7. Narration and Space

A single concept has dominated reflection on filmic space—position. For mainstream mimetic theories, each image is attributed to an invisible observer incarnated in the camera; this observer is at once narrator and spectator. The totalized space built up from editing is then attributed to an idealized invisible witness, the occupant of an absolute position, Pudovkin's "observer ideally mobile in space and time." Diegetic theories are no different in this regard. Here space is said to be "enunciated" by the film, but since no entity can speak space, theorists tend to slip back into mimetic assumptions. Discourse becomes a series of views, having their source in the viewer's positions.

Just as there is more to narration than the camera, so there is more to cinematic space than effects of position. Rather than conceive of the spectator as the apex of a literal or metaphorical pyramid of vision, we can treat the construction of space dynamically. The syuzhet's presentation of information can be facilitated or blocked by the style's representation of space. No theory of narration can simply omit questions of position, but they need to be integrated into a broader account of how films mobilize spatial perception and cognition for storytelling ends.

Constructing Space

The account I propose distinguishes itself from two principal trends in the psychology of visual representation.[1] One trend, close in spirit to that of traditional approaches to narration, has been called the "perspectivist" theory. Its principal exponent, James J. Gibson, has argued that the perceiver's understanding of a visual field is uniquely determined, or "specified," by the laws of geometrical optics. Under normal conditions, the psychophysical stimulus suffices to produce accurate perception; there is no need to reckon in mental processes. According to this theory, a picture can, if it obeys the laws of linear perspective, correctly depict the invariant structure of a viewer's optic array. A film can go beyond this arrested image and *specify* the invariants, thus achieving a delimited array "analogous to the temporary field of view of a human observer in a natural environment surrounding the observer."[2]

The second trend is the Gestaltist one, usually associated with Rudolf Arnheim's work. Here mental operations play a much larger role. The mind is assumed to structure vision through *Gestalten* or what Arnheim calls "visual concepts." Laws of simplicity, good continuation, and so forth govern the structure we "read out" of the world. No picture, therefore, faithfully copies nature in the empirical manner perspectivism assumes. Arnheim sees all pictures as equally artificial in that they rely on the two-dimensional conditions of the medium to convey and express meaning. Perspective is no more faithful to everyday perception than is any other system. "The rule that controls the rendering of depth in the plane prescribes that no aspect of visual structure will be deformed unless space perception requires it—regardless of what a mechanically correct projection would call for."[3] To produce a convincing picture, expressiveness and formal clarity come first, and the mathematics of perspective must be adjusted to fit these demands. As is generally known, Arnheim applied these assumptions to film in order to show that "art begins where mechanical reproduction leaves off."[4]

To some extent, the perspectivist and the Gestaltist views can be reconciled, at least as far as pictorial perception is concerned. Often Gibson and Arnheim aim to explain different things. Gibson likes likeness, Arnheim loves liveliness. Gibson is drawn to representational art, good or bad, while Arnheim favors abstract art and works of quality. Both views offer a wealth of suggestions for analyzing spatial representation in film, but from the theoretical standpoint of this book, the most appropriate theory of spatial perception is that afforded by the "Constructivist" trend.

Chapter 3 has already maintained that a Constructivist theory can explain crucial aspects of spectatorial activity. The film proffers cues upon which the spectator works by applying those knowledge clusters called schemata. Guided by schemata, the spectator makes assumptions and inferences and casts hypotheses about story events. These assumptions, inferences, and hypotheses are checked against material presented to the perceiver. In Chapters 4 and 5, I suggested that this material is organized into a syuzhet which cues the spectator to construct a fabula according to schemata of logic, time, and space. Film style usually supports the construction of the fabula, principally by being compositionally motivated. The Constructivist approach treats the perceiver as constantly active—applying prototypes, slotting items into evolving templatelike macrostructures, testing and revising procedures for making sense of the material. Crucial points in the process are the syuzhet's presentation of gaps in fabula information. The previous chapter adduced some major temporal schemata in narrative cinema, such as 1-2-3 order and conventional relations of syuzhet and fabula duration. Space can also be considered from a Constructivist standpoint, and here we can draw on the rich body of work produced by E. H. Gombrich, R. L. Gregory, and Julian Hochberg.

The perspectivist insists that the stimulus specifies the percept, but the Constructivist believes that the stimulus is insufficient to dictate perceptual experience.[5] Perspectivist theory treats perception as essentially a filtered selection of invariants from the range of available stimuli; on the Constructivist theory, perception is an inferential process which

Cues, Features, and Functions

It is possible to consider filmic space only in its *graphic* aspects. We can treat space as nonrepresentational matter, analyzing it as compositional design and acoustical form and texture. Some films, such as abstract ones, encourage us to limit ourselves to graphic aspects.[35] My concern here, however, is with *scenographic* space: the imaginary space of fiction, the "world" in which the narration suggests that fabula events occur. On the basis of visual and auditory cues, we act to construct a space of figures, objects, and fields—a space of greater or lesser depth, scope, coherence, and solidity.

The scenographic space of a film is built out of three sorts of cues: shot space, editing space, and sonic space. Each of these groupings also involves representing space on screen or offscreen.

Shot Space

Several cues are at work when we construct the objects and spatial relations represented in a shot. In most cases, these work in an involuntary, "bottom-up" manner, but any film can make these cues inconsistent or equivocal in a way that renders them the targets of more deliberate hypothesis testing. (We have seen cases of the latter in those shots that defy linear perspective, as in figs. 7.12–7.13.)

Overlapping contours (partial masking). When one contour occludes another, we attribute the occluding edge to a near object (figure) and the other edge to a distant one (another figure, or the ground).

Texture differences. The rougher or more dense the texture of a surface, the more it comes forward; smoother and less dense surfaces tend to recede.

Atmospheric perspective. All other things being equal, the more indistinct the surface, shape, color, or mass of an object is, the more distant we assume that object to be. Photography and cinema can manipulate aperture, depth of field, lens focus, or interposed translucent materials (gauze, smoke) to create effects of atmospheric perspective.

Familiar size. We tend to base object hypotheses on what we know of the class of objects represented. Prototype schemata for the normal size of people, animals, and things help us decide what is nearer or farther away.

Light and shade. Lighting can suggest planes, as classical backlighting does by reinforcing figure/ground differentials. Lighting can also model the object's form, rounding off planes to create volumes. Highlights tend to suggest surface texture and the direction of the light sources.

Shadows are of two sorts. Attached shadows, or shading, are caused by portions of the object casting shadows on the object itself. Shading tends to suggest texture, form, and relief. Cast shadows may define the object's form, often in distorted ways, or cue us to infer spatial relations within the milieu. Such inferences can throw us off course, as in *India Song.* Here many shots frame a mirror which purportedly reflects the scene before it. Yet the reflections in the mirror cast shadows *into* the space inhabited by the characters—an optical impossibility. (See figs. 7.18–7.19.) This incompatible cue suggests a duplicate world of solid persons and objects behind the mirror's surface.

Illumination and shadows present the same problem as perspective in the Ames room, since any intensity of light could result from an infinity of possible sources and surfaces. The visual system simplifies by assuming that the light comes from a specified direction (usually from above) and is unvarying in its intensity.[36]

Color. Regardless of object, lighter, warmer, and more intense colors tend to seem closer than do darker, cooler, and less saturated ones. For example, pure reds and yellows come forward, pure blues retreat.

Perspective. All the perspective systems we have considered (pp. 104–10) suggest depth on the basis of how straight lines behave. In linear perspective, orthogonal lines converge to one or more vanishing points. Synthetic perspective treats orthogonals as curves. Nonscientific perspective systems can also produce consistent depth cues. For instance, in the inverted perspective of figure 7.12, we can still make hypotheses about what is nearer or farther off. We have already seen how photography and cinema can employ mise-en-scène and lenses of different lengths to create various perspective cues.

Figure movement. One of the cinema's most important cues for object identification and spatial relations is the fact that figures move in the frame. This creates a continuous flow of overlapping contours, strengthening figure/ground hypotheses and often generating transformations of illumination (movement into shadow or light, glitter as highlights play across a moving surface). Movement helps concretize the space, reinforcing object and depth hypotheses. To some degree, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, the construction of objects, their three-dimensional shapes and layout, and their movements call upon bottom-up, involuntary perceptual processes.[37] Still, more strictly cognitive activities, such as prior acquaintance with representational traditions, doubtless also play a role.

Monocular movement parallax. Another very powerful spatial cue is the ability of the camera itself to move. Panning and tilting (i.e., swiveling the camera horizontally or vertically) significantly modify the perceived layout of surfaces and the apparent distances among objects. Tracking or craning the camera in any direction can yield even more information about the field. (Zoom shots, which simply magnify or demagnify the field, do not supply motion parallax.)

Usually, the film viewer constructs monocular movement parallax in bottom-up fashion. This is not to say, however, that Gibson is right to think that camera movement "specifies" both a unique field and a continuous observation point.[38] Bottom-up processes are inferential and probabilistic, however mandatory; the data could be otherwise than the system takes them to be. That this is so in cinema is

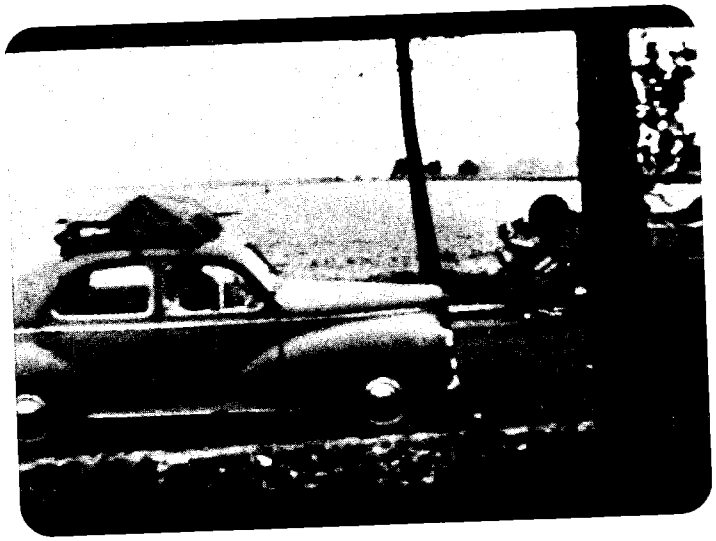
7.18. India Song
7.19. India Song

shown by the fact that any camera movement can control its trajectory so that we are prevented from testing the objects' shapes and spatial relations. The potential ambiguity of the actual spatial layout traversed by a camera movement is exploited in the filming of back projections and of sets in false perspective.

At this point we might well agree with Donald Weismann's claim that representational space can never be strictly flat. As soon as one line or patch appears, there will be cues for figure and ground, near edge and distant surface. Instead, Weismann distinguishes various sorts of depth. There is shallow space, as in Egyptian art, which uses overlapping as the primary depth cue.[39] There are varieties of cubical space, such as those obtained in Japanese angular-isometic perspective, Indian cubical space, and Western linear perspective.[40] Here various cues are integrated into more or less consistent systems. And there is ambiguous space, in which cues come into conflict; the work of El Greco, Cézanne, and the Cubists furnishes many examples. These sorts of space can all be achieved in cinema: the shallow space of primitive film, of *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* and *La Chinoise*, and of many shots in mainstream cinema; the cubical space of long-shot views in Hollywood film, brought to its apogee by Welles's baroque effects; the ambiguous space of the Expressionists and films like *Red Beard*. It is up to the analyst to discover the different factors that cue the spectator to construe the shot's space.

Depth is also a matter of degree. As an example, we might examine how Godard's *Weekend* utilizes depth in depicting an outlandish traffic jam on a rural highway. The action is rendered in four shots and interrupted by titles. Each shot offers an abundance of depth cues. (See figs. 7.20–7.22 for specimen frames.) Foreground planes are picked out clearly, haze diffuses the trees and fields at the horizon (atmospheric perspective), trees and cars overlap and occlude one another, assumptions of familiar size are confirmed, and the movements of vehicles and humans offer straightforward figure/ground cues. Colors bring objects forward by virtue of warmth (red cars or clothes, a red-and-yellow Shell truck), intensity (the foreground colors are more saturated), and brightness (a white horse, white vehicles). Since the day is overcast, there are no strong shadows, but the diffused daylight casts soft shadows onto the road and creates highlights that indicate the curvature of fenders and windshields. The camera's high angle and oblique orientation make the road dash off at an angle, its edges suggesting offscreen perspec-

7.20. Weekend
7.21. Weekend



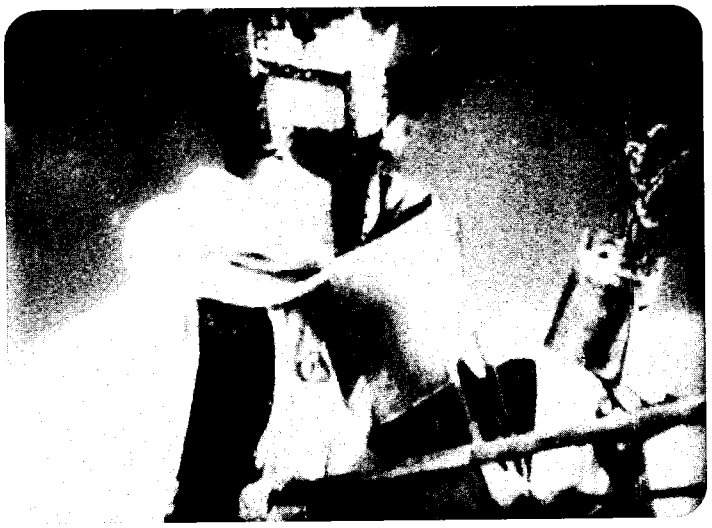
tival convergence. And there is, in all these shots, a steady tracking movement from left to right. Although the movement does not penetrate the cars' area, it maintains the diagonal orientation of the road and constantly suggests the relative distances of objects and figures. In sum, although

7.22. Weekend

the significant action is confined to the roadway in the foreground, the scene employs many cues to articulate planes and volumes.[41]

In contrast, consider a shot of the galloping Teutonic knights in *Alexander Nevsky* (fig. 7.23). There are no cues of cast shadow, color, perspective, or haze. The space is thus relatively shallow. We must rely on overlapping contours and familiar size to place the knights in relative (if vague) depth against the sky. The knights rise and fall, the foreground rider occasionally occluding his mate. But the shot is a very unconvincing depiction of riding a horse. The men's metronomic lungings are implausible as a cue for the thudding and swaying of a horseback ride. And if this is a tracking shot following subject movement, there need to be some cues for relative displacement of figure and background: shifting highlights, slight changes in the knights' positions in the frame, and some background features that by their changing aspects suggest motion parallax. In the absence of such cues, the shot is more easily construed as a static image of two knights rocking to and fro against a backdrop. This seems to me the reason that the shot often raises a guffaw from the audience.

7.23. Alexander Nevsky



7.24. Jezebel: *In the first shot, Jezebel stands only at Pres's chest . . .*

7.25. *. . . but in the closer view, she has risen to his chin.*

Editing Space

The perceiver constructs intershot space on the basis of anticipation and memory, favoring cause-effect schemata and creating a "cognitive map" of the pertinent terrain. For any series of shots, we can always ask how complete and consistent its layout of space is and what areas tend to be favored. For example, in most Hollywood scenes, the editing leaves some areas unshown (the "fourth wall" of interiors) and makes those irrelevant to constructing the fabula. The 180-degree principle of filming and cutting assures that vantage points on the same side of the axis of action are privileged. And the spatial cues tend to be consistent across the cuts.

Interestingly, though, features of figure position often vary markedly from shot to shot without the spectator's noticing (for example, figs. 7.24–7.25). Often such "cheat cuts" affect only peripheral details that never receive foveal attention anyhow. More generally, the cheat cut illustrates how hypotheses favor object recognition and narrative factors and how schemata work "from the top down." Gross cues for objects and relative spatial position fit more quickly into a pattern of causal inference and a general cognitive map than does exact measurement of the placement of a lamp or the precise distance between figures. Noël Carroll remarks: "The ability to postulate a coherent unity of action rather than the spatial continuity associated with matching

7.26. Earth

7.27. Earth

is more fundamental to the flow of the narrative."[42] It also seems likely that shifts in camera position and lens length across the cut make detailed retrospective comparison of two successive shots very difficult. It is simpler to assume consistency and block out minor deviations as "noise." In our shot/reverse shot from *The Spider's Stratagem*, the incompatibilities of background would escape notice were not the ambiguities of Draifa's constantly changing bouquet so compositionally central.

Other films, of course, will challenge the viewer's assumptions about spatial clarity, completeness, and consistency. One scene of Dovzhenko's *Earth* shows a father and son quarreling. The narration withholds any establishing shot (a typical procedure in Soviet montage). Shots of the father alternate with shots of the son. But each man has his back turned to us, and the camera takes up a perpendicular line of view, so that initially the men's relative locations are indeterminate (figs. 7.26–7.27). The men could be facing in any of several different directions. We have too few cues—no eyelines, no overall orientation, no symmetrically oblique setups. Eventually, however, the men's heads turn slightly left or right, and we grasp gratefully at one cue. This proves consistent: father and son are most likely standing side by side, not back to back.

The space of a series of shots can extend over great distances, as in passages of crosscutting, and here the codified cues do not favor completeness. Why would one show every mile between the galloping Klan and the beseiged town in *The Birth of a Nation*? Often, however, constant screen direction becomes an important cue. If the Klan rides from the right, Piedmont must be somewhere off "left" on some grand cognitive map. Many intervening stretches will be hazy, but the end points of this extensive axis of action remain consistent.

Sonic Space

Like visual factors, auditory ones can solicit us to construct space. "Figure" and "ground" exist in sound as well, as when a high-pitched tone tends to emerge from a welter of lower ones. In most films, speech appears to occupy the foreground, noise the background. Volume and acoustic texture

can create what engineers for early talking films called "sound perspective." At first they believed that for maximum realism the microphone should be placed as close to the camera as possible, so that in long shot there would be appropriately distant sound.[43] It soon appeared, however, that more compelling cues would be furnished by a microphone placed fairly close to the players, even when filming long shots. The result was only a slight change in reverberation and volume when cutting from long shot to closer view—certainly nothing as acoustically drastic as the shot change was visually. This ploy succeeds because, for spatial information, sight outranks hearing in the human sensory system. While auditory frequency, amplitude, and timbre can approximately locate a sound source, determining exact distance and position is more difficult than with vision.[44] Under most circumstances, seeing is believing, and so when our vision tells us that a long shot portrays a distant figure, we trust that information more than we trust acoustic cues that suggest that we are somewhat "closer."

Sometimes, of course, sound perspective will be emphasized, as when in *The Big Sleep* the muffled sound from inside Walgreen's office becomes clearer as Marlowe approaches. But even here we are not dealing with direct fidelity. What must be remembered is that the "spatiality" of sound on film is as manipulated as the image. Sound recording, mixing, and reproduction rework the raw material of acoustic phenomena to construct cues. For example, simply recording in a busy environment produces a distressing jumble of sound. Ordinary perception and cognition select certain sonic information and screen out the rest. Conventional film sound does much of this work for us by recording on separate tracks, mixing so as to highlight the important information, eliminating much ambient noise, and smoothly modulating from a dense mix to a thin one. Stereophonic sound exemplifies a more recent attempt to fuse sonic realism with schematic clarity. The spectator falls back on the simplicity hypothesis and assumes a direct link between acoustic clarity, narrative relevance, and spatial coherence. When a filmmaker refuses to construct such redundant cues, as Godard does in his notorious single-miked cafe scenes, the spectator must be more attentive to pick out the narratively pertinent and spatially informative sound events.[45]

Offscreen Space

Shot space, editing space, and sonic space can all engage the viewer's spatial hypothesis forming by guiding his or her construction of offscreen areas. Such areas are of two sorts: *nondiegetic* offscreen zones and *diegetic* ones.

Nondiegetic offscreen space is space which is not part of the fictional world. The principal example of this is a schema all critics invoke: the camera. In our construction of the fabula world, the "camera" is not a physical machine (weighing a lot or a little, bearing a brand name) but a hypostatized offscreen narrational agency that puts certain material on display. This camera is a purely mental construct, a schema for explaining certain spatial qualities and transformations. Of course this schema plays the starring role in invisible observer accounts, which make the camera an anthropomorphic entity. We must recall, however, that this "camera" is not the *creator* of the narration's spatial qualities but the *product* of them.[46] To a design of diagonal lines and upward-tapering human forms there corresponds the schema-driven hypothesis "The camera is at a low angle." To a stream of continually altering aspects and objects there corresponds: "The camera tracks left." Images can cue such hypotheses without the real camera's ever having been in any such position, as animators have known for decades. All that people need in order to construct the schema called "camera," it seems, are some assumptions about how photographic images are produced. The analogy to photography, however, tends to objectify the fictional world as the profilmic event, whereas the critic's task is to treat this camera as the most economical way to integrate many cues about space.

In most films the viewer makes the Bazinian assumption that outside the frame edges lie more regions of the fictional

world: these regions comprise diegetic offscreen space. Noël Burch has itemized them: the spaces beyond the four frame lines, the area behind the camera, the space "beyond" the horizon.[47] It is evident that editing and sound contribute to the construction of offscreen space. Shot 2 will usually show something that was offscreen in shot 1, while diegetic sound will characteristically continue when its source is no longer in the frame.

As a schema, diegetic offscreen space has what Burch calls a "fluctuating" existence.[48] A Constructivist theory can explain why. From a psychological point of view, it would be extremely inefficient—that is, it would call up a cumbersome number of schemata and hypotheses—to project and recall all areas of offscreen space at every moment. Therefore the viewer bets that only certain offscreen areas will become narratively significant and she or he attends to cues that reinforce or disprove that. Thus if a framing leaves some space on the right, it is more likely that a character previously established as being offscreen right will enter the shot. Offscreen space modulates in importance because the viewer's hypotheses make it more or less salient or concrete. Needless to say, the narration can also emit ambiguous or contradictory cues about offscreen locations, as the examples from *The Spider's Stratagem* and *Earth* suggest. In such cases we must revise our spatial hypotheses, and perhaps our causal and temporal ones as well.

One such ambiguity may appear when the narration treats the camera as if it occupied offscreen diegetic space. An amusing example occurs in *The Gold Rush*, when the amnesia-crazed Big Jim lumbers into the lens just as the shot fades out. This usually evokes a laugh because we assume that he is about to collide with that apparatus we call a camera. We shall see shortly how a famous shot from *Sunrise* plays upon a similar shift. At any moment, the narration can evoke the camera as an entity within either nondiegetic or diegetic offscreen space.

Sound has a particularly strong potential for cueing us about offscreen space. The ordinary film often includes ambient noise to suggest a vague but consistent world offscreen. The locality of sound can play subtly between the fabula world and an indefinite spot we call "sound over," from which nondiegetic music and commentary issue.[49] Thus the viewer senses an important difference between the sound montage in *Made in USA* (mixing nondiegetic and diegetic sound into an ambiguously equal "presence") and the cacophony of TV sets, radios, and character speech within the diegetic space of Fassbinder's *Third Generation.*

Given all these factors, how can we theorize the narrational functions of space? Everything we have considered as part of the spectator's activity and of syuzhet/fabula relations—gaps and retardations; matters of knowledge, self-consciousness, and communicativeness—all structure spatial representation. Before we consider one film in detail, a few illustrations may be suggestive.

No single shot is more famous than the one in *Sunrise* which tracks the husband trudging through the marshes to meet the City Woman. The context, pertinent perceptual factors, and narrational functions all contribute to the force that space assumes in this passage.

The shot gathers its effect partly by contrast with another tracking shot that precedes it by a few minutes. The City Woman leaves her cottage and walks through the village to the husband's home to lure him out. A composition in one-point perspective shows her leaving the cottage, with orthogonals and empty space on the left anticipating her trajectory through the shot (fig. 7.28). As she passes, the camera pans left to keep her centered, discovering more offscreen space and strengthening the cues for depth (fig. 7.29). The panning shot is redundant with the narrative schema; she, not the old man and woman in the right foreground, is the important figure. As the pan reaches its apex (fig. 7.30), the camera starts to move with the City Woman, tracking along behind her at her pace (fig. 7.31). She passes a house, to which monocular movement parallax attributes strong effects of volume. The sloping path continues to create cues for linear perspective, eventually revealed as culminating in her target, the family's cottage (fig. 7.32). By tracking behind her, the camera movement plays down the figure and plays up our anticipation of her destination: her size and aspect remain constant, and the greatest spatial transformations occur in the setting. Thus the shot, which begins with her leaving one cottage, points us toward the end point of her

7.28. Sunrise

7.29. Sunrise
7.30. Sunrise

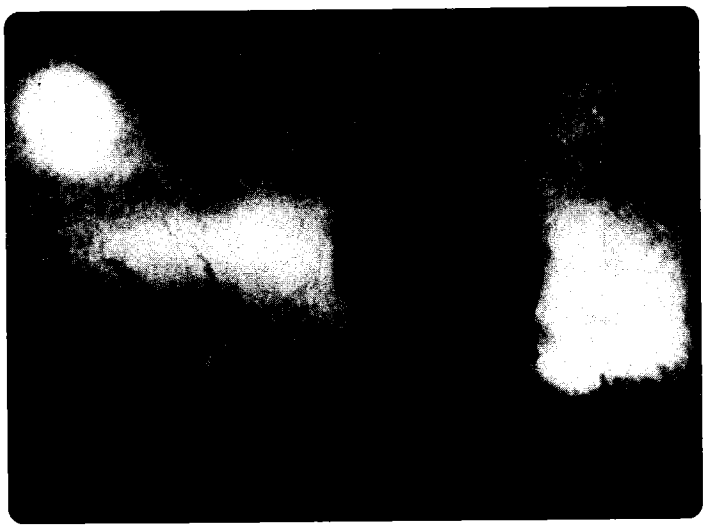
walk, creating a mild crescendo somewhat like that in *The End of St. Petersburg* (p. 74). But here the effect is less self-conscious than in Pudovkin's film because the shot seems "unobtrusively" to follow the City Woman's movement.

In the more celebrated shot—of the husband's rendezvous with the City Woman, the perceptual and narrational cues are quite different. The man walks away from the camera (fig. 7.33); then, having crossed a little bridge, he turns right and passes around behind a hillock (fig. 7.34). The camera follows at a distance, traveling leftward. He emerges from behind the hillock (fig. 7.35) and climbs over a fence (fig. 7.36). Unexpectedly, the man comes straight toward us (fig. 7.37). The camera pans leftward, losing him (fig. 7.38) and glides on through willow branches (fig. 7.39) to reveal the City Woman standing by the marsh waiting for him (fig. 7.40).

The depth cues differ significantly from those in the earlier shot. There is little linear perspective (fragmentary recessions provided by the bridge and the fencelines), and the total space is quite undifferentiated. Atmospheric perspective is a more significant cue because of the mist shrouding the landscape, and familiar size helps pick out objects as well. The camera movement is crucial in endowing trees and slopes with volume. The most sharply articulated space, though, is that occupied by the City Woman (fig. 7.40), with its zones of figure, marsh, and sky: an oasis of clear vision in a vast murk.

7.31. Sunrise
7.32. Sunrise

7.33. Sunrise
7.34. Sunrise



7.35. Sunrise
7.36. Sunrise

7.37. Sunrise
7.38. Sunrise

7.39. Sunrise
7.40. Sunrise

The action here is also much less rectilinear than in the village shot. The husband moves at a constant pace, but because he moves to and from the camera, we see him from many aspects and distances. The velocity of the camera movement must also vary—sometimes slowing down to keep him in frame, sometimes hastening, as when he climbs over the fence. How many viewers would realize that "objectively" the camera pursues an almost perfectly straight path? It is the convoluted terrain and the man's roundabout path that create the sense of serpentine movement. Of course, the fact that the camera does not follow his footsteps but strikes out on its own (fig. 7.38) cues us to read the mobile framing as an independent narrating agency; this is confirmed when we lose the husband altogether (fig. 7.39) and move on to disclose the City Woman (fig 7.40). But there is a cognitive inconsistency in the camera movement that perhaps supplies some of its fascination. The camera becomes an independent presence when it departs from the husband, but in stalking up to us, the man betrays no recognition of the camera's presence; we might be tempted to identify it with our old friend, the invisible observer. Yet immediately the camera moves leftward, and it brushes away the willow branches in our path (fig. 7.39). This invisible observer leaves physical traces of its passing. Unlike the shot following the City Woman, this camera movement heightens the narration's self-consciousness, even at the expense of creating a logical incompatibility.

The camera movement heightens communicativeness as well, taking a shortcut through the foliage to anticipate the target of the husband's walk (with far more overtness than the anticipation of the City Woman's destination earlier). No longer restricted to either character's range of knowledge, we are presented with nearly all the factors of the situation before the characters meet. In fact, our knowlege is as much spatial as causal. The husband has gone out of the shot and the camera moves left, creating a spatial gap: where did he go? The answer is supplied when the camera frames the woman so as to leave a vacancy on frame left (fig. 7.40). She is looking off right, but because of the unbalanced framing and the fact that we have seen the husband leave the frame diagonally on the right, we hypothesize that he is probably circling around to our left. She starts, looks slightly off left (fig. 7.41), tosses her flower away, and starts making up for his arrival (fig. 7.42). Now she looks sharply left and he comes into the shot, balancing the frame at last (fig. 7.43).

7.41. Sunrise
7.42. Sunrise

She steps to him and they embrace. The off-centered framing and the presumption that the husband was somewhere "off left and behind the camera" furnish a strong hypothesis about the development of the shot's space—one which of course supports the developing action schema (the husband has an assignation with his lover). The climax of the shot is at once causal and spatial.

7.43. Sunrise

The *Sunrise* shot glories in the ability of narration to go anywhere at will. In general the classical film translates narrational omniscience into spatial omnipresence.[50] The narration freely acknowledges, we might say, its ability to take us wherever it wants. This omnipresence is usually deployed more discreetly than in Murnau's film, with greater redundancy and fewer flaunted gaps. Most obviously, space can be limited by setting bounds on a character's knowledge. In *Rear Window*, with the exception of only two sequences, the exterior spaces we see are justified as what could be seen from Jeff's apartment. Yet strict confinement to a character's spatial locus can create new sorts of gaps. Take *Dark Passage*, which presents its first several scenes through the protagonist's eyes (subjective camera, "hidden" cuts, to-camera address by other characters, etc.). Instead of enhancing audience identification, this tactic actually conceals a crucial piece of information: the protagonist's appearance. Later, after he undergoes plastic surgery (and acquires Humphrey Bogart's face), the film resumes a normal spatial style.

7.44. The Big Sleep
7.45. The Big Sleep

This more "normal" style affords a fluid set of guidelines for regulating subjectivity and spatial representation. Edward Branigan has studied these principles in admirable detail; I would add only that the structural features he discerns operate as more or less salient cues for hypothesis building. For example, in analyzing optical point-of-view structures, Branigan isolates six elements: a point in space, an offscreen glance, a transition, a camera position from the initial point, an object, and a character. In *Rear Window*, Jeff (point) looks off (glance); cut (transition) to a distant view ("his" position) of what (object) he (character) sees. Each of these factors functions as a cue, and together they allow the spectator to make a strongly grounded inference about character subjectivity.[51] William Simon points out one more cue: an expressive reaction on the part of the character, which can clinch the previous shot as a subjective view.[52] And some cues are stronger than others; in the point-of-view structure, camera angle is a more critical variable than camera distance.

Mainstream narration's treatment of space remains fluid because narrative context can set limits on the tendency toward omnipresence. In *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe goes to a rendezvous with Harry Jones only to find that Canino has gotten there first. Here, for the sake of creating unequivocal cues, classical narration violates strict adherence to optical subjectivity, but it still confines itself within narrow bounds.

After hearing muffled voices inside Walgreen's office (fig. 7.44), Marlowe enters the waiting room. The sound texture clarifies, and an establishing shot shows him halt behind a filing cabinet, eyes right, while Canino interrogates Jones next door (fig. 7.45). There is a cut to a view of Jones and Canino through the office doorway (fig. 7.46). Now, this cannot be Marlowe's optical point of view, since the angle varies markedly from his vantage point. The shot indicates not what Marlowe sees but what he is trying to see, and the half-open door emphasizes the barriers to vision from his station point. When Jones mentions Marlowe's name, cut back to a reaction shot of Marlowe (fig. 7.47), who looks down reflectively as offscreen dialogue continues. He then appears to listen more intently. This frees the narration from any attempt to render Marlowe's vision. We cut back to Jones and Canino, but now seen from a position inside the office (fig. 7.48), followed by a reverse shot (fig. 7.49). These shots cannot be attributed to Marlowe's point of view. They are instead visual accompaniment to what he *hears*. Thus the narration confines itself to what Marlowe learns, but its

7.46. The Big Sleep
7.47. The Big Sleep
7.48. The Big Sleep
7.49. The Big Sleep



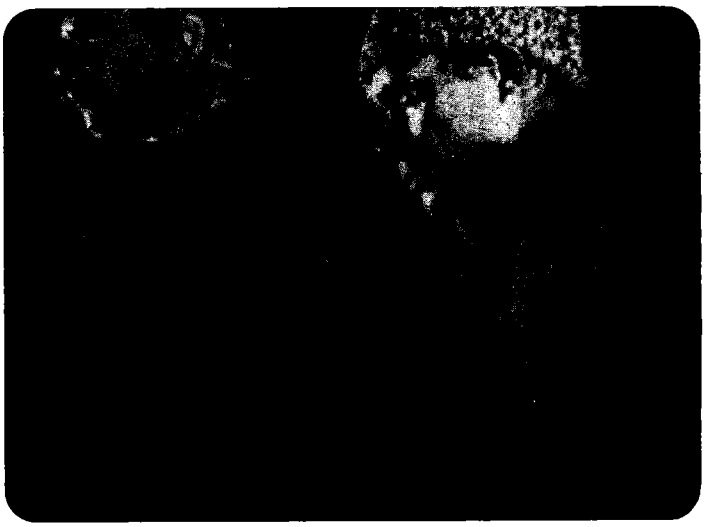

spatial system interprets that constraint generously, refusing to let the protagonist's immobility hog-tie the camera. This tactic remains less self-conscious than the camera's shortcut through the willows in *Sunrise* because the redundancy of action and spatial areas is very great and the cutting is less independent of the character. Had the narration cut to a high-angle shot of Jones and Canino with Canino's fateful bottle of poison in the foreground, we could posit a disparity between viewer knowledge and character knowledge comparable to that of the *Sunrise* shot. But the actual exchange

takes only slight liberties by using the most conventional spatial schemata (from establishing shot to medium shot through shot/reverse shot) to clarify and emphasize the dialogue. Here we encounter that muted, discreet omniscience which Chapter 5 has already discussed in relation to the detective film.

A less realistically motivated narration can flaunt spatial omnipresence, even using it to feed us false or ambiguous cues. In *The End of St. Petersburg,* a worker and a peasant come forward to ask government troops to join the revolution. The troops and the two Bolsheviks are never seen in the same shot, and the latter are in fact presented in an abstract, unlocalized space (fig. 7.50). A general (fig. 7.51) orders a squadron forward to fire on the men. The eyelines and the orientation of the rifles (fig. 7.52) suggest that the squad is on the left, aiming at the two men on the right, with the general somewhere in between (in a purified space like that of the Bolsheviks). The general shouts, "Fire!" Suddenly there is a brief shot of the general, now looking *right* (fig. 7.53) and then a shot of rifles firing to the *left* (fig. 7.54). This pair of shots disrupts our cognitive map of the scene. The general flinches in a head-on view (fig. 7.55). The rifles are now in their previous position, firing to the right. The general topples rightward, obviously stricken. The crossing of the imaginary axis of action in figures 7.52–7.54 throws momentary doubt on exactly whom the soldiers are firing at; the alternating shots of the general and the rifles at various angles suggests the hypothesis that he is the target. This is confirmed when he topples and another shot shows the peasant and worker unharmed. The nonredundant, overtly self-conscious manipulation of space recalls the passage from *Earth* mentioned above.

All these examples recall a point made throughout the previous chapters. In narrative cinema, syuzhet-centered schemata usually control stylistic ones. Once grasped as three-dimensional and furnished with recognizable objects, cinematic space is typically subordinated to narrational ends. The *Sunrise* shots function to match ongoing stylistic hypotheses with macrostructural syuzhet ones—delineating setting, shaping suspense, and forwarding the fabula chain.

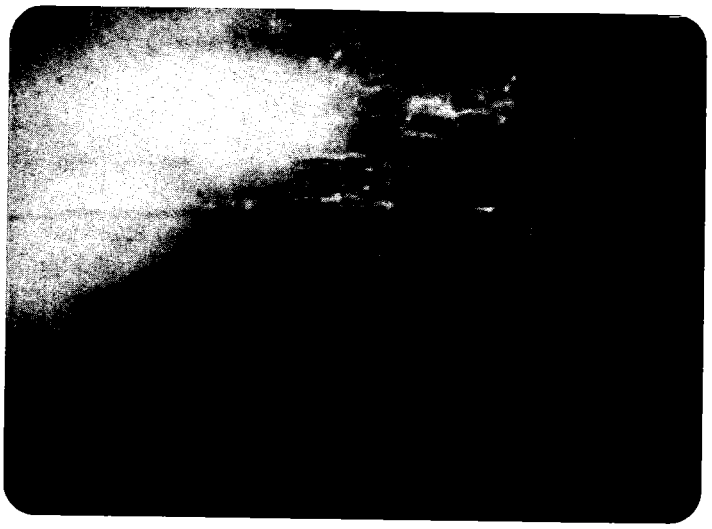
7.50. The End of St. Petersburg
7.51. The End of St. Petersburg



The scene from *The Big Sleep* obviously asks us to slot spatial information into the syuzhet's larger pattern of information dissemination. Even the transgressive spaces of *Earth* and *The End of St. Petersburg* fulfill such purposes. When confronted by such deviant spatial features, we fall back onto

7.52. The End of St. Petersburg
7.53. The End of St. Petersburg

7.54. The End of St. Petersburg
7.55. The End of St. Petersburg



action-based schemata (e.g., soldiers turning on their superior) and then test those on the cues. Stylistic originality in film thus often consists of finding novel devices which the spectator can match to broad syuzhet schemata or hypotheses. Thus the back-to-the-camera compositions in *Earth* are a striking way of expressing the stereotype "fierce opposition," while the violation of conventional eyelines and orientations in *The End of St. Petersburg* vividly embodies the idea of a commander figuratively surrounded by his own troops. Yet the same instances show that, however func-

tional film style may be, it can still powerfully shape our construction of space and narrative. It is to a remarkable example of this process that I now turn.