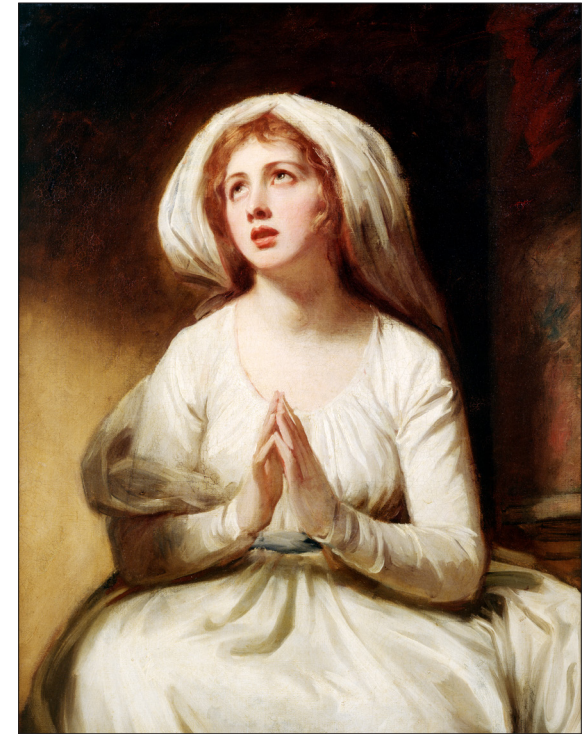


PART THREE Acting

Lady Hamilton was one of the originators of the late eighteenth-century art of “attitudes,” a branch of amateur theatricals that comprised the assumption of a succession of poses usually reminiscent of classical statuary or painting. It seems quite likely that she learned many poses, and the techniques of manipulating the draperies and shawls required for them, from the artist George Romney, for whom she worked as a model during the years 1782–6.¹ While Romney’s *Lady Hamilton at Prayer* derives from a Christian, not a classical tradition, the model’s dress and pose resemble her later attitudes and seem typical of them (Figure 3.1).² The pictorial elements of the pose have been carefully worked out: the eyes look upward to express devotion but the face is gracefully tilted to the model’s right and down, to contrast with the rest of the body and to provide the spectator with a good view of the features; the little fingers have been bent to differentiate the fingers of the hands in prayer, and to give an impression of lightness and repose. The effect of the pose is reinforced by the way the painter has handled the light. It seems to come from the upper left corner, to which her gaze is directed, and falls full upon her face while the play of light on the hands also helps to differentiate the fingers. It is both an evocation of an invisible divine presence and a way of showing off the model’s posture to great advantage. The ersatz quality of the painting according to the canons of present-day taste lies precisely in these qualities of the pose and the composition. What is ostensibly a private moment of religious contemplation appears much

too clearly directed outwards in the creation of an “effect” for a spectator, its formal elements are too controlled, its significance too emphatic.³ But attitudes such as this, organized with great attention to compositional elements as well as to the expression of dramatic situations, formed a cornerstone of late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century acting technique. An understanding of these techniques is a precondition for one of the evolution of film acting in the 1910s.

Our insistence on the importance of such pictorial elements for film acting in this period may seem anomalous. The traditional account is that film acting rapidly departed from the “large” stereotyped gestures suited to the scale of the stage and associated with early nineteenth-century theatrical practice, adopting a more modern style that relied upon “small” restrained gestures and facial expressions more appropriate to the close framings that the cinema permitted.⁴ In an influential recent study of acting styles at Biograph, *Eloquent Gestures*, Roberta Pearson has attempted to trace the eclipse of what she calls the “histrionic” style, which relied on stereotyped postures and attitudes, in favor of the “verisimilar” style, which aimed to adhere to conventionalized notions of “real” gesture and action. She argues that by 1912 the verisimilar style had largely replaced the histrionic, at least among the most acclaimed actors at Biograph. In our view, the actor’s assumption of poses and attitudes was much more important and was important for far longer than this, and other, accounts suggest. In what follows, we begin with a discussion of how



3.1

gestures and attitudes functioned in nineteenth-century acting traditions, seeking to arrive at a more precise definition of pictorialism in acting. We then turn to the question of how this tradition was taken up and transformed within European and American filmmaking traditions.

Actors struck attitudes even when they were not in a tableau. The concern with postures, and the attempt to control how the actor looked while standing or moving on stage, became pronounced in the mid-eighteenth century and persisted until well into the early twentieth. Of course, acting style did not remain invariable throughout this period, but however acting and staging practices changed, the assumption of attitudes and poses remained an important part of the actor’s technique. It should be noted that our efforts to generalize about an

acting tradition that covers such a long time span works against some of the best recent theatre history, which has concentrated on reconstructing specific productions, and documenting the activities of particular theatres and companies. Nonetheless, we have been struck by the strong continuities underlying the discourses on acting in this lengthy period, continuities that derive from a vivid concern with the stage picture. For example, the eighteenth-century performance practices described by Dene Barnett were largely geared to suiting gesture to words; in his sources one finds little discussion of the creation of the sort of wordless tableaux advocated by Voltaire, Diderot and others.⁵ Yet, even within the rhetorically oriented performance styles still frequently deployed for tragedy and for declaiming verse in the eighteenth century, one finds frequent admonitions to the actor to imitate paintings and statues in postures on-stage, and, as Barnett documents, great concern with finding striking visual correlates for verbal expressions.⁶ Here we will argue that such postures and attitudes persisted in the nineteenth century, despite the shift to a much less exclusively verbal theatre.

The coherence of pictorialism as a tradition emerges most strikingly in the contrast with present-day acting methods from which it is quite remote. We will argue that the advent of naturalism and the new drama of Ibsen, Shaw and Pinero represents a definitive break with the actor's traditional concern with the stage picture (indeed, William Archer's attacks on acting geared to "picture-poster situations" in the name of the new drama provides some of the best descriptions of the older aesthetic and acting methods). But even if pictorialism begins to appear dated to the most advanced theatre practitioners at the turn of the century, the older tradition did not simply disappear. For example, Delsarte's acting system, which was based on the teaching of poses, was still being taught by Gustave Garcia at the London Academy of Music in the first decade of the twentieth century, and the evidence from films we will

adduce later shows that these traditions were still alive a decade later throughout Europe.⁷

We would also like to distinguish what we are calling pictorial styles of acting from pantomime. Although contemporary works on pantomime such as Charles Aubert's *L'Art mimique* of 1901, do include examples and discussion of attitudes, we take pantomime to be more specifically concerned with the substitution of gesture for dialogue.⁸ One can find examples of pantomime in silent film, especially in the early years in which actors often resort to it to convey story information. However the practice also came in for criticism, as by Frank Woods in 1909:

The old pantomime sought to convey ideas by motions as if the persons were deaf and dumb. The natural action of the silent play also entered largely in the development of the plot, but detail ideas were indicated by unnatural movements of the hands. For instance, if an actor desired to indicate to another that he wanted a drink of water he would form his hand in the shape of a cup and go through the motions of drinking. Pantomime of this sort is still seen too often in picture playing, but the tendency is to get away from it, the idea being that the nearer to actual life the picture can be made to appear the more convincing it must be to the spectators. The modern director of the first class will now avoid the unnatural hand pantomime as much as possible and will indicate the wish for a drink of water, for instance, by having the player do some plausible thing that will convey the desired idea. The player wishing to ask for drink may hand a glass to some one with a natural motion, or he may indicate the water pitcher by a simple movement of the hand, or he may appear to ask a question, which, followed by the fetching of the drink, clearly and reasonably shows what the request has been.⁹

Woods is objecting to pantomime as opposed to stage business as a means of storytelling. And we would agree with Kristin Thompson's assessment that pantomime in this sense does indeed play a much less prominent role in film acting in serious drama by the middle 1910s.¹⁰ However, what we would call pictorial styles of stage acting encompass a much broader range of gesture than this idea of pantomime. Given the resources of the legitimate

stage, a character would not have to mime, but could simply ask for a drink of water; she would probably not accompany the request with a marked pose unless the situation called for emphasis, for example, if she was about to put poison in the drink.

The important point, for us, is to move away from the kind of linguistic analogy that posits a one-to-one relationship between attitudes and speech as is the case in Woods's example where the actor's hand gesture means "I want a drink."¹¹ Poses and attitudes in the general sense that interests us were conventionalized and did carry significance, but they are probably best understood through analogy with the music that, as noted above, always accompanied nineteenth-century popular theatre. Like music, posing was used to underscore dramatic moments, to convey and heighten emotions, to elongate and intensify situations. Poses are best understood therefore, not as a lexicon, but as a way of managing the stage picture, a visual repertoire that was deployed in relation to specific narrative contexts. A given conventionalized pose, for example an actor placing hand upon forehead in despair, needs to be analyzed not simply in terms of its conventionalized meaning, but more importantly, in terms of how the gesture is realized and how it fits within the overall visual design of the scene. It is these points that we intend to pursue here: how poses and attitudes functioned as an integral part of an actor's preparation for a role (indeed, of the training of actors in general), and how they provided a means of blocking scenes for individual actors and the ensemble.

CHAPTER 5 Pictorial Acting in the Theatre

The frequency with which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century actors were enjoined to study statues and paintings, and to practice poses, and the consistent use of illustrative drawings in manuals on acting and oratory stand in sharp contrast with present-day training methods, and help to signal the degree to which acting was conceived along pictorial lines. Dene Barnett's extremely useful compilation of rules governing posture, gleaned from eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European books on acting, makes it possible readily to document the insistence on copying poses from the other arts.¹² To take only a few examples, Franciscus Lang, in a work of 1727: "I assert, that it can be of the greatest use, if one contemplates frequently, and diligently, the pictures of skilful painters, or statues carved by masters (most of all to be sure [those] of skilful Actors, and also of sacred Orators), so that by the contemplation of these, one may train one's own imagination properly, and thus may strive to imitate the images imprinted on one's mind in living action also."¹³ And, in his acting manual of 1827, Johannes Jelgerhuis writes: "In general one will note in the Ancient figures, curves which are invaluable in the forming of graceful positions, to be looked at with attention; I hope that these instructions will have shed light in your understanding, and demonstrated with what kind of eye these masterpieces of time-honored sculpture should be observed, and how the mind must work in order to profit from them for use on the Stage."¹⁴ Similarly, from later in the nineteenth century, in Henry Neville's section on gesture in an 1895 work addressed to students of rhetoric: "We term attitude

the position adopted at the end of the walk, or when standing still; and this requires very careful study. The elder Kean was so perfect a master of his art that when he first walked on the London stage, and took his position in the centre without speaking a word the audience recognised in him a genius. We may be aided in our selection of appropriate attitudes by attending picture galleries. The painter paints attitudes; his mind is cultivated to record them; they are the significant objects of his art."¹⁵ Such advice is seconded by the use of illustrations of postures and significant gestures in a range of acting and public-speaking manuals. Jelgerhuis is unique in actually having been a painter, and hence able to draw examples of good and bad posture that fit precisely with the text of his lectures, but one also finds illustrations of attitudes, sometimes adopted from other sources, in Henry Siddons's *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action* (where the drawings are adapted from the earlier German work by Engel), Antonio Morrocchesi's *Lezioni di declamazione e d'arte teatrale*, Neville's already cited work, and in Delsarte's system of oratory and the various acting manuals derived from this, and many others.¹⁶

Neophyte actors were thus encouraged to think very carefully about their body on stage in pictorial terms, even to the point of practicing attitudes in front of a mirror. In contrast, a naturalist acting teacher such as Stanislavsky rarely talked about how the actor on stage would look to the audience. Rather the preparation of the actor involved getting students to relax their muscles so as to be able to move freely on stage, doing exercises to improve

their concentration, and various techniques for analyzing a role in psychological terms and promoting identification with the part. Thus, in a discussion of the actor's gait in the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre studio at the end of the 1910s, Stanislavsky asserted that the walk should develop without forethought in a relaxed and natural way from the actor's conception of the part. His greatest concern was that the actor not develop a self-consciousness about his body that would break his concentration, so that in the midst of a scene he would become "hampered by" his feet. He remarks, in the context of criticizing an actor's gait:

Gait is in general one of the weakest points of actors. For instance, of all the actresses I have seen, there was only one whose manner of walking on the stage I personally liked, and even then many people disagreed with me. But no actor's part, as the centre of the audience's attention, ever suffered from it. Why then did the actor's gait spoil everything in this particular instance? Because it constrained and hampered the actor himself. His attention was not fixed on the problem on his part.¹⁷

Attention to the walk as such can thus be detrimental, even if it leads to an attractive or graceful gait, because it may interfere with the actor's internal identification with the character. Stanislavsky has a much stronger rebuke for an actor who, during a rehearsal of Massenet's *Werther*, assumes a pose:

But let us go on. How do you behave after having seen and realised the frightened and confused state of the woman, of the Charlotte you are in love with and into whose house you have rushed so violently? You are an educated man, a man of the world, a man who is used to the society of ladies, that is to say, who possesses

civility, courage and strength. And you can't manage a bow, a smile, a tender look for the woman you love? Is it natural to freeze like that at the door? If you had seen Charlotte lying dead in the room, I could have understood and justified your petrified pose. But now there is no reason for your petrified state. And how long do you intend standing there like that? A minute? Two minutes? Five minutes? Half an hour?¹⁸

The pose is seen as a violation of the psychological logic of character action, a point where the actor loses touch with his part and lapses into a self-conscious stance directed toward the audience.

Perhaps because of the contrast with later acting methods, some historians have concluded that the importance accorded to poses and attitudes in the pre-naturalist nineteenth-century theatre means that actors then were not concerned with character psychology and acting methods were not geared to the creation of what we would consider psychological realism.¹⁹ Certainly the nineteenth-century acting manuals do not place the same emphasis on the actor's psychology, and on the process of identifying with a part, that Stanislavsky does. None the less, it seems clear that throughout the period with which we are concerned, a variety of conceptions of psychology and/or physiology provided a basis for the methods of acting associated with pictorialism.²⁰ For example, in connection with the frequently repeated rule that gesture should precede speech, Franciscus Lang writes:

Now the reason for this effect, is that the parts of the body move more quickly to perform their task by way of the passions, than the mind to its task by way of reason. Moreover it is easier, to show something by a sign, than to utter words, since the mind must devote itself more to the latter, than to the former. Indeed the passions are marshalled without intermediary by the imagination, which flows into them. But the words, as though in the workshop of the emotions, ought first to be worked out by the intellect, until the things which have been inwardly conceived may be expressed in due form through speech. An example from nature. In a harpsichord the keys are pressed first, before the plucked

strings give out a sound. So it is in man. The first realisation of something may be in the imagination: this moves the passion, and the limbs, before reason works, and discloses the inward emotion in words. The actor therefore imitates this natural way, so that he anticipates the word by the gesture.²¹

Like the harpsichord, the body is conceived mechanically, producing gestures and poses almost automatically in response to the "applied force" of the emotions. By imitating the postures that have a natural derivation in the emotions, the actor is sure of stirring a sympathetic response in the audience. Charles Le Brun's 1698 lecture to the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture on facial expression is often cited as an early attempt to codify expressive gesture and to give it a basis in the science of physiognomy. The lecture was accompanied by drawings that appear in many subsequent acting volumes.²² Both Joseph Roach and Louis James have traced the lines of scientific argument that posited various sorts of connections between specific emotional states and expressive gestures, from Le Brun to Johann Caspar Lavater's illustrated and much adapted *Essays on Physiognomy* (1797), through Darwin's *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), illustrated with photographs.²³

Delsarte's late nineteenth-century system of oratory can also be seen as partaking of a similar set of assumptions about the physiological basis for the manifestation of the emotions in gesture, and hence their power to affect an audience. In deriving what he refers to as the "semeiotics" of gesture, he begins by observing the human form in various situations in real life. Thus, he claims that he found it difficult to act surprise until he felt a spontaneous shock in which he "naturally" discovered the way to hold his hands; similarly, his research on hand position led him to compare the way the thumb of the hand is held on cadavers versus children at play.²⁴ It should be noted that although Delsarte uses the word "semeiotics" in relation to the gestural signs that he proposes to analyse, these signs were, in the

terms of a later Saussurian semiotics, motivated and not arbitrary ones. Delsarte, like the other commentators on acting within this tradition who came before him, sought for and found a natural or physiological basis for the postures and attitudes that were taught and practiced. The passions were thought to find natural expression in gesture; insofar as the actor could mobilize these gestures, either through literally re-experiencing the relevant emotions himself, or simply through assuming their outward manifestations, he was likely to strike a resonating chord in his audience.²⁵

Moreover, actors and critics throughout this period clearly aimed to provide a convincing representation of character psychology. Holmström, for example, notes that Mlle. Clairon, an early advocate of the actress's use of facial expression based upon the physiological manifestation of the passions, also emphasized the need to differentiate between characters on the grounds that "the passions take different expressions in different people, depending on social position, nationality, age, etc."²⁶ And the failure to achieve a convincing portrayal of character was often grounds for criticism. Wilhelm von Humboldt, writing to Goethe in 1800 about the skill of French tragic actors in achieving pictorial effects and the beauties of what he called "gestural acting," expressed reservations about the style because a sense of interiority in the representation of character was sacrificed. He argued that the French actor

shows and paints the whole state of the soul, feelings, passions, decisions, but not the heart itself, torn by feelings, overpowered by passions, steeled to bold and sudden decisions. But how could the actor represent what is not representable in its essence? Of course, he can only show us the externalizations, but there is undeniably a mood in human beings in which, in the closest combination of all feelings and opinions, everyone feels an individual being wholly and purely. If the actor can adopt this mood, if he can make voice, facial expressions, gestures stem only from it, he will evoke the same mood in us, and what happens in every great artistic

effect will happen — the spectator will see more than the artist was directly able to represent.²⁷

Pictorial gesture then is “external” but it could and should spring from the “internal” seat of all emotions and, in the very best acting method, would provide the spectator with an illusion of “depth,” an intuition of the character from which the individual passions and postures spring.

Humboldt’s remarks can be taken as evidence of a real concern with character psychology, an interest that he takes to be typically German and opposes to the French tragic actor’s concern with the external and merely visible. Nonetheless, it is in our view a mistake to interpret this as evidence of two distinct approaches to acting. Almost all of the commentators that we have read, German or otherwise and including Humboldt himself, thought that *internal states should be externalized in gestures and attitudes*. One frequently finds the objection raised against particular performances that they are focused on external elements to the detriment of a sense of internal processes or psychological motivation. But in practice this seems to mean little more than that the observer found the performance in question unconvincing. For example, specifically objecting to Henry Irving’s acting style in the role of Mephistopheles in his well-known production of *Faust*, Coquelin writes:

Of course picturesque detail is not to be despised, but it should never become the object of exclusive attention, and above all, no picturesque trait, however natural, should ever be taken as the starting-point of a role. It is the *character* that is the starting-point of everything. If you have assimilated the essence of your personage, his exterior will follow quite naturally, and if there is any picturesqueness, it will come of itself. It is the mind which constructs the body.²⁸

Note that Coquelin does not here dispute the premise that picturesque detail expresses character, but merely argues that the actor’s understanding of the “internal” aspects of a character should come “first” in the creation of a role. Obviously

this is something that is quite difficult to judge in performance. Hence Louis Calvert’s evaluation of one of Coquelin’s most famous roles, Cyrano de Bergerac: “It seemed to me that Coquelin, with all his superb technique, was concerning himself merely with the externals and superficialities, the visible attributes of Cyrano, instead of feeling him.”²⁹ In our view, it is not useful to attempt to explain the pictorial tradition in acting in terms of a lack of interest in character psychology, or an opposition between internal and external approaches to character. Like their modern successors, actors in the pre-naturalist theatre found psychological justifications for what they did on stage (although of course in the naturalist theatre and after actors appealed to radically different kinds of psychology), valued the representation of interior states, and were sometimes found lacking in their representation of those states. What distinguishes pictorial styles of acting, then, is that actors were encouraged to think about how they looked on stage through a training process in which interesting poses were sought out, most frequently borrowed from painting or sculpture, and in which gestures or systems of gesture as codified in the acting manuals were studied and practiced. Presumably many actors received a similar but less formalized training simply by watching others on the stage, and associating certain attitudes with certain moments in certain roles.

The assumption of poses served multiple functions in the management of staging and blocking in this period. Frederick Marker has emphasized the important fact that up until the 1860s, and in some cases even later, there were very few rehearsals as well as real problems disciplining actors to attend rehearsal. For example, at mid-century in the Danish Royal Theatre, the number of rehearsals for a new production averaged between six and eight, even for plays with elaborate scenic effects and newly written music. Marker concludes, with many others, that the modern idea of the director as

the person responsible for controlling the *mise-en-scène* and the one in charge of the visual design of a production did not hold in the pre-naturalist theatre, where responsibility for managing the *mise-en-scène* was much more decentralized.³⁰ Actors were thus largely charged with working out the details of their own movements on stage, and managing how they looked within the stage picture. As Thomas Rede cautions in 1827 in *The Road to the Stage*: “All theatrical people that know their business (no matter how many may be engaged in the scene) form a picture; to understand the consequence of dressing the stage, people should pay a visit to a private theatre, where, from the straggling manner in which the performers stand, some stuck close together, others at the extreme corner of the stage from each other, etc. etc., as if uncertain of their ultimate place of destination, the whole effect is marred.”³¹ Within this context the utility of acting styles based upon stereotyped poses and attitudes is clear. Such styles would have helped actors to plan out their own movements and expressions, and moreover to anticipate what others were likely to do in a scene, facilitating management of the ensemble.

There are several indications of the way in which attitudes were used to plan staging. Most obviously, they functioned expressively to mark situations. Humboldt writes of Talma that “He practices the art of drawing, and his acting shows that every situation he thinks of appears to his imagination as a pictorial image.”³² In 1879, a reporter who had attended one of Bernhardt’s rehearsals noted: “Her acting has always shown that she has a keen sense of the beauty of pose. She gets the full plastic as well as histrionic value of a situation.”³³ Dupont-Vernon recalls a performance of *Le Crime de Faverne* by Frédéric Lemaître in which “at the end of an act in which he had been shaken by contradictory impressions, he summed up the whole situation at his exit in one brilliant gesture. In this gesture, which was at once quite simple and sublime, he gathered together the whole genesis of the scene.”³⁴

A similar account of the relation between attitude and situation, although colored by a rather different aesthetic evaluation, is given in William Archer's wicked caricature of romantic acting in *Hernani*. The precision of the example makes it worth quoting at length:

The scene is Spain, the hot-bed of romance; the characters, a king in disguise, a Castilian hidalgo, an Aragonese bandit. The King, hidden in a cupboard, overhears and then interrupts a love-scene between the bandit and the betrothed wife of the hidalgo: Situation First. Just as the rivals are crossing swords, the hidalgo thunders at the locked doors and enters: Situation Second. He makes a noble speech, concluding thus: —

Don Ruy Gomez (à ses valets) —

Écuyers! écuyers! à mon aide!
Ma hache, mon poignard, ma dague de Tolède!
(Aux deux jeunes gens)
Et suivez moi, tous deux!

Don Carlos (faisant un pas) —

Duc ce n'est pas d'abord
De cela qu'il s'agit. Il s'agit de la mort
De Maximilien, empereur d'Allemagne.
(Il jette son manteau, et découvre son visage caché
par son chapeau.)

Don Ruy Gomez —

Raillez-vous? . . . Dieu! Le Roi!

Doña Sol —

Le Roi!

Hernani (dont les yeux s'allument) —

Le Roi d'Espagne!

Situation Third — and what a situation! What attitudes for all concerned! The king drawing himself up with superb gesture; Ruy Gomez passing from rage to astonishment, and then bending before his liege lord; Doña Sol shrinking back in surprise and dread; and Hernani couched, as it were, for a spring, his eyes blazing forth in sudden hate from the gloomy background of the Gothic chamber!³⁵

While of course this does not describe an actual performance, it does give a plausible account of how a group of actors working within the romantic tradition might approach such a big scene.

The scene is broken down into parts defined by the disguised King's entrance, Don Gomez's entrance, and the recognition of the King, reversals or recognitions that mark the passage from one dramatic situation to the next. For each situation, each actor in the ensemble strikes at least one pose. Archer's description assumes the importance of pictorial contrast already discussed in relation to the tableau, but here it is accorded to the linear succession of poses — the changes in attitude assumed by Ruy Gomez in the course of the recognition — as well as the final static picture — in the contrast between Doña Sol who shrinks back in fear while Hernani looks ready to spring forward in an aggressive posture.

As in the hypothetical case of *Hernani*, actors often seem to have assumed attitudes upon their entrances. Jelgerhuis, for example, writes: "To come onto the stage, in whatever character, I hold it to be necessary and useful that one choose a certain Attitude, to comply with the great lesson of Karel van Mander's *Painting Book*, never without stylishness."³⁶ A star who would be expecting applause at his or her first entrance would hold an attitude to allow time for it, as in the cases already discussed of Irving's first entrance in *The Bells* and the poor opera singer in *Werther* rebuked by Stanislavsky. Humboldt also noted that French tragic actors exited in attitudes, unlike their German counterparts,³⁷ and the discussion of Lemaître's acting already cited suggests that this tradition continued until well into the nineteenth century.

Henry Siddons provides a good indication of how a scene could be planned out as a series of attitudes. He discusses a scene from the opera *Alceste* in which, having already pledged to the gods that she is willing to die in order that her husband may be spared, the Queen is overcome by fear, believing that she already hears the underworld shades who have come to take her. Siddons describes the appropriate attitude of weakness caused by fear (Figure 3.2):



3.2

The last attitude of an actress charged with such a part should accompany this expression with a degree of faintness almost approaching annihilation, with her face averted from the spot whence the terrific sounds are supposed to arise: she should now and then cast a timid and furtive glance, as if fearful of beholding the dreaded spectres: the reversed hands, which she had opposed to them, ought to preserve their former direction; but she should not appear to have force or courage sufficient to give any degree of tension to the muscles, so that, feeble and trembling, they may afterwards drop lifeless by her sides.³⁸

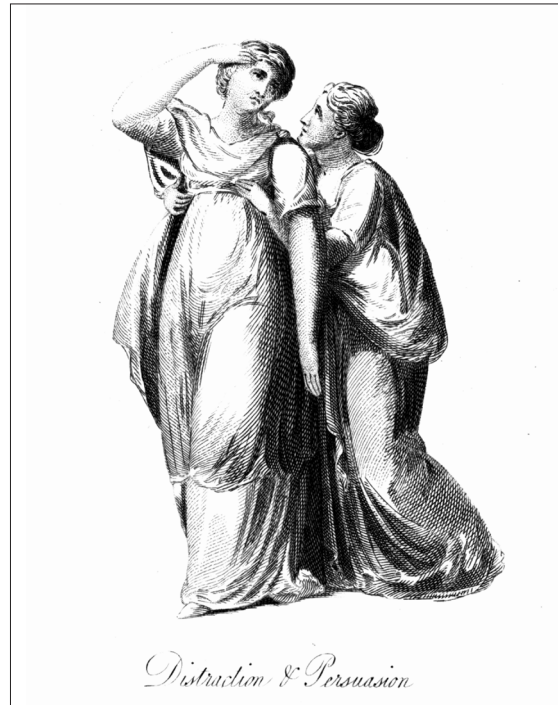
However, immediately after this, Alceste changes her mind and re-iterates her devotion to her husband and her vow in the "second invocation of the infernal gods." In this attitude (Figure 3.3): "The countenance of Alceste should be fixed on the ground, because she is invoking the infernal deities; her body should bend forwards; her step



3-3

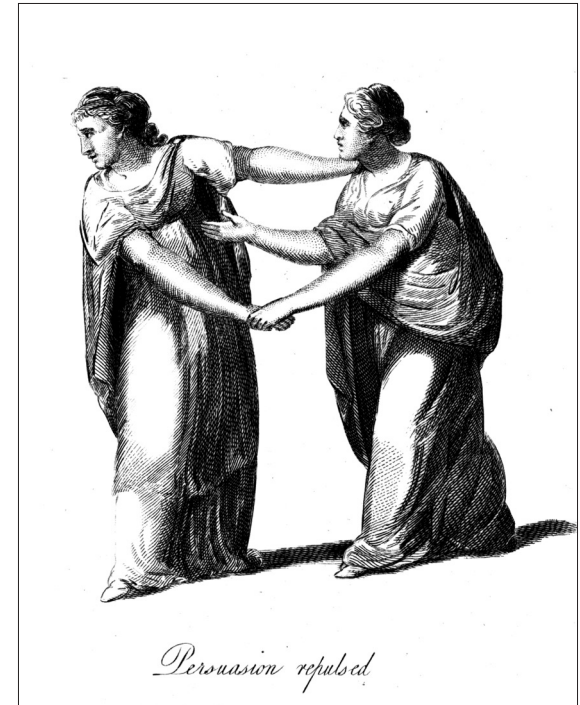
ought to be grand, her arms extend, and each open eye to seem bursting from its orbit: the whole countenance should beam with a species of haggard inspiration."³⁹

The problem that Siddons goes on to discuss is how to make the transition from one attitude to the next, how to bind together sentiments and attitudes that are extremely different, and how to motivate the repetition of the musical motif associated with the vow itself. The solution he proposes is to interpose two attitudes in between the first and the second, so as to make the change in the Queen's countenance and posture more gradual. The intermediate postures make use of Parthenia, the Queen's sister. After her expression of fear upon hearing what she imagines to be the shades, the Queen should rest on Parthenia's breast, lifting one arm and drawing it across her forehead (Figure 3.4), demonstrating



3-4

"the sentiment of the disorder which troubles her soul." Then, in response to her sister's tender plea to abandon her vow, the Queen should express displeasure and finally tear herself away from her sister's arms (Figure 3.5), now ready to reiterate it. Siddons concludes: "By this means the repetition of this devotion will be found not only perfect, but the hurried leap from one sentiment to the other will be totally avoided; and what, without this prudent precaution, might have appeared a useless ornament or a mere misplaced musical luxury, becomes an admirable and expressive trait in the character of Alcestis."⁴⁰ This is one of the few discussions we have seen of how attitudes could serve as the basis for blocking out a scene, although in Antonio Morrocchesi's *Lezioni di declamazione e d'arte teatrale* there is a similar sequence of plates to illustrate Pylades' false report of Orestes' death to Aegisthus



3-5

in Alfieri's *Oreste*.⁴¹ Not only the expression of particular emotional states, but also the relation of the poses to the music and the problem of how to make a graceful and logical transition from one pose to the next would have had to be considered. Although they do not approach the clarity of Siddons's directions, we have found early twentieth-century stage managers' libretti in the Tams-Witmark music library in which it is proposed that the singers be left free to improvise a series of attitudes in tandem with the music in key scenes or arias, indicating the viability and persistence of this way of approaching the problem of staging.⁴²

The interest in how actors made the transitions between attitudes is also indicated by Garrick's well-known party piece performed at the salon of Baron d'Holbach in Paris during his visit in 1763–4 in which he poked his head out from behind a

screen and illustrated various passions in rapid succession.⁴³ In about the same period, Lessing also commented on the skill required of an actor who had to “change from one emotion to another and must make this dumb transition so naturally that the spectator is not carried away by a leap, but by a series of rapid still perceptible gradations.”⁴⁴ It seems important to stress the complex effects that could be achieved by modulating attitudes, and thereby preparing for the largest and most striking effects, since this style of acting is often caricatured on the basis of the acting manuals as merely the assumption of isolated, highly stereotyped poses. But the single pose was only one building block in the architecture of the scene.

In the example from *Alcestis* Parthenia poses in tandem with the Queen, and the process of acting for the ensemble must have involved the orchestration of a number of attitudes on the part of the various actors. The procedure we have outlined of breaking plays down into situations that were then illustrated by a number of highly stereotyped postures would have helped actors to plan and co-ordinate their movements without much aid from a director, and without many rehearsals. Writing of the acting ensemble in 1750, Riccoboni explains:

Several Actors, who ordinarily each have a different character, and whose situation is never the same, must keep in their Playing a certain rapport which prevents them from being inharmonious to the ear, or eyes, of the Spectator. They can be compared to Musicians who sing a piece in several parts; each utters different sounds, but all together create one same harmony.[. . .] In the gestures and movements of all the Actors the same harmony should be found, as in the tones of their voice. Elementary care makes the thing extremely easy. Let each one examine in what position he finds himself with regard to the others. Whether he should show superiority or respect in his position, whether it is proper for him to audaciously face the one who is speaking, or avoid meeting his eye, and keeping to the rule that movements of one lead on to those of the other, and

that all keep exactly within the situation where the scene should place them.⁴⁵

With each actor watching the rest of the cast, and adjusting his or her pose in accord with the situation and the poses of the others, it would have been possible for individual actors to manage the look of the ensemble. Jelgerhuis also recommends that actors mutually adjust their poses, here in order to ensure the proper contrasting attitudes:

And if one’s eye is drawn to a chorus of attendants in a Tragedy, who mostly all stand thus [with arms folded?] from bad habit, then that position is even more to be avoided, I abandon it immediately, as soon as I see, that one or other of my fellow artists, assumes it for a while, as nothing is more ugly, than for two Actors to stand alike, because contrasts must hold in the whole of the tableau, as well as in one particular personage; we must learn to see this, as we stand in a scene, because if it is bad enough that a whole suite stand with arms folded, think then what you get when the principal persons also make much use of it.⁴⁶

In the manuals, actors are frequently enjoined to act and especially gesture in response to the dialogue of others so as to insure a unified stage picture.⁴⁷ The manuals also insist that the most important characters should visually dominate the scene although then as now one supposes that actors sometimes tried to upstage each other, and to make themselves more prominent within the stage picture. The *Dictionnaire dramatique*, defining the term *jeu de théâtre*, recommends: “In this last case [with several actors on stage], verisimilitude requires that the degrees of their expression are suited to the degree of interest that their Characters take in the action that takes place on the stage. In the images that the Play offers us, the same as in paintings [*tableaux*], the leading figure should always have the advantage over the others of principally holding the eye.”⁴⁸ Similarly, Thomas Wilkes writes:

It is his business in all cases to observe nature and propriety; it is observable that in all capital paintings, there are a few principal figures which more remarkably

strike the eye, and by that means throw the attendant figures into their proper distance; in like manner, on the Stage, the leading figures or personages in a scene, should, by their dignity of action, throw the attending characters into their proper shade of inferiority; and, then the whole, like a fine painting in perspective, will be all graceful and harmonious.⁴⁹

The idea of the overall stage picture, and the rules laid down for preserving its compositional harmony, and appropriate relation to the dramatic action, thus served as a guide for organizing the efforts of the ensemble in which actors worked independently to a large degree.

Attitudes thus facilitated staging in a number of ways. They were used expressively to mark situations. They provided a way of managing entrances and exits. Conceiving of the scene as a series of attitudes permitted the individual actor to work up to the strongest ones and to plan out how he or she would effect the transition from one important posture to the next. They also offered techniques for managing the ensemble by positing the principles of contrast between different actors’ poses and of a hierarchy whereby the spectators’ attention was directed to the most dramatically important figures on the stage.

Pictorialism in acting, the traditions of actor training and of staging that we have outlined here, are often defined in opposition to a realist or naturalist style. The terms have become so vexed, especially in regards to film, which is often simply assumed to be naturalistic as a photographic medium, that they require some comment. Appeals to realism or some idea of a “natural” style appear frequently in contemporary discussions of acting but it is often difficult to discern what is meant by them. The problem is compounded when these terms are taken up by present-day historians who interpret them in the light of twentieth-century conceptions of acting without posing the question of the ways the appeal to realism functioned within the context of nineteenth-century theatrical discourses and

assumed importance as a criterion for judging acting. In our view, there are several such ways. With one exception these do not presuppose a rejection of or departure from pictorial elements in favor of some other style.

Most important in the eighteenth century, and for at least half of the nineteenth, was the opposition between beauty and expressiveness. The acting manuals continually stress the importance of grace, decorum, and good bearing in the actor's movements and gestures on stage. Rémond de Sainte-Albine notes that the passions "must be portrayed with vivacity on the face of the Actor. They must not disfigure it. [. . .] Affliction should not be rendered hideous, instead of its being rendered interesting."⁵⁰ The *Encyclopédie méthodique* invokes Lessing's discussion of this question with regard to the visual arts by recommending that the actor study the Laocöon as an example of how to maintain grace and beauty "even in the extreme situations of tragedy."⁵¹ Lessing himself argues that as acting, in contradistinction to the plastic arts, is transitory, the actor may permit himself "the wildness of a Tempesta, the insolence of a Bernini," provided that these attitudes are carefully treated: "It [the art of the actor] must not remain in them too long, it must prepare for them gradually by previous movements, and must resolve them again into the general tone of the conventional."⁵² Ever practical, Jelgerhuis gives instructions for how to die, be stabbed, pray, sleep, and sit at a table in despair with good bearing.⁵³ He advises that even supposedly "clumsy" characters, such as a farmer and his wife, be portrayed with grace.⁵⁴ Obviously, these comments apply only to tragedy, and in comedy the grotesque as opposed to the picturesque was tolerated and even required.

Within the context of the concern to idealize or formally contain expressive gesture, violations of decorum and good bearing were often described as "realistic," and indeed criticized as such. While scholars such as Dene Barnett see the insistence upon good bearing as typical of the eighteenth century,

the notion of realism that is opposed to it certainly survives into the nineteenth.⁵⁵ Boucicault invoked such a conception of realism when he unfavorably compared Bernhardt's playing of the death scene in *Adrienne Lecouvreur* with Rachel's performance of the same scene. He recalled that Bernhardt went into convulsions, writhing on stage, while Rachel simply clung to her young lover and died gazing into his eyes with "no vulgar display of physical suffering except in her repression of it."⁵⁶ Bernhardt is thus criticized for having sacrificed beauty to expressiveness. Of course, one could also accept this idea of "realism" as a positive value, and justify violations of the accepted canons of decorum and the rules of graceful posture on these grounds, as indeed Zola does when he praises what he calls "Romantic" acting as an advance over classical styles.⁵⁷ But whether actors were praised or criticized for being realistic in this sense, there is no reason to assume that they had thereby abandoned the interest in pictorial effect in acting. One may have an expressive gesture, and one that is significant in terms of a narrative situation, without having a formally beautiful pose. Bernhardt's performance in *Adrienne Lecouvreur* presumably fits in this category, and perhaps one definition of the romantic performance style, as opposed to its eighteenth-century precursors, might be a tendency to push in the direction of expressiveness at the expense of compositional harmony and graceful posture.

A second way of using the terms "realism" or the "natural" that also seems to derive from the late eighteenth century advances them as positive terms in opposition to an overly affected or mannered style of acting. Humboldt noted that the French connected the term "nature" with the ideas of simplicity, ease, and restraint, a position that in this passage he does not seem entirely to share.⁵⁸ However, later in his letter to Goethe, he criticizes some French actors in very similar terms:

Acting here is so often mannered, a failing of which even the best actors are not entirely free. Sometimes

they are mannered in the pictorial part, one sees attitudes that do not advance the meaning of the speeches, or a protraction of others that conflicts with nature, or a sudden interruption and change that taste here perhaps finds piquant, but that merely disturb anyone who wants to see all movements arise from a single source alone. Another kind of mannerism is exaggeration and an inadequately measured gradation of expression; a third, which is admittedly uncommon among the good actors, but which I find the most offensive, is the repetition of certain gestural tirades, so to speak, which one actor copies from another, and which become a sort of theatrical commonplace.⁵⁹

This kind of argument appeals to nature as opposed to the overly wrought. "Nature" figures as part of an argument for a "plainer" pictorial style, without rapid or drastic changes in attitude, or long, extended holding of poses.⁶⁰ It is part of an argument for a style that does not call attention to the conventional or stereotyped aspect of the poses, which is apparently what Humboldt objected to when it became obvious that one actor was copying another's postures. Again, in our view, this is a complaint that exists within the confines of the pictorial style; it is not a rejection of posing as such but rather a call for economy and simplicity within its terms.

A conception of a "natural" acting style similar to that evoked by Humboldt can also be found in the late nineteenth century, even after a new conception of naturalism, deriving from Zola, had begun to circulate. For example, elucidating the very different ideas of nature that had influenced actors since Garrick, Constant Coquelin explained his own position as a rejection of the "extremes" of both romanticism and naturalism in Zola's sense: "Just as I would not allow any departure from truth on the plea of picturesque effects, so I would not permit a representation of commonplace or horrible things on the pretext of reality. I am always on the side of nature and against naturalism. [. . .] What I mean by art that is natural in the modern sense is equally remote from both these extremes. It is classic rather than romantic, for everywhere

it regards limit, everywhere it shuns violent antitheses.”⁶¹ Coquelin argued for the importance of mid-nineteenth-century theatrical conventions, both conventional declamatory styles and picturesque effects, but also that good actors should use and judiciously vary the conventions in relation to the demands of genre (he distinguished between tragedy, melodrama and comedy) and of particular roles. This is not necessarily an argument for simplicity or a plain style, since, for example, he argued that melodrama required a certain degree of exaggeration, but the argument appealed to “nature” as a principle of limitation or restraint on the way the actor deployed a recognized body of theatrical conventions.

Coquelin’s reference to Zola signaled yet a third important meaning of the term “nature” — naturalism. Insofar as Zola’s naturalism was associated with the representation of “commonplace or horrible things,” it obviously pertained to the first usage of the term discussed above. But it cannot be reduced to it. Boucicault seems to have found Bernhard’s death scene in *Adrienne Lecouvreur* overly “commonplace and horrible,” but this does not make her a “naturalist” actress in the sense of the tradition defined by Zola or Ibsen. While a comprehensive account of naturalist theatre is beyond the scope of this work, it is necessary to indicate how, in our view, naturalism represented a departure from pictorially oriented styles.

The important feature of naturalist acting as it developed in the 1880s was not that it encouraged actors to approximate real life, or even some conventionalized notion of the real. Rather, in their staging practices the great naturalist directors and actors were willing to abandon not only graceful movement and posture, but also highly emphatic and expressive gesture. In striking attitudes, the actor traditionally summed up an emotion or narrative idea for the audience in the form of one or more compelling “pictures.” But in the naturalist theatre, incidental activity, stage business, became

much more important than the telling gesture or pose as a way of organizing the actor’s activity on stage. There are many well-known instances of the importance accorded to mundane stage business within this movement. For example, Strindberg’s stage directions for the pantomime scene in *Miss Julie* involve the cook, Christine, doing the dishes, cleaning up the kitchen and curling the bangs on her forehead with a curling iron. Similarly, in the Moscow Art Theatre production of *Ghosts* described by Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker, Stanislavsky staged the opening scene, in which exposition is provided by a conversation between Regine and her father the carpenter Engstrand, by having the carpenter on stage from the start of the act, busy fixing the lock on the garden door.⁶² Comparable methods were devised for handling the ensemble. The Markers report that in William Bloch’s definitive staging of *An Enemy of the People*, the director gave fifty-three extras specific “identities” and bits of purposeful stage business.⁶³ Clearly all of these examples have actors performing activities that bear some relation to character or atmosphere, but they are not purposefully designed to produce a pleasing composition, nor to epitomize an emotion or situation as, for example, Lady Hamilton’s attitude epitomizes religious devotion in George Romney’s painting.

Along with the highly elaborated use of stage business, the naturalist theatre of the 1880s fostered an “underplayed,” even opaque acting style. For example, the naturalist director Otto Brahm commented approvingly on the performance style of Rudolf Rittner, one of the actors hired when Brahm took over the administration of the Deutsches Theater in the 1890s:

I had the impression of something that gained extraordinary clarity from its very insignificance: I saw him simply go out a door, nothing more. He had read a letter from his Musotte, and as he mulled it over, filled with its mournful tidings, he walked off, without any ceremony — I think I have never seen anything like it.

Since our whole former style of acting required an appearance of volition, of careful attention to detail, the “effective exit” was one of the weightiest requirements of this school. Every step was defended like the retreat from a battlefield, the actor holding every eye on himself until the last. The significance of Rittner’s exit consisted in that he simply went out, adding nothing. This delighted me and in this little action I saw symbolized the whole revolution of our new method of presentation.⁶⁴

We take Duse’s famed performances of Ibsen as representing an extreme within this general tendency. Duse’s acting is consistently described in terms like “restrained” or “non-melodramatic,” which we take to mean a marked absence of emphatic elements, including gestures and attitudes. Writing in 1927, Arthur Symons described her style as “the antithesis of what we call acting,” and contrasted it with that of Henry Irving, characterizing Irving’s as “dramatised oratory,” which “crystallises into an attitude, dies upon a long drawn-out word,” while Duse’s performance style was “like the art of Verlaine in French poetry; always suggestion, never statement, always a renunciation.”⁶⁵ Indeed, even the arch-Ibsenite William Archer bemoaned the leveling effect of her “dread of melodrama” in her performance as Nora in *A Doll’s House* in London during 1892. He complained that her reactions were so minimal in the scene in which Krogstad points out the discrepancy between the date of Nora’s father’s death and the date on which he supposedly countersigned for her loan, that the audience did not even get a sense of her surprise. Tracy Davis suggests that Archer was expecting Duse to start, and palpably to demonstrate her fear through explicit gestures.⁶⁶

Although one can certainly find examples of productions of Ibsen with other actresses that were praised for their pictorial beauties, and indeed even a famous tableau in *Hedda Gabler*,⁶⁷ the naturalist theatre pioneered by Ibsen and others and developed by actresses such as Duse eventually fostered

a real departure from those eighteenth- and nineteenth-century styles of acting that aimed to produce marked pictorial effects. Ibsen's plays themselves place a great deal of weight on the idea of repression — the inability of characters to express or in some cases even understand the situation in which they find themselves.⁶⁸ The point is underscored by Minnie Maddern Fiske, the American actress who made her reputation as a naturalist in Ibsen's plays, speaking of *Hedda Gabler* in an interview with Alexander Woollcott:

To Hedda the very sight of Lövborg standing there on the threshold of her drawing-room brings a flood of old memories crowding close. It must not show on the surface. That is not Ibsen's way. There are others — alien

spirits — present, and Hedda is the personification of fastidious self-control. She has sacrificed everything for that. No, it may not show on the surface, but if the actress has lived through Hedda's past, and so realized her present, that moment is electrical.⁶⁹

The actor's refusal to provide the audience with pronounced and significant poses would seem to be ideally suited to this kind of dramaturgy that works by the indirect representation of a hidden past, and the repression or containment of feeling. In contrast, pictorial styles as we understand them were geared toward the powerful and direct expression of interior states, and toward making dramatic situations as clear and intense as possible through the orchestration of pose and gesture.

We should note that in our view naturalist acting techniques did have an influence on some film acting, an influence we discuss below in connection with the great Swedish director and actor Victor Sjöström. However, this influence is not as pronounced as has sometimes been asserted or supposed, and we would like to stress the daring involved in adopting this kind of refusal of pictorial effect in the medium of silent film. Naturalist theatre was famously wordy, and to some extent the emphasis on the language compensated for the opacity of gesture and action typical of the acting style. It required considerable sophistication to adapt it to the new medium.

CHAPTER 6 Pictorial Styles and Film Acting

The study of theatre history, at least as regards the nineteenth century, consists in the reconstruction of performances we cannot directly know. But in the case of film we have access to the performances, a fact that sets the historian new problems of analysis, and complicates the process of comparing the two insofar as it involves comparing disparate kinds of evidence. The seeming disadvantage of theatre history, that our sense of performance style must be derived largely from contemporary accounts and reviews, is also an advantage in that the evidence comes to us filtered and to an extent interpreted by viewers already imbued with a sense of the theatre and the performance practices that we seek to reconstruct. If a reviewer says that Sarah Bernhardt “gets the full plastic as well as histrionic value of a situation,” one is justified in assuming that he recognized poses in what he saw her doing on stage, even if more research is necessary to try and determine what those poses were, and why they were singled out for praise. In the case of cinema, however, we are frequently left on our own to describe and analyze the performance that has been reproduced in such detail; we need to isolate its significant moments, to find ways of becoming sensitive to the parameters of a style quite remote from present-day film acting. The real difficulty of learning how to watch the acting of this period, evident to anyone who has tried to teach 1910s cinema, is indicative of this historical distance.

When we do have contemporary accounts of film acting, these are usually found in the trade press. (The respectable cultural press largely ignored film

until the end of the 1910s.) Such accounts demand much more careful reading than they have been accorded by most modern commentators. Much of the discussion of acting in the trade press turns out to be impossibly vague when examined closely, and this problem is confounded by the fact that the trade press is, precisely, a corporate press. It hopes to advance the cause of the cinema as a whole, not to champion some of its products and damn the rest. Every article praising an aspect of the films of one production company will always be balanced by a matching article praising those of another equally strongly. Moreover, from very early there is a tendency to champion film over theatre and, in the U.S., with some exceptions such as the early Film d’Art productions, to champion American films over those of Europe.⁷⁰ Hence it is too easy to select quotations to support, say, a claim for a change in film acting or a contrast between film and stage acting, while ignoring all the other quotations that would undermine it or without taking into account the institutional biases of the trade press as such. Only the most precise accounts of what the commentators see on the screen can be taken seriously, and even then they have to be considered very carefully in the light of the actual performances that we can examine in surviving films.

The problem, then, is to register when and how actors are adapting pictorial stage traditions to the cinema. Most immediately, in our case, the problem is how to recognize a pose when we see one. The difficulty becomes clear if we consider the question of the length of time that an actor must

stay in a position for it to qualify as a pose. In this regard, a comparison with what we know about the pace of theatrical acting is instructive.

It seems clear that the pace of the acting differed according to genre — comedy was played faster than tragedy — and according to individual style — for example, Garrick is reported to have had a livelier style than did the Kembles.⁷¹ Moreover, the few indications that we have about the length of the poses in tragedy and serious drama imply that the pace of acting changed over time. Dene Barnett suggests that although repose was a valued attribute of eighteenth-century acting style, the pace of declamation in tragedy and the recitatives of opera was quite rapid in comparison with present-day performances of such works.⁷² The practice of varying gesture in accordance with the word or phrase, as opposed to the sentence, also implied that there was at least potentially a great number of gestures for each speech.⁷³

By the end of the nineteenth century, the tempo of such acting seems to have slowed considerably. Yeats provides one of the most precise accounts of the length of the poses in a description of the performances of Sarah Bernhardt and Édouard de Max in *Phèdre* in London in 1902:

For long periods the performers would merely stand and pose, and I once counted twenty-seven quite slowly before anybody on a fairly well-filled stage moved, as it seemed, so much as an eyelash. The periods of stillness were generally shorter, but I frequently counted seventeen, eighteen, or twenty before there

was a movement. I noticed, too, that the gestures had a rhythmic progression. Sara [*sic*] Bernhardt would keep her hands clasped over, let us say, her right breast for some time, and then move them to the other side, perhaps, lowering her chin till it had touched her hands, and then, after another long stillness, she would unclasp them and hold one out, and so on, not lowering them till she had exhausted all the gestures of uplifted hands. Through one long scene De Max, who was quite as fine, never lifted his hands above his elbow, it was only when the emotion came to its climax that he raised it to his breast. Beyond them stood a crowd of white-robed men who never moved at all, and the whole scene had the nobility of Greek sculpture, and an extraordinary reality and intensity.⁷⁴

It is hard to tell how typical Bernhardt's style is here and whether it represents a more general change in the tempo employed for classical French tragedy. But one does find other reports of long-held poses.

Paul Ranger provides the example of Mrs. Siddons in the role of Euphrasia in Arthur Murphy's *The Grecian Daughter* (1772). Having stabbed Dionysius in the fifth act, Mrs. Siddons "slowly sank to her knees, stretched upward the arm which had driven the fatal knife into the tyrant's chest and so remained for five minutes to the accompaniment of quiet sobbing from the audience."⁷⁵ This does not seem very plausible to us, and the description by Friedrich Wilhelm von Hassel on which it is based might rather be read as suggesting she was wordless for five minutes while executing a series of poses expressing her complex reactions to the murder.⁷⁶ However, Shaw did commiserate with Ellen Terry about a scene in *King Lear* where Irving's performance of Lear's awakening was so protracted as to force her to hold a pose for the same time.⁷⁷ There are certainly other instances of actors prolonging poses to make a picture at scene ends. With regard to French tragedy, Humboldt notes that "one often sees attitudes protracted that would follow one another more rapidly in our country. Thus, at the end of a significant scene, the actor leaves the stage with as it were protracted gestures, where

we would not tolerate someone, say, walking away with upraised arms and wanting to hold them up until he is lost to the spectators' view. If something like this did happen in our country it would at least happen violently and rapidly, but here it always has the hesitant calm characteristic of all aesthetic poses."⁷⁸ In the middle of the nineteenth century, Fru Heiberg was often praised for the plasticity of her style, but Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker record one occasion when a reviewer, speaking of her performance in Oehlenschläger's *Dina* (1842) demurred: "When Colonel Walter has proposed to Dina, she stretches forth her arm to show him the ring which Ulfeldt has placed on her finger. Walter rushes out, but for some time after his exit she remains standing with her arm stiffly outstretched. This is presumably meant to indicate her absorption in her sorrow, but it is unnatural because of the effort the pose must cost her."⁷⁹ The reference to the effort the pose costs the actress would suggest that it was held for a considerable period.

Boucicault also advised remaining in a pose: "Another thing is, do not let your gesture be too short. It seems that some cannot give the appropriate gesture. They say, 'Go away!' [*with a quick gesture*]. They cannot rest long enough in a gesture. You do not know how long you can rest upon a good one. It tires you, but it will not tire the spectator."⁸⁰ It should be noted that while film scholars sometimes assume that melodrama was acted at a quick pace we have seen no evidence that poses were not held for just as long in this genre — indeed, this citation from Boucicault suggests otherwise. Moreover, the particular importance of music in melodrama would have allowed scope for long and marked posing, since music helps to give rhythm to the actor's movement, and covers over brief cessations in the action.⁸¹

In the case of cinema it seems clear that poses, like the tableaux in the film versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, were not normally held for anything like the length of time of, for example, Bernhardt's poses

in *Phèdre*. Certainly the way of elaborating poses that Yeats describes, in which Bernhardt moved her hands from one breast to another until she had "exhausted all the gestures of uplifted hands," bears a strong resemblance to some kinds of film acting in the 1910s (see, for example, the discussion of Lyda Borelli's acting below). But we have rarely seen an actor pause for more than a few seconds. Thus, in our efforts to analyze this acting style, the time of the pause could not be the sole criterion for defining a pose or attitude. Instead we have looked for the following:

1. There is a slight pause in the actor's movement when the film is viewed at the correct speed of projection (remember Humboldt's term, cited above, of a "hesitant calm" — *zögernde Ruhe*);
2. The actor assumes a stereotyped posture;
3. The posture expresses the character's interior state or in some other way clearly and directly relates to the dramatic situation;
4. The posture is systematically iterated and varied by the actor;
5. The blocking of the actor's movement, or of the acting ensemble, clearly leads up to the pose or leads from one pose to the next.

Obviously the frame stills used in this chapter do not "prove" the existence of an attitude, since they represent no more than one-sixteenth of a second of the actual time of the performance. Rather, they are used to facilitate the work of description.

Poses in the sense proposed above appear in a wide range of silent film. Perhaps the most systematic attempt to describe how they function is Roberta Pearson's discussion of what she calls the "histrionic code" of film acting at Biograph in the period between 1908 and 1912. While we find Pearson's analyses of individual films compelling, we believe the theoretical terms of her argument misrepresent pictorial styles of acting on the stage and make it difficult to understand the various ways poses were adapted to film.

Pearson defines the histrionic code in opposi-

tion to the verisimilar code. The former does not aim to create psychologically complex characters, nor an effect of realism, while the latter does. The former frankly admits its theatricality — the actor palpably “acts,” striking conventionalized poses and attitudes — while the latter eschews such self-consciousness, favoring stage business and byplay with props. But we have tried to indicate the difficulties of defining pictorialism in acting simply in opposition to realism. Nineteenth-century discourses on acting appealed to concepts of realism quite frequently, and often in ways that did not preclude an emphasis on attitudes and posing, but simply served to reinforce notions of expressiveness, restraint or decorum that were not clearly specified as such.

We find the calls for realistic or subtle acting in the film industry trade press similarly amorphous. In general, with the possible exception of Frank Woods, the trade press does not provide enough detail about what actors were doing on screen, or what they should have been doing, to provide a fruitful definition of realism.⁸² Albert Goldie’s “Subtlety in Acting,” for example, argues that self-conscious acting is bad, but he does not specifically mention poses or attitudes, and it is not clear if posing would necessarily be seen as self-conscious in his terms.⁸³ In her memoir “Growing Up with the Movies,” Florence Lawrence is somewhat more specific, criticizing an unnamed stage actor who appeared in a feature in the following terms: “The actor I speak of would strike a pose in nearly every other scene which seemed to ask, ‘Now am I not the handsome lover?’ or ‘Don’t you think I’m some hero?’”⁸⁴ However, it still is not obvious whether Lawrence is objecting to what she sees as the stage actor’s narcissistic showing off, or if any pose, even an expressive one linked to character or situation, is in her view inappropriate for film acting. Recall that Humboldt, who tremendously admired Talma’s pictorial style of acting, nonetheless criticized

“mannered” or “exaggerated” poses that became obvious as such.⁸⁵ The problem is not simply how to interpret Lawrence’s language here, but more generally that analysis of the film industry trade discourse in terms of an opposition between posed and realistic styles of acting is logically fraught. Because people strike poses in real life, often quite conventional ones, even an avowed advocate of “realistic” acting might admit some poses on the grounds that they were “life-like.” For example, a *Moving Picture World* critic like Goldie was not likely to comment adversely on an actor playing the part of an Italian immigrant who used large, vivid and fully extended gestures, given that the lack of “subtlety” would be motivated by ethnic stereotypes. Stanislavsky himself was willing to admit that the actor in *Werther* could strike a pose upon his entrance to Charlotte’s cottage provided there was sufficient motivation, that is, supposing he had discovered her corpse. Even a very strict commitment to realism can accommodate poses in certain narrative contexts. Moreover, there does not seem to be a principled way to determine from the reviews or commentary when an actor is being criticized for posing as such, and when the issue of posing is raised simply because a particular attitude was found inappropriate or unconvincing.

But of course we do not have only the reviews. We have at least some of the films, and this evidence suggests that there was posing throughout the years 1908–12 and beyond, even as the trade press praised realistic acting. Pearson’s own analyses of films suggest that what she has defined as two distinct codes co-existed, and that well into the 1910s Biograph actors continued to use poses alongside elements such as stage business or the employment of props. For example, she notes that, in the otherwise “verisimilar” film *His Lost Love* (1909), the actors fall into poses during the climactic scene in which the wife discovers her husband’s adultery.⁸⁶ She finds a similar mixture of the

two codes in Henry Walthall’s performances in the films *Thou Shalt Not* (1910) and *The Avenging Conscience* (1914), and indeed throughout his career.⁸⁷

Our examples, taken from a European context, confirm Pearson’s observations that actors use attitudes more prominently in some scenes than in others. *Le Homard* (The Lobster; Léonce Perret, 1912), a part of Gaumont’s Léonce series, represents typical comic acting of the period, which involves a great deal of complex pantomime, as well as attitudes and gestural asides to the camera. In the film, Suzanne (Suzanne Grandais) quarrels with Léonce (Perret) over his refusal to purchase an expensive lobster from a local fisherman. He then pretends to go out fishing for lobsters on a stormy night while in fact having made arrangements to buy them. He finally returns home and, with much mugging to the camera, pretends that he is exhausted and suffering from cold after having spent a difficult night at sea. The revelation of his deception leads to a quarrel that is only resolved by the fact that he must rescue the sea-bathing Suzanne by removing an offending crustacean from her posterior. While Perret and Grandais employ vivid and expressive gestures, these often take the form of a rapid “dialogue,” gestures expressing exasperation or reproach exchanged between man and wife during their quarrels. The only attitudes notably held in the film occur during what is for Suzanne (but not the spectator) a potentially tragic moment; during the long night that Suzanne awaits Léonce’s return, Grandais poses, first at the window looking out to sea, then in her bedroom, on her knees in prayer (Figure 3.6). The contrast between the comic and the serious tone is particularly shown up later in this scene when, through a split screen composition, the film composes a triptych showing Grandais on the left, in an attitude of prayer, the sea in the middle of the frame, and Perret on the right, seated comfortably at the movies, and laughing with glee at the Gaumont comedy on the screen (Figure 3.7).

Note that Perret does not hold a pose in the trip-



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tych; this is reserved for Grandais's expression of grief and remorse. It is as if Grandais's acting in *Le Homard* falls out of the comic mode in order to convey Suzanne's state of mind. In general, it seems quite clear that genre was an important factor in determining whether or not the actors choose to adopt attitudes, and the length of time the attitudes were held. Serious drama called for a slower style than comedy, with more pronounced poses and gestures (this was true on the stage as well as film, as Coquelin's discussion of theatrical genres already cited indicates). One tends to find

the longest and most marked posing in historical or costume pictures such as *L'Assassinat du duc de Guise* (1908) or *Quatre-Vingt-Treize* (1914–21), or sentimental stories, especially those dealing with dignified, upper-class characters such as *Ma l'amor mio non muore!* (1913). Pearson notes a similar division in her survey of Walthall's films for Biograph, with one of his most "histrionic" performances being a historical romance, *The Sealed Room* (1909).⁸⁸

But even within serious films, poses become more pronounced at climactic moments, as if the actors are "saving" them for the big scenes. That is, posing is determined by situation as well as by genre. One of the clearest examples we have seen of this tendency is the Danish film *Klovnen* (The Clown, 1917). Joe Higgins (Valdemar Psilander) is the clown in the traveling circus run by Mr. and Mrs. Bunding in which their daughter Daisy (Gudrun Houlberg) is the bareback rider. Joe and Daisy are in love, and when a major impresario offers Joe a big-city contract, he makes it a condition of accepting that the Bundings accompany him. Two years later he is a great success and has married Daisy, but Daisy is courted by Count Henri. One day after his performance, Joe sees Henri kissing Daisy in the mirror in the green room of the theatre. He goes home in despair and finds Daisy there waiting for him. He asks her if she loves the Count; she says yes, so he tells her to go to him. The plot then takes a predictably unhappy turn. After the Count tires of her, Daisy tries to return to Joe, is rebuffed by her father, and commits suicide. Having forgiven Daisy on her deathbed, and mourning her loss, Joe goes downhill himself, and is working in a cheap circus when he meets the Count once again and kills his old rival before expiring.

The scenes of Joe's happy life — the courtship of Daisy, eating dinner with the family, the backstage preparations for their acts in the traveling circus — are all done at normal tempo and without marked posing. However, the whole tempo and style of the acting alter after Joe sees Daisy

and the Count kissing in the mirror. The shift is particularly evident in the confrontation between the two at the house that follows Daisy's departure from the theatre (the titles are translations from the Danish ones in the print):

- 1 A salon in Joe's palatial mansion: the anteroom brightly lit rear center and right, with a closed glass portière at the top of a short flight of steps; a bay window left; a small table, chair and settee front center. Houlberg is sitting on the settee, her head on her hands on the table. Psilander enters from the rear right, opens the portière, looks at Houlberg (who does not yet look at him) and stops (Figure 3.8). He staggers slowly down the steps, then comes forward more quickly, pauses midground right, crosses to stand between the chair and the settee, with his right hand on the chair back. He speaks. Houlberg raises her head with a start, looks up, and leans slowly backwards as he leans forward to her. She apologizes (Figure 3.9). She leans forward again and looks off right. He leans down and seizes her hand. She rises. He releases her hand and steps back, briefly wringing his hands. Without looking at him, she looks down at the table as he leans back towards her, his fist on the table (Figure 3.10). He speaks.
- 2 Title: "Daisy, do you love him?"
- 3 Cut-in to medium shot. Psilander is in profile left, Houlberg's head is raised. She very slowly nods assent, then wipes tears from her eyes. Psilander looks off front center vacantly in grief. He puts his hand on his forehead (Figure 3.11).
- 4 As 1. Cut on action. Psilander with hand to forehead, Houlberg looking down left front (Figure 3.12). Psilander backs unsteadily to stand with his right hand on the chair back. He speaks to her. She turns to him, starts and looks him full in the face. He comes forward and leans on the table.
- 5 Title: "Then you have only one thing to do; go to him!"
- 6 As 1. Houlberg turns quickly to face front left and puts her left hand to her heart. She leans over to front right in agony (Figure 3.13). Psilander comes forward, raises his hands as if to grasp her shoulders but drops them again. He retreats round the settee, his left hand on its back. He points listlessly off left (Figure 3.14). She tries to face him, raises her arms halfway in appeal, drops them again, turns to face front right, then back again, and passes in front of



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Psilander and off left slowly. Psilander watches her go, makes a full gesture of appeal off left, raising his hands to head height (Figure 3.15). He leans back and puts his hands on his head. He turns to front left, pulls his hands down the sides of his face and leans slightly forward (Figure 3.16).

The plot is nominally advanced in these six shots. Daisy decides to part from Joe, but with regret, and Joe's agony at the loss is re-affirmed. However, much more important story events occur in the prior discovery scene in the green room, or a subsequent scene in which Bunding disowns his daughter, thus preparing for his later dismissal of her after she has repented, and her suicide. In contrast, this scene is almost entirely devoted to extending and elaborating upon the situation put in place by Joe's discovery of the betrayal. The acting does not operate to further the action, but to delay it — to maintain the situation and exploit its emotional resonances, before the next turn of events. Our sense that the pace of the acting slows down here is partly a function of the length of the shots (the six shots comprise 173 feet or 2 minutes, 53 seconds at 16 frames per second), partly one of the tempo of the action, as, for example, in Psilander's pose at the top of the stairs and the slow movement from the background to the foreground in shot 1. The gestures and poses adopted by the actors tend to be iterative expressions of grief; this also helps to provide a sense of long duration in the scene, since the succession of poses does not provide us with new information about the characters or events, but merely a variation on what we already know. After this scene, the acting never returns to the rapid and unmarked gestures of the early scenes; as the plot shifts to a serious and sentimental register, the acting style changes in accordance with it.

Because posing was keyed to genre and situation, and effectively co-existed with other, more fluid, uses of gesture, it does not make sense in our view to define it theoretically as opposed to realism, or historically as a precursor that was eventually superseded by a realistic acting style. This

is not to deny, however, the observation by Pearson, Gunning, Thompson, and others that acting style changes in American films in the period from 1908–12. For us, the questions are somewhat different. How did the actors in the newly forming stock companies in 1907–8 — actors largely trained in the theatre — adapt pictorial traditions to film? How did their style change in relation to later developments in film technique?⁸⁹

In this connection it is worth iterating the conditions that impinged on film acting as opposed to the stage in 1908. There was no spoken dialogue, and the whole register of diction and the voice was lost. There was no live audience whose reaction to and understanding of a scene could be gauged. The relatively great figure/camera distance that was the norm in this period meant that the actor was shown full figure but relatively small and on what was usually a small screen (see Chapter 9, below). The “speed” of the one-reel film required that a complex sequence of actions be conveyed in a relatively short span of screen time as compared with any but the most brief one-act play or vaudeville playlet.⁹⁰ In response to these conditions, a theatrically trained actor moving into film at this time might well have been motivated to develop a more emphatic style than he had formerly employed on stage. Several points about acting in the 1908–9 Biographs can thus be explained not as a direct carryover of popular stage traditions, but rather as an attempt to adapt these traditions to the specific requirements of the new medium.

For example, one aspect of acting in the 1908–9 period is what Pearson categorizes as overly emphatic uses of gesture. She argues that actors in the early Biographs often adopt poses with fully extended arms or legs, as in the discussion of Griffith's own acting in *Rescued from an Eagle's Nest* (1908).⁹¹ In one instance, this tendency is evident even in the use of the hand and fingers. Pearson contrasts two proposal scenes in which the principal actor makes his appeal by placing a hand upon his chest, one,

The Voice of the Violin (1909) with Arthur Johnson, the other, *A Summer Idyl* (1910) with Henry Walthall:

Because Walthall stresses his gestures less than Johnson, the performance does not connote the same degree of theatricality. This becomes clear in comparing the way each actor places his hands on his chest. Johnson uses both hands with the palms flattened, to modern eyes parodying a lover declaring himself, as the pose absolutely reeks of theatricality. Walthall places one hand lightly on his chest, the palm slightly raised and fingers slightly cupped. Though Walthall employs a conventional gesture, the lack of emphasis reduces the deliberate self-consciousness of the histrionic code.⁹²

While we would agree with Pearson that actors often use fully extended limbs during 1908–9, we would dispute her claim that this kind of posing is simply carried over from pictorial acting styles in the theatre (although, of course, bad actors were everywhere). The fully outstretched hand position adopted by Arthur Johnson in this example would have been anathema to most nineteenth-century teachers of acting. What she characterizes as the “slow and graceful” movements typical of Walthall's performance in *A Summer Idyl* are much closer to the way in which we understand the elements of pictorial style in the theatre.⁹³

As we have noted, the late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century acting manuals repeatedly stress the importance of grace and good bearing; they also specifically recommend against fully extended limbs. For example, in his lesson on hand position, Jelgerhuis argues that the fingers should always be gracefully curved, to give “play and contrast” to their position. He cautions against either one of two extremes:

I used to know a very good speaker on the Stage, who out of unthinking habit, always appeared with crooked fingers; what a wretched habit! I hope, that this example will be enough, to draw your attention to it, so that you will always avoid it. — Yet don't think, Dear Students! that the hand hanging down with straight fingers can wholly redress this, no, although better than with crooked fingers. [...] For the hanging arm, and the free

and unforced hand, there must be play and contrast in the posture of the fingers, to make it look elegant, to give it looseness, freedom and decorum.⁹⁴

Similarly, he characterizes a fully extended arm as “without grace, stretch[ed] out like a pole” and cautions against movements involving both hands and arms together unless “one adopts them purposely, in order to become ridiculous.”⁹⁵ Riccoboni also tells students to avoid having both arms equally extended, and raising them to the same height. He cites a “well enough known rule” that the hand should not be raised above the eye, adding the caveat that “when a violent passion carries him away, the Actor can forget all the rules; he can move with despatch, and lift his arms even above his head.”⁹⁶ Riccoboni’s remarks suggest that actors could use fully extended, and thus relatively emphatic gestures, but only sparingly, and in accordance with extreme situations. Recall that Yeats makes just such an analysis of Édouard de Max’s performance in *Phèdre*, in which he apparently saved his biggest gesture for the climax of the scene: “Through one long scene De Max, who was quite as fine, never lifted his hands above his elbow, it was only when the emotion came to its climax that he raised it to his breast.” Lessing’s remark already cited about wild or baroque gesture also suggests the importance of modulating such gestures in a sequence; he argued that they could be made acceptable if the actor prepared for them and finally resolved them into more harmonious poses.

The sequence already discussed from *Klovnen* provides a good example of the way in which emphatic gesture could be controlled through the modulation of poses. The actors adopt a series of attitudes expressing grief. These are “smaller” in shot 1, with Psilander posing far in the background, or, after he has come forward, leaning on a chair or table for support, with Houlberg turning away from him. The scale changes in shot 3, a medium shot, so that facial expressions can be emphasized with very little movement on the part of the actors,

as in Houlberg’s small nod of her head in affirmation to the question whether or not she loves the Count. The scene returns to the long-shot framing and builds to the largest gestures in shot 6: Houlberg’s attitude in which she puts her hand to her heart and leans her body away from Psilander to the right to express her grief, and Psilander’s attitude, in the same shot after her exit, in which he extends his arms and raises his hands to head height, and then later, when he pulls his hands down the sides of his face (Figures 3.13, 3.15, and 3.16).

In sum, the extended gestures of the Biograph actors described by Pearson were not the inevitable result of stage practices, but particular applications of them — in some cases without enough care to prevent clumsy postures, and in others without the calculation and timing by which experienced stage actors built up to “big” or pronounced poses. Aside from inexperience or incompetence, we attribute this kind of posing to difficulties already adduced in the period before 1912 — particularly problems of coping with the small scale of the actor’s image in the typical long-shot framings, and the effort to make a story clear in a restricted amount of time to an audience that the actor could not play to nor get reassurance from directly.

Clearly then, another constraint on actors in this early period was the demand for a swift pace. Pearson discusses this, as does the perceptive Frank Woods in a 1910 “Spectator”’s column in which he asserts that “the most marked change that has taken place in the style of picture acting in the last year or two has been in the matter of tempo” and praises Biograph acting for the “deliberation and repose” in its recent films.⁹⁷ Again, the fast tempo Woods disapproves of does not seem to be a direct carryover from the theatre, since all the evidence we have seen about the length of poses there suggests that they were held for much longer than they ever were in film. In the same column, Woods attributes the emphasis on speed to the novelty of the moving picture itself: “Everything had to be on the jump.

The more action that could be crowded into each foot of film the more perfect the picture was supposed to be.” The limitation of length in the one-reel film may also have contributed to the relatively swift pace of film acting. This is how we would interpret Florence Lawrence’s recollection about her differences with Griffith over acting tempo:

What seemed to annoy us “Biographers” very much and hold us back from achieving greater artistic success was the speed and rapidity with which we had to work before the camera. Mr. Griffith always answered our complaint by stating that the exchanges and exhibitors who bought our pictures wanted action, and insisted that they get plenty of it for their money. “The exhibitors don’t want illustrated song slides,” Mr. Griffith once said to us. So we made our work quick and snappy, crowding as much story in a thousand foot picture as is now portrayed in five thousand feet of film. Several pictures which we produced in three hundred feet have since been reproduced in one thousand feet. There was no chance for slow or “stage” acting. The moment we started to do a bit of acting in the proper tempo we would be startled by the cry of the director: “Faster! Faster! For God’s sake hurry up! We must do the scene in forty feet.”⁹⁸

The problem then, was not simply that the exhibitors wanted “action” in every foot, but that such a rapid pace was considered necessary if all the relevant action was to be conveyed in the requisite length.

Perhaps as actors and directors such as Griffith mastered the one-reel form, that is by the date of Woods’s column in 1910, it had become possible to “slow down” to some degree. Note, however, that six months before he praises the deliberation and repose of Biograph actors, Frank Woods criticizes the final scene of the same company’s *All on Account of the Milk* (1910) with the comment: “The last scene appears to degenerate into farce, and to be acted hastily and with too little dramatic effect, due, perhaps, to the lack of film space.”⁹⁹ In general he praises the acting in the film (by Mary Pickford, Arthur Johnson, Mack Sennett and Blanche Sweet) and we assume that the problem of “film space” to

which he refers is that the filmmakers were forced to rush the last scene to ensure that the film was the proper length. Even if Woods is wrong in his guess about what happened at the end of this specific film, the comment suggests that he was aware of the lack of “space” on the reel as a problem for actors. We would argue that it continued to be, and, as compared to the early feature, actors in the one-reel film were given many fewer opportunities to dwell on situations, to hold poses or develop elaborate sequences of them. A three-minute sequence of the sort described in *Klovnen*, in which almost nothing happens at the level of the plot, would be extremely difficult to accommodate within a sixteen-minute movie.

Our attempt to search out the most accomplished and technically elaborated examples of pictorial styles has thus led us to focus primarily on the early feature film. But at the same time this periodization introduces a new limitation or constraint on pictorial acting, since by this point the editing options open to filmmakers begin to interfere with the actor’s performance in ways that would not have been imaginable in the theatre. As Tom Gunning has argued in relation to the example of *After Many Years* already cited, editing can potentially disrupt and reconfigure the actor’s pose and gesture. Cross-cutting of the kind in *After Many Years*, and, later, the kinds of scene dissection that Gunning discusses in relation to *The Lady and the Mouse* (1913), effectively displace some of the actor’s traditional functions, providing filmmakers with other means of directing the spectator’s attention within a space, regulating the pace of a scene, expressing emotion, and underscoring dramatic situations.¹⁰⁰ This possibility is

evident as well in the scene of Little Eva’s death in the World version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, in which the various expressions of grief on the part of the actors are directed and controlled by the editing pattern that alternates between the bedroom and the various spaces outside it. In contrast, in the theatre this regulation of the spectator’s attention would have been structured largely through the acting of the ensemble, through the actors taking turns, the gesture of one setting off or leading to the gesture of another in what Riccoboni compared to “musicians who sing a piece in several parts.” Editing could thus at least partially fulfill functions that had previously been fulfilled by the actor(s) through the generation of pictorial effects. This is not to say that film editing could not co-exist with posing and pictorial styles; but it is to say that a highly edited film could more easily support bad pictorial acting, or non-acting, or a more reduced, i.e., less emphatic, style.

Pearson argues the latter case. In a careful comparison of *After Many Years* (1908) with *Enoch Arden*, she shows how the later version of the same story requires fewer gestures, and less extended ones, because *Enoch Arden* can rely on more cross-cutting and glance/object editing to convey important information about story events and character states.¹⁰¹ But moving away from the example of the Griffith Biographs, we would also suggest that highly edited films could help to accommodate very bad, or at least inexperienced, acting (see the discussion of *A Fool There Was* below).

Indeed, while Biograph films are usually praised by reviewers in the trade press when they are discussing acting specifically, discussions of Biograph’s fast-paced editing usually elicited com-

plaints about its effect on acting style. One review of *A Girl’s Stratagem* (1913) notes “The action is held in pretty closely to its center of interest, and the scene-making searchlight snaps back and forth from one actor to another and seems to pick out the different elements of the situation almost simultaneously. This is a speedy method and makes the picture, as a whole, clear at the expense, now and then, of the acting. The scenes change so fast that the players now and then seem all arms and hands.”¹⁰² And from a review of *The Hero of Little Italy* (1913): “There is a good story in this picture and the producer has made it exciting. As it approaches its climax, the scenes, flashed back and forth, keep the action concrete and almost breathless. But this playing for the thrill is not the best use of the motion picture camera; for in such there is almost no individual acting — everything goes to situation, nothing to character.”¹⁰³ Epes Winthrop Sargent reports on Dr. Stockton’s experiment in 1912 counting the scenes in over twenty one-reel and split-reel films by various manufacturers, with most companies having what he considered high cutting rates (the one Biograph on the list is the fastest cut). Sargent quotes Stockton’s opinion of this tendency: “It looks very much as if Edison and the foreigners were the only ones not bitten by the lightning bug, with the result that his releases are, to my mind, the only ones that are really drama. The others have lots of action, but no acting and no chance for any.”¹⁰⁴ The point is that not only did editing permit the actor to do “less” in terms of posing and gesture, but the pace of a highly edited film required it.

CHAPTER 7 The Pictorial Style in European Cinema

Dr. Stockton's reference to the slow-cut European films as giving scope to the actor is instructive. Florence Lawrence similarly mentions European films, recalling that the release of the Film d'Art productions distributed by Pathé made a big impact on American actors and directors and inspired the "Biographers" to request that Griffith allow them to do "slow acting."¹⁰⁵ And, from a European perspective, Yuri Tsivian has pointed out that in the 1910s advocates for the advancement of a specifically Russian school of filmmaking argued that it was necessary to avoid the "fidgety" American style of acting. Another Russian manifesto discusses the importance of slowness in the following terms:

In the world of the screen, where everything is counted in metres, the actor's struggle for the freedom to act has led to a battle for long (in terms of metres) scenes or, more accurately, for "full" scenes, to use Olga Gzovskaya's marvellous expression. A "full" scene is one in which the actor is given the opportunity to depict in stage terms a specific spiritual experience, no matter how many metres it takes. The "full" scene involves a complete rejection of the usual hurried tempo of the film play. Instead of a rapidly changing kaleidoscope of images, it aspires to rivet the attention of the audience on to a single image.¹⁰⁶

The rapid development of editing techniques in America, and the fact that American films were consistently faster cut than European ones throughout the 1910s meant that the two film-acting traditions developed differently. Given their lengthy takes and tendency to employ deep staging in long shot, European films of this period necessarily relied more upon the actor and the

acting ensemble to provide dramatic emphasis. This mode of filmmaking also gave the actor the time to develop elaborate sequences of gestures and poses. European film actors were thus in a relatively better position than their American colleagues to adapt and refine the performance practices associated with pictorial styles in the theatre. Given these differences, we have chosen to privilege European examples in our description of pictorial styles, and to refer to American films for purposes of contrast in the context of a discussion of the effects of editing.

It is not altogether surprising that a diva film like *Ma l'amor mio non muore!* depends on elaborate sequences of poses and attitudes. But what we would like to indicate here is the extent to which Lyda Borelli's performance in this film is dependent upon and facilitated by the lengthy takes and staging in depth that are typical of European cinema more generally.

The film uses large-scale sets with doors/alcoves or stairs at the back, with one set, the heroine Elsa Holbein's dressing room, having a large triple mirror that shows the entrance door off right. While there are some cut-ins to medium shot, there is no shot-reverse-shot, cross-cutting between simultaneous actions, or high fragmentation of a single scene. There is basically one set-up per space — important entrances and exits in the dressing room are shown in the mirror without cuts, for example. The final scene is the one exception to this rule: the other scenes of singing are seen from behind her on the stage looking out at the audience, but the final scene shows Elsa on the stage from behind

her lover in the audience and then cuts round to a new position on the stage. Aside from the cut-ins to medium shot, characters are usually shown full-figure in the large sets, with the camera a little below eye level and nearly horizontal throughout.

A good indication of Borelli's style is the scene in which Elsa (Lyda Borelli) discovers that her lover Max (Mario Bonnard) is really the heir to the Duchy of Wallenstein (he has been staying incognito near Lake Locarno to recover from a serious illness), and decides to leave him. Elsa, whom Max knows by her stage name Diana Cadouleur, is in fact the daughter of a Wallenstein general who committed suicide when plans of the country's fortifications entrusted to him were stolen by a spy. News of Max's liaison with an actress has reached his father, who dispatches a messenger to call Max back home. The messenger is a former friend of Elsa and her father, Colonel Theubner (Emilio Petacci).

The scene is essentially one shot although interrupted by an insert of the letter. One of the conventions of the diva film is to create scenes in which the diva is left alone to express her reaction to the big situations — a way of directing attention to the star's performance. The last part of the scene provides one of these "star turns" in which Borelli is alone on camera. Excluding the insert, the scene described here takes approximately 5 minutes at 16 frames per second.

68 Salon in Max's villa. A piano front left, a table mid-ground right, stairs rear center rising to a landing across the rear, with a conservatory far rear center. Bonnard is seated at the piano facing left, with Borelli standing beside him, both framed from head

to foot (in their closest framings, characters come forward until they are cut off at the shins). They stop playing to talk, looking at the music. She rests a hand on the back of his head, briefly leans down and rests her head on his. Keeping her hands on his head and shoulders, she crosses round behind him to stand on his left, thereby making space on the right for the servant.

The servant enters through the right background entrance and walks down the stairs to Bonnard. Borelli moves to the center foreground, stands back to camera but turned slightly towards Bonnard, her left hand cupped and resting on her breast. Bonnard reads the card handed him by the servant while Borelli moves to stand behind him, but he places the card down on the piano where she cannot see it. He makes a face expressing annoyance, and dismisses the servant who exits background right. Bonnard gets up as his mistress's banter restores him to a good humor; he stands left, Borelli right, so that they are facing each other in profile.

Petacci enters background right, and the lovers separate and stand back to camera so that Petacci is clearly visible coming down the stairs between them (Figure 3.17). Although her back is to camera, Borelli visibly starts at Petacci's entrance, hunching up her shoulders. As Petacci approaches Bonnard, she turns left into profile and drops her hands which had been clasped at her breast (Figure 3.18). To indicate her surprise and anxiety, she backs away from the two men, moving to the right edge of frame. Petacci bows to the Prince, and hands him the letter. Bonnard turns to the camera to read it. Petacci steps back from Bonnard respectfully looking downwards. He then sees and recognizes Elsa. He raises his eyes, opens them wide in surprise and drops his jaw slightly (Figure 3.19). He gives her a brief nod.

69 Insert: Max's father's letter, presumably reproving him for his affair with a notorious actress.¹⁰⁷

70 As 68. Borelli raises her right hand very slightly from the hip, turning the hand and opening the fingers in a gesture imploring Petacci not to reveal her identity (Figure 3.20). Bonnard looks furious, drops the envelope and crumples the letter. He turns back to camera, and walks up the stairs, exiting left, followed by Petacci. Borelli remains foreground right, back to camera, one arm folded at chest height, the other raised to head height as she watches them leave.



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The section in which Borelli is alone on camera may be divided into three parts. The first segment consists in the confirmation of Elsa's growing suspicions about Max's identity and culminates in a repeated gesture of looking at the envelope addressed to him.

Borelli turns to face camera, touching her cheeks with outstretched fingers. She moves quickly left, placing her right hand on the back of the chair in front of the piano. She raises her left hand in a fist (Figure 3.21). She starts as she sees the envelope addressed to Max, and picks it up, holding it in two outstretched hands. She lowers it, looks away, then steps back, raises it and stares at the letter again (Figure 3.22). She lowers it again, closes her eyes in grief and grasps the back of the chair with her right hand for support.

The second, rather brief, segment, is Elsa's decision to leave Max, represented in a conventional posture of "thought" (perhaps most familiar to us now in Rodin's statue *The Thinker*, but traceable at least as far back as Dürer's *Melancholia I*).

Borelli drops the envelope, raises both hands to about waist height, then very swiftly but gracefully drops into the chair. Her legs cross, her left forearm and hand rest on her raised leg, her right hand remaining out of sight behind her. She leans forward, rests her chin on her hand and raises the toes of her uppermost foot (Figure 3.23). She looks down at the ground, resting her forehead on her hand (Figure 3.24), then swiftly stands up, raising her left hand above head height (Figure 3.25).

The third segment is comprised of Borelli's exit, accompanied by various gestures expressing Elsa's grief. The exit, which is quite prolonged when compared to Bonnard and Petacci's, makes full use of the extreme depth of the set. It begins in midground with three half-turns.

Borelli extends her right arm, turns back to camera, and rests her left hand on the chair back (Figure 3.26). She takes a few steps away and turns to face camera, stretching out her arms waist height in grief (Figure 3.27). She lifts her hands to chest height, makes fists with both hands and turns her back to camera again,



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putting her hands on her head. She ends the turns near a table midground right and takes what seems to be a flower from a vase. Clasping it to her breast she takes a few steps to the base of the stairs.

The exit is then capped by Borelli's movement up the stairs and further postures at the landing on the top.

She goes up the stairs at the right-hand bannister, turning into profile, and opening her arms so that each hand rests on the bannister behind her (Figure 3.28). She ascends the stairs most of the way in this posture. Then, at

the penultimate stair, she turns back to camera, arches her back, leans her head back, and pauses briefly. She finishes climbing the stairs and begins to walk to the exit, with her head in the reverse position, bowed forward. She then turns into profile, facing left in the direction Bonnard has exited, holds out two clasped hands and then raises her right hand high above her head in a farewell gesture (Figure 3.29). She extends her left arm to waist height and staggers toward the door, arms still outheld. At the door, she lowers her head, places her hands on it and moves out of sight, rear left (Figure 3.30).

Borelli is never still. One can isolate stereotypical postures in one or two film frames — the pose in the chair, the standing pose with hands clasping the head to indicate grief — but they are not held. The style might best be described as variations on a set of conventional postures; Borelli does not strike attitudes, but improvises on them in a continuous series of gestures. When she sits in the chair, for example, she leans forward and puts her chin on her hand but then, in an unusual variation of this “thinking” pose, she raises her uppermost foot. She alters the pose still further by resting her forehead on her hand so that we see only the top of her head. Even this is not held, and her movement out of the chair, standing up and raising her left hand above head height, encompasses a very extended gesture that nonetheless is not stressed by pausing. The half-turns are similarly varied. In the first instance a hand rests on the chair back. In the second, the gestures build higher — she stretches out both arms to waist height, then raises them to eye-level and makes two fists. In the third, she places her hands upon her head. The fact that she does not rest on any single pose gives the performance a sense of tremendous lightness and grace as well as serving to downplay the stereotypical nature of some of the attitudes. That this effect is due to the pacing and complexity of the sequence of gestures can be demonstrated by comparing Borelli's performance with that of Bonnard in the later scene in which he receives her farewell letter. Many of his gestures resemble hers — he puts his hands to his head in grief, for example, and also executes a full turn as he moves from the foreground to the midground of the villa set. But Bonnard's gestures are sparer, and he tends to alternate expressive gesture with intervals of quiet or minimal movement, making each attitude relatively more prominent, and providing a sense of physical rigidity that Borelli never conveys.

The scene that follows Elsa's departure from the villa, in which she writes her goodbye letter to Max, is worth examining as an indication of how Borelli



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adapts her style to a medium-shot framing. This scene takes approximately 3 minutes, 30 seconds at 16 frames per second.

71 A railway platform (real). Borelli, in medium shot, is sitting at a table facing front, composing a letter, her head resting on her hand (Figure 3.31). A man is sitting drinking an aperitif to the rear left. The railway lines can be seen rear right leading to rear center. She dips her pen in the ink, puts her left hand (holding a handkerchief) under her chin, shakes her head slightly, closes her eyes briefly, then opens them and begins to write (Figure 3.32). She sighs, wipes away tears with the handkerchief in her left hand, continues writing, but has more and more difficulty containing herself—her eyes and mouth contract in grief, her chest heaves. She stops writing and buries her face in her hands (Figure 3.33), then looks up, transfers the handkerchief to her right hand and wipes each eye. She rests her face in her hands (Figure 3.34), then moves the hands away from her face, holding them up with open fingers as if to indicate an effort to collect herself. She picks up

the pen, redips it and resumes writing. She finishes, reads the letter, folds it and looks up vacantly, then closes her eyes, sobs, folds the letter again with great force, wipes her eyes again with the handkerchief and puts the letter in the envelope. She moistens the handkerchief by putting it to her mouth and uses it to effect a seal of the envelope. She dips the pen and is about to write:

- 72 Insert of the envelope (reconstructed in modern prints): *To Prince Maximilian.*
- 73 She puts down the pen, discreetly wipes her nose with the handkerchief, looks around and gestures to the waiter, giving him the envelope and a tip. As he exits, she rests her face in her hands again. She pulls them away and makes a fist with her hands on either side of her face, then buries her face in her hands. She lifts her face, briefly assumes an attitude of prayer (Figure 3.35) pulls her hands down her face and reburies her face in her hands (Figure 3.36).

Although the gestures in the scene in the train station are necessarily smaller, given the static nature of the shot and the closer framing, the acting strat-

egy does not differ markedly from that in shot 70. Borelli keeps her hands in motion. If she wishes to stress a pose, she does not do so by holding it, but by coming back to it repeatedly, as she does with the pose of the head buried in the hands. The most highly stereotyped gestures, such as the attitude of prayer, benefit from being rather briefly invoked: she conveys the idea of religious devotion without stressing the individual gesture itself. The scene also indicates some of the difficulties with setting up too simple an opposition between posing and stage business. The byplay with props—the handkerchief, pen and ink, and letter—is extensive in this scene until the moment of the waiter's exit, at which point, the "action" finished, her gestures become more purely expressive. Nonetheless, Borelli poses with her hands and face even before this point, and some supposedly "functional" gestures, such as the repeated dipping of the pen in the ink or the folding of the letter, modulate the more abstract and overt representations of grief. For example, in shot 71, she uses facial gestures to convey the idea that she is having difficulty writing the letter, culminating in the point at which she stops writing and poses with head in hands. This is followed by a gesture of open-held hands, which provides a transition back to the business of letter writing. Stage business thus helps to structure the sequence, rhythm, and emotional tone of the series of expressive gestures.

Both the complexity of the repetitions and variations within the gestural soliloquy, and the integration of expressive poses with stage business depend on Borelli having the time and control over her performance provided by "long takes" or more precisely, by the lack of spatial fragmentation inherent in this filmmaking tradition. Asta Nielsen provides an interesting contrast with Borelli. Operating within the same general conditions of "long-take" filmmaking, she exploits the possibilities somewhat differently while remaining within the framework of the diva performance tradition. A scene from *Die*



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weisse Rosen (White Roses, made in 1915 but not released until after the War) indicates just how closely Nielsen observes the conventions of the diva film. Thilda Wardier, an actress, is falsely suspected of having stolen the jewels owned by the family of her aristocratic young lover. The family force the young man to write a letter renouncing Thilda.

- 1 Hotel Lobby. Nielsen enters right carrying a bunch of roses. Reframe left as she sits at a table left in medium-long-shot framing, puts the roses on the table and looks off right. A pageboy enters right with a letter on a salver. Nielsen takes the letter and dis-

misses the page, who exits right. She looks at the letter and smiles. Reframe left to show the window to her left. She opens the letter, kisses the page (Figure 3.37) and reads, still smiling (Figure 3.38). Then her face falls and she looks uncomprehendingly at the letter (Figure 3.39).

- 2 Insert of the letter: *After what I have learned about you, I have to tell you that from now on we must be strangers to one another.* Adam de Rochard.
- 3 As 1. She looks up and then off left, crumples the letter, then uncrumples it and reads it again. She crumples it again and looks up, then puts both her hands on her heart (Figure 3.40). She looks down at the letter, clasps her hands briefly, then puts them

down in her lap, gazing up off left. She touches her heart with her left hand, raises her right hand and puts it above the left, almost around her neck, then puts the left hand down. She rests her chin on her right hand (Figure 3.41). She raises the other hand and clasps them both under her chin. She uncrumples the letter and kisses it. She reads it then again crumples it. She collapses with her right hand holding the letter on her forehead and her left hand in her lap. She puts her right hand with the letter on her left shoulder and leans far over to the left (Figure 3.42). Then she clasps both hands and weeps.

Like the scene in the railway station in *Ma l'amor*

mio non muore! the actress moves hands and face to create a sequence of expressive gestures within the medium-shot framing. Bits of business — kissing the letter, crumpling it — are integrated with more abstract poses. The shot is taken from somewhat further back in *Die weisse Rosen* than in the Italian film, so that Nielsen can make somewhat bigger gestures, such as leaning to the side. Her facial expressions are correspondingly more pronounced, an effect that Nielsen's typical use of heavy dark make-up around the eyes and eyebrows helps reinforce. Although it is not possible to document it from our stills and written notes, we also have the sense that Nielsen's performance is more slowly paced. That is, she will rest for a longer period on a climactic pose, such as the moment when she leans far over to the left in shot 3.

Although operating within the framework of the diva film, Nielsen differs from Borelli in her willingness to introduce comic or “low” gestures into the gestural soliloquies typical of this acting tradition. Borelli's style, which pushes in the direction of the utmost grace and almost balletic complexity, is motivated in part by the character she plays in *Ma l'amor mio non muore!* — an aristocratic lady, a great prima donna. Recall the use of the daintily moistened handkerchief to seal the envelope. Nielsen rarely plays refined upper-class characters of this sort, but rather working-class girls, gypsies, and down-and-out actresses on the make. These sorts of parts both call for and permit some rather daring alterations of acting style, daring from the point of view of the dignity and grace to which the diva usually aspired.

Nielsen's deliberate introduction of vulgar poses and gestures is most obvious, of course, in her comic roles. In *Engelchen* (Little Angel), Nielsen plays Jesta, a seventeen-year old who must pretend to be twelve as part of her family's plan to make her birth appear legitimate to her rich American uncle (her parents did not actually get around to marrying until Jesta was five). Spending the summer pretend-

ing to be a child at her uncle's chateau, Jesta falls in love with him, and must stand by and watch as another visitor, scheming to get his money, aims to entrap him in marriage. Convinced that she is sure to lose out to her rival, Jesta decides to commit suicide, writes a note and then leaves it with a flower for her uncle to find. The sequence is to some extent a “serious” one — the character is sad and does plan to kill herself (although of course this situation is resolved comically). Like the other two letter scenes already discussed, it concentrates on the actress alone, although the action is split over two locations, Jesta's room and her uncle's office. Writing the note in her own room, her rear end gets stuck in her chair, which has been designed for a child and is thus too small for her (Figure 3.43). The scene in her uncle's office encompasses bits of business — such as Jesta kissing her uncle's pipe in affection — with gestures motivated by her persona as a naughty child. At one point she wipes the flower that she is going to leave for her uncle on her dress (Figure 3.44), at another point, she scratches her knee (Figure 3.45). The comedy thus depends upon deliberate clumsiness, and violations of the rules of “correct” lady-like behavior.

What is particularly interesting about Nielsen, however, is that she does not limit this kind of acting to comedy but introduces such vulgar elements into her performance of more serious parts. In *Die arme Jenny* (Poor Jenny), for example, Jenny, a working-class girl seduced by an upper-class man, tells off her lover after he has refused to recognize her in public. The boyfriend tries to apologize as Nielsen stands immobile for eighteen seconds with hands on hips, elbows sticking out, right hip bent out and left knee bent in a pose that amply justifies the previous title's characterization of her as a *Proletariermädchen* (Figure 3.46). She breaks the pose and reacts violently when he attempts to touch her, sending him away by pointing into the distance. After he leaves, she leans quite far to the left, shouting insults after his retreating figure (Figure 3.47),

but this pose is followed immediately by an attitude expressing grief, as she sits and breaks into tears (Figure 3.48). Later in the film, in the scene of Jenny's thirtieth-birthday party, one finds the same repetition of gestures that express her physicality and low class status, intermixed with the kind of grieving gestures that are evident in *Die weisse Rosen* and *Ma l'amor mio non muore!* Nielsen sits with legs splayed out, smoking a cigar and drinking (Figure 3.49). She gets up and dances with her second lover, now presumably her pimp, quarrels rudely with another dancer who bumps into her, and collapses rather drunkenly in a chair front right. The pimp gets a paper and begins to read as she belches, her head resting on her hand (Figure 3.50). But, upon hearing from the pimp that her seducer has gotten married, she sits straight up, her hand falls and her face expresses grief (Figure 3.51). As the party-goers gather round she pretends to laugh and coarsely toasts the couple, but then, unable to bear it, she staggers drunkenly from the café.

The examples of Lyda Borelli and Asta Nielsen indicate the range of styles of acting that fall under the rubric of pictorialism, and further demonstrate the difficulty of explaining these styles in terms of a simple opposition between pictorialism and realism. Although Nielsen was trained at the Danish Royal Theatre and would certainly have been familiar with the naturalist stagings of Ibsen and others performed there, her film acting is much better understood, we believe, in terms of the adoption and transformation of the histrionic tradition of the diva. Within this context, it might be observed that her performance style seems more “realistic” than that of a Borelli. But this effect of realism is primarily the result of the deliberate mixing of comic and tragic acting modes, and, in tandem with this, a movement away from stories about refined upper-class types in favor of lower-class characters who are usually presented as spontaneous and physically unrestrained. “Realism,” then, derives from Nielsen's willingness to violate the expectations of



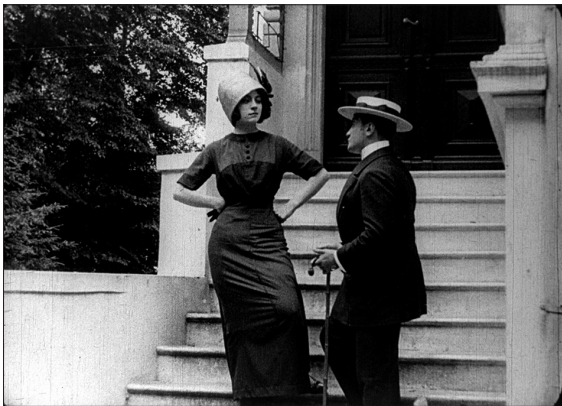
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grace and lady-like decorum that surrounded the diva, or at least to alternate the more typical gestural soliloquies that one finds in a film like *Die weiße Rosen* with other sorts of expressive gesture. It does not, however, presuppose a rejection of or departure from pictorialism as such.

The examples discussed so far have concerned an actress alone, or as the central point of attention in a scene. But the handling of the ensemble within the European filmmaking tradition provided a different set of staging problems, concerning how the spectator's attention was directed when action was staged in depth with a group of actors. Shot 68 of *Ma l'amor mio non muore!* (see above) demonstrates some of the possible difficulties. Theubner enters, Elsa recognizes him and registers surprise and anxiety. After delivering his message to the Prince, Theubner sees her and also registers surprise. This action is handled in a single take, and the staging of this scene in particular makes it difficult to notice the byplay between the two actors — at least for modern viewers used to the classical style. Elsa's surprise must be conveyed with Borelli's back to camera, since she must be turned away from the spectator to “see” Petacci enter at the rear. Later in the scene, just as Petacci looks up and recognizes the true identity of the Prince's mistress, Bonnard, in the foreground of the shot, turns to face camera and reads the letter from his father, expressing displeasure. It is thus quite possible that the spectator will watch Bonnard in the foreground, missing out on what the other actors are doing (indeed, this happened to us on our first few viewings).

In the American cinema in its classical phase, this kind of situation is handled through spatial fragmentation, cutting to a series of reaction shots. This is the case in the scene from *The Social Secretary* discussed in part 2, the discovery of Mayme in the notorious Count's bedroom. In the hunt-breakfast scene in *The Whip* (discussed in detail in Chapter 10, below), Tourneur handles the villainess's surprising declaration that she is engaged to

the hero in a similar way, cutting to reaction shots of the hero Brancaster and his true intended Diana, the villain Sartoris, and, after Brancaster has left the shot, Diana surrounded by sympathetic friends, and so on. This simplifies the acting problem considerably, since all the actor has to handle is his or her own facial expression. Even in this regard, less is more: the repetition and variation of facial expressions established in the pattern of cutting itself helps to convey the emotions of the various members of the group.

Even in the American cinema, however, cutting of this sort does not become common until the mid-to-late 1910s. Earlier American films frequently adopt a different tack, placing the most narratively important character in the foreground of the shot, i.e., somewhat closer to camera than Bonnard's position as he reads the letter in *Ma l'amor mio non muore!* In *The Warrens of Virginia*, for example, the Northern hero (House Peters) waits in the home of his Confederate sweetheart (Blanche Sweet) for news of the battle that will make it clear to her and to her family that he has been operating as a spy. For much of the scene, the hero is positioned in the foreground and is also lit with a floor-stand arc off left that emphasizes his features. Sweet, supposedly waiting anxiously for news about the outcome of the battle, moves from a position beside him through the midground to the door at the back, and later in the scene Confederate soldiers, including her own wounded brother, enter the door with the news of the betrayal (Figure 3.52). Given this composition, Sweet's movements and the later entrances of other characters through the door at the rear of the set never detract from Peters's expressions and gestures. Similar staging can be found in the two-reel film *Red and White Roses* (Vitagraph, 1913). The vamp Lida (Julia Swayne Gordon) is shown in a hotel suite seducing her victim, the politician Morgan Andrews (William Humphrey) in the same foreground position — although she retreats to midground at one point to pose by the

eponymous red roses (Figure 3.53). In a later scene, in which the politician discovers that Lida has been paid off with a necklace to seduce him and destroy his career, he paces angrily front to back center, while she remains still, front right, facing camera (Figure 3.54).

Of course, stage actors have always come downstage to the footlights in order to utter important lines. But this kind of blocking has a much more pronounced effect in the cinema. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9, below, the depth of the playing area in the cinema is much greater than that of the stage, and entails a much greater range of differences in scale — an actor at the nine-foot line appears much “bigger” and closer to the spectator than an actor would in the theatre, while actors in the background of a shot in depth appear much “smaller” and farther away. Thus, the nature of cinematic space gives the actor in the foreground much more relative prominence than the actor at the footlights. Even apart from editing then, in many American films compositional elements specific to cinema were brought to bear on the problem of directing the spectator's attention in the ensemble.

In Europe, however, filmmakers were more likely to retain the long-shot framings in which actors were shown full-figure. And, given the tradition that evolved there of staging complex action in depth, they developed other strategies for directing the spectator's attention: most typically, careful blocking and timing of the action of each actor in the group. One important way to highlight a particular action or gesture was simply to get other actors, or objects, out of the way at the relevant moment. Take for example, the Film d'Art production of *La Tosca* (1909), featuring Cécile Sorel, Alexandre and Le Bargy of the Comédie Française. In the famous scene in which Tosca (Sorel) kills Scarpia (Le Bargy), each character carries out actions without being observed by the other. Scarpia apparently writes an order that Cavaradossi's execution



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be faked, and gives Tosca a safe conduct for herself and her lover, but he actually signals his lieutenant to ignore the order for the fake execution. Tosca agrees to sleep with Scarpia in order to save Cavaradossi, but then plans his death. It is important that the spectator understand the plotting of each character in the action that leads up to the murder. Cécile Sorel and Le Bargy manage this by taking turns, giving each other prominence in alternation.

The set represents Scarpia's bedroom, with double doors rear right, a desk to their right, a bed rear left, a cupboard with candlesticks rear left, and a prie-dieu with crucifix rear center. There is a table midground left, with glasses, carafe and knife, and a couch front right. After having concluded the bargain, Le Bargy hands an order to the lieutenant at the rear doors, instructing him that Cavaradossi's firing squad is to use blanks. To represent Tosca realizing that she must now fulfill her part of the bargain, Sorel collapses in horror on the couch front right. Although the couch is in the foreground, Sorel remains very still and with head downward, so that the eye is directed to the rear of the set and the byplay between Le Bargy and the lieutenant. Le Bargy gestures, countermanning the order and the lieutenant expresses understanding and exits. Le Bargy comes forward, pulls Sorel to her feet and



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embraces her. She demands that he write a safe conduct.

He goes to the desk rear right and begins writing. At this point, Le Bargy has head down and is busy writing in the rear, leaving Sorel the focus of attention in the midground. Sorel goes to the table midground left and picks up a glass of water. After an insert showing the contents of the safe conduct written by Scarpia, the film returns to the same scene. She drinks the water, then assumes a pose indicating that Tosca has seen the knife and conceived her plan (Figure 3.55). She goes to front left, and turns to face Le Bargy, hiding the knife, which is visible to the spectator, behind her back (Figure 3.56).

Le Bargy rises and shows her the safe conduct. She goes to him and having seen it, stabs him in the heart. They struggle, he seizes the knife, pursues her to front left. Then he staggers back toward the door to call for help. Sorel runs to the rear and blocks the doorway with arms open wide (Figure 3.57). Although her pose at the doorway is held and thereby given emphasis, Sorel then takes the knife from Le Bargy and moves off rear left, letting Le Bargy move to midground center. His gestures then become the focal point of the scene as he tiptoes forward (Figure 3.58), falls onto the couch front



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right, then rolls off it, and finishes up lying on the floor, head to camera, his arms stretched out.

The rest of the scene does not concern us here, but it should be noted that it involves prototypical diva acting—the female star, now alone except for the corpse, performs the stage business that became canonical in Bernhardt's performance of Sardou's play, with requisite postures.

The blocking up to the point of the murder thus provides a kind of alternation in which each actor is featured at the moment he or she performs significant bits of business or attitudes. One of the important aspects of blocking in this kind of filmmaking is finding plausible business or attitudes for the actor who is *not* to be the focus of attention, and finding ways for actors to move smoothly in and out of prominence. In *La Tosca* this is done by having each actor look downwards or obscure their face at a point in the scene in which they are not supposed to be noticed; as well as by utilizing the depth of the set to differentiate the actor in the foreground from the actor in the background.

A related blocking strategy, but concerning objects rather than other actors, may be found in another Film d'Art production, from 1910, *La Fin d'une Royauté* (The End of a Royal Line),

with Berthe Bovy of the Comédie Française, and Blanche Dufrene and M. Clément of the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. In this scene, the Dauphin (Bovy), imprisoned with Marie Antoinette (Dufrene) and two ladies-in-waiting, is separated from the Queen by Revolutionary officials.

The set is a poor room in the Temple, with a barred window high in the rear center wall, a door rear left, and a bed rear right in which Bovy sleeps at the beginning of the scene. There is a table front center with two chairs and a stool on which the Queen and her ladies-in-waiting sit. At the entrance of the Revolutionaries, Dufrene and the ladies-in-waiting move to the door rear left. In response to the Revolutionary leader's written order (shown in an insert), Dufrene assumes a pose of refusal, with open arms (Figure 3.59). The scene continues with byplay between Dufrene refusing, the ladies-in-waiting pleading, and the Revolutionaries insisting that Louis must be taken. Then Bovy wakes up, is dressed by the ladies-in-waiting, and before being carried out, assumes a group pose with the other actresses, kneeling in front of the bed to pray (Figure 3.60).

It is necessary to get the chairs and table that were in front of the bed out of the way in order to prepare for the formation of this tableau, and this is done through the work of the ensemble.¹⁰⁸ One chair is moved back before the ladies-in-waiting go to the door to respond to the Revolutionaries. Other furniture is moved at the same time as Bovy's costume change. In response to the Queen's order to prepare Louis for departure, the ladies-in-waiting move the table to left of the bed. One exits left, the other goes to rear right of the bed with stockings. The first lady-in-waiting re-enters with clothes, then moves the stool from front center to left of the bed. One chair remains in which Dufrene sits while the ladies-in-waiting put on Bovy's jacket, sash, and coat.

This business prepares the set for the tableau of prayer, as well as subsequent postures

that follow the exit of the Revolutionaries with the Dauphin, in which all kneel and weep in the area front center, burying their faces in the bedclothes. Obviously the dressing of Louis also has important narrative functions — the respect with which he is treated by the ladies-in-waiting contrasts with a later scene, in which he is made to work and serve at table for soldiers and other citizens. Moreover, the dressing routine helps to delay the moment of leaving, extending the situation of the impending separation of mother and son. But alongside its narrative functions, the stage business performed by the ensemble is integrated with, and put at the service of, the formation of attitudes. The actresses simply and unobtrusively move objects out of the way, opening up a playing space, and a prominent position, for these attitudes.

The examples cited of ensemble acting are fairly early ones, and the actors remain full-figure and relatively far from the camera. But many European features of the mid-to-late 1910s encompass action closer to camera (with the actors' feet "cut off") and hence mobilize the range of scalar values found in the American films as well. They also incorporate more frequent cut-ins to medium shot. Nonetheless, the kind of ensemble acting described above persisted, and was able to exploit

the cut-in, and the greater sense of depth made possible by the use of the foreground space. The high point of the pictorial style in film acting of the 1910s may well not be the gestural solos of the solitary diva, but these extended gestural duets or trios, in which the movements of the ensemble are orchestrated in depth, with actors sometimes trading off expressive gestures, sometimes coming together to form group poses or tableaux.

A scene in Evgenii Bauer's *Korol' Parizha* (King of Paris, 1917) in which the Duchesse de Diernstein (Emma Bauer) attempts to dissuade her son Jean Hiénard (Mikhail Stal'skii) from fighting a duel with her lover provides an outstanding example.¹⁰⁹ Jean is alienated from his wealthy widowed mother and has been living independently of her as a sculptor in Paris. Obligated to visit her in Deauville to request a loan to help a sculptor friend, Frégose, get married, he discovers she is receiving the attentions of a young adventurer, the so-called Marquis de Prédalgonde, nicknamed the King of Paris. Investigating Prédalgonde with the help of a friend of his mother's, Lucienne Maréchal, Jean discovers he is the pawn of a shadowy underworld figure, Raval' Venkov (Rascal in the novel). He confronts Prédalgonde with his discovery, in order to persuade him to leave Paris

and give up his suit of the Duchesse. Prédalgonde refuses, and insults the Duchesse. Jean slaps him and Prédalgonde challenges him to a duel. That night, Venkov attempts to murder Jean, but Frégose shoots him dead. Learning of the imminent duel from Lucienne, the Duchesse goes to Jean's studio to beg him not to fight.

This scene has a duration of 3 minutes, 46 seconds at 16 frames per second (excluding the intertitles and inserts there would have been in the original).

- 1 Jean's studio apartment. Midground right are stairs leading off and up with a mirror behind them. Rear left, there is a vestibule with a nude statue and an outer door beyond. Large windows cross the right rear. There is a bed midground left, and a chair front right.

The shot begins with the actors alternating attitudes within a deep-space composition. In doing so, they necessarily shift the position of prominence from background to foreground and back again.

Stal'skii stands front right in medium long shot facing off front right, but very still. Bauer enters rear left, stops and poses (Figure 3.61). Stal'skii turns to the rear and reacts to her presence; she then drops her coat from her shoulders (Figure 3.62). The actors then move to midground and embrace, forming a group pose (Figure 3.63).



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- 2 Cut in, same angle. Bauer and Stal'skii embracing in medium shot. He turns slowly to look off front center, she to look off front left (Figure 3.64).
- 3 A slightly longer-framed variant of 2. Bauer goes and sits in the chair front right, facing front left. Stal'skii comes to the left arm of the chair and leans over her. He speaks and then straightens up (Figure 3.65).
- 4 Extreme high-angle very long shot of a clearing in woods. Seconds are pacing out the dueling ground.

The next shot utilizes deep space and the principles of alternation found in shot 1, except with Bauer now in the foreground.

- 5 As 1. Stal'skii is standing midground left, facing rear left. Bauer rises from the chair in the foreground and totters to front center as he turns to look at her. She turns to face him, with her back to camera, and holds out her arms in a gesture of appeal (Figure 3.66). He runs to embrace her but stops and puts his hand on his heart to indicate that his honor is at stake (Figure 3.67).

This is a relatively small gesture, and is performed far from the camera, but because Bauer is turned away and still when it occurs, it is not in much danger of going unnoticed. Then it is Bauer's turn to express distress.

Bauer turns slowly away to face front left and puts her hands to her cheeks. Stal'skii looks off front left and wrings his hands in regret. Then he turns away from her as if to reiterate his refusal to abandon his duty. He walks further into midground left, facing left, with his back to the camera. Bauer backs to the chair and leans on it (Figure 3.68).

The actors then come together again to form group poses.

Stal'skii turns, comes to front center, and faces her with his back to the camera (Figure 3.69). They clasp hands, and she kneels. Tilt down (Figure 3.70).

- 6 Similar to 2. Tilt up as he raises her, then sits her down in the chair (Figure 3.71). He kneels beside her, to the left of the chair, facing the camera. He stands up.
- 7 Stal'skii stands facing the camera in medium long shot. Jump cut, reframed to the left in which he appears in profile, facing her. She looks up at him



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(Figure 3.72). He kneels, the pose echoing Bauer's gesture in shot 5 and being similarly accompanied by a tilt down. They embrace. He makes a vow. He rises. Tilt up.

The content of the vow is not clear from the print or easily deducible from the novel. Stal'skii's exit follows his vow. Like Borelli's exit in the scene in Max's villa in *Ma l'amor mio non muore!*, it utilizes the depth of the set to the full, but unlike the diva film it involves both actors in important ways.

Stal'skii leaves Bauer in the foreground, turning and walking to the mid-ground. He pauses in his exit, prolonging the moment by turning to face her and posing (Figure 3.73). He then runs to the vestibule for his hat and stick and exits rear left.

Meanwhile Bauer's gestures become more prominent.

Bauer rises and follows him into the depth of the shot, pausing in the mid-ground, and gesturing with back to camera and arms stretched out towards him as he exits. Stal'skii then reappears briefly outside the window at the rear of the set, moving left to right, while Bauer puts her hands on her head (Figure 3.74). Bauer goes to the foot of the bed.

- 8 Cut in, same angle: Bauer in medium shot at the bedpost. Facing front left, she clutches the bedpost with her left hand, holding her right hand out in front of her. Her breast heaves, her right hand drops out of frame, and she lowers her eyes (Figure 3.75). Fade out.

The final cut-in, like shots 6 and 2, follows upon the composition in depth, allowing a concentration upon Bauer's facial expression.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Korol' Parizha* is the way in which cinematic devices like the use of depth and the cut-in are put in the service of acting in a pictorial style. Throughout the scene, the moments in which the actors alternate poses are articulated through foreground/midground contrasts. Deep staging is used to orchestrate a whole series of poses and attitudes — Stal'skii walks into the midground to strike poses in shots 5 and 7

for example. Further, Stal'skii's re-appearance in the window in shot 7 spectacularly caps this use of depth, the principle of separating the actors into two planes of action being varied with the employment of a playing space even farther removed from the camera.

Editing and camera movement do not limit the scope allowed to the actor but rather follow from the actor's gestures. All three of the cut-ins serve to emphasize an attitude or facial expression — the actors looking off in different directions as they embrace in shot 2, Bauer kneeling to ask forgiveness at her son's feet in shot 6, and her facial expressions after he has departed in shot 8. The tilts are similarly cued to the gesture of kneeling that each actor makes in turn.

The kind of ensemble acting found in *Korol' Parizha* can be found throughout Bauer's oeuvre; other prominent examples of actors trading off gestures include a scene in *Deti Veka* (Children of the Age) in which the young bank clerk tells his wife he has lost his job, and a scene involving three actors in *Nemye Svideteli* (Silent Witnesses, 1914), in which the serving maid, herself in love with her master, finds his fiancée embracing her lover. A similar employment of the ensemble, although perhaps not so slowly paced, can also be found in other European films, and in genres as diverse as the Danish science-fiction film *Himmelsskibet* (The Space Ship, 1917), in the scene in which Captain Avanti confronts the villain David Dane in the space ship, and at various climactic moments in Feuillade's thriller *Judex* (1917), as for example in the pronounced alternation of attitudes that occurs in the scene in which Judex confesses to his mother, the Comtesse de Trémeuse, that he is in love with Jacquelyne, the daughter of her sworn enemy.

The scene of Fantine's death in Capellani's *Les Misérables* (1912) provides another example, which demonstrates how the alternation of attitudes among the actors is combined with the formation of tableaux by the group. Fantine (Marie Venture),

ill and dying, is terrified by the appearance of Javert (Henri Étiévant), who has previously tried to arrest her, and who has followed the disguised Jean Valjean (Henry Krauss) to her bedside in order to arrest him.

Krauss leans over talking to Venture who lies in bed, midground left. Suddenly, the door midground right opens and Étiévant enters, standing on the threshold. Venture sees him and assumes an attitude expressing terror. Étiévant folds his arms over his cane forming a barrier as if to prevent his prisoner from leaving the room. Venture points to Étiévant, and maintains this pose. Krauss turns, keeping his back to Étiévant and moves to front center, then turns again, glances at Étiévant, turns back to face front. All of the actors then hold their positions in a tableau.

Krauss makes gestures as if to reassure the patient. Étiévant comes to front right, and puts his right hand on Krauss's left shoulder. Krauss signals him to be calm, but Étiévant grabs his lapels. Venture, terrified, sits up in bed. Étiévant discloses to the sick woman the true identity of her protector, a thief and run-away convict. Venture throws her hands up. Tableau. While Étiévant and Krauss remain still, she clutches her bosom, falls in two movements and collapses, dead, her eyes open, one arm fully extended to the left.

As if by main strength Krauss forces Étiévant to rear right, picks up a chair, and breaks it on the floor to give himself a counter-weapon against Étiévant's stick. He points, gesturing for Étiévant to get out. Tableau. Étiévant then goes to stand in the doorway rear right, Krauss drops the chair leg, turns to Venture.

In a film like *Les Misérables* the ease with which actors move in and out of tableaux, pose both individually and in groups, allows for the control of blocking in interesting and subtle ways. The postures of the actors can be varied to form striking visual compositions, to help structure the sequence of actions in the take by calling attention to certain gestures or areas of the frame, and to drive home specific dramatic situations in a series of punctual moments. To an even greater degree than in the

diva's gestural soliloquy, then, ensemble acting in the European cinema performed functions that were fulfilled by editing in the American cinema: singling out important aspects of a scenic space, providing a structure of alternation and repetition within scenes. Of course editing did not rule out ensemble acting in America, any more than the shorter average shot lengths ruled out the gestural soliloquy of the isolated actor, but in both instances actors were given less time and less scope for posing.

In the American cinema, which even by the early 1910s approximated more closely the modern conception of one idea per shot, actors had to make do with one or two poses per take. *An Official Appointment* (Vitagraph, 1912) provides a good example of the American tendency to limit the duration of the scene even in a film without the kind of extended cross-cutting that provided the swift cutting rates for Griffith's films at Biograph. Charles Kent, who plays the principal role as well as directing, had a distinguished stage career from 1875 until 1906. He began acting in films because he lost his voice.¹¹⁰ His character, that of an elderly, aristocratic Southern Colonel, motivates Kent's extremely dignified carriage, evident in his frequent bowing and other polite gestures, a trait made fun of by other characters in the film. It is a tribute to Kent's grace and skill that his courtly bearing, while noticeable, never appears overdone even in the face of parodies of it by other actors.

Colonel Armistead has sold off the last of his possessions and traveled to Washington with his loyal servant Amber (Harold Wilson) in hopes of receiving a government post. The post is not forthcoming, and Amber must play his fiddle and beg in the streets to get enough money to pay the rent. A letter, apparently from the Secretary of State, finally arrives offering him a job. The letter is in fact a forgery, the result of a practical joke, a fact that contributes to the film's unhappy end.

The scene in which the Colonel receives the letter is in one take, but relatively brief (approximately

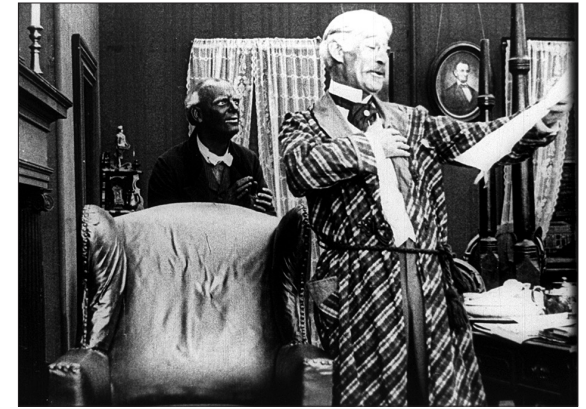
1 minute at 16 frames per second). It is preceded by a title: *The joke is taken seriously*.

Colonel Armistead's sitting room has a window with lace curtains on the rear wall, and a door in the left wall at the rear. A large stuffed armchair is foreground left beside an offscreen fireplace (the flickering light is visible), and a table with chair is midground right where Kent, in dressing gown over his shirt, vest and tie, sits having morning coffee (Figure 3.76). His landlady (Edith Clinton) enters with the mail, rear left, and gives it to Wilson. Wilson brings the letter to Kent at the table. Still chewing, Kent takes the letter and looks at it. He wipes his mouth with a napkin held in his right hand, holding the letter in his left and looking at it. He gets up. He walks to foreground right, while Wilson comes to midground left, behind the armchair. Kent rips open the letter, unfolds it, while Wilson clasps his hands. Kent reads, holding the letter in his left hand. Kent then executes a series of poses. He puts his right hand on his heart (Figure 3.77), then staggers back, fully extending his right arm and resting it on top of the chair back (Figure 3.78). He recovers, looks off left, lifts his right arm high above his head (Figure 3.79), then brings it down, thumping his chest twice with his fist. At the finish of this thumping gesture, he very swiftly points behind him (Figure 3.80). Wilson then goes to rear right, while Kent turns left into profile still reading the letter. He turns away from camera and moves into midground, still reading. Wilson brings him his coat, helps him take off his dressing gown. Kent folds up the letter as Wilson helps him into a frock coat. Moving toward rear left, Kent takes his hat and stick from Wilson. At the door, he stops, faces front left, puts his left hand, still holding the letter, on his heart. He inclines his head back. Meanwhile, Wilson also inclines his head back and holds up open hands at chest height (Figure 3.81). Kent and Wilson exit.

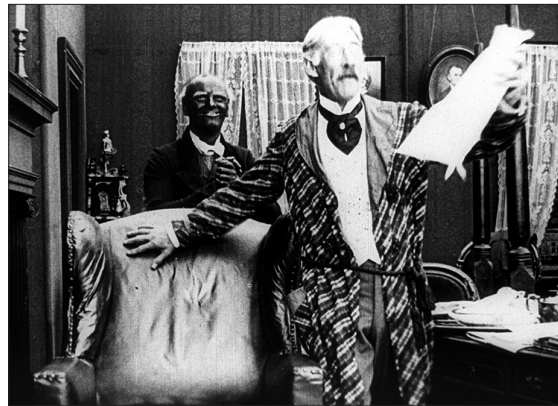
The fast tempo here is a matter of a narrative deadline rather than inexperience on the part of the actors. The scene is hurried in that, from the time he receives and reads the letter, the Colonel is eager to be off to the offices of the Secretary of State to accept his appointment. The business of getting up while still eating at the breakfast table, and later



3.76



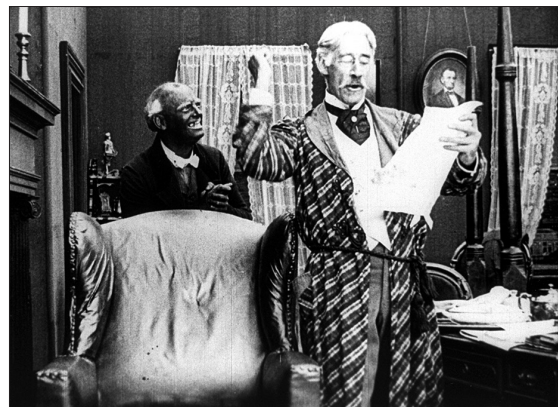
3.77



3.78



3.79



3.80



3.81

of exchanging the dressing gown for frock coat, hat and stick, are all directed toward this narrative goal. Nonetheless expressive gestures are interposed with these bits of business, most prominently when Kent is in the foreground position beside the armchair, but also at the end of the scene, when the two actors pose before exiting. One does find attitudes then, but not very many of them when considered in relation to the European examples discussed above, and they are delivered on the run, pictorial acting's equivalent of American fast food.

As Griffith's experiments with cross-cutting began to make the shot the unit of construction of the scene, or more commonly of the sequence, the opportunities for expressive gesture and posing became still more restricted. Attitudes in the late Griffith Biographs are few and far between, although they are often heightened because of their isolation and the editing structure within which they are placed. Blanche Sweet's performance in *The Painted Lady* (1912) seems an appropriate example, as it has been discussed by Russell Merritt as an early demonstration of bravura acting in Griffith, one of the careful orchestrations of emotional climaxes for which his leading actresses became renowned.¹¹¹ The story concerns the elder of two daughters who follows the precepts of her repressive father (Charles Hill Mailes) and does not paint her face. While most of the young men at an ice-cream social prefer her younger sister (Madge Kirby), who does use make-up, the older girl meets and is courted by a stranger (Joseph Graybill). Later, forbidden to see him by her father, she meets the young man clandestinely and reveals aspects of her father's business to him. When the young man, face disguised with a kerchief, attempts to rob her father one night, she threatens the intruder with a gun and accidentally kills him. The discovery that she has shot her lover drives her mad.

The scene of the murder and discovery takes place in eighteen shots with two titles, the action largely split between two rooms (our breakdown ac-

tually begins with the shot in which Graybill begins to force open an exterior window, but for brevity we begin here with shot 12, after she has got the gun and when she enters the study for the first time).

- 12 Long shot (as 3). The heroine's father's study. There is a chair rear left, an alcove with bookcase and picture rear right, a window on the right side wall, and, near the rear and on the same wall, midground, a desk. The door is midground left. There is a table left front and a chair front center. Sweet enters through the door and Graybill rises. She holds out her free hand, pointing, briefly in the direction of the window. As he advances toward her, she points several more times in that direction. He grabs the gun and they struggle, backs to camera. He is shot, staggers toward the front and falls into the chair front center, his head, facing upwards, resting on the table. She approaches the corpse slowly, gesturing toward the window (Figure 3.82). There is a marked change of attitude indicating that she realizes he is dead. Sweet's eyes widen in horror, she clutches her face with her left hand, retreats rapidly to lean against the door midground left, and rests her right hand against it (Figure 3.83). She moves out of the door, lifting her left hand high above her head.
- 13 Medium long shot (as 4). Entryway. Stairs going up and off midground center. The door leading to the study is in front of the stairs, to the right. A chair and cupboard are partly visible beyond the stairs, rear left. Sweet backs out of the door, still holding the gun, turns back to camera and lifts both her hands above her head, calling for help (Figure 3.84). She turns around, first facing left, then towards camera, then right, her left hand in a fist held at chest height. She starts, opening her mouth and raising both her hands slightly higher, as she looks through the doorway, right (Figure 3.85).
- 14 As 3. Sweet approaches the corpse, gesturing to the window. She removes Graybill's hat with her right hand, which still holds the gun. Giving her left arm an abrupt shake, she pulls down his kerchief, revealing his face. Sweet's face remains neutral at this discovery, she moves one shoulder slightly (Figure 3.86).
- 15 As 4. Madge Kirby enters down the stairs. She screams. Mailes enters front right.

- 16 As 3. Sweet stands near the body, right hand held to mouth. Mailes enters and stands to her right, Kirby to his right. Mailes gestures, bringing his left hand to chest height. Two more men rush in and stand behind him. He explains what has happened, gesturing with open hands. He picks the dead man up by the lapels. Meanwhile, Sweet removes her hand from her mouth, her lips tremble and a tear rolls down her cheek. She then becomes relatively more active, tearing Mailes's hand off the body (Figure 3.87). She clutches at her breast with her right hand. She turns to the corpse, rests her right forearm on the chair back, and left hand on the corpse's chest. She smiles down at him. With her left hand she taps her chest to indicate he was her lover. She turns to her sister and pantomimes painting her face (indicating that she did not do so, did not have to in order to win him). Then she looks down at him, assumes a sorrowful expression. Mailes puts his arms around her and pulls her away from the body. She puts her left hand to her head as he leads her out the door (Figure 3.88).

17 Title: *Shattered*.

- 18 As 4. Mailes and Sweet enter through the door. He takes the shawl and puts it around her shoulders. She smiles and addresses her (imagined) boyfriend off front right (Figure 3.89). Her father holds her, his hands on her shoulders, horrified. He turns her to face him, pleads with her. She turns back to front right, smiling, then begins to frown, then opens her mouth and stares wide-eyed in the stereotypical "madness" expression (Figure 3.90). She leans back and Mailes supports her. He clasps her to him.

A single gesture or a small number of them are contained within each shot, obviating the need to repeat and vary poses, and helping the actress to engineer transitions from one pose and emotional mood to another. Thus, there is only one pose when she realizes she has killed the masked intruder at the end of shot 12, followed by a cut, while shot 13 similarly makes room for only two, the call for help which also functions as an expression of horror, with hands raised above head, and then the turn and start at the sight of the body. Shot 16 obviously allows for more extended posing, and indeed an



3.82



3.83



3.84



3.85



3.86



3.87



3.88



3.89



3.90

alternation between Mailes, whose gestures dominate at the beginning of the shot, and Sweet, whose gestures dominate at the end. But note that even here, the shot is basically concerned with one idea, the revelation of the dead man's identity both for Sweet (although this began previously when she unmasked him at the end of shot 14) and more importantly for her family. The transition to the next situation, the heroine's madness, is not effected in this shot, but through the interpolation of the title (shot 17) and then the cut to the space outside the study. The framing in shot 18 is closer than in 16, permitting Sweet to act out her madness with smaller gestures, and isolating her from the group in the previous shot. But it also means that the division of the scene into distinct moments is largely out of her hands. We do not see Sweet "become" mad. She leaves the study conflicted, defiant and sorrowful, in shot 16, and the title "shattered" prepares us for the change at the beginning of shot 18. The actress's work in shot 18 is limited to pantomiming the conversation that indicates her mental state, and then assuming the final expressive gesture that caps this point.

As we have already indicated, in one-reel films like *An Official Appointment* or *The Painted Lady* a great deal of action had to be packed in, so it may not be surprising that such films do not allow for extended series of poses. But the tendency to limit the lengths of individual takes, and the number of events or ideas presented in each take, becomes if anything more pronounced in early American features. Griffith's features in particular provide single poses or significant gestures, often isolated in close or medium shots, to drive home the point of a character's reaction to a scene. The well-known repeated shots of Mae Marsh pulling at her handkerchief with her teeth during the highly edited scene of her husband's trial for murder in *Intolerance* are indicative of this trend.

One might think that *A Fool There Was* (Frank Powell, 1915), which depends upon and repeatedly

asserts the fascination of the Vampire (Theda Bara), would move closer to the lengthy takes and performance style of the diva film. But most of the film is comprised of short scenes with only minimal time for posing, which alternate between the Vampire and the hapless husband (Edward José) on the one hand, and his wife (Mabel Fremyear) and child (Runa Hodges) on the other. The predilection for brief scenes holds true even in one of the big situations of the film when the moral opposites are brought together, and the wife and Vampire confront each other face to face, so that no cross-cutting is necessary. The husband, having been abandoned by the Vampire and now an alcoholic, is visited by his wife and is about to leave with her to return home. There is a cut to the exterior of the house that shows the Vampire arriving to reclaim her victim and threatening Tom, a family friend (Clifford Bruce). Cut back inside:

Fremyear and José are standing together back to camera at the door, about to exit. Bara appears outside the door; they separate, Fremyear moving left and José right. She enters and poses in the doorway, staring left at Fremyear. Fremyear and José both fall back further, José leaning against the doorjamb, hands shaking and head bowed. Bruce appears behind Bara in the doorway. Bara looks right, at José, then back left at Fremyear again. Fremyear points at Bara and addresses a question to her husband, who nods his head. Bara moves right, leans towards the husband, and rests her right hand on the doorjamb above him, in a sexually aggressive posture. He leans backwards, his pose also held. She puts her left arm around his neck and kisses him. Bruce enters the room, takes Fremyear by the arm and leads her out of the doorway while she sobs. The Vampire lifts her head and looks left, out the doorway, watching them leave and laughing in triumph. José collapses on his knees in front of her and kisses her hand. She looks down at him, then inclines her head back and looks off left again. The pose is held.

While Bara poses several times in the doorway, sometimes along with the other actors, the poses are not varied or elaborated. There is virtually no

prolongation of the duration of the situation by pictorial means, as could have been easily motivated either by representing the husband as torn between the two, unable to make a choice, or by representing the wife as unwilling to leave. The way this particular scene is structured is partly a function of the fact that Powell utilizes the typical Griffithian shallow staging so that everyone is clustered at the door, precluding larger movements and new groupings of the actors. We also suspect that the actress would have had difficulty handling a lengthier take; all the publicity that accrued to the persona of Theda Bara notwithstanding, Theodosia Goodman was neither a Lyda Borelli nor a Blanche Sweet. But the point is that in Europe even a bad director working with a bad actress would have had a much more extended scene here, with many more, and more varied, attitudes. One can imagine what Bauer would have done with it. That Powell dispenses with a situation like this so quickly is an important indication of the kind of scene construction typical of the early American feature. (Of course, directors such as Griffith did prolong situations, but by cross-cutting, not by gestural means.)

There were American directors such as Cecil B. DeMille and Maurice Tourneur who were celebrated in the trade press during the 1910s for the beauties of their respective visual styles, and who, despite relatively high cutting rates, seem closer than Griffith does to European conceptions of the scene, and the traditions of theatrical pictorialism. The American cinema should not be reduced to Griffith; it obviously encompassed a range of degrees of scene dissection and accommodation to pictorial styles of acting. Nonetheless, because Griffith stands as an early prototype of shot-based scene construction, he represents *in extremis* a tendency that had profound effects on American film acting as a whole in the period. For both features and the one-reel film, the principles of scene construction and developments in editing techniques entailed reduced forms of pictorial acting styles.

American acting tended to be faster in tempo than most European acting and more restrained, partly because actors did not have the time to build up to the very largest gestures, and partly because there was less necessity to rely on the actor to provide emphasis at climactic moments.

One might, then, argue that acting in American films became more “naturalistic,” in the sense that it offered reduced opportunities for posing. But it is not clear, to us at any rate, that American acting should in general be called “naturalistic” in the sense of being deliberately non-emphatic, an alternative discussed above in relation to Duse’s performance style. This is not merely quibbling over terms, since it raises questions about the range of acting styles available in the 1910s — more or less emphatic, more or less pictorially inclined — and also the degree to which pictorial elements survive in the case of Griffith, a director often said to be at the forefront of developments of acting technique in the U.S.

We have noted that Duse’s performances were sometimes referred to as “non-melodramatic” or “restrained” by critics, and that in one instance she ran the risk attendant upon this kind of reduction of gesture, when the critic William Archer complained that she did not “put over” an important point in *A Doll’s House*. There is one moment in *The Painted Lady* that seems to approach this method: in shot 14 when Sweet un.masks the corpse and then remains without significant facial expression (Figure 3.86). There is a similar moment in *The Mothering Heart* (Griffith, 1913), when Lillian Gish remains absolutely calm as she receives the news from the doctor that her baby is dead. In a later shot, showing her walking in the garden, her face also appears still. But, these moments of calm appear as such precisely because Griffith tends to isolate discrete moments of scenes in discrete shots. If we look at the scenes as wholes, it becomes clear that the absence of expression occurs only temporarily, the actress briefly withholding expressive gesture only

to give vent to it again. In both of these cases, the heroine’s calm stands in contrast to previous outbursts — in the case of Sweet, the horrified pose assumed when she realized the intruder had been shot dead, and in the case of Gish, her hysterical attempt to hold onto her child when the doctor first appeared to examine it. Moreover, in both cases, the calm precedes another outburst and moment of emphatic gesture — Sweet’s madness in shot 18 of *The Painted Lady*, and the second shot in the garden in *The Mothering Heart* in which Gish flails at the rose bushes with a stick. No doubt these poses and gestures are relatively brief when compared to the gestural soliloquies of a Lyda Borelli or an Asta Nielsen. But, in the context of Griffith’s editing, and, in *The Painted Lady*, his use of titles to effect transitions, these minimal gestures have a great deal of dramatic force. The effect of this mode of filmmaking is anything but non-emphatic.

Thus, we want to chart out a third alternative — in contrast to both Griffith and the examples of European filmmaking discussed so far — which pursues the renunciation of expressive gesture much more aggressively. The Swedish director Victor Sjöström has helped to define this option for us, and was one of those who most systematically explored naturalist technique in this sense. His *Ingmarssönerna* (*The Ingmarssons*, 1919) is very concerned with the subjective experiences of its central character, yet the actors, including Sjöström himself in the title role, hold the use of expressive gesture to a minimum.

The story of *Ingmarssönerna* is essentially one of a decision that has to be made by Little Ingmar Ingmarsson, a Dalecarlian farmer from a locally respected family. His common-law wife, Brita (Harriet Bosse), whom he has not married because of economic difficulties resulting from bad harvests, has killed their child at birth in rage and shame at her unmarried state, and been sent to prison for infanticide. Her sentence is now over. Respectable local opinion, including Ing-

mar’s own mother and Brita’s parents, assumes that Ingmar will reject Brita, so her father has arranged for her to emigrate to America. Ingmar must decide whether to go along with these plans. He goes to the city and meets Brita as she comes out of prison. As her ship to America does not leave for some time, he drives her back to the village. It is Sunday, and she wishes to join the villagers at church. They go into the church, are mortified by the congregation’s stares, and flee before the sermon. When they reach Ingmar’s farm, his mother says she will leave if Brita enters. Brita begs to go back to the city, and Ingmar starts to drive her there. On the way they meet the congregation returning from church, so Ingmar turns into a side road. As he does so, he is hailed by the postman, who gives him a letter. He drives a little way into the trees, then stops and looks at the letter. It is from Brita. She tells him it is a letter she wrote in prison that he was not supposed to receive until she had gone to America, and begs him not to read it. He insists on doing so, and discovers that she had come to love him. He then confesses to her that he continues to love her. Meanwhile, the pastor has gone to the Ingmarsson farm and congratulated Ingmar’s mother on Ingmar’s courageous decision to take Brita back. Embarrassed, the mother sends servants to look for the couple, and they are found and return to all round congratulations.

The story thus turns crucially on decisions and feelings internal to the characters: Brita’s rage turning to love, Little Ingmar’s conflict between the social and moral dictates of his community and his own conscience. In order to support the psychological inflections necessary for this story, and yet allow for the extremely reduced acting style, the film resorts to a number of other devices: a frame story in which Little Ingmar’s question of conscience is directly posed to his ancestors in heaven in a dream; other visions, e.g., of the folk wedding there might have been; large numbers of prolix titles that

often tell what people are thinking; and a fast-cut editing style that approaches classical continuity in the use of eyeline matches (see, for example, the scene in which Brita's parents tell her she must marry Little Ingmar, which has classically correct matches for three characters who are moving about a table). These devices permit Sjöström to convey strong, and complicated, emotional and psychological states while at the same time employing spare and simple gestures.

The scene in which Little Ingmar reads Brita's letter provides an example of this style. The scene is 9 minutes 34 seconds long at 16 frames per second, and consists of 78 shots, of which 27 are titles and 1 the insert of the letter. This breakdown begins with shot 28 of the scene, shortly after the letter insert, and Little Ingmar's reading of the letter. The scene takes place in a wood, with a dirt road through tall trees. The titles are translated from the original Swedish.

- 28 The trap is standing facing front, with the horse front right. Bosse is seated in the trap facing front, Ingmar standing to the left of the trap. He goes to the trap, stands front left, grabs her right arm and shakes her. She looks off front right.
- 29 Title: *"Is it true that the letter says that you love me?"*
- 30 Medium long shot from the front of the trap. Bosse is sitting in the left seat, Sjöström standing to her left, holding her arm. She looks down off front right. He shakes her (Figure 3.91).
- 31 Title: *"Does it say in the letter that you love me?"*
- 32 Same angle as 30, vignettted medium shot of Sjöström (Figure 3.92).
- 33 Same angle as 30, vignettted medium shot of Bosse (turned a bit to the right). She looks at her lap (Figure 3.93).
- 34 Title: *"Yes."*
- 35 As 33.
- 36 As 32. He thrusts her hand off right. His face breaks up. He screams.
- 37 Title: *"So you are lying! So you are lying!"*
- 38 As 30. She has turned to face him, he looks at her. She speaks.
- 39 Title: *"God knows I prayed to him every day to get to see you before going."*

- 40 As 33.
- 41 As 32. He cries out.
- 42 Title: *"Going where?"*
- 43 As 32.
- 44 As 33. She looks wearily off front right, speaks.
- 45 Title: *"I suppose I am going to America."*
- 46 As 33.
- 47 As 32. He looks down right.
- 48 Title: *"Like hell you are!"*
- 49 As 32.
- 50 As 33. She turns to look off left at him, and laughs.
- 51 As 32. He turns to front left, his face working (Figure 3.94).
- 52 As 16. He staggers off front left (Figure 3.95).
- 53 Long shot of the trap facing right across the rear. Bosse in the trap looking at Sjöström as he staggers then falls headlong towards the camera (Figure 3.96).
- 54 Title: *Now it was his turn to weep.*
- 55 Long shot at 90 degrees to 53. Sjöström lying on the ground, his head to the right, weeping.
- 56 Title: *She was so happy she did not know how she should behave so as not to laugh out loud.*
- 57 As 53. Bosse gets down from cart, comes to the left of Sjöström's head front left, sits down on the ground, takes off his hat and strokes his head.

This segment, like the scene as a whole, is dominated by medium shots, which show either the two characters together or one of them individually. There is a high degree of repetition, the extent of which is not immediately apparent from this short segment. For example shot 30, which shows them together in the trap, is a variant of shot 1, a composition repeated in shots 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 (slightly turned to the right), 13, 15. Within the segment, the vignettted shots of individual characters, shots 32 and 33 (Figures 3.92 and 3.93) are both repeated: shot 32 six times, shot 33 five times. These shots have precedents in shots 18 and 19 and following. The scene is thus largely composed of medium shots that regularly alternate with titles following every one or two of the images.

The actors typically remain poker-faced in the medium-shot framings. The whole point of the scene, at least until shot 57, is that each character



3.91



3.92



3.93



3.94



3.95



3.96

is trying to withhold the display of emotion — Brita because she does not want to force a socially unacceptable marriage on Little Ingmar, Little Ingmar because he does not want to force himself on her for a second time. The neutral or contained facial expressions are thus to be read as repressed emotions. Their hesitation or despair is often represented through the direction of their glance, rather than through facial expression. Thus, Bosse looks away from Sjöström in shots 30, 33, 44 when she is trying to deny her feelings for him.

There are moments of expressive gesture, although without extended elaboration, as in Sjöström's grimaces in shots 36 and 51 (Figure 3.94). And such expressions stand out the more forcefully against the backdrop of the previous shots in the sequence, in which characters have seemed so impassive. But note that these momentary outbursts are transitional moments, they do not come at the end of the discovery, epitomizing the meaning of this moment. Indeed, after Little Ingmar comes to the full realization that Brita loves him, the actor collapses on the ground, crying, in long shot and without our being able to see his face (Figure 3.96). Certainly this suggests the idea of a powerful emotion, but it does not directly display the character's reaction to the new situation to the spectator. The title that informs us that Brita is trying not to laugh out loud is similarly indicative of the level of repression still operative in the scene at this point.

The sequence from *Ingmarssönerna* is remarkable for the absence of pictorial effect at the level of acting; it does not heighten, or even always mark out, changes in dramatic situation in this way. The stylistic differences between this film and one like *Korol' Parizha*, films made within two years of each other, should be apparent. At every point in the scene with mother and son before the duel, the Russian film depends on the actors striking elaborate series of poses and attitudes so as to convey a sense of their emotions, and to organize

the rhythm and pacing of the scene. The scene is also structured through the repetition of elements such as the actors' movements from foreground to background, which take place within the "shot." In contrast, not only do the actors express little with their faces and bodies in *Ingmarssönerna*, but all of the important dramatic transitions in the scene are distributed across a large number of shots and titles, the repetition and variation of which account for the structure of the scene as a whole. Paradoxically, there is a gain for the actor in this, since very minimal gestures — a glance off camera, or slight shake of the shoulder when a man is ostensibly crying on the ground — seem to carry a great deal of signifying weight.

The relation between *Ingmarssönerna* and acting in the American features, such as those by Griffith, remains somewhat more difficult to specify. Insofar as Sjöström's reduced style depends upon a high cutting rate, it is closer to Griffith than to Bauer. On the other hand, Griffith's films often provide the spectator with "telling" facial expressions, and poses, a point highlighted by the editing and use of titles. Insofar as the films aim to clarify and heighten the characters' reactions to situations, a process frequently capped by the actor's gesture if not entirely dependent upon it, they are closer to Bauer than to Sjöström. Thus, Griffith does not reject pictorially oriented acting styles so much as he "tames" them, so that they can fit the tempo and discursive logic of the edited sequence. Whereas Sjöström uses editing, among other devices, to pursue the possibilities of an anti-pictorial and non-emphatic style.

In place of a simple binary opposition between naturalism and pictorialism then, we would emphasize that 1910s cinema encompassed a range of acting styles that incorporated pictorial elements to a greater or lesser degree. These elements, which include not only gestural soliloquies, but also methods for focusing attention on specific characters or bits of business in ensemble

scenes, and for blocking out scenes for two and three actors with the requisite poses and tableaux, became relatively more important in the case of filmmakers who did not pursue the option of shot-based scene construction, that is for most Europeans in the 1910s. They do appear in the shot-based

scene construction typical of the Americans, but they are certainly much attenuated. Our present-day tendency to see marked pictorialism in acting as “hammy” or vulgar, our inability to appreciate its grace, sometimes even to understand the ideas emphasized in this way, is a function of the pre-

dominance of reduced acting styles made possible by the development of classical editing techniques that have entailed much greater interest in and attention to the shot at the expense of the complex pictorial elements within it.

Notes to Part Three

- 1 Holmström, *Monodrama*, 110–40.
- 2 Ibid., 120 and Figures 45:2 and 45:11. Holmström points out two examples of Lady Hamilton in poses deriving from Christian iconography in Friedrich Rehberg's drawings of her attitudes. *Lady Hamilton at Prayer* is part of the Iveagh Bequest, and can be seen at Kenwood House, Hampstead, London.
- 3 This analysis of why the painting of Lady Hamilton violates modernist canons of taste is, of course, indebted to Michael Fried's distinction between theatricality and absorption, already discussed in ch. 1.
- 4 In an interview in 1914, D.W. Griffith enunciated one of the earliest versions of this position, arguing that the use of the close-up permitted a more "restrained" style of acting that was "closer to real life." See Robert Welsh, "D.W. Griffith Speaks," *New York Dramatic Mirror* 71, no. 1830 (14 Jan. 1914): 49 and 54; repr. in George Pratt, *Spellbound in Darkness: A History of the Silent Film* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1966), 110–11. There are many recent variants on this argument, including James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 38–9; and Janet Staiger, "The Eyes Are Really the Focus: Photoplay Acting and Film Form and Style," *Wide Angle* 6, no. 4 (1985): 14–23.
- 5 It is perhaps worth mentioning that Barnett's starting-point is a search for contemporary accounts of acting to assist modern opera singers in the authentic performance of eighteenth-century opera. The performance practices he documents accompanied not simply speech, but also recitative and song. In comments on an earlier draft of this book, David Mayer has insisted to us on the importance of the fact that not just opera but much straight drama in the nineteenth century was accompanied, for part if not all of the performance, by music, as were film screenings in the early twentieth century. All our discussion of pictorial acting assumes these conditions.
- 6 For many examples of admonitions to imitate paintings and statues see Barnett, *Art of Gesture*, 122–7 and esp. 161–312 for the various and inventive connections between words and gesture.
- 7 For a discussion of Gustav Garcia's Delsarte-based textbook *The Actor's Art* see Stephen R. Macht, "The Origin of the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art," *Theatre Notebook* 26, no. 1 (Autumn 1971): 19–30.
- 8 Charles Aubert, *L'Art mimique suivi d'un traité de la pantomime et du ballet* (Paris: E. Meuriot, 1901).
- 9 [Frank Woods], "'Spectator's Comments,'" *New York Dramatic Mirror* 62, no. 1612 (13 Nov. 1909): 15; for a similar complaint about pantomime see C. H. Claudy, "Too Much Acting," *Moving Picture World* 8, no. 6 (11 Feb. 1911): 288–9; and J. Searle Dawley, then director for Famous Players Co., interviewed by Robert Grau, in *The Theatre of Science: A Volume of Progress and Achievement in the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Broadway Publishing Co., 1914; repr. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969), 258–9.
- 10 Bordwell et al., *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 189–192.
- 11 For discussions of posing according to linguistic paradigms, see Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*, 21–6; and Kessler and Lenk, "Réflexions."
- 12 Dene Barnett, "The Performance Practice of Acting: The Eighteenth Century, Part I: Ensemble Acting," *Theatre Research International* 2, no. 3 (1977): 157–86; "The Performance Practice of Acting: The Eighteenth Century, Part II: The Hands," *Theatre Research International* 3, no. 1 (1977): 1–19; "The Performance Practice of Acting: The Eighteenth Century, Part III: The Arms," *Theatre Research International* 3, no. 2 (1978): 79–93; "The Performance Practice of Acting: The Eighteenth Century, Part IV: The Eyes, the Face and the Head," *Theatre Research International* 5, no. 1 (1980): 1–36; "The Performance Practice of Acting: The Eighteenth Century, Part V: Posture and Attitudes," *Theatre Research International* 6, no. 1 (1981): 1–32. Many of the same passages also appear in his remarkable book *The Art of Gesture*. Although both articles and book are concerned with the eighteenth century, several sources, including the fascinating and amply illustrated manual by Johannes Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen over de Gesticulatie en Mimiek: Gegeven aan de Kweekelingen van het Fonds ter Opleiding en Onderrigting van Tooneel-Kunstenaars aan den Stads Schouwburg te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: P.M. Warnars, 1827; repr. Uitgeverij Adolf M. Hakkert, 1970) date from the early nineteenth century and seem to us to apply to acting practices in this period as well.
- 13 Franciscus Lang, *Dissertatio de actione scenica cum figuris eandem explicantibus et observationibus quibusdam de arte comica* (Munich: Typis Mariae Magdalenae Riedlin, 1727), 42; cit. Barnett, "Performance Practice . . . Part V": 2.
- 14 Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen*, 70; cit. Barnett, "Performance Practice . . . Part V": 2.
- 15 Henry Garside Neville, "Gesture," in Hugh Campbell, R. F. Brewer, and Henry Neville, *Voice, Speech and Gesture: A Practical Handbook to the Elocutionary Art* (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1895; repr. in Granger Index Reprint Series, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), 121.
- 16 See the already cited works and Antonio Morrocchesi, *Lezioni di declamazione e d'arte teatrale* (Florence: Tipografia all'insegna di Dante, 1832). Various acting teachers published their versions of Delsarte's system, with illustrations; one of the most important in America was Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Dramatic Expression* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1886). See Macht, "Origin of the London Academy of Music," for a discussion of Delsarte's influence in England.
- 17 Konstantin Stanislavsky, "The System and Methods of Creative Art," in *Stanislavsky on The Art of the Stage*, trans. David Magarshack (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), 215. The essay derives from notes taken by auditors of a series of lectures given in the studio of the Bolshoi Theatre, the Moscow opera house, between 1918 and 1922.
- 18 Stanislavsky, "Five Rehearsals of *Werther*," in *The Art of the Stage*, 280.
- 19 To take just two examples, see Susan Bassnett, "Eleonora Duse," in John Stokes, Michael R. Booth, and Susan Bassnett, *Bernhardt, Terry, Duse: The Actress in her Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 138; and Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*, 21, on the stylized nature of the histrionic code, and p. 31, on the kinds of psychological complexity associated with realism.
- 20 See, for example, Roach, *Player's Passion*, 59, speaking of eighteenth-century theories of acting: "The seminal interplay between the plastic arts and theatrical theory—in particular, the actor's fascination with pictures and statues—corresponds, directly, as we shall see, to the interaction between art and science that encouraged the most advanced thinking in this period. In turn, the theatrical theorist's tendency to enumerate the physical signs of the passions and his desire to notate their transitions stemmed logically from current developments in physiology and psychology."
- 21 Lang, *Dissertatio*, 46–7, cit. Barnett, "Performance Practice . . . Part IV": 8.
- 22 See, for example, Michel Gareau, *Charles Le Brun: First Painter to King Louis XIV* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 99, which shows Le Brun's drawing of five rows of eyes, used in his lecture to illustrate the expressive aspects of the eye and eyebrow, and compare with the similar drawing, used almost 200 years later for the same purpose, in Neville, "Gesture," 149.
- 23 Louis James, "Was Jerrold's Black Ey'd Susan More Popular than Wordsworth's Lucy?," in David Bradby, Louis James, and Bernard Sharrat, eds., *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television, 1800–1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 6–7; for another discussion of the importance of Le Brun and related theories on the emerging pictorial style, see Holmström, *Monodrama*, 29–32.
- 24 François Delsarte, *Delsarte System of Oratory* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1893), Episode 1, 388–9, and Episode 2, 401–11.
- 25 Roach, *Player's Passion*, 78–92, traces out the prolonged

- debate concerning the conundrum of “internal” versus “external” theories of acting: some argued the actor must first inwardly feel the emotion that he is to portray, others argued that the actor’s simple performance of the relevant physical gestures would awaken the requisite feeling in himself and his audience. For Roach, Diderot’s formulation of this problem remains the definitive one for the nineteenth century.
- 26 Holmström, *Monodrama*, 32.
- 27 Humboldt, “Französische tragische Bühne,” 394.
- 28 Constant Coquelin, “Actors and Acting,” in *Papers on Acting II, The Art of Acting, a discussion by Constant Coquelin, Henry Irving and Dion Boucicault*, Publications of the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, in the City of New York, 5th ser. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), 11.
- 29 Louis Calvert, *Problems of the Actor* (New York: Henry Holt, 1918), 131–2.
- 30 Frederick J. Marker, *Hans Christian Andersen and the Romantic Theatre* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 166–8; see also Edward J. West, “Histrionic Methods and Acting Traditions on the London Stage from 1870 to 1890,” Dissertation, Yale University, June 1940, 39–43 and 69; Bettina Knapp, *The Reign of the Theatrical Director: French Theatre, 1887–1924* (New York: Whitston, 1988); Helen Krich Chinoy, “The Emergence of the Director,” in Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, eds., *Directors on Directing: A Sourcebook of the Modern Theatre* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976).
- 31 Leman Thomas Rede, *The Road to the Stage; or, The Performer’s Preceptor* (London: J. Smith, 1827), 41, cit. Barnett, “Performance Practice . . . Part I”: 180.
- 32 Humboldt, “Französische tragische Bühne,” 379.
- 33 Alb., “A Rehearsal at the Française,” *Time* (June 1879): 350, cit. John Stokes, “Sarah Bernhardt,” in Stokes *et al.*, *Bernhardt, Terry, Duse*, 34.
- 34 H. Dupont-Vernon, *Diseurs et Comédiens* (Paris: Paul Ollendorf, 1891), 238.
- 35 *About the Theatre*, 308. A prose translation of the passage might run as follows: *Don Ruy Gomez* (to his servants): Squires! Squires! Help me! My ax, my dagger, my Toledan blade! (To the two young people.) And follow me, both of you! *Don Carlos* (taking a step forward): Duke, we have other business first: the death of Maximilian, Emperor of Germany. (He throws down his cloak and reveals the face concealed beneath his hat.) *Don Ruy Gomez*: Are you mad? . . . My god! The King! *Doña Sol*: The King! *Hernani* (his eyes lighting up): The King of Spain!
- 36 Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen*, 38, cit. Barnett, “Performance Practice . . . Part V”: 9.
- 37 Humboldt, “Französische tragische Bühne,” 386.
- 38 Siddons, *Practical Illustrations*, 347.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 348.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 350.
- 41 Morrocchesi, *Lezioni*, 255–7 and figures 17–38, illustrating his own performance of a speech in Act 4, scene 2 of *Oreste* in Vittorio Alfieri, *Tragedie*, ed. Nicola Bruscoli (Bari: Laterza, 1946), 1:363.
- 42 The Tams-Witmark music library is the major U.S. clearing house for performance rights for opera, operetta and musical theatre. A collection of libretti and musical parts for material now out of copyright is held at the John Mills Music Library at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. For many productions the holdings include a stage manager’s score with staging instructions. The date at which most of these annotations were made cannot be established with certainty, but most of the material in the University of Wisconsin’s holdings was acquired by Alfred Tams between the mid-1880s and 1920. The stage manager’s guide for Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* notes that in the aria Lucia sings after her first entrance with her maid in Act 1, scene 2, p. 33, “Lucy should portray the emotion the words express facially and physically with hands and face and especially eyes, and the two girls should come to an agreement as to what they will do on the different phrases; if they have enough interest in the scene to make it go, as far as it rests on their efforts. It is well worth the trial and so we leave it in their hands.” A similar kind of notation is found in the stage manager’s guide for Sir Julius Benedict’s *The Lily of Killarney*, for the scene in which Danny Mann sings an aria about his willingness to kill Eily, opposite p. 144.
- 43 For a discussion of this incident and the commentary it provoked on the part of Diderot and others, see Roach, *Player’s Passion*, 111, 127, 138.
- 44 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *The Hamburg Dramaturgy*, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: Dover, 1962), from no. 17 (June 1767), 46.
- 45 Riccoboni, *L’Art du théâtre*, 79, cit. Barnett, “Performance Practice . . . Part I”: 178–9; for a discussion of the ensemble along similar lines, but related to the mid-nineteenth-century handling of the ensemble see Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker, “Fru Heiberg: A Study of the Art of the Romantic Actor,” *Theatre Research* 13, no. 1 (1973): 31.
- 46 Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen*, 90, cit. Barnett, “Performance Practice . . . Part I”: 183.
- 47 Barnett, “Performance Practice . . . Part I”: 175–80.
- 48 De la Porte and Chamfort, *Dictionnaire dramatique*, 2:117, cit. Barnett, “Performance Practice . . . Part I”: 184.
- 49 Thomas Wilkes, *A General View of the Stage* (London: J. Coote, 1759), 170, cit. Barnett, “Performance Practice . . . Part I”: 184.
- 50 Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine, *Le Comédien*, rev. edn. (Paris: Vincent fils, 1749; repr. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1971), 149, cit. Barnett, “Performance Practice . . . Part IV”: 21.
- 51 Nicolas Étienne Framéry and Pierre Louis Ginguené, eds., *Encyclopédie méthodique, musique* (Paris: Panckoucke, 1791), vol. 1, article “Action,” 49; cit. Barnett, “Performance Practice . . . Part V”: 3–4. The reference is of course to Lessing’s *Laocoön*, first published in 1766.
- 52 Lessing, *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, from no. 5 (May 1767), 19.
- 53 Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen*, 56–64; cit. Barnett, “Performance Practice . . . Part V”: 24–9.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 53; cit. Barnett, “Performance Practice . . . Part V”: 17–18.
- 55 Barnett, *Art of Gesture*, 91–4 and 139–45; see also Frederick Marker, *Hans Christian Andersen*, 184, on what he calls the “neoclassic ideal of *schöne Wahrheit*.”
- 56 Dion Boucicault, “Coquelin-Irving,” in *Papers on Acting II, The Art of Acting, a discussion by Constant Coquelin, Henry Irving and Dion Boucicault*, Publications of the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, in the City of New York, 5th ser. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), 59–60. But compare Boucicault’s account of Rachel’s performance with that given in Laurence Senelick, “Rachel in Russia: The Shchepkin-Annenkov Correspondence,” *Theatre Research International* 3, no. 2 (1978): 103, in which the critic Pavel Vasil’evich Annenkov describes Rachel’s performance of this death scene in Russia in 1853 as having involved her writhing in convulsions and raving so that many women had to leave the auditorium. The discrepancy between the two accounts may be due to a variation in Rachel’s performance of the part over time, or a lapse of memory by Boucicault, or, more interestingly, changing theatrical conventions that could have made Rachel look “restrained” to Boucicault in the light of Bernhardt’s performance style. In any case, our use of the example does not ride on the accuracy of Boucicault’s memory—we cite it as indicative of how he understood the notion of realism and the limits of decorum on stage.
- 57 Émile Zola, “From *Naturalism in the Theatre*,” trans. Albert Bermel, in Eric Bentley, ed., *The Theory of the Modern Stage* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 349–72.
- 58 Humboldt, “Französische tragische Bühne,” 387–8.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 396.
- 60 For a similar complaint about over use, and overly mannered use, of gesture see Lessing’s discussion of hand movements, *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, from no. 4 (May 1767), 16–17. In the middle of the nineteenth century George Lewes cautioned against both overacting, adopting a bombastic or exaggerated manner in an effort to achieve an effect, and underacting, adopting a manner so close to “natural” behavior that the audience did not

- register any effect at all, so that the character appeared dull and flat. See "On Natural Acting," in *On Actors and the Art of Acting* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1875; repr. New York: Grove Press, 1957), 103.
- 61 Coquelin, "Actors and Acting," 37–40.
- 62 Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker, *Ibsen's Lively Art: A Performance Study of the Major Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 105.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 130.
- 64 Otto Brahm, "Die Freie Bühne in Berlin," *Berliner Tageblatt*, 16, 18 Oct. 1909; repr. in *Kritiken und Essays*, sel., introd., and ed. Fritz Martini (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1964), 524; cit. Marvin Carlson, *The German Stage in the Nineteenth Century* (New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1972), 224.
- 65 Arthur Symons, *Eleonora Duse* (New York: Duffield & Co., 1927), 7; cit. Bassnett in Stokes *et al.*, *Bernhardt, Terry, Duse*, 157.
- 66 Tracy C. Davis, "Acting in Ibsen," *Theatre Notebook* 39, no. 3 (1985): 113–23.
- 67 See Davis, *ibid.*, and Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker, *Ibsen's Lively Art*, 169.
- 68 Martin Meisel, *Realizations*, 8, makes a similar point about the differences between nineteenth- and twentieth-century dramaturgical traditions in terms of their assumptions about the possibility of representing emotion: "The actor's challenge always has been to externalize feeling and thought, including that within which passeth show. Only recently in the Western tradition have we accepted the convention that true feeling is always inarticulate and ultimately inexpressible. The earlier convention took for granted a full expressibility in language and behavior; that is, the convention admitted and demanded a direct externalization, with all the analytic simplification that entailed."
- 69 Alexander Woollcott, *Mrs. Fiske: Her Views on the Stage* (New York: The Century Company, 1917), 64–7.
- 70 On the claim that film is a distinctive medium, and superior to theatre, see, for example, Louis Reeves Harrison, "Alas, Poor Yorick!" *Moving Picture World* 19, no. 13 (28 Mar. 1914): 1653; or Maurice Tourneur's claim, in "'Photodrama is a Distinct Art,' Declares Tourneur," *Motion Picture News* 13, no. 4 (Jan. 1916): 516, that he "cares little for the traditions of the speaking stage as applied to pictures," when in fact most of his 1910s features are theatrical adaptations. The claim that American films are morally and/or aesthetically superior to European ones does not become commonplace until after 1910. See, for example, "Temptations of a Great City [Ved fængslets Port], A Special Release That Has Been Successful in Europe," *Moving Picture World* 8 no. 24 (17 June 1911): 1367; repr. in Pratt, *Spellbound in Darkness*, 118–19.
- 71 Paul Ranger, "I Was Present at the Representation . . ." *Theatre Notebook* 39, no. 1 (1985): 19.
- 72 Barnett, *Art of Gesture*, 158–60 and 167; Barnett, "La Vitesse de la déclamation au théâtre (XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles)," *XVII^e Siècle* 128, no. 3 (July–Sept. 1980): 319–26.
- 73 Barnett, *Art of Gesture*, 348–57. Recall Morrocchesi's 22 plates illustrating a speech of 16 lines in a tragedy.
- 74 Cited in Stokes, "Sarah Bernhardt," in Stokes *et al.*, *Bernhardt, Terry, Duse*, 58–9.
- 75 Ranger, "I Was Present": 19–20.
- 76 See John Alexander Kelly, *German Visitors to English Theaters in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), 145–6, citing Friedrich Wilhelm von Hassel, *Briefe aus England* (Hanover: Ch. Ritscher, 1792), 92–100.
- 77 Michael Booth, "Ellen Terry," in Stokes *et al.*, *Bernhardt, Terry, Duse*, 114. Booth indicates that Terry found the slowness of Henry Irving's pace on stage a problem, and discussed it in her correspondence with Shaw, who complained about the tent scene in *King Lear*, where Irving "kept you waiting in an impossible pose for five minutes between 'I will not swear' and 'these are my hands.'" It is not clear how literally we should take the timing here.
- 78 Humboldt, "Französische tragische Bühne," 386.
- 79 Cit. Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker, "Fru Heiberg": 27.
- 80 Dion Boucicault, with an introduction by Otis Skinner, *Papers on Acting I, The Art of Acting*, Publications of the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, in the City of New York, 5th Ser. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), 35.
- 81 David Mayer, "Nineteenth Century Theatre Music," *Theatre Notebook* 30, nos. 22 & 23 (1976): 115–22; *id.*, "The Music of Melodrama," in David Bradby, Louis James, and Bernard Sharratt, eds., *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television, 1800–1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 49–63.
- 82 Frank Woods consistently complained about actors looking at the camera, and in one of his columns he specifically objects to posing in the sense of standing or speaking to the camera, and thereby acknowledging its presence. See "'Spectator's Comments," *New York Dramatic Mirror* 67, no. 1736 (27 Mar. 1912): 24.
- 83 Albert Goldie, "Subtlety in Acting," *New York Dramatic Mirror* 68, no. 1769 (13 Nov. 1912): 4; and for a confused account of whether or not film acting should be emphatic see Hanford C. Judson, "What Gets Over," *Moving Picture World* 8, no. 15 (15 Apr. 1911): 816.
- 84 Florence Lawrence in collaboration with Monte M. Katterjohn, "Growing Up with the Movies," *Photoplay* 7, no. 2 (Jan. 1915): 103.
- 85 Humboldt, "Französische tragische Bühne," 396.
- 86 Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*, 62.
- 87 *Ibid.*, 110–11 and 119.
- 88 *Ibid.*, 105.
- 89 Charles Musser, "The Changing Status of the Film Actor," in *Before Hollywood: Turn-of-the-Century American Film* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1987), 57–62, gives 1907–8 as the date of the formation of the stock companies, a time when the demand for story films had increased to the point that it was no longer practicable for the major producers to hire actors only on a per-day basis. Florence Lawrence, "Growing up": 96, refers to the formation of the stock company at Biograph in 1908. Many in the Biograph stock company had stage experience; see Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*, 83–4, on Griffith making the rounds of the theatrical agencies. The extent to which theatrically trained actors predominated in other moving-picture stock companies is indicated by the biographies of members of the Vitagraph stock company in Anthony Slide, *The Big V: A History of the Vitagraph Company* rev. edn. (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1987), 134–55.
- 90 On the latter two conditions see Thompson in Bordwell *et al.*, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 189–92.
- 91 Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*, 27 (on the unchecked histrionic code with fully extended gestures as typical of "melodramatic" acting), 79–81 (on Griffith's acting as an example of this style), and 2 (for another example of these sorts of fully extended gestures).
- 92 *Ibid.*, 40–1.
- 93 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 94 Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen*, 97–8; cit. Barnett, *Art of Gesture*, 98.
- 95 *Ibid.*, 89 and 87; cit. Barnett, "Performance Practice . . . Part III": 82–3. In *The Art of Gesture*, 132, Barnett suggests that this remains a problem for performers today: "One of the worst (and most common) examples of the lack of pictorial contrasts is to have both hands raised to the same height and equally extended; this always looks gauche and lacking in grace and proportion." 96 Riccoboni, *L'Art du théâtre*, 13–14; cit. Barnett, "Performance Practice . . . Part III": 84. For similar comments about the possibility of extending gesture, and raising the arms above the height of the eyes in moments of passion, see Barnett, *The Art of Gesture*, 107–8.
- 97 Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*, 27, seems to assume that "melodramatic" acting on the stage as well as the "unchecked histrionic code" employed by Biograph actors was fast-paced; see also pp. 80 and 87 on Griffith's preference for "fast acting." Frank Woods's remarks appear in his column "'Spectator's Comments," *New York Dramatic Mirror* 63, no. 1641 (4 June 1910): 16; repr. in Pratt, *Spellbound in Darkness*, 84.
- 98 Lawrence, "Growing up": 107. Note that Pearson,

- Eloquent Gestures*, 87, has abridged this quotation to remove the reference to the thousand-foot reel and the comparison with the feature film. She also interprets this quotation differently, assuming that Griffith's preference for "fast" acting derived from the fact that he had still not abandoned habits acquired in the theatre and his preference for the "histrionic" code. We think the full quotation amply demonstrates the specific cinematic need for speed in this period, i.e., that scenes had to be completed within the requisite number of feet given the limitation of the one-reel film.
- 99 Anon. [Frank Woods], "Reviews of Licensed Films, [...] *All on Account of the Milk*," *New York Dramatic Mirror* 63, no. 1622 (22 Jan. 1910): 17; repr. in Anthony Slide, ed., *Selected Film Criticism 1896–1911* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1982), 4–5. Woods's review of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Selig, 1910), "Reviews of Licensed Films," *New York Dramatic Mirror* 64, no. 5177 (30 Nov. 1910): 30, makes a similar point: "The part of Falstaff was adequately taken, although it suffered like all the rest from the necessity of hastening the action to make it fit into the allotted time."
- 100 Gunning, *D. W. Griffith*, 113–14 and 262–70.
- 101 Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*, 63–74.
- 102 "Comments on the Films, [...] *A Girl's Stratagem*," *Moving Picture World* 15, no. 12 (22 Mar. 1913): 1219; reprinted in Pratt, *Spellbound in Darkness*, 104.
- 103 "Comments on the Films, [...] *The Hero of Little Italy*," *Moving Picture World* 16, no. 3 (19 Apr. 1913): 279; repr. in Pratt, *Spellbound in Darkness*, 105.
- 104 Epes Winthrop Sargent, 'The Photoplaywright: Scenes and Leaders', *Moving Picture World* 13, no. 6 (10 Aug. 1912): 542; repr. in Pratt, *Spellbound in Darkness*, 101–3.
- 105 Lawrence, "Growing up": 107; another example of admiration for the Film d'Art actors may be found in a review of *L'Assassinat du duc de Guise* by Thomas Bedding, "The Modern Way in Moving Picture Making," *Moving Picture World* 4, no. 11 (13 Mar. 1909): 294–5; repr. in Slide, *Selected Film Criticism*, 12–13; "The scenes of the Assassination show accuracy of costume, accessories, archaeological and other details; the grouping, and what we commonly call the *mise-en-scène* are perfect; the acting such as only long and careful rehearsing under a master mind can produce. From this point of view, and I speak from experience of the Paris, London and New York stages, I have no hesitation in pronouncing the film in question as an ideal piece of stage craft in the way of silent drama."
- 106 *Proektor* 20 (1916): 3, cit. Yuri Tsivian, "Some Preparatory Remarks on Russian Cinema," in Paolo Cherchi Usai, Lorenzo Codelli, Carlo Montanaro, and David Robinson, eds., *Testimoni Silenziosi: Film russi 1908–1919/Silent Witnesses: Russian Films 1908–1919* (Pordenone/London: Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine/British Film Institute, 1989), 28–30; see Tsivian's entire section on the deliberately slow tempo of Russian films, pp. 26–34.
- 107 Unfortunately, the original intertitles of *Ma l'amor mio non muore!* do not survive; the longest print we have seen (that of the Milan Cineteca) has new titles composed by the restorers, and the English-language print in the Museum of Modern Art, deriving from an earlier stage in the Milan restoration, translates the Milan titles. These titles leave gaps in the plot, but, more important, we think they may at times falsify the action. Here these prints reconstruct a text of the letter that suggests that the Grand Duke knows that Diana Cadouleur is really Elsa Holbein, daughter of the supposed traitor to Wallenstein. As we note below, Theubner is visibly shaken when he recognizes Elsa. He might not be in the Grand Duke's confidence, but it seems more plausible to suggest that the letter simply reproves Max for a liaison with the notorious actress Diana Cadouleur.
- 108 Marvin Carlson suggests that actors moving furniture to vary the stage composition began in France in productions of Scribe's plays at the Comédie Française in the 1840s, and was further developed by Montigny at the Théâtre de la Gymnase in the 1850s. See "French Stage Composition from Hugo to Zola," *Educational Theatre Journal* 23, no. 4 (Dec. 1971): 366–7 and 372.
- 109 The print we have seen, deriving from the negative preserved by Gosfilmofond, Moscow, lacks titles. The complex plot is difficult to follow without them, so our reading of the story is tentative and indebted to the novel *Roi de Paris* by Georges Ohnet on which the film was originally based. Our spelling of most of the character names also derives from this source. Gosfilmofond has added opening titles to the reconstructed print that give cast lists and character names in Russian, derived from contemporary publicity for the film. With a few exceptions, these seem to be Cyrillic transliterations of the character names in the novel. See Georges Ohnet, *Roi de Paris*, from the series *Les Batailles de la Vie*, 8th ed. (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1898). Yuri Tsivian is currently attempting to restore a subtitled print of the film, using the novel as his source.
- 110 Slide, *The Big V*, 144.
- 111 Russell Merritt, "Mr. Griffith, *The Painted Lady* and the Distractive Frame," *Image* 19, no. 4 (Dec. 1976); repr. in Marshall Deutelbaum, ed., 'Image': *On the Art and Evolution of the Film* (New York and Rochester: Dover Publications and International Museum of Photography, 1979), 147–56.