



1

Hollywood as Modernism's Other: The Case of *Sunrise*

The first of three films the German filmmaker F. W. Murnau made in Hollywood, *Sunrise* has taken its place among the important works of cinema history since its release in 1927. Amid the ebb-and-flow of shifting patterns of taste over many decades, *Sunrise* has retained a remarkably stable position, neither falling victim to devaluation or critical renunciation, like, say, *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1914), nor in need of rediscovery, as was, say, Keaton's work in the 1960s. Even so, the film's meanings as a cultural object are anything but stable. A Hollywood melodrama directed by a "maverick" emigré, the film illustrates the dialogue of seemingly opposed cinematic styles at a crucial point in the formation of "Classical Hollywood" as an institution of representation. In doing so, it situates itself on the cusp of an emergent cinematic modernism and an already institutionalized mass culture, gesturing at once toward the "high" culture of modernism and the "popular" culture of modernity and thereby signaling the crises of cultural value that beset these hierarchies in the age of "high" modernism.

Clearly, *Sunrise* is a "canonical" film, if any film can be so certified. But in what canon is it to be located? When Dudley Andrew concisely surveyed the "determining forces" upon the film's production, he cataloged factors that have by extension shaped its reception: "William Fox's position in Hollywood, Hollywood's position in United States culture, Murnau's homosexuality, the decline of German Expressionism, the function of the pastoral within recently urbanized

societies, the problem of Christianity in a capitalist order" (360). Each of these terms has been treated with greater or lesser degrees of emphasis in critical response to the film over the years, but in cautioning against an exclusionary focus on any one of these factors, against "fetish[izing] one aspect of the work" (356), Andrew effaces what they have in common: an understanding of the film as occupying embattled intersections among cultural formations. It is this aspect of the text I will focus on here, arguing that the film's position as a Hollywood product by a German art-film director whose reputation linked him to a tradition of Euro-modernism inevitably troubles its status as a cultural object.

Two of the terms Andrew pointed to in his contextualization of the film explicitly posit conflicted or potentially incompatible ideologies at work in or behind the text: pastoral versus urban, Christian versus capitalist. The remaining terms do so implicitly. The reference to Fox conjures up the quest for European prestige within the American culture industry, and the reference to Hollywood as a cultural institution in America connotes the opposition of "popular" to "serious" cultural forms in early cinema. The invocation of Murnau's biographically known homosexuality, especially in reference to the avidly heterosexual representation *Sunrise* apparently yields, can only suggest a confrontation with the codes of censorship or displacement within the Classical Hollywood model that work to render such sexualities invisible; or, alternatively, to make them visible only in clearly regulated ways. Finally, the reference to "the decline of German Expressionism," grounded historically in the movement's depletion by American recruitment and German emigration, gives us a picture of the film as the signifier of a tradition in crisis, diluted by its wedding to the opposing and ultimately dominant tradition of Classical Hollywood.

Given this multilayered narrative, it is no wonder that this admirably "elastic" (356) work, to use Andrew's words, guaranteed canonical status by virtue of its very "resilience" (356), should yet be so difficult to *place*, to contextualize in any secure way. Neither unproblematically "realist" in the classical mode, nor fully "modernist" in a clear sense, the film exemplifies both the late phase of a passing (and moribund?) movement and the initial consolidation of a vital tradition, at once crucial to constructions of Hollywood as a machine designed for the representation and production of the bourgeois couple and of critical interest to the study of gay authorship in cinema.

In light of the heady overdetermination of the film's contexts, it is necessary to resist the competing impulses either to assign it to the transcendental domain of the "masterpiece," as Andrew seems

inclined to do in his near-definitive reading, or to fix it squarely within a single one of the ever-shifting canons among which it oscillates, as he rightly warns against. More to the point would surely be to examine specifically what about the film has led to this quality of overdetermination in its cultural placement. It is indeed the very malleability of *Sunrise* as a cultural object that is important here, since this malleability brings into clearer focus the status of the cultural oppositions around which the film's textuality simultaneously defines itself and is defined. The structures of canon-formation routinely depend on the closure of delimited cultural fields, but the very existence of *Sunrise* as a cultural object—central to certain canons, marginal to others, produced in one cultural institution but drawing upon energies of another—illuminates the impracticability of such closure.

Sunrise is characteristic of Hollywood films by European directors in its complex negotiation of textual and cultural levels, conjoining differential codes of style and ordinarily opposed levels of culture. On its release, the film was promoted as the "first international" production, and its "international" status consolidates the very oppositions it negotiates—between Classical Hollywood and German expressionism, between modernism and mass culture, between high culture and popular culture. The film was received as strange and foreign-seeming by the mass audience of Hollywood movies, but, as we will see, it was construed as just another Hollywood potboiler by commentators who allied themselves with a modernist aesthetic. The film's "international" status serves as one of the clearest signifiers of its connection to modernism, but that status accounted at the same time for the difficulty of "placing" the film—as well as for the impulse to "place" it at all. As Astradur Eysteinnsson suggests in his study of modernism,

While everyone seems to agree that as a phenomenon modernism is radically "international" (although admittedly in the limited Western sense of that word), constantly cutting across national boundaries, this quality is certainly not reflected in the majority of critical studies of modernism. . . . The urge to "secure" works, writers, and canons within the boundaries of national literatures does not originate in the present century, but in the case of modernism it does come strikingly to the fore. (*Concept of Modernism*, 89)

In the case of *Sunrise*, the "international" style of the film negotiates Hollywood mass culture with the Euro-modernist dispositions of Ger-

man expressionism. In doing so, the film confronts the illusionism and escapist fantasy associated with Hollywood's commodity culture with the self-reflexivity and cultural critique of modernist aesthetics. Because of the apparent rift between that culture and those aesthetics, the "international" position of *Sunrise* results simultaneously in its alienation in Hollywood and its demonization in modernism. Yet, like many of the most suggestive Hollywood films by European directors, especially during the classical period, its very existence as a cultural object threatens that insulating rift between mass culture and modernism, high culture and popular culture, Hollywood film and German expressionism—and, in turn, thereby threatens the stability of clear demarcations between identity and difference, sameness and otherness, nativity and foreignness, in Classical Hollywood film.

Modernity, Visuality, and Urban Space

If *Sunrise* was finally rejected as strange and remote-of-sensibility by the American audiences for Hollywood films at the time of its release, it was certainly not because the film does not expertly and seemingly wholeheartedly don the chameleonic protective-coloration of its disguise as an ordinary Hollywood movie. In the emotive charge of its melodrama and in the sensational edge of its plotting, the film bears very direct affinities to Hollywood hits of the time, such as *Seventh Heaven* (Borzage, 1927), with which it shares a star, Janet Gaynor. The film's story follows the tribulations of an innocent rural couple from the decline of their relationship to its regeneration. At the beginning of the film, the husband meets a "City Woman," a vamp, who persuades him to murder his wife in order to join her in the city. The husband prepares to do so, but when the wife learns of his plot and flees, he feels intense remorse. When he runs after her, the two of them end up in a nearby city. The remainder of the film shows the renewal of their relationship as they discover the culture of the city, and ends, after they have endured the natural disaster of a storm at sea, with their return to the country and their ultimate reconciliation.

In the extreme polarities of its moods and in its traditional, sentimental concern with heterosexual romance, the film reproduces fundamental conventions of the 1920s Hollywood melodrama. Despite the film's seemingly secure grounding in so typical a genre, however, it incorporates important textual elements that undermine that security. Stylistically, the film draws heavily, especially in its first half, upon techniques of optical subjectivity and devices of intrusive formal

experimentation characteristic of the tradition of German expressionism in which Murnau made his reputation. To be sure, that Murnau was brought to Hollywood at all indicates that this style was not regarded in the institution as fundamentally incompatible with the traditional procedures of filmmaking in Classical Hollywood.¹ Yet the modernist patina of his work, certified in its subjectivity and experimentation, inevitably troubles any simple account of the film's distinctive texture.

If it makes sense to talk about the "modernist" elements of a Hollywood movie at all, and of this Hollywood movie in particular, such discussion must always take note of the complex currents and counter-currents that inevitably disturb the flow of the discourse. In *Sunrise*, the current of romantic melodrama is met by the countercurrent of expressionist "avant-gardism." But the film's avowals of its allegiances to mass culture, by way of its ardent adoption of Hollywood genres, counter those signifiers of modernist textuality the film simultaneously contains. A developing line of modernist cinema contemporary with *Sunrise*, from the canonical avant-gardism of *Un Chien Andalou* (Bunuel/Dali, 1929) to the modernist-expressionism of *Diary of a Lost Girl* (Pabst, 1927), follows the tradition of literary modernism in defining itself against the social, cultural realities of modernity itself. These films, typically, expose the oppression of the forms of social organization, the backwardness of the technologies of progress, and the vacancy of the novel subjectivities they impute to the forces of modernity. Although Hollywood films of the time also sometimes project specific elements of modernity as constrictive or destructive, they more traditionally celebrate modernity itself as progressive toward the demotic utopia so many Hollywood films, consciously or unconsciously, herald.

The representation of *Sunrise* avows its affinities with mass culture by celebrating modernity itself. An important gauge of the relation of *Sunrise* to modernist canons and to the theme of modernity is to be found in its representation of the modern metropolis, usually registered in such texts of the time as the emblematic image of modernity as such. In more traditional modernist cinema, such as the films named above, the image of the city typically functions as an image of modernity's malignance. The "vision of modernism as an unending permanent revolution against the totality of modern existence" (Berman, 30) often projected an image of the modern metropolis as the very index of the chaos, alienation, and fragmentation of modern experience against which modernism typically opposed itself. The adversarial spirit often installed as a determining force in the forma-



FIGURE 1. *Sunrise*: The image of the city celebrates modernity. Courtesy Museum of Modern Art, New York.

tion of modernist canons—where negation guaranteed admission to the canon, affirmation exclusion from it—demanded aggressive critique of the conditions and the very forms of the modern city as an emblem of modernity, even if it was the metropolis itself that produced the new forms of representation characteristic of modernism (Williams, "The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism," 13–16). In *Sunrise*, conversely, the city becomes the site of the reconciliation of the couple who are the film's main characters. This point is in itself noteworthy, especially considering the number of films contemporary with *Sunrise* in which the city is figured as an obstacle to human contact, whether in the European tradition, such as *Pandora's Box* (Pabst, 1927), or in the Hollywood tradition, such as *The Crowd* (Vidor, 1928). The city section of *Sunrise*, however, is closer to the celebratory exuberance of an alternative and distinctively European contemporary tradition in representing urban space, that of the city-symphony film, such as *Berlin* (Ruttman, 1926) or *Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov, 1926). In Murnau's film, the landscape of the city functions not merely as the location of the couple's reconciliation but as its very agent. In spite of a conventional quality of alienation the film's imagery periodically attaches to its representation of the city, its narrative insistently positions the city as a source of fully legitimated renewal.

The movement toward reconciliation in the plot is worked out in a series of discrete and curiously repetitive episodes that correlate the couple's reconciliation with the juxtaposed rhythms of the city itself. For example, when the couple takes refuge from urban overstimulation in a convenient doorway, Murnau repeatedly cuts away from them to an anonymous vantage point of a passing wedding procession on a street whose spatial relation to the couple has not been made clear. Later, after they have wandered into the church where the wedding ceremony is taking place, Murnau again cuts away from the couple's fervent embrace as the husband begs his wife's forgiveness to repeated close-ups of peeling churchbells. In both cases, a quality of dissociation from narrative as such functions to introduce these images in figural terms. Although the shots of both the procession and the bells are finally placed securely into the narrative logic of the film's diegesis, the initial deferral of such placement abstracts the images as visual tropes, thus synchronizing the couple's gradual reconciliation with these explicitly urban metaphors of rebirth. Perhaps more to the point, these metaphors, through their identification with the rhythms of the city itself, differ in character from the expressly inward qualities of figuration at work earlier in the film.

Placed beside another roughly contemporary and passingly modernist canonical film about marital reconciliation, *L'Atalante* (Vigo, 1934), to be sure, Murnau's film is striking in its comparative lack of the rhetoric of introspection in relation to the melodramatic theme of reconciliation, positioning the Hollywood film more closely to the "objective" sensibility of mass modernity than to the "subjective" one of cultural modernism. In Vigo's more typical film, reconciliation is secured through a rejection of the values of the city. This rejection, in turn, is signalled visually through a return from objective imagery to a more interiorized, elemental imagery presented as analogous to a quality of restored inner tranquility. The movement toward reconciliation in the narrative of *L'Atalante* coincides with increased intensity of identification with the estranged characters as individual figures, as well as with a more rigorous focus of narrative energy in relation to the characters. In her perceptive monograph on *L'Atalante*, Marina Warner traces a progression she sees in that film from an initial representation of the city as "a private kingdom of desire" (52) to a greater "realism" as the city's obstruction of Jean and Juliette's romance becomes more pronounced. Warner goes on to oppose the image of the barge where the couple achieved union, industrial yet pastoral, to that of the city that separates them: "The barge, by contrast to the city, now takes on the character of a magical space of safety and dreaming" (55). According to Warner, then, *L'Atalante* participates in a conventional rhetoric of romance, aligning reconciliation with private experience, with a radical interiority, conceiving the city as a distinctly *public* space that threatens the private, pastoral, metaphoric, ineffable, and archetypal space, the world elsewhere, of romance itself.

Expressing some consciousness of such rhetoric, *Sunrise* challenges it decisively even as the film similarly seeks, like *L'Atalante*, to validate, even self-consciously to idealize, the domain of romance, in keeping with the conventions of the lyric melodrama of contemporary art-cinema. In *Sunrise*, by contrast with *L'Atalante*, not only does the narrative become increasingly diffuse as the film proceeds, but the very formal devices associated with identification or introspection, such as subjective compositions, intense close-ups, and point-of-view shots, used amply in the film's first third chronicling the couple's estrangement, are eliminated almost systematically during the narrative process of reconciliation. In *L'Atalante*, reconciliation can be achieved only by leaving the city behind, resuming a kind of pastoralized subjectivity, while in *Sunrise* the phases of reconciliation are correlated with the journey through the city itself. Both films deal with, to return to Andrew's phrase, the "function of the pastoral within

recently urbanized societies," but *Vigo's* depends on a conventional opposition of country and city while Murnau's negotiates this opposition in a manner with, in turn, large implications for the other seeming oppositions around which the film takes shape.

The important difference of Murnau's film in its representation of the city as an emblem of nascent modernity may be seen clearly in a single sequence, as the couple cross a city street after their symbolic remarriage. In the sequence, the camera tracks behind the couple as they move forward, arm in arm, absorbed emotionally in each other and oblivious of the dense traffic encircling them. As they cross the street, the cityscape in front of them is dispelled in a supple dissolve by a matte-shot perspective of a pastoral landscape. A sudden series of cutaway shots to details of massed traffic—a sounding horn, a foot pressing against a brake—is followed by an equally abrupt long shot of the couple embracing amid a traffic jam, the cries of irate motorists bringing an end to their romantic reverie. As an image of modernity, the sequence appears to be evoked uncannily in Walter Benjamin's later discussion of film and modernity: "Film corresponds to profound changes in the apperceptive apparatus—changes that are experienced on an individual scale by the man in the street in big-city traffic, on a historical scale by every present day citizen" ("*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*," 243). The sequence also suggestively condenses several prior moments in the film. It answers the earlier sequence of the husband's tryst with the vamp, in which a parallel matte-shot projects a stylized cityscape behind the two figures in place of the preternatural bog where their meeting takes place. It also echoes the earlier sequence of the couple's arrival in the city when they are buffeted by the dizzying rhythms of the city streets. The condensation of these earlier episodes illustrates by contrast a marked shift in the film's conception of urban space. Initially associated with longing and its rupture, as when the vamp taunts the husband with nocturnal urban images, the city is here coincident with fulfillment and mastery, as the couple's reunion magically and comically delivers them from the city's supposed threat. Both conceptions are clearly dependent on psychic projections worked out formally through the matte-shots. The first, the image of the city-in-the-country, is an image of fragmentation fraught with the surplus energies of its own displacement signified by orgiastic movement as well as by the use of unrestrained split-screens and superimpositions within the image. On the other hand, the image of the country-in-the-city is one of serenity and wholeness.² Both images, by contrast to more typical modernist assertions of their incompatibility, figure the congruency of city and country—and, by

implication, the public and the private, objectivity and subjectivity—but the latter perhaps paradoxically finds compatibility as well in the subject-positions potentiated by either milieu. If in *L'Atalante*, as Warner argues, enchantment is only possible in refuge from the city, in *Sunrise* it is shown to be available in the city itself, as this magical, pastoral image indicates.

Although *Sunrise* reproduces many conventional conceptions of the city familiar in cinema of the 1910s and 1920s, then, the film ends not by rejecting the values of the city, as in *L'Atalante*, but by connecting the couple's reconciliation to their experience of urbanness. Here again, the rhetoric of objectivity born with the couple's arrival in the city is significant. The journey through the city is figured as a successive movement toward a kind of celebratory specularity, a pleasurable acceptance of an explicitly *visual, objectified* urban culture. Indeed, this explicit visuality may be clarified by noting that the disposition of the couple after their symbolic remarriage strikingly resembles that of Walter Benjamin's figure of the *flâneur*. In Anne Friedberg's account, the *flâneur* is "the quintessential paradigm of the subject in modernity, wandering through urban space in a state of distraction" (34–35). For Benjamin, the figure of the *flâneur* serves as a crucial emblem of modern subjectivity because, a wandering observer attentive to the city's contingency and ephemera, his gaze is (theoretically) both passive and engaged: he neither actively resists the city's chaos and fragmentation by mobilizing his own gaze against it, nor takes refuge in nostalgic pastoral, longing for the sense of rootedness, psychic or actual, presumably lost with the very emergence of the city. Rather, for Benjamin, the *flâneur* refines a *new kind of looking*, at once produced by the city and uniquely responsive to it, receptive to urban fragmentation, taking pleasure in the voluptuary chaos and sensory overstimulation the city is often, in early reflection on modernity, said to introduce.

The narrative of *Sunrise* divests itself of the conventional rhetoric of subjectivity in relation to the couple as they gradually assume their positions in the visual culture of the city. As the film progresses, the couple take their places as tranquil *objects* of a public gaze rather than anxious *subjects* of an individualized look. Again, the projection of the pastoral scene after their symbolic remarriage is a crucial turning point here. The image can only be understood logically as a virtual or hallucinatory derivation from private consciousness, yet its lyric force derives from its shared, projective character, strikingly evocative of the nineteenth-century optical novelty of the panorama, a precursor of cinema used predominantly to project rural images in urban spaces, connected directly by Benjamin to the emergent forms of subjectivity

of the *flâneur*: "The city-dweller . . . attempts to introduce countryside into the city. In the panoramas the city dilates to become landscape, as it does in a subtler way for the *flâneur*" (quoted in Friedberg, 24). Thus the image conflates optical subjectivity with the mobilization of an outward-turning, projected, public gaze.³

At the most literal level, the couple's excursion in the city is a movement from a visually charged invisibility at the beginning of their sojourn—as Benjamin characterizes the longing of the *flâneur*, "to be in the midst of the world and yet to remain hidden from the world" (quoted in Friedberg, 29)—to an ultimate exhibitionism. On their arrival in the city, the couple remain unseen by oblivious city-dwellers who hurry past them and by the drivers of vehicles that swerve wildly around them. When they emerge from the church after their symbolic remarriage, the gathered celebrants look at them with ill-concealed disappointment at seeing ragged peasants rather than the resplendent bride-and-groom they expect. Yet the subsequent scenes in the street and in the barbershop figure an emergent, redemptive visuality around mirror-images. The couple first look at photographs that seem to mirror them, on display in a shop window, then at reflections of themselves in the window glass, and finally in an actual mirror in the barbershop in preparation for their visit to the photographer. In larger terms, the couple's activity in the course of their day in the city betokens systematic movement toward novel forms of visual experience. After they commission a photograph of themselves, imaging themselves through this process of commodification, the couple attend a carnival where they dance uninhibitedly before an enthusiastic audience of urban spectators. It is important to note here not only the trajectory from visual subjectivity in the film's first section, with its attendant rhetoric of psychological isolation, to distanced objectification in the city section, with its attendant rhetoric of social communion. Equally important, again, is the coincidence of the thematics of reconciliation, conventionally associated in romantic melodrama with privacy, introspection, subjectivity, with this narrative trajectory.⁴

The most important point here is that the film's supple negotiations of tropes of city/country, especially as they take shape around terms of modernity and visuality itself, provide a way of focusing its negotiations of the styles of German expressionism and Classical Hollywood. The point may be clarified through an analysis of the pivotal sequence in the barbershop, where the play of modes of visuality, thematics of modernity, and rhetorics of subjectivity effects an important shift in the film's tone. Indeed, the sequence is crucial in the coincident shift already noted in the narrative placement of the couple itself. The

preceding third of the film relies heavily on the rhetoric of visual subjectivity associated with expressionism, using superimpositions to signify mental processes, isolating individual characters in narrative space, and organizing sustained sequences around the point-of-view of single characters. The episode leading up to the boat ride, for example, employs such devices exclusively in relation to the character of the husband, while the episode of the boat ride itself makes similarly intense use of such devices exclusively in relation to the character of the wife. By contrast, the space of the barbershop is constructed around the newly interconnected viewpoints of multiple characters, including two—the barber and the “Obtrusive Gentleman” (as the credits identify him)—who do not figure prominently anywhere else in the narrative.

One useful way to understand the formal reorientation marked by the barbershop scene is in terms of a shift away from Murnau’s “imaginary space” (“Secret Affinities,” 37), as Thomas Elsaesser (following Eric Rohmer) characterizes it, to a construction of space more in keeping with—again in Elsaesser’s words—“the clipped realism of the Americans, with its reliance on shot-countershot, the variations of angle and constant reframing for the sake of keeping up pace and momentum” (“Secret Affinities,” 36). The sustained and exclusionary focus earlier in the film on the husband’s point-of-view as he tortuously considers murdering his wife and the subsequent focus on the wife’s point-of-view as her husband’s plot dawns on her both provide clear illustrations of Murnau’s characteristic procedures of “imaginary space.” Viewed by Elsaesser and others as an essential aspect of Murnau’s style, “imaginary space” defines spatial logic according to a rhetoric of subjectivity. According to Elsaesser, “Although almost always taking its cue from the ‘real world,’ [Murnau’s “imaginary space”] finds its coherence in the urgency of a desire, an obsession, an anxiety or a wish” (“Secret Affinities,” 37). An example Elsaesser gives is the scene in *Nosferatu* (1923) where Harker discovers the vampire’s coffin. In that scene, Elsaesser argues, the coherence of narrative space is disrupted by an oneiric or primary-process logic signified by, for instance, “breaking the rules of continuity editing” so that the viewer is “unsure of what exactly Harker has seen” (“Secret Affinities,” 37). Thus, though not explicitly Lacanian in Elsaesser’s version of it, Murnau’s “imaginary space,” signifier of his expressionist style, has ties to Christian Metz’s conception of the work of figuration in *The Imaginary Signifier* (1982): a moment of “perceptual block[age]” (Metz, 274) consciously or unconsciously working against secondary discourse through condensatory or metaphoric operations expressing psychic processes.

An example occurs in *Sunrise* when the husband awakens after fitful sleep and remembers his murder plot. The memory is worked out through a conventional shot/reverse-shot visual structure, a close-up of the husband suddenly stricken with terror, widening his eyes as he looks out-of-frame, followed by a shot of the bundled reeds he has gathered the night before to aid in his plot. The rhetoric of the shots implies through the shot/countershot structure—typical, as Elsaesser points out, of the “clipped realism of the Americans”—that the husband actually sees the reeds, that his glimpse of them is the source of his horror. But the narrative context has made clear that the reeds are concealed elsewhere, in a backyard shed, belying the implied literal contiguity of the shot/reverse-shot. Moreover, although we have seen the husband carefully cover the reeds in a previous shot, the close-up of the reeds in this shot, zooming in on them dynamically, contradictorily reveals them fully uncovered, signifying through both the image itself and the figural zoom the husband’s anxiety of discovery. The conventional suggestion of spatial contiguity between the shot and the reverse-shot makes this a striking example of “imaginary space,” rooting it in the secondary discourse of the classical shot/reverse-shot schema—“taking its cue from the real world,” in Elsaesser’s phrase—yet (in Metz’s vocabulary) primarizing it through a process of formal figuration.

On the face of it, then, the barbershop sequence displaces the subjective visual rhetoric of “imaginary space” and expressionist style with more conventionally objective devices of the Classical Hollywood model, stably balanced frontal compositions and attentiveness to spatial continuity as well as a heavy reliance on “*plan américain*” composition.⁵ The sequence begins with a precisely symmetrical composition with the camera placed outside the shop’s entrance, a dual-paneled glass-and-steel doorway, immediately striking for its hypermodern sleekness of design and its largeness of scale. The door’s transparency allows the viewer to see the busy shop in the depth of the composition, but it also allows the proprietor to see the street, so that when the couple tentatively enter the composition, the vigilant proprietor immediately opens the door with exaggerated cordiality to hurry them into the shop. If the connection of visual consciousness to urban experience previously in the film positions the couple as anxious subjects of the look who themselves remain unseen, from this sequence on they become objects of a generalized, public gaze. The architectural design of the barbershop itself establishes fully a connection between specularity, consumerism, and modernity that the preceding sequences have already implied.

The couple's reinvention as modern subjects is the implicit project of this section of the film, and this project requires their initial placement here as consumers. The see-through doors and the self-reflecting mirror are markers of a specifically modern, panoptical decor that functions to promote the visibility of the shopgoers, the consuming subjects, enabling them readily, the sequence suggests, both to be seen and to see themselves, but necessarily fragmenting the potentially connective, intersubjective, and consequently holistic character of the public look. In the most literal sense, the man and woman are immediately separated from each other when they enter the shop, and much of the rest of the sequence shows their frustrated efforts to see one another across the busy public space, craning their necks and peering awkwardly into mirrors.

One of the pivotal functions of the scene in the barbershop is to introduce an altered emotional texture, displacing the atmosphere of melodramatic anxiety of the film's beginning with one of light-hearted whimsy that will dominate the following third of the film. This displacement coincides with other apparently schematic and interrelated stylistic or formal shifts—from a rhetoric of subjectivity to a rhetoric of objectivity, from a kind of quasi-expressionism to the "American style," from a reliance on the construction of imaginary space to the increasingly complex but comparatively literalized spatial logic of Classical Hollywood. These shifts, in turn, depend on the alternate editing and conflation of eyeline matches and point-of-view shots that are crucially determinant upon classical narration in film.⁶ In these terms, the sequence would mark the stabilization of a style previously characterized by disruptive excess. Symmetrical alternation between shots of the wife seated in the shop's lobby and shots of the husband entrapped in the barber's chair assures a quality of balance and visual coherence. Moreover, while this structural alternation continues to be motivated by characters' looks, these looks are freed of the fetishistic quality and the association with anxiety that attend them in the film's earlier segments, a freedom due in part to the slippage between point-of-view and eyeline matching that classical narration with its requirement of stabilized omniscience occasions. When the wife watches anxiously as a beautician offers the husband a manicure, for instance, the editing patterns alternate between close-ups of the nervous wife and shots of what she sees, so that the viewer may register the beautician's resemblance to the vamp. A more extreme close-up of the wife as her concern grows is intercut with alarmed reaction from the husband and impatient, mysteriously contemptuous reactions from the barber, before the husband finally refuses the manicure to the wife's relief. If

this sequence were to be executed according to the previously dominant logic in the text of imaginary space, its logic would circulate around tropes of the wife's pervasive anxiety, making them central to the scene's visual formation, as in the earlier scene of the attempted murder, where the wife's point-of-view governs the visual presentation of the husband as a monstrous figure. In the event, however, the wife's anxiety is entirely neutralized by the integration of multiple viewpoints that has the effect, in keeping with the "American style," of objectifying the action. No character's response or viewpoint is privileged or presented as formative of a sequence's structure, though the manicurist's viewpoint is actively excluded. Rather, all are subordinated to a newly privileged rhetoric of omniscience in keeping with the tenets of classical narration.⁷ The overt rhetoric of point-of-view remains in place, but its introspective, disruptive force is contained through a maneuver of displacement. In the shots described above, for example, the close-up of the wife looking at the husband motivates a subsequent shot of what she sees, but the latter shot, a frontal view of the barber chair, is manifestly distinct from her vantage point from an angle of forty-five degrees. Thus, the character's look remains structurally determinant upon the visual construction of the sequence, but it now functions to articulate what will be presented as a coherent and neutral narrative space, distinct from the subjective points-of-view of the characters, that is merely one instrument in the arsenal of classical narration.

This gradual movement in the film toward the Classical Hollywood style, as a model of representation produced in and by mass modernity and participating in its cult of "objectivity," reflects the film's celebration of mass modernity itself. Yet the quality of stabilization in the style of the middle third of *Sunrise* is interestingly complicated by the residual recurrence of potentially disruptive elements within its framework. The integration of multiple viewpoints may have the effect of objectifying the action or reorienting the spectator, but it also introduces a new set of distinct formal problems of its own, threatening classical stability. After all, it is possible to conceive of the integration of viewpoints in the barbershop sequence not as the orderly imposition of formal, hence ideological, coherence but on the contrary as a destabilizing *multiplication* of viewpoints that, through a kind of sensory overload, thwarts the very control it was presumably called on to guarantee. Critics as different as Mary Ann Doane and Robin Wood have stressed the film's compulsion toward control in their interpretations of *Sunrise*, noting the film's effort to "enclose and thus sustain its own represented world" (Doane, 71). This drive

toward control is frequently identified with the impulse of classical narration itself. According to Doane, "the manifest desire of the text" is "to control its own reading" (71). Such a claim, however, is dependent upon a conventional theory of classical textuality, as an enclosed, self-regulating system that functions to eliminate contradiction and to produce and regulate normative desire. As both representative text and cultural object, *Sunrise* challenges the closure and self-regulation of classical textuality.

At one level, the barbershop sequence functions to promote a certain narrative equilibrium with obvious ideological effects. The couple's reconciliation, completed in the previous sequence with all the trappings of classical closure that bring the film's first movement to an assured conclusion, is fully *reassured* in this sequence, all potential threats to the couple's renewed couplehood systematically rendered triumphantly nugatory, thus presumably bringing the circulation of desire under control, at least at the text's thematic or representational level. One by one, each new threat—the manicurist, the Obtrusive Gentleman, and the potentially alienating space of the shop itself—is eliminated or overcome, the manicurist rejected, the Obtrusive Gentleman vengefully brutalized by the husband, and the alienating space of the shop successfully negotiated when the separated couple are reunited at the end of the sequence.

In spite of the manifest concern here with a thematic of renewed normality, of restored balance, however, crucial elements of the sequence work to foreground the very dynamics of enclosure and control whose repression the classical model, at least in its available versions, would seem to demand. An important element of the sequence no critic has noted, for instance, is its emphasis on the barber's look during the action involving the manicurist. In a series of curiously insistent close-ups, the barber is shown watching the visual interaction of wife, husband, and manicurist with an expression by turns derisive, resigned, bemused, or aroused—an expression that is, finally, unreadable. The barber has already been introduced as a principle of control, firmly guiding the unwilling husband into a chair, holding him there despite his protests, and kneading with comic force the husband's recalcitrant face in preparation for thorough grooming. But the emphasis on the barber's look once the possibility of desire springs up with the appearance of the manicurist shows the barber's comic resignation to what he manifestly cannot control. In the extreme close-up, the barber looks from the manicurist to the husband, then rolls his eyes slowly upward and tilts his head back in an attitude of genteel disgust. The continuing unexpected attention to the barber's look makes even

more apparent the sequence's complete repression of the manicurist's look. These shots thus punctuate, by contrast to the neutral shots of the manicurist that register her obliviousness of the couple's distressed attentions, the barber's exclusion from the networks of desire bounded by the integrated looks of the other characters.

Even as this exclusion is registered in the film, prominent signifiers associate the figure of the barber with explicit suggestions of eroticism. The close-up of his contemptuous face is stylized to evoke signs of orgasm as well as of disgust, and the continuing movement of the barber's off-screen hands against the husband's face causes the barber's head to palpitate suggestively, an effect heightened by the extremity of the close-up itself as well as by his suggestive positioning at the husband's back. The barber's reaction is linked through insistent *typage* with effeteness or prissiness, and his former assertions of firm control give way here to a posture of ineffectuality secured fully in the film's rhetoric when the husband, seeing his wife beset by the Obtrusive Gentleman, rises inexorably from the chair, erect and imperious, and pushes the barber aside in spite of the barber's formerly superior force. Thus, at the very moment the text's desire appears to be to assert control, specifically control over the desire represented *within* the text, its circuits become overloaded, as it were, strained by the very mechanisms intended to regulate them. In other words, if what finally destabilizes this sequence is its perplexing emphasis on the barber's troubled reaction to desire as the film represents it, that emphasis is not only made possible but, in some sense, *produced* by the presumably objectifying, neutralizing devices—in this case, integrated points-of-view—that are central to definitions of the classical model. The barber is the first of a series of representations in *Sunrise* of male figures emphatically defined as marginal to the regulated circulation of desire within the film who consequently disrupt or block its circulation. The investiture of an unmistakable though circuitous identification in these figures further troubles the conventional reading of the film as a simple reproduction of the conventions of Hollywood romance.

The point takes on even more resonance as the film's placement of the viewer in ever more distanced spectatorial relations to the couple in *Sunrise* becomes more pronounced. Once the barber's disruptive status is registered, the earlier shot of his hands against the husband's face assumes a retrospectively heightened resonance. The shot participates in the rhetoric of Chaplinesque comedy that comes to dominate the film's middle third, signified in the husband's dramatic expression of surprise, but seen in the light of the barber's pointed exclusion from the circulation of desire, the shot is striking also in its quality of tactile

sensuality. The close-ups of the barber seem initially to present a disdainful attitude toward what the film would have us see as conventional desire because of the particular signifying chain in which the shots find themselves, bound by the triangulated looks of the husband and wife at the heedless manicurist.⁸ But the second-order meaning of the close-ups presents the barber's own desire in figures of arousal and orgasm. The shots may thus be read as embedded in a quite different though superposed causal chain from which the logic of the sequence would appear to dissociate them, where the barber's physical contact with the husband's face *causes* the barber's arousal. The point is especially suggestive, given the film's drive in its second half to continue to yield a stock of images powerfully fraught with a rhetoric of sensuality that have, however, been drained of their explicitly erotic undercurrents, especially once the figures of the husband and wife have ceased to function as stabilized nodal points of viewer identification.

The action surrounding the Obtrusive Gentleman provides another example of how the film's strategies of containment give rise to the very possibility of disruption. After the threat posed by the appearance of the manicurist has been surmounted, a close-up of the wife registers the intense relief of her expression. The following shot is a neutral long-shot of the wife's position at the screen-right end of a long bench. Fully in keeping with procedures of classical textuality, the patterning of shots here works to emphasize emotional content of dramatic action without overtly stylized or expressionist articulation of such content. Moreover, the construction of space around the bench the wife occupies is characterized throughout much of the sequence by conventional procedures that promote the illusion of spatial coherence. Though never shown in literal relation to the opposite space occupied by the husband, this space is defined clearly enough in its figural relation to the alternate space through the matching of shots according to characters' eyelines and the symmetry of shot-alternation itself. When the movement from shot to shot is not motivated by characters' looks, it is negotiated by matches-on-action or by the placement of significant objects as orienting pivots from shot to shot. For example, when the wife first takes her seat, a featureless metal globe occupies the space of the *mise-en-scène* beside her, and this globe subsequently becomes a pivotal object of continuity, always in view as the camera shifts positions over several shots. The narrative focus of the scene, as the wife strains to see her husband across the shop, is on the wife's separation-anxiety. However, the mysterious background object, unnoticed by the wife, draws the viewer's attention not only in the constancy of its placement across multiple reframings but by set-

ting up a secondary enigma—What is it?—that is duly solved when a barber removes a warmed towel from it. Not only does the modernized towel-warmer serve as a stabilizing pivot-point within the *mise-en-scène*, then, but its presence occasions further linkage among shots when, for example, a reverse-angle follows the barber with the towel from the wife's space to the husband's, matching the shots on seemingly incidental action and thereby securing an even fuller effect of spatial coherence.

The shift to the long shot after the bit of business involving the manicurist is a moment of internal punctuation that announces both the conclusion of the previous episode and the initiation of the subsequent one involving the Obtrusive Gentleman. As a formal figure, it differentiates itself from previous camera set-ups that have been dictated by the various logics of matched shots. Here the reframing moves from a close-up of the wife to a long shot of the space she occupies without being, as it were, driven to do so either by the need to reveal the object of a look, as in the *sight-links*, or to resolve a visual enigma that has been posed just to negotiate alternating shots, as in the positioning of the towel-warmer. This is not to suggest that this long shot itself produces a rupture in the film's fabric, for it is as much in keeping with the habits of classical narration to articulate such overt syntagmatic punctuation as it is to disavow the drive to revelation that is fundamental to the classical text (both the drive itself and its disavowal, that is, are fundamental). What is striking here, rather, is the assurance with which the classical maneuvers of the sequence readily subsume the logic of imaginary space. In this episode, the Obtrusive Gentleman descends flirtatiously upon the outraged but helpless wife, pressing himself against her and divesting her of her flower, which he places into his own collar. The parallel and symmetrical quality of the sequence as a whole rhymes the barber's ineffectual disdain with the masher's boorish aggression, and these alternative masculinities are both promptly dispatched by the preferred masculinity of the husband, who rises from his chair with ripened virility, fully shaved and thus newly revealed as the *matinee-idol* he has really been all along, pushing aside the now-ineffectual barber and symbolically castrating the hapless flirter, cutting the flower from his lapel with a knife.

This symbolic castration itself illustrates the important point here most clearly. As the husband towers above the Obtrusive Gentleman, the film's rhetoric reimagines the husband in images of the monstrous much like those of the earlier scene in which he advances threateningly upon the wife during the attempted murder in the boat. The stylized, deliberate gestures as the husband reaches for his knife, the frag-

mentation of the action into highly charged close-ups, and the consequent protraction of the scene's tempo all point specifically back to the earlier sequence. The earlier sequence makes sense as an explicit representation of the wife's subjectivity, but the symbolic castration takes place, as I have argued, in a context of thorough objectification—so much so, indeed, that the symbolic dimension of the husband's violence, necessarily purged of any element of inwardness, is played for comic effect, treated as the hopelessly overdetermined, strictly superficial metaphor it must be in this completely exteriorized context. Moreover, the thematic logic of the sequence would have us see the husband's aggression not as an act of monstrous violence but as a valiant intervention on his wife's behalf, yet its nobility is comically undercut by the images of monstrosity the film proceeds nonetheless to attach to it. A residual effect of the logic of imaginary space that dictates the film's first movement, the scene decisively challenges the logic of classical textuality into which the film might have appeared to have moved. Thus, in spite of clear narratological demarcation between the film's first two movements, what they allegorize is not the stark opposition of incompatible styles but the self-reflexive interpenetration of mutually imbricated styles.

Critics of Murnau's films have routinely seen them as enacting tensions among mingled styles, as in Lotte Eisner's identification of Murnau's "oscillation between reality and unreality" (147). Such tensions, in turn, though often seen as engendering crises of representation *within* the text, have a way of clearly illuminating critical assumptions that construct the text. To illustrate the "oscillation" she perceives in Murnau's style, Eisner cites the epilogue of *The Last Laugh* (1924) as an example of realism because, she argues, its triumphal rhetoric deprives the figure of the porter in the film of tragic status. By implication, then, tragedy is opposed to realism in Eisner's reading, possibly because of what Eisner may see as tragedy's heightening, ennobling potential or its highly conventionalized nature. Other readings of *The Last Laugh*, however, precisely reverse Eisner's contention, finding realism in the bulk of the film with its intricately detailed social chronicle of humiliation and a betrayal of realism in the buoyant artifice and intrusive irony of the film's parodic "happy ending."⁹ The point here is not to chastise such critics as misguided and hopelessly out-of-synch, but to suggest that such interpretive nonalignment necessarily reflects categorical negotiations worked out in the films themselves.

In their case study of the reception of *Sunrise*, Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery find that conflicting patterns of signification within