

## CHAPTER 8

### FILM. NARRATING A STORY VISUALLY

#### > THE NARRATOR IN FILM

If, instead of with words, we choose to narrate a story by using images that flow through time, we segue from literature to film<sup>1</sup>. Together with literature, film forms the art that narrates a story in time and space<sup>2</sup>.

Any work of art, be it a painting or a dance, can be filmed. When the film is of a work of literature, then the result is what we usually call a movie, and that is the art we consider in this chapter. While arts such as dance and painting arise first in their own proper form, which can then be filmed, three arts in particular, animation, the movies and photography, can arise directly from exposing a film negative. Still, in these cases, we can distinguish the technology used from the art itself because each of them can be created by other means than filming. A work of animation can be made using computer graphics or any technology that allows figures to mutate through time. Literature itself is the alternative technique to film for narrating a story. It uses the meaning of words to evoke images rather than starting with images and having them evoke meanings. Painting (applying pigments to a canvas) is an alternative technique to photography for the purpose of creating a static image that abides in an external space that is however remote from us in the sense that we cannot enter into it.

In literature we see through the narrator's eyes. Through whose eyes do we see in a film? We may say as before "through the narrator's" meaning either the director's or the screenwriter's. The literal answer however is that we see through the eye of the camera. The camera stands in space where the narrator stood in literature, and records and interprets for us what is seen. As in literature, the camera can be placed exactly where a character stands in space, so that we can see through that character's eyes. There is also a difference. In literature, through self-description, the narrator can appear to us as one of the characters we see in a scene. The camera however cannot describe itself. If we see it, it turns into a lifeless object. It is like the difference between what our brain does and what our brain looks like. With it we are conscious of what is about it, but as an object the brain does not look anything like what consciousness sees.

#### > PERFORMANCE DRIFTS INTO THE PAST

The space shown on the movie screen is separate from our own space. We may try to approach it in order to walk around inside it, but before we can enter it we come up against a screen without any further depth which blocks our way. While a performed art, film is unusual because the performance does not happen either in our space or in our time. In animation, though its space was separate from ours, there is nothing about the nature of the events that occur within that space to indicate anything about its time relative to ours, we are free to assume that what we see occurs as we watch it. With the introduction of human characters in theatre a historical developed separate from the artistic time of the performance. With literature a narrator's time developed that was separate from both the historical and the artistic time. With film, performance too begins to retreat from the experience-phase of the work, and back towards the creation-phase. It will remain there

for good in the spatial arts, in which the steps taken to make the work observable to us are no longer retrievable from within our present experience of the work. In literature, though we noticed the removal in time of the voice of the narrator from the time being narrated, the performance still happened in our present because we used our voice as proxy for the narrator's. In film the entire performance has already *happened*. There is only one performance<sup>3</sup>, which we see only because it was recorded. The other temporal arts can be taped or recorded, but their essential form lies in the live performance. In film, there was just as vital a live performance as in the other temporal arts, but we see it only on recording. It is because the work depends on being recorded that, for the first time on the spectrum, the performance of necessity occurs at a different time than the experience of the work. It also means that *all* performances of a film will be objectively the same, any differences being subjective on our part. In literature differences will occur from performance to performance because of the voice and state of mind of the reader.

Thus the film actors' performances are more connected with the time of the creation of the film than with our experience of it. Gone is the one to one mapping in time, which applied earlier on the spectrum, between the live performance and the moments in our consciousness in experiencing the work. This has serious consequences. We are no longer privy to the *actual* flow of time during the performance, as experienced by the actors. We do not know the order in which the actors experienced the scenes while filming, or how many takes of the same scene they experienced. In the editing process omissions or additions may have occurred with the result that the temporal characteristics of the performance will have been altered. This is true of space too. We do not know whether the rest of a room, beyond what we can see of it, was missing on the film stage. We have only partial access to both the space and the time of the performance. The performance is no longer synonymous with the work of art as defined by our experience of it. All of this raises an ambiguity in the nature of performance itself. The reality of a work lies in our experience of it. In that context we have an aesthetic right to assume that the actors' performance is what we see now rather than what they may have experienced in the everyday world. But we cannot reconcile the two. By the spatial arts, the nature of the performance will become entirely unknown to us.

The film actors usually experience the creation of a film in various sessions spread out in time. This was also true for us as the performers (readers) in literature. We could read the book over several or more sessions without seriously fragmenting our experience of the wholeness of the work. This is an anticipation of the present condition in film, except that the fragmentation goes further in that no one performer ordinarily experiences the entire film until after it is recorded and edited for presentation. In film, there is also less of a distinction in film between rehearsal and performance than applied earlier in the temporal arts. There are various takes, most of which are recorded. As it is recorded, there is no way to know whether a given take will become part of the final work or remain in effect *just* a rehearsal. In music the best rendition of a piece may occur during a rehearsal and never made it to the performance. In film the best take can enter the one, permanent performance.

Who is the film performer performing for? In poetry it seems less someone else talking to us and more towards merging in identity with the person expressing themselves. Dance and theatre can be performed without an audience: the performers as a whole are sufficient audience. Literature was the first art that required an audience separate from the performer(s): the implied person to whom the narrator is talking, even though we sometimes assume the role of both. If the film never reaches

the movie houses, the work exists without its audience. This anticipates the condition in a spatial work of art that it exists in its proper form through time without anyone necessarily ever looking at it. There is nothing about the work that needs to start up in tandem with the arrival of the viewer.

## > THE MANIPULATION OF TIME THROUGH SPACE

In writing a symphony or a work of literature, a mental process of creation occurs in tandem with, or antecedent to, the writing down of a symbolic score or script. However, a film isn't truly created until the material film strip comes into existence, the negative exposed by the performance. In the previous arts, the material object of the score or book is not absolutely required in order for the work to be performed<sup>4</sup>. At most it could give only an indication or suggestion of what is to occur in performance (one could say it "narrated" the content and sequencing of the work). It could not however uniquely determine the content or exact timing of a performance. The material film strip *does* determine every detail of what we see in space and in time. The performance is not created by following it, it creates the performance for the viewer. It does not contain any instructions or suggestions about how to translate the work back into time from space. No instructions are needed, only a device, a projector. The translation is then automatic given the mechanism of the projector.

The film strip holds, in a *spatial* form, the entire temporal work. As with the scores of other temporal arts, the strip itself remains mute, a spatial object not yet in time, until the projector's light, analogous to the light of consciousness, is shone through it and the strip is moved in time across that light. In the previous arts, performers could proceed with or without a score, a script, or any spatial record of the work. Our experience of film however requires the material presence of a film strip passing through a projector. The strip *contains* the performance and it must continue to exist in its physical form between one experience of the film and the next. The strip's identity is thus closer to work itself than in any previous art. It is, however, not yet truly the work. What we see on the screen is not a film strip running through a projector. In the spatial arts, however, the material existence that is present with the work no longer requires translation back into time, it already is itself the work in the form in which we experience it. The material presence remains the work at *all* times, and performances have become no more than the different sessions we spend with the work.

In that the performance precedes our experience of the performance, and is held in the film strip, we may say that, with film, time has been *captured* by space. It also means that *time can be manipulated by space*. Changes in a composer's score or in a theatre script first had to be translated by performers into changes in our experience of the work. Changes to the film strip don't need to go any further in order to become changes in our experience. Space is now the surrogate for time. As we indicated in the previous chapter, in literature, time already could be manipulated *as if* it were space. In film this becomes literally true. Any desired manipulation to the temporal properties of the work can be made by manipulating the film strip in space. This "editing" *takes* time, but there is an indefinite amount of this type of time, because it is outside the artistic experience of the work. The ability of space to store the effects of time is becoming more important on the spectrum. By the spatial arts, the results of an entire process through time can be stored in a single unchanging spatial form.

Just as an inclined plane, a lever, or a pulley provide mechanical advantage when trying to lift an object in space, so, by analogy, in film space gives leverage or advantage over time<sup>5</sup>. It *takes* time

to do this "editing", just as we have to pull further on the pulley ropes than if one were lifting the same object without any mechanical advantage. However this time doesn't "count" in the final product. It is outside the flow of our experience of the film. Thus it does not matter how much time one invests in the editing. The only restraints are economic and the basic fact that eventually one desires to have a final product to view. What one cannot effect in real time and in real space, can be achieved in film by doing it first in space alone, by editing the film strip, and then adding back time through the projector. It is a testament to the close alliance of literature to film, that any exception to the normal way things transpire in the everyday world that can be achieved in film through editing and special effects, can also be achieved by the literary author simply through narrative description.

### > CAUSE AND EFFECT

The locations on the spectrum that are adjacent to the everyday reality are also the only places where we find arts that exists in two quite distinct forms: literature and film, and, painting and photography. It is as if the everyday reality exerts a pull on the two realities nearest it, distending them until film almost separates from literature and photography almost separates from painting.

Together with photography, film uses a technology (exposing a negative in a camera) that closely resembles the functioning of the human eye. Film is thus able to closely mimic the visual appearance of the everyday reality. It is also true that the arts nearest the everyday reality are the narrating arts. They possess the ability, if they choose, to describe anything at all. This includes not only works of all the other arts, but also the everyday reality. In chapter fourteen (the arts in combination) we further identify the propensity each art has to mimic the other arts that lie closest to it on the spectrum. In the case of film, it lies closest to the everyday reality. For all these reasons, it is not surprising that film can simulate the visual appearance of everyday reality.

If an event from the everyday reality is filmed and left unedited, it will be seen as occurring in accordance with the laws of cause and effect. The editor could though break up this single event into smaller events, reorder them, and so break up the original chain of cause and effect. If the event being filmed is one with which we are familiar from everyday life, then when watching the reordered version of it we will be aware that cause and effect has been altered. Yet, because of film's ability to seem lifelike, our interpretation of what we see is not so much that cause and effect has been violated, but that somehow a way has been found *within* the restrictions of causality to make things happen in a different way than is wonted. When an image in poetry evolves in a way that countermands cause and effect, we simply assume that cause and effect doesn't apply there. When a realistic looking image in film evolves in an equally improbable way, we assume cause and effect is still in force but redirected by some powerful new technology; that though the accustomed behavior of reality is violated, we are still in the everyday reality.

Between filming and viewing, the spatial form of the film can be manipulated (edited) in various ways to achieve any desired change in both the spatial and temporal properties of what we will see<sup>6</sup>. The *flow* of time is contained in a linear row of *separate* frames in space. Frames can be added, omitted, or reordered. Their content can be altered. Between any one frame and the next any intervention can occur. The results of editing are at the end returned to time. With the spatial arts,

the results of "editing" (modifying the work) are returned only to space. Here are some of the general ways in which causality can be altered in film.

The tempo of time. As with literature, there is no necessary proportionality between the time an event takes to transpire and the time used to describe its occurrence, only the description is now the actual depiction in images. A bullet travelling across a room can be seen taking seconds or hours to reach the other side. A drop of water hitting the surface of a pond can unfold over minutes. A flower can open up in seconds<sup>7</sup> and the sun can move across the sky in a minute. We can see every changing shape on the surface of a stream of water in turbulence. We can watch a glacier flow down a mountain, or a planet move among the background of *fixed* stars. These experiences are different than someone describing the occurrence of these events to us in a way that lasts these varying amounts of times. It is now the actual event, or so it seems, that takes place in this amount of time. That the new rate of time flow is apparent to us is because it is projected back onto our own consciousness in which time still flows at its wonted rate. Not only can a new velocity be pictured, but that velocity itself can change with time and accelerate or decelerate.

Direction of time. The simple expedient of running the film strip backwards reverses time. If the content of a film is abstract, running it backwards does not produce an effect that is any more improbable than running it forwards. If one shows a house from afar and then gradually draws closer, the reverse effect would seem only odd if it did not fit in with the dramatic implication of the story line at that point. Reversing time has the greatest impact when applied to organic bodies, for it is with living beings that time has the most dynamic role to play. Examples are the flower that becomes a bud, the tree that becomes a seed, the man who becomes a child, the child who vanishes by being un-born. It is less startling when reversals involve inorganic objects, for the change is felt more in space than in time. The man pushing a car becomes the man pushed by the car. The car moving forwards becomes the more comical, but not out of the question, car moving in reverse. It is more significant if cause and effect permits a series of physical events to occur only in one order so that in reversing things a cause succeeds upon its effect<sup>8</sup>. If we start with billiard balls scattered in space, it is possible but highly unlikely that various people with pool cues, all at the same time, could each hit one of the balls in just the right way so that all the balls come together and one knocks into a pool stick, setting it in motion. A man initially motionless jumps upwards and accelerates at a rate of thirty-two feet per second squared. If s'he were to slow down rather than accelerate, we would not feel anything exceptional had happened. Water in a glass could be seen to rise up into the air and enter a pitcher, but this could be achieved as easily by turning space upside down than reversing time. That something seems to run backwards in time at all, is because *our* time still runs forwards. There is no reversal to our conscious time, for if there were, things would simply seem to be running *forward* again.

Continuity of time. As an outgrowth of scene change in theatre and literature, film can exempt us from having to endure through the interim between two events or places in order to get from one to the other. This continues into the spatial arts if we regard the form of the work as a final state of a process. In film the exemption does not only apply to evolution of human events but can apply also to material objects in motion, which need not go through all the intervening positions in space when travelling from point A to point B.

Entropy. In the everyday world of cause and effect, if we continue to do work without pause, we eventually tire. In film, a person can appear to run the full course of a race course in one continuous scene, though when making the film the runner pauses as often and as long as necessary. In the final form of the film the simply camera cuts from one angle to another to mask these pauses. In general, work can seem to be accomplished without the expenditure of energy, the energy being transferred into the everyday time during the editing process where it is not witnessed by us.

## > IS SOUND AN INHERENT PART OF FILM

What we have said so far about space and time in film is unaffected by the presence or absence of sound. The juxtaposition of sound with sight in film is a fundamentally arbitrary. We receive a hint of this arbitrariness when a soundtrack is out of synch with the visual component of the film. Even when properly coordinated in time, the movement of the mouth and lips can seem arbitrary in their appearance, almost funny. It is as if an unsophisticated choreographer has required that a dancer move a muscle in the face every time a sound is made in the accompanying music, or Chevy Chase mimicking Gilda Radner on the Saturday Night Live news.

In chapter one we defined a "primary" sense as one whose data reaches us directly from the art work. The question arises here as to whether sound, as sight, is a primary sense in film. We can approach the question in two ways. We can examine the requirement whether the sense data is arriving to us from the work of art. We can also examine whether a film without sound still retains its essential spatial and temporal characteristics. With regard to the first, the images we see in film exist in a space that, while seeming external to us, is yet not part of our everyday reality, since we have no way of entering it. In the movie theatre, sound is transmitted to us from audio speakers that are in our space and not the film's space. The point of origin for a character's voice, for instance, is not the locale in which we see the character. If two characters are speaking, often their voices will seem to come from the same place though they are located in different places in the screen space. Sight and sound are out of spatial alignment with regard to the experience of space in film.

The second question is more interesting. A film without external sound is still a film: a silent film. A film without external visual input is no longer a film but devolves back to written literature. Unlike in literature, sound in film is freed from the primary burden of evoking images. Sight directly plays the major role in space-making. When talking with someone in the everyday reality we take it for granted that their facial movements and the sounds of their words are bonded together in an indissoluble way. This is the same type of bonding between the senses that we spoke about in chapter one, as part of the act that forges a reality. We said there that art explores what happens when we untie the senses, and then rejoin them in new ways, i.e. when we do not take it as a pre-established fact that they are joined as we usually find them in the everyday reality. It is only in the latter, through cause and effect, that we assume that the visual and sonic are both automatically parts of an indissoluble whole. In film, where we have only sight and sound, but not the other senses from the everyday world, we are more able to consider the two separately, and, like an art critic, determine whether we approve of the way they are being coordinated in time. This coordination may strike us one time as effective, at another arbitrary or even comic. We may wonder why the attempt is always made to conjoin them. How different the two phenomena are! On the one hand twitchings of facial muscles, on the other hand, resonant disembodied sounds.

Wouldn't something else visual go better with the sounds? Whether sound and sight arose together is irrelevant to whether one distracts from the contemplation of the other.

In chapter one we discussed that the viability of sensations in art, as it tries to separate from the everyday reality, can depend on the absence of distracting sensations from other senses. There is a curtailment of the full sensory sphere and the substitution of a carefully controlled sensory environment. The fact that impressions from the different senses arose at the same time did not make them artistically related. In the case of film we have already indicated that the two sensory outputs are not linked to the same position in space. They need to be more than simply synchronous in time. Sounds can distract from the intrinsic visual meaning of the film. If there is no sound track in a film, sounds are free to arise in my imagination in response to what I see. Such sounds will not distract from the sights because they arise in aesthetic accord with the sights. What we imagine is the sound of the voices in the silent film can be more evocative feeling-wise than the literal sounds of the actors' voices. We are also free to imagine what words the actors may be saying. Words do not disappear because there is no sound track.

For a long time silent films were held sufficient without sound. The silent actor had greater leeway than h'er vocal counterpart in expressing states of being. The face is the actor's most expressive instrument. The movements of the mouth and lips that go into forming speech sounds alter the face's expression, and that can include ways that are inconsistent with the underlying mood expressed by the *meaning* of the words. If the actor is able to use h'er lips and mouth freely, their movements can be used to *interpret* meaning rather than be responsible for creating meaning<sup>9</sup>. TV commercials are often constructed with great visual craftsmanship. It is easier to appreciate this quality when spared the voice intoning the name of the product and its list of purported virtues. When the sound is present, though I think I am still seeing, my attention threads its way back and forth between the two senses. My attention to the visual is without an instant to instant continuity that holds the visual together artistically in time.

If sound is added to sight so that film can mimic more closely the everyday reality, then should not other senses be used as well: touch for instance, or taste, odor, and temperature. If the film of a polar expedition is experienced in a comfortably heated movie theatre, it is perhaps because, as in theatre, there is a certain safety built into the space and time of our experience of the work. We do not perish with the main characters in the final conflagration. The space offered to sight through film is not the space that we are in. We have no more direct access to it than an astronomer does to a remote location brought close though a telescope and which therefore cannot be heard or smelled. If data from these other senses are present, they must have been added locally from our own space. If all the other senses were made present to us from within our own space, and sight alone remained outside our space, it would reduce the importance of sight relative to the others. But it is only through sight that we gain access at all the true artistic reality of the film. Joining sight to sound should not be taken as a given in film. It is an option, which if handled well can lead to aesthetically rewarding results.

With film we have come to the last art that uses words as aural phenomena in time. In spite of the similarities that the use of words imparts to poetry, drama and literature, these arts have separate identities on the spectrum. It is when we try to remove words from each art, that those identities stand out more clearly. Without words, poetry returns to the point before words themselves are

born, and we would re-await their creation. Drama, without words, remains the working out through time of a human action, acted out dumbly. Literature, if it wishes to continue narrating a story but without words, can turn into film.

#### > MORE ABOUT SPACE, IN FILM

#### > WHY ART ENTERS A PROTECTED SPACE NOW ON THE SPECTRUM

Throughout the temporal arts space has gradually become more prominent in relation to time. It is now on the verge of becoming the equal of time. However we are also approaching the everyday reality, where space becomes ineluctably tied together with time in the everyday nexus of cause and effect. If art is to preserve its spatial independence from the everyday reality, it must begin to take steps to isolate itself from the everyday space. Thus we find in film a spatial reality which, though external, cannot be entered through the everyday reality (the space in literature was in our imagination and therefore we could enter it through our imagination). This separation of space from the everyday space continues into the first spatial arts, painting and photography. It is not until sculpture that the contribution of space is strong enough that it can preserve its spatial artistic qualities though taking up residence within the everyday space. In the meantime, because space is external, but we cannot enter it, our time too cannot enter the space of the work. The result is that what happens in that space has a flavor of being *there then*, in the present of *its* time, more than *here now*.

#### > PROPERTIES OF THIS PROTECTED SPACE

We are always looking forwards into the film's space. If, for instance, the action on the film screen moves so that, were we in the everyday space, we would have had to turn to follow the action with our eyes, we find instead that in the movie theatre we do not turn, the camera does instead. We therefore do not have the muscular, non-visual cues from our own body that are associated with moving our eye or rotating our body when changing the direction in which we are looking. Yet it is these sensations which give us our sense of grounding in space. Therefore we are not in the work's space. We can respond intuitively to the dancer's motion (see chapter five) or even the motion of the character on the screen, but it is harder to respond intuitively to the motion of the camera<sup>10</sup>. When in the everyday space, if we are looking in just one direction, we can turn at any moment to see in any other direction we choose. This possibility is part of our feeling of being in a space. Even without turning we can still feel a breeze coming from behind or a sound from above. In the film we are subject to the will and timing of director as to in what direction we see when. Our body is denied the full confirmation of space extending all it. Rarely does a character enter the scene from behind where the camera is. Rarely does the camera suddenly rotate one-hundred and eighty degrees. Even if we were to extend the screen around us three hundred and sixty degrees, it would not heighten our sense of being in the space of the images. Just the opposite, for now in *every* direction the images lie beyond the power of our touch. There is always everyday space separating us from the screen (else we would not see the images on the screen).

We can change our position in the movie theatre, but we still see the work's space from the same angle. While the camera, because it is in the film's space, can easily change the perspective on which we view things, no actions on our part can effect a similar change. There is a breakdown of



perspective between the two spaces. Our actions vis a vis the artistic space are physically sterile and remain in our space. As in certain dreams, we are robbed of our will. By painting, not only can't we change the perspective with which we view things, but time in the work has lost its power to effect such a change even on *our* behalf. In dance and theatre no two people can have the same perspective of the same performance at the same time. With film, because there is only one performance, which is repeated identically, and with the subsequent arts on the spectrum, because there is no performance at all, two viewers can have the same perspective at the same time, even at different sittings.

### > WE ARE VOYEURS

We are excluded from the film because of both its space not being ours and its performance time not being ours. There is a vague sense of isolation in watching film, which ironically grows stronger when we watch a film in a movie theatre with other people. Everyone is seeing the same thing. No one's perspective is any different than any other's. We might as well all be seeing the work at different times. We are all equally excluded from the work, as if each were locked in a little cubicle of space, and watching through a private peep hole, apparently only large enough for one person to see through. We can only reach out to one another through our everyday space, never through the film's space.

A magic lens is held up to our eyes, and even though we never change the direction we aim it at, life marches by in a giant parade. Do the people in this pageant know we are looking? Are there other people watching? Like voyeurs we live through others' feelings and see through others' eyes. We are better hidden than Polonius behind the arras because we are hidden by *time* as well as by space. Space in film has driven out our time along with driving out our space. We will not be detected; or stabbed. They are not in our now, we are in their *then*. The narrator, which in film is the camera, can also be invisible to the characters. The narrator can say to us: "just look over here through this hole and see what I can see". This represents a *spatial* advantage. If the narrator *is* visible to the characters, then the narrator can still say to us: "I'll show you these pictures I took last week of the characters, but don't tell them I showed them to you". Here the advantage is *temporal*.

### > HAVING TO DO WITH PERSPECTIVE

In the real world if we see an object from up close and then from far away, a certain duration of time is implied during which we, as an active viewer, must have moved through space to the remoter position. In film, however, we see through the Argus eyes of the camera. One eye may be close to the object and another further away. We may not know if time has passed in between because we may not be sure *who* is doing the looking in each case. It seems to require but a mere impulse of the will to switch from one to another - but whose will? Not our own.

In dance and theatre we can intuit the motion or state of the performer but not see in space from their location. This changes with literature and film. Arnheim in his book "Film as Art" [{}?] says that "the film artist is...able to do what is very hard for the theatre director, namely, to show the world from the standpoint of an individual, to take man as the center of his cosmos--that is, to make a very subjective experience accessible to the eyes of all."

The camera can act as if interested or disinterested in what it sees. A camera position that never changes, regardless of what is going on in the action, implies a state of objectivity and aloofness. It is not "moved" by what it sees. A camera constantly changing angle in response to action implies a state of intense involvement.

How close can we get to the action in film? Just as the reality of a representational painting dissolves at close distance into flecks of pigment, so at a distance where we should be able to touch and feel the action of a film, we realize that this reality is only a sham. We run into the screen. If we could go directly into the space where the action is taking place, we would find, in place of our selves, an object: the camera.

Motion in a straight line, unless directly at the camera, is perceived as a curve. An actor approaching the camera on any line other than the normal from the camera, eventually veers off course and ends up on either the extreme right or left of the screen. When an object is as close to us as it can be on the screen, the space between us and the screen suddenly becomes more noticeable.

#### > FULLFILLMENT OR FRUSTRATION OF THE WILL

What we see on the screen now creates future desires as to what we would like to see, when we would see it, and how we would see it. These desires that are then either satisfied or frustrated and in a way that contributes to the work's rhythmic structure. The director can make us feel imprisoned or omnipotent with a mere change of camera angle. Constantly thwarting our will eventually leads to our passively accepting the director's power. Such frustration can become permanent in the first spatial art. A painting may show us just a glimpse of something we would wish to see more clearly or from a different angle. The sculpture by bulging outwards into our space, only temporarily leaves questions about itself unanswered, eventually we can walk around it. A work of architecture is like the movie director. Its spatial properties lay the ground rules for what we can see when.

#### > FILM AND LITERATURE

Film and literature can narrate anything, not just a story with human characters. This includes being able to describe, in words or in moving images, another work of *any* art, spatial or temporal. They can describe each other. To speak of a *film of* a work of literature though is a bit confusing since that is already the definition of film. More specifically, though, a film can be an adaptation of a preexisting work of literature. The other order, however, is just as possible. We have more to say about this subject in the chapter entitled "The Arts In Combination".

A literal image, as projected on a screen, can convey to us all at once what, with words, must be represented sequentially over time. Film must therefore have a different rhythm than a book. Narration in literature arrests the flow of the action to dwell on description that is necessary to sustain the action. The pace of film is faster than a corresponding work of written literature. Action proceeds less interrupted (as in theatre).

If the novelist says "s'he sat at a desk", we are free to imagine any sort of desk or even not bother seeing a desk at all in our mind. For the film director to portray a desk, it must a specific desk.

Choices are thus made for us, and we have no choice but to see them. Imagination is lost in the perceptual glare of external imagery.

The writer sometimes must make sure that enough description is offered to evoke an adequate image. The film director may have an opposite concern. There may be too much visual data present in space which, if left unfiltered, could make it difficult to focus in on that part of the content of space that relates most closely to the significance of the plot at that moment.

In literature the narrator can be a witness without being a physical presence in space. In film, during the filming, the camera is necessarily a presence in space, seen by the actors though not by the audience, but taking up, and thereby interfering with, a portion of the acting space. The camera is like the blind spot on the retina, the place where what is seen is transmitted to the brain.

If we close our eyes during a film, and there is sound track, the experience returns to that of having a book read to us and we once again form images in our imagination in response to the words. If we then reopen our eyes, we are struck with how different the images are on the screen from the images we were just imagining.

## > FILM (AND LITERATURE) AND THEATRE

If a character in theatre reminisces about h'er past, we do not see the image of that former time. In film this is possible. In theatre it requires a change of scene to alter the content of space. This change takes time, time spent in the everyday reality subject to the lethargy of cause and effect. It is only by *custom* that we choose to consider this time as not being part of the artistic flow of the work's time. This non-artistic but endured time is an adumbration of the editing time of a film, which however has become free of abiding in the viewer's consciousness.

The theatre actor projects h'er voice to us through a shared space. The shared air becomes alive with h'er energy. In literature we must *project* ourselves inwards to be in the work's space, and film we have to project ourselves outwards to be in the film's space.

In theatre, the entire demeanor of an actor, from head to foot, must be consistent with the desired dramatic effect. In film, if there is a close-up of a face, it does not matter what the rest of the body is doing or looks like. In theatre, the actor is often at a distance that requires exaggerated inflection and gestures to overcome that space. In film close-ups allow us to discard the space that would have intervened in theatre between us and the actor. There is no need for exaggeration.

We have arrived at the end of the temporal arts and are about to enter the spatial arts.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A series of still images could be used for the same purpose, as in a comic book minus words, but this would take us past film, and past the middle of the spectrum, and into the spatial arts.

<sup>2</sup> Painting can also narrate part of a story, but it can do so only in space, not in time and space.

<sup>3</sup> This restriction to but one performance perhaps explains some of the fascination with 'restored' footage, 'outtakes', anything that gives us a hint of what might have led to the performance as we now see it.

<sup>4</sup> In chapter four we discussed that in the future instrumentality may exist to allow animation to be created in real time.

<sup>5</sup> It is not only time that can be manipulated through space in film in the editing process, but space too. It can be inverted, inflected, translated, or turned inside out. Different things, filmed at different times can be placed adjacently.

<sup>6</sup> With the advent of computer graphics, much of the manipulations that we are about to describe can take place within the computer. As with the film strip, the computer holds in its virtual space, one-for-one, all the time data of the work.

<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, in speaking of the accelerated pictures of plants growing: "In taking these shots it was shown that plants have expressive gestures, which we do not see because they are too slow for our minds but which become visible in accelerated pictures. The swaying, rhythmic breathing motions of the leaves, the excited dance of the leaves around the blossom, the almost voluptuous abandon with which the flower opens---the plants all at once come alive and show that they use expressive gestures exactly like those to which we are accustomed in men and animals." Rudolf Arnheim, "Film as Art", University of California Press, 1957.

<sup>8</sup> If a work of music were played backwards, on an instrument that had no noticeable attack or decay, nothing would change regarding the quality of the sound of the piece. It would however make the difference as to whether we felt we were hearing "a piece" or just random sounds. Sometimes themes are purposefully constructed to be reversible and still yield a valid effect, but the first time we hear it we would not know yet if it were already being played backwards.

<sup>9</sup> "If a real dialogue is shown with the sound, the spectator will often fail to grasp what it is all about; he will find the facial expression and the gestures unintelligible. In silent film, the lips are no longer word-forming physical organs but a means of visual expression. ... Silent laughter is often more effective than if the sound is actually heard." Rudolf Arnheim, "Film as Art", University of California Press, 1957.

<sup>10</sup> If a camera were within a uniformly painted and illuminated circular room with no doors or windows, and it camera rotated three hundred and sixty degrees around its mount, the viewer would not know motion was taking place. If we were in place of the camera we would perceive movement from within including the feeling the semicircular canals.

---

Copyright © 2000-2005 by Joseph Bloom.

Registered ® (with Copyright Office effective) August 22, 2005.

Registration number TXu1-258-641