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LES SPECTATEURS AU DÉBUT DU CINÉMA

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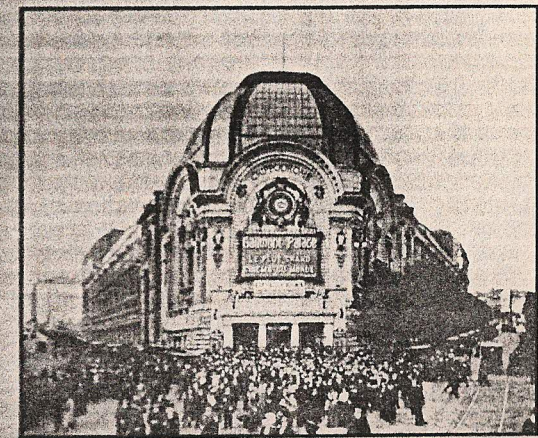
EARLY CINEMA AUDIENCES/LES SPECTATEURS AU DÉBUT DU CINÉMA

No. 11

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REVUE DE THÉORIE LE L'IMAGE ET DU SON  
A JOURNAL OF THEORY ON IMAGE AND SOUND

## EARLY CINEMA AUDIENCES/ LES SPECTATEURS AU DÉBUT DU CINÉMA





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Cet article décrit les débuts d'une sphère publique adverse dans le cinéma allemand de l'époque wilhelminienne. Plusieurs éléments contribuent au développement de cette sphère: d'abord, le remplacement du public bourgeois par la "culture". La technologie, délaissée par la bourgeoisie, devient au cinéma non seulement une source de revenus mais aussi un lieu de rencontre des arts exclus par la culture dominante. Deuxièmement, le cinéma crée un nouveau public féminin. Le cinéma offre aux spectatrices pour la première fois une entrée autonome dans la sphère publique, ainsi que de nouvelles possibilités pour les actrices. Cet article souligne la liberté relative qu'offre le cinéma par rapport au théâtre. L'article suggère que le cinéma engage le public bourgeois d'une façon que le théâtre avait tenté, mais n'avait jamais réussi. Les "dramas filmiques" du cinéma allemand naissant ont réussi à introduire le deuxième sexe à la sphère publique, ainsi introduisant le privé et l'intime au discours public. Bien entendu, cette tendance a déclenché une opposition. L'article montre que le développement esthétique de ce cinéma est marqué par une bataille sur l'entrée des femmes dans la sphère publique.

Elena Dagrada

## Through the Keyhole: Spectators and Matte Shots in Early Cinema

*... la création imaginaire ... est conditionnée en partie, non seulement dans les contenus, mais dans son fonctionnement même, par l'évolution des théories et des techniques qui modifient les rapports de l'homme avec son environnement et la représentation qu'il se fait de sa situation dans le monde.*

—Max Milner

Among the flickering views flowing from early cinema screens, an image recurs to the point of merging with its own shape: a matte, circular or keyhole-shaped, through which is displayed a teeming variety of objects. Preceding and following the appearance of this matted shape are astronomers, scientists, adventurers, urchins, barbers, concierges, maids, and pageboys—everyday life or imaginary characters, adults or children, but all inevitably voyeurs (and voyeuses<sup>1</sup>), intent on exercising with excitement and determination their "faculty of vision."

This faculty of vision—that is, the faculty to benefit from an organ of sight and obtain scopic pleasure through its use—is in my opinion a common denominator of the early cinema audience, an audience as different from today's at least as much as early cinema is different from today's cinema.

Early cinema was undoubtedly very different from cinema today. It belonged to an age that is culturally far removed from today's, an age in the midst of an authentic *perceptual revolution*.

The years between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, which witnessed the rise and affirmation of cinema, were indeed a period of great scientific and technological progress. This progress radically altered the individuals' relation to their surroundings and



the representation of their place in the world: The year 1895, which marked the official birth of the *cinématographe*, coincided with the discovery of Roentgen rays, to be soon followed by the invention of the wireless in 1899. And the preceding years were marked by the invention of the telephone and by the improvement and diffusion of aeronautics. All of these events were to revolutionize people's ordinary perception of the world. The telephone and the wireless deeply changed the perception of distance and of spatial relations, making near and accessible what had been perceived as remote. Air travel revolutionized the perception of space, now accessible and *visible* in every possible dimension. And X-rays made visible the interiors of volumes, most notably the human body, overcoming an insuperable barrier to vision.<sup>2</sup>

A contribution to this perceptual revolution was also provided by the invention of cinema, which in turn was to extend the borders of the look. Cinema itself originated from decades of research in at least two different but only apparently divergent fields, both aimed at exceeding the limits of human vision: the elaboration, on one hand, of a mechanism able to fix, decompose, and analyze the phases of human and animal movement; and, on the other hand, the elaboration of a mechanism able to recompose these phases and illusorily reproduce the perception of movement. In both cases, whether the purpose was scientific or spectacular, the spirit permeating this research strove to bring down the walls at the frontiers of the visible, overcoming the limits of ordinary perception.

In this context, where progress itself became a spectacle, early cinema happened to be a strange phenomenon halfway between an optical-scientific curiosity and a sideshow attraction. It borrowed themes and styles from other contemporary entertainment forms and made an attraction<sup>3</sup> of itself—the invention of the century—and of its magical capacity to render accessible to the human eye images made of luminous moving shadows.

The same can be said about the early cinema spectator, who was incorporated into the films as an "attraction" and whose differences from today's spectator are to be measured not only in terms of social and economic status or cultural background but also in terms of what constituted the spectator's universe, shaping that rich set of experiences, competencies, and expectations that semiotics calls the "encyclopedia" of an age.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of class, education, or nationality, early cinema spectators were deeply immersed in the air of perceptual revolution in progress. This atmosphere fed their imagination, making them eager for images and anxious to direct a rediscovered faculty of vision toward everything that progress had suddenly made accessible to their eyes.

Adequately examined, early films can inform us about the way early cinema solicited and addressed spectators and their faculty of vision. There are classical precedents for using artifacts to learn about their original

consumers. Philology and pragmatics have long sought the textual traces of intended audiences.<sup>5</sup> Philological semiotics, that is, pragmatics applied to texts belonging to a past culture or a culture different from our own, enable the scholar to reconstruct a reception situation that no longer exists and that can no longer be verified outside of the texts themselves. This reconstruction must be effected through language which, once its genuineness has been verified, becomes the evidence from which the scholar may reconstruct the past—and the spectator.

In this study, I want to consider early cinema philologically as a cultural phenomenon of the past whose spectators (their competencies and, in Eco's sense, their encyclopedia) totally differ from today's spectators. I will analyze the language of early films in order to discover where they present traces of the spectator to whom they were addressed. The linguistic forms investigated will deal with the representation of the look: First, the look at the camera, considered a taboo nowadays because it breaks diegetic illusion, but which in those days was a popular stage convention through which the character could easily address the audience; second, the point-of-view (POV) shot, today an element of narrative structure but in early cinema just a trick, an optical effect to reproduce the perceptual experience of the contemporary viewer.

This, then, will be a study of the spectator *in* (rather than *of*) early cinema—that is, an investigation into the way in which early cinema contains its own spectator in its linguistic form.

At some point in the teens (there is no specific date), the look at the camera became, in the fiction film, a universally acknowledged ban. It is, in fact, a look turned to the only point impracticable for the action, the point occupied by the camera. To address this point means to unmask it and reveal the artificial nature of cinematic fiction.<sup>6</sup> In early cinema, however, this prohibition did not exist, and the look at the camera was commonplace, not because of naïveté—as has long been held—but because the conditions motivating its banishment did not yet exist: the diegetic conception of camera position.

The look at the camera in early cinema can be of at least three different types. We may characterize the furtive glance of the absent-minded or curious passers-by, as the first—for example, the look of the voyager who gets off the train at La Ciotat station in *L'Arrivée d'un train* (Lumière, 1895). It is a casual glance, either uncertain or insisting, which transgresses nothing but good manners, as it was presumably considered rude, then as today, to stare at strangers.

Then there is the brazen look of those actors who, in the middle of a scene, ask the director (or a fellow actor) for instructions about what to do. It is a roguish look, much more widespread than one would imagine,<sup>7</sup>



denouncing nothing but improvisation, carelessness, and the unprofessionalism of this cinema that did not always have good reasons for being professional.

The third look, the one that I will discuss at length here, is the look of the actor in a scene who expressly addresses the audience in the theater: He greets the spectators, comments on the events together with them, and dedicates the performance to them. It is a look that, unlike what would happen today, does not break any diegetic illusions; there were, in fact, no diegetic illusions to break. It does not evoke any hypothetical "off-screen" of the fiction but rather evokes the look of the spectator, whose presence and participation were intended to be an integral part of the performance.

Early cinema audiences were accustomed to this look because it was the same one that vaudeville actors addressed to them from popular stages. This was but one theatrical convention that was adopted by the filmed vaudeville act.<sup>8</sup> The formula called for a curtain in the background, often the same as the one on a real stage. The actor (artist, singer, dancer, juggler, prestidigitator) enters the scene, makes a bow toward the camera—that is, toward the spectators seated in the theater—performs his act, salutes again, and leaves the stage. In all of these cases the actor behaves as if the camera occupied the ideal position of a theater spectator, seated halfway from the stage and right in front of it. This ideal spectator does not move, does not approach the scene, does not change place.

The same effect occurred in films with a more elaborate narrative structure in which the actor played the part of a real character. Here too—exactly as in vaudeville—before, during, and after the performance the character addresses the camera (that is, the spectator seated in the theater) and comments, mimes, and underlines the events. Again, this is not because of lack of ingenuity or professional awkwardness, but on the contrary because of adherence to an acting technique as old as the *commedia dell'arte* and widely dispersed over the years on popular stages—the so-called "aside,"<sup>9</sup> a temporary suspension of the action during which the actor directly addresses the audience. The aside, which was still a prevalent stage convention, accounts for most of the looks at the camera in early cinema. This look at the camera is very important in the economy of early cinema, because it is the means of assigning the spectator a place in the film. This should not be underestimated, because it conditioned both acting and filming techniques for many years.

Acting techniques were influenced because the camera aside is based on the mutual recognition of the actor's and spectator's presence. Thus, the actor is constantly aware of the spectator and of his participation, simulates his presence, and knows where to locate him—in the place of the camera. At the same time, the aside conditioned shooting techniques because the fixity of the spectator's place assigns the camera a place equally fixed (and frontal and total) for the canons of what was considered the ideal

visual position of the theater spectator.<sup>10</sup> The choice and organization of content were affected by the aside because in early cinema, assigning a place to the spectator meant, above all else, assigning her the best possible view of the events.

Camera position in early cinema was based on the need to present a series of views to the audience. These views, then, had to be as exhaustive as possible, requiring a camera position that was nearly always frontal in an effort to capture the totality of the scene. The camera position did not depend on diegetic needs but on the need to provide the audience with the best visual position. In early cinema, therefore, the camera's position was a way to predict and posit the audience. And it is for us, today, a clue for reconstructing the spectator of the time, eager for images and anxious to direct his faculty of vision toward a world that the perceptual revolution has made visible.

The image of the matte evoked above belongs to the so-called *keyhole film* genre.<sup>11</sup> This popular early cinema genre presents the image of a character intent on looking through something (usually optical lenses or keyholes) alternating with the image of the objects seen in the following pattern: A first shot shows the character displaying the instrument through which he or she is about to look to the camera (that is, toward the spectator in the theater). Then comes a shot of the objects observed, usually surrounded by a matte that simulates the form of the instrument through which the character is looking. A third shot shows the character stop watching and start commenting on what is seen by miming toward the camera with great excitement and eloquent gestures. This pattern, usually repeated, may vary slightly, but the alternating syntax is always respected.

Even from this brief description, it appears evident that this genre undoubtedly lays the foundations for a structure that would become the basis of the POV shot. In the future, however, the POV shot would presuppose a diegetic conception of camera position. During a POV shot, in fact, the camera symbolically assumes the role of a fictional character, thus projecting a diegetic look<sup>12</sup> onto the screen. But in early cinema, the diegetic conception of camera position did not exist, and in fact this position was presumed to be occupied by the spectator's look. For this reason, and despite appearances, keyhole films do not represent at this stage a fictional character's viewpoint, as one would be led to believe today; rather, they represent the spectator's look.

If we observe these films carefully, we realize that they restructure more or less explicitly the spectator's experience as an onlooker who, outside the cinema, at fairs, or at home, was accustomed to looking *through* something, whether through mutoscopes and kinetoscopes at peep shows, through magic lanterns, or any other kind of amusement based on this essentially voyeuristic practice so fashionable at the time.



The views that the characters on the screen show the spectator<sup>13</sup> were in many respects very similar to the views the spectator could see in the situations mentioned above. They provided a series of visual attractions, spectacular per se (because they were moving<sup>14</sup> or magnified), scarcely dramatized, and autonomous in relation to the syntagmatic continuity of the films in which they are set. Moreover, the subjects shown represent a sort of iconographic repertory of the time.<sup>15</sup> Many stereotypes of early keyhole films (as well as those of "facial expressions," travelogues, and erotic subjects) were also favorite magic-lantern subjects. Finally, the mode of exhibition depicted in the keyhole film was always the same and relied on an optical artifice or trick. Sometimes this conceit is introduced at the beginning, as for example in *Grandma's Reading Glass* (Smith, 1900), which begins with the image of a circular matte inside which we see a newspaper page. The scene is revealed as a trick (the reading glass) only in the subsequent shot.<sup>16</sup>

These films represent, in the matte shot, the visual experience of a spectator in the midst of a perceptual revolution and determined to exceed the ordinary limits of vision. How? By overcoming the limits imposed by distance, that is, by making visually near what is far—by breaking the limits imposed by dimensions, that is, by making visually big what would otherwise be too small to be seen. And by making visible the invisible. The most significant characteristic of these films may be their constant resort to the mediation of an instrument through which to overcome the invisible. At this stage of cinema history, the instrument is an extension of the character as much as the camera is an extension of the spectator's eye.<sup>17</sup>

It can be an optical instrument, like a telescope, when mediation is necessary to visualize things as distant as panoramas of exotic places (*Le Tour du monde d'un policier*, Pathé, 1906), Parisian rooftops (*Toto aréonaute*, Pathé, 1906; *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*), the open sea (*Un Drame dans les airs*, Pathé, 1904; *Aux bains de mer*) or a lady's ankle (*As Seen Through a Telescope*, Smith, 1900). Or like a microscope, the instrument magnifies things until they are made visible, as for example the fascinating mechanism of a ticking watch (*Grandma's Reading Glass*), invisible bacteria (*Le Déjeuner du savant*, Pathé, 1905; *Les Joyeux microbes*, Gaumont, 1909), the colors of a butterfly (*La Peine du talion*, Pathé, 1906), the wonders of the sky (*Le Rêve de l'astronome*, Pathé, date uncertain; *L'Eclipse de soleil en pleine lune*, Méliès, 1907; *Haley's Comet*, 1910), or small insects (*Spiders on a Web*, Smith, 1900; *The Unclean World*). Even an electric lamp can be used as such an instrument. In *Les Cartes lumineuses* (Pathé, 1905), a boy holds up a deck of cards to an *abat-jour* and as if by magic makes erotic images appear on them.

But the instrument can be much simpler, like a keyhole (or the glass overhanging the public bathroom doors in *La Fille de bain indiscreète*, Pathé, 1902), which allows the characters to look through physical and

material barriers and to have access to all that is secret—invisible and inaccessible by definition—hidden beyond thick walls or inside the human mind (*The Inquisitive Boots*, Hepworth, 1905; *Par le trou de la serrure*, Zecca, 1901; *L'Amour à tous les étages*, Zecca, 1902; *Through the Keyhole in the Door*, Biograph, 1900; *Un Coup d'oeil par étage*, Pathé, 1904; *A Search for Evidence*, Biograph, 1903).

The peculiar composition of the frames that characterize these views also confirms what has been said so far. None of them, in fact, corresponds to what one would really see through these instruments, or at that distance through simple keyholes. The size of the objects observed, or their position in regard to the camera angle, do not respect any rule of verisimilitude. Rather, these views are fixed, frontal, and total to provide the spectator with the best possible view of the events.

Again, the choice of the viewing point is that which is best for the audience (contrary to what will occur in the future) and *not* the best for a hypothetical "story." These views, although mediated by a character's look, do not yet represent any fictional viewpoint; they are there for an audience filled with wonder and excitement before the artifice of moving and magnified images, just like the characters on the screen who exhibit wonder and excitement before each of the observed views.

This tendency to break down the barriers of the visible does not dominate only these eloquent cases in which the look is represented.<sup>18</sup> Even when the mediation of the optical instrument is missing, or when the actor's look to simulate the spectator's presence on the other side of the lens is missing, early films are all dominated by the desire to go beyond the limits that circumscribe human existence and to witness and participate in modifying the habitual perceptual relations between people and their surroundings.

Whether they are trick films, actuality films, panoramas, Lumière's "documentary" views, or Méliès' visionary "fantasies," early cinema views were always frontal, total, and fixed—the better to place the world in front of the audience. Notwithstanding differences of class, income, education, culture, or nationality, the audience in the perceptual revolution found a commonly shared extension in the camera. This parallels the motivation underlying the research that contributed to the invention of cinema. Regardless of differences in nationality or intent, whether it was spectacular or scientific, conducted by the American Muybridge or by the European Marey, the experimenters shared a desire to make visible those movements that the human eye could not see—in short, to make visible the invisible.

The position assumed by the scientist who aimed Marey's *fusil photographique* (Figure 1) was the same as that assumed by the voyeur in *As Seen Through a Telescope* (Figure 2): A position of a look in waiting.



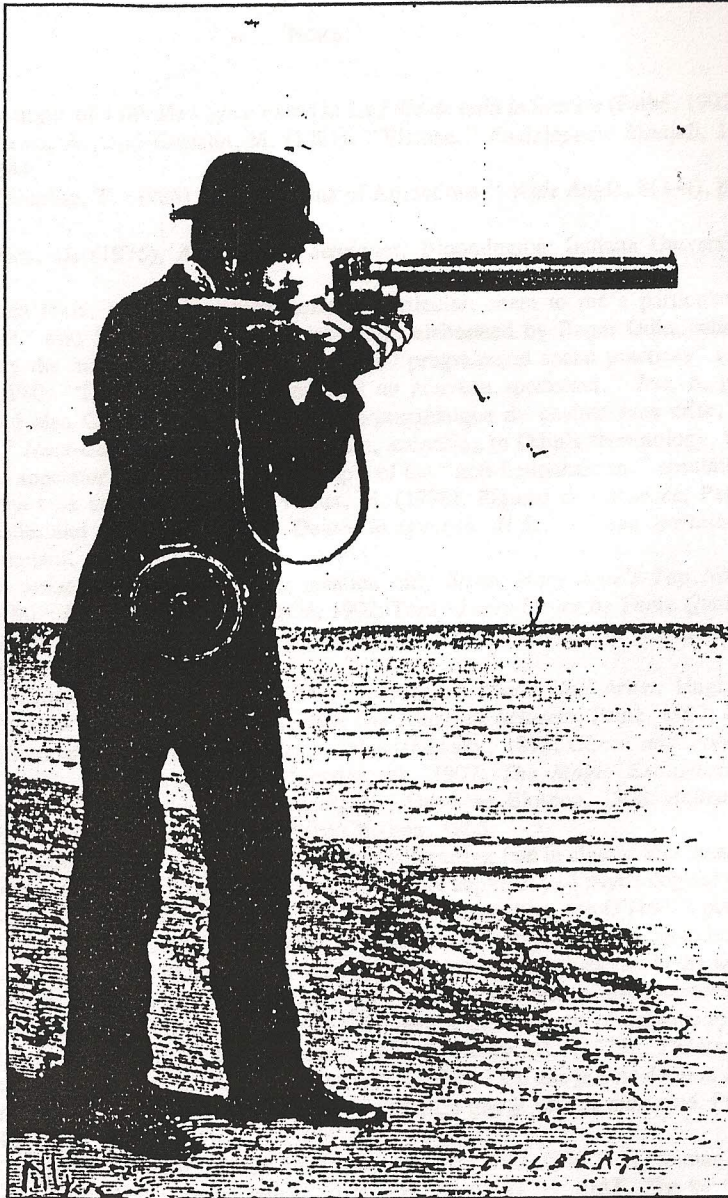


Figure 1.

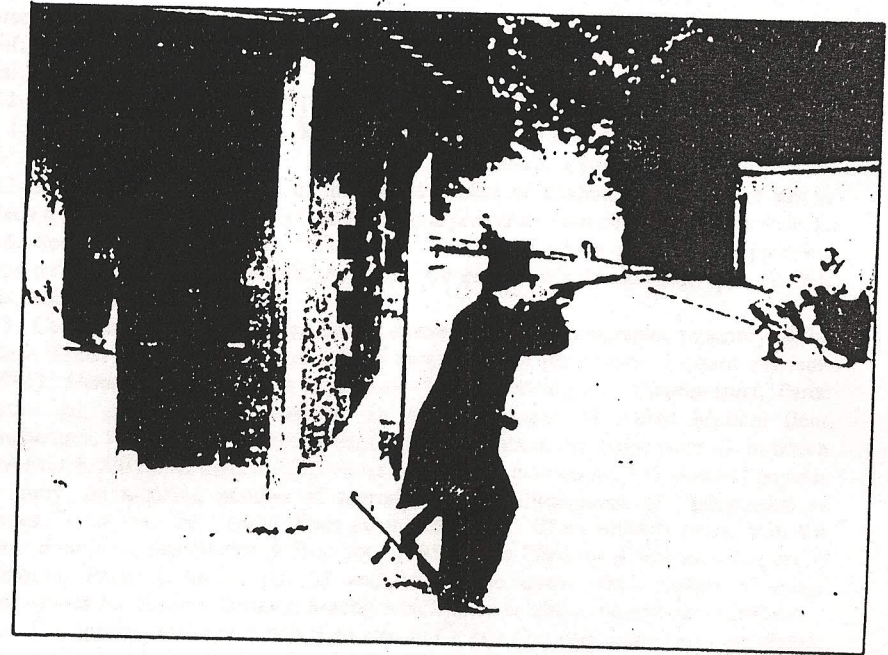


Figure 2.

Little does it matter whether the purpose is to study the movements of birds or to spy a young lady's ankle. It is the "iconophilist" and positivistic look of a spectator who believes he has gained access to the inaccessible by combining the human faculty of vision with science.

Later, as the cinema and its spectator changed, cinematic images would lose this characteristic of absolute faith in the possibility of making the world visible, and it would assume a relative value. Actors would stop simulating the spectator's presence and start simulating the spectator's absence instead. POV shots would assume differing characteristics as required by differing textual strategies (and no longer by the voracity of the early cinema spectator who wanted to see *everything*).<sup>19</sup> A shift would occur from the presentation of absolute and totalizing views to the presentation of differing, partial, and relative points of view.

Only the relation between the camera position and the spectator's eye (which derives from the laws of artificial perspectives and from apparatuses devised in accordance with these laws) would remain a constant determinant. But the rules that governed the relation radically changed. The spectators' faculty of vision would be supported by other sensory faculties so it would be no longer the world that presents itself to their eyes, it would be the spectators who go in search of the world.



## Notes

1. An example of a female voyeur exists in *La Fille de bain indiscreète* (Pathé, 1902).
2. Cf. Costa, A., and Brusatin, M. (1981), "Visione," *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, 14, pp. 1110-1144.
3. See Gunning, T. (1986), "The Cinema of Attractions," *Wide Angle*, 8(3-4), pp. 63-70.
4. Cf. Eco, U. (1975), *A Theory of Semiotics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
5. Ancient texts, and early cinema texts in particular, seem to me a particularly "good object" also for the semiopragmatics theory elaborated by Roger Odin, which aims to study the making and reading of films as "programmed social practices" (cf. Odin, R., 1980, "Du spectateur fictionnalisant au nouveau spectateur," *Iris*, 8, pp. 121-129; and also Odin, R., 1989, "La sémio-pragmatique du cinéma sans crise, ni désillusion," *Hors-Cadre*, 7, pp. 77-92). In fact, according to Odin's terminology, the early cinema spectator would be a fertile example of the "non-fictionnalisant" spectator.
6. For the look at the camera, see Vernet, M. (1988), *Figures de l'absence*, Paris: Ed. de l'Etoile; and Casetti, F. (1986), *Dentro lo sguardo—Il film e il suo spettatore*, Milano: Bompiani.
7. From among many titles, I will mention only *Sister Mary Jane's Top Note*, Hepworth, 1907; *Deshabillé féminin*, Pathé, 1902; *Topsy-Turvy Dance by Three Quaker Maidens*, Smith, 1902; *Two Clowns*, Smith, 1906; *Woman Draped in a Patterned Handkerchief*, Smith, 1908.
8. The examples of filmed vaudeville are numerous: *Music Hall Artist*, Hughes, 1898; *The Musical Eccentric*, Warwick, 1899; *Die Tanzende Schwein*, Pathé, 1907; *Die Springer*, Sklandanowsky, 1895; *Jongleur*, Sklandanowsky, 1895; *Clown and Police*, Hepworth, 1900; *La belle Miranda*, Messter, ca. 1907; *The Magic Extinguisher*, Williamson, 1901; *Die Berhunte Löenbändigerin*, Deutsche Bioscop, 1908; *Animated Cotton*, Urban, 1909; *Metempsychose*, Pathé/Chomon, 1905.
9. The "aside technique" has had a curiously contrasting fate in cinema and theater. Born in a comical and popular context, it reached a more sophisticated psychological and introspective status in modern bourgeois theater (in this connection, see O'Neill's plays, and Szondi, p. 1956, *Theorie des modernen Dramas*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp). In cinema, on the contrary, it retained its connection to its popular roots and survives still in the work of certain young Italian directors who draw on the national tradition of *avanspettacolo*.
10. According to the aesthetics of the *point-ici*, that is, the aesthetic of organizing the dramatic space in front of a fixed spectator. Cf. El-Nouty, H. (1978), *Théâtre et pré-cinéma*, Paris: Nizet, p. 55, and Gaudreault, A. (1988), "Ce que je vois de mon ciné . . . ou le regardant regardé," in Gaudreault, A. (Ed.) *Ce que je vois de mon ciné*, Paris: Klincksieck.
11. See Hagan, J. (1982), "Erotic Tendencies in Film 1900-1906," in Holman, R. (Ed.), *Cinema 1900-1906: An Analytical Study* (Vol. I), Bruxelles: FIAF. The keyhole genre was codified up to the point of generating stereotypes, like the one of the character looking *through* something—a keyhole, a hole in the wall, an optical instrument. In some films, this stereotype can be found alone (that is without showing a second shot

- representing the objects seen), just to produce humorous parodies of the keyhole genre itself: see *La Musique adoucit les moeurs*, Pathé, ca. 1914; *Les Locataires d'à coté*, E. Cohl, 1909.
12. Cf. Dagrada, E. (1986), "The Diegetic Look—Pragmatics of POV Shot," *Iris*, 7, pp. 111-124. See also Branigan, E. (1984), *Point of View in the Cinema*, Amsterdam & New York: Mouton; and Jost, F. (1987), *L'Oeil-Caméra*, Lyon: PUL.
13. For an in-depth analysis of the characteristics of keyhole films, see the essays collected in Gaudreault, A. (Ed.) (1988), *Ce que je vois de mon ciné*, Paris: Klincksieck.
14. See Dagrada, E. (1988), "Un regard indiscret—Le plan subjectif aux premiers temps du cinéma," in Gaudreault, A. (Ed.), *Ce que je vois de mon ciné* (pp. 19-26), Paris: Klincksieck.
15. Centuries of perceptual experiences converge in the iconographic repertory of the keyhole films. Many subjects come from magic lantern projections: Jacques Perriault ([1981], *Mémoires de l'homme et du son—Une archéologie de l'audiovisuel*, Paris: Flammarion, pp. 110-111) mentions an 1884 catalogue by Alfred Molteni (lens manufacturer, lecturer, and author of important works about the magic lantern), in which out of over 8,000 titles, there are 515 views of scientific astronomy, 175 views of popular astronomy, an amazing number of reproductions of illustrations of "géographie et voyages," and even 30 "applications du microscope." Other subjects come from the *théâtre d'ombres*: See Bordat & Boucrot ([1956], *Les Théâtres d'ombres—Histoire et techniques*, Paris: L'Arche, pp. 35 and 163), who quote whole scripts of erotic performances for shadow theaters, among which there is also a *Pierrot pornographe*.
16. The opening matte shot was used also in *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième*, Pathé, 1901, and in *Aux bains de mer*, Pathé 1906, which begins with the image of a circular matte (inside which we see a newspaper page). A trick is wonderfully unmasked in *The Unclean World* (Hepworth, 1903). While eating, a man finds some insects in his food and looks at them through a microscope; we then see the insects walking inside a circular matte, but soon a hand turns them upside down and winds them up with a key, revealing they are just mechanical toys. Appropriately, this film is classified as "Burlesque of the 'Unseen World': the Urban-Duncan Microbioscope" and parodies a series of scientific films produced by Urban in 1903 (*The Unseen World*) which represented microscope views of subjects like *Cheese Mites* and *Typhoid Bacteria*.
17. Nineteenth-century literature is also dominated by this tendency to exceed the limits of ordinary vision (and of the ordinary word). For an in-depth analysis of these techniques of visualization in fantastic literature, see Milner, M. (1982), *La Fantasmagorie—Essai sur l'optique fantastique*, Paris: PUF; for an analysis of the "desire of cinema" in American literature, see Fink, G. (1978), *I testimoni dell'immaginario*, Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.
18. There are many other examples of films representing "visual shocks" to the spectator, basing their effects on the coincidence between camera position and the spectator's look (see *The Big Swallow*, Williamson, 1901; *How it Feels to Be Run Over*, Hepworth, 1900; but also *Their First Snowball*, Urban, 1907; *Photograph Taken from an Area Window*, Smith, 1901). An example that has received little attention is *The Kiss in the Tunnel* (G.A. Smith, 1899—not to be confused with *The Kiss in the Tunnel/Cuddling in the Dark* by Bamforth), which has two shots filmed from the top of a running train while it enters and leaves a tunnel. It was a film "to be joined into tunnel portion of a



Phantom Ride" aimed at soliciting the visitors' imagination by showing them what they would see (and feel) if placed on a moving train.

19. The passage from the representation of views for the spectator to the representation of characters' look carries a deep structural modification of the keyhole film: On this issue, see Brewster, B. (1982), "A Scene at the 'Movies'," *Screen*, 23(2), pp. 4-15. In fact, while in the first case the views are always the best for the spectator, in the second case they become instead the best views for the story. An example: in *Don Juan Heiratet* (Duskes, 1909) a ladies' man is kidnapped by three women in order to prevent him from marrying. After having locked him in a room, the women look through the keyhole door, and the subsequent shot shows *them* the man (partially hidden by the keyhole matte) hanging from the chandelier. Frightened, the women enter the room, and the man, who was pretending, locks them in and escapes. Now, the shot representing the hanging man is not the best visual position from which the spectator can observe the scene; it is, rather, the best possible view for advancing the action. The spectator, in fact, knows very well that the man is feigning because a few shots before we have already seen him preparing the false suicide to cheat his warders. In short, the modern POV shot begins with the advent of the use of the character's look for narrative purposes.

*Les premiers publics de cinéma ont été fortement touchés par les extraordinaires développements scientifiques et technologiques de la fin du 19e siècle. L'univers visuel des premiers spectateurs de cinéma a été formé par les changements rapides causés par une véritable révolution de la perception. A l'aide de la philologie et de la pragmatique, le cinéma primitif peut être analysé comme phénomène historique qui porte encore les traces de son public d'origine. Cet article examine en particulier le regard vers la caméra et le regard à travers une matte. Dans le cinéma naissant il n'était pas tabou de regarder la caméra, car la position de la caméra n'avait pas encore pris un rôle diégétique. C'était plutôt la place du spectateur qui était désignée par le regard des personnages. L'effet de matte—par exemple dans les films à trou de serrure—alternait souvent avec des images de personnages qui regardent. A l'inverse des images qui représentent le point de vue d'un personnage fictif, ces prises de vue à matte représentent le regard du spectateur.*

### Commentary

David Bordwell

## A Case for Cognitivism: Further Reflections

Two contributions to IRIS No. 9 (Spring 1989) make reference to arguments I have made about cinema in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (hereafter *NiFF*) and in my essay in that issue ("A Case for Cognitivism," pp. 11-40; hereafter, "CfC"). In his Editorial, "Cognitivism: Quests and Questionings" (pp. 1-10; hereafter, "QQ"), Dudley Andrew discusses the papers he solicited for the issue. Marcia Butzel's "Paradigms for Cognitivism?: The Perception of Movement and Film Choreography" (pp. 105-117; hereafter "PFC?") discusses both my book and, curiously, my paper in the same issue.<sup>1</sup> I take this opportunity to make some brief comments on both pieces.

In general, "QQ" significantly misconstrues my arguments. In addition, it presents, in my opinion, an oversimplified account of cognitivism and film theory in general.

First, the misconstrual of my views. Andrew claims that I regard interpretation as being "untestable and often willfully idiosyncratic" (p. 6). I have never made this charge and do not believe it to be a valid one. Interpretations are tested and revised within the institutional practice of film criticism, and they are usually far from idiosyncratic, as I try to show in a recent study.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, I have never "insisted" (p. 6) that interpretation should "respect" what cognitive science conceives as "the phenomenal object of typical narration" (p. 6); in fact, I am at a loss to understand what that would entail.

Nor do I declare that cognitive theory is "insensitive to the 'affective' afterglow of narrative comprehension" (p. 6). I presume that Andrew is thinking of a remark made on p. 30 of *NiFF*:

This is not because I think that emotion is irrelevant to our experience of cinematic storytelling—far from it—but because I am concerned with the aspects of viewing that