article on *Kane* appeared ('La Technique de Citizen Kane', *Les temps modernes* 2, 17 [1947]: 943–949). Here Bazin argues with Sartre's comments on the film's narration while also developing a discussion of the film's original uses of depth. All of French film culture knew of Welles's innovations, but only Bazin drew such far-reaching conclusions from them.
 48. Bardèche and Brasillach *Histoire du cinéma* (1935 ed.), 394.

49. In the 1948 edition of *Histoire du cinéma*, Bardèche and Brasillach discuss depth of field and the long take as major discoveries of 1940s cinema; the text nonetheless claims that Welles' innovations had little influence on production, which retained the shooting methods standardized during the 1930s (*Histoire du cinéma* [Paris: André Martel, 1948], 437–438).
50. See my 'Mise-en-Scène Criticism and Widescreen Aesthetics'. *The Velvet Light Trap* No. 21 (Summer 1985): 118–25.
51. Burch describes his interest in 'alternatives to the Hollywood model' as arising from an interest in seeing them as 'possible models for radical film-practices in the capitalist West' (*In and Out of Synch: The Awakening of a Ciné-Dreamer* [Aldershot, England: Scolar, 1991], vii–viii).
52. Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Praeger, 1973), xix.
53. Noël Burch and Jorge Dana, 'Propositions', *Afterimage* No. 5 (Spring 1974): 42.
54. Noël Burch, 'Towards and Experimental Pedagogy', in *In and Out of Synch*, 98.
55. Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. and ed. Ben Brewster (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 6.
56. *Ibid.*, 267, 273.
57. The summary which follows is drawn principally from Burch's *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).
58. Burch, 'Towards an Experimental Pedagogy', 97.
59. Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, 183.
60. Noël Burch, 'Primitivism and Avant-Gardes: A Dialectical Approach', in *In and Out of Synch*, 160.
61. *Ibid.*, 173.
62. Burch, 'Film's Institutional Mode of Representation and the Soviet Response', in *In and Out of Synch*, 122–127.
63. See *Arts Yearbook* 4 (1961): 101–108.
64. Likely influences are the writings of Annette Michelson, particularly 'Film and the Radical Aspiration', *Film Culture* No. 42 (Fall 1966): 34–42, 136 (an essay dedicated to Burch), and of P. Adams Sitney, notably *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943–1978*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979; orig. ed. 1974). See Burch, *In and Out of Synch*, 186.
65. The most famous example is Stan Brakhage writing on ordinary cinema: 'Imagine an eye unruléd by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception' (Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, ed. P. Adams Sitney [New York: Film Culture, 1963] n. p.) Similarly, it seems likely that some of the interest in the 'experimental' qualities of primitive cinema is indebted to Ken Jacobs' *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* (1969), a 'Structural' reworking of a 1905 Biograph film.
66. Interestingly, the French title of *Life to Those Shadows* is *La Lucarne de l'infini: Naissance du langage cinématographique* (Paris: Nathan, 1991). The subtitle, perhaps ironically, recapitulates both the 'birth of cinema' metaphor and the idea of 'film language' found in the Standard Version.
67. Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, 173. See also 'Film's Institutional Mode of Representation', 120; and Burch and Dana, 'Propositions': 52.
68. In 1947 Bazin describes classical *découpage* in language close to Burch's: 'The plot [récit] thus analysed is recomposed on the screen according to a visual melodic line which joins all the twists of the action ... O minotaur, here is Ariadne's thread: *découpage*' ('La Technique du *Citizen Kane*': 945).
69. For a discussion of the ways in which this affected film theory, see Noël Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 20–30. It is not surprising that film historians modeled their work on orthodox art history and music history of their period. In many respects, for instance, Bardèche and Brasillach's book is similar to the 'appreciative' art history of Élie Faure.
70. For a discussion, see Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* trans. L. Scott-Fox and J.M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), Chapters 1 and 2.
71. Such a taxonomy is offered in Burch and Dana's 'Propositions': 46–48. The most influential taxonomy of this sort is Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni's 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism (1) [1969]', in *Screen Reader 1: Cinema/Ideology/Politics* (London: SEFT, 1977), 2: 11.
72. The process of schema and revision in the history of the visual arts has been discussed at length in E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).
73. For Jacobs, film art begins not with an American but with Méliès, the first director to indicate film's 'crea-

tive potentialities' and to use the medium 'as a means of personal expression' (*The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939], 22). After the creative innovations of Porter and Griffith, the film achieved a new status: by 1919, 'motion pictures had acquired all the characteristics of an art' (p. 225). For the next decade of the silent cinema, European national schools introduced technical innovations, such as the moving camera and montage, which the American film was obliged to confront. During the early years of talkies, a few directors exploited the creative possibilities of sound, but by the end of the 1930s, only a few directors appear to display individuality.

74. Iris Barry, curator of the Museum's Motion Picture Collection, translated the *Histoire*. A 1939 exhibition and film series, part of the Museum's tenth anniversary celebration, owes a good deal to the periodization of the Standard Version, via Bardèche and Brasillach and Lewis Jacobs, whose *The Rise of the American Film* was published in the same year. See Iris Barry, 'A Review of Film History in a Cycle of 70 Films', *Art in Our Time: An Exhibition to Celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of the Museum of Modern Art and the Opening of Its New Building Held at the Time of the New York World's Fair* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1939), 335–348.
75. In *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), Tom Gunning

argues that far from escaping from 'theatricality', Griffith's stylistic innovations achieved a closer approximation to the theatrical ideal than could be achieved in the *Film d'art* (pp. 35–40). Similarly, Gunning treats Griffith as a 'Janus-headed' figure (p. 293), not only facing toward the classical cinema but also back to 'primitive' procedures, as Burch claims Porter does. For Gunning, the Griffith films are 'rich contradictory objects' (p. 296). Burch and Gunning acknowledge each other's assistance.

76. There is a surprisingly detailed discussion of classical *découpage* in Renato May, *Il linguaggio del film* (Milan: Poligono, 1947), 67–133. See also the writings of Alexandre Astruc discussed above.
77. On Bazin, see *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 98–103 and *passim*, and 'Mizoguchi and the Evolution of Film Language', in Stephen Heath and Patricia Mellencamp, eds., *Cinema and Language* (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1983), 107–117. On Burch, see my review of *To the Distant Observer*, *Wide Angle* 3,4 (1980): 70–73, and *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), *passim*.
78. See Noël Carroll, 'Film History and Film Theory: An Outline for an Institutional History of Film', *Film Reader* No. 4 (1979): 81–96.