

SPATIAL ARTICULATION IN THE CLASSICAL CINEMA

MOE
ANUUE
Vol 5, No 3.
1993.

A SCENE FROM HIS GIRL FRIDAY

By Vance Kepley, Jr.

I

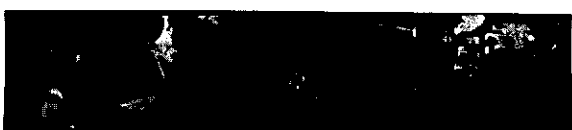
We are still unsure of what we mean when we refer to the "classical cinema." We assign it many names: the "invisible style," the "continuity system," the "Hollywood style" and even the "zero-point of cinematic style."¹ Generally we recognize it as a particular style codified in Hollywood in the 1920s and 1930s and propagated to such an extent that it eventually came to dominate commercial narrative cinema. Some of its characteristics prove familiar: the style seeks to minimize viewer disorientation through such devices as the 180-degree rule and the establishing shot/shot-reverse shot/reestablishing shot structure; and it maintains a sense of continuity through the eyeline match, the dialogue match and the match on action. While these are the instantly recognizable components, recent theoretical studies have sought to determine how the parts function as an integrated system and how that system affects spectators.

One issue of continuing significance in this project is the question of how classical editing articulates the space of a scene.

From the time of Kuleshov's experiments, we have recognized that film has the power to create a completely artificial space consisting of heterogeneous fragments joined together in the editing process,² but a common assumption about the classical style is that its scenes always seem to transpire in a pre-existing "real" space from which the individual shots have been excerpted. Although shots taken from different camera locations present fragments of the total space, we are to understand that the overall space of the scene is stable from one shot to the next. The pieces add up correctly. The classical style, according to traditional theories, permits the spectator to view a scene from several perspectives through changes in camera angle, but the scene could logically be played out in a continuous take, because the space of the scene is as stable as that of a stage play. André Bazin asserts that the classical style adheres to a "verisimilitude of space" to such a degree that if the scene were "played on stage and seen from a seat in the orchestra, it would have the same meaning; the episode would

continue to exist objectively."³ Noël Burch sees the long-take style employed by such directors as Hitchcock in *Rope* as the logical outcome of the classical cinema's tendency to "maintain the illusion of theatrical space, a 'real' space in which the viewer has an immediate and constant sense of orientation."⁴ He advocates a system in which the space of the scene is altered from shot to shot, as in *Four the Terrible* when Eisenstein tampers with the locations of figures and objects with each successive shot to create what Burch labels a "cinematic," as opposed to a "theatrical," space. Cinematic space "exists only in terms of the totality of shots included in the sequence; we no longer have any sense of a surrounding space endowed with independent existence from which a sequence of shots has been excerpted."⁵

Assumptions about the spatial integrity of the classical scene are associated with a theoretical explanation which tends to "naturalize" the editing process. This is the frequently invoked concept of the



Cut 3: Walter successive shot cutting.



Cut 4: Cuts a man's or year moments.

Appendix

The restaurant scene is the second scene in *His Girl Friday*. The ruthless city editor of the *Morning Post*, Walter Burns, has invited his wife and former star reporter Hildy Johnson to lunch along with her fiancé, insurance salesman Bruce Baldwin. Walter hopes to scuttle their marriage plans so he can persuade Hildy to turn to the paper. In the course of his plotting he seizes on the Earl Williams affair, the case of a hapless bookkeeper scheduled to hang for murder.

The appendix stresses shot transitions rather than individual shots; the illustrations designate cuts. The top frame of each illustration contains the last frame of one shot, and the bottom frame of each illustration is the first frame of the subsequent shot. Each cut is numbered and timed in the written description of the scene.

Cut 1/0:00 (dissolve)

H: Well, hello Gus.

H: It's none other. How have things been?

G: I can't complain.

W: I can. I'm hungry. Get me a roast beef sandwich. Rare on white. *(Walter snatches middle seat from Bruce)*

B: Sorry.

G: You, Hildy?

H: I'll have the same, I guess.

B: And you, sir? *(to Bruce)*

B: Yes, that's all right for me.

Cut 2/0:20 (straight cut on Walter turning his head)

W: Bring me some mustard, too, Gus.

G: Yes, sir.

W: Ah, well, well. So you two are gonna get married, huh? How's it feel Bruce?

B: Feels awful good.

W: You're getting a great little girl for yourself. I realize that. Things have been different for me ever since I met Hildy. I've never met anyone quite like her before.

Cut 3/0:39 (straight cut on dialogue)

Everybody else I've known... well, you could always tell ahead of time what they were going to say or do. But Hildy's not like that. You can't tell that about her. That's nice.

W: You're getting something else, too, Bruce. You're getting a great newspaperman.

H: No orchids, Walter. *(Gus serves orders)*

W: One of the best I ever knew. Sorry to see her go. Darn sorry, Hildy.

H: I'd like to believe you meant that.

W: I do mean that. Listen if you ever want to come back to the newspaper business...

H: Which I won't. Oh well, in spite of everything, if I ever do there's only one man I'd work for.

W: You bet your life. I'd kill you if you ever worked for anybody else.

H: You hear that, Bruce. That's my diploma.

B: It must be quite a business if it's... Hildy?

H: Huh?

B: Are you sure you want to quit?

Cut 4/1:17 (straight cut at end of question)

H: Now, Bruce, what do mean?

B: Well, if there's any doubt about it, or if there's anything... No, this is your chance to have a home, to be, like you said, a human being. And I'm going to make you take that chance.

W: Certainly. Why I wouldn't let her stay. No, she deserves all this happiness. Bruce, all the things I couldn't give her. Yeah, all she ever wanted was a home.

B: I'll certainly try to give her one.

W: I know you will Bruce. Where you gonna live?

B: Albany.

W: Albany, huh? Got a family up there do you?

B: No, just my mother.

W: Mother, huh? Oh, you gonna live with your mother?

Cut 5/1:47 (straight cut at end of question)

B: *(off screen)* Well, just for the first year. *(Hildy look suspiciously at Walter)*

Cut 6/1:51 (straight cut)

W: Oh, that will be nice. A home with mother. *(glances at Hildy)* In Albany, too.

Cut 7/1:56 (straight cut)

(Hildy makes small gesture to Walter which acknowledges "ouché")

Cut 8/1:15 (straight cut)

B: Mighty nice town Albany. They've got the state capital there, you know.

W: I know, yeah. We were there once. *(laughs)*

Cut 9/2:07 (straight cut on laugh)

Listen, *(to Hildy)* will you ever forget the time you brought the governor back to the hotel? *(to Bruce)* You see, I was in taking a bath. When I came out without... *(Hildy kicks Walter under table)* uh, she didn't know I was in town. Well, uh, Bruce, how's business up there? Any better?

B: Well, Albany's a mighty good insurance town. Most people take it out pretty early in life.

W: I could see why they would. *(Hildy kicks him again)*



Cut 3: Walter shifts position with each successive shot in Hawks' reverse-angle cutting.

Cut 4: Cuts are timed to stress the remarks or reactions of characters at certain moments.



"ideal observer" who can follow a complicated scene by observing crucial details one at a time. Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar suggest that the camera "becomes, as it were, a ubiquitous observer, giving the audience at each moment of the action, the best possible viewpoint."⁶ This analogy extends back at least as far as Pudovkin's influential *Film Technique*, a theoretical text which has as much to do with the classical style as with the Soviet school of montage. Pudovkin explains the logic of editing by positing a real-life situation in which an "attentive observer" witnesses a violent scene on a street. The observer casts his glance from one detail to the next as the action unfolds, and Pudovkin insists that the camera can replace the eyes of the observer: "the changes of angle of the camera-directed now at one person, now at another, now at one detail, now at another—must be subject to the same conditions as those of the eyes of the observer."⁷

These traditional explanations equate classical editing with the natural by invoking the image of an event transpiring in a real, three-dimensional space, which space is visited by an observer who watches the event from a variety of vantage points. More recent theoretical investigations, however, counter naturalizing explanations of classical editing by examining the highly manipulative nature of the classical style.⁸ In some respects, the classical style resembles the perspective system of Western painting. Both are highly conventional sets of techniques which are widely perceived to be natural modes of representation. The perspective system presumes to portray a real-world scene from the fixed perspective of an ideal observer, while the classical cinema seems to define a real space viewed by an ideal observer from several vantage points. Certain paintings composed in the style of the perspective system make us aware of the system's arbitrary nature by including spatial arrangements which could not be duplicated in reality.⁹

I propose to examine a scene from the classical cinema composed of conflicting spaces, a scene which violates real space and thereby calls into question some of the naturalizing explanations of the classical style. The restaurant scene in Howard Hawks' *His Girl Friday* is shot in strict classical style and could pass on casual viewing as a scene which obeys the spatial integrity of the theater. Yet Hawks manipulates the space of the scene by systematically tampering with the locations of the characters in such a way that the scene could not exist in real space nor, Bazin to the contrary, on stage. The sequence of shots articulates a shifting cinematic space not unlike what Burch finds in *Four the Terrible* and what other theorists find in such non-classical directors as Ozu.¹⁰ How does Hawks employ the classical style to maintain the illusion of theatrical space while, in fact, articulating a cinematic space, and what is the specific ideological function of the scene's spatial manipulation? The task is to explore not simply this scene, but the power of illusion inherent in the classical style.¹¹

II

Hawks is noted for the unobtrusive style which is characteristic of the classical cinema, and he held to the belief that the only function of technique was the efficient presentation of narrative information.¹² He, in effect, professed that proper technique hides itself in deference to and support of the narrative dominant. Before exploring the spatial manipulation in the restaurant scene we need to determine what devices of classical editing function in the scene to help produce this transparency of style.

The restaurant scene has a deceptively theatrical look which has little to do with the film's dramatic source,¹³ but which derives from the fact that the scene is staged in one location with little character movement and only a few camera setups. The scene contains thirty-six shot

transitions, all of which are straight cuts except for two dissolves clearly designed to demarcate the beginning and end of the scene (1, 36). The relative absence of optical devices helps create the sense of invisible editing, since straight cuts can be rendered virtually imperceptible by matching devices. What is more, the tightly circumscribed space of the scene would seem at first viewing to provide little opportunity for significant spatial manipulation.

The staging of so much of the scene around the table reinforces the impression of theatrical stability. Hawks follows the 180-degree rule with a simple arrangement: the axis extends through the table and the characters remain to one side of it, which permits Hawks to employ a consistent practice of cutting to reverse angles as the characters exchange remarks. The framing consists generally of two-shots from over the third character's shoulder so that the third figure is at least represented by the outline of a shoulder on the edge of the frame.

By organizing the scene in this fashion, Hawks includes a sufficient number of spatial cues in each shot to reaffirm the relative positions of the three figures: Bruce on the left, Walter in the center and Hildy on the right. Such consistent screen direction generally maintains a sense of spatial orientation, even in the few shots where Hildy is isolated in shallow-focus closeups (5-8, 17-20). Many spatial cues are omitted from these tightly framed shots of Hildy, but the consistent direction of her eyeline preserves the directional continuity.

The orientation is enhanced by the practice of overlapping fragments of space from one shot to the next. Burch's concept of the "spatially continuous" cut proves useful here and designates a case in which "some fragment of space, fully or partially seen in shot A is also in shot B."¹⁴ All except two cuts in the scene are thus spatially continuous, and the two exceptions are the cuts necessitated by



Cut 7: Spatially continuous



Cut 10: Characters in different spaces

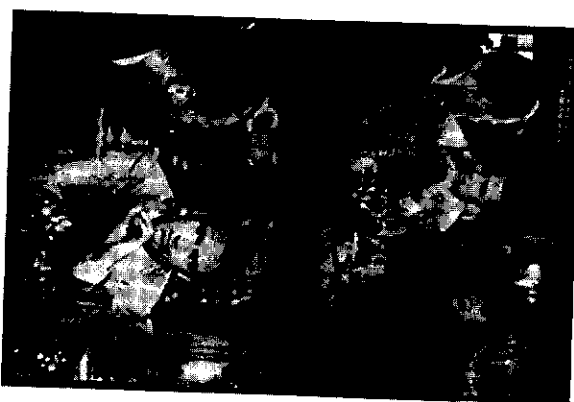
h are straight cuts
as clearly designed
ning and end of
relative absence of
eate the sense of
straight cuts can be
receptible by
is more, the tight-
of the scene would
provide little op-
t spatial manip-

of the scene a-
es the impression
awks follows the
imple arrange-
through the table
in to one side of
to employ a con-
g to reverse angles
er remarks. The
y of two-shots
acter's shoulder
at least repre-
a shoulder on the

n this fashion,
nt number of
to reaffirm the
three figures:
in the center
ach consistent
maintains a
n, even in the
olated in shal-
7-20). Many
om these tight-
but the consis-
ne preserves the



Cut 7: Spatial orientation is maintained even in shallow-focus closeups of Hildy.



Cut 10: Cuts on continuous dialogue provide formal matches by stressing conversation.

B: Statistcs show
Cut 10/2:30 (straight cut on dialogue)
that most of our policy holders . . .
W: You know Bruce, I've got a feeling I ought
to have taken out a little insurance. Of
course that doesn't matter now that Hildy
and I have . . . well, you know, we've phitt.
Does it?

Cut 11/2:41 (straight cut on Walter turning his head)

Well, does it? What do you think? Still it
might have been a good idea if we . . .
if I had taken out a little insurance.
(Gus serves orders)

B: Well, I honestly feel that way. I feel I'm
in a business that really helps people. Of
course we don't help you much while you
are alive. But afterwards—that's what
counts.

W: (laughs)

Cut 12/2:57 (cut on laugh)

I don't get it.

(Hildy's kick accidentally connects with Gus)

G: Ouch!

W: (to Hildy) Nice going.

H: I'm so sorry, Gus. My foot must have
slipped.

G: Oh, that's all right. (to Walter) What
would you like to drink?

W: Coffee, Gus.

G: Shall I put some rum in it? It's a nasty
day out.

W: Sure.

H: Me too, Gus, please.

G: (to Bruce) And you,

Cut 13/3:11 (straight cut on dialogue)
sir?

B: No, not for me, thanks.

W: Go on, Bruce. Have a little.

B: No, I have a lot to do this afternoon. I
have to buy the tickets and check the
baggage.

W: Do it tomorrow. There's plenty of time.

H: But we're leaving today at four o'clock.
Taking the sleeper to Albany.

W: Oh, you're leaving today at four o'clock.
(checks watch) Say, that's only two hours.

H: That doesn't give us much time at that
Bruce.

B: No, I've got a lot to do.

(Walter spills his water)

Cut 14/3:32 (straight cut on Walter leaping up)

W: Look at that. Isn't that silly. All down
over my front.

H: Well, that's nothing new. Here. (hands him
a napkin)

W: No, never mind. I'll get Gus. (walks back
to bar) Hey, Gus.

*Cut 15/3:38 (straight cut on Gus turning head
and Walter entering the frame)*

Do something about this, will you? (whis-
pers) Call me to the telephone as soon as
I get back to the table.

G: Sure. (wipes off Walter's jacket)

W: (loudly) Thanks, Gus. That's fine. Thanks.

*Cut 16/3:46 (straight cut on Walter returning
to the table)*

I'm terribly sorry about that. Silly wasn't
it, Bruce. I, uh . . . let me get this straight.
I must have misunderstood you. You
mean you're taking the sleeper today and
then getting married tomorrow?

B: Oh, well, it's not like that.

W: Well, what is it like?

H: Poor Walter. He'll toss and turn all night.
Perhaps we better tell him Mother's
coming along, too.

W: (to Hildy) Mother? Why your mother
kicked the bucket . . .

B: No, my mother, my mother.

W: Oh your mother. Oh well, that relieves my
mind.

H: (to Walter) It was cruel of us to let you
suffer that way. (to Bruce) Isn't Walter
sweet? Always wanting to protect me.

W: Well, I admit I wasn't much of a husband.
But you can always count on me, Hildy.

B: I don't think she'll need you very much.
Mr. Burns. I aim to do most of the pro-
tecting myself.

(Gus enters from right rear)

G: Mr. Burns.

W: What?

G: Telephone.

W: For me?

G: Yes, sir.

W: That's strange. Uh, pardon me. (exits)

B: You know, Hildy, he's not such a bad
fellow.

Cut 17/4:34 (straight cut)

H: No, he should make some girl real happy.

B: (off screen) Uh-huh.

H: (to herself) Slap happy.

Cut 18/4:38 (straight cut)

B: He's not the man for you. I can see that.
But I sort of like him. He's got a lot of
charm.

Cut 19/4:44 (straight cut)

H: Well, he comes by it naturally. His grand-
father was a snake.

B: (off screen laugh)

Walter's trip to the telephone booth when a completely new spatial fragment is introduced into the scene (20, 21). In these two cases the cuts involve "proximate spatial continuity" because the fragment exists within a circumscribed area, in this case, the restaurant.¹⁵ This reliance on spatially continuous cutting tends to stitch together the fragments of space into a tight whole, reinforcing the illusion of spatial integrity for the scene.

Hawks employs numerous classical devices which hide the presence of the cuts and contribute to the illusion that the scene exists as a continuous event. Matches on action appear frequently. When Walter turns his head in response to the waiter's presence (2) or when Walter turns toward Bruce to ask him a question or to offer him a business proposition (11 and 31, respectively), Hawks cuts on the continuous movement. The subsequent shots in these three transitions are framed as if in response to the movement since they include the new spaces invoked by Walter's glances. A similar strategy is evident at the end of the scene. Hawks cuts on the motion of Bruce turning and glancing off-screen in response to Walter's call, and the subsequent shot incorporates Walter back into the camera field. Bruce's movement overlaps the cut, and his glance motivates the framing of the next shot (35). We find a forceful match on action when Walter spills water and leaps up from the table (14). In the succeeding shots, when Walter departs from and returns to the table, Hawks cuts on his movement into and out of the frame (15, 16). These transitions are motivated by character movements and they deflect attention from the presence of the cuts to the actions of the characters.

Similarly, cuts on continuous dialogue provide formal matches by stressing the characters' conversation. When Bruce rhapsodizes on the insurance business, for example, Hawks cuts during Bruce's remarks from a full three-shot to a two-shot which emphasizes Walter's presence and draws attention to his feigned interest in

Bruce's profession (10). Later, Gus asks Bruce if he takes rum in his coffee, and Hawks cuts on the question from a shot in which Gus is prominent to one which favors Bruce—from the source of the question to the source of the answer (13). Near the end of the scene, Walter proposes that Bruce write him an insurance policy, and Hildy interrupts the conversation. Hawks cuts on the interjection to a reverse angle that includes her more fully into the shot (33). The transition, in effect, answers to a dialogue cue by including Hildy back into the camera field at the moment when she injects herself into the conversation. The scene contains several other cuts on overlapping dialogue which are calculated to complement shifts in the conversation (22, 23, 27, 28).

The cuts are timed throughout the scene to stress the remarks or reactions of characters at certain moments. Even when the cuts lack a formal bridge, such as a match on action or a dialogue match, the transitions are so positioned as to require us to focus on individual figures at particular points in the dialogue, and the shape of the conversation seems to dictate the transitions. For example, when Bruce asks Hildy a question, the cut takes us from a shot which favors him to one which favors Hildy, and the cut anticipates her response (4). During the discussion of the Williams case, Hildy comments on the mayor's cynicism in a shot from over Bruce's shoulder which favors her. Hawks then cuts to a shot over Hildy's shoulder favoring Bruce so that he can offer his naive suggestion that someone "just show that the man [Williams] wasn't responsible" (24). The cut is timed to coincide with a shift in the conversation, and it helps define the difference in the perspectives of the two characters by contrasting Hildy's political savvy with Bruce's innocence.

The transitions are motivated by the narrative dominant, which in this scene is the relationship of the three characters. The cuts help define the association of the characters as the most significant issue

while the cuts themselves remain inconspicuous thanks to the matching devices which emphasize movement, dialogue and character interaction. The classical style forces the character relationships to the foreground and hides the cuts. The scene fairly demands to be perceived as a continuous event transpiring in real space, but a careful look at the *mise-en-scène* reveals that the space of the scene is, in fact, a quite artificial construct.

III

A pattern of spatial manipulation exists throughout the scene as the locations of the figures change slightly from shot to shot. Although the 180-degree policy keeps the figures in the same *relative* position, Hawks frequently makes adjustments in their *exact* position.

Recall that the axis cuts through the middle of the table and that Bruce remains on the left, Walter in the center and Hildy on the right. Walter's placement in the center proves significant; he steals the middle seat from Bruce at the beginning of the scene, and uses that location to advantage by appealing first to Bruce and then to Hildy as he attempts to play the two characters off against each other as part of his scheme.

In those parts of the scene where all three characters remain at the table and where Hawks employs reverse-angle cutting, Walter shifts position slightly with each successive shot. While at the end of one shot Walter will appear closer to Hildy, at the beginning of the subsequent shot we find that he has magically shifted around toward Bruce, and vice versa. For example, at the point of the third cut of the scene, we find a sizeable gap between Walter and Bruce at the end of the former shot, but in the first frame of the latter shot we notice that Walter now sits much closer to Bruce (3). The next cut in the scene reverses that shift; here we notice that Walter somehow has moved back toward Hildy and away from Bruce when

noon -
voices
and
style
of the
scene
con-
sist-
ing of
the po-
sition
of the
train
in fact,



Cut 22: Walter shifts toward Bruce on the even-numbered cuts (22-29).



Cut 23: He shifts back toward Hildy on the odd-numbered cuts.

Cut 20/4:49 (straight cut)

W: Hello, hello. Hey, Duffy, listen. Is there any way we could stop the four o'clock train for Albany from leaving town?

D: (over the phone) We might dynamite it. Okay, now get this. Get hold of Sweeney and send him out of town on a two-week vacation right away. All right, keep your shirt on. Hildy's coming back. No, she doesn't know it yet, but I promise you she's staying here. And listen. Tell Louie to stick around the office. I may need him. Goodbye.

Cut 21/5:15 (straight cut)

H: Thanks Gus.

(Walter enters and takes seat)

W: Oh, this is bad business.

H: What's the matter Walter?

W: Oh, the Earl Williams case.

B: Oh, yes, I've been reading about that.

H: What is the low-down on it?

W: Simple, Honey.

Cut 22/5:36 (straight cut on dialogue and motion of Walter sitting his plate)

Poor little dope who lost his job and went berserk. Shot a cop who was coming after to hang him tomorrow.

H: Oh, what a shame.

B: (to Walter) Your paper, uh, you've been taking his side?

W: Uh-huh.

B: Well, if he was out of his mind when he did it, why doesn't the state just put him away?

W: Because it happened to be a colored policeman. You know

Cut 23/5:41 (straight cut on dialogue)

what that means Hildy.

H: Uh-huh. The colored vote's very important in this town.

W: Yes, especially when there's an election coming up in three or four days.

H: That mayor. He'd hang his own grandmother to be reelected.

Cut 24/5:49 (straight cut)

B: I should think you could just show that the man wasn't responsible.

W: That's not so easy.

H: Um, maybe it isn't so hard either.

Cut 25/5:55 (straight cut)

W: Why, what do you mean Hildy?

H: Don't they have to have another expert examine him before they hang him?

W: Sure, a bird named Eglehofer's gonna do it. He'll say the same as all the rest.

H: Suppose he does.

W: What's the scheme Hildy?

H: Look, Walter, you get the interview with Earl Williams. Print Eglehofer's statement...

W: Yes.

H: ... and right along side of it, you know, double column, run your interview, he's guilty!

Cut 26/6:17 (straight cut)

W: (excited) Ah, Hildy, you could do it! You could save that poor devil's life.

H: Uh-uh, no!

W: Naw, you're going away. I forgot.

B: (to Walter) How long would the interview take?

W: Oh, about an hour for the interview, another hour to write it; that's all.

B: Hildy

Cut 27/6:38 (straight cut on dialogue)

we could take the six o'clock train if it would save a man's life.

H: No, Bruce. (to Walter) If you want to save Earl Williams' life, you write the interview yourself. You're still a good reporter.

W: Ah Hildy, you know I can't write that. It needs heart.

H: Don't get poetic Walter. Get Sweeney. He's the best person you've got for that sob-

Cut 28/6:44 (straight cut on dialogue)

sister stuff.

W: Poor Sweeney. Duffy just told me his wife finally had twins. Tick-tick. Isn't that terrible? Sweeney went out to celebrate and now we can't find him anywhere. So Sweeney has twins and Earl Williams gets hanged tomorrow.

H: Now, Walter, look it isn't...

W: (to Bruce) You argue with her! You argue with her! Otherwise you're going on a honeymoon with blood on your hands. How can you have any happiness after that? All through the years you'll remember that a man went to the gallows because she was too selfish to wait two hours. I tell you Bruce, Earl Williams' face will come between you on the train tonight, and at the preacher's tomorrow, and all the rest of your lives.

B: Hildy???

H: Stop it Walter! Shush! What an act.

Cut 29/7:16 (straight cut)

W: Huh?

H: I just remembered. Sweeney was only married four months ago.

we compare the two frames which adjoin the cut (4). This is clearly an artificial manipulation: there is no temporal ellipsis in cut 3, for example, which would permit a naturalistic explanation of the move since it is a cut on a continuous dialogue.

The pattern of repositioning Walter extends throughout the scene in the cuts where all three figures are present. Walter shifts toward Bruce on several cuts (11, 13, 22, 24, 26, 28), and he shifts back toward Hildy just as regularly (12, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33). In order to identify the pattern and posit an explanation of the manipulation, I shall isolate one series of reverse-angle cuts (22-29). Walter shifts toward Bruce on all the even numbered cuts (22, 24, 26, 28), and he consistently shifts back toward Hildy on the odd numbered cuts (23, 25, 27, 29). In this series the pattern becomes quite clear: when Hawks shoots over Hildy's shoulder, he places Walter closer to Bruce; in shots over Bruce's shoulder, we find Walter stationed nearer Hildy. Hawks relocates Walter in the mise-en-scène each time he cuts to a reverse angle, and he consistently moves Walter away from the figure closest to the camera.

Such a series would have been shot out of sequence in accordance with efficient methods of studio production. All the shots from a given set up would have been filmed at once to reduce time and expense. Hawks could easily have placed Walter in one spot for the series of shots over Hildy's shoulder and moved him once to a new location for the series taken over Bruce's shoulder. One repositioning in the profilmic event becomes a series of shifts in the finished, edited scene.

But the spatial manipulation we find in the scene cannot simply be written off to the exigencies of production or to a lax continuity clerk. The manipulation has a formal significance in the finished scene in that it keeps the figure of Walter prominent near the center of the frame. If Walter were not relocated on each reverse angle, he would be obscured in whole or

in part by the figure closer to the camera. By moving Walter back and forth on each reverse angle cut, Hawks creates a fluid mise-en-scène in which Walter remains constantly visible. While the shots over Hildy's shoulder favor Bruce and those over Bruce's shoulder favor Hildy, both sets of shots favor Walter thanks to the spatial manipulation. Walter remains prominent no matter what angle the camera assumes while the two flanking figures are often obscured or relegated to the edge of the frame.¹⁶

This tactic of guaranteeing Walter's prominence in the frame has ideological significance as well, because it figures in the way the film defines a power hierarchy among the three major characters. Throughout the film Walter is presented as the most powerful figure in the fictional world of *His Girl Friday*, the character most willing and able to exploit the people around him.¹⁷ This is precisely what he does in the restaurant scene, and the pattern of spatial manipulation which assures his physical prominence in the frame complements other codes (e.g., acting, dialogue) which inscribe Walter as the dominant character. It is no coincidence that the figure who dominates the mise-en-scène of this scene emerges as the character most clearly in control of the dramatic situation. The audience might not notice Hawks' subtle juggling act in this scene, but it is not likely to remain unaffected at some level by the heightened sense of Walter Burns' presence.

The spatial manipulation of the scene is similar in kind, if not in degree, to that of Eisenstein and Ozu, but it is not a manifest pattern in Hawks as it is in the two non-classical filmmakers. What disguises the manipulation in this scene? Part of the answer lies in the fact that the reverse angle cuts provide slightly inconsistent depth cues by constantly shifting our view of the three characters. In the third cut of the scene, for example, the repositioning of Walter increases the space between Walter and Hildy, but the new camera angle from over Hildy's shoulder

obscures the space between them (3). Likewise, in the next cut, Walter moves away from Bruce but the new shot over Bruce's shoulder hides the sizeable gap which separates the two figures (4). We would require a consistent depth cue of interposition—the degree to which the mass of a foreground figure blocks out the view of a background figure—to remain cognizant of the distance between Walter and the foreground figure.¹⁸ But the change in vantage point provided by the reverse angle negates this monocular depth cue by refusing us the consistent perspective we would require to gauge the degree of interposition. Classical editing widely held to be a system which provides constant viewer orientation, but here the reverse angles provide a crucial measure of disorientation in the form of inconsistent depth cues which hide the scene's spatial inconsistency.

More importantly, we may fail to notice the spatial inconsistencies because Hawks' fidelity to classical editing foregrounds character relationships and deflects attention from the formal manipulation of the scene. As we have seen, the classical devices cover cuts and create the illusion of a continuous event. The scene operates through a hierarchy of ingredients, and the spatial manipulation functions as a subordinate ingredient helping define the all important issue of the character exchange.

Such a scene might present the illusion that it transpires in a stable, theatrical space, but clearly this scene could not exist except as a combination of conflicting spaces—or to use Burch's term, as cinematic space. Even the analogy of the ideal observer who visits a scene in real space and watches the activity from different positions cannot explain the formal properties of the scene. According to traditional theories, the ideal observer can alter his angle of view but not the position of characters in the scene, and Pudovkin's structure that the "camera must be subjected to the same conditions as those of the observer" becomes suspect. If Pudovkin's

Cut 3:
questi
move)

Cut 3:
to inci

in them (3). Walter moves new shot over a sizeable gap figures (4). We t depth cue of to which the re blocks out figure--to re- space between figure, 18 But it provided by is monocular re consistent re to gauge the istical editing is which provides , but here the cal measure n of inconsis- the scene's

fail to notice cause Hawks' regions reflects atten- ilation of the classical de- re illusion of re operates ilents, and tions as a sub- efine the all- ter exchange. re illusion heatical ould not ex- f conflicting , as cine- of the ideal real space different ormal prop- to tradi- ver can al- ie positions Pudovkin's t be sub- hose of the Pudovkin's

on page 57



Cut 31: When Walter turns to ask Bruce a question, Hawks cuts on the continuous movement.



Cut 33: Hawks cuts on Hildy's interjection to include her more fully into the shot.

W: (laughing) All right Hildy, you win. I'm licked.

Cut 30/7:27 (straight cut)

B: Then Mrs. Sweeney didn't have twins.

H: No, indeed, the twins were Walter's--all his forget it. Here, we'll start all over again.

Cut 31/7:38 (straight cut on movement of Walter leading)

I'll offer you two a business proposition.

H: We're not interested.

W: (to Bruce) Well, you'll be interested. Now you're a smart young man.

H: Don't listen to him Bruce. I know him of old. From way back...

W: (to Hildy) Excuse me will you? I'm talkin' to him. (to Bruce) Now look, Bruce,

Cut 32/7:47 (straight cut on dialogue and motion of Walter turning toward Bruce)

you persuade Hildy to do the story and you can write out a nice fat insurance policy for me. Now what do you think of that?

B: Oh, no, Mr. Burns. No, I wouldn't use my wife for business purposes.

H: Wait a minute, Bruce. Walter,

Cut 33/7:57 (cut on dialogue)

how big a policy?

W: Oh, twenty-five thousand.

H: What?

H: (to Bruce) Fifty thousand.

B: (to Bruce) What's the commission on a \$100,000 policy?

H: Around \$1000. But Hildy...

B: What's wrong with \$1000?

H: Well I couldn't...

B: We could use that money Bruce. How long would it take to get him examined?

B: I could get a company doctor here in twenty minutes.

W: Now you're talking.

H: (to Walter) You keep out of this. (to Bruce) All right Bruce, suppose you have what they'll allow on that old carcass of his. If his...

W: Say, I'm better than I ever was.

H: That was never anything to brag about. Now look Bruce,

Cut 34/8:24 (cut on dialogue)

I'll go back and change and dress. And after you get the check you phone me. I'll be in the press room of the criminal courts building. Oh, Walter.

H: By the way, I think you better make that a certified check.

W: What do you think I am, a crook?

H: Yes. No certified check, no story. You get me?

W: It'll be certified. Want my fingerprints?

H: No thanks, I've still got those.

W: Gus, how much do I owe you? (exiting)

H: (accepts coat from Bruce) Thank you, dear. (whispers) Bruce, how much money do you have?

B: (whispers) You know--\$500.

H: (whispers) Give me the 500.

B: (whispers) But I have to buy the tickets.

H: (whispers) I'll buy the tickets.

B: (whispers) But I should.

H: (whispers) Believe me, dear, I know what I'm doing. He'll get you in a crap game or something.

B: Hildy, I don't gamble.

H: (whispers) I know a lot of people that never did anything until they met Walter Burns. Please, dear.

B: (whispers) All right. But remember, it's everything we have in the world.

H: I know.

W: (off screen) Oh, Bruce,

Cut 35/9:06 (straight cut on Bruce turning)

you got change for a ten?

B: I just...

H: See what I mean don't you, Bruce?

B: I just gave everything I had to Hildy. All I've got left is...

W: Oh, come on, Hildy.

H: Not me. Sign it.

W: Well, all right. (takes some change from Bruce) For the water.

H: Come on, Bruce.

Cut 36/9:32 (dissolve)

Continued from page 56

observer visited an equivalent of the restaurant scene performed in real space and if he assumed the alternating perspectives of the reverse-angle pattern, he could not help occasionally having his view of Walter blocked; his observation would prove less than ideal and hardly the same as that which Hawks provides the audience in his version of the scene.

The important lesson here is not that Hawks "cheats" and gets away with it. In fact the degree of spatial manipulation in the scene seems rather slight, and there are segments in the classical cinema which include bolder uses of space. Rather the consistent nature of the spatial manipulation in this example, where the single character who controls the scene also dominates the mise-en-scène, suggests the degree to which various codes in the classical cinema are subordinated to a narrative dominant. The efficient establishment of the character hierarchy emerges as the dominant trait of this scene, and the spatial code is one of several which work together economically to define that hierarchy. No aspect of the scene—not the character action, nor the dialogue, nor the spatial articulation—creates anything we could call a natural situation. In this lunch scene where the characters never consume their meals, every ingredient proves artificial.

The classical system covers its manipulation behind a mask that is too often explained and understood as a natural form; or to borrow a term from literary theory, it creates what Tzvetan Todorov and others have termed *plausibilité*, the illusion of reality in an artistic text: "the *plausibilité* is the mask which conceals the text's own laws and which we are to take for a relation with reality."¹⁹ An important step in defining the classical cinema is describing the arbitrary nature of the mask.²⁰

Notes

¹ The last label originates with Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 11.

² See for example Kuleshov's discussion of his famous artificial person constructed at an editing table with the "lips of one woman, the legs of another, the back of a third, the eyes of a fourth," in *Kuleshov on Film*, ed. and trans. Ronald Levaco (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1974), p. 53.

³ *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967), p. 32.

⁴ Burch, p. 10.

⁵ Burch, p. 39.

⁶ Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar, *The Technique of Film Editing*, 2nd ed. (New York: Hastings, 1968), p. 215.

⁷ V.I. Pudovkin, *Film Technique*, trans. Ivor Montagu (London: George Newnes, 1933), p. 42.

⁸ See for example the debate on the concept of the "suture": Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema," *Film Quarterly*, 28 (Fall 1974), 22-31; William Rothman, "Against the System of the Suture," *Film Quarterly*, 29 (Fall 1975), 45-50; Jean-Pierre Oudart, "Cinema and Suture," trans. Kari Harter, *Screen*, 18 (Winter 1977-78), 35-47; Stephen Heath, "Notes on Suture," *Screen*, 18 (Winter 1977-78), 48-76.

⁹ In this study, for example, I am indebted to John R. Searle's article on the paradoxical representational system of Velazquez's *Las Meninas*; see "Las Meninas and the Critical Inquiry," 6 (1980), 477-98.

¹⁰ See Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu," *Screen*, 17 (Summer 1976), 41-73; Edward Branigan, "The Space of *Equinox Flower*," *Screen*, 17 (Summer 1976), 75-105; Kristin Thompson, "Notes on the Spatial System of Ozu's Early Films," *Wide Angle*, 1, No. 4 (1977), 8-17. A dictum in Branigan's essay proves suggestive for this study: "Even the classical film—which aims to create 'spatial continuity,' i.e. the sense of a three-dimensional surrounding space endowed with independent existence ('natural' space/time) from which a sequence of shots has somehow been excerpted—creates its space carefully and painstakingly" (p. 104). Yet we still lack studies of the construction of space in the classical system. Stephen Heath's long, discursive "Narrative Space," *Screen*, 17 (Autumn 1976), 68-112, contains pertinent passages.

¹¹ The reader is advised at this point to read the appendix all the way through to establish the narrative continuity of the restaurant scene. Then the reader may refer back to the appendix at appropriate times while reading the balance of the essay. Parenthetical numbers in the text

refer to specific cuts which are filmic and described in the appendix.

¹² For example, Hawks expressed his contempt for "screwed-up camera angles like to tell it [the story] with a film scene. I don't want you to be convinced that this is dramatic, because it isn't all off." See "Hawks Talks," *Film Comment*, 10 (May-June 1974), 47.

¹³ The restaurant scene does not occur in the stage source. All the action in the play takes place in the Criminal Court Building. See Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, *The Front Page* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1928).

¹⁴ Burch, p. 9.

¹⁵ Burch, p. 9.

¹⁶ Note that Walter's conspicuousness in the mise-en-scène is reassured by the fact that his white suit sets him off from figures on either side.

¹⁷ Here I am indebted to Marilyn Gom lucid ideological analysis of the film *Chinatown*: Production for Use, "Walter Angele, 1, No. 2 (1976), 23-27.

¹⁸ Of the major varieties of monocular depth cues—interposition, linear and perspective, familiar size and illumination—direction—interposition is by far the most significant in this scene. The other cues are generally negated by the even lighting of the scene and by the close proximity of the characters. On depth cues see John N.I.: Rendence-Hall, 1964, pp. 34-36. Charles Henry Harpole, *Gradients of Depth in the Cinema Image* (New York: Arno, 1976), Chapter 3.

¹⁹ Tzvetan Todorov quoted in Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), p. 139.

²⁰ I am grateful to David Bordwell for drawing my attention to the formal properties of this scene.